



Fishing Songs from Kilwa Kisiwani, Tanzania: A Case Study of Intangible Maritime Cultural Heritage on the Swahili Coast

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Abstract

Historically, fishers (both men and women) have engaged in different activities ranging from preparing fishing equipment (traps, nets, fishing vessels), weather forecasting, and sailing to fishing grounds and they continue to do so today. While sailing, fishers paddle collaboratively when the wind is low and when the boat is leaking, some crew will bail the vessel. Once they arrive at the fishing grounds, fishers cast anchor, mend the fishnets, and fix the boat foresheets. If successful, the fishers collect their catch, weigh the anchor, return to shore, and prepare to sell their fish. These fishing activities have always been accompanied by maritime customs, traditions, rituals, stories, and gestures. For instance, singing is one key tradition that has continued to accompany the fishing process from the start to the end. This paper documents and present the songs that have always been part of the fishing process in Kilwa Kisiwani, along the southern coast of Tanzania. The fishing songs are presented in the context of intangible cultural heritage of the east African Swahili coast.

Keywords Maritime cultural heritage · Intangible heritage · Kilwa Kisiwani · Fishing songs · Fishers

Setting the context

Singing is a social activity which is part and parcel of people's daily lives (Small 1998; Frith 2012; Maloney and Schofield 2021). Nketia (1974) argues that songs' themes centre on events and matters of common interest among community members or a social group. The songs may deal with everyday life or the traditions, beliefs, and customs of the society. Accordingly, sailors and fishers, like any other social groups, practice singing daily.

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Cementing on this and citing a two-year sea voyage from Boston to California, Richard Dana (1869: 308) informs that “...a song is as necessary to sailors as a drum and fife to soldiers. They must pull together as soldiers must step in time; and they can’t pull in time or pull with a will without a song.” In addition to singing, communities living along the shores of oceans, lakes, and rivers have developed traditions to shape their daily activities (Taylor 1992; Ichumbaki 2011, 2017) of which singing is a part. Interactions between water bodies and communities in the past have created a legacy celebrated by maritime people today that will continue to evolve in the future. This legacy is what we refer to, in this paper, as Maritime Cultural Heritage (MCH). MCH can be understood as a set of tangible and intangible cultural goods both in water and on the land which past humans left, and the present generation celebrate as part of their history (Joan and Carbonell 2014; Henderson 2019; Holly et al. 2022). Whereas the tangible MCH include shipwrecks, submerged settlements, coastal settlements, ports and harbours, maritime ecologies, and geology; the intangible maritime cultural heritage involves cultural practices, artistic and linguistic expressions, local skills, and traditional knowledge.

Taking a holistic approach to maritime cultural heritage, some initiatives in Eastern Africa have focused on built heritage, underwater wreck sites, and historic coastal environments for sustainability purposes (see Henderson et al. 2019). Some other projects have dealt with material practices and living traditions, bringing them into development conversations and resulting in an enhanced understanding of MCH (Holly et al. 2022). While the implemented projects have produced multiple academic works, we hereby present a few on the coast of Tanzania which are also relevant to the current paper. For example, Ichumbaki and colleagues (2022) document the building of *ngalawa* (outrigger log-boat) from the start to the end. The article follows the construction process from the selection and felling of the tree(s) to the launching of the vessel. It outlines the tools and materials used, details the sequence followed in construction, and presents choices and considerations made along the way. Ichumbaki and colleagues’ work outlines the maritime knowledge and skills that need to be preserved and transmitted to generations. The team’s other works detail the types and typologies of boats in Zanzibar channel (Cooper et al. 2021) and documentation of boats’ names and the messages they convey; (Ichumbaki et al. 2022). These research outputs contribute to an understanding of the tangible and intangible MCH of the Swahili coast, including identifying the ways the coastal heritage and its associated intangible aspects, can stimulate ethical, inclusive, and sustainable community development (Henderson 2019). Despite these initiatives, little has been done to document and safeguard intangible MCH.

David Taylor’s (1992) report gives insight on what to document when considering intangible MCH and how to document it. Regarding what to document, Taylor (1992, p. 11) argues that: “...in maritime communities, one rich context for traditional expressions is the occupational group.” Tylor proposes documentation of all traditional activities that identify fishers, boat builders, net makers, harbour pilots, and deep-sea fishing boat captains; these groups’ materials are a source of knowledge for the future generations. Building on Taylor’s idea, some researchers (e.g., see Caillaud et al. 2004) have documented beliefs, customs, and taboos such as restrictions and instructions the local people of Melanesia (New Guinea) use in handling the sea, marine resources, and sea vessels. The proverbs and sayings on the weather of waterways and fishing in general were also documented. Some more recent studies (e.g., see Farley 2021) have documented coastline stories concerning lighthouses, Vikings, whalers, and fishers’ folktales including how such folklore shape landscape, people, and history.

Following the above background, the current paper documents the intangible MCH, particularly the local fishing songs of eastern Africa focusing on Kilwa Kisiwani (KK) as a case study. Kilwa Kisiwani is a World Heritage Site whose development is linked to maritime trade growth during the early second millennium AD. Currently, the sea continues to play a crucial role for local communities dependent on it for their day-to-day livelihoods.

Research Background and Objectives

Globally, the documentation of the intangible MCH has gained momentum in the past three decades (Caillaud et al. 2004; Jeffery and Parthesius 2013; Ichumbaki and Pollard 2019). For instance, Taylor (1992) explains about the folk life of the fishing villages in Florida. In this work, Taylor explains the disappearance of *shanties* (fishing songs) because of technological changes in the maritime occupations due to the spread of popular music through electronic media (Taylor 1992, p. 11). He argues that the advent of engines to haul anchors and nets minimized collaborative works that required singing motivational songs. Taylor's work, however, would have been more persuasive if had documented songs and the context in which they emerge. Unfortunately, the author did not explain the songs' meanings and roles as they relate to marine legends and stories.

Worldwide, there are only a handful of studies that have focused on fishing songs (i.e., Creighton 1992; Hughes 2000; Ishikawa 2004; Konesni 2008; McGlothlin 2019). The few studies that exist are limited in terms of topics and spartial coverage. For instance, the Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM) which was established in 1991 to preserve, promote, and showcase Australia's marine heritage contains a collection of musical sheets of sea shanties (ANMM 2018, 2020). Unfortunately, these musical sheets do not reflect indigenous fishing activities, but rather general maritime communities' lives such as love affairs and pirates. Besides, the museum does not contain documents on the actual meaning of the shanties, which would have provided details beyond the musical sheets. Although the ANMM has historic wooden ships, shipwrecks, engravings, swimming caps, early European sea paintings, medicines, manuscripts, and diaries collections, the narratives on 'fishing songs' are lacking.

Elsewhere, however, some researchers have documented fishing songs from a gender perspective (i.e., women-based motivational songs). For instance, Hughes (2000) and Ishikawa (2004) study of Japanese traditional fishing songs inform about the strength of women, both sexually and in household duties. One empirical example is the fishing song called *Soran-bushi*. Originally, the Hokkaido fishers of Northern Japan sang *soran-bushi* to raise their morale when transferring herring to smaller boats using a net that looked like a giant butterfly (Hughes 2000). The song was later introduced into Japanese traditional dances, where the dancers acted as fishers paddling, dragging nets, pulling up the anchor, and lifting luggage over their shoulders (Ishikawa 2004).

McGlothlin (2019) describes ten (10) fishing songs (American sea Shanties) for promoting maritime culture. She describes song titles alongside their meanings but not lyrics, contexts, and roles. A similar trend is observed in the work of the Smithsonian Museum (2019) that documents lyrics of European Shanties without analysing meanings, roles, and contexts in which the songs emerge. These scholarships build on the work of a folklorist Mary Creighton (1899–1989) who, for nearly fifty years, documented one hundred and fifty (150) maritime songs which, among other things, inform about love, the sea, and battle, (Christian 2017). These songs were collected and recorded from musicians living

in Nova Scotia maritime community but not from fishers (Creighton 1992). Each song Creighton recorded begins with a musical notation (single musical line without guitar tabs) followed by verses and ending with its history. Creighton's work would have been more cogent if had documented the meaning and role of each song as well as the contexts. Despite this limitation, however, Creighton's book is a gem of maritime songs.

Similarly, in West Africa, Konesni (2008) presents fishing songs by fishers of the Ga tribe in Ghana. Although the songs' purpose of energizing fishers is documented, the lyrics meaning, and context of each song are undocumented. Some fishing songs have also been recorded in South Africa. In addition to fishing songs, here the intangible maritime heritage include stories and poems about the sea in memory of the slave trade across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans (Baderoon 2009). One example of these songs is about Alabama, the American confederate ship, which sailed into Table Bay in South Africa in 1863. A song by Nyezwa Mxolisi goes:

*The sea is heavy inside us, and I won't sleep tonight,
I have buckets of memory in a jar, that I kept for days and nights like these
Here comes the Alabama, the Alabama comes over the sea*

(Baderoon 2009, p. 89).

Like the case in West and South Africa, coastal fishing communities in East Africa have beliefs, songs, taboos, and traditions that accompany and guide maritime-based activities: sailing, fishing, boat building and handling of fishing vessels (Cooper et al. 2022). Living heritage such as rituals, narratives, and practices that are associated with the fishing activities, however, are limited in the literature. A few existing ones include narratives of *Jiwe la Jahazi* (a rock formation shaped like dhow), fishers, and other villagers in Kilwa Kisiwani describe as a dhow turned into a stone for it intended to invade Kilwa (Jeffrey and Parthesius 2013; Pollard et al. 2016; Ichumbaki 2020a, b). There are also a few studies that document boat-building knowledge and skills (Ichumbaki et al. 2021) and meanings of wooden boats' names in Bagamoyo (Ichumbaki et al. 2022). A more focused study on intangible MCH is the folklore of a giant man 'Nyengakumbi' described as a maritime hero whose one stretch pushed ships heading to Zanzibar and dragged them back to Kiswere in Kilwa district (Ichumbaki and Pollard 2019: 18). Additional study on MCH along the Swahili coast is that of Mesaki and Salleh (2008). The authors document folklores about seasons, sea waves, winds, fish species, and fishers' determination to reach the shore; a few songs are documented with no details on lyrical translation, structure, meanings, and contexts. Indeed, despite the presence of maritime-oriented research at multiple sites such as Pangani, Bagamoyo, Dar es Salaam, Kilwa and Mikindani (see Fig. 1), a handful of studies on intangible MCH exist.

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that, studies on intangible MCH in East Africa and beyond have focused on oral traditions such as myths, legends and narratives, as well as boat-building knowledge and navigation practices. Along the Swahili Coast and East Africa in general, there are a handful of studies that document and inform about the fishing songs. For instance, there are recordings of songs of Haya people of Bukoba that inform about various topics including fishing, paddling, and hunting (unknown author 1950). On the East African coast, the only existing knowledge about maritime folklore with a mention of fishing songs in passing is that of Mesaki and Salleh (2008). Apart from these two, as far as we are aware, based on the surveyed literature, there are no intensive studies of fishing songs in East Africa. To fill this knowledge gap, the current paper documents fishing songs; provides the songs' meanings and contexts; and assesses the values and/or relevance of the fishing songs for maritime heritage.



Fig. 1 A map of the coast of Tanzania showing location of Kilwa and other key maritime sites mentioned in the text. Source: Map by Hitson Pazza

Fieldwork and Data Collection Methods

The data reported in this paper was collected in two phases: from September to December in 2019 and March to May of 2020. In the first phase, the fieldwork formed part of the *Kisima*¹ project. During this season's fieldwork, the authors had conversations with the KK women to record narratives and stories they tell while fetching water from the groundwater wells. During our discussions, held while the women were fetching water, concerns were raised on how husbands talk about their wives as they sail to and from fishing sites. Of great interest here and relevant for the current article was fishers' songs about women. Thus, the aspect of songs in fishing activities motivated our interest to study the types, nature, and meaning of songs fishers sing while engaging in fishing and other maritime-oriented activities. In the second phase (March–May 2020), we returned to KK for an extended inquiry on fishing songs to answer questions that could not be answered during phase one. The questions we sought to answers were: (1) what type of songs (and how many) do the fishers sing as they head out to fishing, during fishing, returning from fishing, selling their fish, and/or sailing their boats to shore? (2) In what contexts do the fishers sing those songs? (3) What are the meanings of these local fishing songs; and (4) What do the songs contain in terms of maritime heritage, what is their connection with fishing activities and the sea (the fishing milieu) and how the practice of singing changes over time?

To answer these questions, we employed four data collection strategies, namely in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, meeting with a group of women, and participatory observation. For our interviews, we formulated simple and straightforward (semi-structured) questions in Kiswahili. The questions looked for answers from the local people regarding the nature, contexts, and content of fishing songs. Key interviewees and group discussion members were fishers and other experienced collaborators in the fishing industry (i.e., boat builders, fish-trap makers, retired fishers, etc.). We interviewed participants in an informal setting to avoid interrupting their daily schedules. During fieldwork, we conducted interviews either at the beach or home compounds where fishers design and make fish traps. For older people and retired fishers (aged between 60 and 80 years old), we requested appointments and interviewed them at their homes. With the consents of local collaborators, we used H1n Hand Recorder to record conversations. Recording the conversations allowed us to carefully listen to and concentrate on explanations interviewees provided. In addition, we made notes of some key responses and non-verbal clues.

The interviewed local collaborators comprised of night and daytime fishers—both on shores and away from the shore (aged between 20–50 years old) as well as teenagers relaxing on the beach. Other collaborators we interviewed included fish collectors, fishmongers, boat builders, fish-trap makers, and fishers who are also musicians; they compose and sing fishing songs. We also conducted interviews with KK women, including those collecting fish and other marine species along the shore. Additional interviewees included women selling fish and others who used to sell fish but now moved to other businesses. In total, we interviewed 74 respondents (see Table 1).

Our questions to fishers aimed to document the existence of a singing culture during fishing and the kind of songs fishers sing, when do they sing, how and why. As it will become

¹ *Kisima* (*Visima* in plural) is a Swahili word which mean an underground freshwater well. The *Kisima* project in Kilwa investigated the roles of underground freshwater wells in the growth of Kilwa Kisiwani port during the 11th to 18th century. The project was directed by Drs. E. Ichumbaki (University of Dar es Salaam), Edward Pollard (Ireland's Discovery Programme) and Jean-Christopher Comte (University of Aberdeen).

Table 1 Category, number, and percentages of interviewed groups in Kilwa Kisiwani

No.	Categories (Sample Unit)	Sample size	Percentages
1.	Local fishermen	30	40.5
2.	Local fisherwomen	23	31.0
3.	Retired fishermen	9	12.2
4.	Older KK women	4	05.4
5.	Teenagers relaxing on beach	8	10.8
	TOTAL	74	100

apparent in the next sections, answers for these questions enabled us to understand contexts of the songs and the lyrics' meanings. Answers to such questions also informed us of the type of songs the fishers sing as they prepare to go fishing, engage in fishing, and return from fishing, along with related activities. Indeed, these probing questions helped us to understand the various types of fishing songs (both old and new) along with musicological characteristics.

In addition to in-depth interviews, we held focus group discussions between us (researchers) and the local collaborators. This strategy helped to obtain the perceptions and experiences of more than one local person. Focus group discussion was semi-structured whereby purposefully selected participants discussed issues based on selected themes. The discussion involved KK fishers aged between 20 and 50 years. Since fishers perform most of their fishing activities in groups, we held discussions at the fishers' homes and near the shore where repairing of fishing nets takes place (see Figs.2, 3). The group discussions continued during the fishing boat trip where either one or both of us participated. In total, we conducted three discussion groups which had four to six fishers. Like interviews, conducting focus group discussion was intended to understand KK fishing songs, their meanings, and contexts. As a strategy to complement interviews, the group discussions aimed to understand why fishers sing certain songs and not others in various fishing processes.

We also held a day meeting with a group of 19 women, the majority of whom were wives of fishermen. The women who attended the meeting are members of *Wanawake, Utamaduni na Magofu -- Kilwa Kisiwani* (WAUMAKI)² and engage in the business of fishing. At a meeting with the women, we discussed songs the fishers sing during their fishing activities. Although rarely, these women accompany husbands during fishing, they have knowledge of their men's fishing activities including singing songs. Since many of the songs fishermen sing concern women, we explored their (women) feelings about the songs. The issues discussed included how fishers talk about women, the songs' language (content-wise), popularity, and the women's reaction to such songs. Through the discussions we held with the women, we gathered multiple songs fishers sing along with the songs' contents including issues of gender associated with fishing.

Our final data collection strategy involved actual participation in the fishing trips to listen to the songs, observe the contexts in which a certain song emerges, and the associated practices. Through this strategy, we documented songs and actions (behaviour and characteristics) accompanying singing. The fishing trips we participated in had between four and six people and lasted two to six hours, throughout which singing of various songs continued. Likewise, fishers were asked to sing the songs they sing during their fishing activities and several interviewees mentioned similar songs with the same meaning. Our sailing was

² WAUMAKI, this is a women association aimed at empowering KK women by providing them with financial and educational support for various economic projects i.e., selling food



Fig. 2 Fishing nets and a sail hanging on a hut on the KK shore. Credit: Photo by E. Ichumbaki



Fig. 3 Fishermen repairing fishing nets on the KK shore. Credit: Photo by E. Ichumbaki

slow as we continued to inquire on the nature and meaning of a particular song. In all the trips made, we used H1n Handy Recorder to document the songs. We also used pencils and tracing papers to write notes which we later transferred to our field notebooks. Upon returning from the fishing trip, participants rested on the shore, offering us an opportunity to ask additional questions to seek clarification on what transpired during the trip.

Answers for the questions we asked provided an understanding of the differences between fishing songs and other types of traditional music, as well as between newly composed fishing songs and the older ones. Answers from all the collaborators provided a

comprehensive understanding of the elements of fishing, the anthropology of music, and the musicological part. Participating in fishing trips gave us opportunity of recording fishing songs and mapping out songs' contexts. It also become apparent why some songs are more popular than others.

The Fishing Village of Kilwa Kisiwani and Its Maritimity

The research we report in this article was conducted at KK Island, a fishing village in Kilwa district, in the Lindi region on the southern coast of Tanzania. The island lies at 8° 96'S and 39° 5'E, about 320 kilometers (km) south of Dar es Salaam city. Being one of the largest islands in Kilwa Bay, KK is separated from the mainland to the north by a deep channel of 1 to 2 km wide (Pollard et al. 2016). In terms of peopling, KK has different tribes including the Mwera (the dominant native tribe), Matumbi, Makua, and Ngindo (Bacuez 2009; URT 2017). Religion-wise, the majority are muslims due to historical influence of the Arabs and the sultanate rule (Chittick 1974). On KK, there are monumental structures which, in 1981, because of their importance together with the nearby monuments of Songo Mnara, UNESCO declared them a World Heritage Site (Ichumbaki and Mapunda 2017). The island is rich in both tangible and intangible MCH. The tangible MCH includes ceramics scattered along the shore (Chittick 1974), stone anchors, shipwreck sites (Pollard et al. 2016), and causeways (Pollard 2011). The island has plenty of built heritage and exotic trade goods (Chami 1999; Ichumbaki 2014, 2015, 2016; Ichumbaki and Pollard 2015). There are also ports dating from the medieval period (Pollard and Ichumbaki 2016), fish-landing sites (Pollard 2008), and various types of traditional boats. On the other hand, maritime activities like boat building, navigation and fishing are associated with intangible aspects, such as social practices, oral traditions, expressions, and indigenous knowledge and skills.

Fishing is the major economic activity of KK residents as people's daily lives depend on the sea (Bacuez 2009). Fishing takes place at 66 fishing sites grouped in three zones described elsewhere as inland, intermediate, and open sea (see Nakamura 2008, p. 40, 2010:221-223, 2011:55, 2012:77, 80-81; Fig. 4). The inland zone mainly surrounded by mangroves, whose waters' depth range from one to two meters, provides natural fishing ground even for fishers with no boats. Many of the fishers in this zone are women and early career residents. For example, during the low tide on the coral reef, women and children collect shells and sometimes octopus using spears from this zone (Bacuez 2009). Fishing in the open sea whose depth range from six to thirteen meters is exclusively by men, mainly carried out from boats using nets or lines and hooks. The third zone (intermediate) which is shared by both the inland and open sea fishers has a depth of between four and eight meters (Nakamura 2011).

Fishing in all the three zones takes place either during the day or night when the sea is *shwari* (calm). According to KK fishers, it is easy to travel and catch fish when the sea is less turbulent. However, this is not always the case as there are times when they go fishing while the sea is calm but the situation changes when they are already in the sea. Those who fish during the night spend the day on other activities, mostly making or repairing nets and preparing fishing equipment for the night shift. Likewise, those who fish during the day spend their evening arranging and repairing fishing nets for the next day. KK fishers mostly fish in groups but sometimes on their own, depending on the boat carrying capacity. Some fishers sail and fish far from their home, heading to other fishers' camp for a couple of months returning home after earning 'enough money.'



Fig. 4 Map of Kilwa Kisiwani and its environs showing fishing grounds. Source: Modified from Nakamura (2011)

Related activities to fishing include building of traditional boats and making fish traps where marine resources are used as raw materials.

The building of fishing vessels is associated with traditional beliefs. During our fieldwork in KK, the fishers shared some of these beliefs, taboos, and traditions that accompany the building of fishing vessels and how these vessels are handled. For instance, the fishers believe they are responsible for building their own vessels; they fear their boats



Fig. 5 Fish fence in KK. Credit: Photo by E. Ichumbaki

being cursed.³ Boat builders perform rituals on the newly built boat before it goes on fishing trips. On the first trip, the boat owner attaches a small piece of log (*umangu*) believed to provide magical protection on both ends of the vessels. A new boat owner says some words to bless the vessel and protect it from enemies. These activities are believed to protect the vessel from wrecking and to bring good luck when fishing. Although all the boats are mended together on shore, it is unacceptable to take someone's vessel without consent.⁴

KK fishers use various fish traps depending on the nature of the fishing area, but the majority prefer gillnets, made up of a long sheet of netting, weighted at the bottom and with floats along the top (Pollard 2017). Others are a fish-trap basket (*madema*) made up of wooden strips bound together to make a hexagon (Pollard 2017). Fish fences (sticks closely tied together sometimes with a net, locally known as *wando*, Fig. 5) are mostly employed on the seaward side of the mangrove trees (Nakamura 2010; Pollard 2017). Fish fences are used to trap fish when the tide ebbs (Nakamura 2010; Pollard 2017). In a sandy or low tide area, women and children use small-sized fishing nets of mosquito net-size (*tandilo*) to catch small fish, shellfish, and sea cucumbers (Pollard 2017). Other fish traps are hand lines (*mishipi*) and spears (Nakamura 2010).

Basketry is another important activity forming part and parcel of maritime life in KK. Both men and women engage in basket work with the aim of making various utensils for use in different places and for different occupations. For instance, women do basket weaving in their spare time, when not engaged in cooking or other household activities (Bacuez 2009). For men, basket vessels are important for their fishing activities. In this regard, men are specialized in plaiting a type of light basket called '*pakacha*' (made from palm leaves), mainly used for carrying fish (Bacuez 2009). These maritime-based activities are accompanied by the singing of various songs. The types of songs, their meanings, and in what contexts they appear is covered in the next section.

³ A comment made by Hassan Bwanga (30) during the interview conducted on 16/9/2019 at the shore of KK.

⁴ A comment made by Hassan Bwanga (30) during interview conducted at KK shore on 16/09/2019.

Historical Context of Fishing Songs in KK

Fishing songs or *nyimbo za makasia* (in Swahili) in KK are historical and have always been reflected in different social contexts. For instance, according to elderly people, some of the fishing songs emerged from old poetic and verbal traditional dances (ngoma), namely *Manganja*, *Sharubati* and *Tunguli*.⁵ These dances were originally performed by men in social gathering such as weddings and during the rite of passage i.e., spirit manifestation and circumcision of young boys “*jando*”. Besides entertaining, the dances were poetic and narrational on issues like marriage, adultery, and sexuality (Bacuez 2009, p. 17). Through these dances, younger people would learn to preserve customs, norms, and traditions, as well as change unacceptable behaviours since these dances also shamed poor behaviours. According to one of our local collaborators, these traditional dances disappeared around 1970’s (also see Bacuez 2009, p. 17) but have continued in fishing activities as a way of transmitting knowledge and skills. Adaptation of these traditional songs into fishing environments was due to most of the topics reflecting fishers’ lives and reflective of women and their social behaviours. For instance, songs like *Ndimu yangu changa*, *Bunju*, *Mke wangu mimi Malaya* and *Halima Meno* (see appendix: Song No.10, 11, 12, and 16) were originally sung in these traditional dances and later adopted in fishing. The mentioned songs are still popular and sung by KK fishers today for the purpose of teaching youngsters’ about fishers and preserving the past. This is not the case for all KK fishing songs. Other songs, especially those about the sea, coastal environment, and fishers’ ritual taboos are historical for navigation and fishing activities.⁶ Examples of these songs are *Kwanza Tuombe Mungu*, *Kaza kasia tuondoke*, *Nauchelenga* and *Wandu wa Pwani* (see appendix: Songs No.1, 3, 8 and 9).

Many fishers reiterated that their ancestors composed most of songs they sing today, for the songs became popular before they were born. That, even before they began fishing activities, they heard their elders singing similar songs they continue to sing today. Additionally, there is a myth that these songs were inherited from “Unju Bin Unuku” also known as ‘Nyengakumbi’ (a giant man) who used to cross oceans on foot without drowning.⁷ Nyengakumbi, referred in KK as a King of Ocean, lived a long time ago. He strode 12–13 km from Mtumbu to Jiwe la Mzungu (stone of a white person), at the southern entrance to Kiswera harbour, leaving his footprints on the way. Due to his spiritual powers, Nyangekumbi used to catch fish from the sea and held it up against the sun to cook (Ichumbaki and Pollard 2019: 247).

These narrations from KK regarding fishing songs as historical relates to Tedd Gioia’s (2006) argument that music has been part of life at the sea and is as old as the art of navigation itself. Likewise, in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, there is a model of an ancient Egyptian boat showing a harpist and a singer facing the rowers. According to Gioia (2006), this model can be used as historical evidence for singing accompanying fishing activities since around 2500 BC. Egyptian fishers have continued to sing while pulling the rope to lift the net onboard. Today, the Egyptian fishermen believe the songs bring them

⁵ Information given by Mzee Selemani Abdallah Kiwanga (78), Mzee Mohamed Sharifu (70) Bi. Zubeda Mziwanda (80’s) and Bi. Asha (90’s) during interview sessions conducted on 29/03/2020 in Kilwa Kisiwani.

⁶ A comment by Mohamed Nassor Ngalema also known as Milumba (42) during the interview conducted on 29/03/2020 on the shore of KK fishing village.

⁷ A comment by “Ya Blue” during an interview conducted on 27/03/2020 at the fishnet making spot in KK. He calls himself Ya Blue which means “of blue” in relation to the sea and his daily work of fishing.

luck, hence, a good catch (Gioia 2006). Like the case in Egypt, there is no archaeological evidence to prove singing has been part of fishing culture in KK, but the presence of ship engravings in some monuments dating between the 13th and 18th centuries should be used as a justification of this. Since then, the songs continue to be transmitted from generation to generation but with introduction of new songs to cope with current changes and modernity.

The Fishing Songs of Kilwa Kisiwani

Based on the strategies discussed above, a total of 34 songs were recorded and transcribed in Kiswahili and English. The songs are grouped thematically, and each category was analysed together. These themes are religion and beliefs, women's issues, discouraging illegal fishing, and the songs that encourage fishers to work hard. Other categories include songs on maritime knowledge and skills as well as disciplining or shaping people's behaviour. There are also songs for warning and giving advice and hope after missing a catch. Since the people of KK depend on marine resources for their livelihoods, not surprisingly, nearly all the fishing songs inform about the relationships between people's day-to-day activities and their interactions with the sea. In most cases, for almost all the songs, the Lead Singer (LS) is *nahodha* (captain) sitting at the back of the boat. The *nahodha* leads many songs since he is considered an experienced fisher with a lot of knowledge of the sea and where best to fish. In some instances, for instance, when the *nahodha* is gearing, any crew member who initiates '*kilongo*' (sounds) can lead a song.

Songs Reflecting Religion and Beliefs

Fishers consider some fishing songs as prayers to God to bless them in various ways. When singing, fishers believe they will be protected from any danger, sail successfully, and have an excellent catch. Songs like *Kwanza tuombe Mungu* (pray to God first, see song 1 in the appendix) and *Muombe ndiye Ya Rab* (worship him for he is God), are among the very first songs fishers sing as they begin sailing towards fishing grounds. While paddling, the song is often initiated by the LS⁸ sitting in the middle of the boat with the crew at the back and the front. However, this is not always the case since anyone can initiate a song regardless of the sitting position. Singing these songs follows a call and response structure, musically referred to as antiphonal singing.⁹ The verses are improvised and repeated many times: the duration of the song may last for seven to ten minutes before moving to another song. Fishers sing these songs as they paddle to the fishing grounds. The sounds emerging from the paddling process (friction between the paddle, ropes, and water) act as the beat to the song, whereas the movements of their shoulders and hands while paddling help them to keep time with the song's rhythm. The language used in the song is Kiswahili, characterised by coastal words (i.e., *mvuta kasia*, the paddler). Melodically, the song is simple and catchy.

⁸ In singing fishing songs, the lead singer is anyone who begins to sing and take control of the performance.

⁹ Antiphonal singing (Call and response); the lead singer starts singing and others follow by responding to the chorus or short refrains. For instance: '*Mvuta kasia kasema leo*' and others respond '*kwanza tuombe Mungu.*'

Songs Encouraging Hard Work

Having songs that encourage working hard is not surprising because, according to KK fishers, fishing needs encouragement, especially when paddling long distances (approximately 1–3 h). The fishers work in dark, cold conditions, and sometimes experience strong winds and high tides. Sometimes, the absence of wind makes them paddle much longer than normal. They fish for many hours and might get fish only at the end or sometimes return home without a catch. As one of the fishers stated, “*if you lack faith and patience, you can never fish.*” Four songs were recorded in this category: *Stamili*, *Kaza kasia*, *Pakulima nchalile* and *Tukalokote mbigili*. The song *Stamili* has one verse with five lines sung in the form of imitation.¹⁰ The word *Stamili* is a short form of ‘*Ustahimilivu*’ a Swahili word meaning patience. Fishers sing this song as they go fishing, so regardless of whether they have a catch or not, they remain hopeful.

In singing the first line, *Stamili analia* (*Stamili* is crying), the LS shows that someone is crying after failing to receive something (in this context, fish). The following lines by the crew members are meant to give hope to this sad person and encourage him not only to work hard but also to have faith. Although the major language in this song is Kiswahili, there are also words from the Mwera ethnic group, one example being ‘*Liyaya*’, which means hustling without giving up. There are also elements of religious beliefs in the song when the singer sings: *Funga imani* (have faith), a phrase mostly used by Muslims.

Songs Discouraging Illegal Fishing

Songs such as *Akina mama sikia* (women listen) and *Nauchelenga* (I am leaving) serve to raise local people’s awareness about illegal fishing. Dynamite and other illegal fishing techniques such as use of small-sized nets and *mideke* (sharp objects such as spears) are strictly prohibited for they result in overfishing and disappearance of some fish and other marine species. One of the songs in this category is called *Akina mama sikia* (women listen). This song has two verses (the first with four and the second with three lines), telling women to stop capturing small fish that are yet to mature. According to KK fishers, this song is unpopular during fishing trips but popular on regular trips to ship people between Kilwa Kiswani and Kilwa Masoko.¹¹ One collaborator informed us that although many boats are operated using motor-engines, in the past, all the boats used traditional sail, hence, movements between Masoko and Kisiwani depended on winds. Sometimes the captain would anchor the boat waiting for the wind to blow in the needed direction. During the waiting time, the crew and passengers used to sing hopeful songs, one of which was *Akina mama sikia*. A message for this song is discouraging women to use *tandilo* to capture fish on the shore. Singing this song made people deliver a message on the danger of illegal fishing. Recently, this song has become unpopular following the introduction of motorboats that are faster and do not depend on the wind; trips between KK and Masoko take less than half an hour.

¹⁰ Imitation is when the lead singer starts by singing the whole melodic line and other singers respond by singing the whole part in the same way as the leader.

¹¹ Kilwa Masoko is a township and capital of Kilwa district, about 2km north of Kilwa Kisiwani (see Fig. 4).

Songs Reflecting Maritime Knowledge and Skills

Coastal people have knowledge and skills to cope with the maritime environment. They can predict what is going to happen in terms of the weather, tidal cycles, and even the number of fish, through birds sounds and the arrangement of stars and clouds (Morton, 2001; Mesaki and Sellah, 2008; Sharda, 2019). Knowledge of the sea helps residents to peacefully exploit marine resources. One of the songs revealing the maritime knowledge and skills of KK residents is called *Wandu wa Pwani* (people of the coast). This song describes the weather suitable for fishing activities. Fishers sing *Wandu wa Pwani* when sailing to and from fishing grounds. The song talks of a thunderstorm, famously known locally as ‘*kifuku*’ and occurring during spring (*masika*). *Kifuku* is always accompanied by destructive easterly winds known locally as *Ndoka*. Major thunderstorms during the spring are followed by strong winds that do not support fishing activities. Through *Wandu wa Pwani* song, fishers in KK warn each other, especially the junior fishers, not to go fishing for the next day or two.

Much weather forecasting is still done by monitoring the behaviour of birds seen in different seasons, and the arrangement of stars and clouds. The existence and sharing of this knowledge is through the saying: *Nahodha mtweka chombo si mjinga wa bahari, hata usiku wa manane atagundua bandari* (the boat captain is not ignorant of the sea; even at late night, he will always know where the harbour is). Through this saying, KK people show that they appreciate the captain’s knowledge of the sea acquired through apprenticeship. Indeed, this knowledge resides in the fishers’ heads, and they keep reminding themselves through singing. The role of apprenticeship is clear in some of the *Wandu wa Pwani* song lines such as: *Babu amesema wanembwa, Mkisikia mshindo wa pwani msiende kuvua* (our elder says when we hear thunderstorms, we shouldn’t go fishing). The song gives unexperienced fishers the maritime knowledge elders possess.¹² The song’s bridge leads to the second chorus accompanied by hypes (back-ups) when the LS informs about other destructive winds coming from the east locally known as *matilai*. With improvisations, hypes and shouts, the LS can prolong this song for up to fifteen minutes before introducing another song.

Songs Shaping Behaviour Through Warning, Informing, and Giving Advice

During the fieldwork in KK, we recorded songs with messages to discourage alcoholism, laziness, early marriage, and prostitution. The message is expressed in figurative language to hide the real meaning from unintended audiences. One of the songs is *Ndimu yangu changa*, a Swahili phrase meaning my lemon is unripe. According to our local collaborators, the ‘unripe lemon’ stands for young girls that older men want to have sex with. The song has one verse with three lines and a hype section that acts as a bridge. It is short with a simple and catchy melody and lasts for about six minutes after several repetitions. As a fisher revealed, the song aims to warn men against marrying young girls. Thus, *Ndimu yangu changa* is part of the campaign to end young marriage behaviour. The message of the song is delivered through figurative language represented by words such as *ndimu* (lemon) *changa* (unripe), *kata* (slice) and *haina maji* (lacks juice). As the LS improvises, he can replace the unripe lemon with any other unripe fruits such as unripe mango, unripe orange,

¹² A comment by Ahmad Omary Mawe also known as Bangwe (41) during the interview conducted on 31/03/2020 at his home.

and others. Sometimes, the LS may add a prefix to further qualify the fruit. For example, instead of *ndimu* (lemon) he says *ki-ndimu* (a small lemon). Notably, responses of the crew remain the same throughout the song: *haina maji ndani joya* (it is unripe with no juice). As they return to the shore, fishers sing this song more joyfully, especially when they have a good catch, which means a good income for that day. A similar theme is expressed in the song *Sijala tondo* (I haven't eaten the shellfish) whose message also prohibits older men from dating younger girls. Another song in this category of warning and encouraging good behaviour is *Ukienda Salamu* (Pass on our greetings) and it condemns fishers who misuse their money on alcohol and women while forgetting their families.

Furthermore, during fishing activities, fishers sing songs to inform about the dangers they are likely to encounter while fishing. The aim of these songs is to warn, inform, and give advice so that fishers are more careful as they continue with their fishing activities. One such song is *Ukienda Pwani niambie* (Inform me when you go fishing). This song has one verse and a bridge (hype section). The song has two meanings. First, it warns junior fishers not to go fishing on their own as they are likely to encounter dangerous marine species such as stone fish. Thus, they are advised to go fishing in groups or with experienced fishers who can help them when a problem arises. Second, the song discourages cheating in relationships. The song's lyric is as follows: *Ukienda Pwani niambie* (inform me when you want to go fishing); *Usijechomwa na kiko* (So as a stone fish doesn't harm you).¹³ The song also urges fishers not to date fellow fishers' partners and to be careful when off fishing. According to Mzee Sharrif, a retired fisher (70 years old), some fishers date their shipmates' wives thinking they will not be recognized. The song encourages fishers to discriminate fishers who date their fellows' partners as a lesson to make them behave. Mzee Sharifu said, 'if a cheating fisher accompanies other fishers some of whom their partners were involved, there is a danger of fighting and causing accidents while at sea.

Another warning song is *Ukiona uzuri kulelesela hukawii kupotea* (beauty does not last longer). This song consists of only one line that combines Swahili and Mwera (the language of a major ethnic group in the area). According to the fishers in KK, this song is popular when the sea is calm, with no winds that cause big waves making it difficult to sail. With this song, the fishers remind each other to remain active as the situation could change any time.

Songs on Catching Fish

Fishers also sing songs to reflect their mood on the result of a good or bad catch. One song reflecting these scenarios is *Kolekole* (Trevally fish). Fishers sing this song as they lay down their fishing nets or when they have done so and are now ready to collect the *kolekole*. The fishers in KK usually know where to catch the trevally, but do not lay down their nets until they are sure that the fish are there during that day. However, seeing these fish around while laying down their nets does not mean they will catch them. Therefore, through this song, fishers complain how hard it is to catch trevally. As they wait to see whether the fish will enter the nets, fishers paddle around while singing this song. They continue moving around the fishing ground and may continue singing this song and others for between fifteen minutes to one hour before collecting their fishing nets to remove the fish if successful.

¹³ A stone fish is a venomous fish edible when well and careful prepared. In this song, stone fish represent the angry husband whose wife is cheating with another fisherman; hence advised to be careful with him.

Songs Concerning Women

Fishers in KK usually sail in groups, and among the songs they sing concern women. Common issues in these songs include female behaviours, disciplines, sexual ability, etc. These songs normally use figurative language, whereby women are represented by the fishing environment, fish names and fishing vessels to hide real meaning from children and young fishers. KK fishermen believe women are unaware of these songs but our interactions with women revealed otherwise. They also discuss these songs while fishing crabs, seashells, sea cucumbers, and whelks, as well as when frying and trading fish. During our interviews and a meeting held with a group of women, they listed songs and specific lines whose actual meaning(s) are about women. Among the 34 songs collected, ten talked about women, but did not directly reveal the message they wanted to communicate. During our interviews and a meeting, the women felt ashamed and could not explain plainly the meaning of the songs; they kept on laughing and looking at each other when we inquired from them. However, during the second fieldwork phase, when we joined fishing expedition, we became aware of these songs' meanings, and we present some in the next paragraphs.

Halima Meno (Halima has Biting Teeth)

Halima meno song has two verses each containing four lines. The song is about a woman presented as Halima and is one of the most popular fishing songs. Mzee Omary Abdallah (71), a retired fisherman, informed us that Halima represents a married woman who talks a lot and complains about everything such that her husband wants a divorce. Because Halima shouts a lot, her husband no longer has feelings for her; he wants to marry another woman who will listen and comply accordingly. The desire to divorce Halima and marry another woman is reflected in verse two, where the LS and crew sing: *Wanawake wema [wapo] Chole* (Wives who behave are in Chole); *Na Somanilo we usiendekeze moyo* (others are in Somanilo but those from here [KK] are disastrous). From these lines, Halima's husband is advised to go to either Chole (on the Mafia Island) or Somanilo in Pande (see Fig. 4) where he will be able to get a behaving wife. Stressing the song's message, Mzee Omary describes Halima-type women as troublesome, disrespectful, and careless for they regularly shout at their husbands.¹⁴

In another context, Halima is described as an unfaithful wife, a message reflected in the use of the word *kijakazi*. So, Halima is no longer treated as a wife but as a domestic servant. Generally, Halima is regarded as a prostitute. Surprisingly, she is described as a good performer (sexually), a reason she is qualified as *meno (teeth)*; many fishermen want to have sex with her. Those who succeed dating Halima, spend all their money on her and abandon their families. Some informants mentioned that the song is popular enough to be sung at village celebrations such as marriage and initiation ceremonies. For example, one of the interviewees, namely Bi. Zubeda Mziwanda (aged 80) said that the *Halima meno* song forms part of the traditional dance called *Manganja*.¹⁵ Indeed, the popularity of this song is beyond fishing trips; it does not only present the behaviour of Halima and her partners, rather, a real picture of fishers' sexual lives.

¹⁴ A comment by Mzee Omary Abdallah (71) during the interview conducted on 02/04/2020.

¹⁵ *Manganja* also known as *Msanja*, was a KK traditional ngoma (dance) that used to be popular during the 1960's -1970's and was common in ceremonies, particularly at marriage parties happening at night.

Another song informing about fishers' sexual lives is called *Raha ya mke* (The joy of a wife). The song cautions young fishermen planning to get married that the beauty of a woman is good behaviour and not her external features. This is evident in the line '*raha ya mke si sura, raha ni maelewano*' (it is not her face that makes woman a good wife, but her behaviour). Another popular song under this category is *Bunju* (Lumpfish) comparing women's unpredictable behaviours with the lumpfish which can change from being a meal to poison and vice versa. Sometimes, the song symbolises a big, bodied woman (like a fat oily lumpfish) men struggle to have sex with.¹⁶ A related song that describes women's behaviour is *Mke wangu mimi Malaya* (My wife is a prostitute). The song concerns a man complaining about his unfaithful wife and asks for advice from his friends. The friends recommend divorcing her. It came to our attention that nearly all the songs fishers sing reflect the real fishing community lives including marriage problems and love affairs. Through these songs, men share their family concerns and seek advice from their companions.

Discussion and Conclusion

KK fishing songs are characterised by short verses, sometimes one or two lines repeated over and over. They are sung in either a 'call and response' or 'imitation' form initiated by the LS and responded by crew members. Singing fishing songs is highly improvised and repetitive. Melodically, the songs are simple and catchy. Hyping by the crew takes the form of whistling and shouting to raise morale. The paddles striking the water produces the music beats. Many of the songs are about fish, trees, fishing vessels, animals, and metaphors for women, using erotic words either in Kiswahili or the Kimwera languages. Several songs are accompanied by jokes and stories to relieve boredom. Most importantly, the lyrics of these songs cover a wide range of topics, as described in previous sections.

The fishing songs' characteristics have elements of work as some scholars have observed in the past. For instance, fishing songs known as shanties had a different structure depending on the task they accompanied. A LS known as the shanty man, would sing the bulk of the song, while the crew sang the refrain and chorus (Michael 1917). Some shanties had short refrains suitable for a few pulls on the ropes such as *Haul Away*, while longer shanties had a slower pace and a full chorus, such as *Away, Rio* (Michael 1917). These songs were sung with group interplay, unflagging energy, and reliance on the call-and-response form (Gioia 2006).

Music is a living heritage that plays a vital role in people's life. Traditional music like that of the KK fishing community play a bigger role than just entertaining, because they educate, rebuke, and aim to change fishers' behaviour from bad to good. Importantly, these songs preserve fishing traditions. In addition, fishers sing these songs in different contexts, as they prepare their boats for fishing, while sailing and paddling, and dragging their nets. They also sing when they have caught fish or failed to catch any fish. Fishers sing when it is windy and stormy or calm, when it is dark, and as they return to the shore. They continue singing when they dock their vessel and unload their fish. Generally, all fishing activities are accompanied by singing various songs from the start to the end.

With the changes in lifestyle and the environment, fishers in KK modify traditional fishing songs by adding new words and adopting new singing styles. Some fishers have gone further to compose new fishing songs to meet current needs. For example, some fishers have composed songs to raise awareness on the sustainable use of marine resources

¹⁶ A comment from Mzee Mohamed Sharifu (70) during the interview conducted on 29/03/2020.

through prohibiting illegal fishing. Other songs tell fishers to care about their family instead of spending all their money on sex workers. The difference between the old and new songs is that while the former uses figurative language, the latter uses straightforward wording. *Raha ya mke* (the joy of a woman) and *Mke wangu mimi Malaya* (my wife is a prostitute) are newly composed songs that use direct wording. Nevertheless, both old and new fishing songs provide key messages to educate not only fishers but communities in KK and beyond.

Sadly, despite the important message in these songs, KK locals admit that the singing of these fishing songs is slowly disappearing, because fishers are no longer sailing in groups as was the case in the past. This is partly because the large trees that were used to build boats to accommodate up to ten people are no longer available. Nowadays, the economic status of many KK fishers is limited in that they cannot commission the building of big boats to enable them to fish in groups. Instead, they use mango and cashew trees (see Ichumbaki et al. 2021) to build small boats to accommodate 2–3 people. Furthermore, the introduction of motorboats has reduced the number of fishers using traditional boats with a sail which they also paddle. With motorboats, it takes less time to navigate further distances. For these reasons, incidents of singing these songs are decreasing.

This observation in KK relates to what was reported in the United Kingdom (UK) during the 19th century. William Alden (1882: 281–86) informs that the spread of steam engines replacing sails in the UK killed the shanties (sailor songs). Indeed, the popularity of fishing songs in KK is rapidly fading and, in a few years to come, these songs may disappear altogether, along with their messages. This argument emanates from our observation that, teenagers participating in fishing activities are not familiar with many of the traditional fishing songs. Instead, many prefer to listen to and sing *Bongo Flava* songs (see Ichumbaki and Lubao 2020) because of the upbeat tempo of the music. Unfortunately, *Bongo Flava* songs contain no messages that are linked to the maritime life of KK people; they say nothing about fishing activities and life in the maritime environment. *Bongo Flava* songs have different meanings about different contexts, with no bearing on the fishing sector.

Based on the data presented in this paper regarding the roles of fishing songs in the KK community, several conclusions can be drawn. First, these songs give fishers opportunity to express themselves about their maritime history, environment, skills, and daily lives. The values of fishing songs are in their message on local taboos, restrictions, maritime knowledge, and fishing traditions. Documenting these songs means preserving the intangible maritime heritage for the present and future generations of KK and beyond. We have documented some songs, but more initiatives are needed to build on this for posterity.

Second, women occupy a special space in the fishing industry in KK but, unlike men, they are negatively portrayed. In most African societies, a woman's role is undermined by regarding her as a sex object, as some fishing songs describe. In the songs, women are presented as prostitutes something not only disappointing but creating a division between men and women. For instance, most KK women hate fishing songs because they think men use such songs to insult and humiliate them. There is a need therefore to popularize fishing songs that describe women roles in different sectors, fishing being one among many.

Third, the future of fishing songs in KK is uncertain. Thus, maritime heritage scholars, practitioners and other stakeholders in Tanzania and beyond should think of ways to preserve these songs. Digitally recording and disseminating them (fishing songs) and raising awareness regarding their importance will certainly help. There is also a need to introduce an annual fishing song festival where traditional fishing, singing fishing songs, boat racing, beach sports, etc. will be performed. Our local collaborators in KK are of the view that the festival may offer opportunities for fishers to showcase traditional fishing practices, fishing

vessels, and boat-building skills. In this way, young people and visitors will experience traditional fishing practices and other forms of maritime intangible heritage. Elsewhere at Niger river in Kwara state, Nigeria, the *Patigi Regatta* fishing festival features boat racing, fishing, and swimming and has been happening since the 1950s (Aminu 2016). Currently, it attracts not only hundreds and thousands of Nigerians but also tourists from across the world. We recommend a fishing festival in KK to promote fishing songs, while also a campaign to stop illegal fishing, taking care of the family, being careful while undertaking fishing activities and being disciplined in various areas of their lives.

Appendix

Fishing songs of Kilwa Kisiwani. Note: M/LS = Mwanzishaji/Lead Singer, W/C = Wote/Crew.

Song 01: Kwanza tuombe Mungu [Pray to God first].

Swahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti wa kwanza</i>	<i>Verse 1</i>
M: Mvuta kasia kasema leo	LS: The paddler has said today
W: Kwanza tuombe Mungu x 2 Ya Rab! kwanza eeh	C: We first pray to God x 2 Oh God! First
M: Mvuta kasia kasema leo	LS: The paddler has said today
W: Kwanza tuombe Mungu x 2 Ya Rab! kwanza eeh	C: We first pray to God x 2 Oh God! First
M: We tuombe tuombe wee	LS: We should pray, pray
W: Kwanza tuombe Mungu	C: We first pray to God x 2
M: We tuombe tuombe wee	LS: We should pray, pray
W: Kwanza tuombe Mungu	C: We first pray to God
<i>Ubeti wa pili</i>	<i>Verse 2</i>
M: Vuta kasia kwa nia eeh	LS: Paddle with hope
W: kwanza tuombe Mungu	C: We first pray to God
M: Mungu atatujalia eeh	LS: God will bless us
W: Kwanza tuombe Mungu	C: We first pray to God
M: Hapa sipo, hapa ndipo eeh	LS: Maybe [we will find fish] here or maybe not
W: Kwanza tuombe Mungu	C: We first pray to God
M: Vuta kasia ndipo manyama yalipo eeh	LS: Keep paddling, the fish are here
W: Kwanza tuombe Mungu	C: We first pray to God.

Song 02: [U]stahimili/Stamili [Patience].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Kilongo/kianzilishi</i>	<i>Intro</i>
M: OOH!	LS: OOH!
W: OOOH!	C: OOOH!
<i>Ubeti</i>	<i>Verse</i>
M: Stamili analia namna gani	LS: Stamili is crying, what is wrong
Stamili analia funga Imani	Stamili is crying, have faith
Liyaya!	Hustle!
W: Stamili analia, namna gani	C: Stamili is crying, what is wrong
Stamili analia, funga Imani,	Stamili is crying, have faith
Liyaya!	Hustle!

Song 03: Kaza kasia tuondoke [Paddle hard, we have to leave].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
M: Umande haujaja mwanajuma eeh	LS: The wind has not come yet
W: Kaza kasia tuondoke	C: Paddle hard, we have to leave

Song 04: Kasia la Mtu Mzembe [A paddle of a lazy fisherman].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti</i>	<i>Verse/refrain</i>
M: Kasia la mtu mzembe	LS: The paddle of a lazy fisherman
W: Mjiti wake wa mkandaa	C: is made of cedar

Song 05: Tualokote mbigili [Let's go pick thistles].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
M: Tualokote mbigili	LS: Let's go pick thistles
W: Paipo	C: Because there is nothing here
M: Wenzenu wanaokota	LS: Your fellows [who went elsewhere] are collecting things that are worthwhile/valuable
W: Paipo	C: Because there is nothing here
M: Wanapata pishimbili	LS: They fill measures
W: Paipo	C: Because there is nothing here

 Song 06: Pakulima nchalile [Farming is never easy].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
M: Pakulima nchalile, pakulima eeh	LS: Farming is never easy x2
Usione kuviriga matonge, pakulima nchalile	Don't envy my harvest for farming was never easy
W: Pakulima nchalile, pakulima eeh	C: Farming is never easy x2
Usione kuviriga matonge, pakulima nchalile	Don't envy my harvest for farming was never easy

 Song 07: Akina mama sikia [Women listen!].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Kiitikio (W)</i>	<i>Chorus (C)</i>
Akina mama sikia x2	Women listen! Women listen!
Mkienda kuvua leo msitumie tandilo Kuna kamba na lufume leo, hawataki vizuwio.	Today, when you go fishing do not use mosquito nets; there are small shrimps and crabs that should not to be trapped.
<i>Ubeti wa pili</i>	<i>Verse 2</i>
M: Hawataki vizuwio (x2)	LS: They should not be trapped (x2)
Hawa kamba na lufume leo, hawataki vizuwio	These shrimps and crabs should not be trapped
<i>Rudia kiitikio (W)</i>	<i>Repeat chorus (C)</i>

Song 08: Nauchelenga [I'm leaving!].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Kianzilishi (x3)</i>	<i>Intro: (x3)</i>
M: We babu	LS: Old man (x3)
W: Nauchelenga	C: I am leaving (x3)
<i>Ubeti wa kwanza</i>	<i>Verse 1</i>
M: We babu tumekuja kwako, we babu wee	LS: Old man we have come to you, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Kuna maneno tumekuchukulia we babu wee	LS: We have a message for you, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Inafaa kuyasikia we babu wee	LS: It is good that you hear our words, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
<i>Kibwagizo/daraja (x2)</i>	<i>Bridge (x2)</i>
M: We babu	LS: You, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
<i>Ubeti wa pili</i>	<i>Verse 2</i>
M: Leo tunakupa mwemba we babu wee	LS: Today we warn you again, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Bahari sio mali yako we babu wee	LS: The sea is not your property, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Bahari ni mali yetu sote we babu wee	LS: The sea is for us all, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
<i>Rudia kibwagizo/daraja</i>	<i>Repeat bridge</i>
<i>Ubeti wa tatu</i>	<i>Verse 3</i>
M: Mbona tulikueleza, we babu wee	LS: We have warned you already, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: kwa m/kiti tukakupeleka we babu wee	LS: We even took you to the chairman, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Ukatupa majibu mazuri we babu wee	LS: You promised us you would change, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Na ukasema hurudii tena we babu wee	LS: And you said you wouldn't do this again, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
<i>Rudia kibwagizo</i>	<i>Repeat bridge</i>
<i>Ubeti wa nne</i>	<i>Verse 4</i>
M: Leo umefika hapa we babu wee	LS: Today you have come here, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Sumu umemwanzia we babu wee	LS: And sprinkled poison, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Samaki wanatukimbia we babu wee	LS: The fish are running away from you, old man (C: I'm leaving)
W: Nauchelenga	LS: Who will fish in our generation, old man (C: I'm leaving)

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
M: Vizazi vyetu nani atavua we babu wee	
W: Nauchelenga	
<i>Rudia kibwagizo</i>	<i>Repeat bridge</i>
<i>Ubeti wa tano</i>	<i>Verse 5</i>
M: Bahari sisi mali yetu we babu wee	LS: The sea is wealth to us, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Fujo unayotufanya we babu wee	LS: The chaos you are causing, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Sisi tunaisikia we babu wee	LS: We can hear it, old man
W: nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Mabomu unatupigia we babu wee	LS: We hear theexplosives you use, you old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
<i>Rudia kibwagizo</i>	<i>Repeat bridge</i>
<i>Ubeti wa sita (a)</i>	<i>Verse 6 (a)</i>
M: Babu utapigwa makofi we babu we	LS: Old man you will be slapped, old man (C: I'm leaving)
W: Nauchelenga	LS: Why don't you listen, you old man
M: Kwanini usikii we babu wee	C: I'm leaving
W: Nauchelenga	
<i>Ubeti wa 6 (b): Babu anaingilia kati</i>	<i>Verse 6 (b): Old man interrupt</i>
Babu: Kunipiga wala huthubutu we babu	Old man: You cannot dare to beat me
C: nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
Babu: Nitakulaza kigula nikuchinje mfano wakuku we babu wee	Old man: I will lay you down and slaughter you like a chicken
<i>Kibwagizo (x2)</i>	<i>Bridge (x2)</i>
Babu: We babu	Old man: you old man
Wote: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
<i>Ubeti wa 7</i>	<i>Verse 7</i>
M: Kama usikii leo nakuacha we babu wee	LS: If you don't listen, I'm leaving you today, you old man (C: I'm leaving)
W: Nauchelenga	LS: We will call people to beat you up
M: Tutaita watu wakufunge mwemba we babu W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Kama hujui hutataki kutenda we bab u we	LS: You don't want to understand and you do not want to act upon our advice, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
M: Hili swala tunakuachia we babu wee	LS: We leave this matter to you, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I am leaving
<i>Rudia kibwagizo</i>	<i>Repeat bridge</i>
<i>Ubeti wa 8: Majibu ya babu</i>	<i>Verse 8: Old man response</i>
Babu: Babu nimekuelewa we babu wee,	Old man: I have understood you
W: nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
Babu: Maneno nimeyasikia we babu wee	Old man: I have heard what you said,
W: nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
Babu: Kazi nitayafanyia we babu wee	Old man: I will work on it, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving
<i>Rudia kibwagizo</i>	<i>Repeat bridge</i>

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti wa 9</i>	<i>Verse 9</i>
M: Kweli kama umesiki we babu wee	LS: If you have really understood, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm Leaving
M: Hayo unayofanyia we babu wee	LS: The things you have been doing, old man
W: Nauchelenga)	C: I'm leaving
M: Kesho hatutaki kusikia we babu wee	LS: We don't want to hear about them happening ever again, old man
W: Nauchelenga	C: I'm leaving

Song 09: Wandu wa Pwani [People of the Coast].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti wa kwanza</i>	<i>Verse 1</i>
M: Babu amesema wanembwa	LS: The elder has said "young men
Mkisikia mshindo wa pwani msiende kuvua	If you hear the coastal thunder don't go fishing
Kuna upepo aina ya ndoka Unaweza kuwachukua	There is a strong wind that can take you"
<i>Kiitikio (W): Wandu wa pwani elewa x2</i>	<i>Chorus (C): People of the coast listen x2</i>
Mkienda kuvua leo, wandu wa Pwani elewa	When you go fishing today, people of the coast, bear in mind
Kuna upepo mbaya leo unaweza ukaua	There is a bad wind that can kill
<i>Ubeti wa pili</i>	<i>Verse 2</i>
M: Unaweza ukaua x2	LS: It can kill x2
Upepo mkali kutoka bara, unaweza ukaua	Wind from the east can kill
<i>Rudia kiitikio (W)</i>	<i>Repeat chorus (C)</i>
<i>Daraja/kibwagizo</i>	<i>Bridge/hype</i>
M: Ndoka	LS: East wind
W: Anaweza akaua,	C: Can kill
M: Njenje	LS: Tidal wind
W: Anaweza akaua	C: Can kill.
<i>Rudia kiitikio</i>	<i>Repeat chorus</i>

Song 10: Ndimu yangu changa [My lemon is unripe].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti</i>	<i>Verse</i>
M: Nikatie ndimu yangu changa	LS: Slice the unripe lemon
W: Haina maji (ooh changa)	C: It has no juice (it's unripe)
Haina maji, ndani joya	It is an unripe lemon with no juice
M: Nikatie ndimu yangu changa	LS: Slice the unripe lemon
W: Haina maji (ooh changa)	C: It is an unripe lemon with no juice (it is unripe)
Haina maji ndani joya	
<i>Kibwagizo</i>	<i>Hype</i>
M: Kata! Kata!	LS: Slice! Slice!
W: haina maji	C: It lacks juice
M: Kata we	LS: Slice
W: Haina maji ndani joya	C: It is an unripe lemon with no juice

Song 11: Bunju [Lump fish].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti</i>	<i>Verse/refrain</i>
M: Kanipa bunju kuchoma	LS: He has offered me an oily fish to grill
W: Kazima moto kwa kunona	C: Its oily nature puts the fire out

Song 12: Mke wangu mimi malaya [My wife is a prostitute].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti</i>	<i>Verse</i>
M: Mke wangu mimi Malaya	LS: My wife is a prostitute
Nimfanyeje?	What should I do to her
W: Muache!	C: Divorce her!

Song 13: Sijala tondo [I have not eaten whelk].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti wa kwanza</i>	<i>Verse 1</i>
M: Sijala tondo x2	LS: I have not eaten whelk x2
Nimekula changu wa madema	I ate red snapper from the woven fish trap
Sijala tondo	I have not eaten whelk
W: Sijala tondo x2	C: I have not eaten whelk x2
Nimekula changu wa madema	I have only eaten the red snapper from the woven fish trap
Sijala tondo	I have not eaten whelk

Song 14: Ukienda Salam [Pass on our greeting].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti wa kwanza</i>	<i>Verse 1</i>
M: Ukienda salam bwana eeh ukienda salam bwana, ukirudi Salam mjomba	LS: He sends you his greetings and we send you our greetings x2
W: Kamaliza mapesa kuhonga	C: All his money has been misused
M: Ukienda salam bwana eeh ukienda salam bwana, ukirudi Salam mjomba	LS: He sends you his greetings and we send you our greetings x2
W: Kamaliza mapesa kuhonga	C: All his money has been misused
<i>Kibwagizo/daraja</i>	<i>Hype/bridge</i>
M: Haasan eeh! Kamaliza mapesa kuhonga	LS: Hassan is misusing his money
W: kamaliza mapesa kahonga	C: He is misusing his money
M: Kamaliza mapesa kuhonga	LS: He has misused all his money
W: Kamaliza mapesa kuhonga	C: He keeps on misusing his money
M: Mapesa yake yote kahonga	LS: All his money is gone
W: kamaliza mapesa kuhonga	C: He has misused all his money
M: Vilabuni na pombe anahonga	LS: He stays in the bar to drink alcohol
W: kamaliza mapesa kuhonga	C: He keeps on misusing his money
M: Na wanawake wote anahonga	LS: He misuses his money with women
W: kamaliza mapesa kuhonga	C: He keeps on misusing his money
<i>Rudia ubeti wa kwanza/kiitikio</i>	<i>Repeat Verse 1/Chorus</i>

Song 15: Ukienda Pwani Niambie [Inform me when you go fishing].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti wa kwanza</i>	<i>Verse 1</i>
M: Ukienda Pwani niambie	LS: Inform me when you want to go fishing
Usichomwe na kiko	So you don't get harmed by a stone fish,
kikoa kidudu Pwani kile si nyama ya kuliwa,	A venomous coastal insect, not to be eaten.
<i>Wote wanarudia</i>	<i>The crew imitates</i>
<i>Daraja/kinogeshi</i>	<i>Bridge/hype</i>
M: Ng'amuu wee	LS: Tell the meaning,
W: wenzenu wameng'amua,	C: Your fellows know the meaning
M: ng'amuu wee,	LS: Tell the meaning,
W: wenzenu wameng'amua	C: Your fellows know the meaning

Song 16: Halima Meno [Halima has biting teeth].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti wa kwanza</i>	<i>Verse 1</i>
M: Halima meno, Halima Halima meno, Halima	LS: Halima has biting teeth, Halima has biting teeth...Halima
W: Simtaki tena wee Kijakazi kina meno chauma	C: I no longer need her, she has become a domestic servant with biting teeth
<i>Ubeti wa pili</i>	<i>Verse 2</i>
M: Wanawake wema Chole Wanawake wema Chole	LS: Behaving wives are in Chole, behaving wives are in Chole
W: Na Somanilo we, usiendekeze moyo	C: And Somanilo but those from here are disastrous

Song 17: Raha ya Mke [The joy of a wife].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Ubeti wa kwanza</i>	<i>Verse 1</i>
M: Kwa uzuri sio shani, uzuri maelewano, Mkaapo barazani, Pasiwepo mapinzano.	LS: Beauty is not something to see, Beauty is understanding and harmony. When you sit at your balcony, There should be no misunderstanding.
<i>Kiitikio</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
W: Raha ya mke si sura, Raha ni maelewano	C: The joy of a wife is not the face, the joy of a wife is understanding/harmony.
<i>Ubeti wa pili</i>	<i>Verse 2</i>
M: Tujinusuru vijana, Hasa kwa wale waume Sio kama natukana Maneno yangu usome Utakuja pata maana Kwa hadithi za mitume	Youngsters let us defend ourselves, especially the males I am not cursing, read my words You will get the meaning, through prophets' tales
<i>Rudia kiitikio</i>	<i>Repeat chorus</i>

Song 18: Kolekole [Trevally-Fish].

Kiswahili Lyrics	English Translation
<i>Kilongo</i>	<i>Introduction</i>
M: Oooh!	LS: Ooh
W: Ooooh!	C: Oooh
<i>Ubeti (M)</i>	<i>Verse (LS)</i>
Kole kole nyama gani wee, Nyama asie nkia Hupita tambo kwa tambo kama mvuta kasi	Trevally what fish are you? A fish with no tail Just passing here and there like a paddler
<i>Wote wanarudia</i>	<i>Crew imitates</i>

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Author contributions CL conceptualized the research, conducted fieldwork, wrote the manuscript. EI conceptualized the research, conducted fieldwork, wrote the manuscript.

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