

**"READING THE REFERENTS":
(INTER)TEXTUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY
KENYAN POPULAR MUSIC**

Joyce Wambũi Nyairo

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the
Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

Johannesburg, 2004

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Joyce Wambũi Nyairo

Fifth day of October, 2004.

Abstract

This study explores the meaning of contemporary Kenyan popular music by undertaking literary interpretations of song lyrics and musical styles. In making these interpretations, the fabric of popular song is shown to be a network of referents and associations with texts situated both within and outside of the song-texts. As polyphonic discourse, these vast range of textual and paratextual referents opens up various points of engagement between artiste, songtext and audience and in the process, the surplus meanings generated by both the poetry of the text and the referents embedded within it account for the significance of popular songs as concrete articulations that mediate the realities of modern Kenya.

Through the six chapters that make up the core of the study we see the mini-dramas that are played out in the material conditions within which the songs are produced; in the iconographies that are generated by artistes' stage names and album titles; in the strategies of memory work that connect present-day realities to old cultural practices; in the soundtracks of urban spaces and in those of domesticated global cultural trends and finally, in the mediation of the antinomies surrounding the metanarrative of the nation and the realization of political transition.

I conclude by suggesting that Kenyan popular music demonstrates how contemporary postcolonial texts inform one another, opening up a dialogue between texts and also between local events, experiences and knowledges. Equally important, the study defines contemporary Kenyan culture by working out the sources of the images and idioms built up in this music and accepting the complexities of postcolonial existence as a site of fluid interaction between various cultural practices and competing modernities.

Dedication

To the memory of my father, Celestino Macharia.

And for Alfred, Ronald, Stefi and Wanda.

Acknowledgements

My employer, Moi University, Kenya, granted me study leave to undertake this research. Financial assistance for the project came from the National Research Foundation, South Africa as well as the Postgraduate Merit Award and the Harold and Doris Tothill Bequest Fund of the University of the Witwatersrand, for all of which I am truly grateful. Isabel Hofmeyr and Michael Titlestad gave me intellectual counsel with a lot of compassion. I thank them dearly for patiently helping me shape many woolly ideas and for their constant encouragement.

My time in South Africa was made bearable by the friendship and practical support of many to whom I offer sincere gratitude. First, James Ogude, who never tires of throwing academic challenges and who, together with his family, has consistently given support to many "Nyairo projects". Monika Kathina, Peter Kagwanja and their daughter, Astri, gave of their time and space in Pretoria and patiently indulged my forays into their resourceful study. At Wits Sophie Macharia, Ann Ndungu, Salome, Cathy, Wanjiku and Elizabeth brought comic relief to the sojourn. Robert Rono and Levi Ochieng gave much appreciated technical assistance.

For their camaraderie and willingness to run numerous errands I thank those of my former students at Moi University who became my colleagues here at Wits. Their presence and stimulating research interests have provided me with inspiration and nourished my faith in the pursuit of knowledge. Tom Odhiambo, Maina Mutonya, Agnes Muriungi, Godwin Siundu, Grace Musila, Florence Sipalla, Dina Ligaga, Fred Mbogo, Anthony Ambala, Anne Muriungi and Westen Shilaho: I truly believe that you hold the key to the revival of Kenyan literary scholarship.

I must also acknowledge the varied assistance of many friends in Kenya, to whom I offer sincere thanks. Tabu Osusa, and Bill Odidi generously gave of their time, shared their knowledge and helped me to set-up interviews with musicians, producers and studio managers. They also worked tirelessly to help me locate rare recordings and to source archival material. Many artistes and stakeholders in the music industry very kindly discussed their work with me. Foremost amongst them are Poxi Presha, Idi Achieng, Juma Odemba, Markus Kamau, Eric Wainaina, David Ohingo, Tedd Josiah, Alph Rabar, John Andrews, Jennifer Shamala, Gidi and Maji.

A number of professional colleagues added to the quality of this work. Mbũgua wa Mũngai taught me to write grammatical Gĩkũyũ. Eunice Kamaara, guided my translations from Gĩkũyũ with refreshing humour and carefully proofread my draft at very short notice. Kembo Sure and Nathan Ogechi provided valuable secondary material.

Closer home, I acknowledge the efforts of Helen Oruko who helped with transcribing and translation. I sincerely thank John and Susan Chemweno, neighbours turned into translators, who together with their children, Kibi and Cheptoo, kindly helped to sustain my family through my many absences. Many, many members of my extended family

tirelessly offered prayers for the success of this project. Alex and Julia Nyairo gave material support while Al Nyairo was generous in mailing me rare books from the US.

Last and by no means least, my heartfelt gratitude to the very dependable research assistants I found in my nuclear family. My husband, Alfred K. Nyairo, readily combed music outlets, accompanied me to performances, consistently gathered references, debated musical traditions, shed light on many legal intricacies and was always willing to courier my needs to South Africa. And our children — Ronald, Stefi and Wanda — wittily updated my Sheng, supplied trivia on local and international artistes, and passionately urged me on to the finishing line.

In the wake of all this assistance, only I bear responsibility for any shortcomings in this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration

Abstract

Dedication

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

PART 1

Introduction xi

Chapter One

'Poverty, Piracy, Poor Facilities and Government Indifference':

The Political Economy of the Kenyan Music Industry 1

1.1 The Production of Culture 2

1.1.1 The Example of '*Unbwogable*' 4

1.2 Then and Now: A Profile of Kenya's Music Industry 10

1.2.1 Of Media Hype and the Millennium Boom 14

1.3 Piracy 20

1.3.1 Polic(y)ing the Industry 26

1.4 The Markets 30

1.5 Conclusion 36

PART 2

Chapter Two

The In(ter)vention Of Names 39

2.1	Author(is)ing Authority	41
2.2	In Search of the Authentic	52
2.3	Discourses from afar	60
2.3.1	The Middle Ground	68
2.4	The Power of the Nickname	69
2.5	'My Signifier is More Native [Kenyan] than Yours'	72

Chapter Three

***Zilizopendwa* : Between the Romantic and the Discordant —**

	Cover Versions, Remix and Sampling in the (Re)membering of Kenya	79
3.1	Popular Music as Memory	81
3.2	<i>Zilizopendwa</i> as Cover Versions	86
3.2.1	Modernising the Folksongs	90
3.3	Remix: Irony and Disjuncture	98
3.4	Remix as Continuity	105
3.5	Samples of the Past	113
3.6	Conclusion	122

Chapter Four

	(Re)Figuring the City: The Mapping of Places and People	125
4.1	Theorising Space	126
4.2	Nairobi: 'Green City in the Sun'	130
4.3	Walking in the Margins Vs. Walking in the City	140
4.3.1	Of Local Mona Lisas	144
4.3.2	Thugs and Conmen	147
4.4	Conclusion	152

Chapter Five

Kenyan Hip Hop: Of Global Networks and the Circulation of Local Soundtracks	157
5.1 'Bridges of Sound': More than Global, Less than Local	159
5.2 ' <i>Uhiki</i> ' and the Legacy of 'Put up Your Hands and You Scream'	164
5.2.1 <i>Matatus</i> : Soundtracks and Trendsetters	171
5.2.2 ' <i>Ting Badi Malo</i> ' and the Further Domestication of Hip Hop	176
5.3 ' <i>Ukilya Moko</i> ': Gospel Goes Hip Hop	183
5.4 Conclusion	189

Chapter Six

'Ritwa Riaku' and 'Unbwogable': National Longing and the Antinomies Of The Postcolonial Nation	193
6.1 Reading Postcolonial Politics	194
6.2 Corruption and Ethnicity in <i>Sawa Sawa</i>	203
6.2.1 ' <i>Daima</i> ': Between Cycles of Betrayal and Hope	217
6.3 Transforming Ethnic Discourse into National Desire	224
6.3.1 Rewriting National History	227
6.4 Conclusion	235
Conclusion	240
Works Cited	254
Selected Discography	270
Appendix	
i) Interviews	272
ii) Web discourse	273
iii) <i>Kalapapla</i> (2003) Album sleeve	277

iv) Web Discourse	278
v) Map — Nairobi Metropolitan Area	280
vi) Adverts	
a) Nissan Hardbody — <i>Atoti</i>	281
b) Flamingo Airlines — 'But Do we Say'	282
c) VCT — Eric Wainaina	283

Abbreviations

AFM	Action for Music
ASCAP	American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers
CBS	Columbia Records
CD	Compact Disc
DJs	Disc Jockeys
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DVD	Digitally Versatile Disc
EMI	Electric and Musical Industries
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KBC	Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
MC	Master of Ceremonies
MCSK	Music Copyright Society of Kenya
MISC	Music Industry in Small Countries
MP 3	Acronym for Moving Pictures Experts Group 1 or MPEG 2.
MTV	Music Television
NARC	National Rainbow Coalition
VOK	Voice of Kenya
VCT	Voluntary Counseling and Testing

INTRODUCTION

[T]o perceive and interpret the richness
of popular expression requires
historically situated shared knowledge.
(Johannes Fabian 1998:16)

'Reading the Referents'

In thinking through the import of postcolonial studies, Simon Gikandi (2000a) laments 'the absence of the postcolonial text, its reader and its referent' (90). Gikandi is further concerned that a colonial regime of interpretation clouds much of the scholarship on African writing so that local knowledges and histories are shunned while allusions to Western modernity are both privileged and are seen as the mark of great writing. This study is inspired by a desire to correct, however minimally, this glaring imbalance. It examines the vibrant field of contemporary Kenyan popular music as a critical force in the generation and reflection of modern Kenyan culture. The argument is that, by locating and understanding the wide range of referents that inform this music, and to which it also speaks, we can begin to locate the readers (listeners) of postcolonial texts and debate the character of contemporary postcolonial culture. Additionally, by paying attention to what is actually being said in these texts, we can begin to understand the mechanisms by which popular culture texts work as texts (Barber 1997a, 1997b). The study, therefore, proceeds by documenting the specific texts and contexts that are built into local song lyrics and unpacking the complexes of meaning and narrative that coalesce around these lyrics. I also indicate the sources of the emergent musical styles into which the lyrics have been woven and comment on the socio-cultural function of these styles in the contemporary moment.

The referents that I detail are drawn from the broad canvas of postcolonial Kenyan existence but this does not mean that they have an exclusively indigenous accent. Indeed, the very character of these referents forces us to revisit the whole meaning of the term, 'local'. As we shall see in the course of the thesis, the grammar of Western modernity is infused into these local song-texts in ways that dramatise the reality that all postcolonial societies are a matrix of complex relationships with the West. In foregrounding the meaning of local texts from the perspective of intertextualities and audience generation,

my task will be to work out the meaning value that local artistes¹ and audiences ascribe to these imported forms.

Contexts and Intertextuality

The scope and arguments of the thesis are hinged on Johannes Fabian's (1997:21) methodology, which teaches that in order for one to read any popular culture form with thoroughness, one must take cognisance of the key contexts in which this form is produced and re-enacted. As such popular expressions must be read within the historic-political dimensions of the national space. They must also be analyzed from what Fabian (1997:22) terms the 'explanandum', that is, the 'factors determining use or "performance" of these expressions'. Equally important the popular texts must be understood for their multimedia capacities and interrogated for the social referents that they invoke; referents that are crucial for the ways in which they create the audiences that ultimately share in this popular expression

In the field of literary criticism, to speak of contexts is to invite a number of divergent views and practices.² In some instances, contexts are referred to as 'influence'. This influence is defined by Louis Renza (1990:186) as comprising 'elements often understood as external to the opposed essence of "literature" itself ...[and which] exert pressures on the production or reception of specific literary texts'. Speaking of the contexts of a text does not necessarily mean that one is implying that texts offer a stable, inscrutable truth or factual vision of the societies in which they are made and about which they speak (Taussig 1992:44). Indeed, the whole notion of a factual history is itself problematic: since the historical text is also a literary artefact, it entails shifting processes of selection, ordering and narration of material just as fiction does (White, 1978a, 1978b, 1987). Or to put it in the elegant words of Stephen Greenblatt, 'history has lost its epistemological

¹ Throughout this thesis, I use the term artiste to cover the range of people involved in the creation of a song text (Ryan 1985). They include song writers, instrumentalists, rappers, and producers. Where I use the term musicians, it is to narrow the notion of artistes and speak of song writers and instrumentalists alike.

² Structuralist poetics views the context as limited to the confines of the text itself. Materialist criticism urges protocols of reading that underline the historical conditions of production, probe the political ideology within and outside of the text's milieu and consider the prevailing cultural climate of the day as key factors in production and reception.

innocence' (1985:102). To this end then, attempts to paint the socio-historical and political contexts of a work can make no claim to stability, for history is complicated and conflicted, and very often it is entirely subjective. Still, as Valentine Cunningham (1994:96) urges, it is beneficial for our reading to intrude with historical pointedness, seeking 'the text in history and history in the text'.

It is precisely through such nuanced approaches that we can appreciate Johannes Fabian's lessons on popular culture. His insistence on the need to understand the socio-economic and political contexts of whatever element of (popular) culture that is under study arises from his many years of research in the Shaba region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) / Zaire. His point is that cultural processes are always intricately linked to these contexts, they are not only a result of these contexts, but they also echo and shape the contexts. Equally important, is the way popular culture genres speak to one another. To speak of popular music for instance, requires that we look into a mode of dress, a manner of speaking, a culture of graffiti amongst others, as domains that tie into the music, fuelling and reinforcing it.

Fabian makes us aware of the way popular cultural forms act in concert with one another so that sometimes it may not be adequate to unravel the workings of one form without paying attention to other interrelated forms. He looks at the working of a particular theme — male-female relations — in popular song, religious doctrine and popular paintings (1997:21). In doing so he outlines some of the key contexts in which these forms are enacted as first, the historic-political one, secondly, the social referents and, thirdly, the setting. The historic-political context is critical to analysis and understanding since popular forms, like all other art forms, do not take place in a vacuum, they are created within specific national contexts which they speak to and potentially shape. Talking of the social referent of the work is necessary because analysis must be guided by an appreciation of who it is that comprises the audience for these works, what it is that they share in common with the artistes, and the processes by which the artiste calls into focus these shared contexts.

As argued above, history, whether past or contemporary, is anything but stable objectivity. It is a contested, sometimes subjective and undoubtedly dense and layered category. To this extent then, the kind of contexts described in this thesis can only act as guides to understanding a much more fluid and convoluted experience within which the songs under study are created and shaped, and which they in turn mediate. But at the same time, and as Simon Gikandi (2002:3) argues, the idea of context goes beyond the simple notion of social and political history. It involves broader dynamics such as an intellectual climate, the prevailing ideas of the time, the policies and infrastructure (or lack thereof) within the very institutions where cultural productions are made. So beyond framing a political and socio-economic history of the period under study this thesis will go further and flesh out the conditions underpinning the production of popular music in contemporary Kenya. And this is perhaps what Fabian (1997: 22) refers to as the 'explanandum' or setting — 'the factors determining use or "performance" of the expression'. This is important to a text's meaning for it gives us some indication of the constraints within which these art forms are generated and consumed and projects the production of culture as something that is mediated by fairly deliberate and, at times, even contrived considerations.

Throughout the course of this thesis, I deliberately extend Julia Kristeva's (1980) concept, and take 'intertextuality' to mean the various senses in which one text refers to others. Therefore, I trace the sources of the textual referents embedded in a song and debate the ways in which they inform it and imply an audience. In all this, the point, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1968) insisted, is to demonstrate that texts do not exist in a bounded area, rather, they are produced within other structures and contexts. In a second sense, I take intertextuality to mean 'the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position' (Roudiez 1980:15). To this end I not only detail the sources of the vast range of references made in the songs, I also examine how they relate to one another and contribute to the creation of meaning in the text. For, as Graham Allen (2000:6) states

this relationality can itself be figured in various ways: it can involve the radical plurality of the sign, the relation between signs and texts and

the cultural text, the relation between a text and the literary system, or the transformative relation between one text and another text.

In the event, literary analysis need not be limited to the written word, but must instead look to the areas of commonality between texts and bring into the analysis the writer, audience, history and contemporary reality. In this regard, Gikandi (2000a) calls for an intertextuality that brings historical specificity to the text by locating the events and /or fictional texts that have been woven into the body of whatever text is under study. Gikandi stresses that '[t]he force of intertextuality ... would have to be determined by the specific circumstances in which texts were produced, the histories they invoked, and, most importantly, their conditions of reception' (91). Gikandi's urging that our interpretative exercises should transcend the tendency to view the Western canonical text as the key referent in postcolonial writing does not, of course, mean that we are to obliterate entirely the reality of the continued interaction between postcolonial societies and the institutions of Western modernity. For if our readings are intended to situate postcolonial experience in its contexts, then they must also acknowledge the evidence from cultural texts that speak of the postcolony's unfinished business with global phenomena. Even then, the focus of a study of intertextuality in postcolonial texts — such as the present one — should be the injection of local knowledges about these texts and their contexts. That way we might rescue the study of local forms from superficial analyses by critics with a limited insight into local histories and contemporary dynamics since it is these very realities that enrich the cultural text.

While overlaps are unavoidable, the exploration of intertextuality in each of the chapters in this thesis is framed from the theoretical premises of designated intellectual disciplines viz commerce, literature, history, geography, sociology and politics. I deliberately adopt this structure, not only to demonstrate the systems and codes of interpretation that readers (listeners) (un)consciously bring into their engagement with popular culture texts, but also in order to dramatise the extent to which these texts are born out of deeply layered observations of everyday life. Ultimately, I hope that this structure will help to challenge the commonly held view within Kenyan academic establishments that local popular

culture is a vapid and demeaning exercise in purposeless titillation of the senses (Wanjala 1980).

Audiences

Scholars of popular music have long sought to understand *how* music comes to represent its listeners and the common interpretive codes that it establishes between performers and audiences (Frith 1981:159). In a similar vein, Karin Barber underlines that one of the key issues surrounding African popular cultures is that of their audiences (1987). Do audiences exist out there as obedient recipients of texts or are they actively involved in generating the meaning of a text? How does the artist fit into this scheme of meaning-making as authoritarian prescriber of fixed readings or as a mediator of the reality between him/herself and the audience? Barber argues that as consumers of African popular genres, local audiences are never passive; they do not 'give up their turn in normal patterns of communication' (1997a: 347). They are instead 'interlocutors', actively 'constituting the [very] performance' of the text; and thus their input is key to its eventual texture and impact.

The question of how audiences impact on the meaning of a text must also take into its range of inquiry an examination of how texts constitute audiences, for as Barber (1997a: 353-4) argues '[p]erformances do not just play to ready-made congregations of spectators which are out there awaiting address; they convene those congregations and by their mode of address assign them a certain position from which to receive the address'. In her study of Yoruba popular theatre, Barber concludes that the theatre company 'constitutes its audience by its use of time and space and by its mode of address — as a particular type of modern collectivity' (2000:204). Her examination of the processes of consumption and utility of a text — the way audiences edit a text and carry off whatever bits of it are relevant for application in their lives — demonstrates that audiences are not just active participants in the making of meaning, they also aid in the perpetuation of the text. In the event, ' "production" and "reception" appear as moments in a cycle rather than two poles at opposite ends of a process. What is production is also reception; the act of reception is an act of production' (1997a: 358). The present study traces the processes by

which contemporary Kenyan popular music invokes its audiences, transporting them to familiar places, to new spaces as well as fashioning their style and identity.

It is worth noting that Barber's uses of the terms "audiences" and "publics" implies that they are virtually interchangeable entities (1997a). In a Habermasian sense, she is concerned with the effects of media and the commercialisation of cultural forms on the character and constitution of audiences (Habermas, 1989). Though much of Barber's research into Yoruba popular theatre explores the audiences of live performances, she nonetheless takes cognisance of the idea of imagined rather than physically numerable audiences. In this sense, she conceptualises 'an audience as a "public" in the sense of being in principle an indefinitely extensible horizon of anonymous and interchangeable members, to be addressed not as known persons marked by family, rank, class or resident but as persons' (1997a: 348, see also 2000:234). Michael Warner (2002) distinguishes between audiences as bounded categories that are numerable, and publics as self-organised relations among strangers, created in a social space by the reflexive circulation of discourses around texts.

In this thesis, I privilege the text in the question of the constitution of audiences and demonstrate that it has the power to 'imagine, construct and manipulate audiences' (Ogola 2002:48). As such I go by Barber's more fluid formulation of audiences and publics and in a sense collapse Warner's categories into one so that I use the term audiences to indicate all those who are brought together by the discursive practices initiated by the text and by its reflexive circulation. At the same time I take into account the possibility that some of the text's strategies in invoking the audiences may very well generate bounded categories of users. Thus, we shall, for instance, see how in certain instances the language choices of the artistes limits the consumption of their texts and selects a community of users. In seeking to establish how one particular genre of popular culture — music, in a specific location — modern Kenya, creates and sustains its audiences, I will argue that it is the inescapable elements of intertextuality in the texts that establishes the core affinity between artiste, text and audience.

Kenyan Popular Music

To date, the majority of studies of Kenyan popular music have focused on its evolution from colonial times. They document the entry of modern instruments such as the acoustic guitar and the accordion and detail the growth of expertise with these instruments through contact with Christian music and military brass bands as well as the effects of cross-cultural contact particularly with musicians from the Congo, Malawi and South Africa (Kubik 1981, Low 1982, Stapleton and May 1989, Martin, 1991). Many of these studies, particularly Kubik, Stapleton and May and Graham (1989) note the influence of traditional instruments on the technique and style of the pioneer guitar players. Indeed they all mark out the rise of the *benga* style, a variant of traditional Luo dance music, as the highest point in the development of a modern and unique Kenyan urban music form. Within the present study, interest in music styles and instrumentation is limited to analyzing their function within the thematic concerns of the song text and within the contemporary socio-cultural context.

John Roberts' (1968) study of Kenyan popular music is a pioneering work that looks at the structure, composition, language, and audiences of emergent urban music. He contemplates the possibilities of a thriving commercial boom, and outlines those factors that he feels will continue to strangle the popularity and development of the emerging new forms. Roberts' work is a groundbreaking study that provides a number of openings for further investigations to flesh out the directions that he introduces, as well as to provide contemporary evidence and new approaches.

Caleb Chrispo Okumu's dissertation on 'The Development of Kenyan Popular Guitar Music: A Study of Kiswahili Songs in Nairobi' (1998) extends Roberts' horizons. It looks at the evolution of specific musical trends in Nairobi, ultimately settling on 12 songs that are at the heart of what have locally come to be known as *Zilizopendwa*.³ Like many other scholars in the field, Okumu's bias rests on guitar trends, structure and composition, though he briefly touches on the contextual aspects of the selected texts. Like Okumu and

³ Kiswahili for 'old favourites', or what Americans term 'golden oldies' or 'old school' music.

Low (1982), Graeme Ewens (1991) and Doug Paterson (1999) detail the evolution of musical trends in postcolonial Kenya, tracing the patterns of cross-cultural influence, stressing those from Zaire (DRC) and mentioning in passing the impact of Western music on the local music scene. The studies by Paterson (1987, 1999), Werner Graebner (1987) and Ewens (1991) also look at the rise of so-called ethnic music and hybrid forms such as *taraab* which are often read as *the* authentic Kenyan sounds. The studies by Paterson (1999) and Neal Sobania (2003) are particularly useful for the sense in which they handle contemporary material and begin to illuminate a period that is of specific interest to this present study.

Many of these studies debate, however tangentially, the fortunes of recording companies and the vagaries of the local music market. In this vein Wallis and Malm (1984), Stapleton and May (1989), John Collins (1985), Graeme Ewens (1991), and Ronnie Graham (1992) make detailed studies of the commercial aspects of the Kenyan music industry indicating that these commercial considerations are critical factors in the development of a vibrant popular music scene. Malm and Wallis (1992) develop this concern with material conditions further. They unravel the implications of government and media policy on developments in the music industry and show how Kenyan musicians have long been victims of neglect on account of weak policies and even haphazard implementation of policy by the requisite regulatory bodies. They also show that, through the 1970s and 1980s, the failure of local musicians to function under efficiently run umbrella organizations robbed them of bargaining skills and, therefore, left each musician at the mercy of unscrupulous producers and recording companies that often operated without clearly defined contracts. The approaches of these latter studies are useful to the present study's understanding of the conditions of production which must, in any case, be seen as part of the context of creation that necessarily has a bearing not only on the texts that are produced, but also on their patterns of distribution and consumption.

Working within the same sort of concerns as those that dominate Sobania's (2003) study, Gregory Barz's (2004) *Music In East Africa* is an ethnomusicologist's examination of the

role of music in social systems such as religious ritual in traditional societies in Western Kenya. Rather controversially, Barz argues that there is no such thing as popular music as a category in East Africa. The present study will challenge this position by shifting the area of inquiry away from musical activity in rural enclaves (such as Barz is largely concerned with) and tracing the concern with urban spaces and lifestyles that is undoubtedly evident in contemporary music. Again, Barz's argument that traditional music is still popular necessarily places traditional practices in confrontational opposition to contemporary trends. My study will demonstrate how the urban contemporary borrows from and adapts traditional and ethnic styles, languages and instruments to negotiate the dilemmas of modern urban existence and redefine the ethnic as a fluid and mutating category.

In the few studies that engage with song lyrics, one finds a common thread in the way the critics focus on the relationship between popular music and politics (Haugerud 1995, Gecau 1997, Masolo 2000). The position maintained in each of these studies is that in Kenya musical protest has been one of the key ways in which political crises have been documented. Haugerud shows that the notion of "seditious" music has been part of Kenyan political practice through which the inconsistencies of the state's official discourses are exposed. She shows how in the early 1990s *'Thina uria wakorire athini a gicagi kia Muoroto'* (Gĩkũyũ for the misfortune that befell the poor villagers of Muoroto) irked the authorities on account of its stringent political call. The song suggested that 'if there were two (political) parties, we (Nairobi hawkers and their kin) could take our complaints to the other party' (Haugerud 29-30). Masolo illustrates how popular music of this vein exists in opposition to the state's preferred versions of national culture and how consequently, popular musicians like D.O. Misiiani have learnt to communicate their political messages through allegory and allusion. Gecau outlines the sense of political history intrinsically woven into the fabric of the Gĩkũyũ protest songs of the early 1990s. In an era of intense surveillance and repression of dissenting voices, these songs not only provided a political 'view from below', they also became part of the 'quest for democratic space by ordinary people' (Odhiambo 1987:201). Though all these studies offer approaches and interpretations that are valuable to the present study, they nonetheless

tend towards a binary tension between government and popular culture that may cloud the complexities of the relationship between politics and popular music.

In a ground-breaking study that links popular culture with social history, Atieno Odhiambo (2002a) relates the rise of urban guitar music in colonial Kenya to the effects of surplus income amongst workers in the new urban areas. The study emphasises the ways in which the new music of the 1950s and 1960s helped to reflect and to shape capitalist class formation and how the topicality of its decidedly urban themes also focused on the process of decolonization and echoed nationalist politics. Odhiambo exploits song as textual narrative, a strategy that my own study also adopts even as it moves forward in time to fill in the chronotopic gaps left out of Odhiambo's concerns.

The timely studies by David Samper (2004) and Evan Mwangi (2004) respectively, confront the scene of contemporary Kenyan popular music from socio-cultural perspectives that try to unravel the relationship between emergent art forms and global cultural trends. Samper probes the characteristics of Kenyan rap, underlining its vernacular roots and explaining that 'Kenyan rappers are multilingual culture brokers who use all the linguistic resources available to them. By doing so, they confer symbolic power and cultural capital on all the languages used by young people in their identity project' (42). While his contemplation of the relationship between Kenyan rap, youth identity and an urban sense of place is useful, Samper's study nonetheless shows a limited understanding of local texts and contexts. For instance, he misreads the linguistic content of Ndarlin P's music and narrowly defines the *Mungiki* movement as an 'Islamic religious movement that has recently developed in Nairobi' (45). While the study concludes that contemporary ethnic rap represents a revitalization of the traditional heritage, its limitations draws attention to the need for studies that can explore with better authority these traditional nuances and local referents.

Mwangi's (2004) examination of the nationalist and gender politics in the new hip hop music from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania settles on its symbolic use of the phallus and male sexual desire. With some recourse to song lyrics, Mwangi focuses on the fusion of

traditional and modern hip hop styles imminent in this music and argues that the artistes adopt traditional stances merely 'to create an aura of respectability' to shield the obscene pursuit of male lust dominating most songs (12). Mwangi further shows that in this new music an essentially conservative view of both gender relations and sexual politics conflates with the national agenda propagated by East African statesmen. As such self-reliance and independence are projected as the foremost qualities of the ideal man while the aggressive city woman is seen as a threat to domestic tranquillity. Both the reception of the audiences as well as the music itself suggest a desire for regional integration but a hegemonic masculinism and conservative social attitudes dominate the song-texts. Mwangi's broad sweep of the region, and of the dense range of issues packed into contemporary popular music is indicative of the need for more comprehensive and detailed research in the field. The present study sets out to fill this lacuna.

Methodology

Much of the focus of the present study is on song lyrics and where I make reference to musical styles and instruments, it is to document their socio-cultural function rather than to detail matters of structure and score. In my emphasis on the lyrics I uphold the landmark theoretical breakthrough of Jan Vansina (1985) who demonstrates the validity of oral sources by showing that they constitute messages that can credibly further the study of social and historical phenomenon. Vansina emphasises that messages 'are characterised by a double subjectivity, that of the sender(s) of the message and that of the receiver' (194). Consequently, messages invite interpretations that focus on the message itself and also on its symbolic associations. Vansina's approach to the study of oral sources gains further credence within the present study once it is combined with the methodology of Karin Barber (1987), who like Terence Ranger (1975) underlines the importance of understanding African societies through the seemingly banal, informal activities of those who live away from the glare of officialdom. But Barber also stresses that these popular forms be read not simply for their sociological and historic detail, but that they be investigated as 'expressive acts' (1987:2).

My focus on song lyric's also takes in Kofi Agawu's (2001:3) pronouncement that to understand music, as text, is to decode it as 'words that enable song, the poet's emergent music that is eventually colonized by the composer's music'. It is indeed true that the conventions of recorded popular music do, in their inclusion of lyrics rather than musical scores on the album liner notes, foreground the centrality of the poet, of the lyrics to the text. These conventions seemingly acknowledge the fact that audiences take the trouble to learn the lyrics of a song precisely because it is one of the key interpretative codes that they share with the artistes. Even so, music does more than merely "colonise" the words that carry a significant part of the song's overall message. We can adapt Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and see the popular music text as pluralistic discourse that communicates through the varied voices of the poet, the instrumentalist, the sound engineer and so on. In this process, we can not insist on the hegemony of lyrics to the text's overall meaning. Instead we must look at the ways in which the song-texts capture condensed dramas in which various voices or styles speak to and about one another, as well as speaking to voices outside the text (discourses of culture and society) and thus allowing a multiple interpretation of events and characters.

By insisting on reading popular music as a text, I am working to demonstrate that a significant reason for its appeal and its durability lies in its essential literariness; its recourse to narrative, rhetoric, metaphor, allusion and many other literary devices in its bid to captivate, soothe, instruct, provoke and even surprise its audiences. Further, a text Hanks (1989: 95) writes, 'can be taken [heuristically] to designate any configuration of signs that is coherently interpretable by some community of users'. My emphasis is on interpretability and so the concern is not so much in 'the immanent structure of a discourse as in the social matrix within which the discourse is produced and understood' (Hanks 1989:96). In this sense, music when theorised as a text, readily becomes a site within which meaning is negotiated or as Agawu (2001: 8) says of African music, 'while performing practice and audience participation vary according to genre, the activity of meaning construction remains essential to all participants'.

Employing Fabian's (1997) approach, I scan song lyrics as poetic texts, unpacking the layered range of referents embedded within them. No detail is thought to be too minor, and if I seem to explain and analyze things that are tiresomely familiar, it is because I am keen to pay attention to the local knowledge that would escape the non-Kenyan reader or even the Kenyan reader who may be estranged from the issues by a deficit of generational or intellectual experience. The overall point is to critically document the cultural, socio-economic and political texts and contexts from which contemporary song lyrics stem, and to which they (un)consciously speak and give new meaning, so as to create an understanding of the everyday experiences of postcolonial societies and to interpret contemporary culture.

Three forms of fieldwork have supplemented my essentially literary approach. First, I have over a 3-year period carried out structured interviews with music producers, song writers/musicians, radio DJs, studio owners, record company executives and the General Manager of the Music Copyright Society of Kenya. I have transcribed these interviews from cassette using a rewind-stop-play method. Wherever possible, I have made note of speech habits such as 'er', and 'ya', precisely because very often they signal mood and emotions such as hesitation and evasiveness which impact qualitatively on the gist of what is being said. I have also combed music outlets in Nairobi, Nakuru, Kisumu and Eldoret and had numerous informal group discussions with musicians and producers in clubs and other social venues. These have been useful opportunities to observe first-hand the lifestyle and material conditions within which these artistes work. Lastly, my age-old affinity for radio has been particularly studied since early 1999 when it became apparent that both Kenyan popular music and radio were undergoing some marked changes. To this end I have paid a lot of attention to chart shows, request programmes particularly those played on the General Service station of the state-run Kenya Broadcasting Corporation which has the advantage of nation-wide reach over competing commercial FM stations most of which are concentrated in Nairobi. Taking note of the popularity of particular songs and artistes on account of the amount of airtime they are accorded — and also taking note of those that receive no airtime at all for a variety of reasons — has been one of the ways in which I have selected the discography for this study.

Scope

In this thesis I have designated the years 1997 to 2002 as the period under study for a number of reasons. First, it is in these years that the Kenyan music industry began to recover from the slump in production that started in the late 1970s, largely on account of technological developments in the global music industry which made music reproduction easy and affordable thus encouraging music piracy and undermining the earnings of record companies and artistes alike. In Kenya this scenario led to the exit of international recording companies like EMI and Polygram (Wallis and Malm 1984, Bender 1991, Graham 1992). Swept by the worldwide popularity of the disco age, local bands found little work to sustain them as local audiences favoured international recordings (Low 1982, Bender 1991). The few small scale independents that braved the market could hardly match the quality of international productions and thus a vicious cycle of poor quality recordings, weak earnings and low investment in production began (Wallis and Malm 1984, Paterson 1999). As I demonstrate in Chapter One, several factors have been responsible for the revival of the local music industry. Suffice it to note here that the phenomenal growth in production and the accompanying resurgence in the local consumption of these products can only best be described as a millennium boom. On account of this proliferation the years 1997 to 2002 mark a period that provides us with a wonderful opportunity to probe the processes of cultural production and the key concerns of a generation of avant-garde purveyors of culture.

Another fundamental point of interest about this period is the fact that it stands at the threshold of political transition, marking as it did the last five years of Moi's 24-year reign. The expectation of change, the dynamism that had been introduced by the return to multipartyism in December 1991, as well as Moi's reluctance to give up power (Ajulu 2001) created a backdrop of rapid socio-political change and vibrant activity. In this study then, we focus on this moment of an interregnum when the myriad forces of flux strain for expression at a pitch and tempo not normally experienced in the periods of relative calm and "stability".

The thesis is divided into two parts. In the first one comprising Chapter One, I use the persuasive arguments of Johannes Fabian (1997, 1998) to mount a case for reading the contexts of the production and consumption of local popular music as crucial to determining both the consequent texts and their audiences. Indeed, the structures of production are part of the critical material conditions within which popular music is produced and consumed for they actually determine what gets recorded how and when, as well as what gets heard by whom, where and when. I demonstrate that the informality pervading the Kenyan music industry — a microcosm of the growing *juakalinisation* (King 1996) of the socio-economy of Kenya — generates production, distribution and consumption practices that are highly artisanal and unstructured. Arguably, this informality within the industry spins off a complex set of relational activities, so that music piracy, for instance, is a bane to the economic well-being of artistes and government while at the same time resolving the crisis of distribution and supply for artistes and audiences alike.

Part Two opens with the second chapter in which I extend the argument on contexts somewhat by using the ideas of Michel Foucault (1988), Roland Barthes (1988) and David Lodge (1992) to evaluate the significance of authors and to position artistes' names and album titles as constituent elements of the song text. I illustrate that the iconography of these names and titles alludes to contemporary realities and, therefore, has the capacity to speak to local audiences with great immediacy.

Chapter Three explicates stylistic forms and cultural functions of the rich legacy of *zilizopendwa* that is artfully woven into contemporary song-texts. I use the theoretical foundations of a number of cultural scholars, among them the Popular Memory Group (1982), Paul Connerton (1989), David Thelen (1989) and Rey Chow (1995), to situate popular music as a critical site of individual and social history. The arguments of these scholars further help me to probe the socio-cultural significance of memory work. Scanning old lyrics and documenting the sources of traditional musical practices, I delineate the structural modes — cover versions, remix and sampling — upon which local artistes have mounted "new" songs. I suggest that these local artistes are not only

drawing in their audiences by selling nostalgia they are also, creating a complex matrix of ethnic traditions and recent urban musical practice as the foundations of contemporary Kenyan culture.

In the fourth chapter I look at the ways in which contemporary song lyrics map character types onto geographical spaces. This exploration is inspired by Michel Foucault's (1980) call for a resituating of geography, of spatial terms, in the 'archaeology of knowledge'. Thus I look at the way popular music contributes to the social production of space (Soja 1989) and tie this up with Michel De Certeau's examination of power relations in city-scapes. In the event I emphasise the ways in which contemporary song lyrics document the peculiar ways in which postcolonials have occupied, especially marginal spaces in the capital city, Nairobi, overthrowing official urban practices by injecting 'surreptitious creativities' that give the urban environment a hybrid architectural and cultural character. This sense of 'urban disorder' that local audiences so readily recognise has its parallels in the moral fibre of the ubiquitous characters that people these songs and spaces — informal workers, hapless youth, conmen and thugs. The spatial discourses of these song lyrics outline postcolonial class differentiation and mark out new urban identities in ways that emphasise the cultural significance of the city margins where the fusion of ethnic traditions reworks modernity.

If at all Chapter Four's geography of popular music implies place as a physically fixed and static entity, Chapter Five extends this cartography by underlining the inherent mobility of popular music (Connel and Gibson 2003). As such I seek textual evidence that points to the impact of global cultural phenomena on local musical practice. I read this question of influence and intertextuality as a practice of consumerism (Miller 1995). I also take Paul Gilroy's formulation of *The Black Atlantic* a step further by examining the sense in which the transatlantic exchanges that have turned hip hop, gospel rap and fruity loops into local artforms attest to the formulation of an African modernity that is in part framed by the legacy of these exchanges. In probing the character of emergent Kenyan musical styles fashioned around global cultural exchanges I also emphasise the patterns of local circulation that provide the space of consumption. I detail the ingenious

and creative ways in which local artistes consume global trends and rework them into relevance within local socio-cultural contexts. I also consider the possibility that global cultural phenomena provide the opportunity for cultural translocation through which local audiences transcend their physical spaces and claim allegiance to (earthly and even celestial) lifestyles and identities.

The last chapter positions contemporary popular music within the metanarrative of the nation demonstrating through a scanning of the lyrics that popular music engages with a lot more than the quotidian micro-politics of the everyday lives of ordinary Kenyans. My study of the interventions in politics that the artistes make is framed against the conceptual logic of the nationalist movements that attended to the birth of the postcolonial nation and which much of the recent cultural production in Africa has often brought into question. Within a framework that debates the legitimacy of the nation as the only favourable category of association and interrogates the many guises of political power in the postcolony, I scan contemporary songs whose thematic thrusts often reverberate with discourses that legitimate the official national agenda and others that work as oppositional narratives by projecting the nation's failure as arising from the political culture of ethnicity, corruption and state disorder so definitive of postcolonial Kenyan existence. The chapter ends by examining the ways in which, in the last quarter of 2002, the project of political transition hijacked a popular song's narrative of defiance, invincibility and revision of the nation's political and cultural history to successfully propel itself onto the platform of official leadership. In this act, the power of popular music as political education cannot be gainsaid. At the same time, the strategy that saw the newly formed National Rainbow Coalition appropriate '*Unbwogable's*'⁴ national popularity and secure political power at the 2002 General Election, demands that we realise that popular forms are not always as spontaneous as we often like to imagine.

⁴ The word is derived from the Luo verb *bwogo* meaning to scare, or frighten. In its broader usage, *unbwogable* has come to represent a spirit of political invincibility, resilience and resistance. Throughout this thesis I have — in order to dramatise the extent to which cultural production in modern Kenya is bound to indigenous languages and practices — adopted a connotation system that highlights the presence of these ethnic allegiances. Thus, in referencing songs like '*Unbwogable*' which carry a non-English title I not only use the single quotation marks necessary to denote a song, I also maintain the use of italics that is conventionally used to denote words that are foreign to the English language. In the case of non-English album titles such as *Sawa Sawa*, I retain italics to connote the use of a foreign language and additionally underline them to denote their status as composite titles.

This study may perhaps create the impression that male artistes and producers have dominated the landscape of the popular music industry in Kenya over the last few years. While this is true, it nonetheless somewhat obscures the presence of women in popular music. Their growing involvement, performance and contribution to a more gendered understanding of local cultures is certainly an area worthy of study which could be usefully taken up where this particular one has left off. Again, since the landmark productivity of 2001-2002, there have been numerous developments in the growth of the local music industry as well as in continued experimentation with what might typically come to be known as a peculiarly Kenyan popular music style. This too should rightfully form another study of contemporary Kenyan popular music.

CHAPTER ONE

'POVERTY, PIRACY, POOR FACILITIES AND GOVERNMENT INDIFFERENCE'¹: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE KENYAN MUSIC INDUSTRY

...the music industry cannot be treated as being somehow apart from the sociology of everyday life — its activities are themselves culturally determined.

(Simon Frith, 2001:27)

This chapter discusses the music industry as one of the key contexts of the production and reception of contemporary Kenyan popular music. It illuminates the peculiar ways in which the local industry functions and highlights the strategies for survival that its practices engender as requisite structures for that production and consumption. The essential argument is that the production of culture, and in this case of popular song, is not simply a matter of artistic genius. It is very much a technical and commercial process riddled with the tensions of, and struggles for, limited resources through the various stages of its development from composition to recording, producing, marketing and distributing. I argue that the whole industry and its intrigues form a critical context within which the eventual texts should be read, for it is here that complex forces interact to ultimately influence the choice of what is made, by whom, when and how. And even upon release, there are conduits that either mute or propel the consumption of a popular song. These determine the level of exposure that a song has, and thereby mould its reception and the patterns and sites of its consumption.

The chapter illustrates this political economy of production using the specific case of '*Unbwogable*' to show that the local industry has defied the typical market formation of a music industry. Instead it is defined by economies of the informal sector that are characterised by poverty, lack of institutional support, poor facilities and rampant piracy. Taking a historical sweep of the development of Kenya's popular music industry, I note

¹ Ronnie Graham (1992:10) summarises these as the critical factors limiting the performance of African popular music both locally and abroad.

that in the tension between the dominance of multinational recording companies and the numerous independent outfits, innovation and vigour is seen to come precisely from the sites of informality amongst the independents. The ethos of informal trade, known locally as, *jua kali*,² is at the heart of these independents' functioning and is seen to have become thoroughly institutionalised in contemporary Kenya. We shall see the overall effects of this informality on the fortunes of the national music market and also inquire into the performance of Kenyan music on the international market. Indeed we shall consider whether the choice of a market is itself a critical influence on the artistes' creative imagination and on the task of compiling and marketing his/her product.

1.1 The Production Of Culture

In order for the creativity of the artiste to be transformed into a commercial commodity, several mediating factors have evolved to create and bridge the distance between makers of music and its consumers. Some of these conduits have come about in the form of technological merchandise such as gramophones, vinyl records, recorders, radios, television, audio and video cassettes, and so on. Other mediating factors have evolved in the form of personnel — producers, sound engineers, publishers, accountants, collective management societies and a host of smaller business intermediaries. The variable equation of how this collection of factors relate in a commercial atmosphere to create the movement of the product from artiste to consumer is precisely what is meant by the political economy of popular music production. And if as Johannes Fabian (1998) has argued, the popular form constitutes an act of expression, of communication of personal experience into communicable and shared expression, then the interpretation of this expression must in part entail an analysis of the conduits through which these expressions reach their ultimate consumers. In an ideal situation, these variables should be ordered into a policy and market structure so as to effectively oversee and shape the movement of

² Kenneth King (1996) provides an in-depth study of *jua kali* as a viable component of an emerging economy. Suffice it to note here that in the 1980s, the term *jua kali* — which is Kiswahili for 'hot sun' — was increasingly used in reference to the working conditions of artisans who had no established premises and whose businesses were, therefore, run out in the open yards subject to the vagaries of nature. Whereas the term *jua kali* is sometimes used in a derogatory way to describe shoddy, non-professional work, it has more specifically come to mean anyone who is in self-employment, to the extent that in 1988 the Minister for Technical Training and Applied Technology encouraged the use of the term *jua kali* in reference to the informal sector and named the small-scale industry the Jua Kali Development Programme.

popular music from the artist's imagination into the public domain (Malm and Wallis, 1992).

This argument builds on the production of culture theory which in essence reads cultural forms as commercial products and, therefore, does away with notions of the spontaneity of cultural products (DiMaggio, 1977; Petersen and Berger, 1975; Ryan, 1985; Barber, 1987). Ryan in particular underlines that

the contingencies within the production-of-culture process limit the range of products available at any given point in time. If product choices are limited, consumers are then forced to cease consumption or, what is more likely, make the best-available choice from the limited range of products offered (2).

Peterson (1982) identifies six sets of variables that the production of culture research has shown to constrain the production of symbolic products. They include — law, technology, market, industry structure, organizational structure and occupational careers. The final product is seen as the net result of these factors as they interact and are manipulated by agents in the industry. In tracing the development of the Western music industry, Simon Frith (2001:33) concludes that it has come to be structured along four essential lines:

a rights industry, dependent on the legal regulation of the ownership and licensing of a great variety of uses of musical works
a publishing industry, bringing those works to the public but itself dependent on the creativity of musicians and composers
a talent industry, dependent on the effective management of those composers and musicians, through the use of contracts and the development of a star system
an electronics industry, dependent on the public and domestic use of various kinds of equipment.

Along the lines of the production of culture theory we are, therefore, urged to understand how the variables represented here come into play to consciously fashion what is eventually produced as a musical product.

Holly Kruse (1998) further reminds us that there is an inescapable relationship between *inter alia* state policies, market forces and popular music practices. Kruse demonstrates how, for instance, policies such as airplay quotas amount to attempts to control the influx of foreign ideas and therefore, are aimed at promoting national identities through the privileging of home-grown cultural practices. Whether or not these policies are successful in promoting local culture industries is another matter. Diana Crane (1992:144-145) breaks down the 'principal systems for supporting the arts' as patronage, art markets, organizations and government. Within these systems, government can be directly involved in popular music industry by funding training institutions such as performing arts schools and offering recording and performing facilities, through the practices of state-sponsored broadcasting (radio and TV) and also through trade agreements. Arguably, each of these support systems impacts on artistic freedom just as much as it shapes audiences and determines the significance of the work within the public domain. Let us now turn to a practical instance to draw lessons on how the Kenyan music industry functions.

1.1.1. The Example Of 'Unbwogable'

The popular song that came to dominate the Kenyan socio-political landscape towards the end of 2002 first made its entry into Kenya's public sphere early one morning in September 2002. The duo behind it, Gidi Gidi Maji Maji, (Joseph Ogidi and Julius Owino) were not newcomers to the local music scene.³ As we shall see in Chapter Five, their 1999 Luo rap single, '*Ting Badi Malo*',⁴ became an instant dancehall hit, riding on the crest of an already established performance formula and itself spinning off a host of

³ The two first met in Nairobi in December 1998 at the kind of talent contests held at the Florida 2000 Club where aspiring local performers cut their teeth. At the time, Gidi was a high school student at Aquinas High School in Nairobi while Maji had just moved to Nairobi having completed his secondary school education at Kisumu Boys High School. In 2001 Gidi started on a B.Sc. in Information Technology at Jomo Kenyatta University College of Agriculture and Technology and Maji went on to study Electronic Publishing at Kul Graphics Academy of Printing and Technology in Nairobi.

imitations. Indeed, Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's critical success with this single saw them move on to record their first album *Ismarwa* (2000) with producer Tedd Josiah who was then with Audio Vault Studios. But while *Ismarwa* gained good exposure on radio and was generally well received by music pundits,⁵ its "poor" performance on the commercial market became a source of deep anguish for Gidi and Maji.

...we were so much stressed especially after doing the 'Ismarwa' which of course, we, we're honest, we didn't get any payment from that. So we were, we were like er, we were like almost giving up with everything (**MAJI**: Despairing) we were just despairing.⁶

Gidi and Maji admit that they lacked the expertise to challenge the position maintained by their promoters that *Ismarwa* had been a "commercial failure" but Gidi's gut intuition was that

the people who were managing the sales were, were not straight...By those times we didn't, we didn't really take so much interest about, on selling, following up on the sales, or something like that. We just like we trust them, they do them for us, then after some time we ask them 'oh, we have not recovered our money, so there's no way we can give you', see something like that. So, we were like what do we do now?

Maji emphasises that things might have been different 'if we knew, we would have known how to control: 'men, you're not selling it', and stick by that. But that time, anyone could play a God, *ati* [that] 'without me my friends, if you don't sell this thing' '.

Wisened by this experience, Gidi and Maji were quick to have a hands-on engagement with the release of their next song — '*Unbwogable*'. Ironically, '*Unbwogable*' was first broadcast on Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), the state-controlled airwaves. Debuting on the 'Breakfast Club' programme of the General Service DJ Bill Odidi,

⁴ Dholuo for 'Raise your hands up in the air'.

⁵ See Christopher Huggins, 'African Traditional Music Enters the 21st Century', *PHAT!* No. 6, August-October 2001 p.35.

⁶ Gidi at a personal interview (together with James Ogude), Nairobi, May 6 2003. Unless otherwise stated all other comments attributed to Gidi and Maji in this thesis emanate from that interview.

introduced it as the exciting new single from the duo behind the 1999 hit, '*Ting Badi Malo*'. Odidi was clearly addressing himself to the long abiding rumours in music circles that Gidi and Maji were a washed-out act. Odidi says that Gidi had phoned him very late the previous night and excitedly told him about their new single, '*Who Can Bwogo Me?*'⁷ As Odidi was due on air at 5am the following morning, he made quick arrangements to pick up a copy of the new disc on his way to work. At 7.45 am, he unveiled Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's come-back number dutifully asking his listeners to give him some feedback of their response to the song. At the time, not even Odidi could have imagined the sheer impact that this song was going to have on the country over the next couple of months. By the time it became known as '*Unbwogable*', this song had long crossed the threshold of entertainment to become a conduit of political expression, a symbol of resistance and altogether a rare popular culture event. By November 2002, KBC was no longer airing it⁸, for '*Unbwogable*', had become too closely associated with opposition politics and was fast becoming one of the principal vehicles through which Kenyans were demanding complete and total change in the forthcoming December 2002 General Election.

'*Who Can Bwogo Me?*' was mastered and produced by Tedd Josiah at his Blu Zebra Records in Nairobi. By the time of this project, the 34 year old Josiah, who initially trained as a graphic designer at the Kenya Polytechnic, had established himself as a talented and resourceful producer. His interest in music was honed in church where he sang in the choir and always lingered on after the service playing with the drums and piano purely for his own entertainment. With time Josiah tried his hand at composition, took on sound engineering and even spent 7 months in Tanzania recording commercials. His early productions landed him a job with Sync Sounds where he worked for two years and produced two important albums — Hardstone's *Nutin But de Stone* (1997) and the compilation album, *Kenyan — The First Chapter* (1998). Josiah then moved on to establish Audio Vault Studios with Mike Rabar and Dave Muriithi and in 1999 he released a second compilation album, *Kenyan — The Second Chapter* (1999) and Gidi

⁷ Personal interview Nairobi, October 30 2002. Odidi also confirms that in the early days, '*Who Can Bwogo Me?*' was the actual title of this number.

⁸ '*Unbwogable*' duo set to entertain at popular city Spot', *Sunday Nation* November 17 2002, 'Lifestyle' p.10.

Gidi Maji Maji's *Ismarwa* (2000). By the time Josiah established his own Blu Zebra Studios in 2001 he was amongst the most sought after producers in the East African region, one whose products received good radio air-play and a fair amount of media publicity.

Josiah states that by the time '*Unbwogable*' was released on the airwaves, his company had issued 1,000 copies to 'limited outlets...four outlets in Nairobi, and the 1,000 copies disappeared'.⁹ However, the reality on the ground was that it took weeks before record stores, even those in Nairobi, had copies of this CD single readily available for sale. And this scenario of a consumer gap — a time-lag between the moment of broadcasting and that of actual release of sale copies — is not unique to 'Who Can *Bwogo* Me?'; it has happened with virtually every recent Kenyan popular song. Josiah argues, and both Gidi and Maji do confirm, that the preponderance of these time lags has been occasioned by the economic uncertainties of the local music industry. In the wake of relentless music pirates, selling enough legitimate discs to make a profit for both musicians and producers is virtually impossible. Consequently, local artistes have become ingenious. As Josiah explained it to me:

The problem is Kenyan musicians have been victims too many times. You don't want to put a million shillings into your product and nobody buys it, but you still want to be famous, and you still want to do performances. The only way to be famous and do performances is airplay. So release a single, have it out on air, push it as much as you can, you become popular, you get to do the performances, you charge 15/25 thousand for a 15 minute show. And you're in a weekend making maybe 50/60 an average of 50/60 thousand per weekend, it doesn't matter whether you're selling [CDs] or not, you're happy it's good enough money.

⁹ Personal interview together with James Ogude, Nairobi, May 6 2003. Unless otherwise stated all other comments attributed to Josiah in this thesis relate to this interview.

Were these the sort of practical and political considerations that operated in the production and haphazard distribution of 'Who Can *Bwogo* Me?' By their own account, the duo of '*Unbwogable*' had, in a very literal sense, to prove their own invincibility as far as gaining an income from their own labour in this song was concerned. They say that once the piece had been mastered and recorded at Blu Zebra Records they demanded from their producer, Tedd Josiah, that he gives them their song. Obviously the debacle in 2000 over sales and royalties from *Ismarwa* played a part in conscious decision to take over and manage the cutting of CDs and cassettes from '*Unbwogable*' and the actual sales and distribution of the product. To this end they made the jacket covers for the CDs themselves, thankfully falling back on the graphic designing skills of Maji Maji. Using photocopying paper and glue, Gidi and Maji made the album sleeves and run promotional posters; some of which they placed with those music outlets in Nairobi that were willing to help them sell their song. They turned the rest of the posters into billboards literally walking in them as sandwich-men do, through clubs and dance-halls, willing and cajoling patrons to buy copies of their CD.

Much later on they perfected the commoditization of the fast emerging slogan, *Unbwogable* by designing and selling other merchandise, which then worked as promotional material — T-Shirts, bandannas and caps. They made as much as 100% profit from the T-shirts which they were selling wholesale and on 'Cash on Delivery' basis to commercial merchants in Nairobi. To this end, Gidi and Maji became the first Kenyan artistes to not only realise, but to actually tap into - for commercial gain - the potential of popular song as cross-referencing discourse (Warner, 2002: 64). With time, they say, their fans demanded more, going so far as to inquire after an earlier hit-single by Maji Maji and Wiky Mosh — '*Atoti*'.¹⁰ In subsequent issues of 'Who Can *Bwogo* Me?/' '*Unbwogable*' they placed the song alongside '*Atoti*' on one disc.

¹⁰ In June 2004, '*Atoti*' became the subject of a landmark copyright suit in which the late Wiky Mosh's (Wycliff Cavine Omondi) father sued Gidi Gidi Maji Maji and A.I. Records (for Gallo Records) claiming that they infringed on Mosh's copyright on '*Atoti*' by playing, performing and distributing it on their CD *Many Faces* (2004). See Dan Teng'o 'Bitter Rivalry for *Atoti*', *Saturday Nation, Review*, April 17 2004 p.17-18 and '*Unbwogable* Duo Finally *Bwoggo*'d', *Pulse, East African Standard*, June 11 2004, Online edition.

Josiah does not deny that Gidi Gidi Maji Maji took over the sales and marketing of their single. He says that his production outfit, Blu Zebra Records, doubted very much that a single disc could do well in the pirate-infested waters of Kenya's music industry:

we were wondering, 'Just hold on a minute, with all this piracy, are we surely going to sell one song'? And I just said, you know, honestly speaking, 'I just don't believe it' ... it was one song we didn't have the confidence that this song was really gonna be sold. We knew we could push the song strongly on radio, but the sale aspect of it, we weren't really quite sure of... So, Gidi Gidi took up the initiative and said 'look, we will handle our sales and marketing of our music', so we stepped out as a record company and let them handle it directly. But there was a lot of lost opportunity within that particular project, *a lot of* lost opportunity. Again, you can not be the artiste, the distributor, the management, the you know, and that's what they attempted in doing, and I'd say they got, they did make a profit but they would have made a *more* bigger profit.... the pirates clocked about a million discs but they did not.

So significant was the input of the music pirates in the promotion of this song, that barely a month after its release confusion had arisen over the song's actual title. The *Sunday Nation's* 'Lifestyle' column, which weekly carries the lyrics of emerging hit songs, carried both '*Unbwogable*' and '*Who Can Bwogo Me?*' as the title of Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's new single.¹¹ And by the time '*Unbwogable*' was scaling the heights of musical and political success, there was another version of it — '*Unbwogable – Remix*'. Gidi and Maji say they had no hand in cutting this version even though it employs a sample of their original chorus. For his part, Josiah maintains that 'NARC bought the license off that, and it was for quite a pretty penny'. The musicians necessarily cast producer Tedd Josiah in a very negative light, and it was not until August 2003 that they admitted to having been paid Kshs. 800,000 (USD 10,000) as license fees for NARC's purchase of '*Unbwogable*'. Even then, the newspaper account reporting their retraction said that, 'the rappers, who have been claiming that they were not paid for use of the song at political rallies, say they did not know that the money was from Narc until details of the deal became public two weeks ago'.¹² In the cat and mouse game between local musicians and producers,

¹¹ *Sunday Nation*, October 13 2002, 'Lifestyle', p.4.

¹² 'Young Luos *can* make money', *Saturday Nation*, August 16 2003 p.24.

musicians invariably emerge as the injured party and the facts of the monetary transactions between the parties are often clouded behind missing records and unaudited sales.¹³ An interesting question to pose at this stage is why it is that the contemporary popular music industry in Kenya functions, to such a glaring extent, outside of the laid down local and international procedures?

1.2 Then and Now: A Profile of Kenya's Music Industry

The present state of the music industry in Kenya must, of necessity, be understood against the background of its progression over the years and against the background of the national political economy as a whole. The Kenyan economy from independence in 1963 to the present has moved from euphoria and boom (1963-1979), to decline and stagnation (1980- 1990), and on to attempts at financial reorganization outside of donor funding at the official levels within a kleptocratic state bearing a measure of increasingly innovative indigenous practices such as *jua kali* (1990-2002).¹⁴ Since the political changes of 2002 we have seen renewed attempts at strict fiscal management through resumption of foreign aid and the invigoration of export processing zones amid whispers of continuing graft at high levels. In all this, a thoroughly aggressive practice of indigenous business and informal establishments continues to thrive. The local music industry has followed very much the same economic graph and since the mid 1990s has seen phenomenal growth, which has not necessarily translated into economic well-being for all the stake-holders in the industry.

¹³ See for instance Dan Teng'o, 'Unhappy artistes shift camp: producers accused of poisoning working relationship', *Saturday Nation, Review*, February 1 2003, p.14, Charles Otieno and Caroline Nyanga, 'Where is E-Sir's money?', *East African Standard, Pulse Magazine*, March 19 2004 p.6 and Caroline Nyanga, 'Ogopa: Making Music or Not', www.kafoi.com

¹⁴ King (1996) observes that one of the most striking aspects of Kenya's socio-economic fabric over the last 20 years is seen in the way the whole notion of *jua kali* has moved beyond the confines of the marginal trade associated with the urban sansculottes to become the trend for middle and lower-middle class citizens wishing to boost their otherwise inadequate "formal" earnings. Today, this informal sector provides a vibrant hub of services as varied as motor repair, hairdressing, food manufacture and distribution, schooling tuition etc

A number of studies have, with varying depth, covered the early years of the music industry in Kenya.¹⁵ While the majority of these focus on the emergent urban styles in the new age of 'guitar music', a few give us some idea of the practical and commercial side of the business. The overall picture created is that in the early years (1930s-1970s) when a number of multinational recording companies competed aggressively to capture the novelty of a new African popular music on vinyl, business was brisk, marked by a high turnover of recordings in a variety of styles and sounds and backed by fairly high sales figures (as much as 20,000 singles a month in the 1960s). This vibrant commercial scene led to the entry of a number of independent recording companies such as Jambo Records, Rafiki, ASL and the Indian owned Mzuri label (Graham, 1992:148). The independents largely survived on the more marginal business of songs in the host of ethnic languages and styles and in the late 1950s ASL were the first to release Zairean music locally. The majors dealt with the bigger artistes, particularly those who were striving to create a national sound through Kiswahili lyrics, but it is not as if working with big multinational labels gave these artistes star status or turned them into a wealthy lot. It simply meant that the majors were branding a certain type of music and seeking international markets for it. Ultimately the majors were turning out a fairly homogeneous sound. This homogeneity, as well as a number of other factors which I shall detail below, then became the very reason for the collapse and eventual exit of the multinationals from the Kenyan music business.

The pattern of decline was most pronounced through the late 1970s and into the 80s. EMI had established a subsidiary in Nairobi in 1977 and by 1978 they were facing bankruptcy, having been swindled by their local partners and left with high liabilities to Polygram's pressing plant (Wallis and Malm, 1984:92-93, Stapleton and May, 1989:272-273). CBS (now Sony) moved into the market in 1978 in partnership with a Kenyan, Simeon Ndesanjo, and built a 16-track studio to tap the local talent and form a base for future African operations. By 1982 they had also started a magazine, *Music Scene*, as part of

¹⁵ Roger Wallis and Krister Malm (1984, 1992), John Collins (1985), Chris Stapleton and Chris May (1989), Flemming Harrev (1989), Ronnie Graham (1989, 1992), Graeme Ewens (1991), Wolfgang Bender (1991), Doug Paterson (1999), Neal Sobania (2003).

their promotional material and were appealing for indigenous sounds in order for Kenyan music to effectively compete on the international scene. Indeed, Wallis and Malm (1984:94) have described the activities of CBS in Kenya as strategic feats in walking the tight-rope between the interests of a multinational company (represented by their membership in the local branch of the International Federation of Phonogram Industries), and the push for indigenization of the local music industry (fronted by Kenya Record Producers Association to which they also belonged). Even then, with the exception of their international success with Sammy Kasule's 1983 English version of '*Shauri Yako*' (That's your Problem), CBS's experience in Kenya was not all smooth sailing. They lost a lot of money and too often their recording studio proved to be way too sophisticated for local needs for the better part of the 80s and 90s. Eventually they leased it out to Andrew Crawford Productions (Malm and Wallis, 1992:86).

By far the biggest reason for the 1980s decline in the music business not just in Kenya, but worldwide, was the introduction of audio-cassettes as the new sound storing technology (Wallis and Malm, 1984:6-7). As a technological advancement from the vinyl that had previously dominated the Kenyan music industry, cassettes proved to be very harmful to the recording industry even though they spread the culture of recorded music to nearly every hamlet in the republic.

The ease with which music could be reproduced on cassette and the proliferation of battery cassette players throughout Africa (they were comparatively cheap and were not dependent on the provision of electricity), not only undermined the earnings of professional musicians but flooded the market with cheap copies of Western, soul, disco, rock and reggae records (Graham, 1989: 2).

Audio-cassettes very easily lent themselves to duplication, thus opening the doors to massive piracy and home-taping all of which undermined local music production and contributed to a massive decline in recordings and in overall interest in the consumption of local music. By 1990, Polygram closed their plant and ceased record production in Kenya entirely. In the end, only Lonrho's AIT (now back to the Andrews' family as A.I.

Records) and Polygram (now Tamasha Productions) survived the dry spell of the 1980s and 1990s. A.I. Records has been surviving on its agency and distribution work for international labels, a couple of albums with Nairobi based Zairean bands like Super Mazembe and on compilation albums for the international market. Tamasha Productions has been surviving entirely on CD and tape re-issues of Polygram's 1970s hit albums.

In the period when the multinationals had been smoked out of the local industry, the independent producers and studio owners of Nairobi's vibrant River Road fared pretty well. Their target market has always been the numerous artistes working in ethnic languages and with a ready audience in their local communities (Malm and Wallis, 1992:86-87, Paterson, 1999: 512-514). And though they always made tangible losses to piracy they had not incurred heavy costs with sophisticated production as the big labels tended to. As the popular music scene began to undergo a renewed boom in the mid 90s, it was the independents once again at the forefront of discovering new talent and taking the risk of recording it.

The new digital technologies have meant greater ease in the recording process and more and bigger players have come into the business. Research indicates that by early 2002 there were up to 40 studios producing music in Kenya, most of these located in the capital city. 'They range from the proverbial "back room" to large, digitally equipped studios with full production facilities' (Moirra Tremaine, 2002:65). Neal Sobania (2003:201) has also noted the growing sophistication of recording studios around the city. At an interview with Alph Rabar of Homeboyz Entertainment in March 2004, I was taken on a tour of their premises on Baricho Road, Nairobi. It is clearly a multimillion shilling investment boasting two main studios and two recording booths all equipped with digital production facilities. It is here that many of the recent recordings in Kenya have been mastered.¹⁶ The emergent trend is one in which the major players are beginning to obtain overseas licenses for songs produced by the independents and seeing to their entry onto

¹⁶ In January 2003, the three brothers behind Homeboyz Entertainment opened Sprite Homeboyz Academy, the first professional school of DJing in Kenya. Subsequently, they started the Music Technology Academy in Nairobi's South C neighbourhood where they teach music production and live sound recording.

the international market.¹⁷ This scenario runs counter to trends in the West where this kind of integration between the independents and the majors has been on the decline (Toynbee, 2000:156). Locally, integration will certainly see to the enhancement of quality just as much as it will expand the market for local music. But there is also the likelihood that mergers will take place to the point where once again, the bigger players will form a tight oligopoly. This will doubtlessly result in greater professionalism coming to the industry, but it will probably also curb creative autonomy. Major labels tend towards a staid homogenous sound for as Toynbee has observed, 'much as they would like to, major companies find it difficult to directly control the key label functions of recruiting talent and commissioning music' (2000:156).

1.2.1. Of Media Hype and the Millennium Boom

The musical boom that began to catch on in the mid-1990s was the result of a confluence of a number of factors. As I illustrated earlier, through the mid-1980s and into the 1990s the socio-economic demography of Nairobi was increasingly defined by *jua kali* initiatives. With a middle-class that had been brought down to the level of propelling itself forward by tapping the subterranean survival skills of informal trade, there was suddenly a generation of urban citizens who were ready to look at opportunities in the business of leisure in refreshing new ways. Indeed, Daniel Bell (1976) long observed that changes in the nature of work and of the economy lead the affected individuals to a certain amount of autonomy away from the established professional outlooks on cultural choice. In other words, shifts in the economy lead people to make choices about their cultural engagements that are no longer tied to the "set" cultural practices traditionally allied to their occupations. In a situation such as Kenya's where the drive has increasingly been towards economic self-reliance and informality, subterranean cultural practices have correspondingly gained visibility and greater acceptance all around.

¹⁷ In a personal interview with John Andrews of A.I. Records (Nairobi, April 20 2004) he explained that this is the direction in which his company has been moving. Unless otherwise stated, all the comments by Andrews that are used in this thesis emanate from that interview.

Diana Crane (1992:10) has argued that the proliferation of new trends and new cultural forms and genres is in part 'a consequence of new technologies that are providing culture creators with more control over the production of images and sounds'. This has certainly been the case in Kenya's millennium popular music boom. New technology in the form of compact discs necessarily created new energy, possibilities and enticement in the local music industry particularly amongst the young entrepreneurs who were anxious to keep up with developments abroad. And for the old hands in the business, this new technology promised a chance to shrug off the losses from audio-cassette piracy. Producer Tedd Josiah speaks of the proliferation of new music in the year 2001 as the result of precisely such forces:

I think in 2001 everybody realised that the price of CDs is not that prohibitive and if you actually sacrifice a bit, you can do it, but that was after we had been doing it for 6 years. Everybody else decided, it's time to do it now; which is a very good thing, because now it gave *variety*, you know it gave *options* of music which is exactly what we wanted to do. We didn't want to be *the only* music producers or manufacturers, we wanted to be a part of history, you know, wanted to be what, the pioneers? Yes, but you know, part of actually making people see that this is an initiative that can actually bear fruit. And the reason why the following year you didn't see that many albums is because people jumped in without realizing, without really understanding that first of all the pirates ruled the game; and secondly you don't just make music for music's sake, you have to make music that people will buy (emphasis his).

While it is widely recognised that the radio in particular has a symbiotic relationship with the work of recording companies, it may not be as glaringly apparent that radio has the capacity to shape musical styles and directions (Frith, 2001:40). The importance of this is seen in local developments that contributed to the music boom beginning in the mid 1990s. For the period under discussion in this was thesis was also marked by the moment of liberalization in the Kenyan airwaves (Sobania, 2003:81-82). The first private radio station, Capital FM, was licensed in 1996 and since then private radio and TV channels have proliferated. And though, as we shall see later, the role of the broadcast media in the millennium boom is a somewhat contentious matter, for now we can note that liberalization of the airwaves was one of government's direct policy decisions that had a catalyst effect on the development of local popular music.

To further add to the critical moment of change, the age-old fixation of the Kenyan broadcast media with the musical repertoire of the West¹⁸ naturally ensured that in this era, locals were quickly exposed to the growing popularity of American hip hop and other emergent styles both on radio and on TV. Simon Frith (2001:39) argues that record companies rarely construct new music markets, that in fact their sales activities are quick and efficient responses to the musical tastes emerging from the market and aired by the media. In Kenya, developments speak of a slightly more complex relationship involving the media and the record companies in the development of a new era in local popular music. Rather than continue to stifle local musical genius, enterprising young producers decided to capitalise on this seemingly entrenched attitude amongst the local elite and start generating local tunes that were influenced by the Western styles. Thus though, for instance, Tedd Josiah has always felt particularly irked by the habit of foreign owned FM radio stations that feature '5% local, 95% international' music creating audiences that are glued to Western styles, he talks of this slant as partly constituting his motivation to get into the local music industry. Speaking of the concept behind his compilation album *Kenyan – The First Chapter* (1998) he says:

for me, it was an awakening of Kenya. People said it could not be done. Nobody can sing in ragga, nobody can sing R&B, there are no good Hip-Hop, gospel, or blah, blah musicians; and I said, 'you know what, that's all rubbish, I will put together for you, musicians from different diasporas of the music industry in Kenya, and show you, this is the best of Kenya'.¹⁹

In a sense then, the Kenyan music industry began to grow from radio's agenda and also through a mixture of raw creativity and talent manipulation by producers who adapted it to cultivate a new era of popular music around what local consumers were already accustomed to. Interestingly, these adaptive strategies framed around Western styles then became the very impetus for yet other producers to seek a new cultural direction for

¹⁸ See Bender (1991:133-135), Graeme Ewens (1991), Wallis and Malm (1984) and particularly, Malm and Wallis (1992:89-92) who give a detailed analysis of the Western biased radio content in Kenya in the late 1980s.

¹⁹ Ibid interview. See also 'Tedd Josiah, taking Kenyan music to a higher level' in *PHAT* NO. 5 May-July 2001, p.42-3.

Kenyan popular music. Says veteran producer Tabu Osusa who formed the group Nairobi City Ensemble in January 2000

There is a lot of good music in the country but they sound so much American, you wouldn't even know it is Kenyan music. That is what I was trying to avoid, ya, *have some identity, something that is authentic Kenyan music*.... Let us go to our basic African roots, not only African roots, but Kenyan roots you see, like even if it is rap, which for a long time I was very anti, until I realised that no, rap is actually very African too, it can be very Kenyan, but if it is done in the right way, if it is done in the African way, I mean in the context of Kenya (emphasis his).²⁰

John Andrews of A.I. Records, whose family has been in the recording business in Kenya since the 1950s, feels that the changing media practices of the 1990s increasingly brought more and more African content onto the airwaves and screens.

Another thing that really opened up music was — and dare I say it — Channel Television. The introduction of MTV, Channel O and all these other ones, suddenly people became interested in, you know, watching all these modern ethnic, actually continental artistes they adore your Youssor Ndours, your Salif Keitas,... Mandoza, you know name all these different people that suddenly they were looking at and thinking 'damn that's good!' 'I can do that' becomes part of it.

This content became a crucial influence in bringing on a national change in attitude to the whole vocation of music. And even though many feel that continued airplay acted as a further incentive for producers and musicians to continue generating more local music, others argue that to date, media support for local productions remains inadequate.²¹ In Kenya today, the media are major players in the industry, acting as cultural gatekeepers whose role is often seen as harmful rather than helpful to the development of artistes. Cries of unequal coverage and unfair airplay are always being heard though no actual cases of payola and its many variants (Wallis and Malm, 1984:242-245) have ever been

²⁰ Personal interview together with James Ogude, Nairobi, December 20 2001. Also present were Poxi Presha and Idi Achieng, members of the group. Unless otherwise stated, all other references to comments by Osusa and Poxi in this thesis arise from this interview.

²¹Tedd Josiah is particularly passionate about this inadequacy. This is a view also shared by the General Manager of Music Copyright Society, Jennifer Shamala (personal interview April 21 2004). See also Suzanne Kibukosya's comments in Moira Tremaine (2001:66), Emmanuel Mwendwa 'Airplay Crucial say Musicians', September 26 2003 *East African Standard*, Online edition and Neal Sobania (2003:201).

brought to light. But even when payola suspicions cannot be immediately proven, there is still the critical question of the media's power to create and cultivate a particular taste in the society. Nowhere is this more glaring than in the ongoing tensions between the old guard popular musicians and the FM stations in Kenya. In a recent print media report, a group of musicians accused DJs on FM radio and TV broadcasters of never airing their material, and choosing instead to promote a hip hop repertoire as if this is the only contemporary Kenyan music available.²² The activities of media players — from open favouritism to promotion through weekly charts — can indeed culminate in the fashioning of specific musical styles as musicians become more and more conscious of what readily gets media exposure and as they yearn for success in the form of either fame or wealth, and if they are truly fortunate, both.

Though we have tried to draw the link between local broadcasting practice and the popular music boom in Kenya, it is important to note that, contrary to the observations of Frith (2001:39), not all branches of the media have necessarily provided the cue for producers and record companies to follow. As has happened in the case of the local print media through this boom period, there are times when the electronic media lags behind developments in the music industry and is forced to come in belatedly to document a trend that is already well on the ground. Back in June 1997 when Hardstone first started riveting listeners with live performances of a new brand of Kenyan pop, no local musician would have earned full-page coverage in the mainstream press, perhaps with the rare exception of an obituary for an old has-been artiste. Likewise, local mainstream newspapers would never have deigned to carry the lyrics of a local hit on any of their pages. Not even the genre of popular print media had boasted a music entertainment magazine for any significant length of time.²³ Indeed, the much-acclaimed *PHAT*²⁴ magazine only came into existence in November 1999, well after the music explosion,

²²The outcry was well documented in Adhyambo Odera 'Other Singers Cry Foul over Hip-Hop Airplay', June 13 2004 *Lifestyle, Sunday Nation* online edition. Caroline Nyanga 'Seeking Fair Play in Airplay', March 5 2004, *Pulse, East African Standard*, Online edition, Emmanuel Mwendwa, 'Is Skewed Airplay Likely to Influence Music Awards?', September 26 2003, *Society, East African Standard*, Online edition.

²³ The 1980s CBS supported *Music Scene* is a case in point.

²⁴ Loudly advertised as 'East Africa's first music and entertainment magazine', this PHAT is an acronym for *pamoja hip Afrika tunawakilisha*, Kiswahili for 'together we represent hip Africa' and it run just 8 'quarterly' issues.

and clearly it aimed to cash in on, and not just promote, the emergent popularity of local music and its rising stars.

The whole notion of having a supportive media is fairly new to the Kenyan music industry. Indeed, observers of the local music scene have often remarked on the negative attitude of Kenyans towards local performers and their products. It is an attitude that always surprised those who were new to the country and to the local industry. As Wolfgang Bender (1991:127) reports it, in 1977 a manager of EMI, Graham Shepherd, was to remark somewhat in surprise that

there is absolutely no interest in Kenyan artists by the general population: the native musician has such an absolutely low status that nobody asks him for autographs, nor is he beset by fans; musicians are considered drunkards and lazy, and as such they are judged.

Today the mainstream print media offers endless opportunities for promotion. Their coverage has grown to keep up with the millennium boom in popular music, helping to create role models and local celebrities through numerous feature articles of the lives of up-coming musicians. The fairly well-orchestrated campaign to promote local music has been largely in the form of devoting acres of space to cultivating stardom and promoting fan clubs.²⁵ Further, the mainstream media have, along with other corporate organizations like Total, Coca Cola, and Safaricom, been sponsoring award ceremonies and other live performances at a number of social events. Kenyan media houses cannot be ignored as significant determinants in the music industry, and radio and television broadcasts in particular necessarily therefore, appear to invite regulation in the form of content quotas.²⁶

²⁵ See the *Daily Nation's Saturday Review and Lifestyle* and *Young Nation* in the *Sunday Nation* and *Pulse magazine* in the *East African Standard*.

²⁶ Wallis and Malm (1984:257-259), Wolfgang Bender (1991:133) and Neal Sobania (2003:196) detail the effects of an attempt to regulate the content on the state-run Voice of Kenya radio in 1980. At the time, audiences were extremely hostile to local music, terming it 'boring' and bringing a halt to Government attempts to effect a 75% local content policy.

1.3 Piracy

It is important to begin the discussion of the illegitimate sale of recordings by drawing a distinction between piracy and bootlegging. Piracy involves the unlawful reproduction, distribution and sale of material that has already been officially released by an artist or a record label. Bootlegging on the other hand is the release by traders and collectors of a sound or song that 'has never previously been released on a legitimate label' (Marshall, 2003:58). Further, bootlegs sometimes entail just tape/CD swapping between fans rather than selling for profit; other times it operates on a commercial basis but to a very limited extent. The unauthorised material in bootlegs is sourced from either live concerts, or the studio recordings that are never completed as albums. Sometimes it is sourced from alternative studio versions of an already released song. The significance of this difference is that in the West bootlegging has grown into an aesthetic industry that is nurtured by the desire of fans to appreciate an artist or group in terms of their total output. It is also fuelled by the fans' need to connect with the particular authentic flavour that live performances are seen to hold over the artificial processes of overdubbing that are so instrumental to fashioning the official version of a recorded song, and which create a hypostasised rather than a living organic product.

In most African music industries, things work rather differently with open piracy for profit being the only purpose of illegal duplication. Wallis and Malm (1984:288) explain that the basis of modern music piracy is the fact that 'large profits can be made whenever royalty payments can be avoided'. Unfortunately, advances in industry technology have actually made it easier to access and copy music with the intention of selling it for commercial gain. Wallis and Malm further state that this type of organised music piracy is rife in virtually all the countries that their MISC project visited. Ronnie Graham (1989:1) has observed that 'in Africa piracy, bootlegging and the non-payment of royalties are facts of life and ... without proper documentation and protection, the future of rural and urban popular music is at risk'. While many associate piracy with the introduction of audio-cassettes, the truth as Gary Stewart (2000:240) tells us is that 'pirating in vinyl, although technologically more difficult, also occurred'. Stewart goes on to describe the intricacies of the illegal trade involving Zairean records that went on in

Nairobi through the 1970s to the detriment of both the artistes and Phonogram-Kenya. Graham (1989:19) describes the harmful effects of piracy in that era thus

Bootlegging and record piracy on a massive scale deprived musicians of royalties while record companies proved unable to deal with the situation and were similarly deprived of income — an important consideration when it comes to maintaining existing facilities and keeping up with the latest technological developments.

Today the pervasiveness of music piracy in Kenya is not simply about the ease of reproducing cassettes (Malm and Wallis, 1992:87); it actually points to enduring causative factors that are indicative of the phenomenal structural deficiencies within the local industry. As we saw from the example of '*Unbwogable*'s' tortured entry onto Kenya's public spaces, piracy in Kenya is in one sense a matter of filling in the consumer gap between a song's release on radio, and its availability at local retail points. Further, the combination of high costs of production and an economy too weak to allow for significant record purchases results in erratic supply and pushes artistes into strategies of production that necessarily invite piracy. The following scenario, which is a thoroughly commonplace occurrence in Kenya, illustrates the point.

Late in 2001 Kenyan radio stations, particularly KBC's National and General Services were awash with a lively tune by the intriguing title '*Dot Com Lady*'. The singer — simply known as Abedi — was pretty much a newcomer to the world of popular music and was formally employed by day as a clerk. By December 2001 '*Dot Com Lady*', which tells the story of a man cuckolded by his ultra-modern wife, was big on the airwaves. It was playing as many as 5 times on a single day on nearly every radio station. Through the dying months of 2001 the song was not available at any retail outlets either as a single or on an album. As a radio star, Abedi was receiving enough exposure to ensure that he was regularly invited to perform at live shows around the city. But he could not earn royalties from the sale of his song since in practice the disc was nonexistent except for the demo tape that had been deposited with radio stations. By March 2002, '*Dot Com Lady*' featured on a pirate compilation album titled '*Best of*

Kenyan Artists' that carried many of the 2001 radio hits some of which were similarly elusive as originals.

In essence then local amateur artistes have found ways of combating the loss of income that is occasioned by the vagaries of high production costs and/or loss of revenue to music piracy. But their strategies for survival necessarily also create a loophole that makes piracy not only necessary, but actually viable, and so the vicious cycle is repeated. So rampant and institutionalised is music piracy in Kenya that some see it as one of the indicators of national identity (see Appendix (i)). Music pundits often joke that a song that has not been pirated has failed the local litmus test of popularity. The artistes themselves have been heard to embrace this weary humour and concede that a song that goes unpirated is a critical and commercial failure. Many admit that essential issues of low incomes in a depressed economy have plenty to do with music piracy. Quite obviously the economic logic of a three hundred shilling pirated CD over a one thousand shilling original makes all the difference to the person earning three thousand shillings a month. S/he cannot afford the luxury of worrying over matters of quality and durability, let alone over the even more remote concern of artistes' royalties.

Artistes like Poxi Presha actually see some benefits in piracy arguing that it serves the purpose of getting their messages (through the songs) to people who would not otherwise be able to afford to purchase original tapes or CDs.

I'm not someone who believes in keeping my music exclusive. If someone can't afford to buy my CD wacha atafute pirated copy asikize [*let him look for a pirated copy to listen to*]. I'm one of the few artists who believe that pirates sometimes help the artist to create a huge fan base of people who ordinarily would not have afforded his/her music.²⁷

Speaking of the impediments to his work as a producer, Tedd Josiah puts piracy within the wider context of market dynamics and the requisite stages in shaping a new cultural grammar

²⁷ www.kelele.com/Music/Poxi

Pirates have come into Kenya and just *overtaken any possible profit-making venture* that could be in the music industry. They hear a good song on the radio and they know that you're selling your music and you're having a problem really getting it out there, they go to Pakistan come back with 17,000 copies of the same music, and they push it *all over* the place. But, piracy takes money, so you know, it makes you wonder, who is behind this? It must be somebody with a lot of money. You can't just bring in 17,000 units of CDs and sell in the market, you got to have *millions* of shillings to enter that venture. We are trying to kill the piracy but in a sense it's an evil that has assisted us get to a greater objective which was to let the Kenyans know that they can listen to something Kenyan and enjoy something Kenyan. Now that the pirates have assisted us in getting our music into the homes, we want to take that whole thing back. And I know people like AFM — Action For Music, and MCSK, the Music Copyright Society of Kenya have been really in the forefront of trying to you know, create anti-piracy campaigns and burning all of these pirated CDs and things like that. The unfortunate thing is that, we're burning them, but we're leaving a huge gap, consumer gap, because there's no music then filled.

And Josiah concedes that the lack of institutionalised frameworks in the local music industry which has seen producers try, without much success, to work as publishers, distributors and marketing men all at once have created a situation in which pirates have come in and taken over the task of distributors. He further decries the situation that was created by the major record companies in the past. They failed to 'invest enough money in marketing, enough money in distribution' of local music thus allowing the pirates to come in and fill that gap so that all too often 'the pirated product was being sold *more* than the original'.

But aside from the fact that piracy is triggered off by operational deficiencies, it is also a carefully crafted trade to earn some people money illegally, and record companies are forced to be particularly vigilant in sealing off leakage sites which can occur at various points in the production chain. John Andrews explains that sometimes, master copies can disappear from the studio, either with the collusion of the artiste him/herself or, through devious staff. This is most likely to occur in instances where for one reason or another, there is an unduly long delay between the moment of recording and that of the album's

date of release.²⁸ At other times copies that have been sent off for awards have found their way into the hands of pirates. And in this, timing is always of the essence. Andrews explains how not long ago

a brilliant Kenya album ... was put on the market and within one week of it being released locally, I seem to recall getting a telephone call from Customs at the airport saying that they had seen something like 3,000 copies of this album coming in from Pakistan. And quite sadly by the time we got to the airport, it had already disappeared.

The General Manager of Music Copyright Society of Kenya (MCSK), Jennifer Shamala, is an advocate of the High Court of Kenya and has a wealth of training in the field of intellectual property rights. She explains that 'the Kenya Government has not realised the connection of piracy to security. Piracy is connected to organised crime. And it's a multibillion dollar industry'.²⁹ And because there was a move to put Kenya on the security watch list because of this laxity, Shamala has tried to impress upon various government departments the enormity of this step. Her crusade has left her open to crank calls from worried music pirates though none have so far made concrete threats against her.³⁰ Like John Andrews, Shamala also stresses the phenomenal loss of revenue from music sales that is incurred by the government in its failure to curb piracy. The figure could be as high as 5 billion shillings annually according to Ronnie Andrews, copyright consultant for Action for Music, 'a not-for-profit initiative established in January 2002 to redevelop and support the ailing Kenyan and East African music industries through the sustainable empowerment of musicians and enable the fight against music piracy in Kenya'.³¹ Of this figure 410 million shillings is the revenue lost by composers and artistes and 900 million is what the Government would earn in Value Added Tax.

²⁸ At a personal interview on December 21 2002 with Juma Odemba, manager and lead vocalist of Kayamba Afrika, he revealed that though their debut album was completed in 2000, Samawati Productions delayed its release for a whole year. Though this did not happen in Kayamba Afrika's case, it is nonetheless true that such unexplained delays have sometimes caused artistes to resort to "pirating" their own material off their producers.

²⁹ Personal interview, Nairobi, April 21 2004.

³⁰ All the producers and musicians I have interviewed over the last 3 years have claimed to know who the 'big' people behind music piracy in Kenya are. They allude to politicians and their kin and to other politically well-connected businessmen. They always refrain from actually naming them, but state categorically that this trade has international links in India and Pakistan.

These figures graphically demonstrate John Collins' (1985:116) seemingly caustic observation that 'pirate cassette production has almost become a cottage industry in East Africa, one which has cut deeply into the profits of record companies there, both foreign and local'. And much as Collins goes on to state that 'it has become so bad that the Kenyan government has tried to outlaw pirating', one cannot help feeling that they have not tried hard enough. Proof of this is seen in the way Moi's government used to deal with what he deemed politically seditious publications — be they printed material or recorded cassettes. Within hours of their detection such copies would be swiftly mopped up along with their vendors and publishers all of whom would then be promptly charged in court.³² Overall the spectacle of music piracy in Kenya is worsened by the lack of sensitization amongst the buying public about the harm their continued purchase of illegal cassettes is doing. Even worse is the fact that law-enforcing departments are both lax and ill informed. Tabu Osusa talks of the frustration he experienced in December 2001 as he tried to seek the intervention of the police to deal with a vendor at the Kisumu bus park who was trying to sell him a pirated copy of his own album *KaBoum Boum* (2001). According to the police, the vendor had not physically dispossessed Osusa so charges of theft or robbery could not be levied against him. Says John Andrews of this kind of impasse

The law is there but there is no education into the right departments, i.e. the police departments. They know what a pirated cassette is but they wouldn't know how to write a case against it I mean, for example if we took it to court, and said fine 'now you've got to put down the reasons why you're holding this infringing copy,' they wouldn't be able to give you the reasons for it. The same as in the judiciary department again, they know there is a copyright law, and a very strong law, but they don't know how it should be administered and applied locally. And it's right throughout very sadly, under different Acts, under the Customs Act too.³³

³¹ Action for Music April 2003 report at www.actionformusic.org/press/piracyfight.

³² Angelique Haugerud (1995:29-30) documents the ways in which, in 1990, the Moi government used its machinery to the fullest to squash the 'Muoroto' cassettes and the newspaper publications which criticized government demolition of city slums.

³³ In June 2004, the Kenya International Property Institute and the Geneva-based World Intellectual Property Organisation hosted a seminar in Machakos for all magistrates, senior Kenya Revenue Authority staff, lawyers and manufacturers. Participants admitted that their knowledge of intellectual property rights was scanty, thus further underlining the milestones that must be covered before the war against piracy can be won.

In the wake of weak government engagement, artistes and producers struggle individually to confront this menace. For instance, singer Eric Wainaina flags his CDs with the warning: 'Unauthorised copying prohibited. Piracy and Home Taping is Killing the industry'. *Ogopa* DJs whose rather intimidating name (Kiswahili for 'fear') we shall be considering in the following chapter, send scouts to comb music outlets in Nairobi flushing out pirated copies of their work and threatening to beat up the vendors.³⁴

1.3.1. Polic(y)ing the Industry

The Kenya National Cultural Council that was started in 1972 has never been active nor did it ever provide direction for the development of local popular music (Wallis and Malm, 1984:228). In April 1982, President Moi established the Presidential National Music Commission comprising 6 fairly high ranking professionals whose brief was 'to prepare detailed plans and recommendations on the preservation and development of music and dance in the republic'.³⁵ Their widespread terms of reference may have been unduly tipped towards the furtherance of traditional music, which they necessarily saw as requiring protection from foreign infiltration (Ewens, 1991:160). Indeed, this type of bias helps to remind us that even cultural policies are underpinned by ideological dictates (Street, 1997). Still, the Commission did engage in a study of the state of popular music and produced recommendations on 'how the interests of the local musicians can be safeguarded and protected'. To this end, the Commission decried the lowly status of popular musicians whom they termed 'contemporary musicians', noting that they were disregarded in the public domain and could not afford to live off their trade. Given the high tax on musical instruments they could barely afford to maintain serviceable equipment and they had neither conducive practicing venues, nor facilities for specialist training. The consequent lack of specialization results in low standards of composition

³⁴ For close to two years, *Ogopa* DJs hid their real identities from the media. Royalty wars with various artistes have since forced the brothers, Francis and Lucas Bikedo and their manager, Banda to come out and respond to the criticism publicly.

³⁵ Washington Omondi (1984:vi) *Report of the Presidential National Music Commission*.

and performance thus opening a vicious cycle of low returns and poor quality productions (107).

Turning to the recording companies, the Commission noted their 'corrupt, unscrupulous and mercenary tendencies' that saw them swindle musicians of their royalties by taking advantage of their poverty and making a pittance one-off payment for each recording rather than signing contracts for royalty payment. But the Commission also noted that the record industry was existing under 'serious flaws and handicaps to sound trade' (115) amongst them their inability to monitor sales and the evils of piracy. In its far-reaching recommendations,³⁶ the Commission sought amongst other things to have laws protecting musicians enacted and enforced through the police, customs department and the judiciary. They further recommended that airplay for non-Kenyan music be limited to 20% in all public fora, that musicians' unions be formed, import duty on musical instruments be significantly lowered, and that financial investment facilities be made available to musicians as they are offered in other sectors such as agriculture. They even urged that prices of records be controlled. All this was being suggested in part out of the Commission's realization that 'the music industry is a possible gold-mine for Kenyan musicians' (111).

Given the firm grasp on the problems and potential of the local music industry that this Commission had, it is unfortunate that the National Cultural Policy under which its recommendations would have been implemented never materialised.³⁷ Consequently, and not unlike the fate of many government instituted commissions of inquiry, the work of the Presidential Commission on Music turned out to be just another unimplemented government report, gathering dust on the shelves of the Ministry of Culture and entirely ignored by the Ministry of Finance. As Malm and Wallis (1992:97-98) have noted, only the Ministry of Education seems to have paid attention to some of the Commission's

³⁶ Malm and Wallis (1992:97) give a breakdown of the recommendations.

³⁷ It appears plans for such a policy are still underway since in July 2003, the new NARC government's Minister for Sports and Culture announced that Kenya's famous cultural scholars, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ali Mazrui would be invited to fine-tune the National Cultural Policy before its release. (*Daily Nation*, July 5 2003, online edition). Release of the report is still awaited.

recommendations by drafting a curriculum for the teaching of music in schools. It also suitably refashioned the Kenya Music Festival to include colleges and other institutions of higher learning as well as expanding the category of genres in the annual national competition. The state-sponsored broadcaster KBC did try to play more Kenyan music and even established a Music Advisory Board which unfortunately only functioned as 'a committee vetting records before they could be broadcast rather than a policy-making body' (1992: 98).

While debate on the desirability of state involvement in matters of cultural production tends to lean towards the view that state practice necessarily hampers the freedom of purveyors of culture, it is not altogether true to say that the state has no role to play in the business of culture. The state can play an unobtrusive role in the promotion of culture industries. And not so much by prescribing what official/national culture is — which is what many African ministries/departments of culture have tended to do (Askew, 2002) — but rather by creating conducive conditions of trade, and providing institutions where the requisite cultural skills can be attained. In the case of Kenya's popular music industry, the Kenya government has failed to offer incentives to musicians, first by removing tax on imported musical instruments and the requisite equipment and materials for disc production. Music education continues to be fairly limited, and there are no government funded specialist training facilities and neither has the government provided premises for rehearsals, recording and live performances readily accessible to amateurs and professionals alike.

The government's role in seeing to the proper instituting of the copyright law is equally crucial. It is indeed commendable that the government did see the need to amend the old act, taking cognizance of technological changes and their impact on the industry and ultimately coming up with a very comprehensive act that carries sufficient deterrents and punishments but, it is not nearly enough.³⁸ And though copyright infringements on the

³⁸ The recently created Counterfeits Department within the KRA signals renewed government attempts at curbing piracy, and the US government is now working with this office to track counterfeit goods of all sorts and their connection to international terrorism. See John Kariuki, 'War on Terror Targets \$256m Trade in Fakes', *The East African*, June 28-July 4 2004 p.1 & 4.

scale of the (in)famous 'Malaika'- Fadhili Williams - Miriam Makeba³⁹ scale are no longer possible in today's global music economy, it is still true that failure by the Kenya government to see to the sensitization and training of customs, police and judicial officers continues to make the Copyright Act No.12 (2001) — which came into effect on February 1 2003 — a lame duck. As with every other aspect of the local music industry, it has been left to privately organised initiatives such as AFM and the MCSK to struggle along seeking remedies for the situation. As a performance rights licensing organization MCSK only deals with a small part of the Copyright Act whose full impact can only be felt with the added participation of various arms of government, including the department of culture and Ministry of Education. It is up to these departments to create public awareness over the issue of intellectual property rights.

Further, when the government issues broadcasting licenses, they fail to adequately advise the media owners on copyright matters and many have formed the opinion that the music they air comes to them free of charge. Consequently, there are raging controversies surrounding MCSK's performance as far as payment of royalties to artistes is concerned. Artistes denounce the organisation for withholding their money but Shamala, the MCSK General Manager, insists that MCSK is collecting fees from very few of the establishments like media houses, hotels, and clubs which play local music. Many media houses in particular have taken advantage of the confusion created by the splinter groups struggling for the control of MCSK and decided to make no payments at all for performance rights to any of the competing collective management unions.⁴⁰ Radio stations' reluctance to pay license fees to MCSK is not an unprecedented or even surprising phenomenon in the world music business. In America where the adaptability and aggressiveness of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) contributed greatly to the enforcement and development of rights over musical products, the battle between them and radio stations — who were refusing to admit that radio broadcast constitutes performance for profit and, therefore, attracts licensing fees

³⁹ Malm and Wallis (1992:182-187) give a detailed account of the infringement. See also Bender (1991: 131) and 'Malaika : Mboya helped Makeba', *Daily Nation* March 15 2004 p.12.

⁴⁰ See Caroline Nyanga, 'Where is Everyone?' *Pulse Magazine, East African Standard*, April 2 2004 p. 6-7 & 12 for a rundown of the ongoing struggles for the control of MCSK.

— was a long and bitter one (Ryan, 1985). Like Malm and Wallis (1992:197) we can only conclude that state policies always lag behind technological and economic developments. As such government only tries to cope with situations, rather than leading the way. But even when viewed from this perspective, we must nonetheless underline that government's lapses still contribute to the climate of cultural production and they impact on the nature and quality of the final products.

1.4 The Markets

Simon Frith (2001:34) observes that '[w]hile popular music thus depends on the collaboration of creators and bureaucrats, the tension between them, a tension usually read ideologically, as *art vs commerce*, is built into the system'. These conflicts and complexes take many forms. For instance, we have already seen with the example of Abedi's 'Dot Com Lady' discussed in Section 1.3 how the practice of radio hits in Kenya is tied to giving artistes a chance to earn from live performances which pay on average 25,000 shillings per show. While this is indeed a noble strategy for ensuring artistes' financial survival, it is not a good strategy for stimulating record sales. Tabu Osusa firmly believes that the practices of local radio DJs are actually not helping artistes even where the records for sale already exist:

They're even killing the music industry to be honest...just hyping a song like that, sometimes they even kill it... by over-play...they just play it and play it and play it and play it and then they dump it. I mean, that's not the way music should be, music should be gradual, and consistent...they just hurt you like that, then after a while, let's say after two weeks of, or 1 month or 2 months of increased air-play, it's out, it dies even before it's born. And then the artistes become so demoralised.

In other words the market seems structured in such a way that record sales become peripheral. The practice of the consumption market outlined above is radically different from the norms of the popular music cultures in Western societies. John Andrews explains that there, radio play actually stimulates demand for audiences to buy records.

we've been trying to educate Kenyan artistes on this, what happens in Europe is, the artiste goes into the studio and they make an album,

okay. From the album they select 2 or 3 key tracks that they're gonna use to promote that album. And they are what you call 'singles'. Singles are not made for radio promotion okay, radio promotion is made for the album and based on whether it becoming a hit or not, a single is made. A lot of huge albums, let's say for example some of the top artistes Elton John, Celine Dion people like that do not make a single. So we go back to the beginning, they make the album so the album is ready to be sold; in order to promote the album you choose one track that you use on radio. When people go to the shops and they say 'I've heard this track played over and over and over again', the shops say 'yes, it is on the album called such and such'.

One way out of the production and sales quagmire obtaining in the Kenyan music industry at present has been to encourage the making of compilation albums. The idea behind such albums is to mop up the talent from artistes who do not yet have the creative and financial resources to record a full album. It further makes economic sense because as both Josiah and Andrews argue, it is virtually impossible to convince the public to buy a disc bearing a single track for close to 400 shillings. In effect, it makes better sense to have costs and royalties from a compilation album shared out between all the contributing artistes. This is the strategy that one of the biggest local production houses of the millennium, *Ogopa DJs* has adopted. Even then, artistes in their stable have complained that these compilations are actually a strategy to delay their careers. Compilation albums can be a skilful way of containing the more prolific artistes to the point where they remain dependent on the producer for small one-off payments for singles. Artistes claim they are given a one-off 25,000 shillings payment for a single on a compilation album, as opposed to the situation of royalty payments that obviously arises and is far easier to monitor in the case where an artiste records an entire album.

Whatever the reason for them, compilation albums control what gets onto the market, when, and in what form. And yet ironically, the whole design of the local music industry — historically as well as economically — shies away from the very notion of albums. Kenya has always been a singles rather than an album market. Even in those years through the early 1970s when the business was thriving, a top single would sell 50,000 copies (Collins, 1985:116, Stapleton and May, 1989:272) whereas an album release was a

rarity. 'The album market [was] so tiny that when EMI set up its pressing plant in Nairobi in 1976, it kept going by manufacturing 100,000 records a year for the Nigerian market' (Collins, 1985:116). Though the technological developments that have taken us into the age of audio-cassettes and compact discs has seemingly made record singles untenable, the rudimentary nature of the local market stubbornly resists this change. The phenomena of radio hits is the market's own way of dealing with local constraints to global practice and in an interesting kind of reversal, the products of local artistes defy commoditization and individual ownership instead straining back towards (albeit a radio mediated) public performance. In this defiance, live shows offer even more direct interaction between artistes and audiences.

At present, the rampant problem of piracy, the secrecy of producers regarding sales because of the royalties implications (Graham, 1992:10) and the suspicion of artistes levelled at producers and record companies all make it very difficult to tabulate actual sales figures. Likewise the infringement of performing rights by the bulk of the broadcast media means that beyond being acutely aware of the pervasiveness of local music in all public places — from hotels and lift lobbies to *matatus*⁴¹ and clubs — one cannot usefully deduce the monetary value of the local music industry. Nor is it possible to accurately tabulate the, no doubt, huge economic impact the millennium music boom has had on the development of the industry as a whole.

That the market has changed in many superficial and structural ways is sometimes very apparent. For instance, whereas in the mid-1990s local records could only be purchased at the regular music shops most commonly, those on Nairobi's infamous River Road, early in 2002 Samawati Productions brokered a deal to have local music retailed at Kenya's leading supermarket chain, *Uchumi*. In that one gesture, local music was given the authentication of formal enterprise and up-market credibility. Even then, local music continues to thrive within the general parameters of the *jua kalinization* of the Kenyan socio-economy. Neal Sobania (2003:200-201) makes the claim that

⁴¹ Public service commuter taxis.

Nairobi does not even have a record store. There is only one store that sells cassettes and compact discs, but this is but a small part of their operation, which is dominated by the sale of radios, televisions, and other electronic appliances. Seldom does it even have multiple copies of any one album.

It is clear from this statement that Sobania has not fully grasped local commercial practices. Nairobi's city centre and the numerous commercial zones in the suburbs and outskirts are teeming with retail outlets for music. Quite apart from the fact that each of the up-market shopping malls — Yaya, Sarit Centre, Capitol, Village Market — boasts fairly well-stocked music outlets of international standards, local enterprise has introduced a new category of consumer outlets. These are the numerous 'stalls' and 'exhibitions' dotted all over the city centre.⁴² They retail a variety of merchandise (clothes, electronics) including imported and local music (original or pirated) on audio-cassettes, CDs as well as video cassettes and DVDs. Today it is these outlets that are truly the hub of the retail music business and it is here that new music releases are announced and live shows advertised. It is also at these stalls that confrontations between artistes and the small-time pirates occasionally take place. The sale of vinyl records is indeed a thing of the past, but DJs and other collectors who are interested in these do purchase them at what is easily Nairobi's oldest music store, Assanands on Moi Avenue and also in other admittedly less conspicuous outlets around the city. Clearly, Sobania appears to impose a thoroughly Western concept of a 'music store' on a thriving informal economy that has completely revolutionised the whole concept of retail trade.

Another significant way in which music consumption in Kenya has changed over the last few years is seen in the popularity of live performances or concerts. Whereas worldwide, the success of music videos and DVDs in bringing musical performances into the private

⁴² From the mid-1990s economic pressure forced many landlords of commercial premises in towns throughout Kenya to restructure shop space. They rent space to a group of people who then demarcate their individual retail spaces literally on tables or as make-shift stalls. The fact that rent is paid on a daily rather than a monthly basis is particularly attractive to tenants who are still struggling to establish themselves in retail trade. Additionally, rent is negotiated upwards or downwards depending on the economic season. For instance, rents will be higher during the Christmas period when business in clothes is particularly brisk.

domains of consumers living rooms and earning artistes and recording companies huge sales figures has ensured that recording artistes no longer engage in live acts, in Kenya and East Africa generally, live performances have become immensely popular over the last few years.

Turning to the international markets, the question of why African record companies have been unable to promote African music in the West appears to be tied to bigger questions of global economies and age-old trade relations. The music industry in Africa was not exempted from the extractive practices of the colonial economies in the first half of the 20th century. In those days African subsidiaries of multinational recording companies recorded a good deal of traditional and urban music locally and this was then sent to be processed into vinyl discs in the European capitals. And as with agricultural produce such as coffee, the finished product was re-exported to Africa.

Within the popular music industry, remnants of these exploitative extractive practices persist unto this day, going by the dubiously termed concept of "world music" and by the many collaborative projects around of which Paul Simon's *Graceland* (1987) is the most well-known example. "World music" represents 'the way in which the west has been able to "validate" certain styles and musicians' (Graham, 1992:9). From the moment of this category's inception in 1987, the "Kenyan" groups who succeeded in getting recordings with international labels were actually Zairean bands such as Super Mazembe, Orchestre Virunga and Lessa Lessan that were all based in Nairobi. It was not until several years later that D.O. Misioni and the Shirati Jazz Band launched Kenya's Luo *benga* beat onto the world music category. The very idea of marketing a category termed "world music" fits the bill of what Rey Chow (1993: 36) terms 'modernity's relation to "endangered authenticities" '. It is out of this "fascination with the native" that the West(ernised) builds a predilection for what I would term, ethnic collectibles, specimens that signal knowledge of, and ties with, the fast-fading "other" world. And as Arjun Appadurai (1986: 28) demonstrates, these products (and the native by implication) gain value precisely on account of their perceived novelty or "otherness":

value ... is accelerated or enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely contexts ... Such diversion is ... an instrument ... of the (potential) intensification of commoditization by the enhancement of value attendant upon its diversion. This enhancement of value through the diversion of commodities from their customary circuits underlies the plunder of enemy valuables in warfare, the purchase and display of "primitive" utilitarian objects, the framing of "found" objects, the making of collections of any sort. In all these examples, diversions of things combine the aesthetic impulse, the entrepreneurial link, and the touch of the morally shocking.

Commoditization is a practice that reduces the postcolonial to a "subject" and "object" by making novelty out of his/her products and by extension, his/her being. Sometimes the postcolony responds in a reactionary manner, as with the many moments of cultural restitution that worked alongside the nationalist movements in Africa. At other times, and within the realms of commercialised transactions the postcolony seems hopeless caught on the receiving end of imbalanced global economics, and a modernist aesthetic that is always designed in the West.⁴³ It is in this sense that the Kenyan cultural industry often seems torn between an ethnic culture aimed at a Western consumer audience (including tourists to Kenya) and the abundant local variants which often speak of the fusion of very fluid cross-cultural influences. With the music industry, one notes that the many groups that have made a name on the international circuit are invariably resident in the West — Jabali Afrika, Ayub Ogada, Swahili Nation, Milele Afrika. Few ever bother to market their music locally and their work is on the whole virtually unknown in Kenya. But there are also many local producers who frequently try out material specifically for these Western markets. Tedd Josiah says he works on at least two albums every year for the European market. Likewise Tabu Osusa has been involved in a number of collaborative projects with some German jazz bands. Seemingly, success on "world music" labels arises precisely from the extent to which artistes can distance themselves from the local

⁴³ One can see, for example, that Latino musician, Carlos Santana's 2000 Grammy Award was simply an instance of America's capitulation to the growing presence of Latinos in North America. Santana has, after all, been making "unique" music for well over 30 years. Again, political correctness demanded that Denzel Washington and Halle Berry be used to bring the Oscar Awards home to African-Americans in 2001 and redress the 30 year lull in the acknowledgment of African-American excellence in artistic performance. It is this "fixing" of aesthetic standards, by and in the West, that sometimes seems to determine the choices of cultural purveyors in the postcolony.

market. At the same time, they tap into their ethnic roots to sell a music that will internationally be seen as authentically Kenyan. At home, audiences place a heavy premium on artistes acquiring an international cultural outlook and it is the rift between these two positions that those who seek local and international success must negotiate.

The independents stand little chance of penetrating the world market though flashes of brilliance such as Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's '*Unbwogable*' which succeeded in getting the attention of the international label Gallo Records. But it is the occasional chances to perform at international concerts, many of them organised by Kenyans in the diaspora, and at award ceremonies such as South Africa's Kora All Africa Music Awards that will continue to act as the biggest showcase abroad for local music. Neal Hattersley (2004:216) observes that such organised concerts invariably 'attract an ethnic audience matching the origin of the artist playing' and underlines that the wave of immigration to Western capitals such as London has resulted in a considerable ethnic audience. And as John Andrews emphasises, playing to ethnic audiences abroad may not 'exactly be breaking into the international market, but it is a step in the right direction' since the cultural interests of ethnic communities are bound to spread onto those of their host countries. Doug Paterson (1999) believes that the failure of Kenyan music to make a breakthrough in the world markets is on account of the vast ethnic variety of Kenyan music that unduly fragments the market. His argument seems based on the idea that small economies and populations must of necessity stick to just one musical style, as Jamaica did with reggae. Still, the local boom experienced in the last few years in Kenya has certainly had a spill-over effect onto the international markets which are becoming increasingly aware of Kenyan popular artistes.

1.5 Conclusion

Simon Frith has stated that 'the commercial music industry has always been underpinned by the rich variety of amateur activity' (2001:50). This is certainly true of the forces that have attended to Kenya's millennium music boom. Its raw verve has been fed by, and has in turn nurtured an increasingly national *jua kalinisation* of not just the economy, but also of the socio-cultural grammar that became so prevalent in the closing years of the Moi

regime. This whole boom is necessarily a socio-cultural and economic practice that is taking place on the margins of both the formal economy and the officially held out national culture.

The story of '*Unbwogable's*' production and release, which is itself tied into the tensions that surrounded *Ismarwa's* "commercial failure", illustrates very well the political economy of popular music production in Kenya. Artistes' poverty, abuse of copyright laws, royalties wars, lack of expertise, cultural gate-keeping by the media, weak marketing and distribution infrastructure, and the consequent recourse to economies of informality define the industry as one whose informing logic and *modus operandi* is *jua kali* or if you like, informality and artesinal methods. The network of informality runs from the earliest moments of production to the haphazard business of distribution and the casual marketing in make-shift retail outlets. And in a situation where songs hit the broadcast airwaves long before an actual tape or CD recording actually exists, record sales can not be the focal point of the industry. The lull between the moment of a radio hit and of the artiste gathering enough funds from live performances to cut the disc invariably means that audiences have tired of hearing a song on radio and failing to find it available for sale in retail outlets. Piracy then becomes a matter of fulfilling a need.

And while piracy may, on the face of it, be seen as a menace that disrupts the market for popular music, its relationship with the industry is far more complex than this. As we have seen, some artistes and producers recognise it as a critical area of musical consumption and go so far as to admit that it 'provides ideological support for the recording industry, helping to valorise musical commodities' (Marshal, 2003:57). Again the transition from 'Who Can *Bwogo* Me?' to '*Unbwogable*' demonstrates the power of consumers (and pirates are indeed part of the consumption chain) over texts. Audiences can edit a text, even change the focus of its message as they break off for their own uses those parts of it that they find most applicable to the circumstances of their daily lives. Piracy also acts as a powerful means of controlling capitalist enterprise, repeatedly bringing the industry back to its foundations as a people's free engagement with expression and intra-personal communication. In effect therefore, the cultural economy of

piracy forces the local music industry to continue functioning as an underground network, as anti-establishment, persistently moving behind the scenes of regulated commercial enterprise and in defiance of state controls and legislation and by extension therefore, as popular.

The environment of production discussed in this chapter continually points to a cultural economy that thrives on the margins of order, largely unregulated and for the better part lacking corporate support and well-established institutional frameworks that would better control the precarious market operations. In the event, contemporary Kenyan popular music represents a counter culture much more than it can be thought of as embracing official culture. That its energies are subterranean and its methods rudimentary and self propelled indicates the extent to which postcolonial urban practices function as the alternative sites of expression for populations that are marginalised from national political and economic initiatives.

The foregoing discussion of the informality underpinning the local music industry begs the question of the responsibility that central government should bear towards its culture industries. And though there are currently a few signs of improvement, the generally weak institutional frameworks within this industry increasingly call for regulation and control from sectors of government that seem either disinterested or overwhelmed by the tasks at hand. Government involvement in cultural affairs has tended towards national posturing, verbal support and the creation of lame-duck commissions. Matters of international trade have been left to the whims of global cultural eccentricities and this has virtually torn Kenya's music industry into two halves, one servicing local needs, another answering to the demands of international audiences. As I move away from a discussion of contexts to one of song-texts, in the next chapter we shall see how artistes' choice of names and titles are in part aimed at the generation of audiences and markets.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IN(TER)VENTION OF NAMES

What does one understand under the name of name? And what occurs when one gives a name? What does one give then? One does not offer a thing, one delivers nothing, and still something comes to be which comes down to giving that which one does not have.

(Jacques Derrida 1993: xiv)

When Shakespeare observed nearly three centuries ago that 'a rose by any other name would smell as sweet', he immediately signaled the arbitrary relation between a word and its referent, its location within a broad social, cultural, economic and political nexus. When it comes to personal names and baptism however, we must admit that there is a degree of deliberate choice, of agency, that goes into the process and which virtually wipes out the arbitrariness between sign and referent. There is a whole psychology of associations that informs and fuels naming, be it of a new-born child, a business venture, a character in a fictional work such as a novel, or even a musical composition. It is a pondered and painstaking venture, filled with what David Lodge (1992: 36) terms, 'semantic intent'. Indeed, the proud progenitor(s) will, doubtlessly, pick on a name which, they feel, will adequately reflect their intentions in the present, and their hopes for the future. At the very least, they choose a name filled with pleasant, and in their eyes, worthwhile associations in either the present moment or in the recent past. Whether that project will in the future live up to any or all of those expectations remains to be seen. The cardinal point is that the initial choice of name was, at the time of its enactment, pondered, deliberate and, all at once, nostalgic and anticipatory.

The aim of this chapter is to unravel and debate the poetry and iconography of the names of contemporary Kenyan artistes, and of the titles of their albums. These categories create discourses that are continuously competing to inform, cage and define the postcolonial being. The essential argument is that both the names of the artistes and the titles of their albums, are part of the song text because they are imbued with the task of attracting and

even conditioning the reader's/listener's attention. I argue that there is literary worth in these names and titles, leaving the listener with plenty to interpret. The artistes give indications, however intricate and layered, of their imaginary — their conceptualisation and interpretation of the times in which they live. Further, as iconography these names and titles function as signs, they generate a whole range of imagery and symbolism that the audience, consciously or unconsciously, works into their appreciation and interpretation of the song-texts.

As far as naming strategies are concerned, the artistes and groups who have been working in Kenya in the period of the millennium boom can be categorised within two main groups. First, there are those artistes whose indigenous names signal an undying nativist impulse by invoking traditional aesthetics. The second category consists of artistes whose names seek international appeal by echoing the discourses of Western modernity. It is important to view the discourses that the names and titles invented by contemporary Kenyan musicians invite as interventions into the debates on Kenyan popular culture and identity, an identity that many argue is increasingly being negatively shaped by Western modernity through a capitulation to "foreign" influences. Those who demand the reinstatement of traditional aesthetics, who yearn for authenticity, necessarily speak to a static view of their cultures, but as Adeleke Adeeko (1998: 32) points out, this 'privileging of the political significance of the cultural sign depend(s) on a rhetoric of necessity'. As we saw in the previous chapter, the material conditions of the market place, which are themselves part of Western modernity's inverted way of paying homage to "other" cultures, in part demands this display of nativism. Equally important, Kenya's history of colonial marginalisation and denigration necessitates this conspicuous figuration of so-called native identity in the perpetual search for what was lost.

Ironically, these artistes' struggle to return to a fast-receding past is also an articulation of the present. As they create an aura of the ethnic, the original, the "authentic", they inadvertently speak to the modernist pressures of the present. For their reaching out for an "authentic", an original, is precisely the result of their cosmopolitan existence. It is in the urban spaces in the present that the desire to locate an origin, to project an otherness

is nurtured. The dislocation in the present serves as the impetus towards an origin which can come back and act as the guiding moral force through the labyrinths in this fluid urban space. In a sense therefore, what these artistes end up creating is as new as the modernist aesthetic that the artistes in the second category espouse, for authenticity is more than images of the native, more than the aura created by a name. Rey Chow captures well the difficulties of locating the native as a static whole. Those who attempt to do so necessarily also display their own implicatedness in the projects of modernity. 'In our fascination with the "authentic native", we are actually engaged in a search for the equivalent of the aura even while our search processes themselves takes us farther and farther away from that "original" point of identification' (1993: 46).

The artistes whose iconography revolves around a Western conceived modernist aesthetic are equally caught up in treacherous ground. Are we to read as total cultural capitulation their commitment to a global imaginary? Being at the vanguard of embracing externalised influences does seem like a rejection of one's own, but perhaps the most important thing to focus on, is the way these so-called Western standards function within the local milieu. One must pay attention to the functions that are created for these Western practices within what are peculiarly Kenyan conditions. This is perhaps what Bayart (1993:21) refers to as Africa's art of 'extraversion', its ability to borrow and imbibe materials from elsewhere and then use these to deal with and build upon local needs. Jewsiewicki (1997: 103) calls it 'Africa's cultural and intellectual cannibalization of the West' and in his view, it goes on without the 'cultural intermediaries' who facilitate it, ever 'losing their identity'. It is interesting then to debate the iconography that some of the contemporary Kenyan artistes are borrowing from the West, and more importantly, to see how those Western imaginaries are finding relevance in local situations, and being woven into the Kenyan psyche in the present moment.

2.1 Author(is)ing Authority

The 'authors' of song-texts enter the scope of the broader text in two main ways. To begin with, it is their names, as a group or as individual artistes, that flag the album.

These names head both the album or tape sleeve, and they are also printed onto the actual tape or CD in much the same way that an author's name appears on the jacket and cover page of say, a novel. A song is therefore always referred to as "being by so-and-so, or by such-and-such a group". This naming, or labelling, is part of the process of asserting property rights, of giving legal force to something. It is also part of the scheme of marketing discussed in the previous chapter.

In the second instance, within the actual sung text, artistes will often punctuate their songs with "shout-outs" which are calls of the name of the recording artiste or group. These "shout-outs" are part of the way song establishes itself as an oral medium and they also cater for the strictly listening audience — those who never get to see the actual album and note the details surrounding its production. Very often, artistes will even make salutations to their producer(s) in these "shout-outs". In Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's '*Unbwogable*' (2002) for instance, we have the song opening thus '...here we go, Gidi Gidi Maji Maji in the house, with Tedd Josiah, I am *unbwogable*'. Nairobi City Ensemble's version of 'Lunch Time' (2001) similarly begins with salutations that are very much woven into the entire fabric and meaning of the song text: '*Gabriel Omolo, mzee wa kazi, Yeah, Pokea salamu kutoka Nairobi City Ensemble, Tabu Osusa, Yeah!*' / Gabriel Omolo, the veteran, receive greetings from Nairobi City Ensemble, Tabu Osusa. Gabriel Omolo is being referred to as a veteran because the original 'Lunch Time' (1972) was his composition. The group, and particularly their leader, Tabu Osusa, acknowledge and salute Omolo's inspiration for the piece they are about to perform. By itself then, this salutation draws our attention to the fact that we are about to listen to a remix version, just in case the opening bars of the song have not struck — or indeed cannot strike, on account of the listener's inexperience — a familiar chord. Again, in this same group's '*Somo Ti Somo*' (educated you are, indeed) we have along with the opening chords of the song, the melodiously carried banner : '*Tabu Osusa, Nairobi City Ensemble!*'. And towards the end of the song, the vocalist says : '*ma enwa, Idi Achieng 'Majuek', kagim koda Padi Makani, Ali Makunguru, Barly Barliento, Rocky Billa, Sound Engineer: Robert Kamanzi* (you are listening to the voice of Idi Achieng Majuek assisted by Padi Makani...)). In a slightly less elaborate, but equally forceful way, we have, from the

compilation album *Kenyan — the Second Chapter* (1999), Ndarlin P in his song '4 in 1' repeatedly identifying himself in the chorus, as he sings '...yes, yes, yoh, Ndarlin P shake the mic just to be in your area'.

In order to adequately debate the function of these authorial intrusions into the song text, it is necessary to first of all, reflect on the whole notion of 'author', and to think about how authors function vis-à-vis both the reader and the text. A useful starting point in this debate is Roland Barthes' (1968) 'The Death of the Author'. Barthes challenges the 'tyrannical' centring of the author in all those critical practices that seek explanations of a text from the person who produced it. Instead, Barthes focuses on the meaning of a text, by looking at the reader (listener) as the central point in the extrapolation of meaning from the text. Barthes emphasises that the meaning of a text does not lie with the author as creator, as the only one capable of articulating that meaning. Indeed, there isn't even a single, sacred meaning to the text he argues, for 'a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning ("the message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (170). Thus Barthes concludes that 'to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing' (171). Diminishing the authority of the author in the way that Barthes does, necessarily entails the empowering and privileging of the reader. It is the reader who has full view of the text in all its nuances and multiplicities and, how the reader receives and breaks it down is, therefore, much more significant than the way the text was conceived and plotted in the originating instance. As Barthes puts it, 'a text's unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination' (171) so that ultimately, 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author' (172).

Is it possible as Barthes suggests, to read a text 'in such a way that at all levels the author is absent' (169)? And what happens to the reader and the text when the author continually interrupts the writing/singing, to remind the reader/listener of the author's existence? Aren't there times when the author's voice gets woven into the text, becoming one of the many voices in which the narrative is told? Can it, in those instances, be ignored? In addressing the relationship between the text and the author, Michel Foucault (1979) points out that the 'author-function does not affect all discourses in a universal and

constant way' (202). Over time, literary discourses have demanded the presence of the author even though the act of writing seems to efface the writer, so that the author becomes a ' "figure" that, at least in appearance, is outside [the text] and antecedes it' (197). And yet writing is also an act of warding off death, ensuring immortality by what is left behind even as the individuality of the writer becomes subsumed in the many discourses of the text. Foucault argues that the disappearance of the author behind all these discourses is never complete, for as readers/listeners, we rush in to fill the gap by continually seeking an origin for the meaning of the text.

Therefore, readers create authors, giving them key functions in the determination of texts, using them to classify, differentiate, organise, relate and even put limits to the endless interpretation of literary texts. To this end Foucault argues, that the author's name is not 'a pure and simple reference'. It has other indicative functions: 'more than an indication, a gesture, a finger pointed at someone, it is the equivalent of a description' (200). And part of what we as readers/listeners see the author's name to be describing is his/her very text since this name is 'always present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing or at least characterizing, its mode of being' (202). What Foucault continually underlines is that the role an author is ascribed, is necessarily a function of his/her own culture's needs. Views of authorship are necessarily always tied to material and historical needs.

Against these theoretical frameworks, we can begin to read the interjections of artistes' names into their song-texts as much more than the idle chants of braggarts. For one, we need to read these intrusions from the point of view of not just the authors, but from the perspective of the readers/listeners, and in terms also of how they impact on the song's lyrics. To begin with, from the perspective of the artistes, these intrusions are used for commercial effect. They are billboards meant to promote the artiste. Within them, the authority and legitimate ownership over the text is repeatedly stamped. And it is necessary to do this because the portability of the song text makes it possible for an audience — through media broadcasts and other publicly aired transmissions — to engage with the text while being utterly oblivious of its author. Rarely is a written text ever found in such circumstances.

The kind of negative consequences that can arise from having an anonymous text — a highly portable text capable of travelling far and wide unattached to its author — become apparent when, one is dealing with a music industry that is as informal and unstructured as the Kenyan one is. As I argued in the previous chapter, the absence of proper regulatory controls in this market means that music pirates thrive, coming in to fill the consumption gap between haphazard production and erratic distribution. Consequently, most buyers of music in Kenya get their supply from demo-tapes, home dubbing and pirated copies. So, perhaps it is to guard against the threat of total oblivion that can be occasioned by these "faceless" copies that Kenyan musicians repeatedly call out their names within the song text. The argument then being that even where they lose out on the commercial proceeds accruing from the sales of their pirated creations, they can at least ensure that they safeguard their fame. Hopefully, once their names audibly circulate along with their songs, they can expect invitations to "gigs" and performances from which, as we saw in Chapter One, they can recoup some of the financial losses occasioned by music piracy.

This scenario of the commercial and critical dangers generated by "faceless" or anonymous songs — those that make no reference within the song text to their authors — is not a matter of speculative theorising. Witness the case of a pirated song that entered the Kenyan music scene in October 2002. Rendered in Kiswahili and Kihaya — a language from the Haya peoples of the Bukoba region in Tanzania — the song was an instant dance-hall hit in Kenya. It was frequently aired on radio without anyone seeming to know, with any amount of certainty, either the name of the artiste or even the name of the song. The only thing that seemed certain was that the artiste was Tanzanian.¹ By the time the original artsite organised to tour Kenya in April 2003 and officially launch her album, the adverts that were carried in the media were a testimony to the confusion that had reigned over her anonymous hit.² Thankfully, for those who saw the adverts, there was even a photograph of the artiste, now revealed to be Saida Karoli. More significantly, in these adverts her fame could only be attested to, not by referring to her work by name,

¹ Werner Graebner (1997:117) discusses the sorry state of the Tanzanian record industry, noting in particular that 'songs by Tanzanian bands are mostly pirated from RTD (Rado Tanzania Dar es Salaam)'.

² See *Sunday Nation*, April 20 2003, p.25 and *Daily Nation* April 21 2003, p.13.

but by carrying catchy snippets of the lyrics from this immensely popular song that we were now learning, with full assurance, is called 'Maria Salome'. And so the billing in the adverts run:

Saida Karoli
Popularly known for her song –
'...Maria Salome'
...'Wenye wivu wajinyonge'
...'Kanichambua kama karanga' .³

Clearly, the sponsors of Saida Karoli's Kenyan tour were only too well aware that locally no-one knew either her or her song by name. In the circumstances, and short of actually playing the song, the surest way to advertise Saida Karoli was by referring to those lines in the song that had become so popular with Kenyan audiences. And even as she toured Kenya, the confusion over her work persisted, with some imagining that each of the lines quoted in the adverts refer to a complete song, thus making up a total of three different songs. Consequently, there were media reports that talked of 'The 27-year-old award winning songstress, locally known for her hit single *Wenye Wivu Wajinyonge*.'⁴ In the same report, the misrepresentation persists as the columnist says: 'One of her popular songs is *Maria Salome* from her latest album, *Mapenzi Kizunguzungu*. Her songs like *Wenye Wivu Wajinyonge* and *Kanichambua kama Karanga* are thrilling and exciting and are bound to keep fans on their feet'. Even those who claimed to have attended the shows surprisingly remained caught up in the confusion : 'The show reached a climax when Karoli performed her popular hit, *Maria Salome*, as fans danced along feverishly. The musician is expected to perform, *Wenye Wivu Wajinyonge*, at the Coast tonight'.⁵

The Maria Salome case speaks volumes, therefore, about the practical considerations that have perhaps been responsible for drawing Kenyan popular musicians into the habit of repeatedly calling out their own names within the song text. But one also traces in this trend some of the conventions of Congolese music whose influence, as we have already

³ Kiswahili for 'let the jealous ones hang themselves (commit suicide)' and 'sorted me out like a stew' i.e. messed me up.

⁴ Clay Muganda, 'Tanzanian songbird Saida promises fans a lively show', *Daily Nation* April 30 2003 p.3.

⁵ 'Songbird Saida stages thrilling show', *Daily Nation* May 2 2003 p.5.

seen, very much shaped the trends of Kenyan popular music, particularly through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. As far back as the 1950s, Congolese musicians used the opportunity of both performance and recording to let their audiences know about changes in the constitution of group members, and also to salute and acknowledge people who were associated with the group in one way or another. Franco & OK Jazz provide a typical example. Their December 1956 recording of '*On Entre O.K. On Sort K.O.*' was used to announce the group's new line-up, indicating the departure of Roitelet, and the entry of guitarist Nicolas Bosuma 'Dessoir' 'to replace their stellar drummer Pandi' who had been fired along with Roitelet (Stewart, 2000:59).

Following President Mobutu's Authenticity programme early in 1972, Congolese musicians began to exploit authorial intrusion with a new aim. In part, Authenticity forced every Zairean to drop foreign names and adopt authentic Zairean ones instead. It was a requirement that threatened the popularity of the older musicians, who worried that their fans would be unable to recognise them in their "new" garbs and labels of authenticity. Authorial intrusion saved the day for many. In his April 1972 hit single '*Mongali*' — the boastful tale of a sugar-mummy who has enticed the young Mongali Yena — 'Seigneur' Pascal Rochereau actually finds room to weave into the lyrics his '*nom d'authenticite*', Tabu Ley...so there will be no mistaking who 'Rochereau' has become' (Stewart: 173). Today's Congolese music still features a throwing in of names mingled with other shouts and chants. These shouts specifically come from a performer who has come to be known as the *atalaku*, (literally 'look at me') and whose job it is to control and activate the dancing during the *sebene* that brings the performance to a close (White 1999). It is these shouts that lend the music the names by which it has come to be known all over East Africa, for instance, *kwassa kwassa* and *dombolo*. Presumably then, East African musicians borrowed this "shouting" technique, recognising it to be a handy promotional device. Sometimes, the "shout-outs consist of more than a roll-call of band members. In the next chapter, we shall see consider the objective of Nairobi City Ensemble's salutations to friends and associates the world over in their remix of Franklin Boukaka's '*Le Bucheron*'.

Studying the development of Congolese music itself complicates the argument a little more. Much of the scholarship on the growth of Congolese music attests to the impact of James Brown's performances in Zaire, first in 1972 and then again in 1974 during the famous Muhammad Ali versus George Foreman title fight dubbed, 'Rumble in the Jungle' (Stewart:176, White:170, Ewens, 1994:115). A number of bands, foremost amongst them Trio Madjesi a.k.a Sosoliso, adopted and adapted Brown's choreography and 'show' concept, spicing their work with previously rare English shouts like 'come on', a typical James Brown opener. Thus some have argued that the *atalaku* tradition, which is 'an indispensable part of every self-respecting band in Kinshasa'(White 160), may have grown out of the example of James Brown.

And though we shall focus on the influence of American hip hop practices on local popular music more substantially in Chapter Five it is worth noting here that a study of the appearance of producers' names within the song text is a dramatic portrayal of the diasporic connections that are shaping contemporary Kenyan popular music. American hip hop artistes help to advertise fledgling producers who count on this praise-singing to bring them more talent to record and produce. With time, this has become one of the global conventions of hip hop music adapted by all who aspire to make a name as rap artistes. But producer Tedd Josiah introduces a new twist to the argument arguing that there have been aesthetic exchanges flowing from East to West too:

Hip hop has its roots in Africa, we cannot forget that. And African music was all about, especially, I would say hip hop was very much the youth, the warrior, the young person, who's just broken into his youth and discovered that he's such a strong person and so on. When that met English then they would say, 'this is me, and I'm representing my other niggers or warriors from that and that block or that and that village', still it's the same thing, you know, the same that Congolese music does.

Josiah's point is about interconnectivity. There may be nothing essentially American about authorial intrusions into the song-texts, just as much as the convention cannot be termed uniquely African. The key issue is centred on connections and appropriations that

underline authorial intrusion as a function of commercial considerations, as an indication of the desire for self-representation, and ultimately, as a vital component of literary discourse and its dependence on dialogue and polyphony. Indeed, this intrinsic polyphony sometimes turns the author into a narrator, and sometimes into a character within his/her own text. The postcolonial context in particular seems to demand an interlocutor who actively mediates meaning between the competing forces of tradition on the one hand, and modernity on the other. While the text creates the space for this mediation, it does not however absolve the author from adopting an active speaking voice, for the imaginary woven by the text must, to be convincing, ultimately emerge as the shared world-view of the author. And popular discourses in particular demand precisely this kind of formulaic prescriptions (Newell:2000) in which authors work through tangible examples to communicate shared experiences (Barber: 2000). Thus Nairobi City Ensemble's '*Otonglo Time - Remix*' (2001), rapper, Poxi Presha, enters the song text in a blatantly advisory role:

It's Otonglo Time
or otherwise uta wonder
Ni wapi ulitia blunder
Ume waste your time
Wenzako wana ishi Runda
Nawewe ndani ya kibanda
Unadwell
Usiseme
Poxi Presha didn't tell!

It is time to make money
 Otherwise you will wonder
 Where you went wrong
 You have wasted your time
 our peers live in Runda⁶
 And you are in a shack
 squatting⁷
 Don't ever say
Poxi Presha did not warn you!

Poxi, even while being present in the text, takes on the somewhat detached stance of one who has seen it all, whose role it now is to document events and to caution, warn and reprimand. Artistes sometimes come into the song text as characters, and it very often has the effect of establishing a relationship of trust and intimacy between them and their imagined audiences, through the implication that the situations they speak to are in fact, shared experiences. Thus when artiste Redsan proclaims in 'Julie' (2002): '*Na sema oh, mimi na wewe, mi Redsan nakupenda 'lote*' (I'm referring to you and I, I, Redsan love

⁶ A high class suburb on the northern outskirts of Nairobi.

⁷ The term reflects the yoking of languages (Kiswahili and English in this case) known as Sheng. The bastardization of 'dwell' in reference to those living in shacks is a deliberate and comical hyperbole, meant to sarcastically bring out the contrast between the barrenness and mediocrity of the shack, as against the extravagant and flamboyant lifestyles of those doing well in Runda.

you above all others), his audience may tune into the tale on the foibles of urban love more readily once they picture a 'familiar' personage caught up in this predicament. They may even read themselves into the script, imagining that it is they and not Julie that Redsan is professing undying love for. Just as much as on the same album (*Ogopa 1*) the artistes behind '*Wasee Githurai*'⁸ bond with their audience as they urge:

*Come together, we can do this together
Take your time, we are staying here forever,
Ona [see] Mr. Lenny, Mr. Googs,
Vinnie Banton [the group members]
Hepi na mabeshete kule chini Githurai.*⁹

Authorial intrusions can, therefore, work not just to authenticate the author's role, but also to authenticate his/her very subject-matter. The work of these artistes demonstrates that within the postcolony, the function of the author cannot be taken for granted. In large measure, the discourses of assertion and affirmation which framed both the nationalist and the postcolonial moments permeate the artistes' genius and are therefore, embedded in these texts. As readers, our perception of these authors cannot be reduced to the peripheral categories suggested by Barthes. For one, popular forms demand an 'authorising' agent. Even where popular forms simply entertain, there is still cause for an intermediary to underline the need for these discourses of leisure and recreation. It is Foucault's articulation of 'author' as a product of specific historical and contextual imperatives, therefore, that provides far more cogent ways of reading the verbal entries of the artistes into the song-text.

In Chapter Three we shall see how the case of remix versions lends new meanings to the idea of authoring. But we can note here that aside from the likelihood of infringement of copyright that can be generated by remixes in a country where, as we saw in the previous

⁸ Sheng for 'People, we hail from Githurai' (a low-class residential neighbourhood in North-West Nairobi).

⁹ 'we are having fun with our friends out in Githurai' (Sheng). As we shall see in Chapter Four, the use of 'kule chini' – literally "down there" reads as a deliberate reference to the oft-times disregarded and despised ghetto existence of such neighbourhoods. This song's ingenuity lies in its artful thrusting of ghetto existence into ironic prominence and fame by celebrating life there, denouncing monetary gain and subverting the negative "othering" normally suffered by ghetto residents from middle-class snobs.

chapter, experience with intellectual property rights is limited,¹⁰ the art behind remix means that an author can at once be transformed into a reader and a critic all at once. Remixing a song transcends mere imitation or mimicry. It is akin to literary parody and more than that; it signals a recuperation of possibilities that gives the present a certain legitimacy. The artiste, first and foremost, reads and appreciates the work of another artiste. In remixing the work the new author is actually critiquing the original in order to adapt or (re)create it. Juma Odemba, lead vocalist and Manager of Kayamba Afrika, asserts, that a remix can never be an exact copy of the original.¹¹ To this extent, a remix is (re)authored through, or as a form of, critiquing. These versions, therefore, position the new author as reader, critic and author/creator; dramatising as Derrida (1985) does, that 'we would be mistaken if we understood (the staging of author *as* author by the author) as a simple presentation of identity'.

The notion of author as creator borders very closely on matters of (im)mortality. One can argue that the verbal calling and recalling done by Kenyan popular artistes does offer them the promise of immortality, ingraining the author into the nation's memory even as it records key moments and experiences of the audience's existence. The calling out of their own names within a song text can be read as part of the strategy by which many Kenyan popular musicians are recording and recalling themselves into continued existence. And the kind of names they choose to bear, must also be read as part of their strategy of recall, for as Derrida (1993:58) notes, there is plenty that 'the name supposes to name beyond itself...what bears the name, or that toward which one goes through the name'. Likewise, Henry Louis Gates (1988: 55, 87) urges that naming be 'drawn upon as a metaphor for black intertextuality'. And indeed, it is this iconography, its referents and associations that can make the name quite memorable.

¹⁰ MCSK conducted a seminar in October 2002 to create awareness about copyright laws amongst musicians and one of the points they debated was the issue of artistes acknowledging 'borrowed' songs.

¹¹ Personal interview, Nairobi December 21 2002. Unless otherwise stated, all other comments attributed to Odemba in this thesis arise from this interview.

2.2 In Search Of The Authentic

Within this first category, are artistes and groups whose names have been sourced, or coined from, within the local milieu; virtually seeking what Ascroft et al (1989: 17) label 'ancestral affiliation'. Indeed, Juma Odemba explains that his group — Kayamba Afrika — searched for 'a name that sounds African', and they 'did not want to be ambiguous'. They were looking for something that would locate them as 'traditional, but not so traditional', yearning to be nativist without 'sounding too local'. What the dilemma of this group points to, are the difficulties of belonging to the here and now, and reaching back to the past to define this present moment.



Ultimately, Odemba says, they settled on *Kayamba*¹² because it is the 'most commonly used musical instrument in Africa'. And Odemba goes on to say that part of the way in which his group projects a Pan-Africanist image is through their costumes, picking on unusual 'tie-and-dye' fabrics and mosaics which they then blend with European dress modes so as to avoid looking 'too traditional'. But most important of all, Kayamba Afrika pay attention to the symbolic identification that this name invites, particularly on account of the orthography that they chose. It is an orthography which connects better with the phonetics of most African languages and it is also widely used in Southern Africa as part of the Black Consciousness discourse, all of which point to an affirmation of indigenous initiatives. Further, in their privileging of a musical instrument that has come to connote ethnic music throughout the continent, the group's name reverberates with cultural restitution and national pride. The fact of its being further projected through a broad continental lens, echoes with the task of recuperating and rehabilitating Pan-Africanist ideals.

Nowhere is this desire to project authenticity more visible than in the decision reached by Them Mushrooms in 2002 to change their name to *Uyoga*. World Music Portal advertise this new name as 'an indigenous (Kiswahili) word, which essentially translates into 'magic mushrooms' — a mystical species that grows wildly across the depths of Africa's rain forests'.¹³ It is important to note that this is one of Kenya's oldest singing groups, having been formed in 1972. It is perhaps the only one that survived intact, carried the banner of ambitious young artistes, through the musically difficult years of the 1970s. These were the years when popular music in Kenya was associated with derelict behaviour and a bunch of 'has-beens'; faded stars from an earlier era, living on residual fame, only marginally engaged in music making and, in their twilight years, caught up in a life of squalor. Ironically, in the 1990s Them Mushrooms made their mark nationally through an excavation of the 1950s and 1960s Kenyan discography, in stage renditions that came to be known as *zilizopendwa* (golden oldies), a term which then became the

¹² A percussion instrument made from parallel pieces of wooden pipes tied together with parallel running threads or reeds. The hollow spaces inside are filled with dried seeds of various kinds which create the jingle as the *Kayamba* is held and rocked between thumb and forefinger. See George Senoga Zake (1986 :169).

title of their 1991 album. The fact that these *zilizopendwa* tunes captured the attention and imagination of Kenyans in the 1990s, had a lot to do with the way these songs nostalgically signaled to a time when Kenyan popular music (and musicians) had so forcefully articulated the aspirations and tensions of an emergent urban elite. And, it was an elite from whom the rural masses sought their cue in attempting the transition into modernity.¹⁴

Clearly, the decision by Them Mushrooms to change from what was already a household name, and thereby risk the anonymity of a new name, must have hinged on what the group calculated would be a substantial image boost brought in by the new name. The long drawn out publicity campaign that heralded their name-change even involved audience participation in which listeners called particular radio stations¹⁵ with their guesses of what the group's new name would be. The new name was not revealed until November 2002 during the official launch of the group's new single, '*Nzele Party*', at the Carnivore Simba Salon, a club and restaurant off Nairobi's Langata Road. It is worth noting that over the last 8 years or so, the Carnivore has become the Mecca of Kenyan music. In much the same way that, in the 1950s and 60s, a performance at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem, New York marked the coming of age for any American group, today the career of a Kenyan musician is not made until s/he can get to perform at the Carnivore. Njoki Karuoya credits the Carnivore for their corporate sponsored 'Star Search' competitions which 'are still the best launching pad for potential artistes'¹⁶. In many ways then, the choice of the Carnivore Simba Salon as the launching pad for Them Mushrooms new look was a statement about the group's perennial prowess. On that night, they metamorphosed into *Uyoga*, aided by a "new", or if you like, a borrowed, ethnic dance step — *Nzele*. The kind of revisionism exhibited by *Uyoga* must be read as part of the group's strategy for fitting into emergent projects of national self-restitution in which, the older (post 30s) artistes/groups in particular have increasingly turned to local(ised) impetuses as the informing logic for their work.

¹³ Off the website <http://www.worldmusicportal.uyoga.net/>

¹⁴ For a discussion of the themes of these *Zilizopendwa* tunes, see Atieno Odhiambo (2002a).

¹⁵ This name-search became a key feature of Kenya Broadcasting Corporations General Service show 'Breakfast Club'.

Another case in point is provided by the artiste Lydia Abura who used this name throughout her career as a gospel musician as well as during live performances at various social functions. However, in 2002, Lydia Abura chose to project herself more as a popular artiste and for her first album of popular music she chose to go by a "new" name, Achieng Abura. Dropping her Christian baptismal name — Lydia — and pushing forward her ethnic "middle" name — Achieng, a Luo name for a girl born when the sun is shining — must be seen as symbolic of this artiste's struggle to claim a Kenyan rootedness for both her being and her sound. One can read this same nativist strategy as perhaps the informing logic behind the 1994 reconstituting of the all-girl group Musikly Speaking as *Zannaziki*, a play on the Kiswahili word *mziki*, meaning music, and probably a play on *wanamziki* — the musicians. Many of the young artistes today seek attention through fairly literal, affirmative, and sometimes even combative, baptisms. Take for instance the brothers who make up Jawabu. They profess themselves as 'the answer'. And the postcolonial moment does indeed give rise to many questions. These questions stem from the pressures of a deteriorating economy evidenced in the scores of jobless youth, the questions also emanate from an era of confusing moral mores made worse by a manipulative and violent state such as Moi's became in its closing years. And through it all, these young artistes proclaim to have *the* answer, the solutions out of whatever quagmire the listener has perceived.

A rather combative and malevolent note is struck by the group Warogi Wawili — the two witches/wizards. They literally advertise their wares as magical potions, packed with the promise of healing the turbulence of the moment, whether that turbulence is limited to the personal experiences of the artistes, or even if it extends to include the socio-economic vagaries of contemporary Kenyan existence. The iconography of the name *warogi wawili* works up images of bravado and daring. It also works to represent a rather formidable duo, one that other tricksters, such as the music pirates perhaps, might not want to encounter. This evokes the seam of tradition and modernity in two interesting ways. First, one can argue that this name reverberates with discourses of intimidation and threats, the

¹⁶ 'Entertainment Milestones', <http://www.nationaudio.com/96-4NATION/feature17.htm>

kind that we associate with urban gangs in ghettos worldwide. To this extent, the name *warogi wawili* emanates from the peculiarities of urban existence, itself a function of modernity. But even then, the ethnic discourse in which the name is quite deliberately carried points to the localisation of these very experiences, and indicates a recourse to traditional or nativist practices for purposes of confronting alienating conditions in the present¹⁷.

Other modes of contestation come from the ferocious sounding Ogopa DJs. Kiswahili for 'afraid', this name functions as a warning. It works by intimidation and silencing — of opposition, of competition, or of whatever other force may be perceived as confining. So aside from their combative approach to dealing with music pirates which we discussed in Chapter One, this aggressive name functions as part of Ogopa's strategy of defense. It is a signal of these producers' awareness of the politics surrounding the business of music production in Kenya and it is deliberately meant to forestall attempts to dominate or otherwise intimidate these young entrepreneurs. In a sense, one can say they seek to weave a protective shield around the musicians they work with, as well as to boast their expertise in the industry.

I want to argue that some of these young Kenya artistes select vicious-sounding names precisely because of the rather hostile conditions that govern their entry into, and survival within, the Kenyan music industry. It is important to realise though that the power dynamics, the politics of domination, subversion and, sometimes, of artful compromise that we find in the Kenyan music industry, is itself a microcosm of postcolonial Kenyan existence. Listening to the names of Kenyan popular artistes, one realises the extent to which they bear the burden of this existence, opening up discourses of turbulence and providing new idioms for seemingly endemic frustration and tension. Take for example the group Kalamashaka. Their name is built around several Kiswahili words chief amongst them the noun *shaka* — doubt, uncertainty. *Mashaka* speaks of troubles, trials

¹⁷ Chabal & Daloz (1999: 76) note that witchcraft has adapted to the demands of modernity and, they argue, it can be efficacious as therapy for the tensions of urban existence, as well as in establishing kinship ties and levelling social differentiation since it 'is one of the few means of 'indigenous' social responsibility available, however crude its practices may be in reality'.

and mishaps. *Kala* refers to the collar, as in collar-bone or leash and, it can also refer to a kind of wild cat. As one word *kalamashaka* — though rhythmic in an onomatopoeic way that signals discourses of 'loud noise', 'disarray', 'confusion' or 'disaster' — has no actual meaning in the Kiswahili language. The group insists that 'the name roughly means "Trials and Tribulations Faced"'.¹⁸ And in this juxtapositioning of the collar (*kala*) and doubts (*mashaka*) one does begin to decode an almost stifling, strangling motion defining the individual's perception of his struggles within quotidian Kenyan existence. Alternatively, one may conjure up images of a particularly wild and uninhibited reaction to all of the frustrations dogging this existence.

Nowhere are the frustrations, tensions and anger generated by contemporary Kenyan existence better exemplified than in the name of the young rapper, Poxi Presha. Derived from his first name Prechard, 'presha', is a name this young musician acquired from his friends back in high school. The fact that he is sometimes referred to in the media as Poxi Pressure (emphasis mine) is indicative of the fact that many relate his pseudonym to force and coercion. Interestingly, the 'presha' part of his name augments what is implied by his acquired first name, Poxi. In the urban bricolage language, Sheng, to 'pox' is to force yourself onto something or someone, to impose yourself on others, oblivious of their discomfort and displeasure. Taken alongside 'presha' then, the 'poxi' becomes indicative of the way this artiste has thrust himself into the public sphere without any anxiety or doubt about his vocation, his role as a popular artiste. Continuously referred to by the Press as 'controversial', as 'the bad boy of Kenyan music'¹⁹, Poxi has always projected his confrontational approach to the iniquities and financial chicanery in the Kenyan music industry, onto his lyrical reading of Kenyan society as a whole. His name always reverberates with threats to challenge, invade, and overturn even the private recesses and zones of his audience's lives. The images of force and confrontation emanating from the name 'Poxi Presha' have become rooted in the Kenyan social imaginary. In some web discourse aimed at rewriting similes to make them relevant to

¹⁸ See the review on the website <http://www.wakilisha.com/peeps/kalamashaka/>

¹⁹ Ibid Njoki Karouya. See also *Sunday Nation* January 27 2002, p.12.

Kenyan realities that was circulating via email in June 2003 one entry read: 'As loud as Poxi Presha'.

The radical and uncompromising approach to contemporary Kenyan life which is reflected in the names of artistes like Ogopa DJs, Warogi Wawili and Poxi Presha is by no means the only strategy devised by, or available to, local popular artistes. Some like Ndarlin P have taken a diametrically opposing route. This particular name rings with mischief and comic intent. The word 'darling' is being used here, as it would sound coming from a native Kamba speaker. The cryptonymic 'P' stands for people, and in picking this name, Anthony Alex Wainaina was comically endearing himself as 'the darling of the people', negotiating the tentacles of frustration and tension by employing a brand of humour built around ethnic stereotypes that provide comic relief. Likewise, Zulukru press for an intergrated type of ethnic association. First, they invoke an ethnic force from beyond the Kenyan borders, then they comically foreground the Luhya way of pronouncing 'crew', altogether resulting in comical connotations of unity and expansionism.

But, in my view, far more interesting than this employment of comic stances, is the way in which some artistes have negotiated the terrain of local hostilities through a blending of the light-hearted with the radical. The duo Gidi Gidi Maji Maji derive their name first, from an abbreviated form of the proper name of one of the duo. It is Joseph Ogidi's surname that provides the short form 'Gidi'. In Luo, the name Ogidi might be liked to the word *gido*, meaning to tickle. Otherwise, 'Gidi' is a homophone for the English word 'giddy'. The fact of its repetition in the group's name — a repetition that must be derived from Kiswahili speech habits seen, for instance, in the expression, *kidogo, kidogo* meaning 'in small doses' — dramatises even more the English word 'giddy' which refers to frivolous light-heartedness. In a more literary sense, 'giddy' reflects a sense of being overwhelmed by feelings of excitement or pleasure, of being so excited you cannot behave normally. Julius Ondijo Owino (Maji Maji) acquired his nickname from the exploits of his original group members in Kisumu, all of whom lacked the courage to make the break and seek better career opportunities in Nairobi. *Maji* is Kiswahili for

water. Repeated, it refers to something being watery or wet and in the literary sense, being damp or lacking in potency. The reference to Owino in this way is, therefore, paradoxical since he was the only one with the courage and fortitude to survive the initial teething problems arising from relocating to the capital city.

Even more significant for many listeners however is the historical intertextuality echoed in 'Maji Maji'. For anyone familiar with East African history it immediately points to the July 1905-6 uprising in which the Ngoni people of Tanzania rebelled against German colonial oppression, and particularly, challenged the system of forced labour on the German owned cotton plantations. The Maji Maji Rebellion was thus named because, pushed to the brink of zero tolerance, the local leaders sought refuge in the traditional belief systems, in the name of a spirit medium, Kinjikitile. Kinjikitile promised his people immunity against the Germans through a potion consisting, in part, of magical water from the Uluguru Mountains that, once sprinkled on the Ngoni warrior's bodies, would turn the German bullets into harmless water.

That a duo of young Kenyan popular artistes should bring back into play this bold act of protest at a time of disquiet and dissatisfaction within the local system, says much of the invincibility and determination that some have embraced as their path out of the pressures of contemporary postcolonial excesses. The yoking together of the present moment with a historical code for protest — Maji Maji — seems to be tempered by the literal Kiswahili meaning of *maji maji* which indicates a lack of enthusiasm. Further, juxtaposed against the happy, frivolous excitement encoded in 'gidi gidi', the intertextual rebelliousness of Maji Maji contained in the inevitable historical associations coalescing around it, becomes a powerful oxymoron that points to the many 'moments of freedom'. These moments are about seizing agency, breaking away from the confinements of official institutions and discourses and their manipulative policies, they are centred on the articulation of creativity and ultimately, the lighthearted instances are part of what makes the tense and dramatic moments of forceful resistance, bearable. To further illustrate how names can generate an iconography of resistance and struggle, and to show the ties

between socio-economic spaces and socio-political discourses, I now turn to the second category in the nomenclature of Kenyan popular artistes.

2.3 Discourses From Afar

Looking at the names of some contemporary Kenyan artistes — Hardstone, Necessary Noize, Deux Vultures²⁰, Kleptomaniaks, Nameless, E-Sir, K-rupt, Big Pin, In-Tu, Lenny, Googs, Vinnie Banton, Shammah and Nairobi City Ensemble — one discerns in them a marked desire for a cosmopolitan image. As such we hear names that reflect a marked move away from discourses of 'otherness' created in the iconography of the groups I discussed in Section 2.2.

The dominant echo in this second category is one of modernity perhaps, a move to what may be perceived as a more international projection. Take for instance the revision of the name Isah Mwari to the stage name E-Sir. Just two weeks before his sudden death in March 2002, E-Sir told Kenya Broadcasting Corporation's presenter, Bill Odidi, during a live broadcast interview, that he had restructured his name 'in order to reflect who I really am'. Firstly, Isah did away with his surname as a way of rejecting the forms of rootedness it carries. Next he altered his given name, feeling that its Islamic background no longer defined his aspirations or even his experiences. Looking to communicate with a wider audience and gain acceptance amongst them, he Anglicised his given name in a most dramatic way; by aligning himself with the British honour of knighthood as a full measure of his cosmopolitanism. And as if to further underline his immersion in the modern age, the British rooting is preceded by a hyphenated 'E' that easily denotes the grammar of Internet communication.²¹ This strategy of the artiste, whether it be conscious or unconscious, demonstrates the weight of a name as representation of the self. Postcolonial identities therefore emerge as layered and fused constructs that the individual often attempts to restructure and negotiate.

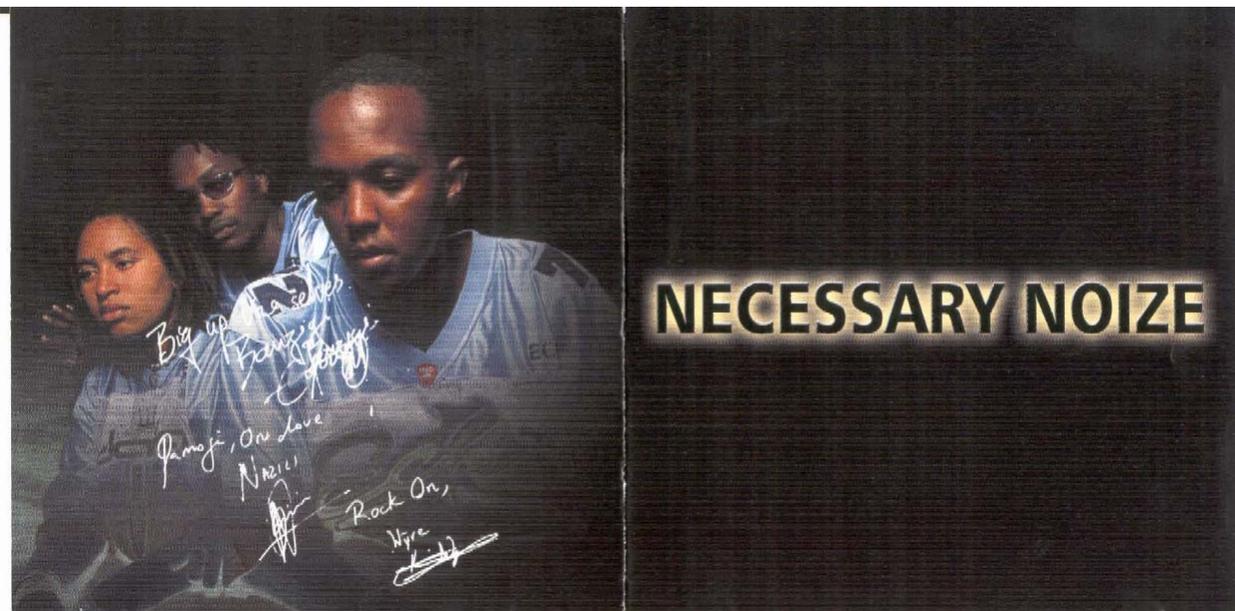
²⁰ Although the duo who make up Deux Vultures - Moustafa Daudi and Thomas Gonzanga are of Tanzanian origin, I have included their work in this study first, because they reside and record in Nairobi and second, because of the specific ways in which their work engages with the social geography of Nairobi (Chapter Four).

At the risk of preempting the discussion in Chapter Five, it is important that we draw some parallels between the names of some of these modernist local artistes and the "signifyin' " practices informing the nomenclature of American hip hop. Local performers like Necessary Noize, K-rupt, Big Pin, Klemptomaniaks and Deux Vultures employ the attention-seeking shock tactics that have turned American hip hop groups like Public Enemy, Run-D.M.C., Missy (Misdemeanor) Elliot, Bounty Killer, and producers like Havoc, and record labels like Death Row, into international household names. That American hip hop artistes carry irreverent names and even some that are clearly inimical to public order, has a lot to do with the roots of the movement. George Lipsitz (1994: 25) argues that:

[t]he first visible signs of what we have come to call hip hop culture (rap music, break dancing, graffiti, B Boy and wild style fashions) appeared in the early 1970s when a member of a New York street gang (The Black Spades) calling himself Afrika Bambaataa organized 'The Zulu Nation'.

Though Lipsitz credits Afrika Bambaata with channeling the energies and anger of South Bronx, New York youth 'away from gang fighting and into music, dance, and graffiti', it has to be said that the creative force behind the exciting new sound that captivated these young people was DJ Kool Herc (Ogg and Upshall, 1999). Every so often in the evolution of American hip hop however, the associations with criminality have repeatedly surfaced in forms such as gangsta rap, which basically relates and valorises criminal activity. Worse still has been the overtly criminal involvement of artistes such as the late Tupac Shakur which generate not just bad publicity, but also provide derelict role models within the hip hop movement.

²¹ I am grateful to my son Ronald for this particular insight.



Even then, in looking at the obvious intertextuality that surfaces in the names and idiolect of local artistes such as Necessary Noize, it is important to note that these aggressive names are as much about the local socio-political context in which the artistes are being shaped as they are about "global flows" and diasporic borrowings. A name like Necessary Noize functions as a demand from the group that the local audiences recognise and accept hip hop culture as part of the formative structure in cosmopolitan Kenyan culture. It can also be read as a call to pay attention to all the marginalised groups in this society, particularly the youth, the poor and the oppressed.

Michael Titlestad (2003) has argued that the informing logic of these 'foreign' entries into local situations is improvisation, which entails appropriating and then adapting in terms of local interests and desires, forms and meanings from elsewhere. The cardinal point here is that these 'foreign' entries are seen to be apt and useful in providing idioms and mechanisms for addressing local realities. We can indeed argue that Afrika Bambaataa found ambition and a sense of purpose from some perceived connections to the 'motherland'. Notions of Africa and dreams of a Zulu nation, with all their discourses of struggle, self-assertion and self-determination all conflated to offer voice and possibilities to disenchanting inner-city youth in the Bronx, New York. Again, as Lipsitz demonstrates American hip hop diva, Queen Latifa, employed images of South African women in the

struggle against apartheid in the music video for her song 'Ladies First'. Consequently, she succeeded in bringing home a positive representation of Black women to an American public that had for too long dwelt on degrading stereotypes of African-American women as 'unwed mothers and 'welfare queens' (Lipsitz, 25).

In much the same ways that African struggles lent strength to the rise of hip hop music in the Bronx, New York, the socio-economic contexts prevailing there have found diametrical parallels in the manner of urban existence in Kenya in the twilight years of the Moi regime. The names K-rupt, Kleptomaniaks, Big Pin and Deux Vultures thus ring with local relevance, they are actually cogent reflections of the decay of those years as well as functioning as pointers to what Jean-Francois Bayart (1993) aptly terms Africa's 'politics of the belly'. And as Bayart et al (1999) clearly demonstrate, it is not that state corruption and the combining of public office with private accumulation are unique to Kenya or even to Africa. As we shall see in Chapter Six, it is the curious ways in which African audiences find cultural legitimacy for such behaviour — through proverbs, idioms and a preponderance of trickster narratives — that makes corruption and misuse of public office virtually definitive of the African postcolony. What we have with the names of these groups then are, in actual fact, metonyms of the system. These names are clearly situated within this discourse of kleptocracy which is defined by Bayart et al (1999: 15) as in part 'the illegitimate use of the state's coercive resources or of resources of violent coercion which are private and, hence, illegitimate'. Bayart et al go on to demonstrate that kleptocracy 'covers a gamut of practices of corruption and plunder which can attain spectacular proportions in conditions where authoritarian regimes are struggling to reassert themselves'.²²

The names K-rupt, Kleptomaniaks, Big Pin and 'eux Vultures are precisely built around and from a society such as this in which scavenging has been turned into a national ethos. They point to an economy of meaning that brings into sharp focus all of the excesses of the Moi regime, and especially of the "big-men" syndrome that marked its twilight years. The deliberately subverted orthography of K-rupt and Kleptomaniaks does not obscure

²² See Roger Southall (1999) for a discussion of the kleptocratic ways of the Moi regime.

their meaning. Neither does the bi-lingual yoking in *Deux Vultures* obliterate its signifiers. Both these strategies — subversion and fusion — are, in fact, part of the regime of destruction and violence that the practices they name entail. If at all they are meant to echo the political disenchantment of those who feel somehow marginalised — and as we shall see later, some of the lyrics of these artistes do indeed confirm their position as neglected underdogs — then, these names do so by a self-conscious ironic bravado that acts as a façade over their real bitterness and concern.

Reading David Anderson on 'Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Kenya', one realises that the informing logic behind the iconography of these music groups seems akin to that of the vigilante groups and state-backed terror gangs that have emerged from 'the criminal underworld of Nairobi's protection rackets and gangsterism' (2002:551). The 'images of warfare, conflict and violence' emanating from urban gangs like — *Jeshi la Mzee* (the old man's army), *Jeshi la Embakasi*²³, *Taliban*, *Kamjesh* (Sheng for 'member of an army') and even the more complexly constituted *Mungiki*²⁴ — are, Anderson argues 'deliberately intended to confuse the "respectable" middle classes, in whom the names themselves invoke fear and dread'. Indeed, these terror groups were often employed in the closing years of Moi's rule to create the kind of tensions — ethnic as well as class based — that were meant to make it difficult to institute democratisation through either transition elections or the writing and enactment of a new constitution.²⁵

²³ Embakasi is one of the 8 constituencies in Nairobi.

²⁴ Peter Mwangi Kagwanja (2003:49) looks at the hybridity of this movement which 'blends Kikuyu traditions, Christian and Islamic values and a vision of Kenya as a commonwealth of equal ethnic nations'. He further examines the 'hijacking of *Mungiki* by sectarian interests', thereby transforming it from a cause of ' "moral ethnicity" to "political tribalism" and violence'.

²⁵ See both Anderson (2002) and Kagwanja (2003) for an interrogation of *Mungiki's* activities, and particularly, of the March 3 2003 bloody clash between *Mungiki* and *Taliban*. Human Rights Watch (2002) - 'Violence as a Political Tool in Kenya' also discusses the use of these groups in politically motivated attacks. The Kenyan media has repeatedly made reference to the involvement of politicians in financing and employing so-called youth groups — 'Bloody Dandora: work of a cartel linked to powerful city politician?' *East African Standard* November 5 2001. 'Banned groups were private armies for hire by politicians', *Daily Nation*, March 9 2002, Mugumo Munene, 'The force behind terror gangs', *Daily Nation*, March 13 2002. The media has also questioned the relationship between so-called vigilante groups, the police and the general public — Gitau Warigi, 'Urban gangsters are playing Mother Teresa', *Sunday Nation*, October 14 2001.

It is this same desire to intimidate that one sees in the names K-rupt, Kleptomaniaks, Big Pin and Deux Vultures. Echoing the political culture dominating their time, these musicians have chosen names whose imagery paradoxically upholds the status quo of the doctrines of avarice, looting and forces inimical to national interest, that were the hallmark of the Moi era. It is important to remember that in any society, cultural practices such as those in which popular musicians engage, are part of the system by which mores and moral standards are taught and preserved. By suggesting immoral behavioural codes as the norm, and indeed, in appearing to legitimise practices that are detrimental to the nation's political culture, the iconography of groups like Big Pin, K-rupt, Kleptomaniaks and Deux Vultures can sow the seeds of warped morality, particularly from the ranks of young impressionable audiences. Indeed, modern criminologists have previously pointed out the connection between such 'cultural styles', and aesthetics that seem rather directly to aid the development of criminality.²⁶

There are times when artistes pick a pseudonym that reflects not so much their being and their concerns, but instead, one that can provide anonymity. The artiste Nameless provides a cogent example. Thrust suddenly into a musical career, and also on account of his shy personality, David Mathenge was not prepared to reveal his true identity when he won a radio rap competition. That is how the pseudonym 'Nameless' was born. Alongside it, he has deliberately cultivated a mysterious stage look: 'I created my stage image — a long black leather trenchcoat, Stetson hat, a mask and my dancers. We were all dressed in black. I loved the wrestler Undertaker and he was my inspiration'.²⁷ So like the Undertaker, Nameless has continually sought a camouflage, and in hiding behind a mask, he draws our attention to the sense in which being an artiste of whatever kind, involves a plurality of self. It is as if Nameless would want to separate his musical self and all the writing and performing he does there, from the David Mathenge who is an architect. And key to this separation is the attempt to virtually efface the artiste, to free his song-texts and allow them to take over the legitimizing of whatever they espouse. Every time

²⁶ See J. Ferrel and C.R. Sanders (1995) *Cultural Criminology*.

²⁷ *Sunday Nation*, August 4, 2002 *Lifestyle* p.10.

Nameless enters the song text, it becomes a statement of "every man", articulating what is so commonly seen and known, so real.

The facelessness sought by this camouflage is reminiscent of American Rhythm and Blues star, Prince, or rather; the-man-formerly-known-as-Prince since, in adopting a symbol in place of his name, the man dropped all attempts at being located in anything nameable. He chose instead to retain his identity by shunning a name and its confining connotations. Anonymity is, in a sense, a way of further projecting the self, drawing attention by absence, by constantly demanding the repeated question "But *who* is that?" It may well be therefore, that through the anonymity of the author a fuller description of his/her persona is attained.

The use of camouflage is again seen in gospel musician Henri Mutuku. In this particular instance, the artiste adopts a name that represents that which is not. To escape the wrath of a protective family, or perhaps to forestall discriminatory practices in the industry, or maybe even as preparation for riding the difficult storms of a musical career, Evelyn Mutuku decided to position herself as a man by dropping her own first name in favour of that of her uncle, Henry. Even then, within a Kenyan context, her gender remains obscured by the unusual orthography in 'Henri' which could also work to reveal a desire for the exotic which necessarily has the desired effect of raising interest and curiosity.

By sheer contrast, there are those names that seek association from far off quarters, for instance Shammah, and The Mighty King Kong. The first is a clear projection of a gospel group, a testament to their desire to witness to their belief in the existence of the Christian God. Quite apart from 'Shammah' meaning 'Jehovah is there', it is also the title that Ezekiel gives to the City of Jerusalem, seen by him in a dream (Ezekiel 48:35). But, even as this name may appear to signal a unilateral commitment to a Christian ethic, it is worth noting the sheer plurality involved in Christianity itself, particularly of the kind practiced in the postcolony. In Shammah, the focus is on the Old Testament, and this can itself be read as a form of neo-traditionalism, the attempt to indigenise Christianity by recycling those parts of the Old Testament that affirm existing 'traditional practices'. The choice of

Shammah thus speaks not only of the multiplicity of influences in the present, but also of the burden of negotiation and selection that cultural purveyors must bear. The thrust towards neo-traditionalism is further complicated by the group's songs which are deeply woven from the performance modes of hip hop, as well as from the evangelical fervour of the Kenyan charismatic churches. Shammah provides a key instance in the ways in which cultural purveyors in the postcolony borrow indiscriminately from an array of influences in their bid to weave a local imaginary.

Another interesting instance of such far-flung borrowing comes from *The Mighty King Kong*. There are invocations of strength, dominance, and maybe even of the triumph of modernity over primitive practice in this name. They derive first, from the 1933 feature film about Skull Island where forces of nature and voodoo are pitted against those of urban civilisation as the giant ape is captured and put on display in the city of New York which is at the time sagging under the weight of economic depression. *King Kong* is also the title of a South African musical of the late 1950s which featured very favourably in Europe. The name *King Kong* has also been adopted by boxers and wrestlers world-wide in their respective bids to intimidate and overcome opponents. That a Kenyan dreadlocked artiste who was crippled by polio in his childhood, should find inspiration in this name is hardly surprising. It is however illustrative of the variety of influences that are wrapped in the Kenyan social imaginary.

For their part, Nairobi City Ensemble bear a name that seeks recognition and legitimacy through locating them within instantly familiar territory. But even the reference to the Kenyan capital is not seen to be enough, the group's progenitor — Tabu Osusa — felt a need, seen in the inclusion of the defining status "city", to supplement the location by emphasising its presumably cosmopolitan and modern character. This cosmopolitanism is further brought to the fore by the term *ensemble*, a word of French origins referring to the collection and representation of all voices, all instruments. And indeed, the city is a place of many voices, not all of them modern, and Nairobi is without doubt as local as it is cosmopolitan. The kind of tensions between nativist impulses and modernist inclinations that this reference to Nairobi brings out are dramatised even further by the constant

juxtaposing, in the role-call interjections into the song text, of the Producer's name against that of the group. Between the name Tabu Osusa on the one hand, and Nairobi City Ensemble on the other, lies a reflection of the complex of contradictions complicating the identity of Kenyan popular artistes.

2.3.1 The Middle Ground

It is precisely because of the difficulty in simply categorising one as either nativist or modernist that one can talk of a kind of middle ground zone visibly projected by artistes such as Jimmi Gathu, David Ohingo, Eric Wainaina, Henri Mutuku, Suzanna Owiyo, Marcus Kamau and T.T. Solomon. Read against the background of Kenyan history, their names reflect the local burden of a split consciousness and existence between an imposed colonial heritage, and a traditional ethnic rooting. In as much as some may see in this divergence a 'melodrama of difference' as Jean Baudrillard (1993:125) terms it, it is also useful to read in this tension the quintessential dynamics of identity that the urban postcolony accentuates. For Gathu, Ohingo, Wainaina, Owiyo and Kamau they have simply carried onto the stage and to the recording studios their actual, or if you like, their proper names, thus appearing to be at ease with the perpetual dislocation that is postcolonial urbanity. It may well be a strategy brought on by the fact of their not seeing any discordance between the author as a persona, and the individual himself, or perhaps they simply carry the burden of "child of two worlds" as a given, as a matter of course.

In the case of T.T. Solomon, the double sound of his initials actually creates an indigenous sounding "name" — coming off as 'titi'. And in thus seeming to invert the order of names — surname before first/given name, one can argue that it is the ethnic rather than the 'other' that is privileged. Seen from another perspective however, one could argue that the cryptonymic initials act as a camouflage, and that the real identity being projected and privileged is the modernised or maybe even the Christianised one represented by the fully inscribed 'Solomon'.

2.4 The Power of the Nickname

In his introduction to Jacques Derrida's contemplation on the politics of the proper name, Thomas Dutoit (1995) demonstrates that the surname, the idea of family nomenclature, arose from the need to give supplemental names, in addition to the baptismal/forename that is. And as Derrida (1993:xiv) asks, 'what happens, above all, when it is necessary to sur-name (surnommer), re-naming there where, precisely, the name comes to be found lacking?' The act of re-naming, of supplementing the baptismal name through a surname, signals a certain lack in the baptismal/forename. But even the surname itself only overcomes its own lack by its constant use, its repetition and re-naming as it is handed down from one family member to another. In much the same way as surnames supplement and supplant baptismal/forenames, nicknames, given to a person in jest, affection or even contempt can, very often, come to carry all of a person's fame and renown. As Dutoit puts it:

If ... the proper name, is originally lacking in such a way that a nickname, a surname, must, by *repetition*, fill its lack, then one's name, one's fame, one's renown comes before anything else through an act of *re-naming* (xi).

Nowhere is this better demonstrated in the field of Kenyan popular music than in the name of Tabu Osusa, veteran producer, composer and music consultant whose 30-year career has been honed in places as far-flung as Zaire and London. It is easy to imagine that his first name, Tabu, is the same as the Kiswahili word — also spelt as *taabu* — denoting sadness, troubles, misfortune or excessive need. Within the context of African popular music however, there is no doubt that this name, Tabu, has the effect of paleonymy. It forms an echo of the famous Lingala musician from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tabu Ley Rochereau, formerly known as Pascal Tabou. Wolfgang Bender (1991) and Gary Stewart (2000) reveal that Tabu Ley's surname — Rochereau — came to him by way of a nickname. It was given to him in jest by his classmates, on the basis of an answer he gave after their primary school history teacher asked: 'Who is the French colonel who defended Belfort during the Franco-Prussian war?' 'Colonel Pierre Denfert-Rochereau', the young Pascal was the only one to answer. And so Stewart details, 'His merciless classmates never let him forget it. From that point on

Tabou, not Pierre, was *the* Rochereau' (89). However, during President Mobutu's Authenticity programme of 1972, the musician was to de-Frenchify Tabou to Tabu, and drop both Pascal and Rochereau in favour of Ley, 'a name from one of his grandfathers' (Stewart; 172).

By an interesting coincidence, it was also during his schooldays that Tabu Osusa was nicknamed 'Tabu'. He says that his mates named him 'Mwana Tabu' (the child or, if you like a more liberal interpretation, the owner of Tabu) because he belonged to a group of naughty boys and because he 'liked African music'. In other words, his schoolmates augmented the image of the person they knew by supplanting his baptismal/forename. Seeing in the name 'William Ogutu' some lack, some inadequacy to fully describe the person they knew, Osusa's friends picked up for him, a double-edged label. First, the 'Tabu' performed as a warning, to reflect how much trouble could be expected from their friend's mischief. Secondly, the nickname 'Tabu' positioned, or insisted on forcefully projecting Osusa as a fan. It is a name that was meant to signal his passion for African music, a passion so strong, that Osusa was to later make his way to what was then Zaire to serve an apprenticeship with the masters of this music. It was a music whose definition and reputation had in part been built around the work of Tabu Ley Rochereau. Stapleton and May (1989:29) describe Tabu Ley's fame thus:

Tabu Ley was an important force in African music in the seventies — not only for his restless powers of innovation, but also for his French television appearances and gigs at the Paris Olympia. His search for a world market, rather than a purely African one, accelerated the flow of African musicians to Paris, where they took advantage of sophisticated recording equipment to pump out a seemingly endless stream of albums.

And debating the factors behind Tabu Ley's international success, Stewart (2000: 391-2) attributes much of it to

[h]is extraordinary gift for translating the pulse of his people into sonnets of universal beauty [which] earned a following far beyond the boundaries of central Africa. Towering above

all was the marvelous voice, the voice against which all pretenders would be measured. Ley and his contemporaries followed the school of Kabasele, but subsequent generations took their lessons from Master Tabu Ley Rochereau

What is more, Stapleton and May add, along with fellow Zairean musicians Franco and Sam Mangwana, Tabu Ley 'built up huge followings in east Africa generally, setting a precedent for musicians like Mzee Makassy and Samba Mapangala who settled permanently in the area' (226). It is precisely this renown of a music doyen that coalesces around the name 'Tabu', a nickname, which after well over 30 years use, has truly become Osusa's own name. And it is not just because, like his Congolese namesake, Osusa perennially sports the collarless shirt, or *abacost*, which was introduced in Zaire in the heyday of Mobutu's Authenticity philosophy and which literally means '*a bas le costume*' — down with the (European) suit. Much more than this image and idiolect is the fact that Tabu Osusa managed and produced Samba Mapangala and Orchestra Virunga in the 1980s. As such, it is in more than that connotative sense of a familiar name, that Tabu Osusa occupies a central place in the development of Kenyan music. Each time his name comes through in the song text, it reverberates as a key link between contemporary Kenyan popular music, its roots in the *benga* traditions of the 1970s, and those critical moments when Kenyan popular music seemed firmly locked in the embrace of Congolese influence, Lingala lyrics and all. These were the moments when emerging local musicians, in their bid to reflect their own competence, adopted as stage names, the names of Zairean popular stars. A case in point is the Luo *benga* musician, Ochieng Kabasele, who sought fame via (Joseph) Kabasele Tshamala, otherwise known as 'Le Grand Kalle' and undoubtedly one of the most influential founding fathers of Congolese popular music.

The idea of local popular artistes aligning themselves to international stars whose work they try to emulate, or whom they find inspiring in some other way, is evident in Kenya to date. Very often, they pick on names that, in the words of Michael Titlestad (2003: 208), lend an 'authenticating signifier', they give the local artiste 'a definitive name that casts an aura of accomplishment'. In the Kenyan context, this tactic once again comes

across very powerfully in the artiste Jah Key Malle. The fact that Kenyan journalists frequently refer to him as 'Marley' rather than his chosen 'Malle', is evidence of the associations that that homophone evokes. These images are further augmented by the reggae beat of Malle's music as well as his dread-lock hairstyle all of which bring into sharp focus one of Jamaica's greatest reggae artistes, the late Bob Marley. This association is further facilitated by Malle's use of 'Jah', the Rastafarian reference for the Almighty. The nativist impulses revealed in the iconography surrounding the names of Tabu Osusa and Jah Key Malle bring onto the Kenyan scene a cultural capital that goes beyond local boundaries. They situate the local within the Pan-African in one instance, and within the African Diaspora in the other. The kind of restitution and return that they undertake have been typical responses to Africa's history of domination and disconnection, as such they form key tropes in other discourses that have wrestled to conceptualise and debate African modernity. And as we have thus far seen, even without arching towards Western impulses, it is a modernity fraught with tensions and contradictions. In looking at the titles of the albums that have pervaded the Kenyan cultural space in recent years, I hope to further demonstrate the difficulties of navigating a nativist route in a puritan or essentialist way.

2.5 'My Signifier is More [Kenyan] Native Than Yours'.²⁸

If you want to know how life has treated an
Igbo man, a good place to look is the name his
children bear.

(Chinua Achebe, 1976:20)

A unifying practice in contemporary Kenyan popular music is seen in the labelling of the eventual products, the albums. Less than one-fifth of the popular albums released over the last five years — *Nutin but de Stone* (1997), *Necessary Noize* (2001), *Lady's Choice* (2001), *Rebirth* (2002) and *Seasons of the San* (2002) — are shot through with cosmopolitan aspirations, aired in English and American slang. And while these titles may indeed echo the concerns of the songs contained within, they do not in terms of

²⁸ Adeleke Adeeko (1998:1)

incisiveness come anywhere near the proximity with which their more nativist inspired counterparts capture the realities of contemporary Kenyan existence. Without doubt the banner of nativist alterity seen in the albums with Kiswahili and Sheng titles dramatises not just their culturally revisionist intervention into Kenyan popular discourses, but more interestingly, these titles are actual narratives of Kenyan life in its most quotidian forms, and also, in the sense of weaving an alternative moral ethos.

First, there are titles that speak with national pride and articulate a passionate defense of our own. Beginning with *Them Mushrooms* album, *Zilizopendwa* there is a focus on local(ised) history. Take Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's album, *Ismarwa* (2000). Luo for 'It is ours', this title's sense of national pride is in part derived from its legitimation of a neologism reportedly coined by independent Kenya's first vice-president, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Kayamba Afrika's self-titled debut album (2001) signals the need to embrace and promote transnational bonds. But more than any other in this spectrum, it is Eric Wainaina's reassuring idiom *Sawa Sawa* (2001) (Kiswahili for 'it is alright') that rings with optimism. This title alludes to the vastly popular refrain '*hakuna matata*' (there is no problem) which shot Them Mushrooms' hit single '*Jambo Bwana*' to international fame in the 1980s. As we shall see in greater detail in Chapter Six, the message that Wainaina seeks to reemphasise and foreground, is the need not just for hope, but for outwardly projecting a stoic stance no matter how turbulent the local currents may be.

But these strong desires for images of national bliss and contentment are steadily undermined in the discourses of some other titles. Take for instance Poxi Presha's depressed outburst in Sheng *Total Balaa* (1999) meaning, utterly jinxed. Its radical fusion of tongues hits out at the sense of defeat, frustration, and points to an inability to grasp conventional means to tackle the blows that are daily dealt out to postcolonial youth by an uncaring exploitative system. Likewise, his *Vita Kwaliti* is a violent fusion of Sheng — *vita* is Kiswahili for 'war' or 'dispute' and the English word quality has been rendered through a local accent. Consequently, the title angrily opens up debate on confronting the system, fighting for one's turf in much the same way suggested by Jah Key Malle's *Hasira* (2001) (anger, wrath), and Zannaziki's *Nipe Nikupe* (1994) — literally 'tit for tat'.

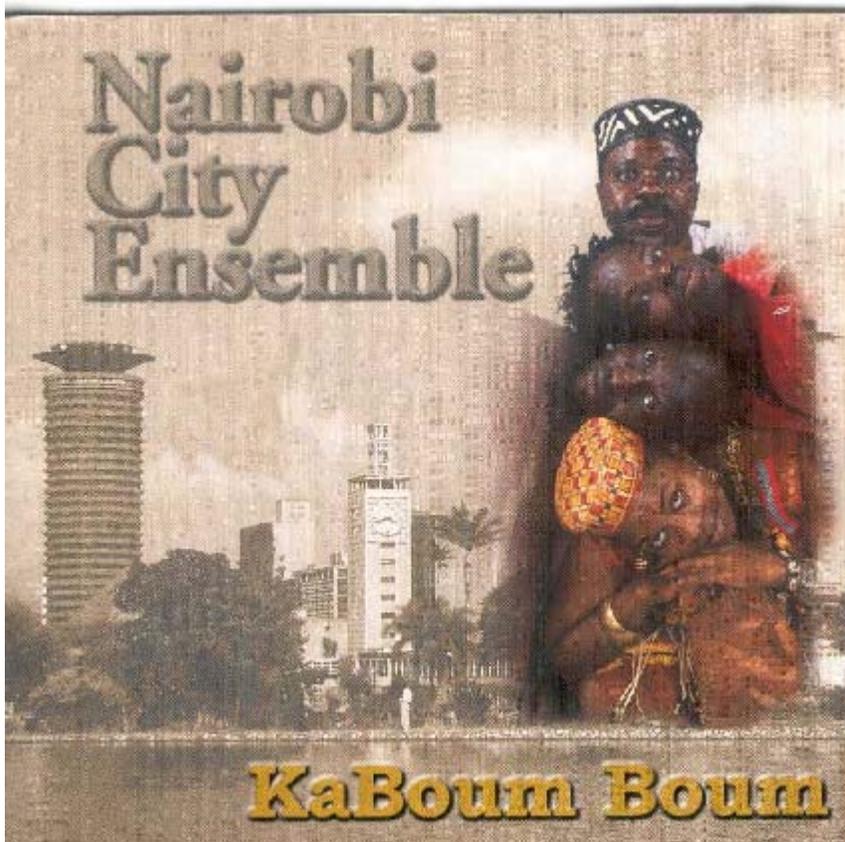
The tempo of angry outbursts and confrontational ways that threaten the status quo is maintained in the intimidating *Ogopa I* (2002).

Projections of the vagaries and degeneration defining urban Kenya are captured well in K-South's neologism *Nairobi* (2002), a near-comical poke at the escalation of insecurity in the capital city, Nairobi. And the confusion over the title of the late E-Sir's debut album is further indication of the volatile times the musicians try to capture, and of the perilous constraints of the music industry in Kenya. Initially, the media touted E-Sir's debut album as being entitled *Hamnitishi* (2002) — Kiswahili for 'you do not scare me'. As such, it would form a defensive reaction to all of the hostilities and set-backs contained in contemporary Kenyan existence. Since E-Sir's death however, the press now talks of the same album as going by the title *Nimefika*, which not only means 'I have arrived', but, it actually conjures up images of excited bravado from one who has recently overcome great impediments.²⁹

And in a reflection of the many spaces of escape, distraction, freedom from tension and from the fighting, there are those nativist titles that cheerfully speak of celebration, hope and promise. Take for instance Achieng Abura's *Maisha* (2002), simply, 'Life'. Somehow, the images that coalesce around this title have more to do with optimism than with dejection. The emphasis is on the fullness of life and the note is singularly celebratory rather than defeatist. It is the same kind of optimism that is encouraged by Mercy Myra's call to smile — *Tabasamu* (2001). And the brilliance of this smile, like the sweetness of Zannaziki's *Tamu Tamu* (1999) (Kiswahili for 'sweet'), becomes an indicator of the temporary nature of the frustrations and set-backs, however consuming and complex they may appear to be in the present moment. Not that these titles are a promise of momentary distraction, rather it is a reinforcement of the sheer dynamism of life so that we appreciate the cycles of release and bondage that add up to the total experience. Where there are breaks therefore, we must receive them as Zannaziki's 2000 album suggests, as *Xawadi*, a phonetic play on the Kiswahili word *zawadi* — a gift.

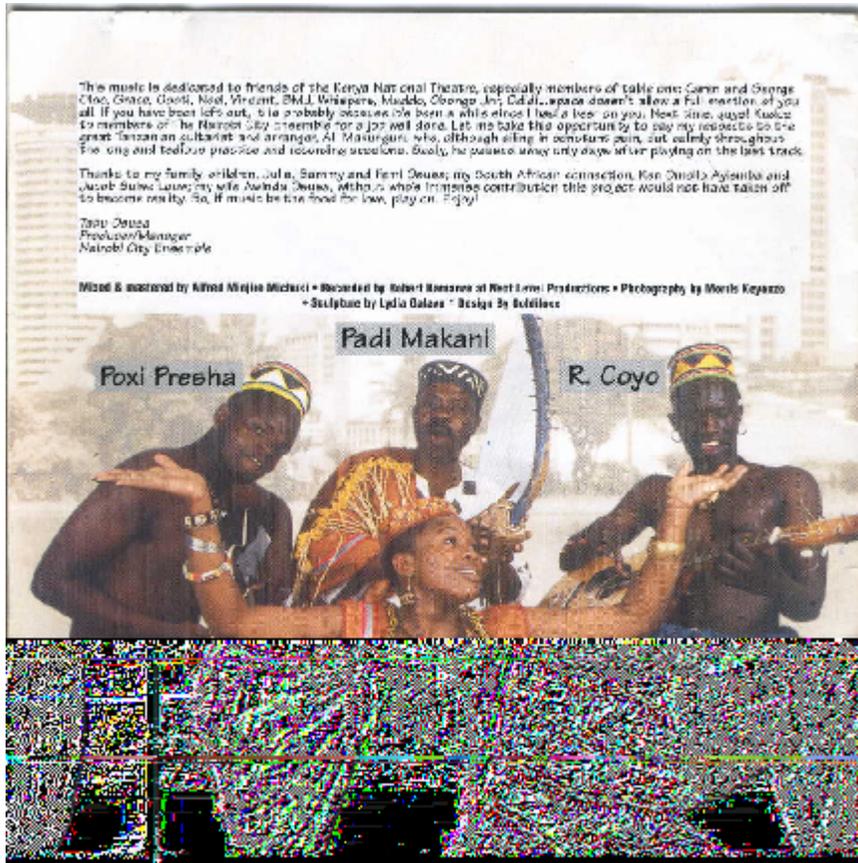
²⁹ Once again a possible explanation for this confusion over titles lies in the swift action of music pirates who normally rush to flood the market with their own editions long before the official copies hit the streets. See Amos Ngaira, 'Losing out to music thieves', *Daily Nation* June 14 2003.

The desire to break away, or indeed the many moments of reflection when a society must look back and analyse its failures and to celebrate its achievements is what Suzanna Owiyo's *Kisumu 100* (2002) is all about. The eponymous track on this album was actually crafted as part of the December 2001 centenary celebrations for the lakeside town of Kisumu. As such, the title tries to conflate images of remembrance, and of the town's essential characteristics, the things the town is associated with, those that typify it one hundred years after its inception.



Nairobi City Ensemble's ethnic sounding *KaBoum Boum* (2001) is, when taken alongside the group's name, an interesting instance of the juxtapositioning reflecting the tensions of contemporary existence, the pull between the cosmopolitan and the native. One may be unable to identify it with a specific ethnic language, but the very sound of it and even its orthography certainly do not appear to belong to the protocols of "standard" English. It is a name that echoes the conscious desire of its progenitor to be recognised, even within the discourses of modern recorded music, as "other". To augment this expressive gesture

of "otherness", the album sleeve of *KaBoum Boum* depicts all of the musicians in various forms of ethnic dress — *vitenge* (brightly coloured ethnic clothes) of various kinds, elaborate beadwork, *akala* (sandals made from the rubber of the tubes used for car tyres), and bare-chested men.³⁰ Presumably the idea is to signal a total commitment to reinstating an African bearing and sound to the core of Kenya's music.



Tabu Osusa explains that the term *KaBoum Boum* is a figurative allusion to 'the sound of the drums' and according to him, drums are 'the *mother of all the African instruments*'. His explanation highlights not only the drum's centrality to African musical composition, but equally significant, its role as a signifier of social activity in the context of Africa,

³⁰ Osusa retains this theme in his subsequent album, *Kalapapla* (2003). See Appendix (iii).

ranging from funeral gatherings, to celebrations at weddings and parties. Indeed, Osuma recalls from his own childhood in what was still a fairly traditional set-up, the prominence of drumming whenever there were social events. It is in his view a trend that is 'now dying off' and possibly his self-conscious task of recuperating a Kenyan sound can be read as one inspired by a desire to locate the continuum of original identity.

The search for an authentic Kenyan bearing finds equal measure in the albums compiled by Tedd Josiah — *Kenyan — The First Chapter* (1998) and *Kenyan — The Second Chapter* (1999). Josiah says that for him, these projects were about an 'awakening of Kenya ... to show ... the best of Kenya'. In an unreserved manner, these titles post themselves as indicators of a particular cultural identity. Most important of all, they view culture as a dynamic and layered process, hence their reference to 'chapters', a reference we must read as indicative of the ways in which purveyors of culture can only hope to capture brief instances of human existence through their episodes of creativity. Josiah's titles promise to narrate the nation over time, catching its pulse in the critical moments, and revealing it as a complex and multi-layered phenomenon.

I started off this chapter with the argument that names must always be read as signifying practices. They generate a host of associations and draw graphic iconographies. The contextual reading of the nomenclature of Kenyan popular artistes and of the titles of their albums that I have made in the preceding pages has demonstrated the difficulties of locating postcolonial cultural practices within essentialist cultural categories. Indeed, the very categories that I espoused at the beginning of my argument have gradually collapsed under the weight of analysis, and revealed instead, the bricolage of associations, borrowings, influences and interminglings that define the social imaginary in Kenya today.

The interconnectivity that Josiah described in his tracing of the roots of hip hop music seem to form the very essence of today's practices. As I have shown, the borrowings come through in a number of varied ways — as silences, as camouflage, as hyperbole and maybe even in outright imitation of others. And while it may be true that the nativist

tendencies seem dominant, it is also true that they speak so much to the present, indeed, they are precisely so flexible and adaptable to prevailing realities, that it is dishonest to limit and transfix them in the past. What constitutes the past, and how that past enters the terrain of contemporary Kenyan songs, will be the subject of my next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

ZILIZOPENDWA: BETWEEN THE ROMANTIC AND THE DISCORDANT — COVER VERSIONS, REMIX AND SAMPLING IN THE (RE)MEMBERING OF KENYA¹

The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us a simple factual "past", since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already "after the break". It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth.

(Stuart Hall, 1994:395)

In this chapter, my arguments are centred on identifying and characterizing the ways in which contemporary Kenyan popular artistes are configuring the present via a reconfiguration of the past, via memory and remembrance. I begin my discussion by trying to establish both the nature and the purpose of memory work in the context of popular music. I argue that popular music is itself a site of memory. It achieves this in part because of its very content, and also because, through its referents, it can encapsulate an era, harnessing the retinue of imaginaries and emotions evoked in the past into a single textualised form in the present. Next, I introduce the *zilizopendwa* cover versions of Them Mushrooms as the cornerstone of memory work in contemporary Kenyan popular music. While I support my thesis with various examples, my arguments centre on two albums — *Kayamba Afrika* (2001) and *KaBoum Boum* (2001). These I find to be representative and sustained instances in employing the key forms and patterns of remembrance that have, perhaps paradoxically, lent force to the contemporary resurgence of Kenyan popular music — cover versions, remix and sampling.

¹ An abridged version of this chapter is set to appear in *African Studies* July 2005 under the title 'Zilizopendwa: Kayamba Afrika's Use of Cover Versions, Remix and Sampling in the (Re)Membering of Kenya'.

A study of these forms reveals that the memory work of contemporary Kenyan artistes is first and foremost predicated on a desire to reinstate authentic Kenyan culture, a point that is emphasised by the individual testimonies of two group leaders, Tabu Osusa and Juma Odemba. The nostalgic returns necessitated by this goal come through as bearing two distinct tones.

First, the majority of cover versions are shot through a romantic prism, some of them dwelling on idyllic moments of ethnic exclusivity and implying that the future of postcolonial Kenya is precisely dependent on building through difference, 'on a politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity' (Hall, 1992:258). This kind of return, I argue, works as a gesture that enacts agency, offers idioms and metaphors for living out the present. Secondly, as my study of remix and sampling reveals, returns to the past echo with pain and disjuncture. The pain comes from recalling moments of trauma. These are identified as the moments of modernity's entry — with focus on the specific terms of that entry — and those of the postindependence experience characterised as it is by political failure and socio-economic decay. But even in the focus on pain and trauma, the key question remains one of probing the relevance and function of this tone in the contemporary moment.

The memory work of contemporary Kenyan artistes is a testimony to the wide canvas of "pastness" that constitutes Kenyan history. It is all at once ethnic/rural and laden with traditional practices, and it is also modern/urban and bears markers of influence from many other cultural practices. The ways in which these artistes speak to this varied past demonstrates the prismatic nature of memory. Indeed, as Pierre Nora (1989: 9) has argued, 'there are as many memories as there are groups'. Or, to put it another way, there are many ways of remembering, primarily because every individual or collective group remembers from a particular vantage point and employs different modes to facilitate that remembrance even though they may all be remembering in order to address present contingencies.

3.1 Popular Music As Memory

The diatribe of retrogression is a formidable heirloom in the house of popular culture theories. But treasures of the past are most valuable when they are pawned for more pressing needs of the present. If the physicality of a particular music is indeed retrogressive, we need to ask why.

(Rey Chow, 1993:147)

On Nairobi City Ensemble's album, *KaBoum Boum* (2001) there is a song entitled 'Somo Ti Somo' in which a mother laments the disappearance of her son, Toni, in America. To supplement the scholarship Toni had obtained for his further studies in America, his family sacrificed their meager possessions, investing their entire future in his education. Five years on, Toni has never written home and he has never sent his family the much-needed money that was to make their investment in him worthwhile. In fact, they hear rumours that he has sought a Green Card and married 'nyar msungu', the daughter of a white man. There are a host of discursive practices related to memory that coalesce around 'Somo Ti Somo'.

For a start, Toni's mother opens her lament by taking Toni back to an earlier conversation; she reminds him what they agreed upon at the time of his departure for America:

Kane wakowi
Jomo Kenyatta Airport
Neisingonwa
Niwacho ni kiduogo

When we escorted you to
Jomo Kenyatta [International] Airport
you promised to
assist all clan members on your return

At this point, the emphasis on memory is twofold. It relates to the mother's act of going back to the originating instance, to that moment of departure. She does this in order to situate and clarify her current predicament of abandonment. The second trajectory of memory is tied to Toni's silence. His silence is sharpened by his mother's persistent calls to him which punctuate her lament:

Toni yawa, yawa! Eh!
Toni kipar eh, kipar eh nyata nyithiu

Surely Tony, surely! Eh!
Tony remember yes, remember even your
siblings

Toni kotheko yawa

Tony you are worrying me, surely!

Utterly desperate, Toni's mother finally evokes the ultimate hold of every mother over her child:

*Ka adiera Toni iwita,
an minu
Parie wuoda dweche ochiko mane
ating'i e iya.*

It is true Toni you have abandoned me,
your mother
Remember my son for nine months
You were in my womb.

Throughout the song, Toni's silence is projected as his refusal to recall. It is dramatised through his failure to return and his failure to maintain contact through letters or by sending money back home. Further, Toni's amnesia is evident as a rejection of the cultural mores of his people. Not only has he abandoned his Kenyan citizenship, he has also violated ethnic social codes by marrying a foreigner. At home, the memory of Toni and of his commitment to his family becomes the source of deep psychological trauma, particularly for his mother. In the refrain that is constructed through the "objective" lens of a third person narrator, the family's abject poverty is necessarily mirrored through Toni's amnesia:

*Somo ti somo Toni,
Baba onge kata koti
Somo ti somo Toni
Ni tinde ikendo
nyar Mzungu*

Educated you are indeed, Toni
Yet your father has no coat
Educated you are indeed, Toni
You have married
the daughter of a white man

*Somo ti somo Toni
Mama onge kata lada
Somo ti somo Toni
Nyithiu nindo mana kech*

Educated you are indeed, Toni
yet your mother has no rubber shoes
Educated you are indeed, Toni
yet your siblings go without food.

It is easy to conclude that Toni's amnesia is the result of physical separation, that departure, the tremendous distance away from the family, and the doubtlessly alienating experiences of a new world create erasure, fracture the memory of home and of loved ones. The trope of return that dominates '*Somo Ti Somo*' is imagined as the point of reconciliation between mother/family and Toni. In '*Popular Music and The Negotiation of Contemporary Kenyan Identity*' (2003: 386-387), I discuss this theme of return as an

indicator of the ways in which Nairobi City Ensemble seeks to reconstitute an authentic Kenyan culture. We can go further here and emphasise that by itself, this whole lament is a plea for Toni's return, conceived in a most idyllic sense and without due recognition to the fact that the chasm of the intervening years and all that Toni has been exposed to in that time, can never allow for wholesome reinstatement. Going by his choice of American citizenship and of a white bride, we can perceive the changes that have taken place in Toni's value system. This scenario of transformation echoes a familiar trajectory in the catalogue of fictional narratives that feature modernity's entry into Africa by examining the national colonial drama through the lens of an individual's private experience of Westernization. As with Waiyaki in *The River Between*, Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer At Ease* and Ocol in *Song of Lawino*, to name a few literary parallels, in Toni too Western education leaves an indelible mark of alienation from traditional practices. The old ways no longer suffice in the individual's attempts to forge ahead, and a complete return to these practices can never be successfully negotiated even though some traces of them persist. In the circumstances, modernity is constructed as a site of alienating pain, as a ground for familial and communal abandonment and tension. Ironically, it also works as a journey that liberates the individual from the strictures of community. It is in this sense of turning back, of probing present predicaments through returns to earlier experiences that we can see 'Somo Ti Somo' as a classic in lyrical memory work. It is laden with powerful thematic and structural returns that dramatise the centrality of memory in the contemporary social imaginary.

The dominant trope of return in 'Somo Ti Somo' demonstrates that popular song is indeed a palpable site of memory. It is a text that allows both the individual and the community to pile their layers of experience onto its fabric, thus acting as a patchwork quilt from which these experiences can be retrieved at a later date simply by listening to the song again. And in the broad spectrum of experience, there are two distinct categories constituted under the label 'memory'. First, there is individual, private or personal memory. Such is the nature of the recollection that Toni's mother makes. It is limited to her individual perception and only comes alive because she wishes to remind her son of a specific event and set of obligations. In the second instance, memory exists as a

collective, social, public or cultural undertaking. At this level, memory, under the guise of narrative and legend, becomes the signpost that institutes tradition and culture. By situating itself within earlier discourses on Africa and Westernization, '*Somo Ti Somo*' becomes an act of public remembrance. In essence, popular music is a site of memory both on account of what is inscribed within it, and also by virtue of its mnemonic capacities.

In theorising the different ways in which history is recorded, the Popular Memory Group (1982) list biographies, autobiographies, historical fictions, historical movies, guide books, the mass media, forms of 'private remembrance' — such as letters, photographs and diaries — as key forms of social history. Despite their commendable work in opening up the whole notion of history, the Popular Memory Group nonetheless fail to include popular music as a critical form of social history. Paul Connerton (1989) underlines that images and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by performances. He posits that commemorative ceremonies, because of their enhanced performativity, are the bedrock of social memory. Connerton's argument lays the basis for seeing popular music, which is naturally performative, and which is very often employed in commemorative ceremonies, as a carrier of social history.

The Popular Memory Group study usefully emphasises the ways that people remember, and as with Richard Werbner's reflections in *Memory and the Postcolony*, they distinguish between official or state discourses of remembrance and memorialisation, and the memory work that emanates unsolicited from the general public. Indeed, a key concern here, which is also shared by Connerton (1989) and David Thelen (1989), is with the control and ownership of social memory, of those structures and sites through which social memory is carried and maintained. There is, of course, the realisation by all these scholars that control of a society's memory — regulation of what is remembered, how it is remembered as well as what is ignored or erased — is a valuable tool for maintaining and legitimating political power. In this sense, popular music in Kenya occupies a vital position for as we saw in the first chapter, the whole local music industry — through all

the stages of production, sales and marketing — operates with very little, if any, institutional support. Effectively, it falls outside the scheme of official control and it can, therefore, offer radically different readings of the past from those sanctioned or controlled by the state.

A critical approach in interrogating social memory, Thelen advises should query the similarities and differences between memories constructed by marginalised groups — and this should include those constructed within marginalised forms — and those memories that belong to the larger, officially recognised enterprises. The idea here is not the designation of certain versions as erroneous, and the upholding of others as more factual and correct. Instead we must, as Salman Rushdie (1991:12) urges, appreciate that memory work can never be total or complete. Like a broken mirror from which we glean only partial images, fragments or shards, memory too must be read as only being capable of constructing in parts. Because memory is partial, it brings with it error. Sometimes these errors come about because memory is necessarily also about forgetting (Walder, 2000). And, as Walder insists, there is a necessity in these errors. Indeed, the critical point to ponder in ignoring the "erroneous" nature of memories, is the individual's, or the society's reasons for constructing their memories in a particular way (Thelen, 1125). The key function of social memory, we then realise, is the establishment of shared memories, the insistence on shared experiences in the past which works to bind communities in the present (Thelen, 1124). In reflecting on the logic of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs), Wole Soyinka (1999:20) points out that memory is 'amenable to closure', thus we can go back to the past with a view to putting to rest experiences of trauma and disruption, rather than allowing them to fester unexplored. Again, it must be understood that part of the function of memory, is the building and shaping of individual identity in the present (Ganguly, 1992, Hall, 1995). To this end, gaps and ellipsis, erasures and suppressions of certain events in the past become imperative if the objective of (re)membering the individual in the present is to be achieved.

In effect, then, and as all of these cultural scholars repeatedly emphasise, returns to the past are always inescapably linked to the contingencies of the present. Even where, as

Sally Falk Moore (1998) demonstrates, actors project their work towards accountability that will be detected by future generations, the fact is that they see in the future work of memory a relevance that determines present actions. Reading contemporary popular music as a site of memory is, therefore, a task in exploring the uses to which that music puts the past. It is about outlining the forms through which the songs (re)member that past. It is also about interrogating the web of associations from that past, and seeking their connections and relevance in the present that is under construction.

3.2 *Zilizopendwa* As Cover Versions

The power of memory is evident in the many ways in which, in every era, contemporary artistes labour to align themselves to venerable artistes from earlier periods. The most blatant of these ways is cover versions. On the face of it cover versions appear to entail just the simple re-recording of an old song by a new artiste/group with very little, if any, variation to the original tune and lyrics. But in actual fact cover versions are never neutral repetitions, they actually entail a whole act of reinterpretation that constitutes a shift in textuality and meaning since the contexts of production and reception are no longer the same as those that prevailed in the time of the original. Further, questions of timing, of the moment of re-release in the form of a cover version indicate the ideological considerations and intentions that underlie the decision to create a cover version. In reading cover versions then, one must pay attention to these shifts in interpretation and their attendant ideological underpinnings.

Cover versions invariably benefit from advances in technology in the form of modern instrumentation and more sophisticated recording techniques than the ones that were available at the time of making the original song. And though cover versions are fairly accessible ways of evoking remembrances of earlier artistes, songs, periods and moods they nonetheless require the subordination of this earlier experience. As remembrances, they create an interesting kind of amnesia for artiste and audience alike. As they recall an old performer, they also demand that we block out, overlook the original artiste's interpretation and accept this new one. In a sense also, we are required to erase the

apprenticeship of the new artiste and instead, invest him/her with the status of a maestro, an old, experienced hand precisely because he/she is handling material that has already gained access and credibility in the public domain. The old song is imagined as the new artistes' ticket to public acclaim.

While cover versions tend to be the main stay of many resident club bands in Kenya, in the late 1980s it was the persevering group then known as Them Mushrooms that began to popularise songs from the earliest repertoire of local recorded music as evergreen Kenyan pop standards. This repertoire was, by definition, one of the urban guitar music that had emerged as one of the modes of expression and patterns of leisure amongst a growing working elite in colonial Nairobi (Odhiambo 2002a). The song-texts articulated decidedly urban themes, not least of which were the foibles of the growing working class, their daily battles to forge tenable moral codes within their new environment, and persisting memories of their rural/traditional upbringing and its ethos. In 1991, Them Mushrooms recorded their first album of these 'golden oldies' entitled *Zilizopendwa*. It became so successful that the following year they reworked more of the oldies in *Zilizopendwa 1992*. The two collections were ultimately made available in 2001 as *Zilizopendwa — Wazee Wa Kazi* (the veterans). It is instructive to note that these albums were released at a time when Kenyan music was — for various reasons already discussed in Chapter One — at its lowest ebb in terms of production and also in terms of its national reception. In aligning themselves to the popular music boom period of the 1950s and 1960s, Them Mushrooms were seeking local legitimacy by underlining to Kenyan audiences that their own engagement with popular music amounted to a credible contribution to local cultural production. At the same time, they were working to make local audiences recognise the existence of a body of conventions, an emergent sense of tradition within this particular local cultural practice. Equally significant in Them Mushrooms' project of reinstitution are the frames within which they prescribe the acts of remembrance for their imagined audiences. On *Zilizopendwa — Wazee Wa Kazi* the medley 'Zakale Zipo!' the old ones are still present, features a brief original piece that prescribes the setting for the public musical remembrance thus:

Nyama choma

roast meat

<i>Nyama choma</i>	roast meat
<i>Na moja ya baridi</i>	and one cold [beer]
<i>Teremusha, ponda raha</i>	have a drink, indulge
<i>Wazee wakumbuke</i>	let the old timers reminisce.

The call is made specifically to the old-timers, perhaps those who were in their youth at the time the discourses of the old tunes unfolded and peaked. The moment of reflection is clearly conceived within the social parameters of what Odhiambo (2002a) studies as *kula raha* (the consumption of leisure), and which in contemporary Kenya is marked by the *nyama choma* culture of roast meat and beer drinking as the ultimate forms of recreation. Presumably then, the moments being recalled through the *zilizopendwa* tunes are similarly happy and carefree. The past is unmistakably clothed in garbs of happiness and plenitude. The nostalgia evoked speaks to a happiness that was lost and there is irony in the fact that not all the thematic veins of those old songs collected on the album were centred on happy indulgence. There is a subversion of the past in the way this 'Intro' draws blinds over the old songs, flattening the socio-economic and political landscape of their making by erasing the tensions and contradictions that they articulated. The focus now is not on what these songs said, but on the "happy" times in which they were initially enacted and consumed.

In essence, then, the project of remembrance that Them Mushrooms unveil is very consciously being steered in the direction of "the good old days", itself a refusal to engage with the trauma and tension of the colonial and the neo-independence periods. If these songs act as metonyms of the period they invoke Them Mushrooms necessarily turn them into stylish indices of those social times, thereby divorcing them from the political nuances of the time. It is possible to read this as an instance of memory being evoked romantically, perhaps for the purpose of numbing the pain of the present moment, by seeking momentary relief or distraction in the ideal of happier times in an earlier epoch. This mode of remembrance, this tendency to privilege bliss and maintain closure on the agonies and ambivalences of the more immediate past is reminiscent of Senghor's Negritude. Senghor's strategy entailed escaping the intense pressures of colonial denigration by selectively rummaging through the cultural memory of his people. And as

the poem 'New York' demonstrates, he then used that memory to declare the intrinsic innocence, beauty, compassion and rhythmic genius of the African, all of which were seen as counter-virtues to Europe's vices of heartless mechanisation and a ruthless industrialisation that had no room for human feeling.

Ultimately, strategies such as those employed by Senghor and by Them Mushrooms in their *zilizopendwa* projects cannot be dismissed as distortions of the past. Indeed, their informing logic, as Wole Soyinka reminds us in his 1999 re-reading of Senghor, is one of recuperating local agency in the face of overbearing interference. Soyinka (1999:123) is insistent that: 'Negritude [was] a movement of protest, rejection and racial recovery'. As such, its poets 'looked to the past, yes, but as armory in the heated course of validating their present and contesting the European denigration of that past' (132). Projecting the past through a romantic lens can therefore be efficacious in generating pride of self, and of one's peoples. To paraphrase Stuart Hall's (1995: 13) argument regarding the creation of Caribbean identities, romanticised returns work as symbolic gestures whose purpose is providing the idioms and metaphors for confronting the present, thus becoming valuable tools in negotiating the political and even the cultural impasse of the present.

In Kenya, the example of Them Mushrooms *zilizopendwa* projects set the wheels of lyrical memory turning in two distinct ways. For one, there has since then been a proliferation in the making of cover versions. Notable examples include the rerecording of Issa Juma's (Les Wanyika) massive 1979 hit, '*Sina Makosa*', by the Tanzanian, *Cool James* (2001). Similarly, Markus Kamau's² (2001) remake of Nguashi Timbo's (Super Mazembe) 1983 classic '*Shauri Yako*' and Jah Key Marley's rendition of '*Charonye ni Wasi*' (2002), a 1976 smash hit originally sung by Habel Kifoto of the Kenya Army band, Maroon Commandos, provide other contemporary instances of cover versions. Again in 2002, the duo of Jawabu (Kallaway and Shaky) honoured their father, Peter Akwaabi, by remaking his '*Dada Njoo*' a tune most popularly remembered as a martial standard at

² A white American, Markus Kamau (alias Mark Hankins) has been playing the guitar and composing songs with local bands around the Mt. Kenya region and in Nairobi since the mid-1980s. His first album is *Rock in a Hard Place* (2001) featuring his version of '*Shauri Yako*' (that's your problem). But his first single, 'Wanjiku' was recorded at Andrew Crawford Studios in 1987.

commemorations of national days throughout the 1970s. More intriguing instances of this manner of return are seen in journeys that go even further back in time to harvest from the storehouse of traditional folksongs. Kayamba Afrika's eponymous debut album (2001) provides ample illustration of this route and its particular brand of romantic nostalgia. The other dimension in the emerging lyrical recourse to the past has involved more complex experimentation with the *zilizopendwa* repertoire, culminating in the growing prominence of remix and sampling as key routes of lyrical memory. I will rely largely on both the album *Kayamba Afrika* and Nairobi City Ensemble's *KaBoum Boum* (2001) to interrogate the three practices of recall though I acknowledge that Mercy Myra's 'Musa' (2001) is an equally cogent example of remix.

3.2.1 Modernising The Folksongs

At the 7th Annual Kora All Africa Music Awards in 2002, Kayamba Afrika³ were nominated finalists in the category of 'Best Traditional Music'. This is indeed their forte, for their Manager and lead vocalist, Juma Odemba, describes the group's work as 'neo-folk music'. He hastens to add however, that this should not be taken 'to suggest colonialism' or to imply an outsider's fascination with the exotic. Rather, Kayamba see themselves as working in the vein of the celebrated West African artiste, Fela Kuti, to generate 'Afro-traditional' music and popularise it both locally and abroad in the wake of the many competing influences that have been thrust to the fore by the technological advancements of our time.

Kayamba Afrika was formed on April 7 1998 and its roots lie in the strong tradition of church choirs. Some of its members belonged to St. Barnabas Church Choir (Moses Ekirapa, Juma Odemba, Walter Ominde), others to Our Lady of Visitation Makadara (Argwings Kodhek, Simon Ngigi, Anthony Odeng, Peter Ngeru), Maxwell SDA Choir and Kariobangi South Catholic Church Choir (John Nduati) all based in Nairobi. It was

³ In 2003, the original Kayamba Afrika broke up into two groups with the Juma Odemba led one retaining the name, Kayamba Afrika, and the one led by Peter Ngeru adopting the name Kayamba Fiesta. Both groups retain their neo-folk style as is evidenced by Kayamba Fiesta's 'Pretty Jane' (2004) and Kayamba Afrika's 2004 album, *Sherehe*.

through church choral competitions that members of the group first met and from where they joined the internationally acclaimed and state-sponsored Muungano National Choir that was formed in 1979 and led by Boniface Mganga. In terms of both its design and its musical engagement, Muungano National Choir was part of the official version of culture that emerged soon after independence and which, on account of sometimes covert state manipulation, gained notoriety as one of the many sites of sycophancy in the Moi era. Dismas Masolo (2002:370) captures the function of these types of choirs arguing that

following Moi's initially shaky ascent to power after Jomo Kenyatta's death in 1978, massed choirs of schoolchildren, college students, and employees of public institutions were formed nationwide under government orders and invariably coerced into publicly reiterating through song and dance, the eternity and invincibility of Moi's dictatorship as part of divine providence...The number of these choirs as well as the direct political evocations of their songs intensified greatly following the failed coup attempt on 2 August 1982 [sic].⁴

Organisations fell over themselves to form these choirs. Consider for instance the fact that in 1978 Juma Odemba was recruited to the Nairobi Teachers choir at the age of 14 because there was a shortage of bass singers. Moving to Muungano in 1985 he benefited greatly from expert vocal training and international exposure. Odemba talks of the fierce competition that would take place between choirs jostling to be selected to perform at State House from where they would scoop all manner of favours and cash rewards. To date, Kayamba Afrika's association with the state persists and is visible at public and private functions alike. They were part of the entertainment lined up at the opening of the Constitutional Conference at Bomas of Kenya on April 29 2003 and they were also invited to add colour to the then Vice President, Michael Wamalwa's wedding on May 10 2003. Apart from these obvious ties to official culture, Kayamba Afrika reveal their commitment to the idea of local musical traditions through their acapella polyphonous harmonies and in their revival of a wide variety of ethnic folksongs. None of these practices necessarily amounts to a legitimization of the Moi state's ethnic divide and rule tactics which often threatened to fracture the national ideal of harmonious co-existence

between the variety of communities.⁵ Indeed, many acknowledge that even outside of state privilege, Kayamba's commitment to traditional music 'is holding its own at a time when hip hop and rap appear to be all the rage'.⁶ But even then, it is important to interrogate the means by which their songs have attained their appeal, and to probe the question of the significance of the reenactment of these songs in the contemporary moment.

The album *Kayamba Afrika* comprises 12 tracks. Of these, 9 are adaptations of folk songs taken from 8 different ethnic communities in Kenya — the Luhya, Gikũyũ, Kisii, Taita, Maasai, Kalenjin and the Pokomo. By terming them folk songs, what I am stressing here is that they are songs 'originating from the country folk and handed down from generation to generation, and ...used, as a group communication device, to focus the attention of groups on important issues, to organise them for joint response, and to produce consensus' (Lomax, 1978:275). In other words, these songs form the canon of originating practice and they are often projected by state discourses of national culture as laying claim to some notion of ethnic authenticity which may, in actual fact, be more imagined than real. My concern with these re-worked folksongs is not so much with extrapolating the poetic content of each song, but with situating the act of their resurrection by Kayamba Afrika, and the thematic concerns of the songs within the context of contemporary existence. As with Eileen Julien's (1992:46) concern with the question of orality in African fiction, the idea here

is to examine the ways in which the adaptation of genres associated with the oral tradition reveals not what has often been thought of as virtually blind adherence to the conventions of traditional art but rather narrative goals, social and ideological vision.

⁴ The coup took place on August 1 1982.

⁵ From the onset of multiparty politics in December 1991, Moi's government launched a series of state-sponsored ethnic clashes which it labelled 'land clashes' in an attempt to shift the genesis of the violence from election motivated political tribalism to age-old economic tensions over displacement and land ownership. See Peter Mwangi Kagwanja (2001) and Atieno Odhiambo (2004).

⁶ Kenneth Kwama, 'Folk Music is Their Forte', *East African Standard Profile Magazine* June 7, 2003.

In other words, I want to investigate both the manner and the purpose of Kayamba's remembrance and to gauge how these revised songs fit into contemporary socio-political contexts.

The rendition of folksongs in the contemporary moment is normally met with the more romantic side of nostalgia — excited recognition and ethnic pride — but the fact remains that it is still possible to reconstruct the tensions and concerns of traditional existence from a reading of these folksongs. Take for instance the panegyric songs on the album *Kayamba Afrika*. One of them focuses on the gift of wise leaders ('*Omuntun*')⁷, and the other is in praise of courageous youth ('*Miri*'). The air of victory that these praise songs carry should not mask or gloss over the tensions out of which they arise. Wise leadership entails constantly negotiating handicaps and problems in the task of steering a community to greater prosperity.

Read in the context of the prevailing politics at the time of *Kayamba Afrika's* release, this Kalenjin song can be seen as the choral group's attempt to gain the head of state's favour on account of the (un)deserved praise '*Omuntun*' showers on him. The song '*Miri*' shows traditional societies as sites of expansionist ambitions since the courage of the youth can not be realised unless it is tested. And quite apart from the fact that they occasionally came under threat from the encroachment of other communities these traditional societies were also subject to the vagaries of attack from wildlife. More than anything else, panegyric songs basically work towards encouraging succeeding generations to forge on, hence perhaps the tendency to react to them with so much ethnic pride.

'*Magondo*' is a Luhya song of festivity celebrating marriage and inviting blessings for a newlywed couple through the "traditional" gesture of showering them with coins. In all likelihood, traditional custom involved the use of other tokens of economic exchange such as cowrie shells, and the songs points us to the way tradition was quick to domesticate and appropriate coins for new uses in age-old rituals. Since '*Magondo*' re-

⁷ The correct enunciation and spelling in Kalenjin is '*omutun*'. Poor diction and incorrect enunciation have been the strongest criticisms levied against *Kayamba Afrika*.

enacts a rite of passage whose relevance persists in the present and it therefore finds ready applicability in the contemporary contexts, particularly since its indications of prosperity and good fortune (money) echoes what is revered in contemporary societies. '*Kiti Kiti*' is the Maasai song that formed Kayamba Afrika's entry for the 2002 Kora All Africa Award and according to Odemba it was a choice they settled on after seeking the views of a cross-section of their fans. The song reenacts the legendary Maasai fixation with cattle wealth, reflecting the behaviour of rival groups when they meet at grazing venues and mock one another, each bragging about the size of its herd. It is interesting to note that while Kayamba's project of modernising folksong invariably involves the grafting of modern instruments — and in particular of the electronic synthesiser — onto ethnic tunes, their performance of this Maasai piece steers clear of such experimentation. As if to further propel the world renowned reputation of the Maasai as a community that has rejected the disruptive intrusions of modern existence, Kayamba stick to an accapella 'polyphonous multi-part' harmony in '*Kiti Kiti*', which is pretty much a faithful reenactment of traditional Maasai musical practice (Paterson, 1999:510-511). In essence then, this flag bearer of Kenyan music at the Kora Awards deliberately pitched its saleability on the ubiquitous novelty value of the Maasai as a "static", uncontaminated community.

It is possible to glean from the folksongs the values and aesthetics of traditional communities, many of which may still be tenable in the present age given the various tensions within the national moral economy. The Gĩkũyũ song '*Wakariru*' demonstrates traditional Gĩkũyũ equation of woman's beauty to her capacity for hard work. Thus the girl, Wakariru is urged to wake up quickly and start her work early for the rain is fast approaching and its bounty can only be guaranteed by the work of Wakariru's hands. The song's onomatopoeic rendering of the sound of the rain adds to its general homiletic air urging all to take refuge at the welcoming pillars of the homestead. There is a sense in which the song appears allegorical, speaking of some interference with the community that comes from afar. Like the rain, this impending disruption to communal order is very often insidious; initially posing as beneficial only to later on unleash the full weight of its malevolence. In the circumstances '*itugĩ cia nyũmba*' (the pillars of the homestead), refers

to the imperative of the tribe/group closing ranks, standing firmly together against invasion.

Reference to the malevolent side of the elements is again heard in '*Nkere*', a Kisii folksong in remembrance of '*ekebwe*' a great famine that had devastating effects on the community. The song documents the losses from the famine, moaning over proliferating strange ailments — '*murimo wa baba*' (my father's illness) — and destruction of other kinds. Other forms of disruption to traditional society appear in the form of individual immorality such as is recalled in the Kamba folksong, '*Ngulo*'. This homiletic song issues a warning to the village thief whose crooked ways are censured even as he is asked to return the pumpkins he stole.

Much as Kayamba's stated goal is a reinstatement of traditional Kenyan songs, their conceptualisation of a Kenyan past cannot feasibly be entirely centred on pre-colonial Kenya. Indeed, their discourse of return is forced to confront the definitive moment of disruption in traditional societies — the entry of modernity via the key pillars of colonialism: Commerce, Christianity and Western education. This confrontation is tackled in Kayamba's cover version of '*Mulunya*', a 1950s Kiswahili number by George Mukabi, one of the pioneers of urban guitar music in Kenya and one whose singular contribution to this new form lay in his unique blending of the Luhya *sukuti* rhythm and percussions with a novel finger-picking guitar style (Stapleton and May, 1989: 227, 235-236). '*Mulunya*' dwells on the Janus-face of colonialism, speaking of the tempting conveniences of modernity that result in the perennial tension between the grip of tradition and the pull of Westernization. Here is the song's depiction of the everyday challenges faced by the locals in colonial times:

Nilikuwa kwetu Mulunya
Nilisikia makelele
Kutoka mji wa Etangale

I was at our home in Mulunya
I heard screams
From the home of Etangale

Si walisema Murunga alikufwa
Twende tu bebe
Sisi tuli shindwa
Natulikuwa na sicooter yetu

Didn't they say Murunga died
Let us go ferry him
We were unable to do so
And we had our own scooter

In the face of such challenges, the youth are advised to choose wisely between modernity's many conveniences.

<i>Vijana wa leo</i>	Young men of today
<i>Ni na wambiyeni, vijana</i>	I am telling you young men
<i>Mukiwa na pesa zenu</i>	If you have your own money
<i>Kwanza mununue mtoka</i>	First buy a car
<i>Kwanza mununue mtoka</i>	First buy a car
<i>Sicooter muache</i>	Leave scooters
<i>Eh, muachiye warembo, vijana</i> ⁸	Leave them to the ladies, young men
<i>Mtoka ndugu ita beba mama</i>	A car, my brother, will carry your mother
<i>Mtoka ndugu ita beba papa</i>	A car, my brother, will carry your father
<i>Sicooter muache</i>	Leave scooters
<i>Eh, muachie warembo, vijana</i>	Leave them to the ladies, young men
<i>(Sicooter ni hapa hapa tu towni bwana!)</i>	A scooter only takes you close by, just to town man!

Kayamba's reworking of '*Mulunya*' displays the parodic capacity of cover versions. It is an interpretation that stresses the sense of otherness that was endemic to colonial relations first, by opting for a Kiswahili that is laden with a heavy Luhya accent. Within the Kenyan urban social contexts, deliberate linguistic impediments of this kind are efficacious for laughter precisely because they play on ethnic stereotypes in ways that force listeners to confront the suspicions of inter-ethnic existence through a light-hearted mutually enacted system of "othering". And because the colonial experience trained people to regard ethnic accents as a sign of lack of sophistication, Kenyans have long since inverted this slight and turned these accents into banners of self-acceptance that project "weaknesses" as precisely the mark of one's identity.

Aside from Kayamba's use of language to examine the social relations that emerged in colonial times, George Mukabi's original lyrics offered an engaging commentary on the locals' tortured desire to embrace the things of modernity. This desire is strong, almost

⁸ The Kiswahili word 'vijana' actually means youth, but as this song demonstrates there is a tendency by non-first language speakers of Kiswahili to use it to refer specifically to young men only rather than to both men and women.

compulsive, but we are shown that these modern conveniences are not without their nuisance and shortcomings.⁹ Scooters are an individualistic and selfish mode of transportation, unsuited to communal lifestyles in the village. But more than this, one could argue that in actual fact, the avowed preference for cars over scooters represents the persona's perceived need for both speed and enhanced mobility. Kayamba's spoken aside at the end derides scooters for their inability to take one far away, and by implication, quickly enough. And even though the song situates the functions of this mobility within the village, mobility is nonetheless indicative of journeys further and further away from this centre. As with Ayi Kwei Armah's interrogation of postcolonial materiality in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the car becomes a symbol of modern success and the source of both individual and familial tensions over the need to "make it". Indeed, it is precisely because cars were introduced to the continent within the climate of colonialism that Africa's whole encounter with motorization brought on distinctly tortured political and social relations.¹⁰ In '*Mulunya*', the persona belongs to the ranks of those who stood in awe of the car, correctly gleaning its power to transform society on account of its victory over space and time. The song's emphasis then, is not on ferrying Murunga's corpse, but on using the objects of modernity to ward off Murunga's death.

Having perceived the car's power in this sense, '*Mulunya*'s' persona seems to embrace modernity albeit outside of the political order that has introduced it and enforced the boundary between those who have cars and those who are awed by them. One could perhaps stretch the argument and say that the car in '*Mulunya*' is a symbol of power. In fact, it is a symbol of authority and political power which, read from the confines of traditional society, is necessarily framed along gender lines as properly belonging to the domain of the men, the custodians of lineage in patrilineal societies. The individualism of

⁹ Luise White's (1997) study of the urban legends that surrounded the introduction of cars in colonial East Africa dwells on the local people's hostility to technological progress and the interminable suspicion with which they regarded the coloniser's uses of motor transport. '*Mulunya*' reflects a marked change in local attitudes and underlines convenience and enhanced social status as benefits of motor transport.

¹⁰ See Erdmute Alber's (2002) discussion of motorization as a site of competition for power and prestige in colonial Dahomey.

the scooter is to be left to the young women who will in any case leave to form new associations outside their maiden homes.

Looked at in another way, '*Mulunya*' seems to warn that the force of modernity, its creation of mobility will sweep away all traces of traditional practices and origins. Much can be made of the journey motif in this song which basically works in counter-discourse to the many journeys of return that Kayamba's commitment to reinstating Kenya's ethnic music involves. And given the technological infrastructure (from the musical accompaniments to the act of recording) that enables Kayamba's journey into a Kenyan past, it is clear that their search for a cultural base cannot be constructed outside of the intervening experience of colonialism which continues to mediate notions of an authentic Kenyan culture.

3.3 Remix: Irony and Disjuncture

In the previous chapter, I stated that remix is both a form of literary parody and a legitimizing practice that exploits specific historic and political circumstances. This is because its structural formation rests precisely on the fabric of an older song. To this end, the starting point in remix is the new artiste's invocation of an old song. It begins as a private or individual recollection, no doubt filled with all of the subjective motivation that attends to private memory. Beyond this point, there lies this new artiste's conscious decision to turn his/her private recollection into a shared and therefore public remembrance. The act of re-recording and re-issuing an old song immediately transports that song from the realms of private reminiscence to the status of cultural memory (Werbner, 1998). It is henceforth enacted in public spaces, re-entering the media, clubs, *matatus* and so on. A remix becomes the thing in the present which triggers associations from the past (Thelen, 1989). Indeed, once released to the public, the remix necessarily has a mnemonic effect on its audiences, it triggers in individual listeners a whole range of private memories, which may very well be tied to public events in the past. These associations are also about perceived dissonance between "then" and "now", invoking new trajectories of meaning in both these historic categories. As such, remixes are the epitome of textualised memory, they are storehouses for remembrances. And the memory

being (re)enacted is not simply the text of the original song, more than that, it is also that of all the socio-political contexts of the moments when that song was first conceptualised and the contexts in which audiences previously engaged with it. All the nuances of place, time and events are brought back to the fore, the moment the song is replayed.

By its very nature then, remix is a dialogic form, predicated on the notion that the song text can be duplicated and reworked into an interminable number of versions. Quite apart from the obvious plurality that governs remix, there is also an underlying trope of destruction defining this form. The destruction is inherent in the dismantling and rearrangement of the original song. Further destruction is found in the inevitable realignment of memories, the imposition of old forms into new contexts and the deleting of old associations as fresh consciousness is demanded. Thus a typical audience reaction to the first hearing of a remix may very well be "but what have they done with so-and-so's song?" Ultimately, it is the manner in which that remix exploits the past, and the uses to which it puts that past in the present that will work to endear it to its 'new' audiences. Let me outline this point by focusing on 3 remix numbers — Kayamba Afrika's 'Elizabeth' and Nairobi City Ensemble's, 'Lunch Time' and '*Le Boucheron*'.

Kayamba Afrika's 'Elizabeth' is an imaginative reworking of S.E. Rogie's 1962 smash hit, 'My Lovely Elizabeth'. Rogie's song was born out of his first experience of aborted romance.¹¹ Jilted by his girl and feeling cheated by his friend whom she had opted for, Rogie sought release from his pain in this song which he first recorded at the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Services. The song became so well known on the West African coast that EMI Records picked it up and turned it into an international hit thus marking a major development in Rogie's musical career (Graham,1989:108). So embedded within the lyrical memory of Africans across the continent was this song that even the internationally acclaimed Congolese musician Kanda Bongoman made a remix of it in 1999.¹²

¹¹ See Rogie's biography on liner notes of the inlay card on Cooking Vinyl label's July 2002 re-release of the album *Palm Wine Guitar Music*.

¹² Kanda Bongoman's version 'My Love Elizabeth' is on the album *Sweet* produced by Gallo Records.

In a sense, the pain of Rogie's first true love turned out to be liberating in more ways than one. It turned the tide of his musical fortunes. To date, 'My Lovely Elizabeth' stands as the most popular song Sierra Leone has produced. Given its international circulation, 'My Lovely Elizabeth' was very familiar to Kenyan audiences in the 1960s. In an era filled with tense liberation struggles, the heady optimism of independence, the celebration of blackness and the aspirations towards Pan-Africanism, 'My Lovely Elizabeth' was a unique celebration of the ordinary lives that pulsed alongside the larger national narratives of liberation. But perhaps these personal narratives sat in counterpoint to the bigger picture. I will come back to the possible tensions between aborted romance and the optimism of that historical period in a while, but for now, suffice it to note that for post-1950s Kenyan audiences, all of the socio-historical contexts of the independence moments were brought back into play with Kayamba's remix release in 2001.

Beyond the broad political contexts of the 1960s, the many memories that Kayamba's remix evokes are further domesticated by the group's rendition of the song's universal theme of a love-sick jilted man in 4 languages; 3 of them — Gĩkũyũ, Dholuo and Kalenjin — Kenyan ethnic languages. As it is, the fact of the theme itself falling within the realms of everyday human encounter gains easy access and applicability within a local imaginary and is, therefore, bound to draw out memories of a very personal nature. Indeed, the complications of love affairs — their passions and their disappointments — strike much more than a chord of familiarity, a note of passing interest in all. In opting to relate this tale of a love triangle in local ethnic languages, Kayamba locate the experience and the memory within the broader parameters of their "indigenisation" project. The memory of Rogie's ballad is given new emotive force and wider national interest by rendering it in local terms and in more than one local language. What therefore started out as a discourse of the personal and the ordinary — romance — is in this way turned into the articulation of national(ist) aspirations, enacted dramatically in a public arena. Kayamba's Odemba joked, during our interview, that 'love is a very serious issue' but he also admitted that his group did adopt the strategy of '4 in 1' language 'to promote other peoples' languages'. They saw it as a vehicle of ethnic identity and as a bait to help the

group 'catch as many people as possible'. Once again there is the underlying point that artistes are always acutely aware of the fact that nostalgia sells and their memory work may sometimes be motivated by this simple fact rather than by complex ideological beliefs.

If we focus on the idea of remix as a parodic form, we can read interesting departures in Kayamba's version of 'Elizabeth'. Much as the remix revisits Rogie's concern with a romance that has been broken off rather deviously, it nonetheless tends to parody what Rogie had expressed so emotively, so painfully. The urgency of these heart-wrenching emotions is turned on its head in Kayamba's remix whose choice of lyrics projects a comic hyperbole. Take for a start the opening English verse:

*I am deeply worried at heart
Cos the girl I love so well
My friend has snatched from me
Now I really don't know what to do
But to hang my head and cry
For my lovely Elizabeth, my sweet Elizabeth*

As with the rest of the song, the speaking voice here belongs to the jilted lover. Notice that though speaking in English, he nonetheless settles on the peculiarly Kenyan and highly colloquial term 'snatched' to describe the circumstances of his cuckolding. In ordinary Kenyan parlance, 'snatched' is used to mean cuckolded, and so entrenched has the reference become that many do not seem to have any idea that they are stretching the meaning of the word into an unusual and novel collocation. It is precisely the colloquial status of this term, therefore — the fact of its being informal, casual slang — that robs the matter at heart of its gravity. In fact, it paints the situation in a decidedly comical manner, and to lend weight to the parody, it is the jilted man himself who pokes fun at his implied ineptitude. This depiction of a bemused though hopelessly out-witted persona is once again achieved when the verse is repeated in Gikūyū. Here, the group speaks of the cuckolding using the term '*karahuririo*' — literally meaning 'grabbed' or 'snatched up', and invariably invoking the apposite image of hawks stealing chicks from unsuspecting hens.

The tragi-comic dimension of this tale of cuckoldry is further reinforced by the ambivalence of the second verse in *Gīkūyū*:

<i>Tīrītu tūingĩ</i>	the many girls
<i>tūrīa twī harīa</i>	who are here
<i>tūnyonaga tūgaita maithori</i>	cry whenever they see me

It is not clear whether these girls cry because they desire him, or because they empathise with him as a cuckolded lover. If they cry because they want him and he is not interested, then the verse is comical, particularly because the cuckold is now projecting himself as a sought after catch. If the girls in question cry with sympathy for the cuckold then we are struck by his truly pitiable state. His utter helplessness is what we hear in the lines that follow:

<i>rīu ndiūū ngūrora na kū,</i>	now I don't know what I will turn to
<i>rīu ndiūū ngwīka atīa</i>	now I don't know what I will do

In his confusion the jilted lover dramatically moves on to settle on the most extreme of all 'resolutions' — suicide (*'njoe kamba ndūite'* / take a rope and hang myself). Interestingly, the idea of suicide is not posed as a conclusively arrived at position. The persona does not explicitly say he is going to take a rope and hang himself, which would be *'ni ngūoya kamba nīite'*. And though the singing tone does not carry the inflection of a question, the choice of words nonetheless points more to an interrogative than to a conclusive statement. This same scenario of drafting dramatic options is heard again in the Luo verse when the jilted lover, having sworn his undying love for Elizabeth (*'chunya podi medo gombi'* (my heart still continues to desire you)) appropriates rather grave terms to communicate his sense of dejection. *'Ti atimra nadi'* (literally, the comical how will I do myself) is actually an emotively heavy way of asking 'now what am I going to do with myself'. It captures the kind of helplessness a mother would echo upon the death of a child. Its deliberate choice by Kayamba is not so much a parody of those tragic circumstances such as those, but it is evoked to communicate the extent of the persona's despair. Indeed, the persona's helplessness is further accentuated as he calls out to his friends - *'Jo Kayamba apenjou'* (people of Kayamba, I ask you). He then repeats,

presumably for their benefit: '*ti atimra nadi*'. But as the song gains momentum it reaches its climax in:

Sweet Elizabeth but why did you have to go?
My Elizabeth but why did you have to go?

The persona can not help turning to wit and caricature to express his loss:

Come back to your lovely Rogie
Ye, blackie boy Rogie
Don't you miss me whatever they may say
Come back to your lovely Rogie

The term the persona uses to "advertise" himself — 'blackie boy' — is more of a caricature than a term of endearing attributes or virtue. He is presumably looking at what he has to offer Elizabeth and it is so limited that we can not help laughing at, rather than sympathising with him. The critical thing to follow up on in the remix 'Elizabeth' is the purpose that is served by its being parodied.

Again, it is important to realise that the whole idea of parody here is not just limited to Kayamba Afrika satirising Rogie's original, much more than this, it is underlined in the way Kayamba distance themselves from the ridicule of cuckoldry and opt instead to retain Rogie as the victim of this deceit. Thus it can easily seem that it is he, the original artiste that is the target of their satire. Stephanie Newell (2000:109) discusses the ways in which some Ghanaian popular fiction 'refunctions' the Western texts that it parodies. One can extend Newell's argument to read the way Kayamba Afrika's 'Elizabeth' reinterprets the jilted lover's position. They adopt a measure of light-heartedness that must be aimed at helping the persona recover his lost esteem by endearing him to his audience as a comic wit, one with the capacity to negotiate a difficult emotional situation through humour and brutal self-examination. In effect, then, what the song suggests as a solution out of the emotional quagmire, is not so much the tentatively approached option of suicide, but rather a capacity to see humour in awkward places, to shed the garb of self-importance. The last verse which is rendered in all four languages — one line in each — *chamanenyu Lisabeth* (I am crying for Elizabeth), *ti atimra nadi* (what I'm I going to do

with myself), *njoye kamba ndi ite* (I take a rope and hang myself), and the English 'my sweet Elizabeth'— builds on the idea of the commonality of this experience. Once again we are brought back to the conscious weaving of national bonds. It emerges as a deliberate pitch at localizing nostalgia for sale, through emphasis on shared experience, however mundane and quotidian that experience may be.

Within the socio-political contexts of the present, the bridging of ethnic differences is a truly urgent need. Long shattered by the blood of fratricide, such as the ethnic land clashes of 1991/2 and 1997 (see fn 5 on p.92) and repeatedly dogged by the tensions of betrayed political aspirations, the mood of the Kenyan postcolony has for a long time been a pale shadow of the celebration and optimism that characterised national independence, and into which S. E. Rogie's 'My Lovely Elizabeth' had seemingly ironically thrust its air of disappointment and despair. Within the contemporary socio-political discourses of widespread disenchantment, Kayamba's remix ironically teases out memories of that independence era tinged, not with the regret and despair Rogie sung of, but with the optimism and enthusiasm that the promise of independence suggested. The irony is two-fold and in both instances it is dependent on the timing; on the historical moment into which the song enters the Kenyan public sphere. It lies first in the spectacle of S.E. Rogie's dispirited original, which, back in the early 1960s struck a chord of disillusionment where all around in Kenya there was anticipation and jubilation. In the second instance, irony is to be found in the way Kayamba Afrika reintroduce this song into a climate of political decay and economic mismanagement and yet refuse to sustain the original's air of lonely dejection by opting to foreground instead a lively and distracting tomfoolery. It is reversals and tensions such as these that tie remix to parody, a parody moreover, which works through what Linda Hutcheon (1988:11) terms 'ironic discontinuity'. In other words, remembrance becomes disjuncture, fracturing its way into the present even as it serves the needs of the moment. In contemporary Kenya, those needs have in large measure, rotated around the need to wash over ethnic difference and reiterate instead our mutual implicatedness in the project of humanising our existence. But much as remix may have generated an ironic revisiting of many of these socio-

political issues, remix is also capable of capturing a sense of continuity of experience in refreshing new ways.

3.4 Remix as Continuity

As with Kayamba Afrika's return to an old West African hit, one of Nairobi City Ensemble's remixes creates a sense of continuity by drawing on Pan African links and stressing the similarity of African postcolonial experience. The original '*Le Bucheron*' (the woodcutter) was a 1970 recording by Franklin Boukaka of Congo Brazzaville.¹³ It was a song ahead of its time in many ways, leveling a harsh indictment against the (mis)management of African independence. Like 'Lunch Time', it speaks of the privations of struggling workers and peasants, and bemoans their working conditions.¹⁴ '*Le Bucheron*' is highly critical of the performance of elected leaders whose empty promises haunt their trusting electorate. The associations and legendary prominence of this song within Kenya's public sphere carries interesting ironies.

'Le Bucheron' made its entry into Kenya in the early 1970s, back in the days of state-controlled and heavily censored airwaves — Voice of Kenya (VOK) — and it was invariably played on national radio daily, sometimes even two or three times in one day. Unversed in either French or Lingala, the radio DJs doubtlessly mistook its plaintive chorus of '*Aei Africa eh, Eh Afrika, Oh lipanda (independence)*' for a passionate praise and celebration song. VOK's radio presenters had completely missed out on its dirge-like despair, its near death-knell for African independence expounded in the song's verses. Had '*Le Bucheron's*' message been properly understood by the gate-keeping broadcasters, it would, no doubt, have been censored and labelled subversive by a hedging and highly defensive regime. This is precisely how Nairobi City Ensemble remix version, with its explicitly critical rap message in Kiswahili, English and Sheng has been received. When it was first released in July 2001, state-controlled radio instantly gave the song a total

¹³ Nairobi City Ensemble mistakenly documented their remix as '*Le Boucheron*' (sic), connoting 'a cruel/blood-thirsty butcher' rather than the woodcutter (*Le Bucheron*), which Boukaka meant.

¹⁴ I have elsewhere discussed the remix strategies in both Nairobi City Ensemble's '*Lunch Time*' and '*Le Boucheron*' as instances in the invention of a tradition for both Kenya's popular music and also as part of

black-out, effectively muting the message into what Werbner (1998:8) terms 'buried memory'. And buried memories Werbner warns us always produce 'unfinished narratives' which fester in the present, calling 'again and again for a public resolution to their predicament', because people are consciously aware 'that they have not been allowed to remember'.

When the songs are examined against the whole body of contemporary Kenya remixes, the distinguishing mark of ingenuity in Nairobi City Ensemble's remixes of both 'Lunch Time' and '*Le Boucheron*' is to be found in their novel use of rap to punctuate the sung verses.¹⁵ The rap comes in to amplify the themes of the original sung verses which the remixes retain intact. Group Manager/Producer, Tabu Osusa admits that he chose to rework 'Lunch Time' so as to remind Kenyans that they once had songs with good lyrics and good composition. He goes on to say that although rap is generally associated with rebellious American hip hop, his group nonetheless decided to adopt it for these remixes in order to capture the attention of the more youthful Kenyan audience. Poxi Presha, the group's rapper, justifies the use of rap in contemporary Kenyan music saying: 'there's nobody who is the owner of music who must say that music should be done this way, or that way'. Admitting that 'rap is hostile, it's like shouting...to get attention', Poxi underlines that it was a suitable strategy to adopt in seeking to expound on the still relevant themes of earlier musicians. In Chapter Five I shall interrogate the informing influences in the use of rap in contemporary Kenyan music, for now, suffice it to note that the rap sections in these two remixes exploit a form of anti-establishment protest popularised (but not necessarily initiated) by American hip hop artistes. The context of the much decayed Kenyan economy of the 1990s and the political impasse that was occasioned by Moi's stubborn hold on power — which we shall detail in Chapter Six — is critical to reading the rap sections within these two remixes.¹⁶ Indeed, the rap is

the basis for its national identity (2003: 393-395). Here I extend these arguments further and dwell on the emotional accents that emerge from these acts of remembrance.

¹⁵ It is instructive to note that Papa Wemba, an international Congolese musician, has recently made a remix of '*Le Boucheron*' that echoes Nairobi City Ensemble's version in its use of rap.

¹⁶ See Rok Ajulu (1998 and 2001) and Roger Southall (1999) for a discussion of Kenya's political impasse and the deterioration of the economy that was fuelled by a kleptocratic state.

employed precisely to lend emotive force to the themes of postcolonial betrayal and strife that the two original songs were concerned with in their own time.

It is possible to see in this use of rap the defiant nature of remix. The notion that Poxi is refusing to sing, and is instead changing the definition of song by talking rather than singing to the beat, is itself an act of assertion that may very well qualify as a parodying of form. At a thematic level, the intertextuality of these remixes situates the originals as the core texts from which contemporary realities superimpose themselves in a discourse that emphasises continuity in the sense of similar circumstances which have only continued to deteriorate with the passing of the years (Nyairo & Ogude, 2003:359). Indeed, this pattern of remembrance echoes Paul Connerton's (1989:26) assertion that to 'remember...is precisely not to recall events as isolated; it is to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences'. Thus the sense of *déjà vu* created in these songs relates not only to the original songs but to the way their content finds haunting relevance in the present where socio-economic conditions ('Lunch Time') and political failures (*Le Boucheron*) have significantly worsened. It is precisely this deterioration that the emotive rap lines capture so graphically.

The critical thing about the nature of Nairobi City Ensemble's remembrances here lies in the choice to go back to moments of pain and disjuncture. Using the same logic that has popularised 'Truth and Reconciliation Commissions' (TRCs) on the continent, Nairobi City Ensemble seek out these troubled moments in our past. They do so not simply because those old experiences echo so well prevailing conditions in the present, but more importantly, because the ultimate aim in the exercise of remembrance should be redress and restructuring.¹⁷ Neither one of these goals can be achieved without, first and

¹⁷ The most significant of these has been that of South Africa established under the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995 and headed by former Anglican Archbishop and Nobel Laureate, Desmond Tutu. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda is another example of official attempts to ventilate and properly archive buried pasts of atrocity and trauma. It has culminated in the creation of what Heidi Grunebaum-Ralph (2001: 199) terms the 'recovery of the past within the context of consensual public history [which] would then also be a containment of the possibilities of individual remembrances within that context'. Since coming to power in Kenya of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Government in December 2002, there have been persistent calls for the setting up of a truth and reconciliation committee to probe particularly, the instances of political assassinations in past regimes

foremost, disclosure. And disclosure here would entail creating understanding through public confessions of past atrocities with a view to unraveling motives and perhaps making reparations for the affronted and instituting suitable punishment against perpetrators. The confrontations made in both these songs are aimed precisely at creating the kind of public ventilation of national wrongs that TRCs aim at. Exploiting a number of literary devices, the thematic strands of the songs generate a confluence of contending emotions.

In '*Le Boucheron*' the gaze turns critically inwards in a stream of self-reflexive interrogatives that call for collective responsibility for some of the postcolonial messes, even as the focus singles out politicians in particular for harsh rebuttal:

<i>Mbona tunajifanya?</i>	why do we pretend?
<i>kwani bila IMF</i>	you mean without the International Monetary Fund
<i>hatuwezi penya</i>	we cannot prosper?
<i>Africans there is a way tunajidanganya</i>	we cheat ourselves
<i>Tukijigawanya</i>	dividing ourselves
<i>viongozi wetu tuki wasengenya</i>	gossiping about our leaders
<i>naku wazoyesha</i>	and constantly encouraging them
<i>kutu chapa chapa ka mapanya</i>	to keep beating us up like rats
<i>Watoto wao wako ulaya</i>	their children are abroad
<i>Walisha penya</i>	they have penetrated and succeeded
<i>ni ma polluticians wana tufanya fanya</i>	it is just politicians messing us up

Sometimes, as with the indictment of racial discrimination, the views of the postcolony are rendered through a near-comic gaze that is nonetheless aimed at demanding redress.

<i>Mother Africa you're accused you're the mother of HIV,</i>	
<i>wife-beating</i>	
<i>na (and) minor problems kama ulevi</i>	like alcoholism
<i>A black man on T.V. ni mweusi</i>	is dark
<i>Ni kama amepakwa G..V</i>	as if he has been painted with Gentian
<i>Violet</i>	

(J.M. Kariuki, Tom Mboya and Robert Ouko) and the atrocities of the 1992 and 1997 ethnic land clashes. To this end the Government established a 14-man task force headed by Prof Makau wa Mutua to look into the viability of a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission. It solicited views from the public over whether or not a commission should be established (and if so, what its terms of reference would constitute) and filed its report in June 2003. To date, no TRC has been established but a parliamentary committee investigating the murder of Robert Ouko began its sittings in July 2003.

Ultimately, a total sense of helplessness is created through the pungent bitterness and disappointment with the so-called fruits of independence: '*Which makes me wish afadhali uhuru hatuge win*' (we had never won independence).

One of the most fascinating things about the '*Le Boucheron*' remix in the context of national memory work is the way its structure creates a sense of dialogue between the present and the past. This is achieved by rapper Poxi Presha's repeated invitations to vocalist Padi Makani, invitations that usher in the sung verses from the original. At the start Poxi introduces himself and then invites Padi to sing saying: 'Poxi Presha again, so Padi, sing your feelings'. And as Padi sings taking us back to Boukaka's original lyrics in Lingala, Poxi periodically punctuates Padi's lines with 'right', 'yes', 'listen', 'do you hear' and 'it's true'. Once he is done with the first part of the rap on contemporary realities, Poxi again engages Padi, the voice from the past, with lines like 'Padi, Explanation One', 'African Padi, explanation two', 'Was our freedom an unwanted pregnancy, Padi? 'Sing on, sing on Padi'. In essence, Poxi's interjections invite the moment of remembrance in a conversational manner that belies the power of the memory being reawakened. In this way the sense of continuum is dramatically underlined as the backward glance opens up cogent perceptions of the present.

Interestingly, it is Padi, the Lingala voice from the past, who comes in with another category of memory — Tabu Osusa's personal remembrance of friends, associates, group members and family the world over. The salutations to them that Padi renders is first and foremost a friendly gesture. But even more than that, it is further acknowledgment of the performative ties between Kenyan popular music and its Congolese counterpart from which, as we saw in the discussion of Osusa's name in the previous chapter, local music has drawn much inspiration. Bob White (1999:164-165) explains the origins of the Congolese tradition of "throwing" peoples names in performances and in recorded songs emphasising that '(p)eople whose names are "thrown" come from a wide variety of social and professional backgrounds'. These salutations, therefore, illustrate the group's ties in London, America and Tanzania and this necessarily invites some reflection on the

interconnectedness of practices, people, places, experiences and memories. And shared memories overcome time and space, becoming cardinal factors in forging cultural practices and communal identities. The final remembrance in the remix is of the original composer of '*Le Bucheron*', the late Franklin Boukaka, to whom the debt of enlightenment gained through his everlasting song, is acknowledged:

*Just imagine how hard it is to cut firewood
And to sell it
And who enjoys the fire?
Enough respect to Franklin Boukaka
From Tabu Osusa
Your music will stay for the African children
And their children,
and the children of their children.*

The cardinal point to note here is the one made by Sally Falk Moore (1998:150), that memory-work is sometimes future-oriented. By underlining Boukaka's song as a gift to posterity, the imperative of acting for the future is demonstrated. Boukaka's documentation of the failure of post-independence leaders to deliver on the promises of liberation is, Poxi insists, a lesson that was intended for future generations. Nairobi City Ensemble takes us back to learn from Boukaka's observations. Further, apart from setting down their own lessons for posterity, and thereby striving towards future-accountability, the group also emphatically invites posterity to look back to these moments, thereby dramatizing the commitment of memory-work to the future.

Gabriel Omolo's original version of '*Lunch Time*' (1972) had the distinction of being the first Kenya single to sell close to 300,000 copies and it earned Omolo the first ever local Golden Disc Award (Okumu, 1998:60). Written in the best vein of social commentary, '*Lunch Time*' was composed at a time when Omolo worked for a packaging firm in Nairobi's Industrial Area. It is his observation of the lifestyle of urban workers, gained during this period, that forms the thrust of the song's narrative. A satirical rendition in Kenya's national language, Kiswahili, it talks of the economic pressures of city workers, the majority of whom seldom ever afford lunch. In the circumstances, their lunch hour is mostly spent idling in the park or on the streets pretending to be window-shopping. On

pay-day, there is a dramatic change for all except the unemployed. Then, workers stream into hotels for their favourite meals and the high income earning ones live it up in five-star hotels on the "right" side of the city.¹⁸

The predominant emotion generated by the new rap lines in 'Lunch Time' is one of satiric laughter:

*Yes, Uchumi [the economy] is to be given all the blame
Yes, so imagining is the name of the game
So why should I care if kushiba [satisfaction] is the aim,
After all, all digestion systems end the same.
...People eating githeri [maize and beans] imagining chicken are so many
Postponing lunch till jioni [evening] to catch up with ugali baridi
Thanks to street preachers and the comedians
At least we can visit your areas
When our pockets get notorious,
We are dearly saving, while you are killing us with laughter, some are yawning*

But the rap also captures the utterly bizarre face of postcolonial existence:

<i>Shida hufanya mtu kukaba mutu koo</i>	problems can make you mug people
<i>Mtu kuzaa mtoto</i>	they cause some to give birth
<i>na kutupa ndani ya choo</i>	and throw the child in a pit-latrine

It cynically paints the picture of heartlessly designed economic policies, all the time forcefully insisting on the reality of the situation through the repeated 'yes'. Listen to the gravity of things:

*Yes, lunch time haijali [doesn't care] about unemployment
Yes, it doesn't care about your retrenchment,
Yes, it doesn't give a damn about teachers' underpayment
Yes, neither the politicians overpayment.*

The aggregate of all the emotions generated by Nairobi City Ensemble's 'Lunch Time' and 'Le Boucheron' is a lasting memory of the postcolony as at once a site of great hope,

¹⁸ We shall see in Chapter Four that as with many African colonial towns, the city of Nairobi was carefully segregated into White, Asian and African neighbourhoods. Today, the demarcations from colonial times ascribe descending levels of affluence. The area west of what is now Tom Mboya Street (formerly Victoria Street) was predominantly white and to date, it still boasts high-class hotels and businesses, access to which is barred not by pass laws, but by prohibitive costs.

but more often than not, as the location of great pain, discord and despair. But even though memory confirms this pain to be somewhat endemic to the African postcolony, its resurrection is not aimed at a helpless acceptance of the fact. As I conclude elsewhere, to 'be a Kenyan, is to constantly be disgruntled about the present, and yet remain full of hope about the potential, the promising possibilities in the future' (2003:395). In effect, therefore, the memories evoked by these popular songs are woven into a fabric of the present's articulated resistance and rebellion. And it is not as Keya Ganguly (1992) argues that remembering a past of pain takes the edge off the despair of the present by making one focus on the many positive things in that present. Instead, Nairobi City Ensemble work that memory of pain and rupture so that it instills even greater resolve to fight off the host of postcolonial vices persisting in the present. Evoking the memory of rupture is an act of rebellion, aimed at throwing off official discourses of the past which, to hijack Joanne Demer's (2003) sentiments over American hip hop artistes (mis)representation of the 1960s and 1970s, tend to flatten the landscape of the past, erasing tensions and contradictions, and projecting in their place a façade of uniformity, of great achievement and of harmony.¹⁹

3.5 Samples of the Past

Sampling is another of the ways in which contemporary artistes link themselves to earlier practices thus creating some form of continuum, some sense of tradition in the cultural practice of popular music and in the social imaginary at large. The term sampling is taken from hip hop discourse, and outside the recording studios, it grew from the very early practices of hip hop when Disc Jockeys from New York's Harlem and the Bronx would manually scratch vinyl records to create a seamless 'old school' mix of dance music. While various scratching practices still persist and are particularly popular amongst club DJs, it is the more technologically developed practices of sampling that have greatly revolutionarised the world of popular music and recording. Joanna Demers (2003:41)

¹⁹ In this regard, President Moi's official speeches always stressed his Nyayo Philosophy of 'being mindful of other people's welfare' even as state-sponsored ethnic violence rocked the country. In the same way, his lieutenants looted state coffers even as Moi declared his government's outright war on corruption

explains it as 'a digital process in which pre-recorded sounds are incorporated into the sonic fabric of a new song'. In the context of music production, sampling has been in practice for many years and was often used as a short cut for producers, engineers and composers to quickly and cheaply provide chunks of pre-recorded sounds which were then transferred to new recordings (Rose, 1994:73). My use of the term sampling in this thesis lays its greatest emphasis on the borrowing of old lyrics which enter the new songs in a variety of ways — as allusions, echoes, pastiche and even parody. My approach here follows on Walter Ong's (1982:42) reading of originality in the narratives of oral cultures. Ong argues that 'narrative originality lodges not in making up new stories...[instead] formulas and themes are reshuffled rather than supplanted with new materials'. In this sense, what I try to do here is to trace the dominant themes, the lasting idioms and narrative practices that popular songs are helping to congeal as part of the Kenyan cultural economy.

A number of contemporary Kenyan songs sample from the vast heritage of the traditional music of the nearly 42 communities that make up modern Kenya. The most dramatic of these samples is in Hardstone's 1997 hit '*Uhiki*' (Gĩkũyũ for the wedding), the song that ignited the flames of Kenyan hip hop, and opened up the space for a resurgence in both creativity and interest in locally produced music. But even as samples go, '*Uhiki*'s' strategies reveal a complex web of cultural ties between the ethnic Gĩkũyũ roots, Kiswahili traces, American Rhythm and Blues, and Jamaican Patois which I will handle in Chapter Five when I look at local music's ties to global cultural practices. Suffice it to say for now, that the sampled use of a Gĩkũyũ folksong in '*Uhiki*' demonstrates the impossibility of what Wole Soyinka terms the 'pristine memory' that is often sought in the search for African authenticity. Remembrance is of necessity filled with gaps and amnesia, as well as fissures and distortions. Present attempts at recall only serve to underline that contemporary memory can never reach wholesale an uncontaminated traditional past, perhaps because such a past does not even exist but is instead a distillation of various influences over time.

There are many local efforts that signal a powerful commitment to an ethnic past and assert the strong influence of vernacular cultures in contemporary existence. A case in point is Zannaziki's collaboration with K-South in *'Kondo Gakwa'/my basket* (1999) which is woven around Gĩkũyũ folklore. For 3 of the songs on the album *Xawadi* (2001) — *'Kairitu Keega'* (good girl), *'Wira ni Wira'* (work is work) and *'Ii Wakiri'* — Zannaziki actually employed the research skills of Mutu Gechuru wa Gethoi, in selecting adaptable Gĩkũyũ folksongs and folktales. Gethoi is said to be a published poet/academician whose special interest in African Culture has led to the Mutu Renaissance Afrika initiative, a 'grand effort to amplify our rich past and resuscitate our dignity'.²⁰

There are equally complex efforts in sampling ethnic folksongs and their specific art forms apparent on Nairobi City Ensemble's *KaBoum Boum* (2001) which I detail as part of the group's use of ethnic consciousness to forge contemporary Kenyan identity (2003: 385-389). This use of ethnic art forms such as *pakruok* and *chuogo* is further reinforced through the use of traditional instruments such as *nyatiti* and *tung* thus effectively drawing Luo audiences into familiar cultural terrain. Again Nairobi City Ensemble's reliance on ethnic stereotypes works as a mode of self-criticism aimed at reforming a community's socio-economic practices (389-393). It also effectively draws in a wider audience of those Kenyans who can recognise their sampling from the repertoire of early urban guitar music such as we hear in *Jakong'o's* use of Ashanti's 1965 number *'Ka Mibetie Kichiemo'* and *'Otonglo Time's'* borrowing from Joshua Omwami's *'Kariobangi Mbio Mbio'* (1976).²¹ The significance of sampling these two pieces, I argue elsewhere, lies in Nairobi City Ensemble's tendency towards cautionary anthems in their commitment to reforming contemporary Kenyan moral ethos through recourse to the moral codes of the past. Today, these old anthems carry credence as collective wisdom and accepted tradition (2003: 387-388, 390). A remembrance that serves a purpose such as this cannot, therefore, be parodic. It works more as essential pastiche and not in the derogatory sense of lacking originality which Jameson (1991:17-18) decries as the

²⁰ From the album's liner notes.

²¹ *Nairobi City Ensemble's* sampling of old Kenyan recordings has inspired other such instances, notable amongst which is Redsan's sampling of 'Vundumuna' (1984) in his runaway hit 'Julie' (2002).

hallmark of postmodernism. For Jameson posits that 'Pastiche is thus blank parody...the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture'. In '*Jakong'o*' we instead see in the sampling, a pastiche that uses imitation not just as a form of flattery, but as *the* starting point, the illustrative anchor in prescribing socio-cultural practice for the present. This pastiche does not relate to the original in a derogatory sense and neither is it playful or satirical in the best manner of parody.

The only original composition on the album *Kayamba Afrika 'Auma'*, also reveals interesting dimensions in the sampling of Luo traditional forms, foremost amongst these being the use of the *nyatiti*. This use of a traditional instrument stands out markedly on an album that predominantly relies on the use of a computerised keyboard (synthesiser) to modernise traditional folksongs. Essentially a love ballad, '*Auma*' opens by recreating a traditional feast, perhaps a wedding, hosted in honour of the beautiful girl, Auma. The dialogue that introduces this feast images the sharing out of the meat from the slaughtered cow.

Ombich [intestines] for dogs
Agoko for children
Chuny [liver] for teachers
Oboo [kidneys] for women
To madong' [and what remains] for everybody

This recalls an atmosphere of a ritual ceremony.

Then the song zeroes in on Auma's qualities, expounding on her praise name '*nyar* form four' (girl from four four i.e. an educated girl) to show that despite such attainment, she still mirrors Luo aesthetics and concepts of beauty foremost of which are a 'brown' skin and white teeth.

Rapudo mama aweri
Lake tar ka pamba
Adundo mtoto supa

slim one, mama, I am singing you
her teeth are white like cotton
super one (baby)

kalando Auma mahero
...Auma sweetie mia pachi
thoche ler ka nyota
nyar gi musa
wang'e chalo matunda

brown one, Auma the one I love
give me your mind
your thighs are as clean as a star
sister of musa
her eyes are like (passion)fruit.

Beyond this poignant recourse to Luo aesthetics is the use of *pakruok*, a practice of praise poetry involving the display of 'linguistic artistry, virtue names and financial ability' (Masolo, 2000:369).²² As the love-struck persona winds up his ballad, his friend intones '*awinjo osiepna otoyoy*' (I have heard you, my friend, hyena). Peter Amuka (2000:92) explains that in the Luo discourse of *pakruok*, friends call one another 'terrible hyena', as an 'allusion may be to some romantic, economic or political exploit or achievement by one or more of the individuals'. In '*Auma*' the jesting between the friends goes on as the suitor striving to give himself an even worthier distinction of praise asks: '*Timotheo, ngisa gima ng'at momeo mokosomo wacho ka ng'ato sungore ne?*' (Timothy, tell me what a rich man says who has not gone to school when someone else is boasting to him?) Timothy's answer - 'what is those you has, that I don't has?' must, to be appreciated, be situated within the ethos of modern Luo who revere higher education as the only valid access to modernity and all its materiality. Timothy's answer is, therefore, in the light of these standards of modernity, a cruel satirical jab at all pretentious quasi-literates, who strut around bars and nightclubs, expensively clad and liberally displaying their money by buying many "rounds" of drinks. But their grip on modernity is proved to be tenuous as soon as they open their mouths and embarrass themselves with their out-pouring of "broken" English. As a narrative on the age-old tensions between Western education and ethnic aesthetics, '*Auma*' offers a witty perspective that persuasively brings out the emotive power of ethnic practices.

But even more challenging than this sampling that is based on ethnic cultural practices, I find, is that which is taken from the cultural repertoire of modern Kenya. I have in mind the now growing trend of sampling urban lore and recreational modes onto recorded popular music. The practice of sampling old Kenyan recordings may be seen as an off-

shot of the *zilizopendwa* enterprise. And it isn't just that contemporary artistes have been quick to realise that the youth of those early years now form a critical buying market with significant disposable income to spend on entertainment. More than this, contemporary artistes are creating room for a re-reading of our cultural history, as well as articulating shifting positions in the formulation of both the nation and the distinguishing markers of its peoples. Some of the interventions into the debate on Kenyan culture that contemporary artistes are making are fairly radical. Take for instance Kayamba Afrika's reworking of '*Amalwa*' (alcohol), a colonial times Luhya song that warns against the newly formed habit of drinking bottled beer. This beer the song warns is '*chinje pilipili*' (as bitter as pepper). The tensions in the song are made up of much more than the threatening influx of Westernization which, one can argue, the bottled beer metaphorically represents. In actual fact, the homiletic recourse to indigenous forms that the first part of '*Amalwa*' seems to insist upon is dramatically undermined by the intrusion of the songs climax rendered thus in Kiswahili:

<i>Kayamba wanacheza kalongolo</i>	<i>Kayamba</i> play 'mummies and daddies'
<i>Kalongolo ni mchezo wa Kayamba</i>	'mummies and daddies' is the game of <i>Kayamba</i>
<i>Kalongolongo ni mchezo wa Kayamba</i>	'mummies and daddies' is the game of <i>Kayamba</i>

<i>La la la la × 2</i>	
<i>Odeng ingia ndani</i>	Odeng come inside
<i>Ujiringe ringe</i>	Walk with a swagger
<i>Ujikune kune</i>	Scratch yourself
<i>Ucheze soukousu</i>	Dance <i>soukous</i>
<i>Ucheze show!</i>	Dance and show off

<i>La la la la</i>	
<i>Richie ingia ndani</i>	Richie come inside
<i>Ujiringe ringe</i>	Walk with a swagger
<i>Ujikune kune</i>	Scratch yourself
<i>Ucheze soukousu</i>	Dance <i>soukous</i>
<i>Ucheze show!</i> ²³	Dance and show off

²² See also Amuka (2000:90) for a discussion of *pakruok* as a riddle that opens up the space for sustained verbal exchange.

²³ Sometimes the children would sing '*ucheze soul*' / dance *soul* in imitation of a dance popularised in the 1960s by American star James Brown.

These two verses are borrowed from children's recreational tunes dating back to Nairobi of the 1960s and on the face of it they are quotidian displays of children's urban existence. Situated as they are within an old lyrical discourse that denounces Western influences, they rather powerfully become a contrary thread in that argument, at once revealing the extent of the complexities contained in the argument that the past provides a mirror of authentic Kenyan culture. Which past? Whose past? As with the Kalenjin folksong '*Omuntun*', the first part of the chorus in '*Amalwa*' — the reference to the urban children's make-belief game of 'mummies and daddies' — is rendered against a Congolese *dombolo* dance beat. White (1999: 156) describes *dombolo* as a 'highly eroticized commercialized dance step...banned in other parts of Africa for "political reasons",...popular ways of speaking about the moral crisis in the Congo have gone from an emphasis on "democratisation" to "dollarisation" and now "dombolisation" '. The weaving of *dombolo* onto the fabric of a Kenyan popular song is not unique or unusual given the legendary influence of Congolese art forms on local music. It is yet another testament of the extent of the myriad contagious cultural influences that pervade African postcolonial life and which are invariably met with cries of local cultural loss, decay enslavement.

The second part of the climax in '*Amalwa*' is again taken from Kenyan urban lore, this time from a highly performative play song that was very popular with children in lower and middle-class residential estates through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The children gathered to play would form a circle and once a participant's name is called out in the song, that child would have to come into the middle of the circle and show off the actions or dance styles being called out in the song. Juma Odemba talked of these urban intrusions in '*Amalwa*' as 'commercial breaks within the strict traditional music'. He says he thinks of them as 'totally unrelated to the rest of the song', and argues that their only function is to act as 'show-stoppers, to sell dance to the song'. Aside from confirming that popular artistes do pay specific attention to market trends, Odemba's admission of the cultural dislocation in '*Amalwa*' shows the typical reluctance with which postcolonials admit to their urban connections whenever the word culture is mentioned. Equally significant, his take on the intrusion of this urban lore gives a powerful insight into the

fractured ways of memory. Shot through broken mirrors and filled with fragmentary vision, it is of a past one is never fully in comprehension of, littered as it is with so many discordant experiences (Rushdie 1991). Working as urban postcolonials necessarily turns cultural purveyors like Kayamba into hybrid chroniclers, so that although the group's commitment is to reinstating traditional ethnic discourses, their project of remembrance cannot escape the memory of a recent past to which it is equally bound. As Masolo (2000:375) would have it their generation's ideas 'on what they imagine as "tradition", are as legitimate as those to which they are opposed'. As products of an urban upbringing, the group's collective conscious is perhaps less informed by traditional ethnic existence than it is by postcolonial urban lifestyles which we now see jostling for space and recognition within the milieu of what is to be termed Kenyan culture.

It is particularly instructive to note that Kayamba's retrieval of urban lore is not an isolated event. It has actually spun off a popular culture trend that consciously feeds off nostalgia for urban childhood, recalling the ways in which children took their places in the towns and forged an identity out of that existence. This same nostalgic and culture seeking chord is struck by the mass email entitled 'Em Good Old Days' (see Appendix iv). It is the same logic that penetrates Zannaziki's parodying of the children's play song '*Tasha analia, analia, analia/ anataka bwana yake*' in '*Kairitu keega*' (2001).²⁴ Again in T.T. Solomon's '*Tangu Tupendane*' (since we fell in love) (2002) we hear a mocking chant borrowed from the storehouse of children's play songs:

<i>Nampenda penda?</i>	Who do I love?
<i>Nani?</i>	Who?
<i>Mschana mumoja</i>	A certain girl
<i>Nani?</i>	Who?
<i>Mschana mrembo</i>	A beautiful girl
<i>Nani?</i>	Who?
<i>Ah si lali</i>	Oh, I can never sleep
<i>Nani?</i>	Who?

²⁴ The children's play song referred to says '*Tasha analia, analia, analia, anataka mama yake*'/Tasha is crying, crying, crying, she wants her mother. *Zannaziki* adapt this and say 'she wants her husband' as part of their song's counsel against forced and early marriages.

In essence then, Kayamba's use of urban children's lore belongs to an emergent Kenyan discourse creating a web of associations that increasingly point to the recognition and legitimization of urban lore as a key constituent within the broader umbrella of Kenyan culture.

Further lyrical attempts to read Kenyan culture out of recent history are seen in a unique example of sampling provided by Tedd Josiah on the album *Kenyan — the Second Chapter* (1999). As indicated in the first chapter, Josiah conceived his projects as a cultural awakening of Kenya. To lend this awakening national relevance Josiah uses a sound-bite from an old speech by Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's founding president. One could actually term this particular speech as Kenya's founding dictum, since it was Kenyatta's commencement speech, in Kiswahili, on Independence Day (December 12 1963). Consequently, Josiah's use of it provides a rare instance of popular forms sampling from official or state related discourses. It is important to find out what aspects of official memorialisation, Josiah finds instructive and useful to popular/public renderings. Here is the part of Kenyatta's speech that he samples, direct from the original soundtrack of that day's proceedings:

<i>Sisi watu wa Kenya tume simama imara</i>	We the people of Kenya have stood firm
<i>Hakuna mtu yo yote katika dunia</i>	There is no-one in the world
<i>ambaye ana weza kujidai</i>	who can falsely claim
<i>kwamba sisi wanainchi wa Kenya</i>	that we the citizens of Kenya
<i>tuko katika miguu yake</i>	are under his feet
<i>Miguu, kukaa katika</i>	Feet, to sit
<i>Chini ya miguu ya mutu mwingine</i>	under the feet of another
<i>Kupiga magoti</i>	to kneel
<i>Kwa mutu mwingine au inchi ingine</i>	before another person or another nation
<i>Mambo hao leo</i>	this state of affairs today
<i>Au hapo jana usiku saa sita</i>	or at midnight
<i>Ili kwisha ka yoyomea <u>kabisa</u></i>	it ended, ground to a halt <i>completely</i>
<i>Tu kawa huru</i>	we became independent.

The power of Josiah's strategy comes from actually using the original vocal soundtrack that bears Kenyatta's booming and emphatic intonation; his was a voice that many found both captivating and memorable. Kenyatta's message here celebrated the newfound

freedom and underlined the pride and dignity in the new nation which he felt all needed to strive to uphold. Indeed, Kenyatta's focus was on consciousness, on keeping alive the fact that Kenya was a new nation now, an autonomous one, free to chart out its own path. Josiah appropriates Kenyatta's message into the cultural milieu as part of his defense in the war against the dominance of "foreign" music in Kenya's public spaces — media, clubs and recreational spots. With regard to the emotionally and physically violent experiences of the colonial era, not least of which was Mau Mau, Kenyatta's Government operated a policy of amnesia, epitomised in the slogan "Forgive and Forget" (Clough, 2003:256). On this account therefore, Josiah's appropriation of Kenyatta as a beacon for defining "Kenyaness", can have interesting implications. Using Kenyatta's founding message can be seen as a gesture that clears space for Josiah to articulate a new moment in Kenyan culture. It may be one based on traditional ethnic practices, yes, but also one that is free to imbibe and adapt influences from the modern age in Kenya, an age that was ushered in by Kenyatta. Again, using Kenyatta's speech at a time when the Moi regime had perfected the game of imposing oblivion, of forgetting and deleting from public memory the performance of the Kenyatta government, can be interpreted as an act of resistance against state-inscribed silences, and officially manipulated versions. In this vein, it is instructive to note that Josiah's employment of the image of Kenyatta is not an isolated event. By the late 1990s, recordings of Kenyatta's speeches along with his pictures dominated *matatus* and small business enterprises, particularly the *jua kali* ones (Haugerud, 1995:30, n211). These acts of defiance sat in counterpoint to the harsh political climate engendered by an intransigent regime that fueled ethnic violence and wanton mismanagement of state resources (Klopp, 2000, 2002).

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the ways in which contemporary popular artistes enact remembrance, creating audiences by tapping on the already familiar. Throughout, I have argued that their recourse to the past actively serves the contingencies of the present even where that contingency may simply consist of striving to ensure the artiste's market success. Their retrievals become authenticating devices, asserting the validity of contemporary work as part of a burgeoning genre of popular culture. They intervene in

the debate on Kenyan cultural identity, mediate personal emotions, try to shape moral norms and confront political crises. The canvas that feeds cover versions, remixes and sampling attests to the vastness and the plurality of a Kenyan past. This is not just in terms of its varied ethnic background which doubtlessly provides powerful anchors for many of the recordings; equally significant is that this canvas is evidently beginning to include sedimented urban cultural practices. And the forays into precedents from as far away as Sierra Leone and the Congo further point to the polyglot cultural influences that have marked that past and which continue to colour the present.

Beyond asserting the notion of culture as a fluid and dynamic process, the use of cover versions, remixes and sampling open us up to the essential plurality of popular forms, to their multimedia operations. Thus urban children's lore becomes a source for the lyrical content of recorded popular music. Web (Internet) discourses are reaffirmed through popular song. Sampling from official speeches echoes and supplements visual displays in public places. Indeed the whole web of meaning that remix and sampling create is seen to be a complex layering of contradictions so that what was official political discourse in one era is employed as protest narrative and substance for cultural revolution in another. The syncretism of these discourses is again witnessed in the fact of the modern technologies that provide the modes of circulating these "native discourses" — electric instrumentation, recording studios, CDs, and cassettes. They all speak from the confines of modernity's enabling agency; an agency that cogently brings the past back into the present.

But more than anything else, Kenyan lyrical memory emerges as a site where disjuncture and trauma are confronted and articulated. Foremost in these memories of trauma are the experience of colonialism, the betrayal that came out of African independence and the continual battle to tame and appropriate modernity. The experience of modernity crystallises around key institutions and objects — Western education and the struggle over new languages (Kiswahili and English), the car, bottled beer, and foreign dances (soukous and *dombolo*). In this tension tradition emerges as a growing and changing topography rather than a consolidated pristine object. In the event, the strategies for

recouping memory are more than parodic categories, they are beacons of moral agency in the face of change. They are also political strategies that confront the impasses of the present by suggesting new possibilities and pluralities. The past is purposefully scanned, maybe as a way of resisting change (Thelen: 1125), but even more, to establish the thematic conventions of the popular music genre and to mediate moral crises. And memory is a useful ally in defining and confronting the present, not just in the sense of what is brought to the fore, but also because memory allows for amnesia, for deletions, eclipses, gaps and suppressions.

The sense of history that emerges from Kenyan popular music is held between romantic nostalgia on the one hand, and the reenactment of pain and trauma on the other. These varied accents provide a fairly complementary recap of the nature and purpose of individual and national memory and Kenyan popular music succeeds in asserting itself as a key constituent of public memory. Across the chasm of time and through memory, history emerges as one of the platforms of address from which contemporary artistes appeal to their audiences. Let us now see how the links between places and people creates the sense of geography that permeates popular song-texts and provides a radar with which audiences can negotiate the contours of contemporary urban existence.

CHAPTER FOUR

(RE)FIGURING THE CITY: LYRICAL MAPPINGS OF PLACES AND PEOPLE¹

What does it tell us about the "postcolonial condition" when, in a region with a predominantly rural population, the concerns of its writers are overwhelmingly urban?

(Roger Kurtz 2000:103)

In the previous chapter, I dwelt on the historical contexts of contemporary lyrics and demonstrated that (un)conscious memory work is one of the strategies through which contemporary Kenyan artistes seek audiences. In this chapter, I probe the geographical text(ualitie)s of contemporary popular songs by looking at how popular music conceptually constructs places — in the ways it mentions them within the song lyrics and depicts them in music videos — and also in the way that certain sounds incorporated in the songs become indicative of specific places. Undeniably, much contemporary Kenyan popular music generates various discourses of the capital city, Nairobi, and this chapter proceeds by showing how the relationship between cultural forms, like music, and places is symbiotic. Places help to shape cultural forms while cultural forms are in turn crucial in mediating our understandings of spaces and places (Connell and Gibson, 2003). The arguments in this chapter are premised on theoretical ideas of geographers and cultural theorists who view urban space as a product of social and cultural engineering to the extent that people shape the places around them just as much as places themselves influence social behaviour and cultural practice.

I use a number of contemporary songs — '4 in 1' (1999), '*Wasee Githurai*' (2002), 'Mona Lisa' (2002), '*Usiku wa Manane*' (2001), 'Nairobbery' (1999), and '*Tafsiri Hii*' (1998) — to illustrate the artistes' portrayal of the novel ways in which postcolonial Africans have inhabited the city of Nairobi; increasingly privileging pagan genius and the marginal

¹ Part of this chapter will appear under the title '(Re)Figuring The City: The Mapping Of Places And People In Contemporary Kenyan Popular Song Texts' in the collection *Essays On East African Popular Culture* forthcoming from Africa World Press.

spaces of Eastlands and beyond, while overturning architectural plans and other official discourses of the city. This (re)figuring of the city is achieved through what de Certeau (1998:156) terms the 'surreptitious creativities' on the margins, creativities that contain powerful legitimating practices of new urban existences. And because urban space in particular is very much a product of creative imagination, I also highlight the sites of desire that the lyrical artistes repeatedly bring into imaginary existence. Beyond tracing the spatial and socio-historical contexts surrounding these poeticised locations, I investigate 'the literary strategies through which the said locality is evoked' (Clifford, 1992: 97). Thus I delineate the characters that are sketched into the places, showing them to be ubiquitous as well as functional in the key ways that they inject specific characteristics onto the places that they frequent or inhabit. Ultimately, I emphasise the spatial senses in which contemporary Kenyan popular music succeeds in defining and shaping urban class differentiation in postcolonial Kenya.

4.1 Theorising Space

Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time on the contrary was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic.

(Foucault, 1980:70)

Popular music is a constant accompaniment in everyday existence. Via radio, television, through speakers in cars, lifts, at malls and even in our homes music fills out the spaces of silence. In this way music writes and revises our perceptions of the many spaces and places that we daily inhabit. Like other cultural productions, popular music emanates from within specified geographical locations, and debate over the culture of a particular people is necessarily bound by temporal as well as spatial considerations. In a sense, the relationship between cultural forms and places is symbiotic for places help to shape cultural forms, while cultural forms are in turn crucial in mediating 'our understandings of space and places' (Connell and Gibson, 2003:2).

My analysis of the (re)presentations of place in contemporary Kenyan song lyrics is guided by Michel Foucault's (1980) intermittent commitment to a resituating of

geography, of spatial terms, in the 'archaeology of knowledge'. It is also premised on Edward Said's (1995) formulation of 'Orientalism', which articulates the notion of invented geographies as part of a system of dominance. Though consciously committed to historicism, Foucault nonetheless embraces the idea of a critical practice that will henceforth project space, just as much as time, as key to the mediation of human existence. A spatial epistemology necessarily proceeds by recognizing that space, like time, exists freely in nature. The ways in which we fill up space are a matter of our own designs and consciousness, in the same way that we purposefully sketch out time with demarcations, details and events. In other words, and as Edward Soja (1989:136) would have it, we daily engage in 'the social production of space and the restless formation and reformation of geographical landscapes'. Whether we speak of the formation of national, provincial, regional or council boundaries, or we focus on the building of cities, highways, agricultural research stations or beach resorts, the fact is that we are consciously intervening in the perception and creation of space:

A group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call "the land of the barbarians". In other words, this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs" is a way of making geographical distinctions that *can* be entirely arbitrary (Said, 1995:54).

Clearly then, we make places into what they become, just as much as places can shape our perception of ourselves, other places and other peoples. Edward Said's *Orientalism* dramatises the extremities of geographical thinking. It shows how, in the case of Western perceptions of the Orient, over ambitious spatial imagination led to the smothering of a whole variety of social, linguistic, political and historical realities in place of staid and static portrayals of the whole area labeled "Orient". An area that was necessarily seen as a site of the exotic, the despotic, sensuous, cruel and so on. Said's study calls attention to the need to carefully limit the area under study, and also to inject approaches other than the purely geographical in the understanding of peoples. Advancing Gaston Bachelard's

(1964) argument about the way humanity endows spaces with certain values and attributes to these places key functions, experiences and connotations, Said (1995:55) says space 'acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here'. Said's approach of anchoring spatial imagination within other critical approaches, such as poetics, is echoed by both Foucault and Soja who are quick to point out that the injection of spatial consciousness into critical theory should not, for one, result in the denial of history. In actual fact, Soja urges a critical practice that will bear the 'triple dialectic of space, time, and social being' (137). This way, the whole notion of modernity will be more usefully problematised, not solely as an intrusion on and destruction of tradition, but as a complex reordering of the ways in which time and space relate.

It is worth noting that Said's work is hinged on the argument that the imaginative creation of the Orient was in large measure facilitated by a history of relations of domination, with the Orient forming the 'greatest and richest and oldest colonies' of Europe (1). This attention to relations of power vis-a vis spatial imagination is amplified in Foucault's postulations. Indeed, Foucault argues that, the 'spatialising description of discursive realities gives on to the analysis of related effects of power' (70-71). Just as Said demonstrates the colonial design that in a sense necessitated "Orientalism", so too must we pay attention to the reasons why, and the ways in which spaces are ordered and how they thereby reflect relations of inequality — landed owner/squatter, indigene/foreigner, insider/outsider, oppressor/oppressed. The ways in which spaces function in relation to other spaces is also key to unearthing these relations of power. Thus Foucault's notion of heterotopias: 'those singular spaces to be found in some given social spaces whose functions are different or even the opposite of others' greatly illumines the political economy of space and dramatises the indelible tie between space, social relations and discourses of power.

In 'Walking in the City', Michel de Certeau applies Foucault's approach of tying space to power relations and examines the city as a construct of power. De Certeau looks at city by-laws, plans, architectural designs and concept cities as part of the official discourses

of the city space and, therefore, as key components in the exercising of power. Within these official discourses of the city, however, there lie many other practices of urban existence that defy laid down structures and that contain powerful legitimating practices of the 'surreptitious creativities' (156) that proliferate on the margins. My own reading of place in song lyrics, and of the way lyrics document places, adopts de Certeau's thinking and moves away from notions of the ideal(ised) city to seek instead understandings of (alter)native urban practices. The deterioration of city structures and planning cannot, therefore, be viewed in negative terms that reside in the designs of official power structures. Instead, the idea is to concentrate on unearthing the life that is lived in the gaps between official practice/discourse; in the 'everyday practices of lived space, of the disquieting familiarity of the city' (157). In other words, I will be focusing on 'the city in a cultural context' (Agnew et al, 1984) and dramatizing the human agency that lends the city its subaltern rhythm and tempo. Reading the city in this way necessitates that one pays attention to modes of movement through the streets and neighbourhoods. How people move through locations — whether they walk or drive for instance, or whether they stick to named streets or alternatively, create their own walkways — is critical to the ways in which they can impact upon it, or as de Certeau says, to the ways in which they can spatialise the city rather than simply being flattened and totalised by it.

What Foucault, Soja, Said and de Certeau help us to appreciate is the fact that geographical space is as much of a man-made entity as history. But equally important, these scholars bring into clear focus the fact that there are many indicators that must be probed in seeking to understand the ways in which people shape places. Filling out both space and time is in part achieved by cultural engagement, and popular music makes soundtracks, it helps to map and define place, just as it marks and documents time. The geography of popular music (Connell and Gibson) that I am interested in, therefore, is first, a question of examining the places that popular music talks about, and the ways in which it represents those places. How a place is referred to in a song will not only tell us plenty about the people who live there, it will also affect the ways in which those very people relate to and live in that place. Talking of the sense of a place as Steven Feld (1996:91) reminds us actually entails not just seeing it and possibly smelling it. It is also

fundamentally about coming to recognise the sounds associated with that place. Acoustic experience of a place is, therefore, one way in which a song text can echo or represent a place. In the songs that I deal with, this acoustic experience is relayed through injecting the everyday sounds of an estate or a city street, the so-called street buzz,² onto the dialogue and theme of the song text.

4.2 Nairobi: 'Green City In The Sun' ³

The inclusion of Ndarlin P's '4 in 1' on Tedd Josiah's *Kenyan — the Second Chapter* is indicative of its being representative of the novel trends that Josiah has been promoting as part of the cultural reawakening of Kenya. More importantly for the concerns of this chapter, '4 in 1' is a very good example of the way sounds become representative of places. Perhaps the song's title is a reference to its multi-lingual composition, which can itself further be read as a metaphor for the unity in diversity that is a much sought after ideal in polyethnic and multiracial postcolonial Kenya. David Samper (2004:43) is right when he observes that Kenyan rappers are using ethnic languages as a 'revalorisation of the past' and to 'add an African flavor to rap'. Indeed, the resonance of Ndarlin P's art comes from his ability to mimic the polyethnic nation by rapping in Kiswahili that is spoken in 3 different accents (Kamba, Kalenjin, Indian) in addition to employing 5 distinctly different languages — Kiswahili, English, Sheng, Kamba and Gĩkũyũ. One could also argue that the title '4 in 1' refers to the 4 different identities that Ndarlin P performs in the song. First he is the combative *matatu* driver, then an inquisitive Asian, then a rapper — '*a gee from the westside, Nailovi*' (a rap master purportedly from Nairobi's Westside) and finally, Ndarlin P poses as an ardent suitor.

At the onset, '4 in 1' reconstructs the geography of Nairobi's Eastlands through a menacing *matatu* crew. The crew encounters an inquisitive Asian trader: '*kijana wewe*

² I am aware that the term street buzz can often mean rumours and indeed, even this particular meaning is applicable in describing the habitual sound and activity of Nairobi's places for as Alessandro Triulzi (1996:78) says of African cities in general, rumours are 'one of the new signs of contemporary Africa and its strategies of identity'.

³ The motto of the City of Nairobi since colonial times.

nani na unataka nini, ebeshte wewe nani unakaa kama jambazi?' (young man who are you, my friend who are you, you look like a rogue). The answer to this query comes across as a graphic spatial invocation of the driver's daily contact with the city's marginalised suburbs: '*mimi driver wa Umoja kule Kayole pamoja na Komarock*' (I am a (*matatu*) driver plying the route between Umoja, Kayole and Komarock). Umoja and Kayole are low-income high density residential estates within Embakasi constituency in North-east Nairobi. Umoja was a site and service USAID-sponsored Nairobi City Council project started in 1974. Being a site and service scheme, the developers put up the infrastructure, to wit, roads, sewer, street lighting, water and electric power. In addition, they built a kitchen and bathroom/toilet for each unit leaving each allottee (most of whom were lower level civil servants) to complete the house in his/her own time, along the lines of a project designated plan, by adding a sitting room and two bedrooms. But because allottees hired artisans of dubious qualifications, and because supervision and inspection were compromised, and later, utterly overlooked owing to tensions between the City Engineer and the Project Manager, Umoja lost its designed uniformity.⁴ Instead the estate took on eclectic designs, sizes and quality according to the whims and abilities of the allottees. For one, many residential units began to double up as commercial premises.⁵

Kayole was also a site and service scheme completed in the 1980s and provides another example of a housing project that, from the onset, steered away from the original plans to take on a shape and character that has been dictated by the owners of the housing units and their needs. Komarock, which is within the same Embakasi constituency, was completed in 1991. It was a turnkey mortgage housing scheme, meaning that occupants received a fully completed unit developed by Kenya Building Society, a subsidiary of Housing Finance Company of Kenya Limited. But much as Komarock was intended to be

⁴ Winnie Mitullah (1992:193) links these inappropriate standards to lack of affordability and concludes that what Government had initially designed as low-income housing was ultimately only affordable and attractive to middle-income groups as inflation continued to push up the cost of construction.

⁵ Kenneth King (1996) has demonstrated that one of the most striking aspects of Kenya's socio-economic fabric over the last 20 years is seen in the way the whole notion of *jua kali* has moved beyond the confines of the marginal trade associated with the urban sansculottes to become the trend for middle and lower-middle class citizens wishing to boost their otherwise inadequate "formal" earnings. Consequently all

a middle-class, medium density estate, since its inception, it has fallen prey to numerous unplanned extensions in contravention of all the planning, designs and city by-laws, thus resulting in phenomenal 'illegal densification' (Ochieng, 2001:1).

Ndarlin P's reference to all these city estates in '4 – in -1' echoes the cinematic technique of a camera zooming past a wide range of images. It quickly dispenses with the places even as it names them since the act of driving through the neighbourhoods is at once also an act of distancing as well as of engagement. It is a statement about transience, a kind of bird's eye-view of the place that refuses to connect with the places or furnish us with detail, but one that nonetheless echoes with authority acquired through lived experience. In essence, the driver makes a statement of denial as well as affiliation, he knows these urban spaces, identifies with them through the nature of his work even though he may not be domiciled there. Until the Traffic Act (Amendment) New Rules (2003) which outlined Government policy on public transport, *matatu* drivers belonged to the *jua kali* or informal sector.⁶ Again, it was the failure of local authorities to provide efficient transport networks to the city's later-day housing schemes that created this commercial lacuna in the private sector and which was readily covered by private enterprise.

Each of the neighbourhoods referred to in '4-in-1' lies in the greater Eastlands residential area of Nairobi comprising in the main, estates that were built in the 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s as turnkey mortgage company estates and some, as site and service projects with International funding. In a temporal sense, these neighbourhoods take on a secondary existence within the city. They came into being at a time when the services provided by the local authority — the Nairobi City Council — had deteriorated badly on account of petty competitive politics and graft.⁷ To this extent, the 'spatial legacies' (Robins,

manner of businesses, from school tuition to hairdressing and motor garages have been set up in the city's residential and commercial zones alike.

⁶ A 1972 ILO report of Kenyan employment described its informal sector as the source of livelihood for a large percentage of the urban population and categorised taxi drivers as belonging to this group of low wage small-scale occupation.

⁷ Godfrey Anyumba (2003) reflects on the governance problems of the Nairobi City Council and observes the link between low revenue collection and poor service delivery. Executive interference exacerbated the problem. For instance in March, 1983 President Moi dissolved the Nairobi City Council, suspended the Mayor of Nairobi and in place of the elected council, appointed a City Commission whose mandate was to

2000:409) in these latter-day estates are metonyms of disorder, need and neglect.⁸ Many of these neighbourhoods lack basic facilities such as street lighting, paved pathways, recreational spaces, refuse disposal and other social services. Security is bad and organised surveillance by the police is erratic and unreliable. No distinctions are made between residential zones and commercial ones, all flow into one another in a seamless stream of haphazard spatial exploitation. Looked at in terms of urban practice (Agnew et al, 1984; de Certeau 1998) these neighbourhoods are the hallmark of (alter)native enterprise, reflecting much local ingenuity and improvisation. The informal nature of the protagonist's job in '4-in1' is therefore reenacted in the areas he daily traverses where the dominant architectural scheme speaks of *jua kali* — informality, bold self-help initiatives and an utter lack of official or institutional support. As the lyrics drive us through these neighbourhoods, the emphasis may be on the speed of the wheezing *matatu*, and detailed graphic images of the neighbourhoods are blurred into a continuous flow of built up environment. It is an environment that speaks with familiarity to the driver even as he avoids prolonged engagement with it. Indeed, the driver's frivolity is itself an offshoot of the irreverence with which spatial order has been disregarded.

In the third verse however, the protagonist's gaze does linger on two residential areas – Buru Buru and Mukuru (wa Njenga):

*Nie ndigikuhenia
ati "gwitu ni Buru Buru'
nyumete ghetto noma
iria ya inda
ya mukuru*⁹

I won't cheat you
saying "I come from Buru Buru"
I come from a troubled slum
the Industrial Area one,
Mukuru

run council affairs. This Commission's performance was oft-times compromised by shady financial deals and manipulation by the Executive.

⁸ Marc Howard Ross's (1973) study of Nairobi's Mathare Valley provides a concrete study of the possibilities and levels of social and political organization in informal urban settlements and shows that lack of political will and intervention compromises the ability of squatters to translate a sense of community into positive change in spatial habitation and provision of physical infrastructure and social services.

⁹ I have reproduced the lyrics as they appear on the album without the proper Gikũyũ orthography.

¹⁰ The word "Buru Buru" is a corruption of the Maasai word "Emburbul" which loosely means a marshy place. However, it is the area to the far east of the estate - where Doonholm and Tena estate now stand that previously formed swampy ground. The area where Buru Buru Estate was built was vast grassland plain.

At this point, it is interesting to note how the protagonist as ardent suitor introduces himself to his *amorata* through a passionate defense of his home. And both his person and his home are, of necessity, identified by a negation of Nairobi's more affluent neighbourhoods: '*Nie ndigikuhenia ati "gwisu ni Buru Buru" ' (I won't cheat you that I am from Buru Buru). Significant too is the fact that this negation is uttered by way of a disdainful sneer, witnessed in the mocking tone of childish mimicry that is meant to imitate the snobbish ways of those from the middle-class quarters of Buru Buru.¹⁰ This aggressively uttered mimicry is perhaps intended to rule out the possibility of interpreting the suitor's negation of Buru Buru being an instance of his being apologetic or even ashamed of his own background. Actually, the mocking tone lends pride of place, and even a measure of authority, to the next line when he unequivocally declares that he comes from '*ghetto noma*'.*

The derisive attitude to Buru Buru that we hear in '4-in-1' arises from multiple socio-historical nuances. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the developed part of Nairobi stopped, on the eastern part, just short of these grassland plains. Eastern Nairobi, or Eastlands, as it is more commonly known, was in the segregationist colonial era designated as one of the African and, therefore, low-income areas. By contrast, the more leafy and greener Westlands and a good part of the North (Muthaiga) was reserved for the favoured white community whilst the South was generally for Asians. Roger Kurtz (1998:77) explains that the development of

Nairobi offered a perfect opportunity for colonial authorities to experiment with urban planning. Nairobi's design was the result of two predominant and not necessarily conflicting imperatives; on the one hand to create a model of the Garden City, a concept that was becoming important in British urban planning at the end of the nineteenth century; and on the other hand to create an essentially European city in the African setting based on the South African model.

Frank Furedi (1973) traces the history of "native" occupation of the city of Nairobi explaining that prior to 1950 Africans were expected to provide their own housing in designated 'Native Locations' (276). Furedi further argues that this colonial "colour bar" that governed residential areas in the city was 'partly legalized by more than 100 ordinances and was partly social'.¹¹ He underlines that the growth of haphazard African settlements arose from the steady marginalisation of Africans in towns, and, as Roger Kurtz (1998:78) and Winnie Mitullah (1992:186) also show, from the widely held view that Africans were merely temporary residents of the city. In any event, the comparatively low wages that were paid out to Africans made it impossible for them to rear families in the city and presumably, they too consequently thought of the city as a place of isolation, segregation and, ideally, of temporary residence. It was not until 1939, Kurtz points out, that a 'deliberate policy of government paternalism' (79) was designed and 'the first housing projects for Africans in Ziwani, Kaloleni, and Pumwani', all confined to Eastlands, were started.¹² Even then, the infamous pass laws strictly controlled the movement of Africans into the city. After independence in 1963, and all through the 1970s, Eastlands broadly comprised two parts. One was the planned and government developed sector, for instance Ofafa, Jericho, Jerusalem, Shauri Moyo, Ziwani, Mbotela, Kaloleni, Pumwani and the other estates which today make up Makadara constituency. The other was the then small, unplanned and undeveloped area of informal settlement around Mathare, which in later years was to grow exponentially to become the sprawling slum that it is today.

Chronologically, Kimathi (1969), Harambee (1973) and Buru Buru (1975) estates were the first middle-income residential areas to be sited in this part of Nairobi; an area that was previously reserved for low-income groups and which correspondingly carried small dwelling units, with shared compounds and sometimes even shared ablutions. Buru Buru Estate is bounded to the immediate south by Jogoo Road and still further south by a long

¹¹ Kurtz (1998:78) reports: 'The early planning commissions — the Williams Report of 1907, the Simpson Report of 1913, and the Feetham Report of 1926 — recommended explicitly racial segregation as the basis for city planning'.

¹² Mitullah (1992:186) argues that it was in fact the colonial policy of providing African men with 'bed space rooms in segregated areas...[that] set a precedence for poor housing for low-income groups in urban areas'.

stretch of Railway land followed by Industrial Area. To the south-west is the low-income/slum neighbourhood of Makadara Estate, and to Buru Buru's west, in fact adjacent to Buru Buru Phase 3, lie Jericho, Lumumba (low-income) and the middle-income Harambee Estate. Further afield to the north and north-east are low-income Kariobangi and Dandora estates. To the east Buru Buru is bordered by Outer Ring Road. This arterial road, and the ones that jut out of it such as Jogoo Road, Juja Road and Kangundo Road,¹³ takes one through perhaps the widest collection of low-income and informal settlement areas in East Africa. Not surprisingly, the more plentiful and comparatively spacious rooms, the enclosed compounds, and the provisions for car-parks in Kimathi, Harambee and Buru Buru estates have always stood out like sore thumbs amidst the smaller and crowded holdings that previously defined the Eastlands area and gave it the rough and congested character and identity that it holds to this day. This (dis)location makes these estates, particularly the vast Buru Buru, stand out as iconoclastic, as Foucault's heterotopias whose spatial practices sit in counterpoint to those of its immediate neighbours. And although middle-class estates (Doonholm, Fedha, Avenue, Tena, Continental) have since proliferated along Outer Ring Road, Buru Buru still remains the primary index for middle-class disjuncture in Eastlands. Its residents have had to live with the Sheng label for middle-class snobbery and for the elite — *mabarbie*¹⁴ —regularly being touted at them by their less privileged neighbours. We hear this same disparaging reference to elite urbanites (*'nie ndiri kabarbie ta kambuyu puff daddy, no tikwenda gwakwa ni mbecha atari daddy'* (I am not elite like that old man Puff Daddy,¹⁵ but it isn't my fault, it is just that my father has no money)) just before Ndarlin P the suitor utters his rejection of Buru Buru.

It is all of these spatial and socio-historical contexts of disjuncture, dramatic architectural contrasts, class tensions, and neighbourhood rivalries that coalesce around '4 in 1's

¹³ Along Jogoo Road lie Makadara, Ofafa Kunguni, Maringo, Kaloleni, Muthurwa amongst other high density low-income estates. Along Juja Road is the expansive Mathare slum and the vast Eastleigh division, which has gradually descended into a highly populous low-income area. Komarock estate is on Kangundo Road. See Appendix (v).

¹⁴ Though it seems to connote the popular Barbie dolls, the term as Chege Githiora (2002:178) argues is more likely derived from the biblical reference to the Babylonians who were more privileged than the plebes.

¹⁵ A famous American Hip Hop producer and artiste, who now goes by the name P. Diddy.

sneered disclaimer of Buru Buru. It is a disclaimer that shuns perceived middle-class pretensions while at the same time vaguely concealing the dreams and desires of Nairobi's low-income and slum dwellers whose signifier of material success is a residence in Buru Buru. But it is also true that there is palpable pride and appropriation in the protagonists declaration of his origins in Mukuru (wa Njenga) slums, next to the city's Industrial Area.¹⁶ Mukuru wa Njenga is one of the many informal settlements that have strategically mushroomed around Nairobi's Industrial Area, sheltering a large reservoir of unskilled and semi-skilled workers as well as thousands of hopeful unemployed. The other slums in the vicinity are: Kayaba, Kisii Village, Fuata Nyayo, Sinai, Langa Langa, Mariguini, kwa Reuben, Kahirira and Commercial. In the 1960s, Mukuru was the Nairobi City Council garbage dump, and since slum shelters are largely built from waste material, the site easily lent itself to informal settlement. This history of informal settlement reverberates with new import when one takes into cognisance the etymology of the word *mukuru*. It is a Gikuyu word meaning 'a ditch', and there is a commonplace idiomatic phrase — *gukira mukuru wa thina* (to cross the poverty line). In the case of Mukuru wa Njenga slums, the leap across to Industrial Area and on to the coveted Buru Buru is supposed to be the turning point. It rarely ever comes though and invariably the hopefuls daily cross back into the slum, into a designated poverty zone.

As the ardent suitor in '4-in-1' imagines a weekend date with Njeri, one cannot help noticing the lack of geometrical symmetry, the haphazard structural layout in the sites of the proposed outing. He imagines guiding his intended past shanty houses built of iron sheets and on to a low budget food outlet. With pride and a vaguely disguised claim to authenticity, he shows off the socioeconomic activities of the slum — earthy food outlets offering ethnic cuisine. The emphasis is on the simplicity, the humble cost of the indigenous menu in contrast to the pretentious 'pizzas and hot dogs' from the high-class outlets far away from the slums. Throughout, the song echoes a definite preoccupation with food. In verse one, there is the bag of *mahindi* (maize) that the driver solicits from

¹⁶ In verse two, the master rapper, is introduced as coming from Sinai, another slum bordering Industrial Area. But he goes on to brag that he is 'a gee from the Westside Nailovi', which is clearly meant as a mocking taunt to imitate the territorial rivalries between the East Side (Bronx, New York) and West Side (Compton, California) American hip hop artistes (Murray Forman 2000).

the Asian, then in verse two, there is talk of the street smart Kavindu whose lucky catch of a white man guarantees her a meal of rice. Then in verse three, we listen to the lengthy menu of the ghetto market's cuisine. This preoccupation with food can very well be read as an amplification of the hunger and desire that defines existence in marginal locations. It is a hunger in physical and material terms, but also in psycho-social terms; a desire to gain entry and advance, or even just the desire to be recognised and accepted on one's own terms. The imaging of these desires reveals some slippage in the song's reconfiguring of marginal spaces since it works within officially defined discourses of slums as sites of perpetual need and longing.

Indeed, the shrillness of the desire for recognition and space is apparent in the dominant motif of contest along which '4 in 1' is structured. There are three key sites of contest. First, there is the rapper's boast in the introduction:

<i>Wakati tunasema si[si] ni wanoma</i>	when we say we are troublesome
<i>Sio kusema tuko na homa</i>	it doesn't mean we have a flu
<i>Mimi siwezi kutwangana ati niku s[h]oot</i>	I can't fight if it means I shoot you
<i>Nikusomoa rungu na kutandika kichwa</i>	I'll get my knobkerrie, hit your head
<i>Mpaka unatoa nundu</i>	until you have a bump
<i>We got stuff that is hundred times nicer than the bestis</i>	
<i>Yoo! Even Tupac Mashakur and S[h]aquille Onyi</i>	
<i>Including Osam Bin wa madeni [of the debts] knows this</i>	

The promise of lyrical prowess is heard in the structuring of witty rhymes and puns. The humour is advanced further by the naïve baseness of the protagonist who necessarily interprets a rapping contest to mean physical combat. To dramatise his mastery over internationally famous stars Shaquille Oneal (basketballer) and Tupac Shakur (hip hop artiste) the multi-faced Ndarlin P invokes international terrorist, Osama Bin Laden to authenticate his claim to lyrical prowess, a prowess which then becomes the subject of the song's chorus.

In verse one we see a continuation of verbal eloquence when the inquisitive Asian engages the protagonist, as *matatu* driver, in a heated exchange of insults. The exchange

culminates in the second instance of contest when the driver threaten physical violence: '*naweza kukuchana hivyo wacha tukanana*' (I can beat you up so you'd better stop hurling insults). Lastly, there is the romantic contest in which Ndarlin P, who is trying to win Njeri's heart, tears apart perceived neighbourhood rivals continually referring to them as cowards and weaklings who can even be beaten up by a girl (*'no kihurwo ni muiritu'*). In the staging of all these contests Ndarlin P, in his various subaltern identities, is always framed as the only credible victor. The motif of contest, and particularly resorting to physical violence, echoes very succinctly age-old attitudes and tensions between Nairobi's *mabarbie* and *ulolo*, the uncouth youth from lower income Eastlands. In these depressed neighbourhoods, challenges — both social and economic — are invariably met and resolved through combat, and not surprisingly it is Eastlands that has to date produced virtually all of Kenya's world class boxers.¹⁷

Much as '4 in 1' rings with many official discourses of subaltern existence, it does nonetheless inject many moments of the untold and often ignored aspects of life on the margins. Key to this display of the banal is the promise of romance between Njeri and Ndarlin P. In essence, the romance template upon which this geography of Nairobi is written is two-fold. It is about Njeri whose heart the driver turned suitor is trying to win, and it is also about the idyllic rewriting of the slum that he makes. Based on the commonplace notions of the slum as a site of abject hunger, privation and violence, romantic love might be imagined to be hopelessly at variance with the space in question. But in both of the instances of romance in '4 in 1', there is the determined effort to escape marginality, to refute the official city discourses of socio-economically challenged spaces as places of fear, abject poverty and utter misery. In their place, the song projects images of innovative provision of basic services, education from the school of life, relaxation and romantic love.

¹⁷ Aside from the obvious physical aggression that is nurtured in spaces of want and spatial congestion, colonial authorities in Kenya had established social halls with all manner of sports and recreational facilities for the residents. Amongst these were the boxing and training halls at Pumwani, Kaloleni, "Dallas" Muthurwa, Jericho and Kariakor. Steve Waruingi Kenya's first international medallist (Bronze, 1970 Commonwealth Games), Steve Muchoki (Gold medallist 1974 King's Cup in Bangkok) and Robert

Much of the power of this song comes from its consistent application of a comic tone. Defying the emotive anger that normally governs rap, and ironically subverting the contest motif that structures the song, '4-in-1' resituates marginal spaces in the popular imagination through humour. Take for instance the image of emptyheadedness that is captured in the insult '*mudomo ndio kubwa kama bakuli ya jela*' (your mouth is as big as a prison's feeding bowl). Its comic force comes from the irony embedded in the commonplace knowledge that Kenyan prisoners are starved, fed on rations that were formulated in colonial times.¹⁸ Another instance of humour is seen in the deflationary technique that Ndarlin P the suitor employs to discredit his rivals: '*na muchene nugwo manenehirie na tunua twingi, nye-nye-nye propaganda ta Kanyingi*' (they peddle a lot of gossip with big mouths, yapping propaganda like [Kuria] Kanyingi). This onomatopoeic mimicry (*nye-nye-nye*) overtly critiques the political sycophancy (former) President Moi's system of patronage engendered, by singling out the famed tactics of one Kuria Kanyingi.¹⁹ Ultimately, '4 in 1' succeeds through the conviction with which it evokes lived experience in Nairobi's marginalised spaces as something that is real, that has its quotidian and even bright moments. They are shown to be places where people laugh and cry, and from which comic relief can be generated to offer respite from the uptight pretensions and social vertigo induced by the middle class and its posturing.

4.3 Walking in the Margins Vs. Walking in the City

In Section 2.1 I argued that artistes sometimes cast themselves as characters within the song text in order to lend greater credibility to their subjectmatter. In what came to be seen as their advertisement of a little-known peri-urban neighbourhood, nominees at the 7th Kora All Africa Music Awards, Googs and Vinnie Banton (Moffat Omari and Vincent Ihaji) captured the attention of Kenyans with their enthusiastic cry '*wasee tumetoka Githurai*' (people we hail from Githurai). The song's chorus amounted to an audacious,

Wangila Napunyi the first and only Kenyan Olympic Gold medallist (Seoul, 1988) all grew into their careers from these Eastlands boxing halls.

¹⁸ See Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1980) discussion of the attempts by prisoners, in the days when Ngugi was detained at Kamiti Maximum Security prison, to have these meagre rations revised.

almost radical, privileging of the margins of the city as a major site of fun and recreation and by a happy coincidence it remained a dance-hall hit for much of 2002 thereby effectively asserting the place of peri-urban youth in Nairobi's entertainment circuits. Full of pride of place and origins the artistes effusively sing:

*Na wasee tumetoka Githurai
Twa come kukupa rhymes zingine dry
Tuki fry mpaka MCs kama jai, mpaka rapper
Ikiwa zimeshika sema
'my, oh my'*

People we come from Githurai
We come to bring you great rap
We beat MCs like Jai, even rappers
If (our rhymes) are good, say
'my, oh my'

*Come together we can do this together
Take your time we're staying here forever
Ona [see] Mr. Lenny, Mr. Googs, Vinnie Banton
Hepi na mabeshte kule chini Githurai*

Having fun with friends down in
Githurai

Githurai is a fast-growing informal, middle to low-income peri-urban settlement 16 km east of the city centre and adjacent to the sprawling Eastlands. Being on the margins of the city it carries all of the advantages of the lower land rates and cheaper standard of living that makes peri-urban areas so attractive to would-be urban residents. The proximity to Eastlands gives Githurai a typically urban culture which is accentuated by all the verve and spontaneity of low-income settlements. Apart from the patchwork mix of commercial enterprises and residential dwellings, the area teems with the violence and insecurity that is alluded to in the song, and graphically portrayed in its music video. Githurai is shown to be polluted by a gun culture and by the degeneration of its youth into desperation and violent crime

*I say something going wrong in our world
People take something
So it's impressionable
And lots of gun
When guns forever gone
Are we living so high
That we can't see*

¹⁹ Previously a humble inspector of motor vehicles, Kanyingi was catapulted to the position of Director of Motor Vehicle Inspection on account of pandering to, and being an errand boy for, Moi. Used for the dissemination of propaganda by Moi, Kanyingi made a bid for parliament on a KANU ticket in 1992.

*Now I admit this suffering shows
Lord, I look upon a man
I'm free....*

Clearly, and as the music video dramatises, the spectacle of violence constantly hangs over the song's deep commitment to the pursuit of pleasure in Githurai. Images of neighbourhood graffiti, idle youth, guns and wildly driven *matatus*, ferrying passengers to Githurai, dominate the music video coloured with the distinctive TV aerials of novel *jua kali* designs that typify the Githurai and Zimmerman²⁰ skyline. In fact, it is possible to argue that the partying and jubilation of '*hepi na mabeshte kule chini Githurai*' is merely an interlude in a life of serious threats of violence and grave moral pressures. The song attempts to subvert the recurring images of violence and insecurity by invoking a rather stark sexual grammar as one of the pockets of imagined leisure which permeate this space:

<i>Whose got the biggest appetite for Kenyan ladies? Madame hu vaa thongs wakijua they're wearing tights Madame hu vaa shorts, silky skirts with no high heels Ni [its] Mr Googs</i>	Girls wear thongs when they know they're wearing tight skirts Girls wear shorts
--	---

But there are material restrictions that persistently stand in the way of all these objects of desire, so that seeing or imagining them is one thing, but having them quite the other:

<i>Stupid MCs are still asking Githurai beshtes [friends] What you thinking boys, Googs afford this? That's, that's that's a lie. I'm a simple crazy guy toka kule [from] Githurai And if I had the dough Ninge kuwa nime buy fries Au sio [isn't it] Mr. Sly?</i>	I would have bought chips
--	---------------------------

One of the strengths of '*Wasee Githurai*' comes from the way it constantly seeks alternatives out of this quagmire of need and insecurity that is so endemic to life in marginal spaces.

²⁰ Zimmerman neighbours Githurai to the West.

*For real hapa Kenya,
msee, stori huwanga hivi
Shika shika mic karibu MCs
jenga CV
Believe me, this just had to be on TV
And other radio stations
They wanna play my CDs
Excuse me Mr. Joe
You really don't have to pay me
Just air my song
And let, let it, let it play.*

Truly, here in Kenya
man, this is the story
Grab a microphone, invite MCs
build a CV (repertoire)

Rather than wallow in disappointment and desire, the protagonists reveal a street smartness, a keen understanding of the way the Kenyan socio-economic fabric, and not just life in marginal Githurai, functions. They project musical engagement as a site of freedom, as a space within which to overcome the temptation to fall into crime, and as a legitimate way to seek recognition and come away from the margins. And the inequalities and the pitfalls of the Kenyan music industry that I discussed in Chapter One are echoed in the songs lyrics and their subtle reference to hustling producers and DJs. In effect, and as the lyrics of '*Wasee Githurai*' intimate, the engagement with music pays not in monetary terms, but more in terms of opening new spaces of expression, untainted by the violence that dictates social relations in this place of vicious exploitation.

But more than anything else '*Wasee Githurai*' is a rallying call for youth. For those who are strangers to Githurai, it succeeds in effectively whipping up their curiosity and creating a desire to know these new spaces in the city. And although the poetic lyrics may be far more effusive than the actual reality of existence in the place is, residents of Githurai are made to feel they are leading a credible urban life and that even they are enviable masters of artistic expression. The song suggests rewards for these artistic maestros, but we notice how these rewards are steeped in traditionally gendered notions of "success".

*Okay I'm called Googs
and I come from Inner Core
I mean, and that's where
na flash MCs ndani choo*

[a section within Githurai]

I flash all the MCs in the toilet

[beat the MCs at the rapping game]

*Get it, get it, get it right, yoo, I'm on
That's why the fly (sophisticated) ladies
Wako (are) busy on the floor*

Repeatedly, the song's focus is on this desire to impress the ladies, on a reading of self and place that is dominated by the pursuit of leisure, which is necessarily conceived as nights of endless cavorting with the ladies:

*When should we say,
Let me see your hands up, baby
Hii ni remix sawa,
kwa mamanzi ni sawa*

this is a great remix
fit for all the beautiful girls.

4.3.1 Of Local Mona Lisas

This persistent reading of place through a stark sexual grammar finds even greater resonance in Deux Vulture's 'Mona Lisa', a track on the same *Ogopa I* (2002) album that features '*Wasee Githurai*'. By contrast, 'Mona Lisa' poeticises the Central Business District, the very heart of the city of Nairobi. The focus is the prestigious Mama Ngina Street, previously known as Queens Way in colonial Kenya and, at independence, renamed after the first lady of independent Kenya.

*Naamka kumekucha
Napita Mama Ngina
Nasikia eh kokoriko
Chukua
Baada ya muda naona
Dame wa kisure
Expensive kind of looking
Utathani ametua
Wacha nikwambie
Dame alikuwa amevaa
A black stretcher
A blue silky top
and a pair of black sketchers
an African queen,
a rare kind of species none of you has ever seen.*

I wake up, dawn has come
I pass Mama Ngina [Street]
I hear [sound of a cock crowing]
Take [sound of a coin being dropped]
After a while I see
A smart/confident lady

You'd imagine she flew [in from abroad]
Let me tell you
The lady was wearing

Clearly the protagonist's choice of walking this street creates the opportunity for him to take note of a lot of fine details. Notice the juxtapositioning of Mama Ngina Street, the

sound of a cock crowing that precedes the rap lyrics and which is subsequently imitated in the rap, followed by the jingle of coins dropping onto some surface. Some of the sounds being used to typify this busy city street dramatise the differentiations and incongruities of postcolonial African life. The Central Business District of Nairobi, and particularly Mama Ngina Street, carries all the prestige of the originally planned Green City. But now the signs of its domestication, of its gradual absorption into the local urban practices typical of economically depressed locales is apparent. First, the age-old signal of daybreak echoes a tension between the economic survival tactics employed by ingenious city dwellers and the documented city by laws which forbid the rearing of domestic animals in certain zones of the city. Next we note the jingle of dropping coins that indicates the presence of beggars domiciled on the street, and into whose strategically placed bowls merciful pedestrians distractedly toss their offerings. The signs of postcolonial incongruity abound, for it is along this same street now hosting the hungry homeless that the expensively clad Mona Lisa emerges. Looking like one fresh from a shopping trip abroad, she appropriately echoes all that is modern and material on this street which boasts a number of top class clothing outlets, some of which are international chains. Just as much as those songs that focus on city margins, 'Mona Lisa' too becomes a testament of the way cultural forms can reproduce capitalist spatiality.

The description of Mona Lisa as an 'African queen' is paralleled alongside the domesticating sound of cockcrow. This is obviously aimed at localizing her beauty, even though her adornments stand as the epitome of the latest in Western fashion trends and, therefore, work to mirror the dominance of Western aesthetics in local up-market places. The street itself defines both Mona Lisa and the protagonist who lusts after her. Some of the material trappings of modern existence that are sold on Mama Ngina Street are reflected in the adornments of this 'rare kind of species'. She is then turned into an object of male desire and fulfillment symbolically suggesting the African male's perpetual hankering after the things of modernity even as native enterprise persists and encroaches on previously modernised spaces. And there are clear discourses of power and control that go with walking Mama Ngina Street and with the protagonist's romantic involvement with Mona Lisa. This is seen in the tensions between Western capital and the encroaching

local initiative to define both the people who walk this street, and the street itself. And in this tension the ugly side of Western capitalism is briefly dramatised in the oblique reference to the beggar on the street. It is a reference whose very covert manner — a distractedly verbalised '*chukua*' (take) against the sound of the hurriedly tossed coin — is symptomatic of the ways in which postcolonial nations have only paid lip-service to the growing masses of have-nots. Secondly, one notes the articulation of control in the way the protagonist boasts of his hold over Mona Lisa: '*wazee kila siku wana uliza, dawa gani nilifanya mpaka aka chiba*' (men keep asking me what magic potion I spun so that she could succumb to me). And it is not as if the reference to love potions and charms here necessarily signals the survival of traditional practices. Indeed, it may well be that the protagonist's hold on Mona Lisa is precisely derived from his material ability to afford her the pleasures of modern life. The evidence for this kind of deduction comes from the protagonist's insistence on '*wacha nikupe raha, mtoto ya kiKenya*' (Kenyan beauty let me treat you to leisure, to the good life). Modern existence has its own set of romantic charms, defined in material terms and as powerful as traditional love potions. If modern men resort to material displays to exercise control over today's women, they seem to interpret women's power over them as singularly coming from the way women use their physical bodies. Thus Mona Lisa's seductive power crystallises around her walk: '*cheki Mona Lisa anaviyo tingisa, mimi nina baki nime jazzika*' (look at the way Mona Lisa swings, it leaves me utterly entranced).

And yet, one can further argue, Mona Lisa is also the object of another form of control — that imposed on her by the dictates of fashion which prescribe to her what is "in" and what is outdated. Walking Mama Ngina Street, this historical sanctioned street of modernity and liberation now seems to carry certain confinements brought on by this need to fit in with the fashionable dress code. There is, therefore, an underlying tension between liberation and empowerment on this street. The street itself gives Mona Lisa a nearly magical charm and much as she is herself commodified by its spaces, she in turn is bestowed by the very space with a capacity to enchant and control. Again, by deliberately naming her Mona Lisa, Deux Vultures subvert a Western aesthetic icon for local exigencies insisting on reading the spaces she inhabits as the very ones that define the

beauty of the 'African queen'. Still, though the space being inhabited is a local one, it somehow still retains all the aura of its colonial design and continues to enforce aesthetic standards from another locale, which necessarily defines just how that space is to be inhabited. This is seen in part in the way the experience of walking Mama Ngina Street automatically opens the protagonist's mind to seek after other sites of glamour, and of the consumption of leisure. And given the layered association between the local and the Western this flight of fancy is imagined in a language that connotes exoticism and sophistication to the local audience: '*Ca ve vous parlez Francais? ...Niku peleke Casablanca, Mombasa, Roasters, Salsa come to my kasa*' (Do you speak French?...I'll take you to Casablanca, Mombasa, Roasters, Salsa [dancing] come to my den).²¹ Walking the Central Business District of Nairobi, it is intimated, exposes one to a culturally complex modernity and its things of glamour.

4.3.2 Thugs And Conmen

Arguably, much of Eric Wainaina's work on the album *Sawa Sawa* is dedicated to a (re)figuring of the nation along several templates and this will be the subject of Chapter Six. For now, however, it is worth noting that one particular song on this album, '*Usiku wa Manane*', limits its engagement with a national cultural and moral ethos to a very localised experience. Its depiction of the streets of Nairobi is dominated by metaphors of fear and insecurity.

*Hebu shika maarifa
Kama wewe mgeni
mjini huu wa taiifa
Hizo pesa ufiche
Na huo mzigo uushike
Unapofika huko
kibanda cha Akamba
usikawie
Wenyeji wa Nairobi
hawafiki mjini
usiku wa manane*

You had better style up
if you are a visitor
in this capital city
hide that money
and hang onto that bag
when you get to
Akamba bus-stand
don't delay
residents of Nairobi
never go home in the
dead of night.

²¹ Casablanca and Roasters are popular clubs in Nairobi; Mombasa the national hub of recreation and tourism.

Nairobi is at once a place that fosters deep fears and anxiety, one where warnings such as this song issues must be announced to all neophytes and visitors:

<i>Wasiojua wanapewa ujuzi</i>	The uninitiated are given advice
<i>Wasiojua</i>	Those who don't know
<i>Wanaowinda huamka jioni</i>	Those who hunt rise in the evening

Depicted as hostile to all newcomers, unwelcoming and treacherous, Nairobi can only be described as a city teeming with thieves and conmen. From the street-smart youth who lend a hand at a cost, to pickpockets at bus stops and the more daring thugs in the city estates, this city is full of deceit:

<i>Kama we mwenye gari</i>	If you own a car
<i>mjini huu wa taifa</i>	in this capital city
<i>Motokaa ikikwama</i>	If the car stalls
<i>Lazima ujue uta chota</i>	You must pay up something
<i>Msaada wa bure huwa na bei</i>	Free help is very costly

Clearly there is a specific practice for inhabiting the city, rules that must be obeyed and space that must be given to those who have long acquired the air of controlling Mafia warlords:

<i>Hasa ikiwa Friday</i>	Especially on Friday
<i>Usiwanyime pesa zao za pombe</i>	Don't deny them their money for a drink
<i>usiku wa manane</i>	in the dead of night
<i>Nausifike huko mtaani</i>	And don't go to the estates
<i>kama hujulikani</i>	if you are unknown there
<i>Utauwacha mshahara wa mwezi</i>	You will lose a whole month's pay
<i>usiku wa manane</i>	in the dead of night

It is as if the segregation policies that initially shaped the city of Nairobi persist unabated. Only that now, they are no longer the product of racial discrimination, they are instead fostered by yawning economic disparities that are compounded by eroded morality. This is the Nairobi that constantly locks its doors on the poor, relegating them to its periphery, and some of them to a life of crime. This Nairobi is governed by a logic of protecting the interests — political and economic — of just a few and it is these imbalances in the administration of security and justice that have accelerated crime in the city. In many

ways, '*Usiku wa Manane*', parallels the depiction of 'urban fears' that one finds in a lot of Kenyan popular fiction (Kurtz 1998).

The kind of shadowy underworld characters Wainaina alludes to in '*Usiku wa Manane*' are sketched out in finer detail in many of the songs on K-South's album, *Nairobi* (2002). The title track with its self-propelling clever neologism that captures the moral and economic character of the capital city was first released as a single in 1999. It is graphic in its representation of merciless thugs and in fact, one of the protagonists on the song 'Nairobi' is a criminal who details his activities somewhat unapologetically:

*With no substantial financial income at all
See some of us would rather go rob than stay in stalls²²
Some of us would rather break laws and take yours
Duck tape your mouth shut in case you make noise
Like making full grown men cry like little boys
Nairobi, wake up with your TV missing
Somebody's on a mission to make you the next victim
Better listen or you'll be the next victim, yeah*

The situation is not made any easier for city residents by the many 'corrupt cops', who have turned into criminals. The song urges street-smartness:

<i>Nairobi kuna machizi</i>	There are many crazy/connish people in Nairobi
<i>Chunga mafisi</i>	watch out for those policemen
<i>Zitaku dishi ukiwa mumbichi</i>	they'll eat you up if you're naive
<i>Ubaki uchi</i>	you'll be left naked
<i>Kisha utawekwa</i>	afterwards you'll be thrown
<i>kwa booti ya Msubishi</i>	into the boot of a Mitsubishi
<i>Maombi kisha mazishi na makasisi</i>	Prayers, then your funeral, and priests

Just as in 'Nairobi', so too in 'Mr. Policeman' is police harassment projected as a far worse form of torture and debasement than the activities of thugs with 'no substantial financial income'. K-South's indictment of 'corrupt cops' is harsh, and their various

²² This reference to stalls may not be restricted to describing cramped housing quarters in poor neighbourhoods, it may be also be a reference to the tiny informal trading outlets that I discussed in Chapter One (fn 42).

references to them — '*fisi*'²³, '*karao*' 'corrupt cops', reflect the uncomplimentary street view of law enforcement agents as a hungry, unscrupulous lot. In 'Mr. Policeman', hapless youth desperately plead their innocence once they run into policemen who harass them for all sorts of contrived offenses.

<i>umefanya hatia</i>	you have committed an offense
<i>kuranda taoni</i>	loitering in town,
<i>barabarani</i>	on the road, without clear purpose
<i>mtoto wa mdosi</i>	being a rich man's child
<i>kuvuta bhangi</i>	smoking marijuana

Apart from the unlawful beatings they get from these policemen, the unfortunate youth are repeatedly threatened with confinement in police cells unless they can produce '*chai na majani*' (tea with tea leaves), a colloquial way of asking for a hefty bribe. The young boys know they are up against the impossible: '*tumeanguka kwa mtego*' (we have fallen into a trap), and that negotiating their way out of it requires both tact and ingenuity. They continually plead, not just their innocence, but also their circumstances — '*Tumetoka Kariobangi, hiyo ina manisha? Ama tumetenda dhambi?*' (We are residents of Kariobangi, what does that mean? Or have we committed a crime [by hailing from there])? This plea is hinged on drawing sympathy and enforcing social guilt by projecting the youth as already disadvantaged and victimised by virtue of their origins on the humble side of Eastlands. Kariobangi is projected as a site of urban strugglers daily battling to 'afford a meal'. It is a place where *jamaa wa mtaa* (people from 'low income city council housing estates... in Eastlands')²⁴ suffer grave neglect from the authorities. Many carry out hawking businesses that are constantly being disrupted by sporadically enforced city by-laws.²⁵ To this extent, declaring that one is from Kariobangi is offered

²³ In Standard Kiswahili, *fisi* means hyena. Its reference to policemen in Sheng is probably derived from the Standard Kiswahili word for policemen - *polisi*. Still, the pun on *fisi* effectively projects the negative street attitudes to policemen. Anyumba (2003) surveys the organizations engaged in crime prevention in the city and their strategies and implementation of ways of combating crime and notes the historical and contemporary reasons for the public's deep-seated distrust of the Kenya Police.

²⁴ Chege Githiora (2000;160) rightfully observes that coming from Sheng, this is a more accurate translation of the word *mtaa* rather than the Standard Kiswahili meaning of 'suburb' or 'town quarter'.

²⁵ See for instance newspaper reports such as 'Group Accuses City Guards of Extortion', *Daily Nation* September 4 2002 online edition. Also 'Nairobi Hawkers Alliance (NAHA) Protests' www.streetnet.org.za/naha4 and US State Department February 1995 report 'Kenya Human Rights Practice, 1994'.

as both an apology (for the inability to afford a bribe) and a statement of assertion that pitches for the right of all to equal existence within city spaces. K-South's view that the law enforcement officers themselves have perpetrated insecurity in the city is similarly made clear by the pioneers of Kenyan ghetto rap Kalamashaka in their all time classic '*Tafsiri Hii*' (1998) off the compilation album *Kenyan — the First Chapter*.

<i>kwenye corner</i>	at the street corner
<i>nakumbuka saa mbili usiku nikiona</i>	I remember seeing at 8p.m.
<i>yule mzee akishikwa koo</i>	an old man being mugged
<i>balaa, nashindwa nikimbilie nani</i>	calamity, I don't know where to run
<i>Jambazi? Apana</i>	To the thugs? No
<i>Polisi? Apana</i>	To the police? No
<i>Watanitia pingo hata bila sababu</i>	they'll handcuff me for no reason
<i>Maisha nimangumu</i>	life is tough

Clearly, the decay of the 'green city in the sun' is shown to transcend mere physical deterioration; it has affected the whole system of order. In the same way that city estates long lost their original design and pattern, so too has the logic of disorder crept into the lives of city residents who have metamorphosed dramatically to embrace an inverted morality whose only guide is a ceaseless hunt for money. K-South's 'Nairobierry' draws out well this drama of inverted logic and reversed roles that the youth struggle to make sense of:

<i>Nikutoshanishwa</i>	It is all about comparisons
<i>ati mvua ita waka</i>	That the rain will shine
<i>jua ita nyasha</i>	the sun will fall
<i>Kunywa kumi kumi</i>	take lethal local brews
<i>na macho zitaoneshwa</i>	and you will be able to see ²⁶
<i>Hospitali wenye</i>	at the hospital
<i>vidonda zitaponeshwa</i>	those with wounds will be healed
<i>Masquatter watapewa</i>	squatters will be resettled
<i>maploti Kileleshwa</i>	on plots in Kileleshwa ²⁷
<i>Nikuteswa teswa</i>	we are just being persecuted

²⁶ The locally made brew *Kumi Kumi* has severally killed drinkers and left others blinded as it's brewers sometimes mix it with methanol or formaldehyde, lethal chemicals that are not meant to be ingested. See Justin Willis (2003).

²⁷ Today this is an up market residential neighbourhood in Nairobi's Westlands that ironically was the site of the first informal African settlements in Nairobi in the 1920s (Furedi, 1973).

In this jungle of confusion and moral debasement, the city's youth hang in precariously seeking guidance and salvation from the twin crises of immorality and poverty. Sometimes they look to religion:

*Wale wakunionesha jinsi,
njia, vipi,
Nini maana ya ndini
Ndio niamini
Yaani nikiona dameu
namimi ndio nisi sini
Si msimu nifanye nini Billy man
Sina Bima
sina jembe na pahali pa kulima*

[where are] those who will guide me
show the way, show how
what is the meaning of religion
so that I can also have faith
so that when I see a girl
I do not sin
this season, what do I do Billy man
I have no BMW ²⁸
I have no hoe, no land to plough

And as in '*Wasee Githurai*' the youth seek their escape from marginal existence through music:

*Tafsiri hii
maisha kule mjini ni mazii
Ninalia nikutumia M.I.C.
...nilishika microphoni kila siku
ile niwe kaa maPuff Daddy
ama yule Buster
...kokopogoa ni
muziki kuucheza
ilighetto tuweze toka*

decipher this,
life in the city yields nothing
I cry out using a microphone
I held a microphone every day
so as to be like the Puff Daddys
or like Buster [Rhymes]
you can only break away
by making music
so that we can leave the ghetto

'*Tafsirii Hiii*' ends with salutations to youth in Kariobangi, Dandora, Huruma, Jerusalem, all of them estates in Eastlands. These are the sites these young rappers represent; the ones that give them their character and the ones from which they feel they must break away in order to evolve new identities.

4.4 Conclusion

Contemporary Kenyan popular music has certainly opened up the frontiers of place through its rejection of the city as a totalizing experience, and its embrace of the newer

²⁸ There is a pun here on the word *bima*. In Kiswahili, *bima* means insurance against loss. This meaning is apt in the context of the song's concerns, though the artistes were more likely employing the Sheng meaning of *bima* — the BMW car.

zones of the city. The spatial discourses in virtually all these songs, are also engagements with class differentiation. Up to a point, the ideologies and legacies of segregation that designed the city of Nairobi are upheld and replicated through economic disparities. What is clearly apparent then, is the capacity of contemporary Kenyan popular music to define and to shape the formation of social classes in Nairobi. Like the tunes of old that Atieno Odhiambo (2002:264) reads in '*Kula Raha: Gendered Discourses and the Contours of Leisure in Nairobi, 1946-63*', contemporary Kenyan songs similarly persist in capturing 'class differentiation within the African urban social formation' in Nairobi. These new songs emphasise the city as a place of heterogeneity, a place of ethnic and cultural variety in which people are sometimes identified and even pigeon-holed on account of the way they speak/sound. The cosmopolitan potential of these sounds is evidenced in the rap songs' easy association of sounds and meanings from ethnic languages and accents as they are mapped onto the English language and even onto socio-cultural nuances especially those from America.

In large measure, the lyrical artiste's imaginative impetus comes from the desire to confront the vagaries of life on the periphery. To this extent, contemporary popular songs sketch into cultural imagination and memory the new marginal spaces, those where native ingenuity has transformed notions of town planning by injecting the agency and enterprise of those living there, and has dictated new ways of occupying urban spaces. Through songs like '4 in 1' and '*Wasee Githurai*', one captures the spatial and the social geography of these areas, and even gleans a better understanding of the people who inhabit these spaces, and of the pleasures and dreams that daily lubricate their existence. In Foucauldian terms, we realise these spaces as 'real' as socially produced places whose essence is very different from that of the ideal(ised) city.

In virtually all the song-texts I have analysed here, the depiction of the city is never linear or uniform; it is fraught with tensions and contradictions that signal the serious limitations of the very spaces under discussion. As such, these texts never really succeed in obliterating the official discourses on slums and informal settlements, though we do see the artistes attempts to generate new terms for reading marginal(ised) society. Like

American hip hop of the late 1980s, which moved away from 'the spatial abstractions framed by the notion of "the ghetto" to the more localised and specific discursive construct of "the hood" '(Forman, 2000:68); Ndarlin P, just as much as Kalamashaka and K-South, shuns the official term 'slum'. Not even the more politically correct expression "informal settlement" is found to be acceptable. In their place, the artistes use "ghetto", seeing it as a more credible term to capture this existence. Perhaps "ghetto" is seen as a more favourable label because of its association with African-American existence, which in the local Kenyan contexts is a desirable lifestyle read as signifying positive difference and cultural agency (Behrend 2002). Alternative discourses of these spaces also come from the way the songs show the cultural economy of informal settlements and reconfigured city estates as one that is governed by ingenious native enterprise and accompanied by romance and leisure in refreshing new ways. But even then, songs like 'Nairobi' and 'Mr Policeman' tend to somehow undermine these alternatives through their underlying subscription to the idea that there are irredeemable urban spaces of want and violence which constitute an emergent Kenyan ghetto culture.

Additionally, the spatial legacies of these contemporary songs problematise the praxes of "tradition" and "modernity" in entirely new ways, opening us up to the realisation that cultural boundaries are continually open to (re)negotiation. Indeed, contact with place is shown to alter practice, demand changes and accommodate innovation. Thus even where the notion of "home" is not articulated by direct naming, there is nonetheless overt statement of place as originary, as root rather than route. The protagonists in '4 in 1', 'Wasee Githurai', 'Tafsiri Hii' may desire upward mobility and more privileged living spaces, but they certainly do not consider themselves to be passing through Mukuru, Githurai, or Kariobangi *en route* from some rural enclave that has a first claim over them culturally. To reiterate Alessandro Triulzi's (1996:81) argument

Today's urban Africans are no longer "strangers in the city" as they were called in colonial literature: frightened peasants in an environment not their own, that was not *for* them who were passing through. Now most of them are born in the city or have adapted to it and redefined their own role in the urban

context, elaborating new ways of survival, new forms of communication and connection.

Colonial policy and attitudes had colluded with ethnic cultural practice to enforce the idea that the city was only a place of temporary abode and that ancestral location was the proper formulation of home. The evidence from contemporary song-texts indicates that economic circumstances and emergent cultural alternatives have challenged the validity of this mindset.

The other important lesson to be gleaned from these lyrical discourses of spatiality has to do with the way these songs reveal space to be a central element in the evolution and definition of character. As the young artistes in '*Wasee Githurai*' rap personally about themselves, we realise that it is that location, that very site of marginality, impending violence and the momentary distractions of partying that have made these young men. They project Githurai as the cornerstone of their livelihood and identity. Indeed one could say that the characters that people all these songs are strongly defined by their structural environments. The dominant architectural modes reflect much insidious ingenuity, and it is precisely this moral logic that we see reflected in the characters. In other words, one can put up a case for the relationship between the spectacle of spatial "disarray" and the preponderance of violence and insecurity in Nairobi. The decay of the 'green city in the sun' is shown to transcend mere physical deterioration. It has affected the whole system of order. In the same way that city estates long lost their original design and pattern, so too has the logic of disorder crept into the lives of city residents who have metamorphosed dramatically to embrace an inverted morality whose only guide is a ceaseless hunt for money.

The characters we see have grown within the physical culture of continuous innovation and consequently, they hold out fairly unconventional practices as their mainstay within these congested and complex surroundings. It is also these very conditions themselves that engender the tendency to glorify and overly privilege the pursuit of pleasure as the foremost engagement of city life. But for all the partying and parade of beautiful girls on the dance floor, songs like '*Wasee Githurai*' and '*Mona Lisa*' cannot entirely escape the

inhibitions and restrictions of their surroundings, they are, therefore, also very much songs about hunger, desire and socio-economic insecurities.

The ubiquitous characters who people the songs under study — the *matatu* driver, thugs and robbers, desperate youth, ambitious hip hoppers and the urban novice — help to typify both the places and the experiences related in the songs. They are also framed in ways that hold out the "bad guys" for condemnation while drawing sympathy and support for those who constantly struggle to make sense of and better their world. Stephanie Newell (2000:154) has argued that the 'repetition of particular character types that one finds in popular narratives can be seen as ...[a] textual strategy signifying far more than the author's effort to "stereotype" or to "reflect" the real world'. In the case of Kenyan popular songs however, there appears to be just precisely this need to typify. It seems the idea is to repeatedly turn the lens of popular imagination away from a preoccupation with the "big" figures — the politicians and the rich and (already) famous. In their place, these songs bring out and popularise the lives of the commonplace and ordinary who the interpretive audiences are already familiar with, but whom these audiences have never been assured are worthy of national attention and/or social recognition. Given this preoccupation with projecting local spaces and their social dilemmas, how do contemporary popular songs locate the place of local existence within the global cultural economy? I take up this discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

KENYAN HIP HOP : OF LOCAL SOUNDTRACKS AND THE APPROPRIATION OF GLOBAL MUSICAL PRACTICES¹

[T]he history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings. Cultures are not impermeable...Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures.

(Said 1994:261-262)

In June 1997 a local budding artiste, Hardstone, aka Harrison Ngunjiri, captured the attention of live audiences across Nairobi with an unusual song entitled '*Uhiki* — Pinye's remix'.² Once it was released by producer Tedd Josiah on the album, *Nuting But de Stone* (1997), Hardstone was launched on a high profile national career; soon thereafter he left for the United States to try his luck on the international music circuit. In large measure '*Uhiki*' seems to have gained audiences' attention on account of its unconventional form. Doug Paterson (1999:519) describes it as bearing 'a strange combination but one Hardstone pulls off nicely'. Embedded within the mix was a diversity of musical traditions — from ethnic folksong to American rhythm-and-blues, from Kiswahili ballad to Jamaican reggae. Arguably, each of the genres in '*Uhiki*' appealed to a particular moment in Kenyan musical history; each captured a specific local market; and, all of them combined testify to the existence of a complex web of global networks that constantly shape and revise popular music in local contexts. Hardstone's '*Uhiki*' stands as a seminal moment in contemporary Kenyan popular music. It heralded a new era in terms of musical style, production and audience reception. The varied influences within it

¹ An earlier version of this chapter appeared as ' "Reading the Referents": The Ghost of America in Contemporary Kenyan Popular Music' in *Scrutiny2* Vol 9 No. 1, July, 2004, p. 39-55.

² The song earned Hardstone the 'Best New Artist of the Year' award at the inaugural 1997 Nairobi Kisima Awards (Paterson 1999:519).

confirm the fluidity with which popular music circulates from one place to another, virtually unbounded by either spatial limitations or geographical distance.

This chapter is framed as an inquiry into the geography of contemporary Kenyan popular music that is instantiated in works such as '*Uhiki*'. In particular, it focuses on the inherent mobility and perennial movement of popular music (Connell and Gibson 2003: 45), as well as the external borrowings and influences that make Kenyan popular music so constitutively intertextual. As I look at the impact of global forms — hip hop and its performance practices, gospel rap, and fruity loops — on local contemporary popular music I shall be asking the following questions.³ Does the presence of "foreign" cultural elements obscure the locality of contemporary Kenyan popular music? What value are these "imported" texts ascribed within the local milieu? What is the cultural significance of this borrowing? How does it help to define Kenyan youth?

Graeme Ewens (1991) demonstrates that Kenyan popular music has borrowed from, and been shaped by, popular American musical trends since the 1960s. He reminds us that the Kenyan "twist" craze, popularised by Fundi Konde, David Amunga, Daudi Kabaka and others in the 1960s, was based on American rock-and-roll. Indeed, Daudi Kabaka had a major success with '*Helule Helule*', a version of which reached number four on the British pop charts in 1968. Ewens goes on to trace the impact of soul, funk and pop on local styles through the 1970s and 1980s. Artistes like Slim Ali and the Hodi Boys, who are best remembered for their mid-seventies hit 'You Can Do It', 'maintained their soul fusion in a different milieu from the bar or dancehall bands who sang in local languages' (Ewens 1991:159). Around the same time, Ishmael Jingo hit the local charts with his own version of Ashford and Simpson's 'Fever', while Kelly Brown's 1980 hit 'Higher' was framed firmly within the tradition of American funk. One might add that popular Gĩkũyũ musicians Joseph Kamaru and D.K. Kamau clearly modelled their style on the Americans

³ Much as hip hop had its origins in America (Section 2.3), its quick diffusion into and appropriation by the youthful populations of Europe and Asia makes it possible for one to claim its global status. In this regard there are a number of informative studies on the development of hip hop in New Zealand (Mitchell 1996), France (Steve Cannon 1997), England and Germany (Bennet 2000), Tanzania (Haas and Gesthuizen 2000), Germany and Australia (Connell and Gibson 2003).

Jim Reeves and Jimmy Rodgers in their two-decade hold on ethnic Kenyan popular music. Having established that the question of American influence on Kenyan popular music is not new we must, nonetheless, underline that the current wave of intertextuality in local song-texts is unprecedented in terms of its sheer volume, extent, preponderance and intricacy.

In these processes of exchange, where artistes derive local styles from American examples, the capital city Nairobi acts as a focal point of the constitutive 'cosmopolitan loops' (Turino 2000:8). It is the advances in trans-national communication and in recording technology that have resulted in the city emerging as a node of inter-cultural activity. These facilities have provided the impetus for the growth of musical hybrids that this chapter explores.

5.1 'Bridges of Sound'⁴: More Than Global, Less Than Local

Any attempt to investigate global systems of exchange and interaction must bear witness to the power of popular music to negotiate space and time. 'Like all forms of sound, [music] is inherently mobile' (Connell and Gibson 2003:45). For one, when people are moving – whether freely or as a consequence of coercion – they carry their musical practices to their new abodes. The mobility of music, it seems, has much to do with the recuperative musical practices of diasporic populations. Further, modern recording technologies have, since the invention of the gramophone, turned music into a highly portable cultural artefact. Indeed, economies engaged in the production and distribution of music have sprung up and articulate communities across borders and oceans alike. The advantages to be gained from even more portable forms, such as the Compact Disc (CD), and Internet forms such as MP3s, have greatly accelerated the speed, quality and quantity of both the production and the distribution of music. Albums can be recorded, say, in Kenya, fine-tuned, mixed and digitally cut in South Africa, and finally released simultaneously in Kenya, South Africa and London.

⁴ I borrow this expression from Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poem 'Jah'.

The lines of diffusion of popular music (or soundtracks) can be reconstructed as significant markers of cultural exchange, as evidence of the continual association of peoples and regions – however unequal or skewed those relations might be.

Cultural linkages and exchanges can be explored from the perspective of circulation as translation. Circulation is an indication of how commodities and ideas move from one location to another. That movement is necessarily facilitated by the act of translation. In *Tokens of Exchange*, Lydia Liu (1999) probes the question of the production and circulation of meaning-value in the enterprise of translation. She ponders the arguments of some post-structuralists whose notion of complementarity in translation underlines that an original ought never to be privileged, in terms of meaning-value, over the translation. Liu argues that this idea of 'hypothetical equivalence' which is implied by complementarity is somehow mired in questions over 'how hypothetical equivalence is established, maintained, or revised among languages so that meaning, which is always historical, can be made available or unavailable to the translator' (2). Again, Liu ponders the effect of unequal levels and forms of global cultural exchange on the idea of reciprocity in translation from one language to another. Her view is that even with translation, one must be cautious about regimes of power and the limitations to relations of exchange that are thus mounted. Ultimately, she argues 'the study of meaning in the political economy of the sign needs to be grounded in the actual history of the global circulation of meaning-value' (7). Indeed, Liu's approach urges the consideration of historical associations such as colonialism and underlines that the cultivation of 'exotic difference' and othering that institutions such as colonialism mounted impacts negatively on the task of translation. As with Appadurai's (1996) notion of 'disjuncture and difference', it 'victimizes ... difference by translating it as a *lesser value* or *nonuniversal value*' (Liu, 7). By insisting that translation is not about distortion, that new texts can rewrite, parody or otherwise manipulate the original, Liu brings out the fundamental fact that translation entails creativity. That creativity has intrinsic value that is dependent on the circumstances and needs of the translator who will necessarily append to the original a value that is concomitant with their own needs and aspirations. The real meaning of translation and exchange must, therefore, always be read from the perspective of the

recipient. For as Liu forces us to contemplate, in the marketplace of cultural exchange, there cannot be, as globalization theories might blind us into believing, any gold standard that can buy out all others or against which other cultural products can be measured and valued.

I want to use Lydia Liu's postulations on circulation and translation to interrogate the patterns of the diffusion of American hip hop into Kenya and to frame 'the limits of translatability' (Hofmeyr 2004:28). I am taking the appropriation and reworking of what is now an international art form to constitute an act of translation. The idea of reading this act as translation finds further anchorage in the fact that, as with the Kiswahili rap that has taken Tanzania by storm,⁵ much of Kenyan hip hop adopts an ethnic rap format, thus seeming almost literally to transform the linguistic format of American hip hop. But beyond the simple transference of language, what forms and networks of circulation have facilitated this linkage and made hip hop so portable? In this case of Kenyan ethnic rap, what is it that has been translated? What meaning-value has been transferred from America to Kenya? Are the definitive practices of American hip hop (unusually high decibels, blaring volume in moving vehicles, the logic of remix, designer fashion etc) as well as their discursive themes finding functional anchorage in urban Kenya?

A focus on Africa's relations with the rest of the world, on its situatedness in the project of modernity, could very well adopt the argument of Jean-Francois Bayart (2000:217). Bayart categorically refutes the metaphor of an 'Africa in a limbo', one that is completely detached from developments in the rest of the world, and bound in backward time by the ravages of war, HIV/AIDS, poverty and political mismanagement. Bayart argues that this is much too 'simplistic a view of the relation of Africa to the rest of the world'. Like Frederick Cooper (2001), Bayart is bound to a historical approach in reading the question of Africa and Western modernity. He underlines his earlier held view that the 'salient feature of the last three centuries is not the growing integration into the Western world economy but, on the contrary, the latter's inability to pull the continent into its magnetic field' (1993:21).

⁵ See Peter Jan Haas and Thomas Gesthuizen (2000), '*Dani ya Bongo: Kiswahili Rap Keeping it Real*'.

This is what Bayart terms 'extraversion',⁶ and what Jewsiewicki calls 'Africa's intellectual cannibalization of the West' (1997: 103). Extraversion, appropriation or cannibalization all refer to Africa's ability to tap into Western resources and cull whatever is of political, economic or cultural gain to the continent, sometimes altering and amending it quite significantly, but all the while enriching Africa's own discourses and engagements.

Even then, an examination of how Africa has engaged with modernity cannot end with simply looking at how modernity impacts on Africa's discourses. Indeed, these very discourses should themselves be considered versions of modernity. This is what Paul Gilroy formulates in *The Black Atlantic*, except that he limits his reading of Africa's contribution to modernity to an examination of the life and culture of the African diaspora. Like Gilroy, I hold onto the gaze that embraces cultures of the New World as substantive elements that are not inferior or marginal to Western modernity. Gilroy's reading of African cultures in the diaspora is useful for its insistence that these cultures be read not only for their functional contribution to Western modernity, but also that they must themselves be read as having been born within, and therefore shaped by the institutions of Western modernity. Still, it is imperative as Simon Gikandi (1996) suggests, that we carry these arguments beyond Gilroy's spatial confines of the African diaspora and map them onto the experiences of black people within Africa, and more specifically for the purpose of this thesis, we locate them in Kenya. Again I take my cue from Gikandi in moving beyond Gilroy's conceptual framework of the hermeneutics of a "black Atlantic" and embracing an experiential and historicised approach to reading local cultural forms and their associations with Western modernity. While Gikandi's concerns centre on 'the place of Africa in the discourse of European modernity', my own position is triggered by wanting to investigate the possibility of a Kenyan modernity; one that is home-grown, not just by transfusing European models and forms wholesale onto local

⁶ Bayart (2000:254 - 255) identifies 'six major formalities' in 'the grammar of extraversion' – 'coercion; trickery; flight; mediation; appropriation...and rejection'. Most of these forms apply only to Africa's political and economic relations with the West. In terms of the continent's cultural engagement with the West it seems to me that coercion would be a difficult, if not impossible trajectory for the continent to advance.

spaces, but one that is growing out of the artful extraversion and domestication of "global" forms in local contexts.

Emphasising the circulation and subsequent translation of imported cultural forms underlines cultural products as part of the modern system of global consumerism. Indeed, Daniel Miller (1995:8) argues that in the contemporary world, 'culture has become increasingly a process of consumption of global forms'. This focus on consumerism forces us to ask whether local consumers (artistes) are creating any new images and idioms, or whether they simply regurgitate images produced elsewhere and impose them on local social, economic and cultural structures. But most importantly, we must resist the idea that the local is embedded with some uncontaminated and static authentic culture. Instead the focus should be precisely on the adaptability and capacity for mutation of the local so that we see 'the construction of local culture as a process by which global institutions are consumed and, as it were, regurgitated as locality' (Miller, 1995: 11). In formulating what he terms 'posteriori difference' Miller insists that the local claims its identity precisely through the peculiar ways in which it relates to the "Other". At this point, the local is seen not as derivative of tradition, and neither is it read for its syncretism but rather, the emphasis is on the idea that the entry of "foreign" institutions and cultural forms clears the space for the contemporary creation of entirely new forms.

Karin Barber and Chris Waterman (1995) study this phenomenon of the local consumption of global cultural trends as a form of 'creolization'. Their study of contemporary Yoruba art forms seeks the ways in which 'locals selectively "appropriate" elements from the metropolitan cultures in order to "construct" their own hybrid medium in which to articulate their own, historically and socially specific, experience' (240). Barber and Waterman state that the creolization model has the advantage of underlining the 'creative role of people as culture producers, rather than representing them as passive victims of global gangrene' (240). Like Miller, they encourage an approach which seeks the new meanings that trends and forms from other cultures are imbued with in their new settings, rather than continually lamenting the loss of the "authentic". To this end, they detail the 'shifting and unstable flow of pastiche and allusion' that permeates the

contemporary Yoruba that they study (241). By looking at the local as the starting point and working out the processes by which it domesticates borrowed forms and employs them to intensify local performances, Barber and Waterman explicate the new meanings that permeate the localization of global cultural forms.

In this chapter I likewise take note of the capacity of contemporary Kenyan popular music to incorporate global musical trends within local texts and experiences. I want to see how the co-opting and localizing of imported forms becomes a strategy for the generation of audiences by projecting the tensions of their lived experience in the present. I will try and see how the process of domestication suggests new ways of living within the local environment, including the possibility that these new styles generate audiences by facilitating what Martin Stokes (1994:3) calls a 'cultural relocation' that allows both the artiste and the listening public to fashion new spaces even if these are only imagined rather than physically experienced. For as Andy Bennet (2000:27) study of popular music, global consumer trends and youth culture reminds us, the youth 'take the cultural resources provided by the popular culture industries and use the prescribed meanings attached to such resources as templates around which to construct their own forms of meaning and authenticity'.

5.2 '*Uhiki*' And The Legacy Of 'Put Up Your Hands And You Scream'

Nairobi's male elephants uncurl
their trumpets to heaven
Toot-Toot takes it up
in Havana
in Harlem
bridges of sound curve
through the pale rigging
of saxophone stops
(Edward Kamau Braithwaite 1973:162).

'*Uhiki*' opens with the recreation of a traditional Gĩkũyũ homestead depicted in a dialogue between a father and son. It is a dialogue which (re)asserts the traditional role of the

Gĩkũyũ father in the marital affairs of his sons. This traditional Gĩkũyũ atmosphere is enhanced by strands of the Gĩkũyũ folksong '*Nyũmba ya Mwari Witu*' (our sister's home) which becomes the chorus as the song proceeds. But even as the dialogue develops, the first bars of what we gradually recognise as the instrumental rhythms of the 1982 Grammy Award-winning hit, 'Sexual Healing', emerge. The song was, of course, made famous by the African American musical icon, the late Marvin Gaye. From the way the Gĩkũyũ chorus and a subsequent Kiswahili prayer are used, we realise that '*Uhiki*' is framed along similar lines as the American Keith Sweat's 'Twisted' (1996), itself a remix of 'Sexual Healing' that introduced refreshingly new lyrics onto Gaye's reggae-influenced song.

In 1997, Hardstone emulated Keith Sweat's strategy of remix, retaining the instrumental beat of 'Sexual Healing' and pursuing, although from an altogether less erotic angle, Gaye's theme of the perils of romantic love. Confirming the Kenyan fascination with Rastafarianism and reggae music, or perhaps underlining Gaye's own debt to reggae, Hardstone changes dialect in the third verse, rapping in Jamaican patois. This multi-lingual approach, apart from attesting to diverse cultural legacies, also works to show the theme of aborted romance as a universal human experience. To add to the conflation of acoustic practices in '*Uhiki*', the voice ensemble's harmonies are punctuated by the insistent and typically American hip hop chant: 'Hardstone in the house, you put up your hands and you scream'.

As observed earlier, Hardstone's '*Uhiki*' was a seminal moment in the birth of Kenyan hip hop. By far its most striking feature is the use of remixes as both locally authenticating devices — in the sense of speaking to a traditional Gĩkũyũ context — and also as affirmation of its commitment to American hip hop's discursive practices. For, as Paul Gilroy (1993:103) argues, 'the aesthetic rules which govern [hip hop] are premised on a dialectic of rescuing, appropriation and recombination'. It is tempting to interpret Hardstone's engagement of Gĩkũyũ cultural practice as a mark of deeply embedded local traditions, as a nativist gesture. But there are many aspects of the song that signally undermine this position and repeatedly point to the text's situatedness within a modern

cultural dispensation. For one, if one listens carefully to the dialogue between the father and son, one picks out a number of dissonant elements, some of which are occasioned by this contact with Western modernity.

Father

Nũũ ũcio woka ũtukũ? [sic]

Who is that coming at night

Son

Nĩ niĩ baba

It is I father.

Father

*Rũu tondũ nĩ woka,
nĩ woka na mũkagwo? [sic]*

Now since you've come,
did you come with your wife?

Son

ĩhĩ baba, Ona ndĩrooka gũkwĩra atĩrĩrĩ

No, father. I've even come to tell you

nĩ na mũka wakwa [sic] nĩ tũrahĩtanirie

that my wife and I quarrelled

Father

Mũrahĩtanĩria kĩĩ ?

Quarrelled over what?

*Rũu na[nĩ]we ũratũmire ndĩrendia [sic]
Ng'ombe yakwa ya ngirĩĩndi
nĩgwo mwĩke ũhiki
Rũu [r]ĩ, ũhoro ũyũ
we[e] ũrenda ũkorwo atĩa,?[sic]*

Now, you made me sell
my pedigree cow
so that you could afford to marry.
Now, this matter.
how do you want us to deal with this?

*nĩ ndirenda ũhoro ũyũ
Mũthenya ũyũ ũngĩ
mũrambĩrĩirie kũina haha
'ũ nyũmba ya mwarĩ witũ,
ũ nyũmba, ũ nyũmba.',
Rũu maũndũ maya nĩ marikũ[,]
we Ngũnjiri[,] we?*

I don't like this business.
Just the other day
you started singing here
'our sister's home'
'home, home'
Now what is all this,
you, Ngũnjiri, you?

The dialogue itself is ironically poised against the celebratory title of the song, for it speaks of a situation of marital tension between newlyweds. In the dialogue, the father responds to the matter from within the conventions of Gĩkũyũ cultural practice. His

concern is that the pedigree cow that he paid out, as precious dowry for his son's bride, seems to have gone to waste, and, what makes matters worse is that this has happened so soon. But marital discord is not the source of the subversion of traditional discourses that is reflected in this dialogue. The old man's acute concern for his wasted wealth seems to sit at variance with the lament of unrequited love that constitutes the rest of the song. It signals the tension between generations, each seeming to function within value systems that make no sense to the other. The dissonance between generations may also be read in the strained accent that relates the narrative and which betrays the persona as a non-native speaker of Gĩkũyũ, one who is clearly unfamiliar with nuances of double-vowel intonation in that language. For instance, in the phrase 'woka ũtukũ' the presence of consecutive double vowels between the two words requires the speaker to collapse them into one utterance and enunciate it as 'wokũtukũ', thereby effectively bridging the double vowel into one syllable.⁷

Apart from this, as I indicate in the transcription above, the Gĩkũyũ being spoken does not adhere to the rules of Gĩkũyũ grammar, and certainly does not accord with Gĩkũyũ linguistic etiquette. A Gĩkũyũ parent does not refer to his/her child's spouse by the term "husband" or "wife". He or she would speak of a spouse who is yet to be a parent as "the son/daughter of so-and-so" or, if the couple has a child then the parent would use "the father/mother of so-and-so". One could also argue that there is an element of farcical excess in the subservience observed by the son, Ngũnjiri, in the way he repeatedly refers to his father as '*baba*'. In Gĩkũyũ tradition, Ngũnjiri has qualified to be a man since he is married, and this status ought to have altered the terms of reference between father and son. To continue calling his father *baba* is somewhat belittling to his own manhood and independence. If he were to follow convention, Ngũnjiri would answer to his father using a term of respect, such as the traditional *awa* or the modern (Kiswahili derived) *mũthee* meaning 'old man'. The failure to observe the social graces that go with traditional Gĩkũyũ familial discourse conventions betrays '*Uhiki*'s' sense that tradition is dynamic

⁷ See John M. Mugane (1997: 5-6) and Cristiana Pugliese (1995: 90).

and vital: it is not represented as hypostasised and normative, but as a complex cultural matrix that can be evoked, violated or reworked.

In seeming contradiction to this, the intermittent invocation of the Gĩkũyũ folksong '*ĩ nyũmba ya mwarĩ witũ ĩgitĩtwo na ithanjĩ, ĩ na icuthĩ cia ng'ombe*' (our sister's homestead is secured with reeds and flywhisks) resituates '*Uhiki*' in the domain of nativist practice. Traditionally, this folksong would be performed during courtship and marriage ceremonies, celebrating values of female chastity, domesticity and family. Additionally, '*Nyũmba ya mwarĩ*' is also a statement of ethnic pride and nationalism, given that the Gĩkũyũ myth of origin centres on Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi and their nine daughters from whom all Gĩkũyũ clans are descended, and after whom they are accordingly named (Kenyatta 1938). The folk song has, therefore, always been invoked as an expression of family cohesion as well as ethnic pride and purity. It is a call, in other words, to ethnic citizenship, intended to ward off threats to the group's integrity, territory and spiritual foundation. In the post-independence Kenyatta era in particular, the song was singularly politicised. It came to connote ethnic hegemony and control of the nation-state in the wake of opposition by the Kenya People's Union (KPU) political party in 1966, and again in 1969 following the assassination of the charismatic Dholuo politician, Tom Mboya.

Juxtaposed within the "foreign" musical elements, the use of this folksong in Hardstone's '*Uhiki*' seems an ironic statement about the long distance that has been travelled from an oft-idealised time of ethnic and cultural purity. For even as the lyrics pay homage to these moments, the song's instrumentals take us further and further away from traditional settings and resituate us in the contemporary moment. As mentioned earlier, the song's remix strategy is modelled on American Keith Sweat's 1996 project using '*Sexual Healing*'. What Hardstone does, therefore, is to latch onto a successful musical idea of a contemporary American artiste, thereby drawing in a youthful urban audience in Kenya, one that has been consistently reared on a musical diet of American trends such as pop, soul and rhythm-and-blues.⁸

⁸ As I indicated in Section 1.2.1 Wallis and Malm (1984:257) and Malm and Wallis (1992:93) discuss attempts to shape Kenyan media policy in 1980 along the lines of a 75% quota for local music on all radio

By the same token, Marvin Gaye's original is not at all alien to the Kenyan urban audience.⁹ At the time of its release in 1982, it quickly rose to prominence in Kenya popularised by radio DJs who were constantly looking to the United States to fill the void left by the paucity of local recordings. Clearly the popularity in Kenya of a Grammy winning African American artiste in the 1980s was itself a reflection of the extent to which postcolonial Kenyan urban youth had, since the early 1960s, been consumers of a Motown, Stax/Volt soundtracks which originated in marginalised black America. Interestingly, 'Sexual Healing' is itself a richly hybrid text. Simultaneously an intensely erotic and a spiritual song,¹⁰ it is heavily influenced by reggae, probably as a consequence of the ten months Gaye's spent exiled in London in 1981. Gaye's original, which is so personal and so sexually graphic (towards the song's conclusion he whispers into the mic 'please don't procrastinate, or I'll have to masturbate'), seems incongruous besides the metaphors of community and nation, and the decorum of the traditional Gĩkũyũ folksong. But it is not just *differences* in cultural practice that are noteworthy. Given Africa's capacity for extraversion, we can identify that the apparently local — as it is represented in Hardstone's remix — includes an abridged and adapted version of postcolonial cultural discourse within it. We are not, then, speaking of some simple combination of "traditional" and global texts. Indeed, contemporary Kenyan popular culture seems, more accurately, comprised of markers of the foreign that simultaneously appeal to reworked constructions of traditional values and practices. This is no binary matter.

In effect then, '*Uhiki*' is not about how the local gets drawn and absorbed into Western modernity, but rather it is about the artful forging of local derivatives of modernity, a

broadcasts, and they argue that this legislation was frustrated by what was found to be a dearth in local material.

⁹ Released in October 1982, the single sold over a million copies and was a huge hit in Kenya through 1983. The album 'Midnight love' sold two million copies, effectively jumpstarting Gaye's stalled career. 'Sexual Healing' went on to win Gaye the only two Grammy awards to come out of a 30 year career in the category of R&B's Best Male Vocal and Best Instrumental Performance for 1982.

¹⁰ David Ritz who co-authored its lyrics says, 'The song was born out of our conversation concerning pornography. Gaye's apartment was filled with sadomasochistic magazines and books by Georges Pichard, a European cartoonist in whose drawings women were sexually brutalized. I suggested that Marvin needed sexual Healing, a concept which broke his creative block' (296).

project that is clearly fraught with potential contradictions, and sometimes, given its techniques of appropriation, often lacks either consistency or cogency. This complex relational logic is also apparent when Hardstone goes on to blend a Kiswahili prayer into the discourse of marital frustration. It becomes apparent that his narrative is a syncretic mediation of crisis (in this case both marital and cultural) through a blending of practices. After all, Kiswahili is itself a product of the fusion of East African coastal communities with Arabic cultures.

*Eh we Mola,
tafhadali na kuomba
nipe jawabu,
La swali langu,
mupenzi wangu anipa mawazo
Huyu bibi sio bibi
Ila ni mawazo
Aja hapa
Anipa vikwazo
Eh we mola wangu nipe jawabu
La swali langu
K'husu penzi langu
Anipa mawazo
Anitoa jasho
Kila siku kanitesa*

Oh God
Please, I pray
that you give me the answer
to my question
my lover is causing me anguish
that wife is no wife
she is just anguish
she comes here
she gives me conditions
Oh my God, give me an answer
to my question
concerning my lover
she gives me anguish
she makes me sweat
persecuting me everyday.

The prayer expresses an anguish that literally has the persona breaking into a sweat. We are struck by the lyrical power of this prayer and its likely symbolic reference to foreign cultures as the troublesome bride, the song once again employs its hip hop tactic of defamiliarisation by switching dramatically to the locally stylised Jamaican patois appropriate to reggae. In the sections of reggae-rap we have the culmination of the 'Uhiki's' vast cultural canvas.

But of all the elements that sound off against, or subvert, the traditional Gĩkũyũ folk song, it is the typical hip hop refrain: 'Hardstone in the yard, yo! *put up your hands and you scream,*' that dominates the text. Even as the Kiswahili prayer continues in the background to the beat of 'Sexual Healing' this refrain reverberates as the critical code through which youthful local audiences are invoked and immersed in the activity on the

dance floor. Calling for choreography that allows the young audience to revel in uninhibited expression bridges the distance between American cultural practice and emergent Kenyan identity. The variety of genres and styles in *'Uhiki'* is a salute to musical and cultural intertextuality, to the fluidity, hybridity and mobility of postcolonial popular art forms. We might well be tempted to read *'Uhiki'* as a farewell to traditional ethnic practice and the gateway of global hip hop trends as the hallmark of contemporary Kenyan popular music. Alternatively, though, it may well be seen as the starting point in acknowledging the extent of the daily blending and negotiation of cultural varieties that is entailed in all of postcolonial existence.

5.2.1 *Matatus*: Soundtracks and Trend-setters

At this juncture, it is important for us to note that the global cultural practice that has come to be known as hip hop constitutes far more than the musical genre of rap. Tricia Rose (1994: 41-61) details its growth as a cultural process which includes — in order of their emergence — graffiti, break dancing and rap. Graffiti preceded rap by close to a full decade. Spray painted on subway walls, trains and trucks it was the foremost means by which marginalised black urban youth in New York shifted the urban terrain 'inscribing their otherwise contained identities on public property' (Rose 1994: 22). By using public transport as their canvas graffiti artistes ingeniously sent images of black urban existence outwards to the rest of the city. Like Rose, Alex Ogg and David Upshall (1999) elaborate on the ways in which dance modes and clothing fashion have also been employed as part of the expressive forms constituting hip hop culture. Undoubtedly, out of all these facets, rap has had the most prominence in part because the diffusion of sound easily precedes that of visual images.¹¹ The print media may have greatly aided the circulation of these visual aspects, but it is the legacy of the electronic media — the conduit for Music Television (MTV) and its various derivatives such as Channel O — that has turned hip hop's graffiti, dance and fashion into internationally available standards.

¹¹ As Connell and Gibson (2003: 54) argue the 'combined rise of radio and the record industry allowed songs to be heard far beyond their origins...[r]adio contributed both to more rapid national and international diffusion'.

In Kenya, the domestication of hip hop seen in the example of '*Uhiki*' and the subsequent growth of ethnic rap has been accompanied by refrains such as 'put up your hands and you cream' and their accompanying choreography. These essential hip hop formats are easily recognisable at local live performances and in the now emerging trend of music videos. It is an interesting coincidence that locally, the culture of graffiti that is so intricately related to rap music, has similarly found its greatest expression and circulation through public transport vehicles, specifically through the colourful inscriptions on *matatus* plying urban routes. And as with the black urban youth of America who, according to Mark Anthony Neal (1999:162) reconstructed the black public sphere and used the 'sonic reach of the electronic audio systems found in cars and utility vehicles inhabited by black urban youth' to demarcate the parameters of this space, the Kenyan *matatus* have similarly become a nerve centre for the diffusion of global hip hop practices.¹² Mbugua wa Mungai's (2003:3) study of 'Nairobi *Matatu* Discourse' explores the range of verbal and written activities and symbolic acts 'deployed upon the vehicle or embodied by *matatu* workers and passengers, in interactions with each other ...[on the] *matatu*'. He notes that

Music, DVD movies shown for the duration of a trip, stickers, icons of film, music and football stars drawn on the vehicle, hip hop fashion, humor, idiom and gestures used by crews and passengers, crews attitudes towards other road users and the disregard for the Highway Code are all ingredients of *matatu* culture (3).

The Traffic Act (Amendment) New Rules (2003) which came into effect on February 1 2004, seemed to legislate against the colourful inscriptions, slogans, logos and stickers that used to be displayed outside and inside the *matatus*.¹³ These inscriptions bore catch-

¹² Werner Graebner (1992) stresses that the *matatu* is a complex public sphere that provides the space for the reenactment and performance of all sorts of cultural and economic transactions.

¹³ In part the Act, which was enforced by the Minister for Transport and Communications Hon. John Michuki amid a chorus of dissent, requires that all public service vehicles be painted in one colour, to be broken only by a yellow band running along the vehicles mid-section. Further, all *matatu* drivers must be over 30 years of age and like their touts they must wear regulated uniform (navy blue for drivers, and maroon for touts). Though the Act was aimed at ensuring roadworthiness, curbing road carnage and boosting investors commercial gain and harnessing government revenue from the sector, its implementation

phrases from contemporary issues, local and international alike. They were the names of designer labels, condensed local idioms or proverbs, titles of contemporary films, and very often titles of popular hits, and names of local or international popular musicians. As with the *mahewa* (music) blaring from the speakers both to entertain the crew and to attract passengers, these highly artistic and visually captivating slogans and artwork would be changed very regularly so that at any one time, a *matatu* would feature the very latest in popular narratives. Poet Ralph Johnstone (2000:96) subtitles 'The Smasher': 'a poem written by Kenyan *matatus* (plus two buses and two trucks)'. The poem gives a dramatic illustration of the way *matatu* inscriptions aptly articulate and respond to contemporary experience, providing the space for reflection, debate and subversion. Consider this verse of the poem:

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES
BOSS MASTER
NAMELESS
SECRET FACE
HIDDEN:
OUR CHOICE (99-100).

One could argue that the slogans invoked local and international stars almost indiscriminately, perhaps only determined by the position of the song on local charts, or simply going by the force of a song's lyrics. These popular lyrics would be edited and their most versatile, comical or otherwise suggestive parts would be turned into a slogan for use by a *matatu*. In some instances, *matatu* slogans are associated with international popular hits, for instance, 'Notorious B.I.G.', 'God's Property' (the title of Kirk Franklin's 1998 album), 'Why Me' (Shaggy 2001), 'Twisted' (Keith Sweat 1996).¹⁴

Since *matatus* are, by definition, about movement they necessarily traffic their theatres from one location to another; just as much as various genres of popular culture texts intermingle within the singular space of the *matatu*. In effect, they constitute an important point in the diffusion of both local and international popular music for in this spatial and

has had serious socio-cultural ramifications, amongst them the being the erasure of a whole canvas of artistic and sartorial expression.

¹⁴ See Johnstone (2003) 96-97.

generic intermingling they literally spread the geographical scope of consumption of this music and create new imaginative possibilities in the associations that are built around the music. To hijack Edwards Said's (1994:261) pronouncement on culture, in Kenyan *matatu* discourses, just as in contemporary Kenyan popular music, there are no 'absolute debtors and creditors', for commuters and pedestrians alike are constantly being exposed to the very latest trends, issues and idols. *Matatu* slogans amplified audiences' comments on numerous cultural texts, appropriating them for discussion, elaboration and explanation within their own circumstances and lives. Just as contemporary Kenyan popular music reveals evidence of the way the local confronts and interacts with the "global", so too do *Matatu* soundtracks and slogans illustrate the inevitable juxtapositioning of "global" practices in local spaces.

In recent years, the entry of key communications devices such as satellite TV and the Internet have opened a new channel of soundtracks between the Western world and those connected African capitals which function as the central points of reception for Western cultural products. In the world of popular music, central nodes of access such as Music Television (MTV) have accelerated the diffusion of entertainment products into Africa. Connell and Gibson argue that the power of MTV comes largely from its shift in 'the emphasis of popular music from the aural to the visual' (56). Satellite television has rapidly circulated MTV's graphic images to youth in the privileged parts of urban Africa who very quickly gain knowledge of current Western musical trends thereby whetting the appetite for "global" music trends. Indeed, many contemporary Kenyan artistes acknowledge that their careers were launched in local clubs where they made a name from doing convincing imitations of international hip hop stars such as Snoop Dogg, L.L. Cool J and N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude).¹⁵ John Andrews of A.I. Records sees the diffusion as having moved from global to continental and finally into national spaces and argues

Another thing that really opened up music was
— and dare I say it — Channel Television. The
introduction of MTV, Channel O and all these

¹⁵ Poxi Presha says he started his career at night clubs in Mombasa, doing cover versions of artistes like Shabba Ranks, Shaggy and L.L. Cool J.

other ones, suddenly people became interested in, you know, watching all these modern ethnic, actually continental artistes they adore your Youssor Ndours, your Salif Keitas, ...you know Mandoza,...all these different people that suddenly they were looking at and thinking 'damn that's good!'

Arguably, one of the most significant aspects of this kind of diffusion is not just the fact of its existence, but rather, the question of how its influence is ultimately absorbed and how it is subsequently utilised. In terms of engendering musical practice, the influence of major international communications players has been most evident in the increasing role of digitally sampled music formats, otherwise known as "fruity loops", in contemporary Kenyan popular music. Fruity loops is actually the name of

a computer inspired music creation program. Its heritage can be traced to the sampler and the tracker (an early computer music creation program). It is a potent program for a novice who knows nothing about making music but also for a pro whose been at it for years. Fruity Loops lets you take samples, available all over the net in both MP3 and various wave formats, and turn them into a sonic lattice of your own creation...Another great thing about Fruity Loops is the humanize function which depending on your setting alters panning, volume, pitch, and the other variables of your song to make things less robotic.¹⁶

The entry of this highly mechanised manner of music creation in contemporary Kenya has been viewed by some as a dangerous development, detrimental to the continued growth of the country's own cultural practices. Writing in one of the Kenyan dailies recently, columnist David Makali lamented that local media houses are badly implicated in the process that has seen the promotion of 'Western computerized and digitalized sound' at the expense of 'original and authentic sounds' of old school local bands (*Daily Nation* May 3 2003: 8). Makali's argument and that of other detractors of fruity loops is that local songs made from instrumentals that are 'mastered in Western music labs (and)

that are improvised by producers of the new crop of bandless and solo artistes with unproved shelf life' are acts of imitation, alien and undeserving of being considered Kenyan. Makali finds the music 'sensational but devoid of substance and the language is highly corrupted. All that a teenager needs to do is puff out some inane lyrics of forced rhymes about completely unconnected things, like *nipe shati nikupe basmati* ' (give me a shirt I'll give you *basmati* [rice]).

Makali's sentiments raise a number of issues about the essence of local popular music. Does it lie in the instrumental sounds or in the lyrics? Again, our attention is drawn to the fact that local musical acts are increasingly becoming imitative of Western performers not just in terms of their dress sense and performance modes, but also in terms of actual music production techniques. Those local producers who depend on fruity loops for their mixing only require the local artiste to come up with the lyrics for a song. Does this infusion of lyrical arrangements to the pre-recorded sounds qualify as local creativity? Hesitant to discuss the use of fruity loops by local producers, singer Eric Wainaina nonetheless argues that working with digital sounds does require talent, and it does spur creativity.¹⁷ The lyrical content of the ultimate song text is another point at which local creativity is tested. Where local songs adopt and circulate imported idioms — for instance, in Zulukru's use of Sisqo's 'unleash the dragon' and Baha Men's 'Who let the Dogs Out?' in their '*Khassupu*' — we must seek out the local meanings that these poetic loops acquire. The point at which imported idioms lack local relevance or adaptability represents the precise moment when we realise the limits to the global diffusion of hip hop. In this regard, local rap has attracted a fair amount of vapidly imitative works, but there are also songs with profound lyrical substance, rooted in socio-political contexts of local relevance and reflective of serious engagement with issues of the day in Kenya. I will demonstrate this point in the following section with an examination of the essence of Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's '*Ting Badi Malo*' (1999).

5.2.2 '*Ting Badi Malo*' and the Further Domestication Of Hip hop

¹⁶ www.multimediant.com/pcon/zfruityloops.html

¹⁷ Personal interview, Nairobi, Sept 4 2003. Unless otherwise stated, comments attributed to Wainaina in Chapter Six also emanate from this interview.

To further investigate the ways in which Kenyan artistes have appropriated and localised the discursive practices of hip hop, one needs to look at the contexts of their creativity and to relate these to the American contexts in which hip hop achieved its contemporary visibility, popularity and commercial success. Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's 1999 hit '*Ting Badi Malo*' is a text through which we can explore these relations. The song is a classic example of ethnic rap belonging to that tradition begun by Hardstone's success with '*Uhiki*' and extended by other local practitioners such as Poxi Presha and Ndarlin P .¹⁸

Apart from its deft blending of Dholuo and Sheng, '*Ting Badi Malo*' advances local priorities through numerous contextual references to Kenyan people, places and events. To begin with, the song presents itself as the very latest example in a long history of local popular styles. To promote and legitimise their "new" style, the artistes invoke the names of older musicians and older dance styles.

<i>Tinde donge</i>	Nowadays listen
<i>iye ni miel opogore (opogoro)</i>	you agree that dances are different
<i>Jo moko dombolo</i>	for some people <i>dombolo</i>
<i>benga ni mana kanyo,</i>	<i>benga</i> is just there,
<i>Kabaselle 'luna Kidi',</i>	<i>Kabaselle Luna Kidi</i>
<i>Jully 'Dunia mbaya'</i>	Jully 'Dunia Mbaya'
<i>An ka mako mic,</i>	Me if I catch the mic,
<i>giluonga ni ero rap man,</i>	they say 'here is rap man',
<i>gidi gidi maji maji combination what a gwan.</i> ¹⁹	

Gidi Gidi Maji Maji, in an act of self-promotion, market themselves by first of all recalling the expertise of earlier Dholuo artistes. First Ochieng Kabasselle, the maestro of Luo *benga*, is invoked through his band *Luna Kidi* ('the stone') and then Princess Jully and her massive hit which warns of the dangers of contracting HIV/AIDS — '*Dunia Mbaya*' (Kiswahili for 'the world is rough'). These canons of Dholuo popular music are the pillars on which a new art form — Kenyan rap — is being mounted. Its emergence is sometimes irreverently presented as a forceful incursion into the world of song that will

¹⁸ Poxi Presha's '*Dhako*' (Dholuo for 'woman') and 'Mummy' (1996) were perhaps the first recorded examples of ethnic rap. Since then, Poxi and others like Kalamashaka have made rapping in Sheng an even more popular form of contemporary local hip hop practice than the raps in indigenous languages.

¹⁹ 'What a *gwan*' is part of what is known as Dholuo Sheng, in this context, one can read it as 'explosive combination'.

oust every other musical style and overwhelm the past. We can see this in the way Gidi and Maji map the spread of hip hop, while at the same time marketing their own art.

*Mae mit malo
kata lingala watatu
miyi winje,
even Zaiko Langa Langa²⁰
has converted to hip-hop*

This one is good, up
even that Lingala trinity
will make you listen

*A rap gi Dholuo non-stop
nyaka a top up the top
Eh, apenji u utawesa kweli*

I am rapping in Dholuo non-stop
until I reach the top
I ask you all, can you beat this

Popularising the emergent rap form is also a matter of tying it to familiar local images, tropes and concerns.

*Mae gidi gidi from chieng loso kidi,
a rap gi Dholuo,
ka wamiel gi nyatiti,
ling thi thi thi,
mondo ichik mana iti,
iwinj gik ma awacho
kata in e dala pacho
Achako pako mayo!
I am not for hire,
abiro umi kaka nam oum*

This is Gidi Gidi from the old days
I rap in Dholuo,
as we dance with *nyatiti*
[mimics the sound of *nyatiti*, the Luo lute]
hush completely so that you only
pay attention to the things that I am saying
even when you are in the house back home
I start praising, wow!
I am not for hire,
I am coming to cover you

*gi water hyacinth
lakeside Kisumu
yaani [that is] Westside connection*

with water hyacinth

Notice the attempt to sell rap from within the tenets of traditional music and to locate it not just as an urban phenomenon, but also as something of value even in a rural context. In this regard the reference to 'water hyacinth' is an apt metaphor that captures the widespread diffusion of the emergent rap style. It is a metaphor that, in particular, Dholuo listeners within the environs of Lake Victoria, a Dholuo speaking region, would readily

²⁰ A Congolese Lingala group formed by teenagers in the 1970s. Over the years, they have become very popular in the Eastern African region in part on account of their fancy dance steps. Gary Stewart (2000:304) describes the group as 'a wellspring of inspired choreography'.

relate to. The invasive weed is a great menace in the region and wrecked havoc on the fishing communities when it overran the lake in 1999.²¹ In Nairobi too, water hyacinth covered the waters of Nairobi Dam and the vast media coverage that was given to this problem at the time means that this song's metaphor was very topical back in 1999. Thus, even though '*Ting Badi Malo*' seems to be committed above all else to promoting hip hop on the local scene, and to dance and endless revelry, it nonetheless reveals a critical knowledge of the domestic issues of the day. This is further evident in the way that it draws in the micro-politics of domestic spaces, talking of police harassment, and the ubiquitous street beggars that populate every Kenyan town.

*Gol pachi kuom polise
matheko e kor yo
'kitu kidogo mi'
maskini ma obet e lo*

Remove your thoughts from policemen
who are disturbing people on the streets
'give me something small'
[say] the beggars that sit on the ground

Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's final appeal for the relevance of hip hop in the local context is made through citing Dholuo cultural practices, suggesting, with seemingly irreverent humour, the deep ties between some of these ethnic practices and the new art form.

*Miel a meila utamaduni mar Kenya wa,
yawa Dholuo ero a rap
yawa mano ema angeyo*

just dance the tradition of our Kenya
goodness, here I rap in Dholuo
goodness that is what I know,

*waru gi mchusi
shinda hata Pearl Omega
tamu tamu ka sukari
ama supu ya omena
Tera tera nya Kisumu
kata iyudo heart burn*

potatoes and stew,
better than Pearl Omega²²
sweet like sugar
or sardine soup
Just take a daughter of Kisumu
even if you get heart burn

²¹ The water hyacinth problem on Lake Victoria was so severe, covering over 12,000 hectares of the lake, that the World Bank allocated US \$ 9.3 million to the Kenya Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project to seek solutions to the menace.

²² In 1996, Prof. Arthur Obel announced that he had discovered a wonder drug, Pearl Omega, which would effectively control AIDS and prolong the lives of people infected with HIV (Moyiga Nduru 1996. AIDS – KENYA: new cure or old story? *Inter Press News Service*, Monday 11/05.). Obel's announcement was met with a lot of suspicion from the medical fraternity, partly because in 1989 he had been involved in the promotion of Kemron, another locally developed "wonder" AIDS drug that failed to demonstrate its reputed efficacy. The Kenya AIDS Society went as far as filing a restraining order against Prof Obel's continued marketing of Pearl Omega, on May 3 1996. The Kenyan High Court refused to grant the injunction and the Court of Appeal upheld this decision on January 23 1998.

*backward forward, kata pukore*²³
miela miela rap thum inyalo
goyo nduru kata igo uuuuuuuuwi!
Ka ja tero buru

backward forward, even if it pours
just dance rap music
you can scream
like those who *tero buru*²⁴

The depth of local resonance in these verses comes from their engagement with both contemporary issues and traditional practices, all of which function to domesticate the practice of rap music. There is a vivid recreation of what is familiar to local audiences. Also, what is particularly striking is the way Gidi Gidi Maji Maji anticipate criticism of their work, paralleling it to local controversies such as Pearl Omega and insisting on a more accommodating and inclusive society. Much of their critique, it seems, is aimed at those who continually shun local ingenuity in favour of imported alternatives, particularly in the field of popular music. Ultimately the statement being made is that there is a need for flexibility, sufficient to appreciate the introduction of new rituals alongside the old ones (*tero buru*). The screaming and shouting that accompanies hip hop should not be viewed as being any more disruptive than the wailing of the traditional *tero buru*. Similarly, even though '*Jo moko jo Nairobi*' (some people are from Nairobi), urban Kisumu also constitutes home ('welcome to Kisumu *pacho*') and, this new music can also accommodate the *nyatiti* that is often relegated to the village. We see, then, that (re)contextualization and syncretism emerge as key considerations in the representation of culture in the music.

But in '*Ting Badi Malo*', just as in the Hardstone remix, the debate about "the local versus the imported" does not construct these two as simple binaries. Even though '*Ting Badi Malo*' sets out to popularise Kenyan rap by situating it locally, it also works within a complex matrix of Western modernity pointing to the centrality of global forms to the local creative imaginary. Take, for instance, the way Gidi Gidi Maji Maji describe their prowess saying, '*kendo ka odoke thum ter ka mac daddy*' (if it goes back to music, take a

²³ The motions of a lady drinking sardine soup and suffering heart-burn are artfully collapsed into the design of a vigorous dance movement that leaves the performers gasping for breath.

²⁴ *Tero buru*, is a Dholuo funerary rite 'usually performed in the morning before the burial...it can be quite wild and destructive of property...people put on masks of cattle heads and leaves, hold spears, going out into the wilderness and running back singing and acting like wild beasts, so as perhaps to chase away demons so that the deceased may rest peacefully'. (Cohen and Odhiambo 1992:114).

swing like Mac Daddy).²⁵ Paralleling their prowess to another socio-economic context — the world of computer technology — and borrowing the terms of reference from this entirely different discourse is a fine example of the local's capacity for extraversion (Bayart 2000). Later the song text promotes itself by declaring its allegiance to American hip hop in a direct invocation of international stars. This is obviously an attempt to authenticate this group's style and skill, as well as a striving for trans-national acclaim.

<p><i>Maji Maji ema koro riembo meli yawa yawa welcome to Kisumu pacho an e the MC ma KRS wacho</i></p>	<p>Maji Maji is the one who is now steering the ship, goodness! Welcome to Kisumu our home I am the MC of whom KRS speaks</p>
---	---

KRS One, aka Kris Parker the American rapper, is 'the central figure and lyricist in a group of rappers and musicians organized under the name Boogie Down Productions' (Rose 1994:107). Being referred to by him would obviously be a major scoop in gaining national and international visibility as a hip hop artiste. This reference is also aimed at urging national appreciation of local performers and a revision of the view that local music is inadequate in comparison to that of international artistes. Notice the other gesture towards American hip hop in Gidi Gidi's introduction of the duo as hailing from 'Lakeside Kisumu *yaani* [that is] Westside connection, Wa [we] represent niggaz from all over the nation'. These lines literally translate American hip hop practice, especially rap's commitment to spatial discourses and its assertive inscription of marginalised places onto national imaginaries. As Murray Forman's (2000:73) study of American hip hop suggests,

when rappers refer to 'local flavour', they are identifying the detailed inflections that respond to and reinforce the significance of the music's particular sites of origin and which might be recognised by others elsewhere as being unique, interesting and, ultimately, marketable.

The reference to place by Gidi Gidi Maji Maji could, therefore, be read as part of their salute to the practices of American hip hop which thrive on building locally distinctive

²⁵ Mac Daddy is American slang for 'a person who is particularly good with Macintosh computers'.

rap sounds through constructing 'place based identities' (2000:67). In part this is achieved through the use of an exaggerated Dhuluo accent in the pronunciation of 'connection', thus make it sound as 'connexson'. Perhaps this mispronunciation is meant to parody the discourses of representation and the turf wars that have characterised the MC contests between African American rappers from the East Side (Bronx, New York) and the West Side (Compton, California). Forman (2000:71) details 'a decade-long antagonism between East and West coast rap that has too frequently proven that the gangster themes comprising the lyrical content are based in more than mere lip service or masculine posturing'.

The keystone in Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's practice is that they straddle the cultural discourses of Western modernity on the one hand, and experiences embedded in the local environment on the other. Thus even as Maji Maji likens his appeal to that of American KRS One, he makes his grand entry using the local metaphor of a ship docking at the lakeside city, Kisumu, 'our home'. Key translations, then, have been artfully made by the local rappers so that the audience's attention constantly returns to familiar scenes (passenger steamers and fishing boats on Lake Victoria), local phenomena (water hyacinth and the AIDS scourge), and current debates (Pearl Omega and *tero buru*).

Ultimately the major debt of '*Ting Badi Malo*'s' to American hip hop practice lies in its evocative chorus, in the call to raise arms up in the air that has marked hip hop anthems of celebration, protest and surrender the world over. In fact, this whole song grew out of this attention-seeking chant which Gidi Gidi and Maji Maji say they used to employ during rap competitions in Nairobi dance clubs 'to get people involved'. That is how producer Tedd Josiah met them, and when he offered them a chance to record a demo track with him, they built on the '*Ting Badi Malo*' line and without prior writing or rehearsal, recorded the song in Josiah's studio in just one take. Though the call to raise one's hands and wave them in the air seems so tied to American hip hop anthems, the act of translating this call into Dholuo is symbolic of the commitment to local adaptability, colour and relevance. It certainly served to rocket Gidi Gidi Maji Maji to Kenyan stardom, and developed the genre of ethnic rap in a whole new way.

5.3 '*Ukilya Moko*' : Gospel Goes Hip Hop

The translation of hip hop trends on the local Kenyan scene has not been restricted to the category of popular dance music. Local gospel artistes have likewise appropriated American trends in gospel music so that today, urban Kenyan gospel music bears all the defining hallmarks of the hip international sound that has come to be known as gospel rap. This is abundantly evident in Shammah's 2001 hit '*Ukilya Moko*' (Kikamba for raise up your hands) and in the strongly R&B influenced 2002 Kora Award co-winning song, '*Nakuhitaji*' (I need you) by Henrie Mutuku.

'*Ukilya Moko*' follows a typical hip hop format of a sung chorus interjecting between rap verses. Like American Kirk Franklin's '*God's Property*' (1997), '*Ukilya Moko*' appeals to youth through its funky dance rhythm and heavy bass lines. Indeed, just as African-American churches of the 1990s were forced to use the rhetorical strategies of street discourses and popular forms in order to draw the youth to a spiritual message, so too have the Pentecostal and charismatic churches in both rural and urban Kenya found in popular music a useful crowd puller. As Mark Anthony Neal (1999:171) observes of the fusion of hip hop and gospel in the music of Kirk Franklin, 'music is a vehicle to keep black youths in the church, but in order to pique their attention, the church has to be willing to inhabit the aural spaces that black youth culture constructs'. Thus while popular songs and styles have sometimes grown out of adapting gospel formats — for instance in the way American soul music grew out the African-American spirituals — the present wave of gospel music is the result of the converse process in which evangelist churches have hijacked the popular discourses of R&B and hip hop to propel their spiritual message.²⁶ In other words, it is not just that local gospel groups in Kenya noticed the success and appeal of modern American gospel music, but that they also noticed the success of local contemporary popular artistes and decided to adopt some of the strategies that contributed to the proliferation and success of this new popular music.

'*Ukilya Moko*'s' beat and rhythm crosses over from the solemnity of hymns and aggressively ventures into the terrain of funk music. But even beyond the beat, one can see a direct link between the interactive and highly performative chorus of '*Ting Badi Malo*' and one of the verses of '*Ukilya Moko*'. The choreography for '*Ting Badi Malo*' run thus:

<i>Kete mana piny</i>	Put it down (on the floor)
<i>Duoke mana ka</i>	return it just here [on the hip]
<i>Ting badi malo, be ungeyo!</i>	lift your arm in the air, do you know[how]?

'*Ukilya Moko*' calls for the following movements.

Stand up on your feet, your feet
move your head to the beat, the beat
Throw your hands in the air
Everybody says 'yeah!'

Likewise, '*Ukilya Moko*'s' call to '*uga mbuu asia uuuuuuu*' (scream and exclaim) are no different from Hardstone's cry 'put up your hands and you scream'. To all intents and purposes, all these songs create the same atmosphere of euphoria and celebration and can easily be accommodated on one dance playlist. Sometimes they fit into one another by converse strategies. For instance, Hardstone resorts to prayer and introspection to seek mediation in a romantic crisis while the gospel '*Ukilya Moko*' demands a vigorous physical display of inner spiritual being along the lines of the dance routine prescribed by '*Ting Badi Malo*'. '*Ukilya Moko*'s' choreography resounds with allusions to 'Shackles (Praise You)' the 2001 Grammy Award winner from American gospel artiste Mary Mary.

The sense of intertextuality among popular forms is again evidenced within the text of '*Ukilya Moko*'. The rap verse of this song is in the style of a typical gospel reading at a local charismatic revival or crusade meeting. It is also true to the kind of street preaching that Poxi Presha satirises in 'Lunch Time' (see Section 3.4) and which dominates the lunch hour of impecunious workers and the unemployed in virtually all major towns in

²⁶ In Kenya, one can speak of the appropriation of Gikūyū hymns by secular forces during the *Mau Mau* struggle (see Christiana Pugliese, 2003) and in the present day, the *Mūgithii* (Gikūyū for train) tradition thrives on a secularisation of Christian hymns (see Maina Mutonya, 2003).

Kenya. In Shammah's faithful recreation of this common urban scene one is struck by the rapid-fire translation of the gospel excerpt from Kiswahili [S] to Kikamba [K].

<i>Bwana asifiwe, Amen,</i>	Praise the Lord
<i>bwana asifiwe, watu wa Machakos, Amen</i>	Praise the Lord, people of Machakos
[S] <i>Bibilia ina sema</i>	The Bible says
[K] <i>Bibilia ya thia</i>	
[S] <i>Paulo na wafuasi waliomba</i>	Paul and the disciples prayed
[K] <i>Paul na asilia wahiye</i>	
[S] <i>Mpaka milango ya gereza ika funguka</i>	until the prison doors opened
[K] <i>mpaka[sic] miango ya jela ya funguka</i>	
[S] <i>Inua mikono sasa</i>	Raise your hands now
[K] <i>ukilyai moko iguu</i>	
[S] <i>Natuanze kuinua bwana</i>	And let's start raising up the Lord
[K,S] <i>na tukilye bwana Yesu, mwokozi</i>	
<i>Alleluia, (Alleluia)</i>	
[S] <i>Bwana asifiwe</i>	Praise the Lord
[K] <i>mwathani adikwe</i>	

Notice how the crusade script introduces the Kikamba speaker by identifying the target audience as 'watu wa Machakos' (a town in Eastern Province, in the heart of Kamba territory). The Bible excerpt itself is short, and the sermon is dominated by the attention-seeking ploys of the main speaker with his demands for physical affirmation of the faith. Given that sometimes the translator does not give an actual Kikamba rendering of some Kiswahili terms — for instance *'funguka'* which in Kamba should be *'higuka'* — it is possible that Shammah intends to parody the local gospel crusade mania and the open city street forms. But even if parody was not intended, the popular crusade or street preaching format from which *'Ukilya Moko'* borrows is often filled with a lot of hilarity emanating from the translation exercise, in which the "inaccurate" deliveries emerge as part of the hazardous task of trying to capture, render and practice the (elusive) divine word. As Lydia Liu (1999) would argue the value of these translations lies, not so much in the attempts at reciprocity of meaning, but in the creativity of the speaker. Here the speaker's seamless flow from one language to another easily entrances the audience. Again, tapping into everyday street forms becomes a powerful vehicle for stirring audiences and propelling gospel music into the popular imagination by giving it the leverage to compete alongside other popular music forms. It is also a handy instrument of familiarization in simplifying for youth consumption, the moral crusade and evangelizing

mission that constitutes the *raison d'être* of gospel music. Again, one could also argue that this translation format of charismatic missions has its parallels in the 'call and response' protocols of hip hop performance. In a sense then the shift from one language to another parallels the flow of calls from earth that resound in heaven.

There is a sense in which the task of competing with many other cultural practices for the attention of urban youth breeds a tactic of ambivalence with regard to the ways in which artistes address God and the sacred word. In *'Ukilya Moko'* the Almighty is never once mentioned directly in English. Direct references only come in the other mediums — Kiswahili and Kikamba viz *Bwana, Bwana Yesu* and *Mwathani*. Thus when the English chorus states — 'If you're not ashamed to praise, common praise him let me see you do it like this' — there is no concrete reference to God. This anonymity is further heightened by the singularly emotive revelation.

*Makes you wanna go ooh,
makes you wanna go aah
Makes you wanna go ooh, go aah,
makes you wanna go aah*

The sense that what is being experienced is indescribable is captured in the sensory expression 'go ooh, go ahh', a reflection of passion that might more readily be related to an erotic experience than to ecclesiastical joy. In the circumstances, the ambivalence surrounding the naming of divinities and of the sensations of the mind and/or body taps into the sensual imagination of youth, providing an imaginary that is not necessarily tied to the gospel message intended by the group. This capacity for free associations becomes the entry point that ropes in the attention of the youth for it readily feeds their capacity for projected independence and contrary behaviour. In tracing the transatlantic influences in contemporary Kenyan gospel, one realises that in this capacity for erotic innuendo, there are contrasts to be drawn between Shammah's speechless mesmerisation and Kirk Franklin's explicit focus on the youthful body in 'God's Property' as he commands 'shake the booty that God gave you'.

Again, listening to Henrie Mutuku's R&B influenced '*Nakuhitaji*' (2001), one identifies the guise of anonymity as a central strategy through which contemporary Kenyan gospel is propelling itself into popular sites by deliberately remaining open to secular interpretations. The ambiguity of the title cannot be gainsaid. Indeed, this ambiguity is the central trope along which the entire song text — which like '*Ukilya Moko*' borrows the translation format of local charismatics — is constructed. Take for instance the very first verse which reads precisely like a love poem to an undisclosed beau.

[S] *Kila siku nakuangalia wewe*
[E] *Everyday I'm looking out for you*
[S] *Nashugulikia kufuata nyayo zako*
[E] *Wondering how I'll take the steps you make*
[S] *Kila siku nakuangalia wewe*
[E] *Everyday I'm looking out for you*
[S] *Nashugulikia kufuata nyayo zako*
[E] *Wondering how exactly will I take the steps you make*

The possibility of '*Nakuhitaji*' being a romantic ballad is accentuated even further by the second verse.

[S] *Ndani ya roho yangu*
[E] *In my heart*
[S] *Mimi kiu changu*
[E] *You are the thirst of my life*
[S] *Ndani ya roho yangu*
[E] *In my heart*
[S] *Mimi ni njaa yangu*
[E] *You are the hunger of my heart*

And then the declaration of the chorus — '(I need you) *Nakuhitaji*' — repeated nearly six times, and built into a crescendo that creates the impression of deeply felt erotic passion just as much as it can point to acute spiritual hunger and a sacred yearning. It cannot be that Henrie Mutuku never once feels inspired enough to call out to the Lord by name. Her guise of anonymity readily feeds into a romantic template, freeing the imagination of potential listeners to flesh out their own images, rather than binding them to the laid down canon of spiritual practice and testimony. Thus positioned, Mutuku's song can quite flexibly be mapped onto the social imaginary of individuals or community depending

upon their needs. The ambiguity of a line like: 'You're the one who is with me when I wake up, you're with me when I lie' serves the public imaginary in more than one sense. There is also a sense in which this song text signals the reality of contemporary existence as an ongoing negotiation between transnational sites and identities. As such the romantic nuances in the song are a feature of the physical world on earth while the spiritual narrative projects the vast cosmic domain of the "future" in heaven. But gospel teachings are also about drawing that remote celestial existence into the present, thereby situating individual identity as a matter of where one is going and not just where they are at the present moment. The song's appeal to romantic inclinations becomes a medium through which the discourses of religious faith and practice are made tangible and accessible. Rather than dwell on abstractions, as is the tendency with much religious literature, Mutuku's gospel song hijacks the language of romance in order to ably communicate spiritual perception and project the self into this earthly world as much as into the heavenly one. Or to put it another way, the ways of Eros being as mysterious as those of God, the forms of addressing them are easily collapsed into one fluid model.

As with '*Ukilya Moko*' Mutuku's '*Nakuhitaji*' is similarly underpinned by the strategies of Kenyan popular religious practice. It carries inbuilt translations from Kiswahili to English structured in the pattern of alternate Kiswahili and English lines, as if to ensure that the message to potential audiences is bilingually tracked at every stage.

[S] *Mara nyingi na kukosea roho wako*

[E] *Many are those times I go and go against your heart*

[S] *Lakini nina furaha umenipa upendo wako*

[E] *You given me a heart that truly loves you more and more every day*

Much more than the lyrical content, it is the structure of this translation strategy, so clearly reminiscent of street preachers and evangelistic crusaders, which continually suggests '*Nakuhitaji*'s' engagement with gospel. The way the translation and circulation of religious discourses in contemporary Kenyan gospel music employs popular street mediums speaks of the powerful influence of popular forms and is indicative of local ingenuity particularly since it is so artfully woven into the fabric of the fairly distinct transatlantic influences of Kirk Franklin, Mary Mary and Tramaine Hawkins.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter my examination of contemporary Kenyan popular music has revealed the circuits through which global hip hop practices have been diffused into the local environment. Their entry through various music formats — tapes, CDs, videos, MTV, MP3 — belongs to the broader global systems of exchange that are often taken to mean that the local constitutes passive consumers and not creators. But in the discussions of *matatu* circulatory roles and of local popular music practice and its capacity to appropriate and revise global phenomena, we have seen just how active and creative local consumers are. The localizing strategies and contextual detail apparent in these forms attest to the agency of local audiences and to the way these forms serve local interests. Indeed, it is precisely because the discursive practices of rap are so centred on local allegiance and representing domestic issues that the form has become so easily adaptable by Kenyan artists, some of whom are doing a remarkable job in using the form to speak with local relevance.

And in tracing the "global" dimension and contexts from which local songs are fashioned the argument in this chapter has underlined the dynamics of circulation and cultural links that comprise Kenyan modernity. The Kenyan modernity hypothesised is best captured in the view of postcolonial cultural antinomies as ones that are, in part, fuelled by a deep commitment to indigenous culture (aspects of which are retained) but that are nonetheless dynamic enough to constantly admit into their midst the seeds of their continuing renewal. It is a "cultural logic" that is, more than anything else, sharpened by an arching towards newness juxtaposed against a display of the local and its past. As a result of this logic, static notions of centre and periphery, of local and foreign — often so mechanically inscribed in analysis — are constantly revised and blurred.

Thus we realise that in the use and subversion of Gĩkũyũ etiquette in '*Uhiki*', for instance, the artist's allegiance to tradition does not prioritise either purity or ethnic exclusivity. An equally complex texture of cultural fusion is apparent in '*Ting Badi Malo*' which continually urges a privileging of new cultural practice even as it invokes tradition in the

form of *nyatiti* and *tero buru*. Indeed, one cannot help noticing that the song does not concretely make use of *nyatiti* as part of its instrumentation; it only lyrically invokes *nyatiti*'s assumed hold on the perceived musical preferences of the intended audience. Again, their reference to traditional practices such as *tero buru* and ethnic cuisine such as *omena* is tinged with parody, as if Gidi Gidi Maji Maji seek to keep a careful distance between their art and these "old ways". These local initiatives are themselves variations on traditional practice which has — we need always to remind ourselves — never been static. Ultimately then, ethnic identities as well as traditional practices are forever being transformed, and the question of whether this amounts to dilution or enrichment is more of a political concern than a meaningful description of culture. Still, we might deduce from this that local artistes seem to use traditional practices only insofar as they suggest a somewhat restrained, even ironic, commitment to roots. If anything, their greater commitment is to contemporary existence, which by definition seems to entail constant appropriation and refashioning of largely American examples.

Undeniably, the cultural processes we see being enacted in Kenya's new popular music, of which '*Uhiki*', '*Ting Badi Malo*' and '*Ukilya Moko*' are representative, constantly generate new idioms. Many of the new similes, metaphors and tropes are hewn out of the local environment, as various phrases we have considered attest (among others, 'sweet like *omena*' (sardines), '*abiro umi kaka nam oum gi water hyacinth*' (coming to cover you like water hyacinth), '*shinda hata Pearl Omega*' (better than Pearl Omega)). These are not only instances of "local colour", but are adamant assertions of roots and belonging meant to counter the fear of cultural capitulation which many read into the increasing prevalence of hip hop on the local music scene. At the same time, some of the idioms these new songs popularise — 'put up your hands and you scream', 'dot com lady', 'unleash the dragon' — are clearly plagiarised from global discourse. The pertinent question, though, concerns the relevance of these borrowed idioms in their new local contexts and the extent to which they allow Kenyan youth to define themselves by identifying with their counterparts in the West.

If Kenyan popular music is borrowing from black diasporic cultures in the United States, which originally derived from African contexts, how should we to read the complex construct of authenticity in contemporary Kenyan popular songs? Are we to understand these relational cultural practices as modernity's assault, threatening the imminent annihilation of the local? Should we think, along more optimistic lines, of connectivity and return, or somewhat cynically of opportunistic syncretism? If we accept that systems of cultural exchange have, however uneven and coercive they may be, always existed among regions of the world, then we might regard the practices we have analysed as part of a long tradition of black Atlantic relationality. We might, then, consider the importation of hip hop to Kenya as an instance of a fractal pattern of importation, appropriation and manipulation that has a provenance which indissolubly links both contexts (African and American). Hip hop, then, might be read as an instantiation of this ongoing history of the black Atlantic and its plurality of appropriations and recombinations (Gilroy 1993). In other words, the use of hip hop by Kenyan artistes is a practice of (re)appropriation of black culture, a resumption of the dialogue that was interrupted, and almost silenced, by the economic dynamics of slavery and colonial hegemony.

The songs I have studied in this chapter have made apparent the sense in which contemporary Kenyan popular music can be defined by its 'boundary-crossing capacity' (Cooper 1987:101). As consumers of global cultural trends, local audiences enter into alliances with (mostly) African-American icons through hip hop music, dance and fashion and that way they transform their own lifestyles by identifying with those of other worlds. Gospel music too acquires this capacity to spiritually and culturally relocate its audiences opening up a dialogue that reads the real world through the promise of eternal fulfilment in the world to come. In other words, the boundaries crossed are also temporal ones as the music traverses time, both backwards and forwards, creating a continuum of experience between worlds. Modernity, if we read these processes as constitutive, becomes an act of communication, a shared experience among peoples, rather than simply the (re)colonisation of the postcolony by Euro-American economic and cultural capital. That we often deny local agency in our reading of these contacts stems in part

from a colonial regime of interpretation. Also, postcolonies (and here I have Kenya in mind) have somewhat fragile senses of their own identity as nations. The wounds of colonial domination are still visible enough to call for the constant nursing and nurturing of national priorities. This might explain why diasporic links are often held to be of secondary importance, and why the tendency is to decry cultural linkages that appear commercially intimidating to the postcolony for fear that they will threaten and overrun national culture and political independence. Artistes who blatantly flirt with Western cultures are often deemed to engage in the worst type of cultural capitulation. But beyond the verbalised official discourses on national(ist) culture, do popular forms themselves aspire to national(ist) designs? What extent of political engagement can we read in contemporary Kenyan popular culture? This is the subject of my next and final chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

'RITWA RIAKU'¹ AND UNBWOGABLE: NATIONAL LONGING AND THE ANTINOMIES OF THE POSTCOLONIAL NATION²

In the course of Chapter Two, I established the iconographic link between some artistes names and the socio-political contexts of institutionalised graft and political thuggery in which these artistes have made their entry onto the Kenyan cultural scene. In much the same vein, in Chapter Three I indicated that cogent interpretations of some of the work of Kayamba Afrika, Nairobi City Ensemble and Tedd Josiah can only be made against the background of some understanding of the national politics prevailing at the time of the songs' making. In the present chapter, I will be bringing together the threads of these references to the relationship between national politics and popular song-texts by concretely looking at the ways in which contemporary songs become sites through which artistes and the listening public experience and mediate national politics. From these songs, what do we read as the chief characteristics of Kenyan political culture? What do the songs tell us about the ways in which the Kenyan public engages with political power? In their interpretations of the political moment how do these songs mediate the gap between official histories and pronouncements on the one hand, and leadership practices on the other? How has contemporary Kenyan popular music either promoted or subverted official discourses of the nation in the era of political transition, a period necessarily marked by intense lobbying for greater democratization and heightened anxiety over political change?

The basic premise of the chapter is that popular music is a viable site for imagining the nation (Anderson 1990). Presumably then by reflecting and molding the thoughts and

¹ Gīkūyū for 'your name', the title of track no.7 on Eric Wainaina's 2001 album, *Sawa Sawa*, (Kiswahili for 'it is alright') which was produced in the US while Wainaina was a student of Music Production and Engineering/Songwriting at Boston's Berkelee College of Music.

² Part of this chapter will appear as 'Popular Music, Popular Politics: 'Unbwogable' & The Idioms Of Freedom In Contemporary Kenyan Popular Music' in *African Affairs* Vol 104, April 2005.

practices of a community, popular music can overcome obstacles to unity and help to formulate the new nations that all decolonization projects dreamed of. Additionally, it is presumed that popular music can offer incisive criticism of political leadership, thereby steering political practice away from excesses that endanger the will of the majority. The data for the chapter is mainly drawn from Eric Wainaina's '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*' (2001) and Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's '*Unbwogable*' (2002).³ In order to fully explore the fairly layered and sustained examination of postcolonial Kenya that the post-Kenyatta generation engages with on Wainaina's album,⁴ I will read '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*' as forming part of a dialogue with the rest of the tracks on the album *Sawa Sawa*. A useful way of beginning this discussion of contemporary lyrical engagement with the realities of Kenya's postcolonial politics is through an examination of theoretical debates on African political experience and particularly, of those that dwell on the obstacles to postcolonial nation formation.

6.1 Reading Postcolonial Politics

The task of nation formation in the postcolony has entailed more than constitutional delinking from colonial power. In equal measure, it has been an act of imagination, desire and will (Anderson 1991; Chatterjee 1986, 1993; Bhabha 1990). Part of this imagination has consisted of the careful fashioning of key shared memories, such as the colonial experience, into 'national memories' (Renan 1990:19). Renan further states that as the cornerstone of the nation, 'national memories' function largely through the constant invocation of the ancestors (or nationalist heroes) and their teachings: 'A heroic past, great men, glory... this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea' (1990:19). There is much to be gained by focusing on communal loss and pain, and not just on communal triumphs. Emphasizing grief visits guilt on posterity, and guilt adds up to obligations, duties, in essence, a certain amount of indebtedness to the nationalist enterprise. This is why colonised societies continually look back to the moment when their sovereignty and their traditions were trampled by colonial domination. Again, we must note as Renan does, that the idea of a national memory involves a careful process of

³ '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*' is colloquial Kiswahili for country riddled with corruption.

⁴ Tracks 3, 5, 8 and 11 are narrative verses performed by the comedy trio, *Redykulass*.

selection from competing histories of the community. In other words, nations are built as much by forgetting as they are by remembering, and as Terence Ranger (1983) would have it, nations also flourish by the orchestrated 'invention of tradition[s]'.

Core to the building of national consciousness as Frantz Fanon (1968) tells us, is the building of national literature; a literature that echoes an ethos of combat and that is fully committed to the idea of total national liberation. In Fanon's mind, writing of the Negritude variety was an inadequate rendition of the terms of the liberation struggle since it unwittingly reinforced the biases and stereotypes of the colonisers. It is perhaps with this knowledge of Fanon's recipe of a literature that embodies and empowers the anti-colonial struggle that Frederic Jameson (1986) terms all Third World literatures allegories of the nation. In his view, 'the telling of the individual story, the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself' (85-86). The key point for us here, is not so much that we should be carried away critiquing Jameson's reductive view of nationalism as a Third World preserve (as Aijaz Ahmad, 1987 does), but that we should note the ways in which literature, and indeed, all popular art forms can constitute credible renditions of national consciousness. In effect, these cultural productions are naturally poised to formulate and promote new levels and aspects of nationalism.

But do nations necessarily represent and speak for all the people in a community all of the time? This is the kind of question that is posed by critics of Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, such as Neil Lazarus (1994), who feels that anti-colonial nationalism also entails a certain amount of exclusion and marginalisation, for example, of women's causes. What this kind of critique indicates is the very real danger of nationalist thought and practice being turned into state dogma once the anti-colonial struggle has succeeded. Homi Bhabha (1990:298) talks of the 'liminality of the nation' since official discourses of the nation can never be completely inclusive of all members of a community. There will always be those who remain on the margins of this discourse and whose experiences and aspirations are sidelined or ignored. Bhabha's notion of 'DissemiNation' entails writing against the certainty of the term nationalism since the 'cultural construction of nationness

[is] a form of social and textual affiliation' (292). As we probe 'the strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of "the people" or "the nation" and make them the immanent subjects and objects of a range of social and literary narratives', we need to look at the cultural productions on the margins and see what alternative views of the nation they provide. Because popular art forms are often deemed as being limited to matters of leisure and pleasure, the act of probing them for their engagement with nationalist and political discourses can be interpreted as an act of dissemination, of writing from the margins of state-sanctioned versions. Popular culture is indeed a matter of writing from the margins since the postcolonial state positions itself as the repository and the arbiter of 'the truths of the nation', its history and ethos.

Again, any reading of postcolonial nationalism must, in order to be inclusive, recognise the implicatedness of the ruled in the fashioning of a national political culture. This is the point Achille Mbembe (1992) makes in his articulation of the ways in which the ruled facilitate and participate in the performance of state power, replicating its codes in their own everyday practices and churning out new idioms to graphically name their nation's political culture. Just as importantly, we need to pay attention to the many processes by which the public imaginatively subverts, undermines and learns to live with the obscenities of African dictatorships. The sum total of public participation and contribution to national political practice is seldom considered in official versions of the nation.

Another point of caution regarding the veracity and completeness of discourses of the postcolonial nation comes from Frederick Cooper (1994:1519). In his reading of African history he argues that '[p]olitics in a colony should not be reduced to anticolonial politics or to nationalism: the "imagined communities" Africans saw were both smaller and larger than the nation, sometimes in creative tension with each other, sometimes in repressive antagonism'. It is in this same vein that Jean Franco (1989:205) has argued that the nation is a very complex and contested term, and that it may not, at least in the Latin American context, even be 'the inevitable framework for either political or cultural projects'. In essence, therefore, critics have increasingly noted the shift in configuration of

postcolonial spaces, especially as they are reflected in a literature that increasingly focuses on fragmentation and plurality as opposed to simply continually upholding the primacy and singularity of narratives of liberation. The point is that the narrow conception of the nation as the primary category for imagining and articulating liberation has been challenged by the failure of postcolonial states to deliver on the promises of independence. Consequently, the hostility towards (alter)native categories such as ethnicity that one reads in discourses of liberation and national culture by Fanon and Cabral now invite scrutiny.

Some critics do not see the ethnic category 'as an impediment to emancipatory political and cultural praxis' (Esonwanne 1993:50). Indeed, they insist that "'tribalism"...far from being an obstacle to governance, is what makes possible any government at all' (Appiah 1992:170). This is not the same thing as the negative effects of ethnic divide and rule which political leaders sometimes employ to ensure their survival in office. Ethnicity does facilitate beneficial rethinking of cultural and national agendas. As Emmanuel Yewah (2001) argues African writers who, through various strategies such as writing in ethnic languages, are increasingly decentring the nation from their narratives and suggesting fluid national boundaries are constructively challenging postcolonial leadership and creating the much needed space for a reconception of the past and the future. Indeed, part of the strategy of rethinking the postcolonial nation lies in reconceiving ethnicity and accepting difference, for as Clara Joseph argues, there is much strength to be gained from forging the cultural differences in a multiethnic nation. In any event the 'surfacing of ethnic and tribal differences, like Freud's return of the repressed, is simultaneously a process in the journey toward healing as well as a stage of the illness itself' (2001:61).

Nicholas Nyangira (1987) traces the roots of modern political organisation in Kenya to the ethnic associations in urban areas that were necessitated by colonial policies on land tenure which pushed natives into the towns. Nyangira further argues that it was the whole colonial system that formed the basis of new ethnic and class inequalities in postcolonial

Kenya. He then documents the role of ethnic affiliations and class alliances in the field of national competitive politics ultimately concluding that

to bid convincingly for political power at the national level in Kenya one needs the support of the petit bourgeois and the bourgeois proper of one's own ethnic group, or at least the most important factions of it.....[o]nce this ethnic-based support is secured, one then moves to seek support of the bourgeois leadership of other ethnic groups (26).

Nyangira makes passing reference to the fact that once in political office, leaders use power to appropriate resources and often manipulate ethnicity — an otherwise 'rational way of mobilizing the masses politically' — to acquire ardent supporters (30).

Michael Schatzberg (1998) sheds useful light on the factors frustrating the realization of the national ideal when he describes the complex relationship between ethnicity, class and state that Nyangira introduces as the 'triple helix'. These dynamics Schatzberg argues are the 'basic dimensions of contemporary life ... throughout sub-Saharan Africa'. In the circumstances, ethnic ties become key to the acquisition of wealth and consequently, the middle-class becomes necessarily comprised of a specific ethnic group. Equally important, the state becomes the primary means by which this personal wealth is accessed. Following on the work of other Africanist scholars, Schatzberg underlines ethnicity is 'a protean, contextual, and intermittent phenomenon' (9). Changes necessitated by different impulses will cause realignments in which some groups will fracture into smaller entities while others will merge to create supra-ethnic groups. At the same time, individuals have a way of projecting strategic ethnic identities, each time privileging the allegiance they imagine will give them the greatest leverage within the context they find themselves in. Even then, the state itself is as much in a constant state of flux just as ethnicity and class both are.

The power of Schatzberg's thesis lies in the way he relates the interlocking dynamics of interaction between state, ethnicity and class. Particularly cogent are his arguments about the ease and force with which ethnicity and class can dominate and condition state

formation so that those in power perpetually hijack the state and constitute their own class around it; guided primarily by the fact that they use its institutions to consolidate power and wealth. Further, Schatzberg seems to embrace John Lonsdale's (1994: 131) perception of 'moral ethnicity' when he argues that tough economic conditions in the postcolony force workers to seek 'survival and refuge in ethnic enclaves' (14). While this ethnic consciousness might obscure class-consciousness it can, outside the domain of political interests, promote economic prosperity. It is actually the state, as Achille Mbembe (1992:25) reminds us, that complicates the question of ethnicity. Through coercion and repression and through side-shows like sports rivalry and ultimately, through its ideological institutions, the state struggles to control and regulate ethnicity. In Mbembe's words (1992:25)

those who control the state incessantly preach the main task of all citizens is to build the nation. In addition, and as a corollary, national leaders regard any subnational identity, including ethnicity, as a threat to nation-building and thus illegitimate. There is ... an explicitly articulated hostility toward any subnational identification, even though much research has shown ordinary citizens perceive no conflict whatever between their national and ethnic identities.

Speaking of the Kenyan context, Atieno Odhiambo (2002b) draws a distinction between the academic posturing of ethnicity 'as a generic topic', and the ordinary people's lived experience of either efficacious agency or crippling handicap on account of what they know as "tribalism".

Kenyan Africans... talk and think about tribalism as the regular experience of their everyday lives, in its many enabling capacities, its incapacitating impediments upon the hopes of individuals, and its blocking of opportunities for whole communities. They use tribalism as a practical vocabulary of politics and social movements (230).

Within this scheme, Atieno further establishes the historical processes by which tribalism was long turned into an 'attribute of state power' (231) so that today, it is employed to quantitatively aid in the incumbent regime's consolidation of power and thereby effectively exacerbates the oppression of other communities. To effectively occupy state power then, each incumbent regime cumulatively places members of its ethnic group in strategic public positions within the civil service, in state corporations and in the armed forces. Regardless of merit or experience, privileged members of the ruling ethnic community dominate the political, social and economic life of the country. That they occupy such prominent and powerful positions is purely a matter of the incumbent's strategy for survival within the emergent nation-state.

And the incumbent has few choices really for as Kimani Njogu (2001:381) observes,

'[i]n a country where ascendancy to the highest office in the land translates into at times real and at times illusory feelings of social and economic promise among the members of the leader's community, ethnic solidarity can frequently be quite strong and compelling'.

Ken Omolo (2002:215) terms this phenomenon 'political ethnicity' which he sees it as 'a prominent characteristic of the one-party state in Kenya'. Ultimately, and as many scholars have repeatedly demonstrated, this ethnic centred interpretation of statehood and nation formation invariably opens the doors to political and social rivalry, corruption and economic stagnation (Haugerud, 1995; Throup & Hornsby, 1998; Ajulu 2001, 2002; Southall,1999; Klopp, 2000, 2002; Omolo, 2002). The kind of difference it engenders is not the stuff upon which nationhood can be fostered, instead it invites perpetual splintering and fissure, spreading the wholesale view that ethnicity is in *toto* a bad thing.

A rather radical reading of African postcolonial experience is made by Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Deloz (1999) who argue that the crisis of modernity reflected in contemporary African political life can only best be understood as the

'instrumentalization of disorder'.⁵ This they define as 'the process by which political actors on Africa seek to maximize their returns on the state of confusion, uncertainty, and sometimes even chaos, which characterizes most African polities' (xviii). Core to their argument on 'disorder as political instrument', however, is their very useful inclusion of corruption as a critical dynamic in the triple helix that has dominated and continually disrupted the realization of the national ideal that was the objective of all decolonization projects.

Not only does corruption thrive on the moral economy of disorder that privileges 'informal, uncodified and unpoliced' approaches to socio-economic and political action, it also amounts to a reality of profitable opportunities for those who know how to work this system. Unconcerned with the moral dialectics and national economic losses arising from institutionalised corruption in Africa, Chabal and Daloz probe the political practicalities that are served by corruption at all levels of society.

[C]orruption is not just endemic but an integral part of the social fabric of life. For those at the bottom end of the society, like lowly civil servants, the sale of the limited amount of power they possess is virtually their only means of survival. Higher up, extortion is one of the major avenues of enrichment; it facilitates social advancement and the upholding of one's position... it enables the political elites to fulfil their duties, to meet the expectations of their clients and, hence, to enhance their status (99).

With the somewhat sweeping statement that 'corruption in Africa concerns the whole of the population' (102) Chabal and Daloz underline that this brand of 'corruption is most frequently bound up with important ties of reciprocity linking those who are related within networks of vertical relations' (96). In their view, so long as a redistribution of

⁵ I term their arguments radical primarily because they tacitly position the political crises in Africa as a set of consciously woven conditions by wilful leaders. By granting such forceful agency to wrongheadedness, Chabal and Daloz not only invite the label of (un)conscious racists who demand a different set of rules to read/judge Africa, outside the normal humane ones prevailing in the West, they also erroneously lump African electorates together with their devious leaders as crafty operators rather than compassionately

looted resources filters down the social ladder, the behaviour of beneficiaries of graft 'is deemed acceptable' by the populace since corruption is not a matter of a particular class but 'a habitual part of everyday life, an expected element of every social transaction' (99). Indeed, Chabal and Daloz come to the general conclusion that 'there is a distinct impression that corruption remains accepted as an integral part of the socio-political order' (108). Anti-corruption discourse from government is mere rhetoric and any public disclosure of graft or the occasional purges and prosecution of bribe takers are actually 'convenient devices for eliminating political rivals rather than a real attempt to reform the political 'order' ' (104).

While much of the emphasis of Bayart et al (1999) is on the African states' involvement in international networks of crime, they nonetheless note that the 'interaction between power, war, economic accumulation and illicit activities of various types' in part constitutes the criminalization of the state in Africa. As such, like Chabal and Daloz they lament the breakdown of order in the ranks of state authorities and see the connivance and greed of government personnel as a critical link in the movement from kleptocratic to felonious states characterised by proliferation of illicit international trade in drugs, arms and donor funding.

The inclusion of corruption as a major dynamic in the evolution of postcolonial African states enriches Schatzberg's triple helix in ways that are extremely beneficial to unravelling the conundrum of African postcolonial politics. The function of corruption is especially useful to understanding how unpopular regimes have blended state, ethnicity, and class to retain their hold on political power. Evidently then, debates on postcolonial African political experience crystallise around four key dynamics – the state, ethnicity, class and corruption. It is precisely the interplay between these factors that is seen to continually intrude on and disrupt the realization of the national ideal that was the objective of all decolonization projects.

seeing them as pawns and victims in a system they can do little to control or reverse without inviting total anarchy.

As to whether this question of nation formation — whose possibility seemed to be the natural goal of all decolonization movements — remains a public or a private dream is certainly an issue worthy of investigation, one that cultural forms, along with other intellectual productions on the continent, can help to illuminate. As if to stress the centrality of cultural production to the understanding of this riddle of nation formation, Simon Gikandi argues that the predominant engagement of recent African writing has actually been an urgent need to 'question the ideological foundations on which the narratives of decolonization were constructed' (1992a:378). In other words, contemporary artistes seem to be engaged in a revision of the foundations of the nation, and are ruthless in their depiction of the failures of post-independence regimes and the problematic of power sharing. Angelique Haugerud (1995), Kimani Gecau (1997) and Dismas Masolo (2000) document the practice of musical protest in Kenya as a significant part of opposition politics. Can we, therefore, conclude that contemporary popular forms, as part of the cultural production in the postcolony, necessarily engage in a revision of the foundations of the nation? Indeed, how do these popular art forms help to reflect and even to formulate new conditions of possibility for postcolonial affiliation? We need to probe the textual examples from *Sawa Sawa* and '*Unbwogable*' for the answers to these questions.

6.2 Corruption and Ethnicity in *Sawa Sawa*

At the 7th Kora All Africa Annual Music Awards in 2002 Eric Wainaina and Henrie Mutuku were named the winners in the category "Best Artiste – East Africa". Wainaina's winning song was '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*' (hereafter referred to as '*Nchi*'). Many have labeled '*Nchi*' 'Kenya's anti-corruption song' for the poignant way in which it describes the extent of moral and political decay in Kenya of the post-Kenyatta era.⁶ To begin with the title of the song foregrounds rampant corruption as the hallmark of national character. And when the opening verse begins with '*Mzee alisema, "hakuna cha bure"*' (Mzee⁷ said "there are no free things"), it instantaneously casts a backward glance to the Kenyatta era

⁶ See Simon Robinson, 'The Bribe Has Spoken', *Time Magazine* March 11 2002, p.41 and Eric Shimoli and Muriithi Muriuki, 'Kenya's List of Corruption Unveiled' *The Daily Nation* January 19 2002 p.1.

⁷ A Kiswahili term of respect for an old man, and the sobriquet by which Kenya's founding president was known.

and the promise of liberation. A stark contrast is being created between the nationalist ideals that were formulated in the moment of decolonization, and the dominant realities at the time of the song's making. Kenyatta's dictum had aimed at enforcing a doctrine of hard work and sacrifice by all and Wainaina invokes it close to 40 years later to establish the cornerstone ethic of the nation.⁸ The very act of going back to the words of the 'ancestors' of the nation signals the nation's unconscious desire for heroes, and for a common past of suffering (Renan, 1990:19). Again, 'national memory' is evoked in order to properly cast the reality of the present within the mould of deviation from the ideal past and it is doubtlessly meant to initiate guilt over the betrayal of national ideals. For as the song says of our present relation to Kenyatta's doctrine: '*hiyo msemo tumeutafsiri kinuyme!*' (we are contradicting that dictum).

One can argue that in terms of *Sawa Sawa's* engagement with national form, what we note from the opening line of '*Nchi*' is Wainaina's reverence for Kenyatta's mythical role as liberator. As we shall see later on in the chapter, this reverence becomes even more apparent in '*Daima*'. In *Nchi* the simple reference to Kenyatta as 'Mzee' draws us into acknowledging the wisdom and authority of the nation's founding manifesto. And taking us back to what Kenyatta continually said is itself part of 'the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative' that is endemic to all projects of narrating the nation (Bhabha, 1990:297).

Having detailed the many acts of bribery that accompany everyday existence — from bribes paid out to secure school places for one's children, to road licenses that are "sold" at exorbitant prices — Wainaina asserts '*twarudisha Jamhuri yetu nyuma*' (we are retarding development in our republic). In other words, the old narrative of the nation is also cast in terms of development and the use of a collective pronoun here is indicative of the act of shared responsibility for the nation that we are all being asked to shoulder. What Wainaina tries to do in *Nchi* is to engage public perception into viewing corruption not so much as an act that benefits the individual, but as an omission that abandons the

⁸ From the collection of Kenyatta's speeches in *Suffering Without Bitterness* one notes the preponderance of this message of 'uhuru na kazi'/ freedom and hard work. See for instance p.215-16 where Kenyatta expounds on the logic of this dictum in the context of national development.

nation to neglect and decay. And the chorus is very forthright and harsh in declaring that '*Nchi ya kitu kidogo, ni nchi ya watu wadogo*' (a country of riddled with corruption is a country of small-minded people).

Although some critics of '*Nchi*' argued that the song was unduly prosaic and utterly lacking in captivating lyrical poetry, that its message was too stark and bland, it is actually possible to see the artiste's sustained employment of irony and reversal. When, for instance, the chorus sarcastically implores '*ukitaka chai ewe ndugu, nenda Limuru*' (if you want tea [a bribe] my brother, go to Limuru [a tea-growing area in Central Province]), Wainaina does employ an interesting pun on the idioms of corruption. Even more interesting is the deliberate way in which the surplus meaning around this chorus lampoons the discourses of corruption for their somewhat obscene preoccupation with eating and the stomach (Mbembe 1992: 9; Bayart 1993). Both Mbembe and Bayart have demonstrated that eating is a critical idiom in the grammar of power in postcolonial Africa. Metaphors such as "the national cake" and *matunda ya uhuru*⁹ — which were coined in the independence years to graphically mirror the concepts of power sharing, development (distribution of infrastructure) and self-determination — have, over the years, grown into tired and much vulgarised clichés. Presently, they are only understood in literal and practical terms as harbingers of corruption; a corruption that thrives on the avaricious exploitation of the state and its resources for the primitive accumulation of wealth by a few individuals.

Within much the same framework as Mbembe's exposure of the vulgarity of this vocabulary of eating, '*Nchi*' satirises public officials whose understanding of their role in office does not go beyond individual gratification and never takes into account the needs of others. The description of activities at the Kenyatta National Hospital paints the picture starkly:

Huko Kenyatta madawa zimeisha
Mashiti zauzwa
marikiti mia kwa mia
Wafanyi kazi waenda miezi bila pesa

At Kenyatta [Hospital] drugs have run out
beddings are sold
at the market for a hundred shillings each
staff are unpaid go without pay for months

⁹ Kiswahili for 'the fruits of independence.'

Ni bahati ukitibiwa

you will be lucky to get treatment.

The burden of graft on private and public institutions is crippling, and there is truly a thin line between "chai" and theft. Turning the East African discourse of corruption – "chai" – on its head by pointing in the direction of where the real food is, sabotages the pseudo-location of this "chai" language in the traditions of African hospitality. "You eat where you work", is the ruthless corollary dictum that is often used in Kenya to justify demands for "chai". These "eating" discourses are devious cannibalizations of tradition. For while many ethnic traditions require one to feed strangers and visitors alike, these gestures of genuine hospitality and tradition are thoroughly bastardised in the modern economy of corruption when a commercial value is pegged onto what ought to be a voluntary gesture. Again, the whole idea of terming bribes "*kitu kidogo*", literally something small, is a euphemistic understatement that attempts to belie the gravity of the actions both in terms of the way they compromise morality, and also in terms of their negative impact on economic activity. Transparency Kenya's report on the Kenya Urban Bribery Index for 2001 showed that Kenyans 'paid around 16 bribes a month, an average of US \$ 100 or one-third of respondents mean monthly income'.¹⁰ This can hardly be termed "something small". And neither can the extent of moral decay that accompanies it, if it could be scientifically tabulated, be anywhere in the region of the negligible. When Wainaina sings '*ukitaka soda ewe Inspekta burudika na Fanta*' (if you want a soda Inspector [of police] relax with a Fanta), he is deliberately refusing to appreciate the figurative prowess of the language of graft. A literal approach to reality becomes the only way to reverse the metaphorical terms of the grammar of graft. Consequently, we are forcibly pushed into drawing a line between being traditionally hospitable to one another on the one hand, and the more brutal exploitation of individuals, the state, public, and private institutions on the other.

Wainaina's sustained use of irony and reversal is again seen in the second stanza when he sings about the way appeals for help from the police are met with: '*sisi hatuna gari, leta elfu tano ya petroli, saidia utumishi*' (we have no transport, bring five thousand shillings

for fuel, aid our service). In the Kenyan culture of moral corruption and economic decay the Kenya Police motto, '*Utumishi kwa wote*' (service to all), has been inverted to mean, that the police do not come to the aid of those who do not adhere to their terms. Again, Wainaina states '*mahakamani hela ndio haki, kwa elfu chache mshtakiwa ndiwe mshtaki, ushahidi uwa utajiri*' (in the courts money is justice, for a few thousand [shillings] the accused becomes the accuser, evidence is constituted by wealth). The graft Wainaina sings about is truly a national culture that has turned logic on its head. From small acts of everyday existence to practices in the highest offices, from the law enforcement officers to the seat of final arbitration, graft paves the way and disorder is truly instrumentalised (Chabal and Daloz 1999). This disorder has become national praxis to the extent that the nation seems to be bound together principally through its collective moral poverty.

But the national moral agenda is not simply a matter of a people whose imaginary has been colonised by the example of their rulers (Mbembe, 1992:10). In a manner reminiscent of 'the man's' dilemma in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*, *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo* does argue the case for the connection between endemic graft and poor remuneration of workers. Thus in the third verse Wainaina turns to the mismanagement of institutions when he observes: '*Wafanyi kazi waenda miezi bila pesa*' (staff are unpaid for months). And even where pay is forthcoming, it is often a mere pittance:

<i>Mzigo wetu unazidi kuwa mzito</i>	Our burdens are increasingly too heavy
<i>Watoto wane</i>	four children
<i>Na mshahara</i>	and a salary
<i>wa elfu mbili mia tano</i>	of two thousand five hundred [shillings]
<i>Ya viatu, ya vitabu na vyakula</i>	for shoes, books and food
<i>Nauliza na Mbotela</i>	I am demanding with Mbotela
<i>"Je huu ni ungwana?"</i>	"Is this proper?"

Rok Ajulu (2001:199) points out that in seeking to unravel the workings of the Moi regime it is imperative that one sees the relationship between the endemic graft in this period and the regime's intransigence regarding political pluralism and democratization. As the calls for political transition grew louder Moi's henchmen — who anxiously saw

¹⁰ Eric Shimoli and Muriithi Muriuki, 'Kenya's List of Corruption Unveiled', *Daily Nation*, January 19 2002

their term in office quickly drawing to an end — became even more brazenly corrupt.¹¹ But more than this, it is critical that we not only see 'the political roots of the economy's stagnation' (Southall 1999: 93), but that we also appreciate the lasting effect of this misrule and predatory destruction on the nation's moral fibre. As Wainaina shows, remuneration that is out of touch with economic realities (when a chosen few have far more than they have rightfully earned) is bound to breed corruption.

This last verse also shows that part of the process by which *Nchi* situates itself as a narrative of the nation, lies in the way it appropriates other long institutionalised popular cultural forms of address. This is what we have in the rhetorical demand: '*je huu ni ungwana?*' This is actually the title of a radio programme that has been run on the state-controlled Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC, formerly Voice of Kenya) since the early 1970s. Aired every Sunday between 12.30 p.m. and 1 O'clock, '*Je, Huu ni Ungwana?*' is a dramatic address on private and public decorum. The producer and narrator, veteran broadcaster Leonard Mambo Mbotela, usually picks on a subject of societal concern and through anecdotal references, he illustrates graphically the vulgarity of those who are straying away from the "correct" practices and norms demanded by the particular subject under discussion. In this programme Mbotela positions himself as an arbiter on social etiquette and propriety, helping listeners to master the ethical practices of contemporary existence. He speaks with fatherly wisdom, sometimes cautions, often castigates and frequently punctuates his performance with the rhetorical question '*je huu ni ungwana?*'. At every stage, and particularly towards the dramatic end of each narrated incident, this question invites public moral outrage.

p.1.

¹¹ In this period state inspired kleptocracy (Southall 1999) gained such momentum, that it metamorphosed into what Ajulu (2001:199) terms 'contractocracy', that is 'the questionable purchases by government departments and parastatals, unauthorised expenditures and non-payment of duties on imported goods. It also refers to the award of government lands to cronies and subsequent sales to well connected business persons, sale of government houses to cronies at knock-down prices and the award of non-existent consultancies to dubious consultancy firms'. The high point of this wanton looting of state coffers was the Goldenberg plunder that run from 1992 to 1994 (Kibwana et al, 1996: 89-91). Recent reports indicate that through it the Government paid out a total of Kshs. 78 billion (US \$ 1 billion) in a series of complex falsified export compensation to Goldenberg International (*Daily Nation* April 30 2004 p.1).

Wainaina's adoption of Mbotela to arbitrate in the question of Kenya's lop-sided economy and its dilapidated moral fibre is indicative of the way societies' established moral beacons are sometimes (re)enacted through popular discourses rather than being solely mediated through laws and institutions of justice. Mbotela's programme is something of a people's moral court and Wainaina keys into it to gain moral authority and relevance for his own lyrical crusade. Again, it is instructive to note the intertextuality of popular forms, to see how they constantly borrow from one another, piggybacking from one to the other so that each inscribes itself onto the social imaginary by echoing established popular codes.

The public reception of '*Nchi*' indicates that it was, on account of its anti-corruption theme, received as an act of opposition politics. As we detail elsewhere, the Kenyan establishment responded to this song by way of censorship and repression (2003:375). Refusing to have it aired on the state-controlled KBC radio even after it had been nominated for the 7th Kora All-Africa Awards, showed the government's fear regarding the song's effect on public perception of national affairs. Even more dramatic, at a performance in Nairobi in August 2001 that was attended by the then Vice-President George Saitoti, over-zealous security officers switched off power supply to halt Wainaina's live staging of '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*'. But even though the singer himself asserts that 'he had no misgivings about the government when writing the song as most of the lyrics were in fact directed towards corruption at a personal level', the fact remains that '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*' does give a damning account of state performance.¹² And without doubt, this is the very reason why Transparency Kenya invited Wainaina to perform the song during their launch of the Bribery Index Report in Nairobi on January 18 2002. By bringing out the ghost of corruption, turning it into open discourse rather than hidden transcript of the state's functioning, the song easily fueled civil society's agenda of dissent. Indeed, one must see this song as fitting into the 1990s emergent culture of oppositional politics whose attack on the state often wielded corruption as an effective weapon of criticism against the state's institutional mismanagement. Thus '*Nchi*'

¹² Rosemary Tollo, 'Eric Wainaina: Setting Sights on The Kora Awards', *Sunday Nation, Lifestyle* June 16 2002 p.8.

complements other documented discourses on corruption in the Moi era.¹³ One could almost say that owing to '*Nchi*'s' pithy and popular form, it stood a far better chance of gaining public attention than the preceding fairly academic treatises, with their acutely limited circulation, had done.¹⁴ Without doubt, '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*' effectively stoked the flames of what Wainaina terms 'the fatigue with Moi that had gripped the general populace by 2001'.

The riddle of corruption as a moral problem situated somewhere between eroded personal morality and national economic stagnation occasioned by poor leadership is further explored by the two tracks that anchor *Nchi*. The first one — '*Kitu Gani Hii?*'/ what is this — precedes and actually introduces '*Nchi*' and the second one — 'T.A.V' — comes immediately after '*Nchi*' to amplify its major theme. These two tracks as well as '*Unataka Gani?*'/ Which do you prefer and 'Dear Parents' are dramatised narrative verses performed without any musical accompaniment by members of the comedy trio, Redykulass.¹⁵ Each of their pieces on *Sawa Sawa* effectively supplements the main theme of '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*' by dramatizing instances of corruption and of the neglect of public service ('*Kitu Gani Hii*' and 'Dear Parents'), lamenting the financial burden of poorly paid urban workers ('T.A.V'.), and illustrating police harassment and corruption in the public sector ('*Unataka Gani?*'). These dramatizations adopt hyperbole as the vehicle of their comic edge, the most conspicuous instance being the use of various exaggerated ethnic accents adopted by the different characters in each narrative verse.

¹³Foremost amongst these are Kenneth Matiba's (1993) *Kenya: Return to Reason* (see especially chapter 3) and Kivutha Kibwana et al's (1996) *The Anatomy of Corruption in Kenya* which, not only details specific instances of corruption, but also analyses the impact of corruption on the legal, political and socio-economic systems of the country. See also A. Mullei (2000) *The Link Between Corruption and Poverty: Lessons From Kenyan Case Studies*

¹⁴ Gerishon Ikiara (1993) *Corruption in Kenya: A Review of the Literature* is another example of the low-impact kind of public discourse on corruption which preceded *Nchi* and which invariably came from the ranks of civil society.

¹⁵ *Redykulass* rose to national acclaim early in 1999 as stand up comedians specializing in political satire. Soon, the demand for their live performances translated into a slot on commercial TV, first with Nation TV and later with KTN.

'*Kitu Gani Hii*' is rendered in the gruff voice of Redykulass' John Kiarie, mimicking a harassed lower-middle class Gikūyū urban dweller. His indignation is roused by the spectacle of inefficiency all around:

<i>Namuka asubuhi, double rationing</i>	I wake up in the morning to double rationing
<i>Hakuna maji, hakuna sitima</i>	No water, no electricity
<i>Barabara imekuwa sio lami, ni shamba</i>	Roads have no tarmac, they are farms
<i>Nothing is no longer working</i>	Nothing works anymore
<i>Nataka kulipa biro ya simu</i>	I want to pay my telephone bill
<i>Accountant is on lunch break</i>	Accountant is on lunch break
<i>Until prompted otherwise</i>	Until prompted otherwise

The persona makes the connection between the lethargy of public workers, the poor services they render and the endemic culture of graft in which everybody "big" and "small" alike, is implicated.

<i>I cannot believe it</i>	I cannot believe it
<i>Polisi: "kitu kidogo"</i>	Police: "something small"
<i>Mutu ya simu: "kitu kidogo"</i>	Telkom employee: "something small"
<i>Hii citi kajo watu: "kitu kidogo"</i>	City Council employees: "something small"
<i>Chifo: "kitu kikubwa"</i>	The Chief: "something big"
<i>Mukora, anataka kitu yote</i>	The thugs demand everything
<i>What am I supposed to do?</i>	What am I supposed to do?
<i>Kitu gani hii?</i>	What is this?

The piece gives an engaging presentation of the private and public losses that are incurred by a combination of the erosion of the work ethic, and the vagaries of corruption. Since the persona here represents the badgered urban worker, what we note from his tone of frustration is not the sense of acceptance of corruption 'as an integral part of the socio-political order' (Chabal and Daloz, 1999:108); but rather, we realise that in the drama of institutionalised corruption the ordinary people are, very often, simply helpless victims and pawns. And in illustrating the widespread extent of corruption '*Kitu Gani Hii*' forms a suitable introduction to '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*' and its labeling of graft the hallmark of the national character.

In the same spirit of supplementing and amplifying the theme of the main song, 'T.A.V.', short for 'tax added value', is a sardonic inversion that is aimed at jabbing at the

establishment's failure to ensure the delivery of services to the public whenever they are taxed. There truly is no value to be gained from the various commodities and services for which workers are ruthlessly taxed¹⁶. In the best tradition of burlesque, Walter Mongare gives a one-man rendition of the burdens of the urban worker. It is instructive at this point to note that by itself, Redykulass' appearance on Wainaina's album automatically amounts to an indictment of the Moi regime. In all of their performances lampooning Kenya's political heavy weights, Mongare — with his uncanny resemblance to Moi and with an accomplished imitation of Moi's mannerisms — always rendered a convincing portrayal of the then president. In every instance, Moi emerged as a crafty and ruthless politician, exceedingly dim-witted but nonetheless authoritarian and in full control of the sycophants who surrounded him. Redykulass' criticism of Kenya's political culture always amounted to a double-edged swipe, for if at all Moi — for all his lack of intellectual finesse — had succeeded in misruling Kenya for over 20 years, it was partly because we the populace had become a nation of uncritical and even greedy sycophants. From 1999 Mongare's voice had become the epitome of public critique of the Moi regime and the culture of sycophancy it had reared.

The broad Ekegusii accent that Mongare uses to deliver the English and Kiswahili script of 'T.A.V.' is meant to typify an urban worker of minimal schooling and fairly limited exposure to the luxurious trappings of modern existence. The heavy ethnic accent adds to the general hyperbole of the urban worker's tax burdens from social security and income tax to 'pedestrian tax, zebra crossing tax'. It gives the verse the force of the extreme fiscal pressure the state exerts on individuals, and highlights their helplessness and frustration.

*Imagine, bwana hawa watu
wametumaliza, bwana
mshahara anakula
elfu moja mia tano kwa mwezi
mutu anakata*

N.S.S.F.,

N.H.I.F.,

levy, income tax,

pay as you earn, earn as you pay,

Imagine, man, these people

are finishing us, man

you get a salary

of one thousand five hundred [shillings]

someone deducts

National Social Security Fund

National Hospital Insurance Fund

¹⁶ Along with the promise of free primary school education, one of the opposition's campaign pledges in December 2002, was that once in government, NARC would ensure Kenyans no longer ranked amongst the most highly taxed people in the world.

*Marriage tax, pedestrian tax, zebra-crossing tax,
Traffic lights tax, value added tax, tax added value!*

Rattling off this list demands a permanently rising intonation, which is itself typical of the natural cadence of the Ekegusii language¹⁷, thus helping to further typify the character.

<i>Ile kitu basi bwana</i>	the only thing, man
<i>anabaki kwenda</i>	that remains
<i>kuchukuwa</i>	for you to collect
<i>ni ile karatasi ya pay slip</i>	is that paper, the pay slip
<i>We utakata</i>	Would you refuse
<i>kuchukuwa kitu kidogo, bwana?</i>	to take a bribe, man?
<i>Ah batunyarire bwana ah!</i>	These people are tormenting us, man!

While some may read 'T.A.V.' as a justification for corruption perhaps arguing that poor pay creates the loophole for corruption to thrive, in actual fact, 'T.A.V.' functions to explicate the deteriorating economy, and show that its degeneration has occurred as a direct result of the kind of systemic corruption at higher levels that is hinted at in '*Nchi*'. We are meant to follow the argument through from '*Nchi*' and appreciate that wanton corruption leads to economic decay. Urban workers earn miserable incomes precisely because of corruption at high levels.

Having catalogued the urban worker's financial pressures, Mongare's persona issues an exasperated cry: '*ah, batunyarire bwana, ah!*' (ah, they are tormenting us)! The anguish is located deep in the worker's consciousness. Uttered in his native language, Ekegusii, it casts an accusatory finger at faceless and ruthless oppressors, labeled by the collective pronoun — 'they' — that relates to the earlier '*hawa watu*' (these people), and invites the listeners shared experience as workers. On account of the switch to mother-tongue, this protest now seems to speak not merely of the financial woes of the worker, but also of the political (and economic) victimization of an entire ethnic community.

But an even more sustained employment of ethnic stereotypes, and by extension an interpretation of the political economy on the basis of political ethnicity is found in the verse '*Unataka Gani?*' (which one do you want). As in 'T.A.V.', ethnic accents feature

strongly as typifiers of the roles of oppressor and oppressed. This three-man act play features two heartless policemen, both of whom speak in Kalenjin accents, and a male victim of police harassment who speaks in a Luhya accent, to capture his status as a pedestrian and subordinate worker.¹⁸ In a swift series of interrogatives reminiscent of the harassment of the soothsayer in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the policemen bombard the baffled pedestrian with a barrage of questions that he barely has time to answer.

1 st Policeman:	<i>Kijana natoka wapi?</i>	Young man where are you coming from?
	<i>Nakwenda wapi?</i>	Where are you going?
	<i>Jina yako nani?</i>	What is your name?
	<i>naishi wapi?</i>	Where do you live?
	<i>baba yako na itwa nani?</i>	What is your father's name?
	<i>Apana jibu nani?</i>	Aren't you going to answer?

Amidst the sound of a fast descending cane and cries of anguish from the victim the second policeman thunders.

*Eh, kijana,/ young man
you are definitely a suspect!
Can you produce your ID?*

VICTIM: *I'm not*

2nd Policeman: *Kama huna ID leta kipande* If you don't have your ID bring your pass
*Kama huna kipande leta kitambulisho*¹⁹

VICTIM: *I've said*

2nd Policeman: *If you cannot produce the 3 legal documents,*

1 st Policeman:	<i>Twende!</i>	Let's go
	<i>Twende,</i>	Let's go
	<i>criminal!.</i>	

So successful was this skit in its vivid depiction of the fate of hapless citizens open to all manner of assertions and manipulation once they land in the path of patrolling policemen,

¹⁷ See L.S. Bickmore's (1998) study of the tonal patterns of this language.

¹⁸ Colonial fashioning of ethnicity created a situation in which Luhyas and Kambas, who were deemed to be far much trustworthy than their Gikuyu and Luo counterparts, got the privileged jobs of working as domestic servants in white peoples homes. This legacy has today cumulated into a stereotype that labels Luhyas "cooks and watchmen". See Atieno, 2002b for a discussion of the colonial roots of ethnic stereotypes.

¹⁹ ID, *kipande* and *kitambulisho* all refer to the national identity card.

that Redykulass was later commissioned to adapt it for a Trust condom advert. The cornered pedestrian pleads his innocence as he is accused of all sorts of ridiculous infringements

1st Policeman: *We can charge you with anything:
Obstruction of justice, smoking with violence*

2nd Policeman: *Yes.*

1st Policeman: *Being in possession of firearms with an intention to breach of contract.*

2nd Policeman: *Yes.*

1st Policeman: *Loitering with intent of first degree murder,
Looking at a government building suspiciously,
Soliciting sexual favours from an unwilling female gender
Unataka gani? which do you prefer?*

2nd Policeman: *Unataka gani sasa? which do you prefer now?*

VICTIM: *But I'm innocent, bwana / man*

2nd Policeman: *Innocent kitu gani? / how
Si umesikia ile Haven't you heard all
makosa yote umesomewa? the offenses that have been
read out to you?*

Frightened and cornered by this threat of arrest and false charges, the victim is easy prey for the policemen's demands for '*kitu kidogo*'.

VICTIM: *I'm innocent.*

2nd Policeman: *Jiteteye, jiteteye kijana Defend yourself, young man.*

1st Policeman: *Can you buy your freedom?
Can you purchase you freedom?*

2nd Policeman: *Toa kitu kidogo Give something small*

1st Policeman: *Tunaelewa We understand
lugha ya chai, the language of bribes,
toa! bring some.*

At this point the police have created ample fear in the victim and they can literally name their sum or even physically extort it from the defenseless victim. The irony is that once they have their bribe, the police are now ready to be of service, 'Can we give you a push?' offering to escort the bewildered victim to his destination. Utterly dejected the victim can only mumble to himself '*Eh, bwana, hii kitu kidogo inaleta shida*' (Man, this bribery business is becoming a real problem).

Casting the policemen as ignorant Kalenjins makes the connection between corruption and ethnicity. It is a stereotype opens and sustains the debate on the illegitimacies of a government that, all too often, employs ethnicity as organizing practice. The logic of this practice sees members of one's own ethnic community appointed to public service jobs that they are unqualified to do. Consequently, merit and service are sacrificed at the altar of political ethnicity but the incumbent politician is assured of retaining political power (Chabal and Daloz 1999:6; Odhiambo 2002b 2002; Njogu 2001). It is precisely this tendency to blatant nepotism and the consequent mediocrity in public service that this skit '*Unataka Gani?*' aims at exposing and critiquing. The ethnic stereotypes employed here serve to dramatise the stark reality of the way Moi's Kalenjin people "othered" the rest of the communities. They were unfairly dominating jobs in the public service when all around unemployment plagued the youth and seemingly unsatisfied with reaping the lion's share of government largess, they infringed on other people's hard earned property.²⁰ Some may think '*Unataka Gani?*' a dangerous generalization of social relations in Kenya, but it does tally with Odhiambo's reading of local people's understanding of the workings of political ethnicity (2002b:230-231). Again, looking at '*Unataka Gani?*' we must recall that the violent divide in this play between ruler and ruled, cast as it is in Manichean terms, is a replication of the pattern of the ethnic clashes that rocked Kenya intermittently between 1991 and 1997.²¹ The reversal of order in

²⁰ Kagwanja (2001:73) argues that in the multiparty elections of 1997, the hegemonic elite 'used property, especially land, illegally acquired from the displaced communities, to buy support from its ethnic constituency, and to reward it for voting for the ruling party during the elections'. Also see Jacqueline Klopp (2000 :7) for an incisive study of the way Moi used "land grabbing" — the irregular privatization of land, 'as a patronage resource and instrument to maintain control'.

²¹ See Haugerud (1995:39) and Kagwanja (2001:75) for discussions of the patterns and political purposes of this state-sponsored violence. O'Brien (1996:63) reports the effect of ethnic polarity and hostilities that these clashes had on Kenya's youth.

which enforcers of the law become the aggressors, surpasses even Chabal and Daloz's (1999) reading of the extent of travesty in African politics and is the epitome of the political and moral decay fragmenting efforts at nation formation.

The narrative verses included on the album *Sawa Sawa* are brilliant examples of the 'popular struggles for democracy' (Odhiambo, 2002b:225) which have always been articulated as part of Kenyan nationalism. These verses and *Nchi* bring into question the role of the nation, so that whereas in the colonial period an independent Kenyan nation was conceived as the epitome of common aspirations, now the nation is clearly emerging as a 'repressor of desires' (Gikandi, 1992a:380). A conscious looting of the state alongside politicised ethnicity have sustained a repressive regime and frustrated the lot of the majority.

6.2.1 *Daima*²²: Between Cycles Of Betrayal And Hope

The question of accountability to public good, of government as the protector of citizen's lives is the theme of the song 'Who is to Blame?' This song relates the plight of university students who rise to the intellectual responsibility of debating and probing public events and government's performance. They are 'mourning the state of the nation', only to be met with heavy state repression whenever they engage in a demonstration, and regardless of how peaceful and civil their demonstrations are. What Wainaina reports in this track is so graphically typical of the realities of public university students in Kenya, that the song can only be prosaic rather than poetic. Bitter about the political culture of government denials and abdications, the chorus demands: 'Who is behind this? Who is in the shadows? Who lights the flame of this raging inferno, and watches from high windows?' A description of the decay in schools and the troubles of poorly paid teachers forever caught in strikes and demonstrations because 'something isn't right with this equation' brings into question the whole value of education that amounts to no more than book knowledge. The theme of betrayal is writ large in 'Who is to Blame?', the promises of rewards after independence, after attaining education are no longer being met in this society. The condemnation for the economic, moral and political state of the nation

²² Kiswahili meaning forever, the title of track 10 on *Sawa Sawa*.

echoes in the Kenyan call to street lynching and mob justice: '*huyo, huyo*' (there he goes). This call reverberates as the song fades out and we picture this dramatic chase for the traitor in which the betrayed are left lagging far behind, and hopes of eventual justice seem to lie in a very distant future.

In *Sawa Sawa* the postcolonial nation is continually framed as the site of tension between promises and betrayal. Individual emotions swing between optimism about the future and the nagging doubts and uncertainties emanating from present realities. Such is the picture of contemporary existence that we get from the song '*Mashaka*' (uncertainties). This time, the story of the nation is told from the perspective of a street child. Often desperate, hungry and depressed, the child's drug-induced brain oscillates between the illusory moment of his 'new found happiness' and the present reality of being chased off the streets along with his mother who has no idea how to shrug off the label of 'a menace to society'. It is a label that has condemned the family to an endless life of squalor. Beyond projecting a brutal society and relating the pain of the dispossessed, the tensions in '*Mashaka*' are an echo of *Sawa Sawa*'s formulation of a nation still in the throes of formation. Its ugly side speaks of the failures of independence and its hope for the future is also still ironically embedded in the age-old promises of independence. But for now, it remains caught in a liminal interregnum, straining to realise itself but also weighed down by the burden of moral ineptitude and misdirected political will.

The idea that the Kenyan nation is yet to congeal or revert to its true identity and form is again evident in the song '*Bolingo*', Congolese Lingala for 'love'. The title is clearly meant as a sarcastic reference to local audiences' age-old preference for Congolese music (Ewens, 1991; Wallis and Malm, 1984; Stapleton and May, 1989). But the critique of these preference aside, the persona still reflects on the question of relevance, debating how language affects content: 'trouser, *longi, mufuto*, pussy, *nyau, paka*', three different languages to name the same thing. The reality is that in Kenya one always has more than 2 languages in which to consider an idea, from which to borrow a culture; why add to the number by delving into Lingala and Congolese ways, he seems to be asking. And as the chorus implores, do we know what we are borrowing when we abandon the local in

favour of Kofi Olomide and other Congolese artistes? Apart from its obvious pitch for local artistes 'Ndarlin P, Kabaselleh, and Princess Jully', and a demand for clear legislation and enforcement on the music piracy that is impoverishing our artistes, '*Bolingo*' is a debate on the quagmire of Kenyan cultural identity. It is fairly defensive about roots and in its nativist stance it refuses to consider the possibilities of hybridity and the opportunities afforded by bricolage. In the circumstances, one can only read the songs adoption of a typically Lingala *kwassa kwassa* chorus and climax from the perspective that Wainaina is employing mimicry for purposes of defiance.²³ Having pondered the matter of Kenyan cultural identity further, Wainaina is now quick to point out that he is 'not as passionate now about the issues [he] raised in '*Bolingo*'.

Evidently, the essence of the bulk of the lyrics on *Sawa Sawa* coalesces around images of socio-economic decay and feelings of a national sense of betrayal and frustration. All of this points to the ambivalence and tension surrounding the notion of independence and the quest for nationhood. In effect, these lyrics obliquely raise the question of the state's role in regulating and adhering to a national form. Consequently, the album's title and the title track itself appear to sit in ironical juxtaposition to the picture of aborted independence that has been built up in the other songs. The privileging and invocation of reassurance, *sawa sawa* (it is alright), probably signals the artiste's attempt to hold out hope for the individual and the society, an avowed commitment to shake off despair and continue believing in the possibility of the nation. In addition, it may be intended as a strategy to appease a beleaguered regime, placating it into listening to an (alter)native view, one that shuns official discourses for the raw and first-hand experience of the citizens.

In some ways, the song '*Sawa Sawa*' is a thanksgiving prayer whose text is deeply woven around the Biblical verse, Isaiah 40:31 as is evidenced by the opening verse

*I wake up early in the morning,
and hear the birds call out my name*

²³ *Kwassa kwassa*, 'a play on the French '*C'est quoi ça?*' is the name of a beat and dance step popularised outside Kinshasa by Kanda Bongoman' (Stewart, 2000:327).

Na mashujaa wa zamani
Hawakustushwa na risasi
Au kufungwa gerezani
Nia yao ukombozi
Kuvunja pingu za ukoloni

by the old warriors
they were not intimidated by bullets
nor by imprisonment
their aim was our redemption
to break the shackles of colonialism

Few have lyrically captured the pain of the nation in the pangs of its birth with the poignancy of Wainaina. True to Renan's letter, the national memory rests in pain, struggle, a common enemy and gallant heroes (1990:19).

All of the key referents in Wainaina's discourse of patriotism in *Daima* are taken from the dictums and verbal style of the master narrative of national historiography that gained ascendance in the Kenyatta years.²⁴ So committed is Wainaina to the first republic's script of liberation that although he initially composed and performed this song in English under the title 'Kenya Only', he ultimately preferred to memorialise it in the recording in Kiswahili, which is the officially endorsed national language.²⁵ And in this too, Wainaina's rationale seems to be drawn from the political practice of Kenya's founding President, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. At the public celebration of national days — Madaraka, Kenyatta and Jamhuri²⁶ — Kenyatta's words always repeatedly invoked racial equality, unity and the right of the indigenous Kenyan people to control their own land, as the informing logic of the struggle for Kenya's independence. He would then dismiss the script written in *kimombo* (English) and go on to authoritatively enforce the creed of *tulijinyakulia uhuru kutoka wabeberu* (we fought for our freedom from the colonialists), in an off the cuff *lugha ya taifa* (the national language), Kiswahili.²⁷ Thus Wainaina echoes these official performances as well as the creed of national unity when he says,

²⁴ See John Lonsdale (1992: 265-266) and B.A. Ogot (1995:235) for a rationale of Kenyatta's 'nation-building myth that "we all fought for freedom" '.

²⁵ Composed in 1997, 'Kenya Only' made its first national appearance on August 22 1999, when Wainaina was invited to perform at a family commemoration of the 21st anniversary of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta's death. President Moi was the chief guest at the function.

²⁶ Madaraka Day is commemorated on June 1 as the day in 1963 when Kenya attained self-government. October 20, Kenyatta Day is a commemoration of the day in 1952 when Kenyatta and many others were arrested at the height of the Mau Mau war when the colonial government declared a state of Emergency. Some of those arrested were detained without trial while Kenyatta and 6 others were tried for their association with Mau Mau and later jailed at Kapenguria for 7 years. Jamhuri Day, December 12 commemorates Kenya's transition into a republic in 1964.

²⁷ See *Suffering Without Bitterness* (1968:213-14) for a report of Kenyatta's shift from the written English script to off the cuff Kiswahili on Independence day.

<i>Wajibu wetu</i>	our duty
<i>Ni kuishi kwa upendo</i>	is to live in love
<i>Kutoka ziwa mpaka pwani</i>	from the lakes to the coast
<i>Kaskazini na kusini</i>	north to south

In probing Wainaina's preference for *Daima* over 'Kenya Only', one must underline that the extent to which it was a considered decision, part of his commitment to what he feels is 'the urgent need for a national language'. To this end he overcame his own inadequacies in Kiswahili by seeking the services of a translator. The general structure of '*Daima*' makes one realise that Kenyatta's words and style became the embodiment of a generation's imagining of the Kenyan nation. It is also instructive to note that though Moi, when he came to power, was to similarly adopt the style of a written script in English followed by an off the cuff address in Kiswahili, it is to Kenyatta and not Moi that Wainaina looks for the terms and the grammar that will mirror this dream of allegiance to a Kenyan nation forever. With audible conviction Wainaina, like other popular artistes of the early 1960s,²⁸ perpetuates Kenyatta's version of the founding of the Kenyan nation. He invokes the symbolism of the national flag, the words of the national anthem and the Loyalty Pledge as markers of an ideal that should still hold credence, and which we should continue to aspire to.

<i>Hakika ya bendera</i>	the surety of the flag
<i>Ni uthabiti wangu</i>	is my resolve
<i>Nyeusi ya wanainchi</i>	black for the people
<i>Na nyekundu ni ya damu</i>	and red is for the blood
<i>Kijani ni ya ardhi</i>	green is for the land
<i>Nyeupe ya amani</i>	white for peace
<i>Daima mimi mkenya</i>	for always I am a Kenyan
<i>Mwanainchi mzalendo</i>	a patriotic citizen.

In *Sawa Sawa* then, the desire for the nation is cast in the symbols of that freedom, the people, the sacrifices of armed struggle, the land, and the prayer for peace after independence. It is also cast in epochs and personalities, Kenyatta's versus Moi's. The Moi era has perverted nationhood, and the nostalgia for national wholeness and essence is

²⁸ James Ogude (2003) underlines the spontaneous patriotism of the popular singers Isaya Mwinamo memorializing Kenyatta's role in the struggle as he sang '*ukoloni umekwisha, kwetu hapa Kenya, wandugu kumbe mateso yake, yataleta Uhuru Kenya*'/colonialism is over here in Kenya, my brothers, so his [Kenyatta's] suffering was to bring freedom to Kenya'.

necessarily reincarnated in the legacy, image and words of Kenyatta when Wainaina sings

<i>Umoja ni fahari yetu</i>	unity is our pride
<i>Undugu ndio nguvu</i>	fraternity is our strength
<i>Chuki na ukabila</i>	hatred and tribalism
<i>Hatutaki hata kamwe</i>	we will never entertain
<i>Lazima tuungane</i>	we must unite
<i>Tuijenge nchi yetu</i>	and build our country
<i>Pasiwe hata moja</i>	let there not be one
<i>Anayetenganisha</i>	who divides us

Listening to *Daima*, forces one to query whether, in the words of Simon Gikandi's analysis of Ngugi's *Matigari*, it is 'a belated national narrative' (1992a:379). And as Gikandi observes, there are likely to be 'problems that arise when a narrative of decolonisation is evoked in a transformed postcolonial era' (379). And this seems to be precisely the issue with '*Daima*'s timing. It reasserts the national pledge and melodiously tries to wash away the fractures and reversals entailed in the practice of the Nyayo era which '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*', its supplements, as well as 'Who is to Blame?' and '*Mashaka*', document. And as we saw earlier, the protest in '*Nchi*' is launched from the premise of contemporary Kenya's deviation away from Mzee's guiding motto for the nation and then it proceeds to illustrate the many ways in which we have '*tafsiri kinyume*' (contradicted) this philosophy in the Moi era. The relevance of the national rhetoric of '*Daima*' in the post-Kenyatta era resides in the socio-political contexts of the state oppression, nepotism, rampant corruption and particularly, the ethnic land clashes against whose recent memory of turbulent violence and divisive strategies. It is this reality of ethnic clashes in recent Kenyan history that effectively absolves '*Daima*' from the limitations of irrelevance and ahistoricism that Gikandi cautions about and which gives a sense of urgency to the song's narrative of the nation. In essence, '*Daima*' functions as a cursory moment which not only takes stock of the past, but one that is deeply anxious about the future on account of present realities. In the circumstances, *Daima* signals a moment of recommitment to a second liberation and a possible rebirth. Of necessity then, it becomes an indictment of the Moi regime for its failures to forge nationhood, to truly adhere to and encourage ethnic unity and opportunities for all.

6.3 Transforming Ethnic Discourse Into National Desire

The longing for national form exhibited on the album *Sawa Sawa* is given a new dynamic and farther complexity by the intractable question of ethnic citizenship. '*Ritwa Riaku*' (your name), is the only song on *Sawa Sawa* that blatantly emerges from the confines of ethnic allegiance — Gĩkũyũ. Modeled from a Gĩkũyũ folksong, '*Ritwa Riaku*' keys into the dominant theme of return that underlies this album, this time taking us back to an ethnic past. But it is possible that '*Ritwa Riaku*' is much more than the simple yearning for ethnic citizenship. A highly evocative love song, it relates the persona's deep commitment for his girl, Wanjiru. So dedicated is he that in the long wait for Wanjiru at an undisclosed rendezvous, he runs the risk of falling prey to wild animals and even of being accosted by curious over-zealous young men. The emphasis of the ballad is on the interminable wait, heard through the evocative repetition of the chorus: '*Ngweterereire, ngweterereire, mwendwa ngweterereire, ngwetererie*'²⁹ (waiting, waiting my love, waiting, waiting). Throughout the patient but endless wait, only once does the persona utter his lover's name – 'Wanjiru', it reverberates into the distance, leaving the call for the persistence of the wait as the dominating memory.

Constructed within the same mode and mood of sentimentality that dominates both '*Daima*' and '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*', this love ballad works by evoking nostalgia and heightening desire in its perceived audience. Indeed, there is a whole mixed bag of emotions, oscillating between aching desire and passionate love, fear and anxiety and then the sobering patience and hope. It is the lack of closure in this romance, the hint of perhaps an unrequited love, and its setting amongst so many songs framed around the discourse of macro-politics and nationalism that leads to an allegorical interpretation of '*Ritwa Riaku*'. Like Kenya, Wanjiru exists in name, but is never seen or made tangible. All that drives her citizens (persona) is the hope of her realization (appearance). In the meantime, the suitor suffers confusion as imposters come to the fore ('*nditaga nyamu cia githaka mwendwa ritwa riaku*' (I mistook wild animals for you, calling them by your name)). Again, corruption (marauding animals, rough young men) threaten(s) the envisaged harmony and the build up to fruition or actualization. Excitable youth pose

²⁹ I have reproduced the lyrics here as they appear on the album liner notes, devoid of Gĩkũyũ orthography.

another threat to the moment of reunion between the citizens (persona) and the nation (woman) they have so long dreamt of embracing. The figure of Wanjiru fuses into that of the nation, and '*Ritwa Riaku*' can be a romantic imagining of the Kenyan nation, just as much as it is a passionate poem from one lover to another.³⁰ The contrast between the image of the wild animals, the belligerent youth and the tempered hope of intimate love draws out the path of the risks and dangers of mounting a national enterprise. Singing the song in Gĩkũyũ does not necessarily decentre the nation (Yewah 2001). However, the song's allegorical framing of the nation may very well be seen as part of the assertion of ethnic exclusivity and may even be read by some as the trodden path of Gĩkũyũ hegemonic interests in the Kenyan national project (Odhiambo 2002b; Ogot 2003). But without doubt, the presence of a Gĩkũyũ folksong on a contemporary album whose main theme is the search for national form reflects the schizophrenia of polyglot African nation-states. To this end, ethnic cultures compete with and sometimes enrich national identities (Joseph 2001:61). Matters of ethnic consciousness feed into the question of national form from perspectives that are often idiosyncratic, and certainly historical and cultural.

Under the banner of popular cultural forms, the transition from ethnic consciousness to national citizenship can be mediated by a number of factors, not least of them being audience reception and historical timing. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the rise to national prominence of Gidi Gidi Maji Maji's 2002 dancehall hit, '*Unbwogable*'. As I stated in Section 1.1.1, '*Unbwogable*' entered the public space in a politically charged moment — the eve of a General Election. And this was not just another General Election; it was one that promised to end the interregnum that was prompted by the December 1991 constitutional amendment that had left President Moi with only two more credible terms at the helm. In the wake of Moi's mixed signals over his retirement and Kenya's transition (Ajulu, 2001) '*Unbwogable*' found an expectant political audience, a people in need of a catalyst to strengthen their resolve and launch them onto full-scale defiance. As we document elsewhere, the reaction of the Moi regime in trying to keep '*Unbwogable*'

³⁰ This allegory runs in marked contrast to the conflation of ideas of masculinity with those of the nation that is heard in some Kenyan hip hop music. See Mwangi (2004)

off the state-owned airwaves instantaneously transformed the song into political allegory (2003:375). Anybody listening to it thereafter automatically sought its political content.

But outside of the effects of state intervention, how do we account for the singular political interpretation that this song was given, if as the duo behind it claim they had never intended the song specifically for politics? Maji is adamant that '*Unbwogable* was really not meant for people as such....it put into pictures a lot about what we felt, what we went through...particularly our belief in who we are'. Concerned about their perceived commercial failure following the debacle over the sales and marketing of their debut album, *Ismarwa* (2000), Gidi and Maji were under immense pressure to succeed as musicians. Getting themselves out of the confinement they were now suffering meant clearing space for expression; articulating the limits that they felt were being placed on their operations as creative artistes. Asking one another 'who can *bwogo* you?', repeating the chant 'I am *unbwogable*', to themselves and to one another became the ultimate bedrock for inspiring them into creativity.

As had happened with their earlier hit single '*Ting Badi Malo*' (1999), '*Unbwogable*' grew from what was initially a chant. The duo's producer, Josiah, confirms that it is precisely within the context of confidence building and morale-boosting that the catch-phrase 'I am *unbwogable*' entered the domain of performative art. Back in April 2001, Josiah was in Tanzania with a troupe of artistes for the Zanzibar International Film Festival. As he recalls, it was here that Gidi and Maji introduced the chant 'I am *unbwogable*/ Who can *bwogo* me/ I am *unbwogable*/ I am unbeatable...just to give them, sort of like psyche before they went on stage'. Back then, Josiah was struck by the inspirational potential of this phrase and by the time they decided to take it to the studio for recording in September 2002, Maji realised that Josiah 'felt the song,... so from that, his creativity got inspired'. While Gidi and Maji state that they brought in a roll-call of Luo cultural and political leaders because they served as inspirational forces in confronting the duos personal tensions, their producer insists that recording '*Unbwogable*' was a decided act of political intervention. Says Josiah: 'one morning we thought to ourselves, "I think this election is swinging in a very funny way. Er, we need to help certain people actually feel

unbeatable" and er, we released the song'. Josiah goes further to state that even in this 'conscious decision' to use music to back the opposition, their gaze rested on one individual:

And then er, they saw what Raila was going through, how he was being, trying to be sidelined by er, Mr. Moi and they said, no, no, no, we have to rise to the challenge, he's going to remain a, a powerful person and we're going to push him with this. Er, so it became a tool, it was actually a very good tool for Raila and his whole campaign.

Josiah's decidedly political reading of the whole objective of fashioning *Unbwogable* ties in with the traditional function of song as socio-political commentary amongst the Luo people that is demonstrated so well by David Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo (1989). Josiah traces the political basis of '*Unbwogable*' by explaining how later on political pundits approached him and his crew with suggestions to amplify '*Unbwogable*' so that it would carry a more pointed political message to publics of varying ethnic extraction. But before I complete the story of how '*Unbwogable*' came to occupy a national political platform; indeed, how it was used to try and reflect the ethnic unity of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), let me look at what — beyond the highly portable catch-phrase, *unbwogable* — Gidi Gidi and Maji Maji were actually saying in this song.

6.3.1 Rewriting National History

Beyond the introduction of the singers and salutations to their producer, the song catches the listener's attention through the portrait of Kenya's economic landscape that is alluded to in the provocative opening interrogatives:

*What the hell is you looking for?
Can['t] a young Luo make money anymore?
Shake your feet baby girl en ang 'o?'* / what is it

This opening is decidedly confrontational. For the younger Kenyan audience, it strikes with all the familiarity of nostalgia, echoing as it does a 1997 number by American hip hop artiste, Mace. And it is not just the feigned Dholuo accent of the persona that adds to

the familiarity of the questions by helping to localise them. Most important of all, it is the experience that it speaks to that is hauntingly familiar for the Kenyan public. For while in Gidi Gidi and Maji Maji's case it may stem from very personal circumstances, it nonetheless connects very directly with the lives of so many young Kenyans, daily caught toiling for a pittance. Sometimes, as the lyrics imply, the work is not only awkward, it is also unrewarding; with the individual perennially frustrated by bureaucracy and corruption. The song gains emotive power by at first employing anger to fight off the suffocating sensation of being drugged down into oblivion by a decayed economy. The persona then tempers the outburst of anger through the playful invitation to dance — 'shake your feet baby girl ', thereby seeking some momentary reprieve from his daily woes. The listener is being invited to likewise lose his/her frustration in the urgent query — 'en ang'o?' (what is it?) What follows once again is the drama of self-assertion, in part achieved through the establishment of the persona's roots: *Maji Maji nyakwar ondiyo am a Luo* (Maji Maji grandchild of Ondinjo, I am Luo). We shall later on see the furtherance of this concern with establishing Luo pedigree for various personalities mentioned in the song; for now, we note that the outburst of aggression, the struggle for space, recognition, respect, dominates the text:

*But who are you? What are you?
Who the hell do you think you are?
Do you know me?
Do I know you?
Get the hell out of ma face
Because hey, I am unbwogable
I am unbeatable, I am unsueable.*

And the most popular part of the song — its chorus — is heralded by a show of bravado:

*So if you like ma song
Sing it for me and say
CHORUS
Who can bwogo me × 3
I am unbwogable*

This bravado is, in itself, an enactment of autonomy, a barrier against any further interference and intrusion. Later on in the song Gidi Gidi advertises himself as a 'big name, I'm saleable'. But always he makes a return to his roots 'Kanyamwar, Homabay ng'ama chalo koda' (in Kanyamwar, Homabay, who is like me?) not only as part of his identity, but as part of the proof of his greatness, since as he boasts none in Kanyamwar, Homa Bay equals him. What the duo do here is to draw on the Luo cultural repertoire of *pakruok* (self-praise) that I discussed in Chapter 3. The speaker here compels and admonishes his listeners to pay attention because he is a worthy voice of status and integrity. In certain ways *pakruok* is often directed at imaginary or real enemies to provoke and to challenge them into a verbal combat. The challenge made by the duo here was necessarily seen to have been directed at the Moi regime mocking and deflating it of its authority and borrowed power. The question-answer structure of the chorus (and it is significant that the question is raised 3 times) is a sure formula for winning audience participation, inasmuch as it also works as hype to beef up individual spirit. A significant part of this song is informed by its strategy of invoking memory as the cornerstone of inspiration, as the bedrock from which the volatile future is confronted.

<i>Ya jodongo nyaka ipar</i>	Old/great people you have to remember
<i>Jo ma okonyi nyaka ipar</i>	Those who have helped you, you must remember
<i>Jo ma Oting'I nyaka ipar</i>	Those who baby-sat you, you have to remember
<i>Maji Maji nyaka ipar</i>	Maji Maji you have to
<i>Ondijo kwaru yawa</i>	remember, your grandfather well.

The purpose of the memory work demanded here is, as happens in most instances, seen to be located in contingencies in the present (Thelen 1989; Chow 1993; Ogude 2003). And as I argued in Chapter 3, those contingencies may be limited to the (re)membering and shaping of the individual's identity in the present (Ganguly 1992; Hall 1995). Indeed it is precisely this desire to revise and reassert themselves economically, and even more to re-establish their place in the Kenyan socio-cultural imaginary that Gidi and Maji generated the term *unbwogable*. But, it is also likely that the bigger purpose of the memory project is one of establishing shared pasts as the informing logic that binds the community — be it the Luo nation or Kenya as a whole — in the present.

From this moment on, to hijack Rey Chow's expression, 'we are in the solemn presence of history, with its insistence on emotional meaning and depth' (1993:151). Indeed, contrary to readings of '*Unbwogable*' that may have sensed a generational gap — that may have seen in the phenomenon of *unbwogable* an act of youthful defiance — the roll-call of Luo greats that follows affirms its powerful bonding of the young and the old. It actually speaks of the reverence and respect that the young (embodied by Gidi and Maji) have for their "mentors". With the mention of each personality — Gor Mahia, Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya, Ouko Robert, Raila Amolo, Anyang Nyongo, Orenge Jimmy, Joe Donde — there follows the testament '*donge aparoin*' (I remember you). Included in the catalogue of Luo greats are popular musicians Okatch Biggy and Princess Jully of the '*Dunia Mbaya*' fame, now linked to '*jaluo malo-malo ute*' (Luo people [who] are high up there). Later on in the song, the call is made to each Luo politician, for instance:

Anyang' Nyong'o
gini tek manade ni
Yawa, gini pek manade ni,
Jo Seme gini lich manade ni,
You are unbwogable!

Anyang' Nyong'o
 this matter is a difficult one
 Truly, this matter is a heavy one
 People of Seme³¹ this thing is awesome indeed,

The rhetorical questions are an invitation to all to embrace unity as the only strategy for navigating out of the political quagmire. They also encourage those personalities thus named and who are still living, to continue in their role of inspiring and intervening on behalf of the people. The song's political agency is heard in its enunciation of Luo nationalism. In part, this is articulated by the establishment of each personality's Luo pedigree, an authentication achieved by stating their roots and thereby affirming the existence of a Luo ethnic nation. In other words, claims to Luo ethnic citizenship are verified by citing location, by naming the exact place within this nation from which one hails. And as we have argued elsewhere, the roll-call of Luo notables establishes a tradition of resistance dating back to the legendary Luo warrior and magician, Gor Mahia (Hofmeyr et al 376). It also includes more recent nationalist heroes such as Jaramogi

³¹ The rural home of Anyang' Nyong'o.

Oginga Odinga and Tom Mboya and contemporary critics of the Moi regime such as James Orengo.

Gidi Gidi Maji Maji rework Kenya's political history into memorable and accessible texts, as entertaining music. Significantly, and perhaps one of the reasons why opposition politics related so well to it, their remembering works counter to the then ruling party's cultural memory. KANU had always resisted inscribing Mboya, Ouko and Jaramogi as national heroes. Indeed, KANU's official cultural ethos had no room for maverick critics such as Orengo and it made no space for legendary cultural icons like Okatch Biggy and Princess Jolly. And it is not just in the matter of these explicitly national positions that *Unbwogable* engages with politics. Much more of the song's politics lies in its structure, for we find this same dismembering of the past, the defamiliarisation of what we "know", as the logic underlying the coining of the term *unbwogable*. The politics of what became the song's key text — *unbwogable* — lies, precisely in its linguistic structure, in the way the word refuses to fit an orthodox restriction of a singular tongue. Instead, we are seamlessly thrown from one tongue to another — beginning with an English prefix, taking in a Dholuo verb, '*bwogo*', and ending with an English suffix. This violent fusing of tongues that is endemic of Sheng, and in this particular case the yoking together of English and Dholuo, is a testament to a new Kenya. It is one that breaks with the pre-colonial and colonial past made up of ethnic identities hostile to one another, it attests instead to the multiple and fluid identities that are increasingly defining, particularly urban, postcolonial Kenya.

In this sense '*Unbwogable*' is continually located in history, dismembering and fusing it, reinscribing and rewriting it. As John Street (2001:248) puts it, 'The message is in the mix', and it is a message of disjuncture and dislocation away from the binds of negation and interpretations of discontinuity that characterised both the Kenyatta and the Moi regimes in their official scripts of Kenyan history. Ultimately, it seems that it is the very nature of this one word in the song, '*Unbwogable*', its relation to the pattern of new Kenyan ethnicities that linguistically signal genuine ethnic fusion that tied in to the demands of the political moment of the third multiparty General Election. This then led

to the public's rejection of a narrow ethnic reading of the text, they embraced the insertion of Mboya, Jaramogi and the others as part of Kenyan national history, thus forcing an interpretation of the song that spoke directly to the national agenda.

If Gidi Gidi and Maji Maji had meant their song to be read as an act of their individual self-assertion, as a "pep talk" to keep themselves strongly focused on the vocation of their choice, then it is more than coincidental that they draw their courage from the acts of fellow musicians (Okatch Biggy and Princess Jolly), and politicians alike. For, in a striking reciprocal gesture, the NARC opposition politicians took on '*Unbwogable*' as their anthem, lending credence to B.A. Ogot's (1995:234) observation that in many world systems, '[c]ultural symbols drawn from tradition are manipulated for political mobilization'. As Kenyans readied themselves for the 2002 election NARC were going to use its appeal not just as Gidi and Maji had — to still themselves for the battle of a General Election — but even more importantly, they were propelling their party's agenda, their own popularity by riding on the back of the song's success. The act of NARC appropriating '*Unbwogable*' as their anthem was actually a conscious and deliberate intervention, made by international supporters of NARC. As I stated in Section 1.1.1, the song's producer, Josiah, is unequivocal that licensing fees was paid for NARC's use of *Unbwogable* as their party slogan. Talking about how the licensing deal was sealed, Josiah says:

Josiah: late November, is when friends of, it was friends of LDP who stepped in to buy the license. Again, Kenyans didn't believe in their own music, somebody came from abroad, paid for the license and said, 'now here, run with this'...It was actually a, an initiative from the British Government itself

Q. And, and they liked...particularly this, this song, or they were basically prepared to back up anything that would...?

Josiah: They liked particularly what this song had done by that particular point. They had been following er, the cultural trends and they had been looking er, for marketing gimmicks to help the whole campaign.

Later on, Josiah avows that these same NARC sponsors suggested new versions of '*Unbwogable*'. They asked the producer to remove a lot of the Luo elements in the song, and in their place 'put Masaai, Gikuyu, Kamba, Luhya and Kalenjin' referents to give the song a broader national appeal, but at the same time retain '*Unbwogable*'s' catchy, assertive and provocative chorus. Says Josiah:

the third and final decision of making it er, er, more Kenyan and more er, er, to encompass more cultures and languages was actually er, a decision that we would not have made if, if we had not been approached. I can not er, you know, take full glory for that particular decision. It was something that an outsider said 'you know what this song has *huge* impact already, but if you want to make it go *bigger* than it is right now, create more languages in it, put a diverse section of things in it', and he said 'this end, we shall pay you'. And I think money became a *huge* incentive, cos it was like a *huge* amount of money.

But Gidi Gidi and Maji Maji say they were not involved in the remix project. What Josiah came up with was a version of '*Unbwogable*' that opens:

*What the hell are you stopping me for?
Can't a young Masaai chung'a ngombe
nasimamisha mimi
na Nairobi sio yako*

Can't a young Maasai graze cattle anymore
you restrain me
and yet Nairobi doesn't belong to you

This catchy opening of the remix version — known as '*Unbwogable* Remix featuring Mr Ebbo' — plays on pre-colonial and colonial history. There is a muted reference not just to the name 'Nairobi' as a Masaai one meaning 'swamp', but more importantly to Masaai pre-colonial ownership of what was the grazing land on the Nyika plains. The idea of making '*Unbwogable*' have greater national appeal lyrically translated into having as many ethnic communities as possible lay a claim to their rights as Kenyans. In a host of respective ethnic accents the song details the socio-economic woes of a host of Kenyan

ethnic groups — Kalenjins, Kambas, Gikuyus and Luhyas. At impromptu fundraisers, NARC supporters raised as much as 800,000 Kenya shillings for the duplication and distribution of tapes with these songs. The important thing to note about this whole exercise is that in its conception and distribution, the remix text was a deliberately fashioned act of political intervention. It constituted part of NARC's performative politics in which they struggled through song to convince the public that they could right all the wrongs that had supposedly been perpetrated by the Moi regime. In '*Unbwogable* Remix' NARC rewrites Kenya's history, showing KANU to be behind all of the economic decay, the corruption, the misappropriation of resources and the overall mismanagement of the country.

We must at the same time focus on the structural formation of remixes for as I argued in Chapter Three remix versions are centred around the tropes of destruction and plurality; around the notion of breaking the known, and creating something over and over again, each time building on the old to create a new form. In this particular remix, the destruction is aimed at not just the original '*Unbwogable*', but just as important, it is centred on breaking KANU's political dominance apart. It is a destruction that is in part achieved by the plurality echoed in the many voices that carry the message of '*Unbwogable* Remix', taken as they are from a fairly representative ethnic cross-section of Kenya. Consequently, it worked to embody NARC's definitive constitution as a conglomerate of interests forged across ethnic and party divides. And when NARC's newly elected Mwai Kibaki was sworn in as the third president of the republic of Kenya on December 30 2002, he delighted the crowds thronged at Nairobi's Uhuru Park when he used the word *unbwogable* to refer to the resilience of the Kenyan people and the sense of achievement that his new government shared with them over their election victory. Both the song and the word *unbwogable* had become deeply rooted in the cultural and political memory of the Kenyan people, recognised by many as the badge of a new Kenyan identity.³²

³² See the *Washington Post*, December 26 2002 and Marc Lacey, *New York Times*, February 16 2003.

6.4 Conclusion

Can we therefore conclude that contemporary popular forms, as part of the cultural production in the postcolony, necessarily engage in a revision of the foundations of the nation? Indeed, how do these popular art forms help to reflect and even to formulate new conditions of possibility for postcolonial affiliation? To ask these questions is not necessarily to assume that popular songs are by definition always in opposition to state practice, that they automatically constitute 'alternative transcripts' (Gecau, 1997:154). However tempting it is to adopt a binary approach to the analysis of political songs, a much more nuanced and instructive approach to the issue is one that looks at the tenuous links between national practices and the oppositional forces which try to police state practice.

Sawa Sawa's relationship with national history is fairly complex. There is an undeniable antinomy at work in this album, seen first between its title, *sawa sawa*, a proclamation that everything is alright, and the content. Indeed, the dominant discourse of the album's texts decries the deplorable socio-economic conditions and moral ethos in contemporary Kenya. The album's casting of contemporary experience is imbued with a strong sense of the betrayal of the essence and ideals of independence. Wainaina's discourse takes a singularly linear and monochromatic vision in which the stated desires of the Kenyatta leadership become the barometer from which the performance of the Moi regime is read. *Sawa Sawa* does not subject Kenyatta's leadership to a test of its own ideals, hence the misconception that the collapse of the national project began with Moi's inept leadership. And the sustained reading of Moi's performance records a scorecard that demands change and indicts the state for occasioning and perpetuating moral, economic and political decay.

But even as *Sawa Sawa* unravels what Gikandi (1992a: 381) terms 'the problematic of power and the state' its vision does not look at the performance of power in the postcolony purely as a matter of the incumbent leadership. Rather, Wainaina seems to proceed within Mbembe's (1992) arguments which pit the populace squarely within the arena of politics and the problematic of the nation-state. We therefore see the dynamics

of the public legitimizing, abetting and performing power. If the focus in this album is on the way official practices vitiate national morality and engender near anarchy and economic decline, it is at the same time a critique of a dangerously imitative populace; one that is badly in need of a reawakening to their duty to bring to a halt poor governance. That the critique is indeed double-edged is made glaringly apparent by the didactic narrative posture and tone, almost patronising and certainly denunciatory, that Wainaina employs in his award-winning '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*'.

An additional point of interest in *Sawa Sawa* is raised by its inclusion of the Redykulass narrative verses. The juxtapositioning of forms — songs, narrative verse, dramatic skits — metaphorically echoes the national loss or distortion of form. Alternatively, this mixing attests to the multiplicity that defines the nation and continually defies the notion of a singular narrative of the nation. The sense of incongruity is further extended when one contrasts the comic mode and mood of the narrative verses with the sombre nostalgic one of the songs. It is easy to miss the caustic satire of Redykulass and imagine that they condone the nefarious survival tactics that have become a Kenyan national ethos through their comedy. Again, Redykulass' reliance on ethnic accents to typify character can easily raise their own problematic reactions in a multiethnic nation where political contingencies constantly sharpen the awareness of ethnic difference. To this extent, popular forms may be read as helping to entrench ethnic separatism. However, the stereotypes that these accents help to echo are a step towards mutual acceptance across the ethnic divides, and they do point to the cultural value of diversity. Read against the background of '*Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*' which all these narrative verses supplement, the tendency is to see the thrust of ethnic stereotypes purely as something associated with the fragmentation, nepotism and negative difference that was accentuated in the Moi years. These verses seem to whip up blame and resentment right onto the doorstep of Moi and his cronies and they do not help to ease the transition from ethnic identity to national citizenship.

It is precisely this richness of cultural diversity and movement from ethnic exclusivity to national exigencies that was embodied in the conception and reception of '*Unbwogable*'.

But precisely when does the space of ethnic citizenship connect with the domain of national belonging? *'Unbwogable's'* reception teaches us that in the postcolony, it is increasingly difficult to hold onto either one identity in negation of the other. Postcolonial politics may from time to time uphold ethnic favouritism, but this only sows the seeds of its own destruction as ethnic absolutism is defied and society strains towards new ethnicities of hybridity and plurality. Indeed, the reception of *'Unbwogable'*, its congealing around the key Sheng term as the banner of Kenyan oneness, seems to prove Stuart Hall's argument that in key moments, we tend to cling 'to the nation all the more tightly because the order of certainty with which it is associated is currently being torn away' (1996: 69).

The material conditions that gave birth to, not just the term *unbwogable* but more precisely the very spirit of it, represent a key moment in the lives of two young individuals. Their ability to express that moment, to congeal its experiences of pain, anger, dejection, near despair, and in the midst of all these, their sheer determination, translate to an individual's struggle for space, for freedom out of the pressures and disappointments of daily existence (Fabian, 1998). The economy of resistance that clothes the moment of *'Unbwogables'* birth — and which the duo avow was never, in their conception of the song, a statement of political intention — ultimately travels with the term to inhabit all its other sites of its usage. And this is precisely the point about popular forms. They are creative instances arising from the individual's attempts to formulate coping mechanisms, to come to terms with personal experiences and, the power of popular forms resides in their extreme portability, in their capacity to inhabit different locales, to link individuals and generate audiences. In terms of what it originally stood for, and of what it ultimately projected once it was in the public sphere, *'Unbwogable'* demonstrates how popular forms offer a 'democratic prospect for approaching and transforming everyday life' (Chambers, 1986:13).

As far as state power is concerned, *'Unbwogable'* had entered the political domain on a note of difference, interpreted as being critical of the KANU government and thus shunned by it. Later, NARC's licensing sanctioned it as a site of resistance, a vehicle of

salvation and the ultimate in articulating a deep-seated longing for freedom from economic and political domination by the system. '*Unbwogable*' has since walked away from the path of difference and ensconced itself as the preferred trajectory of official culture. In this instance, official culture is seen to grow from popular discourses. And there are lessons to be learnt too from the path of '*Unbwogable*'s' transition. First, the singular political interpretation of the song speaks of the constraints that are imposed on both the creative artistes and the listening publics; '*Unbwogable*' came to carry just one meaning which was the political one. Naturally, this was accentuated by NARC's act of appropriating the song as a campaign anthem. Further, the entry of the British national who paid the initial license fee for '*Unbwogable*', as well as the making of '*Unbwogable* Remix' and the fundraisers that made cassettes of these songs available in many rural homes indicates that the generation and spread of popular forms is not as spontaneous and informal as we would sometimes wish to imagine. Popular forms can, in fact, be very deliberately engineered products. Ultimately, we must acknowledge that the phenomenon that '*Unbwogable*' became, that it initiated and propelled was not simply dependent on the text *a priori*, it was also made possible by the timing of the moment of its emergence and initial circulation. At a critical moment, therefore, '*Unbwogable*' provided the terms with which to articulate personal emotions and wider political implications. It provided an idiom and harnessed the prevalent mood for change and rebirth in the nation.

The strong political content in the songs that I have analyzed in this chapter indicate that popular music does indeed provide the space for constant debate over leadership and national identity, particularly when autocratic regimes stifle all other avenues of exchange (Odhiambo, 1987:200-201). And within this space there emerge versions of a people's history, politics and aspirations that do not always correspond to those that are written, regulated and perpetuated through the state and its institutions. It becomes abundantly clear, therefore, that though the state wields a lot of opportunities and power to fashion and promote a singular and unifying national narrative, it can never really provide an unchallenged account of the nation. But as we see from the underlying tensions in *Sawa Sawa* — particularly when they emerge so powerfully in the haunting invocations of '*Daima*' and '*Ritwa Riaku*' — and even in the reception of '*Unbwogable*',

the state's shortcomings nonetheless do not curb the people's singular desire for national form.

CONCLUSION

African writers, artists, singers, and film makers have long debated what it means to "decolonize" African culture as well as to distance the artist from the rigidities of the post-colonial successor states. Does it mean rejecting European ideas of what constitutes a novel, a painting, or a film as much as refusing Eurocentric content? Or does it mean that the artist is open to whatever influences he or she wishes to turn to, to whatever themes he or she wishes to engage?

(Frederick Cooper 2002:188)

In his reading of Jomo Kenyatta's (1938) *Facing Mt. Kenya*, Simon Gikandi (2000b) demonstrates that one of the central governing ideas in the development of Pan-Africanism and indeed, in the fashioning of nationalism right from the 1890s, was 'the doctrine of modernity without colonialism' (25). Gikandi concludes his argument with the very apt observation that the paradoxes of this notion aside, it would be left to decolonization to provide the 'final test' as to whether Africans, left to their own devices, could be 'agents of their own transformation' (24). A transformation which, in the words of Jomo Kenyatta, would enable 'people to take part in world culture' (305). The range of intertextual referents we have unearthed in the course of examining the lyrical content and musical styles of contemporary Kenyan popular music, as well as the dominant themes that emerge from these texts has provided a window through which — 40 years after the onset of decolonization — we can interrogate the character of postcolonial Kenyan culture and reflect on its relationship with the West.

The songs we have examined in this thesis force us to revise the country's prevailing notions of culture, (particularly those that are given prominence by official state practice) by making it starkly apparent that there are a host of cultural influences other than the traditional ethnic ones that are daily being woven into the fabric of Kenya's cultural economy. But even with these influences, it would be pretentious to label even the ultra-urban aspect of contemporary Kenyan culture universal. For as we have seen, within these spaces vestiges of traditional expression abound, and the domestication of whatever

is borrowed carries a uniquely Kenyan creative genius. In essence then, I would, in order to privilege the native genius at work term Kenya's emergent modernization 'native cosmopolitanism'.¹ It is a strategy that perennially keys into the contingencies of history even as it takes stock of the spatial moment.

The iconographies of the artsites' names and album titles, as well as the dominant themes of these songs reveal the complexities of the co-existence of the old practices with the new ways. We notice the overwhelming capacity of the local to absorb and integrate, so that affiliation with the local does not obliterate affiliation with Western practices. Indeed the local seems to thrive upon the cultural antinomies suggested by a binary opposition between tradition and Western modernity. In other words, we have traced the character of the local as precisely that of its absorptive ingenuity in shaping and revising forms and experiences from wherever into effective vehicles for articulating personal predicaments. In the event, whether one is looking at the cultural function of *zilizopendwa*, at patterns of urban settlement or at the nature of Kenyan hip hop, the renewal and identity of the local is predicated on its scavenging ability to connect the present to a whole range of practices around it. The local is constantly revising tradition into something that is at once recognisable in the sense of being dated, but at the same time enticing on account of its novelty. As with Waterman's (1997) study of Pan-Yoruba identity one is inclined to conclude of contemporary Kenya that '[o]ur tradition is a very modern tradition'. Indeed, I want to suggest that the bricolage of influences that we have seen at the heart of the cultural matrix that these songs represent is a projection of the cultural dynamics that make up modern Kenya. It is a cultural space in which staid uses of the terms "traditional" and "modern" no longer make sense. Indeed, popular cultural practices such as the music we have studied here function in ways that collapse these categories through the inchoate engagement with history and the interminable mixing of styles, ideas and practices.

This is not to say that within the scope of this cultural bricolage there are no moments of tension whatsoever. The persistence of the theme of alienation occasioned by cultural

¹ This is an inversion of Tejumola Olaniyan's (2001) idea of cosmopolitan nativism.

change that we hear in songs such as '*Somo ti Somo*', '*Uhiki*', and '*Dot Com Lady*' speaks of the pain that accompanies this absorption and revision of the past that we are saying is so definitive of contemporary Kenyan culture. Again, it is possible to conclude that the tendency to imbibe Western discourses that is evident in many songs is itself a projection of the longing and desire for things modern and foreign that underlies the lifestyle of urban youth in particular. It seems then that popular culture subsists in its capacity to blend the distinctly familiar with the utterly new and novel.

This thesis has also provided us with an opportunity to think through the whole idea of the "popular" in a contemporary African sense. It emerges, as Barber's (1997b: 3-4) inquiry suggests, that within these contexts, the consumption of popular cultural forms that require technological media are not necessarily the preserve of the subaltern. Indeed, this thesis has demonstrated how the very production of these forms requires a fair amount of sophisticated equipment that is way out of the reach of the urban sansculotte. True, the methods that producers of this music employ speak of the kind of unregulated and rudimentary ways that we associate with subaltern existence, and this is perhaps the only sense in which the production of these forms becomes a project of "the people". Again, as we saw in Chapter One, modes of distribution are precisely so informal as to create greater access for consumption by the lower classes through radio and pirated cassettes. The proliferation of live shows pretty much covers the economic range of urban existence, from acts in top of the range clubs like the Carnivore to talent contests in lower middle-class neighbourhoods like Dandora.

We have also seen how popular song-texts have provided the space for the practice of alternative politics. Indeed, the example of the national acclaim for Wainaina's '*Nchi*' and that of NARC's hijacking of '*Unbwogable*' demonstrate the limited avenues of dissent that are available to the Kenyan intellectual elite /civil society. Popular cultural forms thus function as avenues of expression not simply for those who speak from below, but significantly also for those who would wish to intellectualise local experience and bring about effective political change. This use of popular cultural forms leads to an interpretation of the popular as that which speaks for the (politically, socially,

economically) suppressed majority. The overall point is that we begin to see contemporary Kenyan popular music occupying a very fluid space of the concept of the popular in terms of the sites and modes of its production, its thematic concerns and forms of address, and finally, its patterns and sites of consumption.

Perhaps the critical thing to note about these acts of the popular is the sense in which — whether as economies of income or of leisure — they open up sites of freedom for their producers and consumers alike. Sometimes, this freedom arises as artists fight their way out of the grip of exploitative producers by fuelling piracy. In other instances consumers learn to work the system of uneven distribution to their gain. In all these interactions the popular is governed by its capacity to create room for expression. That expression sometimes takes the form of economic gain, other times it is a matter of relieving psychological anguish, or of lashing out at the system and the conditions of deprivation that it creates. Sometimes it is simply a matter of generating humour or asserting social recognition. In every instance expression generates a moment of freedom (Fabian 1998) in which the artist articulates observations and desires which at the best of times are communicated to a receptive audience that embraces the text and articulates its own emotions through consuming it.

By locating cultural texts in historical moments we have considered 'culture a praxis that also entails contradiction, contestation, and experimentation; in short, negativity and freedom' (Fabian, 1998:32). Relations of power, Fabian argues, ought to be considered as 'inherent in cultural processes that are predicated as much on freedom and confrontation as on norms and integration' (1998:33). And this is not simply because these popular expressions comment on historic-political situations, but because their very existence is a testimony to constant negotiation for individual and institutional space and recognition, away from or as legitimate parts of, established or official cultural discourses. Thus thriving under any form of oppression — colonial or postcolonial — popular culture demands freedom in more than one sense. It asks for freedom from political and socio-economic inequalities, it also requires a fair amount of freedom for those who create and consume it. But, popular culture amounts to much more than mere reaction to distasteful

conditions. What happens in these conditions of negation and rejection is that artistes develop a capacity to transform 'experience into communicable expression' (18). Their power derives from their ability to transcend their own entrapment and emotions and generate a form that helps them to express and share these experiences. Those who argue for the limited power of popular art to bring about socio-political and economic transformation (Mwangi, 2003) underestimate what the generation of these popular forms means to those who fashion and consume them. The focus on limitations here arises from necessarily seeing freedom as a collective enterprise. But, it is important to see the ways in which popular culture can liberate the individual creator and consumer alike, taking them beyond the reach of the status quo for, however transient this moment of freedom may be, it does constitute a significant transformation within the self. To argue that popular forms have no capacity to bring about liberative transformation is to focus not just on the collective, but also on the long term. This is a view that equates freedom with a totalizing experience. But freedom, as Marx's dialectical materialism dramatically demonstrates, and as Fabian (1998:21) underlines, comes in moments:

there can never be freedom as a state of grace, permanent and continuous. As a quality of human self-realization, freedom cannot be anything but contestatory and discontinuous or precarious. Freedom, in dialectical parlance, comes in moments.

In the circumstances, one might feel that popular forms are by extension an effective tool by which the status quo can be maintained in any society, after all the only freedom that is ever realised is individualised and transitory rather than collective and revolutionary. To argue this way is to deny the producers and consumers of popular art forms of their agency and potential. Their active engagement, very often in places and ways completely outside of the gaze of the establishment, details and fashions communicable meaning out of the conditions and pressures of their existence. And this, particularly when coupled with other forces of change, can have a significant snowballing effect.

In considering the implications for contemporary Kenyan culture that emerge from our examination of contemporary popular music, it is important to privilege Sheng within the wider scope of the context of the millennium music boom. We do so, not simply because a good number of the songs produced in this period are actually sung in Sheng but also, because this reality makes it fairly apparent that it is precisely the speakers of this new language who are consistently providing a new cultural field. They are spinning a new expressive ethos that is nurtured by their daily interactions and which evolves a praxis that is unique in terms of its engagement with, and enactment of, postcolonial urban life. This study has not detailed the origins of Sheng as an urban peer language,² but through its demonstration of Sheng's dominance in contemporary popular music it has noted the functional movement of Sheng from strictly private domains of inter-personal communication to the public and visible spaces of everyday life and the quarters of dominant urban culture. Indeed, and as I argue elsewhere, 'Sheng has moved from marginal spaces in the so-called African locations of the city, to the air-waves on FM radio, to advertising billboards, and even to celluloid as we have recently seen in Andiah Kisia's November 2002 film, *The Aftermath*' (Nyairo and Ogude, 2003:396). While underlining the role of popular music in the growing prestige of Sheng, Githiora (2002:160) observes that

Sheng is moving out of the estates because of a growing perception of "coolness" especially among young males, i.e. a covert prestige that is associated with toughness, masculinity and local solidarity. This is taking place in part because of Sheng's increasing use in mainstream media, but more significantly because of music and popular youth culture. "Rapping" and singing in Sheng is currently enjoying great success among the youth across all socio-economic classes of Nairobi.

And there are cultural implications arising from this whole phenomenon. Githiora's study points to the way that Sheng connects to the many other popular socio-cultural

² Spyropoulos (1987) and Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997) discuss Sheng's origins and somewhat erroneously date it as a 1970s phenomenon, thereby overlooking the effects of the dismantling of ethnic divides in the Eastlands residential neighbourhoods that occurred soon after independence.

alternatives to official practice that have continually been sought and engineered by marginalised urban populations. In this study we have seen how the affinity between Sheng and popular music is exploited for the expressive capacities that it gives to the artistes as well as to the visual arts artistes who use the *matatu* as their canvas, thus circulating both the discourses of Sheng and those of the music further afield.³ Much contemporary popular music seems to define its Kenyanness by its use of Sheng as a typically local initiative whose accent resides in its ingenuous fusion of indigenous and borrowed languages alike. Sheng is the hallmark of the agency of marginalised populations as they coin new forms to label and express their existence and thereby define themselves.

I have argued elsewhere that it is significant that Sheng 'features in songs that tackle the most pressing issues in the postcolony – eroded morality, failed economies and aborted democracies' (2003:396). And it is precisely the community of Sheng speakers that provide the frame of reference for many of these songs that are now defining the contemporary moment. Sheng evolves new terminology virtually daily and it has proliferated to the point where there is now a fully-fledged dictionary of Sheng (Moga and Danfee 2004). And as we saw with the case of '*Unbwogable*', popular song has proved to be one of the sites where this coining of new words readily takes place. The artistes are not merely picking up the idiom of the people in the Brechtian sense but rather, they themselves coin new expressions that give the people new terms with which to reference their realities. And as the example of NARC's appropriation of the term *unbwogable* showed, the audiences and subsequent users of the newly coined idioms are not limited to speakers of Sheng. Rather, the incisiveness of the new expressions pools in new audiences and users from across the generation divide. Indeed, terms like *unbwogable*, *atoti* and 'do I say' (from Poxi Presha's '*Otonglo Time*') have been legitimised through corporate advertising where circulation in the media like mainstream newspapers, radio and billboards confirms the pervasiveness of the new cultural grammar.

³ As Werner Graebner (1992) and Mbugua wa Mungai (2003) demonstrate, Sheng is intimately woven into the complexities of *matatu* and its discourses which, as Mbugua details, has evolved to a position of centre stage in the dominant urban culture.

Simon Gikandi (2000:271) has noted that one question that has continued to haunt cultural production in Africa is whether the nation depends 'on a single unifying language to sustain its identity', or whether indeed the 'national space is inherently polyglot'. It is a question that has dogged the foremost producers of postcolonial African culture, particularly creative writers such as Chinua Achebe, Gabriel Okara, Hamidou Kane and most especially, Kenya's own Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In *Decolonising The Mind*, Ngugi bids a "final" 'farewell to English as a vehicle for any of [his] writings' (1986: xiv) and urges a return to African languages as the only genuine way of recovering the cultural eloquence and agency of the African peoples. My own reading of Ngugi's position on the cultural value of the language(s) of Kenyan creativity is that it is based on a narrow and somewhat antiquated view of the Kenyan society. No society in the world is static in any one aspect. A people can not be speaking precisely the same language through all time, just as much as they do not all speak with the same accent and from the same reaches at any one moment in time. This is what Gikandi (1992b) points to when he dismisses Ngugi's romantic and organic notion of language. Gikandi further questions Ngugi's post-1977 ideology of language and ponders over whether indeed literature in African languages necessarily has the capacity 'to recover a collective ethos and to bear a national history and memory' (2000:265). Indeed, Gikandi queries, how language could 'transcend historically engendered social divisions to become the signifier of a unified nation and its many voices?' (265).

Quite apart from this glaring epistemological gap in Ngugi's theorizing of language and culture, he fails to budget for change. He does not see the real force of multiethnic postcolonial existence, in both rural and urban enclaves, as itself a viable ground for rendering, not just new experiences but also, new ways of expressing and defining oneself. Consequently, he remains bound in a specific time frame imagining a pure 'reconnection with the broken roots of African civilization and its traditions' (1986:42). Not only have the actors on the postcolonial stage significantly changed, the circumstances too have shifted the paradigms of language so that what was prevailing in the 1950s no longer obtains, while what was perhaps only nascent in the 1960s may now

have thrived into a full-blown commonplace reality. To expect that the language that nurtured a particular reality then — and even then only for some and from many varying dimensions — can still be alive, pertinent and efficacious in the present is to underrate the natural pattern of human progression.

In effect, therefore, in thinking through the question of African creative enterprise, we cannot like Ngugi continue to think along the lines of return. In Gikandi's terms, this would be a nativism that 'ignores historicity and social agency' (2000:273). Ngugi is free to call for local traditions and to yearn for the (re)birth of indigenous agency, but traditions are as much always in the making as they are in the past (Hall 1994:394, Nyairo & Ogude, 2003:396-7). Nairobi's urban youth long found creative ways of confronting and describing their reality in linguistically fresh and liberal ways that have been taken up in multiethnic centers all over Kenya. These new ways have condensed into an entirely indigenous mode of articulation, Sheng, which not only speaks to the present and defines a group; it has actually become one of the central characteristics of contemporary cultural production. Ngugi does acknowledge in passing the vibrancy with which 'the peasantry and working class' have Africanised the master's language and 'created new African languages, like Krio in Sierra Leone or Pidgin in Nigeria' (23). He looks at them from the limited perspective of the way they are enriched by a host of African ethnic languages whose 'syntax and rhythms' they have adopted thus consequently keeping these ethnic languages alive. Still, it is to the indigenous ethnic languages that Ngugi steadfastly looks for Kenya's cultural renaissance:

Only by a return to the roots of our being in the languages and cultures and heroic histories of the Kenyan people can we rise up to the challenge of helping in the creation of a Kenyan patriotic national culture that will be the envy and pride of Kenyans (1981:65).

In so doing, Ngugi fails to anticipate the power and capacity of the emergent forms as credible reconstructions of native aspirations and cultural bearing in the present.

Discussions on postcolonial cultural practices must make room for spaces of fusion and bricolage, for the languages that signal adaptation to new circumstances and which point to the continuous emergence and redefinition of (new) peoples.

We learn from the pervasive use of Sheng in contemporary popular songs that Sheng is very much a re-writing of modernity. Both colonial and postcolonial political configurations presented English as 'the official bearer and the magic formula to colonial [and post-independence] elitedom' (Ngugi, 1986:12). In other words, many people saw English as 'the language through which modernizing trends are introduced' (Abdulaziz and Osinde, 1997:43). The reality of postcolonial existence however is one that increasingly points to political economies that have not — whether through sheer inadequacy or wilful malpractice — delivered on the promises of the material benefits of a modernity that was to be approached via a mastery of English. In the event, the aborted promises are echoed in the bastardization of English in Sheng. As we have seen, Sheng is a practice that delights in blatant reversal and distortion, in violent yokings and witty mimicry all of which 'is particularly apt in depicting the near chaotic spaces in the socio-political realm once tradition and modernity meet' (Nyairo and Ogude 2003). Sheng is the cultural metaphor for the defiance that is harshly projected at a disappointing modern state. But far much more than merely "rubbishing" the English language, and by extension questioning the notion of Western modernity as praxis that can generate a viable African nation-state, the emergence and profusion of Sheng is a testament to the agency and ingenuity of indigenous people, at once breaking out of the shackles of official language policy and its haphazard drive to modernity. It also represents their resistance to the static confines of ethnic enclaves as they opt instead for the fluid fusion and blending of ethnic identities, national aspirations (Kiswahili) and colonial legacies as the true measure of postcolonial reality. To transplant Tejumola Olaniyan's (2001:81) pronouncements on pidgin to the cultural significance of Sheng one can say that it is

located in the interstitial space where English meets the indigenous language, [it] is a potent denativizing, transethnic and transnational mass language. It disciplines both the foreign and the

local within the seething cauldron of sprawling urbanization where only self-conscious and heroic periodic renewals are able to shore up — and even then, in reshaped "modernized forms" — nativist or ethnic loyalties.

The historical emergence and subsequent position of Sheng within the gallery of Kenya's ethnic, national and official languages is the biggest bearer of the mark of opposition and resistance that this language *ipso facto* carries.⁴ The grammar of resistance that is inherent in Sheng is dramatised well by Mbugua wa Mungai (2003:18) when he argues that it

is a vernacular of youth insurgency that aids in the imagination and mapping of an alternative subjectivity. It is in this sense very much an infusion of fresh air, so to speak, into a linguistic situation where the established languages are considered insufficient or unresponsive to the needs of the youth. As a subcultural linguistic experiment with possibility, Sheng disrupts the stranglehold on urban public discourse previously held by Kenya's official languages, Kiswahili and English, particularly the former.

And though Mbugua necessarily privileges Sheng as the preserve of urban youth we have seen how the vehicle of popular music helps to circulate Sheng's currency beyond barriers of age. In assessing Sheng as resistance and as an index of a postcolonial cultural grammar, one can adopt Gayatri Spivak's (1993) metaphor and argue that the problem is not with the inability of the subaltern to speak; rather it has lain with the deafness of those who seek to interpret them and their causes. Their refusal to pay attention to subaltern discourse and accent creates the spurious impression that "native" cultures exist out there in a pre-dated rural past.⁵ The relative contemporaneity of Sheng and its absorption into popular music practices indicate the evolution of this category "native" and its mutation into a palpable marker of postcolonial urban existence in the here and

⁴ See Ngugi (1986:11-12) for a discussion of the hierarchy of languages in colonial and postcolonial Kenya and Githiora (2002:177) for a tabulation of contemporary patterns of language preferences and use in contemporary Nairobi.

⁵ For instance, since its inception, the Kenya Oral Literature Association has persistently carried out its fieldwork in rural areas thereby seeming to endorse the notion that oral cultures do not exist in urban environs.

now. Like the styles (*pakruok*) and musical instruments (*kayamba, nyatiti, tung*) that are woven into contemporary songs, the ethnic languages in Sheng point to an intractable connection with the rural past yes, but more than anything else, these songs and Sheng are discourses of the urban present rather than of return to a pristine past. That this urban present is necessarily also a project in remembrance and nostalgia for the old ways does not amount to a negation of the present. At the same time, what all these innovations indicate is that ethnic identities as well as traditional practices are forever being transformed, and the question of whether this amounts to dilution or enrichment is more of a political concern than a meaningful description of contemporary culture.

The use of Sheng in these songs is a statement about identity and especially about the validity of urban culture as a legitimate constituent of Kenyan culture. Further, the fluency and communicative potential it accords the speaker/listener indicates a capacity for both originality and identification. And even though the other languages of Kenya — vernaculars, Kiswahili and English — have been used in many of the contemporary songs, the boom in local music varieties is most dominantly associated with Sheng as an urban language whose key signifiers are defiance, freedom, unity, locality and identity. Indeed, the idea of a Kenyan modernity finds its clearest definition in the dynamics and energy of *jua kali* and Sheng with their emphasis on originality, innovation and informality. As we have seen of the recent developments in the local music industry, *jua kali* breaks out of political constraints and economic order as it is imposed from above and has permeated all levels promising to economically empower many. And Sheng too is truly about resisting impositions, it speaks to postcolonial communities' desire for self-representation, indicating the evolution of urban culture as a credible category and constituent in postcolonial Kenyan identity which is certainly not the same thing as official/national versions of Kenyan culture. To reiterate, indigenous enterprise has tied into contemporary cultural developments and this ethos of informality has nurtured the growth of the local music industry.

The whole question of intertextuality in contemporary Kenyan popular music opens us up to the importance of repetition to cultural formation. In *zilizopendwa* and the other

strategies of remembrance that popular artistes employ, repetition is a focal point in the structure of the song text. Again, as with the cut and remix technique of messages and sounds that underlies all these strategies, repetition informs the make-up of the fruity loops that dominate Kenyan hip hop. In the course of this thesis, we have repeatedly seen the interconnectedness of contemporary popular cultural forms. They have, as Barber (1987:5) has noted, an 'infinite elasticity' that allows them to continually inform and shape one another, virtually defying categorisation. Thus popular music feeds off, and also supplies idioms for, cultural forms as varied as web discourse, *matatu* slogans and legends on a whole range of fashion items, foremost amongst them being T-Shirts. The songs are also increasingly in use as cell phone ring tunes. Through these range of practices, repetitions are made and stylistic continuities are ensured and condensed into concrete cultural beacons. As confirmation of both the commercial potential and the lifestyle influence of popular artistes and their products, we have seen how the corporate world is increasingly borrowing their images and messages to promote seemingly unrelated merchandise (cars) and services (VCT screening).⁶ In effect contemporary popular music is turned into a cultural institution and also facilitates contemporary culture through these various forms of repetition.

Perhaps we can think of intertextuality as an indication of informality and argue that the fluid crossing and blending of forms and referents that it entails is a fairly unregulated structural design not only of popular texts, but also of the way these texts relate to other institutions and practices. To this extent, we cannot, therefore, continue to think of intertextuality as the considered preserve of elite cultural practices and as a mark of their sophistication. Popular forms reveal an intense capacity to engage with a vast range of discourses in ways that do not always amount to vapid mimicry or unimaginative parody. In a sense, this structural fluidity echoes the reality of postcolonial existence at virtually all levels. As we have seen from the song lyrics, the broken down socio-political and economic order, as well as the failure to transition into institutions of order and workable systems has ensured that Kenya is a country in which the informal carries the greatest

⁶ See Appendix (vi). The Nissan Hardbody T.V. commercial is particularly creative in its use of 'Atoti's' chorus — 'Atoti this way, Atoti that way...Atoti left, right, to the centre...Atoti panda [climb], Atoti shuka [descend]' — to advertise the car's alleged versatility.

public authority. Informality defines the day to day existence of the ordinary people and accurately captures the dominant logic underlining all official discourses. In much the same way, popular texts are defined by the fluidity of their forms, resisting confinement in any one era, genre, intellectual discourse or context. In a manner that reflects avid consumerism, they simply imbibe and use whatever serves their agenda of self-propulsion and popularity best. But then again, it is the very informality of the popular culture text that allows it to mediate a broad range of the issues attending to the complexity of postcolonial existence.

WORKS CITED

- Abdulaziz, Mohamed and Ken Osinde. 1997. 'Sheng and Engsh: Development of Mixed Codes Among the Urban Youth in Kenya. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 125: 43-63.
- Achebe, Chinua. 1960. *No Longer At Ease*. London: Heinemann.
- _____.1976. *Morning Yet On Creation Day*. New York: Anchor Press.
- Adeeko, Adeleke. 1998. *Proverbs, Textuality, and Nativism In African Literature*. Gainesville: University Press Florida.
- Agawu, Kofi . 2001.'Introducton'. *Research in African Literatures*, 32, 2: 3-7.
- Agnew, John, John Mercer & David Sopher. (Eds) 1984. *The City in Cultural Context*. Boston: Allen & Unwin.
- Ahmad, Aijaz. 1987. 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"', *Social Text* 17: 3-25.
- Ajulu, Rok. 1992. 'Kenya: The Road to Democracy', *Review of African Political Economy* 83: 79-87.
- _____. 2001. 'Kenya: One Step Forward, Three Steps Back: The Succession Dilemma', *Review of African Political Economy* No. 88, Vol.28: 197-212.
- Alber, Erdmute. 2002. 'Motorization and Colonial Rule: Two Scandals in Dahomey, 1916', *Journal of Contemporary African Cultural Studies*, Vol15, No. 1: 79-92.
- Allen, Graham. 2000. *Intertextuality*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Amuka, Peter. 2000. 'The Play of Deconstruction in the Speech of Africa: The Role of *Pakruok* and *Ngero* in Telling Culture in Dholuo'. I. Karp and D.A. Masolo (eds), *African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 89-104.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communitie: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.
- Anderson, David M. 2002. 'Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Kenya', *African Affairs* 101, 405: 531-55.
- Anyumba, Godfrey. 2003. *Planning for Crime Prevention: The Case of the City of Nairobi*. Pretoria: Safer Africa.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

- Press.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 1992. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.
- Askew, Kelly. 2002. *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bachelard, Gaston. 1964. *The Poetics of Space*. trans. Maria Jolas, New York: Orion Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1968. *Rabelais and His World*. Cambridge Mass: MIT Press.
- _____. 1988. 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse'. David Lodge (ed) *Modern Criticism and Theory*. London: Penguin. 125-156.
- Barber, Karin. 1987. 'Popular Arts in Africa', *African Studies Review* 30,3: 1- 78.
- _____. 1997[a]. 'Preliminary Notes on Audiences in Africa', *Africa* 67, 3:347-362.
- _____. 1997[b]. 'Introduction'. *Readings in African Popular Cultures*. Oxford: James Currey.
- _____. 2000. *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in Theatre*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Barber, Karin and Chris Waterman. 1995. 'Traversing the Global and the Local: Fuji Music and Praise Poetry in the Production of Contemporary Yoruba Popular Culture'. Dan Miller (ed) *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*. London: Routledge.
- Barthes, Roland. 1964. *On Racine*. New York: Octagon.
- Barthes, Roland. 1988. 'The Death of the Author'. David Lodge (ed) *Modern Criticism and Theory*. London: Penguin. 167-195.
- Barz, Gregory. 2004. *Music in East Africa: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1993. *The Transparency of Evil*. London.
- Bayart, Jean-Francois. 1993. *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. London: Longman.
- _____. 2000. 'Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion', *African Affairs*, 99, 217-

- 267.
- Bayart, Jean-Francois, Stephen Ellis and Beatrice Hibou. 1999. *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Behrend, Heike. 2002. 'I am Like a Movie Star in My Street': Photographic Self-Creation in Postcolonial Kenya'. *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa*. London: Zed Books. 44-62.
- Bender, Wolfgang. 1991. *Sweet Mother: Modern African Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bennett, Andy. 2000. *Popular Music and Youth Culture: Music, Identity and Place*. New York: Palgrave.
- Bhabha, Homi. (Ed.) 1990. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.
- Bickmore, L.S. (1998). 'Opacity Effects in Optimal Domains Theory: Evidence for Ekegusii'. Ian Maddieson and Thomas J. Hinnebusch (eds) *Trends in African Linguistics: Language Theory and Linguistic Description in Africa*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press. 107- 115.
- Braithwaite, Edward Kamau. 1973. *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Chabal, Patrick and Jean-Pascal Daloz. 1999. *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Chambers, Iain. 1986. *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1986. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*. London: Zed Books.
- _____. 1993. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton : Princeton University Press.
- Chow, Rey. 1993. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Clifford, James. 1992. 'Traveling Cultures'. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler. *Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge. 96-116.
- Clough, Marshall S. 2003. 'Mau Mau & the Contest for Memory'. E.S. Atieno Odhiambo & John Lonsdale (eds.) *Mau Mau & Nationhood*. Oxford: James Currey. 251-267.

- Cohen, David and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo. (1989) *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape*. London : James Currey.
- _____. (1992) *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa*. London: James Currey.
- Collins, John. 1985. *African Pop Roots: The Inside Rhythms of Africa*. London: W. Foulsham & Co Ltd.
- Connell, John and Chris Gibson. 2003. *Soundtracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*. London: Routledge.
- Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cooper, Carolyn. 1996. 'Race and the Cultural Politics of Self-Representation: A View From the University of the West Indies'. *Research in African Literature*, 27, 4, 97-105.
- Cooper, Frederick. 1987. 'Who is the Populist?' *African Studies Review*, 30, 3, 99-103.
- _____. 1994. 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History', *American Historical Review* 99, 5 1516-1545.
- _____. 2001. 'What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective'. *African Affairs*, 100, 189-213.
- _____. 2002. *Africa Since 1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cunningham, Valentine. 1994. *In the Reading Goal: Postmodernity, Texts and History*. London: Blackwell.
- De Certeau, Michel. 1993. 'Walking in the City'. Simon During (ed) *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.151-160.
- Demers, Joanna. 2003. 'Sampling the 1970s in Hip-hop'. *Popular Music*, 22,1: 41-56.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1985. 'Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name'. *The Bar of the Other: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida* (Ed.) P. Kamuf. New York : Schocken Books.
- _____. 1993. *Passions*. Paris: Editions Galilee.
- _____. 1995. *On the Name*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dutoit, Thomas. 1995. 'Translating the Name?' *On the Name*. Jacques Derrida, Stanford: Stanford University Press. ix-xvi.

- Esonwanne, Uzo. 1993. 'The Nation as Contested Referent'. *Research in African Literatures*. Vol 24, No.4: 49-62.
- Ewens, Graeme. 1991. *Africa O-Ye! A Celebration of African music*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- _____. 1994. *Congo Colossus: The Life and Legacy of Franco & OK Jazz*. Norfolk: Buku Press.
- Fabian, Johannes. 1997. 'Popular Cultures in Africa: Findings and Conjectures'. *Readings in African Popular Culture*. Ed. Karin Barber, Oxford: James Currey. 18-28.
- _____. 1998. *Moments of Freedom: Anthropology and Popular Culture*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1968. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Feld, Steven. 1996 'Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea' in Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (eds). *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press. 91-135.
- Ferrel, Jeff. and C.R. Sanders. 1995. (Eds). *Cultural Criminology*. Boston M.A.: Northwestern University Press.
- Forman, Murray. 2000. 'Represent': Race, Space and Place in Rap Music' *Popular Music* 19, 1: 65-90.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- _____. 1988. 'What is an Author?'. David Lodge (Ed) *Modern Criticism and Theory*. London: Penguin. 197-210.
- Frith, Simon. 1981. 'The Magic That Can Set You Free: The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community'. *Popular Music*, 1: 159-168.
- _____. 2001. 'The Popular Music Industry'. Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (eds). *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 26-52.
- Furedi, Frank. 1973. 'The African Crowd in Nairobi: Popular Movements and Elite Politics', *Journal of African History*, XIV, 2: 275-290.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. 1988. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Ganguly, Keya. 1992. 'Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and the Construction of Selfhood'. *Cultural Studies*, 6,1: 27-50.
- Gecau, Kimani. 1997. 'The 1980s Background to the Popular Political Songs of the Early 1990s in Kenya' in Rino Zhuwarara, Kimani Gecau and Mariana Drag, *Media, Democratization and Identity*. Harare: Dept. of English, University of Zimbabwe. 149-176.
- Gikandi, Simon. 1992[a]. 'The Politics and Poetics of National Formation: Recent African Writing' in Anna Rutherford (ed) *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial*. Sydney: Dangaroo Press.377-389.
- _____. 1992[b]. 'Ngugi's Conversion: Writing and the Politics of Language'. *Research in African Literatures*, 23, 1:131-144.
- _____. 1996. 'Introduction: Africa, Diaspora, and the Discourse of Modernity', *Research in African Literature* 27,4, 1-6.
- _____. 2000[a] ' "Reading the Referent": Postcolonialism and the Writing of Modernity' in *Reading the New Literatures in a Postcolonial Era*, ed. Shusheila Nasta, London: Cambridge. 87-104.
- _____. 2000[b] 'Pan-Africanism and Cosmopolitanism: The Case of Jomo Kenyatta', *English Studies in Africa*, 43, 1: 3-27
- _____. 2002. *Ngugi wa Thiongo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Githiora, Chege. 2002. 'Sheng: Peer Language, Swahili dialect or emerging Creole?' *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15,2:159-181.
- Graebner, Werner. 1987. 'Popular Music in Kenya - a Historical Overview'. Richard Trillo (ed.), *The Rough Guide to Kenya*. London: Routledge.359-360.
- _____. 1992. *Sokomoko: Popular Culture in East Africa*. Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi.
- _____. 'Whose Music? The Songs of Remmy Ongala and the Orchestra Super Matimila. Karin Barber (ed). *Readings in African Popular Culture*. London: James Currey.110-117.
- Graham, Ronnie. 1989. *Stern's Guide to Contemporary African Music* London: Pluto Press.

- _____. 1992. *The World of African Music*. London: Pluto Press.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. 1985. 'Shakespeare and Exorcists', in *After Strange Texts : The Role of Theory in the Study of Literature* Gregory S. Jay and David I. Miller (eds).
Alabama: University of Alabama Press.
- Gunebaum-Ralph, Heidi. 2001. 'Re-Placing Pasts, Forgetting Presents: Narrative, Place and Memory in the Time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission'. *Research in African Literatures*, 32, 2: 198-212.
- Haas, Peter Jan and Thomas Gesthuizen. 2000. 'Ndaani ya Bongo: Kiswahili Rap Keeping it Real'. F. Gunderson and G. Barz (eds.) *Mashindano! Competitive Music Performance in East Africa*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers. 279-294.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Hall, Stuart. 1992. 'New Ethnicities' in *Race, Culture and Difference*. James Donald and Ali Rattansi (Eds.), London: Sage. 252-259
- _____. 1994. 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press. 392-403.
- _____. 1995. 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', *New Left Review*, 209: 3-14.
- _____. 1996. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.
- Hanks, W.F. 1989. 'Text and Textuality'. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 18: 95-127.
- Hattersley, Neal. 2004. 'The Current State of World Music in the UK', *Popular Music*, Vol 23: 2, May: 213-219.
- Haugerud, Angelique. 1995. *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Harrev, Flemming. [1989]. 'Jambo Records and the Promotion of Popular Music in East Africa: The Story of Otto Larsen and East African Records Ltd. 1952-1963'. Wolfgang Bender (ed) *Perspectives on African Music*, Bayreuth African Studies No. 9, pp. 103-137.
- Hofmeyr, Isabel. 2004. *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim's*

- Progress*. Johannesburg, Wits University Press.
- Hofmeyr, Isabel, Joyce Nyairo and James Ogude. 2003. 'Who Can Bwogo Me? Popular Culture in Kenya'. *Social Identities*, 9, 3:373-382.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: history, theory, fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Ikiara, Gerishon. 1993 *Corruption in Kenya: A Review of the Literature*. SIDA report, Nairobi.
- Jameson, Frederic. 1986. 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 65-88.
- Jewsiewicki, Bogumil. 1997. 'Painting in Zaire: From the Invention of the West to the Representation of Social Self'. Karin Barber (ed). *Readings in African Popular Culture*. Oxford: James Currey. 99-110.
- Johnstone, Ralph. 2003. 'The Smasher'. *Kwani?* 01 Nairobi: Kwani Trust.
- Joseph, Clara A.B. 2001. 'Nation Because of Differences'. *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 32, No. 3 57-70.
- Julien, Eileen. 1992. *African Novels and the Question of Orality*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Kagwanja, Peter Mwangi. 2001. 'Politics of Marionettes: Extra-legal Violence and the 1997 Elections in Kenya'. Marcel Rutten, Alamin Mazrui and Francois Grignon (eds). *Out for the Count: The 1997 General Election and Prospects for Democracy in Kenya*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers Limited. 72-100.
- _____. 2003. 'Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca? The Mungiki, Ethnic Violence and the Politics of the Moi Succession in Kenya, 1987-2002', *African Affairs*, 102, 25-49.
- Kenyatta, Jomo. 1938.(1978). *Facing Mt. Kenya*. Nairobi: Kenway Publications.
- Kibwana, Kivutha, Smokin Wanjala and Okech-Owiti. 1996. *The Anatomy of Corruption in Kenya*. Nairobi: Claripress.
- King, Kenneth. 1996. *Jua Kali Kenya: Change and Development in an Informal Economy 1970-95*. London: James Currey.
- Kinyatti, Maina wa. 1980. *Thunder From the Mountains: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs*. London: Zed Press.

- Klopp, Jacqueline M. 2000. 'Pilfering the Public: The Problem of Land Grabbing in Contemporary Kenya'. *Africa Today* 47,1: 7-26.
- _____. 2002. 'Can Moral Ethnicity Trump Political Tribalism? The Struggle for Land and Nation in Kenya'. *African Studies*, 61, 2: 269-294.
- Kurtz, J. Roger. 1998. *Urban Obsessions, Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Kurtz, J. Roger. 2000. 'Post-Marked Nairobi: Writing the City in Contemporary Kenya'. D. Grover, J. Conteh-Morgan and J. Bryce (eds), *The Post-Colonial Condition of African Literature*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press. 103-110.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1980. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kruse, Holly. 1998. 'Fields of Practice: Musical Production, Public Policy, and the Market' in Thomas Swiss, John Sloop & Andrew Herman (Eds.) *Mapping the Beat : Popular Music and Contemporary Theory*. Oxford : Blackwell. 187-201.
- Lazarus, Neil. 1994. 'National Consciousness and Intellectualism'. F. Barker, P. Hulme and M. Iversen (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 197-220.
- Lee, Marshall. 2003. 'For and Against the Record Industry: An Introduction to Bootleg Collectors and Tape Traders', *Popular Music*, Vol. 22 No.1: 57-72.
- Lipsitz, George. 1990. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- Liu, Lydia. (Ed.) 1999. *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Lodge, David. 1996. *The Art of Fiction*. London: Penguin.
- Lomax, Alan. 1978. *Folk Song Style and Culture*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books
- Lonsdale, John. 1992. 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: The Problem'. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (eds) *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, Violence and Ethnicity*. London: James Currey. 265-303.
- _____. 1994. 'Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism'. P. Kaarsholm and J. Hultin (eds) *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*. Roskilde University.

- Low, John. 1982. 'A History of Kenyan Guitar Music 1945-1980'. *Journal of International Library of African Music*, Vol.6: 17-36.
- Makali, David. 2003. 'Musical Freedom Spurs Youth Crisis'. *Daily Nation*, May 3, 8.
- Malm, Krister and Roger Wallis. 1992. *Media Policy and Music Activity*. London: Routledge.
- Martin, Stephen H. 1991. 'Popular Music in Urban East Africa: From Historical Perspective to a Contemporary Hero'. *Black Music Research Journal*.11, 1:39-53.
- Masolo, Dismas A. 2000. 'Presenting the Past and Remembering the Present: Social Features of Popular Music in Kenya'. Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman (eds) *Music and the Racial Imagination*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.349-402.
- Matiba, Kenneth. 1993. *Kenya: Return to Reason*. Nairobi: Kalamka Ltd.
- Mbembe, Achille. 1992. 'The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony'. *Public Culture* 4, 2:1-30.
- Mbugua wa Mungai. 2003. 'Nairobi *Matatu* Discourse'. Unpublished paper submitted for the 'Popular Literature in Africa Symposium', University of the Witwatersrand, November 29-30 2003.
- Miller, Dan (ed). 1995. *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*. London: Routledge
- Mitchell, Tony. 1996. *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania*. London: Leicester University Press.
- Mitullah, Winnie. 1992. 'Towards a Policy of Upgrading Informal Settlements and Site and Service Schemes in the City of Nairobi'. *African Urban Quarterly* 7 1/2:186-194.
- Moga, Jacko and Danfee (eds). 2004. *Sheng Dictionary*. Nairobi: Ginseng Publishers.
- Moore, Sally Falk. 1998. 'Systematic Judicial and Extra-Judicial Injustice: Preparations for Future Accountability'. Richard Werbner (1998), *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*. London: Zed Books. 126-151.
- Mugane, John M. 1997. *A Paradigmatic Grammar of Gikũyũ*. Stanford: CLSI Publications.

- Mullei, A. 2000. *The Link Between Corruption and Poverty: Lessons From Kenyan Case Studies*. Nairobi: African Centre for Economic Growth.
- Mutonya, Maina. 2003. 'Mũgiithi Performance: Popular Music, Stereotypes and Ethnic Identity'. Unpublished paper presented at the 'Popular Literature in Africa Symposium', University of the Witwatersrand, November 29-30 2003.
- Mwangi, Evan. 2003. 'Journal's Special Issue on Kenya Focuses on Culture', *Sunday Nation* online edition, October 19.
- _____. 2004. 'Masculinity and Nationalism in East African Hip-Hop Music'. *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*, 41, 2: 5-20.
- Neal, Mark Anthony. 1999. *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Newell, Stephanie. 2000. *Ghanaian Popular Fiction*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 1965. *The River Between*. London: Heinemann.
- _____. 1980. *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. London: Heinemann.
- _____. 1981. *Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann.
- _____. 1986. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey.
- Njogu, Kimani. 2001. 'The Culture of Politics and Ethnic Nationalism in Central Province and Nairobi'. Marcel Rutten, Alamin Mazrui and Francois Grignon. *Out for the Count: The 1997 General Election and Prospects for Democracy in Kenya*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers Limited.381-404.
- Nyairo, Joyce and James Ogude. 2003. 'Popular Music and Negotiation of Contemporary Kenyan Identity'. *Social Identities*, 9, 3:383-400.
- Nyangira, Nicholas. 1987. 'Ethnicity, Class and Politics in Kenya'. M.G. Schatzberg (ed.), *The Political Economy of Kenya*. New York: Praeger.15-31.
- O'Brien, Donal B. Cruise. 1996. 'A Lost Generation? Youth Identity and State Decay in West Africa'. Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (Eds) *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*. London: Zed Books.55-74.
- Obudho, R. A. and G. O. Aduwo.1992. 'The Nature of the Urbanization Process and Urbanism in the City of Nairobi, Kenya'. *African Urban Quarterly* 7 1/2: 50-62.

- Obudho, R. A. and Z. Muganzi. 1991. 'Population Growth and Urban Change: A case s Study of Nairobi, Kenya'. M. Bannon et al., eds., *Urbanization and Urban Development: Recent Trends in a Global Context*. University College, Dublin. 108-120.
- Ochieng, Crispino C. 2001. 'Planned Housing in *Komarock* Nairobi, Changes Due to Ten Years of Illegal Densification'. ESN/N-Aerus Annual Workshop Leuven Brussels, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/>
- Odhiambo, E.S Atieno. 1987. 'Democracy and the Ideology of Order in Kenya'. M.G. Schatzberg (ed.), *The Political Economy of Kenya*. New York: Praeger.177-201.
- _____. 2002[a]. 'Kula Raha: Gendered Discourses and the Contours of Leisure in Nairobi, 1946-1963'. Andrew Burton (ed.), *The Urban Experience in East Africa*. Nairobi: British Institute. 254-264.
- _____. 2002[b] 'Hegemonic Enterprises and Instrumentalities of Survival: Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya'. *African Studies* 61,2: 223-249.
- _____. 2004. 'Ethnic Cleansing and Civil Society in Kenya 1969-1992'. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 22,1: 29-42
- Ogg, Alex and David Upshall. 1999. *The Hip Hop Years: A History of Rap*, London: Macmillan.
- Ogola, George. 2002. 'Mapping Texts: Imagining Audiences in Popular Fiction'. *English Studies in Africa*, Vol 45, No 2: 47-62.
- Ogot, B.A. 1995. 'The Construction of a National Culture'. B.A. Ogot and W.R. Ochieng (eds.) *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93*. London: James Currey. 214-236.
- _____. 2003. 'Mau Mau and Nationhood: The Untold Story'. E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (eds.) *Mau Mau & Nationhood : Arms, Authority & Narrration* Oxford: James Currey.8-36.
- Ogude, James. 2003. 'The Nation and Narration: "The Truths of the Nation" & The Changing Image of Mau Mau in Kenyan Literature'. E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (eds.) *Mau Mau & Nationhood :Arms, Authority & Narrration*. Oxford: James Currey.268-283.
- Okot P'Bitek. 1966. *Song of Lawino*. Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House.

- Okumu, Caleb Chrispo. 1998. 'The Development of Kenyan Popular Guitar Music: A Study of Kiswahili Songs in Nairobi'. Unpublished MA Thesis, Kenyatta University.
- Omolo, Ken. 2002. 'Political Ethnicity in the Democratisation Process in Kenya', *African Studies*, 62, 2 209-222.
- Ong, Walter. 1982. *Orality and Technology: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen.
- Paterson, Doug. 1987. 'The Live Music Scene'. Richard Trillo (Ed.), *The Rough Guide to Kenya*. London: Routledge.361-362.
- _____.1999. 'Life and Times of Kenyan Pop'. Simon Broughton, Mark Ellingham & Richard Trillo (eds) *World Music: The Rough Guide*, Vol.1. London: Penguin. 509-522.
- Parry, Benita. 1994. 'Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism' in F. Barker, P. Hulme and M. Iversen (Eds.), *Colonial Discourse / Postcolonial Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 172-196.
- Peterson, Richard A. 1982. 'Five Constraints on the Production of Culture: Law, Technology, Market, Organizational Structure and Occupational Careers'. *Journal of Popular Culture*. 16: 158-173.
- Pugliese, Christiana. 1995. *The Life and Writings of Gakaara wa Wanjau*. Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies.
- _____.2003 'Complementary or Contending Nationhoods? Kikuyu Pamphlets and Songs 1945-52'. E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and J. Lonsdale (eds.) *Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration*, Oxford: James Currey. 97-120.
- Ranger, Terence. 1975. *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970*. London: Heinemann.
- _____. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Renan, Ernest. 1990. 'What is a Nation?' trans. M.Thom. Homi Bhabha (ed) *Nation and Narration*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Renaz, Louis. 1990. 'Influence'. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds). *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

- Ritz, David. 1991. *Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye*. New York: Dacca Po Press.
- Robins, Steve (2000). 'City Sites'. Sarah Nuttal and Ceryl-Ann Michael *Senses of Culture*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press. 408-425.
- Rose, Tricia. 1994. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press.
- Ross, Marc Howard. 1973. *The Political Integration of Urban Squatters*. Evanston, Northwestern Press.
- Roudiez, Leon S. 1980. 'Introduction'. Julia Kristeva *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rushdie, Salman. 1991. *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Granta.
- Ryan, John. 1985. *The Production of Culture in the Music Industry*. Lanham & New York: University Press of America.
- Said, Edward. 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage.
- _____. 1995. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Penguin.
- Sampler, David. 2004. 'Africa is Still our Mama': Kenyan Rappers, Youth Identity, and the Revitalization of Traditional Values'. *African Identities*, 2,1:37-51.
- Schatzberg, Michael G. (ed.) 1987. *The Political Economy of Kenya*. New York: Praeger.
- _____. 1988. *The Dialects of Oppression in Zaire*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Sobania, Neal. 2003. *Culture and Customs of Kenya*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Soja, Edward. 1989. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space In Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso.
- Southall, Roger. 1999. 'Re-forming the State? Kleptocracy & the Political Transition in Kenya'. *Review of African Political Economy* No.79: 93-108.
- Soyinka, Wole. 1999. *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri. 1994. 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*. New York: Columbia. 66-111.
- Stapleton, Chris and Chris May. 1989. *Africa All-Stars: The Pop Music of a Continent*. London: Palladin.

- Stewart, Gary. 2000. *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the Two Congos*. London: Verso.
- Stokes, Martin. (ed.) 1994. 'Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music'. *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Spyropoulos, Mary. 1987. 'Sheng: Some Preliminary Investigations into a Recently Emerged Nairobi Street Language'. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*. 18, 1: 125-136.
- Street, John. 1997. *Politics and Popular Culture*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- _____. 2001. 'Rock, Pop and Politics'. Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, London: Cambridge UP. 243-255.
- Taussig, Michael. 1992. *The Nervous System*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Taylor, Timothy D. 1997. *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*. New York : Routledge.
- Thelen, David. 1989. 'Memory and American History', *The Journal of American History*, 75, 4: 1117-1129.
- Throup, David and Charles Hornsby. 1998. *Multi-party Politics in Kenya. The Kenyatta and Moi States and the Triumph of the System in the 1992 Election*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Titlestad, Michael Frank. 2003. 'Making the Changes : Representations of Jazz in South African Literature and Reportage'. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Toynbee, Jason. 2000. *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions*. London: Arnold.
- Tremaine, Moira. 2001. 'Making Waves :The Kenyan Music Scene', *Msafiri*, November 2001 - January 2002, Issue 7: 62-66.
- Triulzi, Alessandro. 1996. 'African Cities, Historical Memory and Street Buzz' in Iain Chambers and Linda Curti (eds) *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*. London: Routledge.78-92.
- Turino, Thomas. 2000. *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P.

- University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. 1982. *Making Histories: Studies in History-writing and Politics*. London: Hutchinson.
- Vansina, Jan. 1985. *Oral Tradition as History*. London: James Currey.
- Walder, Dennis. 2000. 'The Necessity of Error: Memory and Representation in the New Literatures' in *Reading the New Literatures in a Postcolonial Era*. Susheila Nasta (ed.), Cambridge: D.S.Brewer.149-170.
- Wallis Roger and Krister Malm. 1984 *Big Sounds From Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries*, New York: Pendragon Press.
- Wanjala, Chris. 1980. *For Home and Freedom*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.
- Waterman, Chris. 1997. ' 'Our Tradition is a Very Modern Tradition': Popular Music and the Construction of Pan-Yoruba Identity'. Karin Barber (ed). *Readings in African Popular Culture*. London: James Currey. 48-53.
- Warner, Michael. 2002. 'Publics and Counterpublics', *Public Culture* 14 (1): 49-90.
- Werbner, Richard. 1998. *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*. London: Zed Books.
- White, Bob. 1999. 'Modernity's Trickster : "Dipping" and "Throwing" in Congolese Popular Dance Music'. *Research in African Literatures* Vol 30, No.4; 156-175.
- White, Hayden. 1978[a]. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*. London & Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- _____. 1978[b]. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. London & Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- _____.1987. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. London & Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- White, Luise. 1997. 'Cars Out of Place: Vampires, Technology, and Labor in East and Central Africa'. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in A Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 436-460.
- Willis, Justin. 2002. *Potent Brews: A Social History of Alcohol in East Africa 1850-1999*.Oxford: James Currey.
- _____. 2003. 'New Generation Drinking: The Uncertain Boundaries of Criminal Enterprise in Modern Kenya', *Africa Affairs*, 102, 241-260.
- Yewah, Emmanuel. 2001. 'The Nation as Contested Construct'. *Research in African Literatures*. Vol 32, No. 3, 44-56.

Discography

- Hardstone, 'Uhiki - (Pinye's Remix)', *Nutin But de Stone*, **Sync Sound Studios** (Tedd Josiah) **Kelele Records**, 1997 ke **31018**
- Kalamashaka, 'Tafsirii Hii', *Kenyan, The First Chapter*, **Sync Sound Studios**, (Tedd Josiah) **Ivory Island Records**, 1998
- K-South, *Nairobbery*, **Samawati Production**, 2002.
- Ndarlin P, '4 in 1', *Kenyan, The Second Chapter*, **Audio Vault Studios**, (Tedd Josiah) **Ivory Island Records**, 1999
- Gidi Gidi Maji Maji, 'Ting Badi Malo', *Kenyan, The Second Chapter*, **Audio Vault Studios** (Tedd Josiah), **Ivory Island Records**, 1999
- Them Mushrooms, *Zilizopendwa Wazee wa Kazi Collection*, **Mushroom Records**, 2000.
- Nairobi City Ensemble, *KaBoum Boum*, **Tabu Osusa**, 2001.
- Kayamba Afrika, *Kayamba Afrika*, **Samawati Productions**, 2001*
- Them Mushrooms, *Zilizopendwa, Wazee wa Kazi* *
- Eric Wainaina, *Sawa Sawa*, **Christian Kaufmann** 2001.
- Henri Mutuku, 'Nakuhitaji', *ReBirth*, **SoulChild Inc** (Steve Ominde), **SoulChild Records**, 2001
- Mercy Myra, 'Pole Musa', *Tabasamu*, **Samawati Productions**, 2002*
- Zannaziki, *Xawadi*, **Samawati Productions**, *
- Red San, 'Julie', *Ogopa 1*, **Ogopa DJs**, 2002 / *2003 Seasons of the San*, **MWM Promoters** (2003)
- Googs and Vinnie Banton, 'Wasee Githurai', *Ogopa 1*, **Ogopa DJs**, 2002
- Deux Vultures, 'Mona Lisa', *Ogopa 1*, **Ogopa DJs**, 2002 ** 2002
- Shammah, 'Ukilya Moko' ** 2002
- T.T. Solomon, 'Tangu Tupendane' ** 2002
- Jah Key Malle, 'Charonye ni Wasi' **
- King Kong, 'Cinderella'**
- Chameleon & Redsun, 'Mamamia'**
- Abedi, 'Dot Com Lady' **
- Markus Kamau, 'Shauri Yako', *Rock in a Hard Place*, **Chura Kipara Productions**, 2001.
- Jawabu, 'Dada Njoo', *Dance, Dance*, **Mandugu Digital, Samawati Productions** *

Nameless, 'Ninanoki', *Ogopa I*, 2002 **Ogopa DJs / On Fire Ogopa DJs** (2003)

Gidi Gidi Maji Maji, 'Unbwogable', **Blu Zebra Records**, (Tedd Josiah), 2002

Marvin Gaye, 'Sexual Healing', *Midnight Love*, **CBS Records**, 1982.

Keith Sweat, 'Twisted', *Keith Sweat*, **Elektra/Asylum**, **ASIN B000002HGN**, 1996

Sisqo, 'Unleash the Dragon', *Unleash the Dragon*, **Def Jams**, **ASIN B0000365F2**, 1999

Mary Mary, 'Shackles (Praise Him)', *Thankful*, **Sony**, **ASIN B00004T0Q1**, 2000

Baha Men, 'Who Let the Dogs Out', *Who Let the Dogs Out*, **Artemis/Antra Music**, **CDU 12222897**.

* The year of production is not indicated anywhere on these CDs, nor on their liner notes. Wherever possible I have given a date dependent on information I have received from the artistes during personal interviews or on the time the album became available in retail outlets to the best of my knowledge.

** The songs appeared mid 2002 on a pirate CD entitled *Best of Kenyan Artists* whose design imitates that of **Audio Vault Studios' Ivory Island** Record label and the album sleeve even carries the Ivory Island logo.

APPENDIX

i) Interviews

Tabu Osusa, Poxi Presha and Idi Achieng for Nairobi City Ensemble, Nairobi, 20 December 2001 (with James Ogude).

Bill Odidi, Nairobi 30 October 2002

Juma Odemba for Kayamba Afrika, Nairobi, 17 December 2002

Tedd Josiah, Nairobi, 6 May 2003 (with James Ogude)

Gidi Gidi (Joseph Ogidi) and Maji Maji (Julius Owino), Nairobi, 6 May 2003 (with James Ogude)

Eric Wainaina, Nairobi, September 2003

Alph Rabar, Homeboyz Entertainment, Nairobi, 22 March 2004

John Andrews, A.I. Records, Nairobi, 20 April 2004

Jennifer Shamala, Music Copyright Society of Kenya, Nairobi, 21 April 2004

ii) Web Discourse

Date: Thu, 20 Nov 2003 00:48:20 -0800 (PST)
From: Rahab <ncrayha02@yahoo.com>
Subject: Fwd: YOU ARE KENYAN IF...????
To: archyachy@yahoo.com, angirake@yahoo.com, kasipul@yahoo.com,

Reply-To: <daniel@georgedaniel.net>
From: "Daniel Ngari" <daniel@georgedaniel.net>
To: "Triza Nungari" <siah_n@yahoo.com>,
"Timothy Kihumba" <kihumba@hotmail.com>,
"Mercy" <suengari@hotmail.com>,
"Antony Mbugua" <tonyngari2002@yahoo.com>,
"Catherine Ngari" <cngari@bluemail.ch>

Subject: YOU ARE KENYAN IF...????

Date: Tue, 14 Oct 2003 15:19:53 +0800

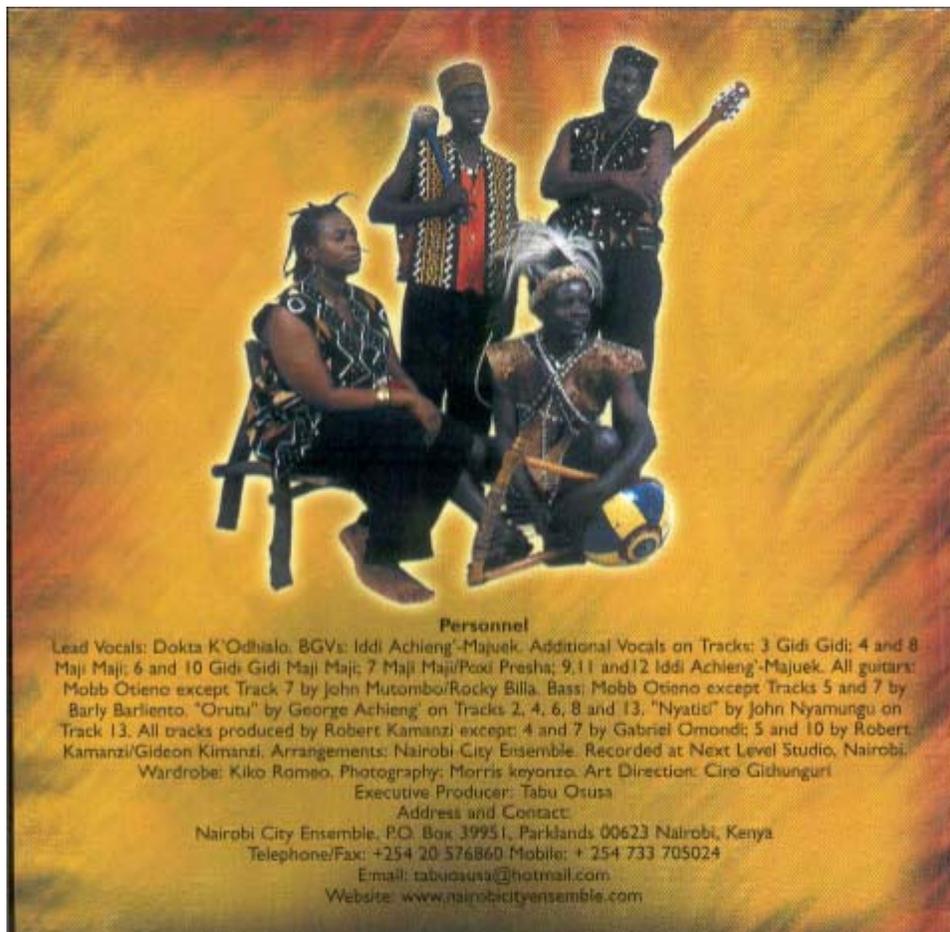
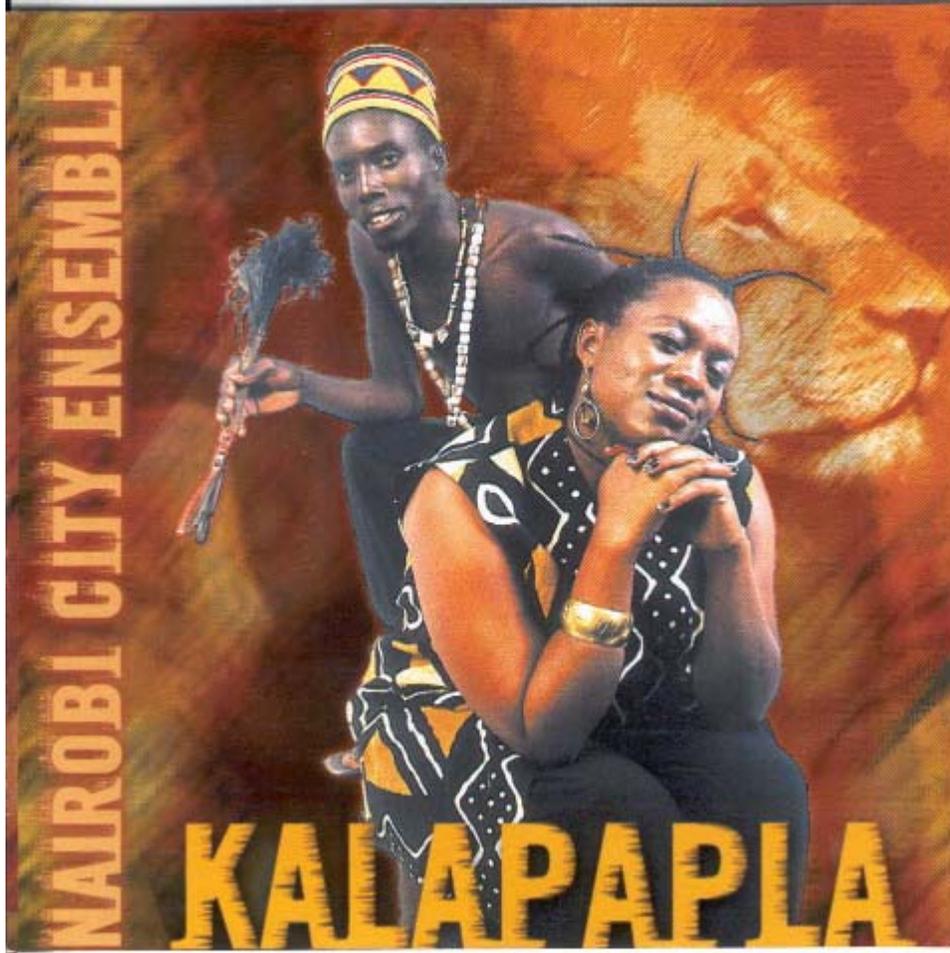
You know you are a real Kenyan if.....

- >
- > 1. You unwrap all your gifts carefully, so that you
- > can re-use the wrapping. Ama you tumia it to cover
- > your potted plants in the digz or cover your meza in
- > the jikoni.
- >
- > 2. You don't have genuine containers or utensils,
- > you
- > only use margarine, ice-cream and yoghurt mibebe.
- > (Blue band, Kasuku, Kimbo, mallo, Lyons Maid)
- >
- > 3. You call an older person you've never met before
- > 'uncle' or 'aunty.' "auntie, unashuka," "uncle si
- > nikuvukishe baro?"
- >
- > **4. More than 90,sorry 95% of the music CD's and**
- > **cassettes in your digz are illegal or pirated**
- > **copies.**
- > **(done in Dubai,kariokor base or Rivarori)**
- >
- > 5. Your backyard or store is always full of stuff
- > because you never throw anything away, just in case
- > you need it someday. (a gum boot without a partner,
- > njumu ya left ya sandak zile za tenee and the baby
- > walker - the baby now 12 and you are 40)
- >
- > 6. You have a collection o! f miniature shampoo

- > bottle
- > (mikebe tupu) from your stays at hotels (Sarova
- > shaba,
- > Sirikwa...) and also the tu flamingo sabuni soaps
- > that
- > are usually offered in the lodges. Most of them ni
- > zile umechanua. It's kenya anyway.
- >
- > 7. You have almost always overweight baggage when
- > travelling by plane. (Taking unga ya jogoo, Omena,
- > Royco, sugarcane, arrowroots and githeri to 'uncle'
- > Paul in the U.S.!)
 - >
 - > 8. If a store has a limit on the quantity of a
 - > product, then each member of the family will join
 - > separate queues to purchase the maximum quantity
 - > possible. (Mumias sugar during a shortage)
 - >
 - > 9. All children have annoying nicknames. (bebi, toi,
 - > boi, kadogo, nyako, rembo, doli, mamie, dadie, toto,
 - > kanono, twig)
 - >
 - > 10. Nobody in your family informs you that they are
 - > coming over for a visit. Uncle, wife, sis-in-law,
 - > two
 - > nephews and mboch have camped at home from
 - > Wesdan-(Western)
 - >
 - > 11. You sanya, mints and toothpicks at restaurants.
 - > (Murray mints, wrappers, an! d chumvi shakers,
 - > serviettes!)
 - >
 - > 12. Your mathee has a minor disagreement with her
 - > sister and she has not talked to her for almost 10
 - > years. (nisikie mkiongea ama mkicheza na watoto wake
 - > -
 - > mtaniona)
 - >
 - > 13. You only make telephone calls at a cheaper rate
 - > at
 - > night. (Ati economy ni mbaya!)
 - >
 - > 14. You teach your friends swear words in your
 - > language. (jinga, fala, shenzi wallahi billahi, aki
 - > ya
 - > ngai, nyasai kende mrembe mno ingoho!)

- >
- > 15. You never have less than 50 people to meet you
- > at
- > the airport or see you off even if it is a local
- > flight. (Yeah, my relas from Gatanga have hired a
- > minibus to see me off to Lokichoggio. - 1st person
- > to
- > fly in the family, that's why)
- >
- > 16. You keep changing your Internet Service Provider
- > because the first month is free you surf for the
- > first
- > free month and then when it is time to start paying,
- > you dissappear (I have proof, I know some
- > jamaas.....)
- >
- > 17. Office supplies mysteriously find their way to
- > your home.(M! akasis, biros, mastamps, stapler ya
- > mdsosi, makaratasis glue etc,etc.)
- >
- > 18. You don't buy a printer because it is cheaper to
- > do it at your work place where it is free. (kudowea
- > Yenyewe!)
- >
- > 19. You wash your car on a Sunday. (Yeah reading the
- > paper sitting on a kamawe in tu baggy shorts) even
- > if
- > you don't have one, you usually spend most of your
- > time imagining that you have one.
- >
- > 20. Weddings never start at the appointed time.
- > (three
- > hours later, African time: Better late than never)
- > food is majimaji (kitoweo), salt is NEVER enough)
- >
- > 21. You always lie about the ages of your children
- > if
- > they have to pay higher admission fees."Hapana, haka
- > katoto kangu ni kasweet sixteen"and yet he has
- > beards
- > all over. (Nairobi Show)
- >
- > 22. When you are young, your parents buy you clothes
- > at least two types and too big so that they would
- > last
- > longer.

>
> 23. At least one of yo! ur uncles is a teacher.
>
> 24. You have a 10 kg bag of rice in the kitchen. (!
> Basmati from Mwea)
>
> 25. You always read first the Sport sections of the
> Sunday newspaper that you have ombad the vendor (Ati
> wacha ni cheki headlines za ball tu! (especially
> jamas!)
>
> 26.You always love shopping at Uchumi strictly
> during
> the End month and at the mid month.Reason: End of
> month sales. Ati mapromo!
>
> So then am a real Kenyan and am proud of that.Are
> you...? If you are, prove this to me by forwarding
> this message to five of your friends and hopefully
> you
> will make someone's day better just like i have.
> Ama?
> Have a nice day.
>
>
>
>
>
----- End of forwarded message -----



APPENDIX (iv)

' OCTOBER 2002 - 'EM GOOD OLD DAYS'.

> > REMEMBER.....> Sandaks that came in any color known to man, and when it got hot your> feet felt like they were in a freaking sauna>> Closing day in primo and your parents give you Ksh. 5.00 and felt like> the body coz you know chips, soses and cools are on you.>> "wanteds" on closing day from the school bulllys and class prefects were> usually the target after three months of being on the noise maker list.>> times when there was only VOK and on satos you had to sit and vumilia> watching 'football made in germany" before the weekend movie.>> relas from shags come to your house and take over the tv and all they> wana watch is Press Review, Dunia Wiki Hii, Press Conference and to top> it off they put national service on the radio.>> games like kalongo, tapo, shake,taking jualas and wrapping them aroud> so tight with kambas and the result was an oddly shaped but functional> mpira.> The list goes on.....>> LEONARD MAMBO MBOTELA - Je Hii/huu ni Ungwana?>> this thread is too good to go to waste.>> what about magazines like True Love, Drum, Viva, Step, Picha> Hadithi..... covering your primo books with brown paper or gazetis ha> ha ha miss them days !!>> you're forgetting... we had to cover the books with brown paper, plastic> paper and put those blue and white labels with our names on them.>> remember holiday homework?? we used to wait mpaka the last two days of> hol's before beginning math "sums" and inshas on akina inspekta wingo of> simu ya kifo...>> Do you remember "Fearless Fang" ati he used to ride an elephant>> He-man na sword yake joh. mimi lakini nilikua chali wa skeletor>> season ya bano ndiyo ilikua mambo yote. mother alikua akitoa noma juu ya> uchafu kwa mifuko. mimi bado huwa na ile bano yangu ya silver yenye kazi> yake ilikua kumaliza za wasee wengine.>> Hiyo bano ilikuwa inaitwa Spider and they were very rare and in high> demand. heheh good memories.>>>> kumbuka days of mamboleo, that sh** was the most boring and what about> washaing the tv to get those test signal lines, yaani tv haijanza ama> those messages of do not adjust your set after you've been trying to> reduce brightness for kitu 1/2 an hour and kumbe KBC are cocking up as> usual.>>>> 1)Button Moon,that TIRED cartoon KBC used to show them days. KBC> Programmers put us thru hell with their tired shows.>> 2)When KTN first came out,and some jamaas used to feel hot cauze their> TV's showed KTN clear bila any antennas hoisted atop their houses. Some> of us has 2 antennas and a booster lakini bado KTN wasn't showing right.>> 3)When EVERYBODY used to watch Neighbours on KTN and Weekend Movie on> KBC.>> 4)Before the FM Revolution jamaas used to listen to Sundowner on KBC> English Service. When Capital and Metro hit the scene jamaas switched> fast.....No doubt.>> the days of windbreakers, moccas, pumps, those thin ties, those shiny> grey suits, music by colonel abrahams, alexander o'neil, starlight club> opposite buffalo bill's restaurant, going to nairobi show and getting> lost, kumbuka "tattoo" at night at nairobi show? those truly were the> days...>> what about playing that game for pele...you remove the tumthings from> bottle tops and blow> "pa"!...rounders...and cha mama..>>>> Manze playing SHAKE in the esto -- the jamaas against the chicks, back> in the day when we were all too young to feel sweet...>> Also those days of playing police and robbers and mkebe(another version> of hide and seek, only using a kimbo or blueband mkebe)>>>> And those Pepsi animal books, I think I will declare mine a collectors> item the moment I recall exactly where I left it>> also gone are the days of playing "tapo", drinking chai ya

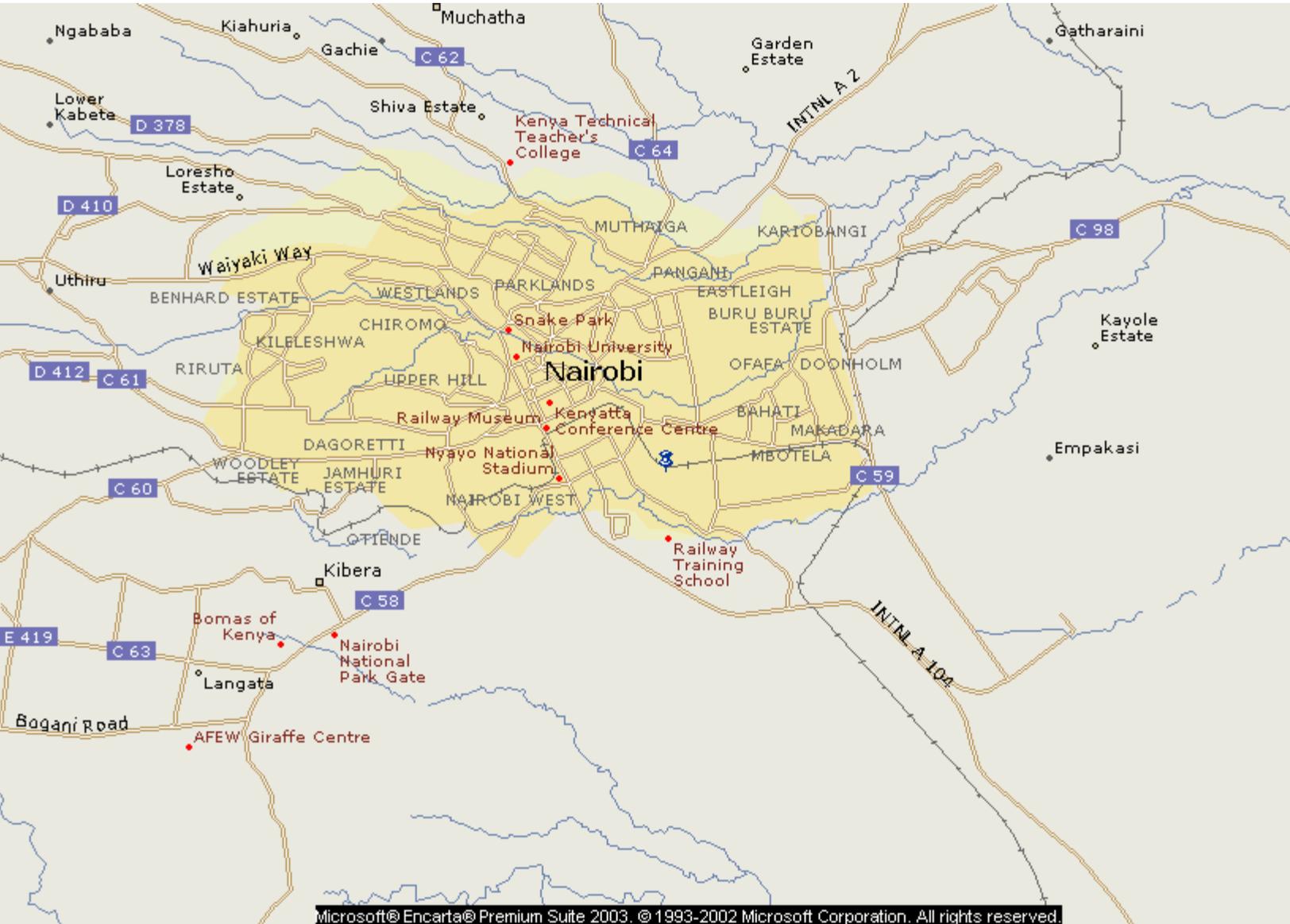
saa kumi,> eating hot lunch in school, walking to the bus stop and playing mpaka> six before entering a full bus, the days of carrying rucksacks, wearing> socks with potatos, living in houses where we need a gate, a wall with> broken bottles and a dog called chui...>> and the days of programs like "jiburudisheni' and "just a moment" ...>> How about "Tushauriane" and the way it was banned so fast>> and remember the programme "Usiniharakishe" which aired for two episodes> and then was banned?>> ... i remember way back then, we used to make "safo cars" usin kimbo and> cowboy tins, steal coat wire hangars, and cut bata slippers for the> wheels and stuff. Then race around the estate over the weekend during> the safari rally. Others would make motis out of wire and blada alone,> and have its own steering wheel. And also, when guys used to play, i> cant remember the name, but someone would draw a road track with many> curves and guys would bring bottle tops. One would place it and hit it> with the middle finger 3 times and it had to be in the track or you were> out of the game.>> the game of was called "bottle tops". We called the game "1 2 3".>> remember the days when we used to be all excited kama kwenyu kupikwa> chapo and that day you would be wishing for the day to end so that you> can go and eat the chapos.dont forget akina wild rose,the rich also cry> and no one but you. who recalls christmas wouldnt be christmas without> nguo za chrisi????????>> Is that guy who used to present HABARI with a serious afro like he was> >still in the 70's still doing it..Hamisi Themor was is> name...remember...Football made in Germany,Kufungua Kituo,Kiini> Macho,Space Ghost...>> REMEMBER THOSE SODAS THAT CAME IN EVERY COLOUR AND FLAVOR IMAGINEABLE> ... SCHWEPPE/ SCHWOPS OR SOMETHING...> remember the soda called "mirinda"?>> Remember the signature tune for KBC Radio News?> The tune for "Sundowner"?>> The classic tune for "Late Date"?>> how about that mo'fo of saturday night show in KBC before FM radios> landed who used to play a song a million times them chana kenyan by> playing a part of the song then reading them out? -when you had a kobole> (5 bob) you were the hero of the esto coz u could buy (puruz) patcos> for everyone.? man the good ol'days>> remember those mare kwa mare guys? (mali kwa mali) they used to come to> the estate and exchange all your old clothes and shoes for a plastic> basin and two glasses...>> machongolo pipa... (Kamero Na Kaguti Chongolo pipa pipa) who was> shokolokobangoshe??>> shining outside church as a teenager with the latest clads... that song> "zaminamina zankalewa mwana wa a a...">> going for debate against other government chuos...>>> WWW.MASHADA.COM

>
>
>
>
>-----

>Yahoo! Mail -- Une adresse @yahoo.fr gratuite et en français !

Join the world's largest e-mail service with MSN Hotmail. [Click Here](#)

Nairobi Metropolitan Area Kenya



REFORMS

Team set to revise policy on the small enterprises

By Nation Reporter

A task force was appointed last week to look into policies relating to micro and small enterprises.

The 15-member task force, headed by Prof Terry Ryan, was appointed by the Minister for Labour and Human Resource Development, Mr Najib Balala.

According to a Kenya Gazette notice dated May 5, it shall submit its report to the minister within 40 days.

The team will also review all policy documents on micro and small enterprises, including strategic and implementation plans.

Terms of reference

It shall look into programme and activity reports, government-donor contracts and memoranda of understanding relating to the sector.

The team shall review the financial reports on micro and small enterprises programme of the ministry to assess their cost-effectiveness.

It shall also assess the concerns of Jua Kali industries as presented to the minister by Jua Kali umbrella associations, with a view to recommending corrective action.

The effectiveness of various

New farm machinery



Photo/Moses Nyakiti

ON THE TEST: The new Bell 1226 tractor imported from South Africa and a locally fabricated trailer rig, both recently launched in Kisumu by Farm Engineering Industries Ltd, undergo trial in Mumias last week. The tractor is powered by a John Deere engine which the firm says is fuel-efficient, and the new Automatic Allison transmission, and is capable of carrying a load of up to 30 tonnes.

components of the micro and small enterprises sector projects, including the participation of Jua Kali in national and regional marketing exhibitions and how these can be undertaken effectively without donor funding, will also come up.

The task force will assess the extent to which umbrella micro and small enterprises organisations are able to execute their mandate and roles in support of the members.

It shall also review the governance and institutional capacity of the Jua Kali organisations with a

view to providing guidelines for any new projects designed to support the sector.

It shall make policy and programme recommendations for enhancing micro and small enterprises for job creation and economic growth.

Members are William Oloo Otula, Charles Nyangute, David Knopp, Pharesh Ralego, Gogo Awich, Henry Koweru, Jennifer Riria, Manga Mugwe, M.W. Thairu, Caesar Gachira, Patrick Kinyori, Vincent Omuse, Winnie Mitullah and Salim Ndamwe.

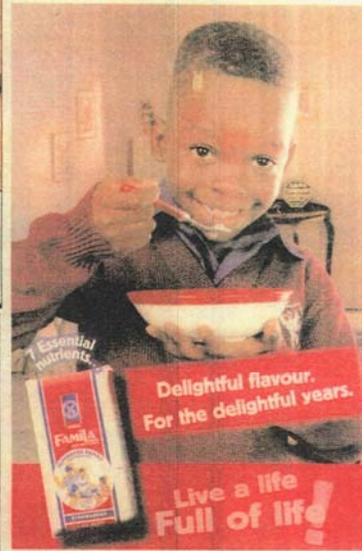
The task force will have the

power, with the approval of the minister, to co-opt members or appoint committees as it deems fit only for specialised aspects of its terms of reference.

The secretariat is based at the ministry's headquarters at Social Security Building.

The creation of the team comes at a time when the government is increasingly looking towards the micro enterprises sector to create jobs.

Prof Ryan, a former economic secretary, has been involved in a number of projects in the micro enterprises sector.



ATOTI!

When it comes to looks, no utility pick-up comes close to the Nissan Hardbody Double Cab. And what do you know, her stunning beauty is not just skin deep. Loaded with Power Steering, Dual Airbags, ABS Brakes, Air Conditioning, Alloy Rims, Bucket Seats, Central Locking, Tonneau Cover, Roll Bar, Power Windows and Mirrors, Fog Lamps and a CD Changer, the Hardbody Double Cab comes in a array of trendy colours that will give you plenty to sing about.

D.T. Dobie

Showrooms: Nairobi College House Tel: 69077300, Lusaka Road Tel: 69077200 Email: sales@dt Dobie.co.ke
Nairobi: Tel: (020) 211775 Email: sales@nku.dtdobie.co.ke Mombasa: Tel: (041) 316757 Email: sales@msa.dtdobie.co.ke



Bush demands UN action against Iraq

UNITED NATIONS, Thursday

US President George W. Bush told the UN General Assembly today that "action will be unavoidable" against Iraq, unless the United Nations enforced resolutions requiring Baghdad to disarm.

In a speech to the UN General Assembly, President Bush laid out a harsh indictment of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, saying he has flouted a decade of post-Gulf War demands from the United Nations by developing weapons of mass destruction.

"The Security Council resolutions will be enforced — the just demands of peace and security will be met — or action will be unavoidable," President Bush said. "And a regime that has lost its legitimacy will also lose its power."

Insisting that Iraq's refusal to abide by previous resolutions threatened the authority of the United Nations, President Bush said the United States

would work with other members of the UN Security Council on a new Iraq resolution.

"If Iraq's regime defies us again, the world must move deliberately and decisively to hold Iraq to account," President Bush said. "The purposes of the United States should not be doubted."

President Bush's speech coincided with an increased beat of US war drums, including the disclosure that the US military command overseeing operations in the Middle East would, at least temporarily, be transferred from the United States to the Gulf in November.

President Bush, who has increasingly equated his commitment to oust President Hussein with the US-led war on terrorism, insists on the world body forcing Iraq to abandon any programmes it has to make weapons of mass destruction.

The United States is demanding a return of unrestricted inspection of Iraq's suspected weapons programmes, which President Hussein agreed to after

his defeat in the 1991 Gulf War but which were abandoned in 1998 after hindrance by Iraq.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, speaking minutes before President Bush, insisted that only the United Nations could authorise the use of force in cases that went beyond straightforward self-defence.

In a powerful appeal for respect for international law and multilateral action, he said: "Even the most powerful countries know that they need to work with others in multilateral institutions to achieve their aims."

President Bush gave a prelude of his remarks in grain words delivered in New York yesterday during ceremonies marking the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks, saying America would

defend civilization against "any terrorist or tyrant."

The White House released a 22-page document listing 16 UN Security Council resolutions it said President Hussein had violated, including demands he destroy, and stop making, weapons of mass destruction.

For its part, Iraq bluntly warned Washington it was ready to repel any invasion with every weapon at its disposal, even kitchen knives, sticks and stones.

Speaking to Reuters hours before President Bush's speech, Iraqi Foreign Minister Najj Sabri denied his country had weapons of mass destruction and said Baghdad still hoped to avoid any attack.

"But if we are attacked, we will choose our own means by using everything at our disposal, even sticks, kitchen knives, our hands and stones," he said. (Agencies)



President Bush

President Bush

President Bush

US a threat to world peace, says Mandela

JOHANNESBURG, Thursday

Former South African President Nelson Mandela has branded the United States a "threat to world peace."

In an interview with Newsweek magazine done on Monday, the Nobel Peace laureate

criticised the United States for acting unilaterally and undermining the United Nations as a forum for settling international disputes. He said US headline policies aimed to please American oil and arms companies.

"If you look at those matters, you will come to the conclusion that the attitude of the United States of America is a threat to world peace," the revered 84-year-old African statesman said in the interview, which appears on Newsweek's Web site.

"...What (America) is saying is that if you are afraid of a veto in the (UN) Security Council, you can go outside and take action and violate the sovereignty of other countries," Mr Mandela said.

"That is the message they are sending to the world. That must be condemned in the strongest terms."

In another development, Britain said today the United Nations should set Iraq an ultimatum "with a sting in its tail" to make President Hussein comply with demands over weapons of mass destruction.

Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, it was vital Iraq understood that the world was ready to

take him on. "A UN process — as well as a clear ultimatum with a sting in its tail as far as prospective military operations is concerned — is part of making it clear to Iraq just how seriously we view the situation," Mr Hoon told BBC radio.

Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair, under pressure at home over his unstinting support for President Bush, bowed yesterday to calls from supporters and opponents alike for a parliamentary debate on Iraq.

More than 160 members of the 659-strong chamber, most from Mr Blair's Labour Party, have signed a motion expressing "deep unease" about Britain backing military strikes on Iraq — particularly if there is no explicit UN backing.

The one-day session, expected to take place on September 24, will give members a chance to voice their grievances three weeks before they were due to return from summer recess. (Agencies)



Mr Mandela

Kisumu
1,500/-*
(but do we say!)

Incredible! Flamingo Airlines, Kenya's only budget airline, flies four times daily to Kisumu City on time - every time and at the lowest fares in the market. Get this - effective 12th September: fly to and from Kisumu from 1,500/-* one way on our early morning and evening flights and 2,500/-* on all our other Kisumu flights. Simply book and pay for your tickets today! Yaw! Yaw! And now you can join our Flamingo AirReward Programme - ask for your Flamingo AirReward brochure at our check-in desks. To obtain full details on our incredible Flamingo Fares, visit www.flamingoairlines.com or call our Barclays Plaza Call Centre: 32074340. Kisumu Office: 035-20081/2. Flamingo - Kenya's reliable budget airline. Yaw!



Malaysian opposition leader warns of Muslim backlash

KUALA TERENGGANU (Malaysia), Thursday

The leader of Malaysia's biggest Islamic opposition party has accused the West of waging a "crusade" against Muslims since the September 11 and warned that US military strikes against Iraq would raise the risk of more terrorist assaults inside America.

Mr Abdul Hadi Awang, who campaigns for what his supporters say is fundamentalist Islam for this Southeast Asian nation, said today that Washington has demonised Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein without proof and ignored abuses against Muslims by Israel and Russia. Malaysia has had a high

profile in the global war on terror. Its government has detained more than 60 suspected Islamic militants with alleged ties to Al Qaeda, including a former army captain accused of letting two of the September 11 terrorist hijackers meet in his Kuala Lumpur apartment in 2000.

"We are seeing how the United States and its allies are carrying out new crusade wars against Muslims," Mr Abdul Hadi told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview in which he distanced his party from Islamic extremism. "The attacks against Afghanistan were cruel and without any strong reason," he said. (AP)

282

Sasa? Mimi naitwa
Eric Wainaina.

Ninapenda sana kutunga nyimbo ambazo zinatupatia
silaha za kupambana na hii life.

Hata niko na plan za kuoja siku moja. Na
singetaka kitu chohote kizuie plan zangu.

Kila mtu ako na life moja. **Everyone**
just has one life.

Na ni kwa hiyo maana nikatembelea
kituo cha **VCT**, ili niweze kujua status
yangu ya **HIV**. Niweze kuchukua control
ya maisha yangu.

Sasa natua mahaji niko, na vile
naweza do, ku-achieve hizo dreams.

Kama uko na plans za kuishi na mtu, au
kuoja, manze....Anza na kutembelea kituo cha **VCT**,
chanukeni pamoja.

**CHANUKENI
PAMOJA**

