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**HOWARD UNIVERSITY
Faculty of the Graduate
School of
Arts and Sciences**

**Language, culture and communication: the
role of swahili taarab songs in Kenya,
1963-1990**

May 1992



10 DEC. 1992

HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Language, Culture and Communication:
the Role of Swahili Taarab Songs in Kenya, 1963-1990

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Arts and Sciences

of

HOWARD UNIVERSITY

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

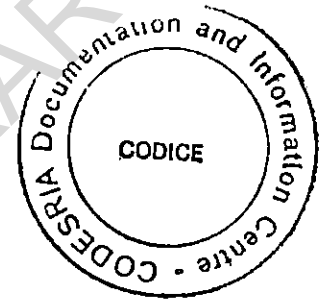
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of African Studies

by

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Washington, D.C.
May 1992



Programme de Petites Subventions

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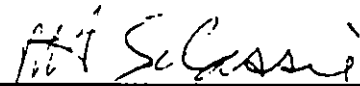
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DEDICATION

For my wife, Regina Mukai Kitula, our children, Tabitha, Sammy and Ndeleva and for my parents, Tabitha Nduva and Samson King'ei Muthango who, together with my other teachers, sharpened my interest in and respect for our languages and culture.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to offer most sincere thanks to the Deans' Committee, Kenyatta University, the International Development Research Center (I.D.R.C.) and the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Science Research in Africa (C.O.D.E.S.R.I.A.) for grants that supported the research leading to this dissertation; Kenyatta University and Howard University for jointly sponsoring the study through the International Student Exchange Program. He also would like to express deep gratitude to all who helped him in various ways during the study and lastly, the members of the Dissertation Committee for their most able and tireless effort in guiding the work.

ABSTRACT

Language, Culture and Communication: the Role of Swahili Taarab Songs in Kenya, 1963-1990

This study explores the formal, thematic and socio-cultural attributes that have contributed to the molding of Swahili taarab songs into a viable medium of sociopolitical communication in contemporary Kenya. The analysis is mainly descriptive and utilizes the sociopolitical and stylistic theoretical perspectives expounded by Terry Eagleton and Emmanuel Ngara as well as insights from the speech-act theory outlined by Elizabeth Traugott and Mary Pratt . The corpus of the songs analyzed was collected during various field research trips between 1985-1991 and are composed by both male and female artists from Kenya's coastal city, Mombasa. The approaches used include both formal and informal interviews as well as the observer-participant method.

The predominant themes conveyed through the songs and the stylistic attributes are discussed. The study also critically examines the sociopolitical and cultural role played by Swahili taarab in contemporary Kenya. The study concludes that although taarab was borrowed into the Swahili culture from Arab and oriental cultures, its contemporary form and idiom is closely related to and draws from such forms as wimbo, shairi, ngonjera and other traditional Swahili poetic forms. In addition, taarab provides a useful source of archaic Swahili vocabulary and an important avenue for mass communication. The study calls for the formulation of a national cultural policy that promotes the effective use and development of the taarab and other indigenous media of mass communication.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1:1 Kenya

1:1:1 Climate and Geography

With an estimated population of about 23 million (1989), and occupying an area of about 582,648 square kilometers (224,960 miles), Kenya is a country of very striking physical and climatic forms.(1) The main climatic division range from the hot, arid and semi-arid northern sector to the moderate and well-watered and forested highlands; and from the torrid and wet lake basin bordering Lake Victoria on the west to the Indian Ocean in the east. Other picturesque topological features include the glassy lakes sitting on the floor of the great Rift Valley that runs through the center of the country in a north-south direction, and the many volcanic mountains on the ridges on either side of the Rift Valley together with the two gigantic rivers Tana and Athi, which drain almost two thirds of Kenya's land mass.

Altitude in Kenya varies from the sea level on the marshy coastal basin to the cool and wet highlands that stand over 10,100 feet above sea level. Mount Kenya, on the central province of Kenya is about 17,040 feet high. Almost all the major types of tropical climate types are found in Kenya. These include the steamy and humid coastal type, the dry and hot savanna type which covers over two thirds of the country, the cool and wet highland type and the humid and very wet and hot equatorial climate.

Agriculture forms the backbone of Kenya's economy and provides jobs and livelihood for over 85% of Kenyans. Most of the earnings in the agricultural sector come from coffee, tea, pyrethrum and horticulture, although since 1989/90 tourism has surpassed coffee as the country's leading foreign exchange earner.

With a young and fast growing population, Kenya faces many formidable challenges which include the need to invigorate its debt and deficit-ridden economy,

shortage of foreign exchange due to falling commodity prices, a rising oil import bill, a high rate of population increase, unemployment, and deteriorating social services such as education, health, housing, energy supply, transportation and communication.

1:1:2 History and Politics

Anthropological research carried out in Kenya in the last few decades suggests that protohumans roamed the country over 20 million years ago. The most recent discovery shows "Homo" genus of humans lived in the area about 2.6 million years ago. The earliest group to arrive in Kenya is thought to be the Cushitic-speakers who settled around 1000 B.C. and received the first group of Arab traders and sailors in the first century A.D.

Due to the country's proximity to Arabia, India, and the Far East, many traders and explorers from these lands made contacts with Kenya's coast many centuries ago, and by the 8th century, many of these groups had began settling down on the various centers along the coastal line such as Lamu, Pate, Siu, Malindi and Mombasa. At this time, Bantu and Nilotic peoples also moved into this area. The use of Swahili, though for many centuries confined to the coastal area, spread fast from mid-18th century to late 19th century during the height of the slave and ivory trade when the trade caravans began penetrating the east African mainland as far as Buganda to the north and Congo and Mozambique to the East and south respectively.

The Arabs were followed in the early 15th century by the Portuguese whose 200 year rule on the East African coast had very little impact on the language and culture of the local people. The Portuguese were ousted in the 1600s by the Arabs who established their own rule in Mombasa and Zanzibar. Their way of life influenced Swahili language and culture. Indeed, it is through the use of the Arabic language script that the Swahili community began to write Swahili poetry and prose. The origin of Swahili taarab songs, the subject of this study, is also traced to the time of the 19th

century Sultan of Zanzibar Sultan Seyyid Bargash, and the earliest form of taarab in this tradition was initially composed and sung mainly in Arabic using instruments from Arabic and oriental cultures. To this day, many of the Swahili taarab songs, although cast fully in Kiswahili using African idioms, often reflect and adopt Arabic and Indian tunes.

Kenya was formally brought under British rule around 1896 and together with Uganda Tanganyika (mainland Tanzania) and Zanzibar. became part of the British East Africa. Its status was changed to that of a colony in 1920 and remained under the colonial yoke until 1962, when the protracted liberation struggle mounted by Kenya Land Freedom Army called "Mau Mau" culminated in the political independence of the country. Kenya became independent on December 12, 1963, and a republic within the Commonwealth of Nations in 1964, under the leadership of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, who was to lead the nation as the first President until his death in 1978. The ruling party, Kenya African National Union (K.A.N.U.), was rivaled at independence by the minority opposition party of Ronald Ngala, Kenya African Democratic Union (K.A.D.U.) and Paul Ngei's African Peoples Party (A.P.P.).

Although Kenya remained a "de facto" one party state but constitutionally a multi-party democracy, even after the banning of Oginga Odinga's short-lived opposition party, Kenya Peoples Union (K.P.U.), in 1969, it was only after the 1982 constitutional amendment that the country became a "de jure" single party state. With the return of multi-party politics, however, parliament has had to repeal this legal provision to pave the way for the formation of other parties.

Mzee Kenyatta was well-known for his love and reverence for African culture, especially Kenyan music and dance. (2) Most, if not all the major national presidential functions in his era featured Swahili and other local traditional dances as part of the entertainment, and Kenyatta often freely joined the dancing, despite his advanced age. Little surprise therefore, that a good number of the songs analyzed in this study directly

describe the artists' view of presidential role in the national development of Kenya reflecting the deeply political function of the genre. Upon his death in August 1978, president Kenyatta was succeeded by the then Vice President, Daniel Arap Moi.

Kenya maintains a 188 member unicameral national assembly elected together with the president for a five-year term every five years. The president, who is above the law as long as he remains in office, is the government's chief executive and appoints the cabinet and all senior government leaders. He is the Chancellor of all the public universities and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.

There are 40 administrative districts in Kenya grouped into seven provinces, with Nairobi, the capital city, having a special status as an extra province. The central office of the president oversees the function of all arms of the central government, local authorities, as well as the other public institutions. It is also responsible for defense, internal security and the formulation of the country's foreign policy, the coordination of all developmental activities and day to day administration throughout the republic.

Kenya's capital is Nairobi, one of Africa's largest metropolitan cities which stands about 5,000 feet above sea level. It has a pleasant temperate climate with temperatures ranging from 30°F to about 80°F and two rainy seasons per year. Established as a seat of the government in the beginning of the 20th century, Nairobi has a population of over 1.5 million and is growing in importance as a leading international business and commercial center on the African continent. Other important towns include the coastal harbor city of Mombasa, Kisumu on the shores of lake Victoria, Nakuru on the floor of the Rift-Valley and the fast-growing University and industrial town of Eldoret.

Life in the post-colonial Kenya has been characterized by a widening economic and cultural gap between the rich few and the poor majority. Landlessness, unemployment and underemployment, rural-urban migration and deepening political disillusion are just a few of the major aspects of social life in Kenya today. As a result

of the growing economic distress among the majority of Kenyans, especially the youth, social problems such as drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, school drop-out, teenage pregnancies and prostitution are now rampant in the country. Moral decay, individualism and materialism have given rise to many related social vices including the hitherto unknown phenomenon of "sugar daddies" and "sugar mummies". Some of the songs analyzed in this study address some of these issues.

Yet, Kenya has also made giant strides in all aspects of economic development since independence. Despite having one of the continent's fastest growing and youngest population (over 60% of Kenyans are under 25 years), Kenya has achieved an enviable success in satisfying basic domestic food and nutrition needs and in meeting challenges in basic and higher education, primary health care, industrialization, transportation, housing and tourism, to name but a few areas. Through the unique national motto of Harambee (let us pull together), the country has managed to raise funds for a variety of public projects such as schools, colleges, hospitals, road construction, housing and educating the needy, among other uses. These efforts have effectively supplemented the government task of financing national development.

1:1:3 Kenya's Cultural Diversity

Kenya's culture is richly varied and reflects the way of life of a multi-racial society. Apart from the indigenous Africans, Kenya is also inhabited by Arabs, Asians, Europeans and people of many other races and covering all the continents of the world. There is a strong tradition of interracial cultural mixing and inter-marriage as well as reciprocal respect for and tolerance of the religious preferences of each group. This is attested to by the peaceful co-existence in the country of Christian, Islamic, Hindu Sikh and other religions, and in addition, major religious holidays of these groups are observed at the national level.

With over 40 major language communities, Kenya uses English and the national language Swahili, in many cases, as co-equal official languages. Although the former remains the medium of administration, higher education and commerce, the latter is fast gaining ground as a potential sole official and national language. Not only is Kiswahili the only Kenyan language with the longest literary history, it is also the only language that is taught nationally. The study of written and oral Swahili literature is one of the fastest growing fields of study in East and Central Africa and beyond.

1:1:4 The Swahili Community

The Waswahili are an African people who inhabit the east African coastal strip from Barawa in southern Somalia in the north to the mouth of river Rufiji on the northern part of Mozambique in the south. The term Swahili, derived from the Arabic Sahil (also Sawaahil) which means "coast" was not originally used by the Waswahili to refer to themselves but was probably used by the Arabs to describe inhabitants of the east African coast. (3) According to Chiragddin and Mnyampala , Wangozi (or Wangovi) and their language was Kingozi. (4) Their original home area from which they dispersed to other parts of the coast was called Shungwaya and today lies roughly to the north of the Lamu district of Kenya. They expanded and pushed southwards over the years into all major island cities such as Lamu, Pate, Malindi, Mombasa Zanzibar, Pemba, Kilwa and Comoro Islands.

Centuries of cultural contact and physical interaction between the Waswahili and the foreigners, such as Arabs, Persians and Indians, have given rise to various groups of people with varied facial features but who still share the same language and culture. The Waswahili today consist of various groups: the original Bantu-speaking Africans, the Afro-Asians, Cushites and others. Mizra and Strobel make this clear when they point out that "With intermarriage and concubinage, the racial composition of the coastal population became mixed, so that ethnic identification, racial characteristics and

social status were not completely congruent." (5) This diversity is also reflected in the large cluster of Swahili dialects which number over 15, spoken all over the coastal area. (6) The best known are the Ki-Amu, Ki-Mvita and Ki-Unguja spoken in Lamu, Mombasa and Zanzibar island. However, despite their ethnic diversity, the Swahili are "wielded together by a common cultural identity with one another and a consciousness of a common history and interests." (7)

1:2 The City of Mombasa

The bulk of the research leading to this dissertation was done in the Kenya's coastal district of Mombasa, one of Kenya's earliest urban centers which has a current population of over 700,000. Mombasa is the second largest city in the country and lies about 500 miles (880 kilometers) to the southeast of Nairobi. It borders Kwale and Taita Taveta districts to the south and east, respectively, while Kilifi, Tana River and Lamu districts are situated to its north and northwest. Regarded as Kenya's gateway to the world, the exact date of its establishment is not known but it is estimated to be somewhere between the 10th and 11th centuries.(8)

Among the many historic monuments found in this premediaval East African city is the famous Fort Jesus Museum built around 1648 by the Portuguese as a shelter from attacks by enemies. It also served as a prison the British colonial government declared it a national museum in 1959. Other attractions of historical importance in the city include the 16th century Swahili sector of the town called Mji wa Kale (Old Town) which has a rich heritage of African and Oriental architectural designs. This is also the home of many famous classical and modern Swahili poets and artists including most of the taarab singers and composers interviewed for this study. There is also the Frere Town area, situated in the northern part of the town where many freed slaves from many parts of east and central Africa were settled in the 19th century. In addition, there are many excavation sites around the city such as Mnarani, Gede and Shagga where

important discoveries of Afro-Arabic civilization dating as far back as the 8th century have been made in the recent years. Mombasa has had long standing diplomatic and commercial ties with many Middle Eastern and Oriental peoples such as Arabs, Persians and Indians as well as the surrounding Swahili cities of Lamu, Pate, Zanzibar and Pemba.(9)

Presently, the city of Mombasa is one of the world's most popular tourist destinations, visited each year by thousands of holiday makers and researchers who come to see its majestic sandy and palm-strewn beaches, coral reefs and nature parks. In addition, the city has many different types of libraries, archives, stores, market bazaars and curio shops, movie houses, theaters, and art galleries where various kinds of Swahili and Oriental and other art works are displayed. With perhaps the longest historical traditions of all African cities south of the Equator, Mombasa provides a meeting point for many aspects of traditional and modern cultures of East Africa, the Middle East, and the far East and weaves these aspects into a complex and throbbing social milieu.

Apart from providing a haven for all sorts of games and sporting activities, the city is an important center for artistic and linguistic expression and creativity in Kenya where "men and women of many creeds and diverse backgrounds assemble periodically to recite poetry and sing songs individually or in unison in many languages."(10) Recitations of poetry and singing is not just carried out in the local Swahili dialects of Kimvita, "Kiamu" (Lamu dialect) and Kisju (Pate dialect), but one also hears poetic compositions in Arabic, Gujerati and Hindi. In addition, many songs in the Bantu languages of Kipokomo and Giriama, whose speakers intermingle closely with the Swahili community, are also frequently presented. (11)

1:3 The Place of Culture and Oral Tradition in the National Development of Kenya

Culture is the mark of the uniqueness of a people's life which encompasses that people's total mentality as expressed in their social institutions, language and philosophy. The outward expression of culture is manifested in the various forms of performing and creative arts such as dance, drama, sport, music, painting, textiles, sculpture, pottery and carvings, among other avenues. Therefore, simply defined, culture is a statement of how a given people interact among themselves and with the rest of the world.

The pan-Africanist or negritudist view of the African culture, as expounded by Leopold Sendar Senghor, among others, stresses the close communion of the human person and the natural environment including the spiritual world as well as the common use of meaningful imagery and symbolism in all spheres of life.(12) The Marxist, for their part, define culture as a tool of "resolute struggle" in the battle against all forms of social exploitation and domination. In this sense, culture assumes a militant political nature and answers to a unified universalist mission of social liberation. This is the view that is expounded by Amicar Cabral, Frant Fanon and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (13). The present study treats the concept of culture as a dynamic force that is shaping the destiny of the African society in its quest for freedom, peace and development. As Janheinz puts it, "It is a culture that is shaping the future of this continent". (14)

The diversity of Kenya's national culture, like that of other African societies, is "typically often expressed through the nation's unique artifacts, diversity of song and dance, theater, literature and other traditions".(15) This expression is dynamic and embodies Kenyans' responsiveness to changing social, political and technological environments. This cultural transition has caused basic social and psychical dislocations that precipitate many problems at the individual and community level. Some of these problems, fears and challenges arising from this cultural and political regeneration are addressed by Swahili taarab and other Kenyan oral artists in their

artistic compositions. Examples of such problems include social deviance, increasing individualism, alienation and self-centered behavior.

The political use of popular song and dance is an important aspect of contemporary Kenya. This is so because, unlike in the developed world where mechanized forms of mass communication are used, in a typical African country like Kenya, the use of such forms is seriously limited due to scarcity of the necessary resources needed to put them in place. As pointed out elsewhere in this discussion, the largest part of Kenya's population lives in the rural areas where the level of infrastructural development is very low. These areas still lack basic needs like clean piped water, electricity, all-weather roads, telephones, and decent housing. In these circumstances, therefore, mass media, including radio, television and newspapers reach a very small segment of the population. Hence the importance of indigenous media oral poetry and song.

Since Kiswahili is Kenya's national language, poetry, and any other oral materials composed in the language are assured of reaching a wider audience than those composed in any other local language. The Swahili taarab songs are no exception to this rule. Indeed, the government of Kenya places a great deal of importance on development of Kiswahili and notes that, "A national language is one aspect of cultural identity as it plays an important role in national development". (16) This assertion stresses the fact that popular oral forms composed in Kiswahili such as the taarab songs help to strengthen Kenyans' respect for and pride in the peoples' common cultural heritage which is essential for their unity as a nation and for ensuring a sense of identity and belonging.

The Swahili taarab is a popular musical form which utilizes various genres of oral poetry and which is featured in almost all important formal or casual social functions in the Swahili community. It reflects the viability of the Swahili culture which, as one critic pointed out, "is a culture that has grown up to give birth to its own

literature, philosophy of life and values.”(17) Swahili taarab songs have been, and continue to be, an important creative and performing art form in the Swahili community and in the national life of Kenya. Historically, the form was employed as a medium of social communication and entertainment. Whether recited or intoned, the highly regularized metrical organization of the genre has provided a rich source of both poetic and musical experimentation.(18) This formal and thematic dynamism has enabled the genre to serve as a viable tool for communicating feelings and ideas of nationalism and for the interpretation of Kenya’s national political philosophies of “Harambee” under Kenyatta’s regime and “Nyayoism”, under Moi’s rule.

In the post-independence era, many Kenyan political leaders have made use of various forms of indigenous media like song, drama and dance in an attempt to reach the masses in the rural areas where the use of the sophisticated modern media is minimal. In Kenya, an oral form like the Swahili taarab song performs three main important roles: entertainment, education, and information. The present study takes the view that these seemingly diverse functions of the songs are an integral part of the sociocultural strategy which is necessary for mobilizing people for enhanced national development. This study examines the formal and thematic qualities of the Swahili taarab songs with a view to making a case for their role in national development.

From the time of the struggle for independence right through the post-independence era, hundreds of songs have been composed and published in the official media for political purposes. National dance troupes, choirs, bands, and theater groups are already performing this function on a regular basis through the use of Swahili language which is the only truly trans-ethnic language of East and Central Africa. The importance of the language in the cultural and political life in Kenya and also as a kind of Africa’s future lingua franca has been underscored by many scholars and cultural critics. (19)

Since it is not possible to illustrate all the possible development problems that the song in Kenya has been used to communicate since independence, this study will focus on the use of Swahili taarab songs in the sociopolitical arena at both the local and national levels. It explores the use of the songs as a medium of social communication in Kenya with emphasis on their function in the Swahili community and the nation as a whole. In addition, to studying the lyrical and poetic nature of Swahili taarab, many of its other prosodic and structural features which have attracted the attention of a number of literary critics and poets in the past several decades will be examined. The elaborate formal attributes of Swahili taarab are matched only by its wide thematic variation which encompasses a wealth of religious and secular topics and issues dealing with contemporary Swahili and African life.

One major aspect of Swahili taarab form that has generated a lot of interest as well as controversy recently is its artistic employment of traditional Swahili poetic forms such as wimbo (song), tarbia (the quatrain), and utumbuizo (serenade). This is not to say that taarab and these traditional poetic genres are one and the same. The fact remains that the forms are sub-genres of the same traditional Swahili poetic tradition. However, critics have been fascinated by the fact that although taarab is a latter day addition to this tradition, and it is a product of a slightly different cultural background, it has assimilated the features of the Bantu traditional Swahili poetry to the extent of being indistinguishable from the rest of the forms in the proto-Swahili poetic tradition.

Another important source of interest of the study of Swahili taarab is to explore the manner in which taarab poets have used the musical form to create a genre that is stylistically and thematically comparable to the traditional forms, but yet remains distinct and unique in many respects, such as composition, setting and performance.

1:4 Purpose and Objectives

This study analyses the salient formal and thematic attributes in a selected corpus of contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs by male and female poets with special emphasis on the various literary devices employed by the poets in the composition and performance of the songs. It examines the form, content, and functional dynamism of the Swahili taarab and discusses the potential of the Swahili taarab and the song medium as a vehicle for mass sociopolitical communication in Kenya in future. In addition to the question of the theoretical definition of the songs and their relationship with other genres of the Swahili poetic tradition, the study also pays attention to the details of composition, authorship, treatment of gender and other related important and topical social issues of current importance.

1:5 Nature of the Problem

Over the years, the Swahili taarab has distinguished itself as a prominent medium of social communication among the Swahili community in Kenya and East Africa as a whole. The fact that the songs are composed in Kiswahili, Kenya's national language, means that they have the potential of reaching a greater audience throughout the country than songs sung in any other local Kenyan language. In addition, this implies that these songs have certain attributes that seem to propel them way ahead of other similar oral Swahili poetic forms such as tumbuizo or ngonjera in their role as vehicles of sociopolitical communication at the local and national levels. It is therefore the interest of this study to explore the formal and thematic features of these songs with a view to understanding the characteristics that make them viable as a medium of communication.

Although the Swahili taarab may have originated from a non-Swahili and a non-African cultural environment, through an imaginative and highly creative genius, the Swahili poets have Africanized the form from the point of view of structure, style

and content over the last hundred years. However, some critics such as Mohamed Khatib (1981) have questioned the "Africanness" and "oralness" of Swahili taarab, particularly its composition and performance.

To date, no study has been undertaken to investigate the extent to which contemporary Swahili taarab songs utilize authentically traditional Swahili poetic sub-genres like wimbo (song), utumbuizo (serenade) or ngonjera (form of Tanzanian intoned poetry). In addition, no study has been carried out to determine the role played by the use of the Swahili taarab as medium of communicating certain national development issues in Kenya.

1:6 Research Questions

- (a) What are the formal and stylistic features of the taarab form and how are these qualities related to the function of the songs? Additionally, how far does the taarab form compare or contrast with that of the major traditional Swahili poetic forms such as wimbo (song) and shairi (quatrain)?
- (b) What are the predominate themes conveyed via the taarab in contemporary Kenya?

1:7 Hypothesis

This study is guided by a working hypothesis based on the assumption that literature is an artform with its own unique form, principles of internal organization and rules and procedures of performance. Additionally, literature has a sociopolitical function and reflects the culture and values of the society in which it is created. The present study assumes that Swahili taarab fits this description of literature and explores the sociopolitical role which the songs play in contemporary Kenya and how they use traditional poetic forms such as wimbo (song), shairi (quatrain), utumbuizo (serenade) and ngonjera (intoned poetry) to convey certain themes.

1: 8 Theoretical Framework

In evaluating the communicative value of contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs, the present study steers away from giving subjective or prescriptive definition of sociopolitical development from a normative position based on any dominant ideological perspective. The author subscribes to the view shared by Rodgers, among others, that each country should be expected to fashion its own methods of sociopolitical communication and to develop in its own chosen way.(20) However, this observation notwithstanding, sociopolitical communication should also incorporate the definition of “development” outlined by many contemporary development theorists and economists and other social scientists which looks at communication as an aspect of social development from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view. In this sense, development entails economic growth as well as distributive justice.(21) Enhancement of the human production capacity goes hand in hand with the equitability in the sharing of the product. Therefore, the present study defines sociopolitical communication as the fashioning, promotion and dissemination of all types of ideas and information geared toward the total improvement of the lives of Kenyans. Similarly, development communication may be viewed as the “total process that includes, understanding the audience, its needs, communication planning around selected strategies, message production, dissemination, reception, (and perhaps, interpersonal discussion with peers), and feedback, rather than a one-way direct communicator-to-passive-receiver activity”.(22)

To date, theoretical and critical work on Swahili oral forms like the taarab songs is insignificant. However, by incorporating a number of broad theoretical perspectives drawn from various contemporary models in the study of literature and language use in communication, the present study will construct a framework within which to study the form, content and function of Swahili taarab songs. The study will be guided mainly

by the sociocultural critical perspective expounded by Terry Eagleton. In addition, the stylistic model developed by Emmanuel Ngara and the speech-act and ethnography of speech theories developed by various critics and linguists such as John Austin, Dell Hymes, Mary Pratt and Elizabeth Traugott. Aspects of functional critical theory as used by Farouk Topan and Mbye Cham, will also be utilized.

Informed mainly by Marxist-Leninist perspectives on literature and art, Eagleton's model constructs literature as a form that is intricately bound up with the entire social organization and, therefore, as part and parcel of existing power relations in any given society. This is why he calls this approach to literary criticism "political" or "sociological" and uses the two terms interchangeably. He states, "Literature is vitally engaged with the living situation of men and women: it is concrete rather than abstract".(23) From this perspective, literary criticism and, indeed, all manner of artistic creation, is not merely an object of pure intellectual inquiry, but rather a particular social perspective in which to view the past lessons and present options of the human society. This form of criticism assumes the responsibility of exploring and critically engaging all manner of social ills such as sectionalism, exploitive relations, abuse of power and extreme materialism, which tend to promote imbalanced development by encouraging socioeconomic differences among people.

In addition to the above, sociocultural literary criticism is a multi-disciplinary model which brings together perspectives, ideas and techniques from a wide range of fields of study including linguistics, history, literature, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and other subjects that focus attention on human social experience. This is one of the strong points of the model because in current scholarship, especially in the area of social sciences, there is an increasingly strong tendency to steer away from approaches that take a unified and abstract view of complex human experience rather than an integrative approach. The present study adopts a holistic perspective in exploring the form and content of the Swahili taarab songs in comparison with other

major traditional Swahili poetic forms. Another important aspect of this model is its problem-centered approach to literature as a form of art. The model stresses the fact that modern literature is functional in the wide social sense and hence, does not entertain the notion of "art for art's sake". This reality of African literature and art is strongly brought out by Ayi Kwei Armah, Okot P'Bitek and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, among others.(24).

In tackling the complex aspect of language use in the Swahili taarab songs, the present study draws on the stylistic critical approach outlined by Emmanuel Ngara.(25) Although under this model the unit of analysis is the whole text, in the present study, the unit will comprise both entire song texts and stanzas. This approach is inclusive enough to be applied to the written as well as oral forms like taarab songs and addresses both the linguistic and literary aspects of literature. According to this model, the main factors that affect language choice and the over-all quality of a work of literature are as follows:-

- (a) Medium of transmission or delivery; eg. verbal or non-verbal
- (b) Mode or physical form of the work; eg. poetry, novel, short story, song, legend, myth, proverb, riddle, film, drama etc.
- (c) Language or dialect being used
- (d) Context of usage
- (e) Field or register of usage eg. legal, historical, literary etc.
- (f) Participants in the dialogue (Dramatis personae)
- (g) The targeted audience
- (h) Personal factors affecting individual artists; eg. psychological, religious, or social orientation, interests, inclinations, past experience or influences.

Each of the above sub-headings of the stylistic model as developed by Ngara underpins an important aspect of the present study in the analysis of the structure of Swahili taarab as a literary form. More importantly, the theory relates the formal structure of a work of art to the content. For instance, Ngara points out that the cultural

and historical setting of the work determines or influences the artist's choice of language. This view reflects the linguistic fact that language is not a mere system of meaningful symbols but a realistic representation of the prevailing values, attitudes, prejudices, habits and mannerisms of the community that uses it. As Ngara points out, ".....art and society are one. Songs, praise poems and folktales arise from the preoccupations, beliefs, assumptions and struggles of the community as a whole."(26)

The functional theory, as outlined by V.W.Turner in his study entitled, "The Three Symbols of Passage in the Ndembu Circumcision Ritual", by Farouk Topan in the study of Swahili spiritual songs, and by Mbye Cham in his study of style and language use in the west African and west Indian novel, deals mainly with various aspects of meaning in a work of literature. V.W. Turner, calls the model "Levels of Meaning Theory". (27) lists the following levels of meaning in a work of literature, which the present study considers relevant and useful in dealing with the problems of meaning in Swahili taarab songs:

- (a) Exegetical level: referring to the meaning given by the author of the work.
- (b) Expressional level: referring to the meaning derived from the text of the work.
- (c) Functional level: referring to the social role or function assigned a work.

The other perspective which guides the present work is the model constructed by a number of critics of language and literature in the 1960s and 1970s. This model which seeks to relate aspects of linguistics to literary criticism has been discussed in detail by Mary Pratt and Elizabeth Traugott. (28) It covers the three main types of speech acts: the locutionary, the illocutionary and perlocutionary categories of speech acts. Simply put, the model explains that language is always used to perform the function of passing a meaningful message from the speaker to the audience with the aim of getting the audience to perform a desired act or to effect a change of behavior in the

audience. This does not, however, suggest a closed-end or one-way system of communication but an active process of verbal and social interaction.

The present study therefore draws upon the tenets of the broad sociocultural theory and other literary and linguistic perspectives which closely relate to, complement, or strengthen these tenets. The over-all objective is to develop and forge an integrated theoretical model which is broad, relevant, and capable of addressing the aspects of form, content and, to some extent, the function of the Swahili taarab songs in their contemporary sociocultural setting.

1:9 Methodology

The study was carried out in two phases. The first phase involved the collection of Swahili taarab songs which form the primary data of the study. In the second phase, the data collected were supplemented with data from secondary sources before an in-depth study of the songs was undertaken. The primary sources of data consisted of recordings of live performance of taarab songs from social settings, radio and television broadcasts and recordings from Swahili music stores. The most important secondary sources included various forms of written materials like books, journals, magazines, newspapers. Data from formal and informal interviews were also widely gathered and used in the interpretation and analysis of the songs. In all cases, the aim was to obtain original songs as well as commentary on them which could provide some informed opinions on the historical development of the songs as well as their content and function.

In the course of collecting the data, emphasis was placed on obtaining a sample that was generically, geographically and historically representative, and special attention was paid to the sociocultural setting of the composition and performance of the songs. Once recorded, the songs were transcribed into Swahili and then translated into English.

The data for this study was collected mainly in Kenya and supplemented in Tanzania over a period of six years from 1985 to 1991. Initial field work was carried out between January and October 1985 in Mombasa, Kenya with the sponsorship of the Dean's Committee of Kenyatta University, Kenya. A number of Swahili taarab songs were collected along with other oral materials including proverbs and idiomatic expressions. The writer carried out many interviews with poets, authors, teachers, taarab singers, journalists, and literary critics on various aspects of taarab songs, in particular, and the whole field of Swahili and African oral literature, in general.(29) Altogether, a corpus of over 120 songs was collected, transcribed and translated out of which the last sample of about 60 songs was picked for detailed analysis. The texts used for this analysis appear at the end of the work under the various appendixes. In cases where the researcher was unable to trace the author, the text was listed as belonging to an unknown artist. This, however, does not suggest the authorship of such songs was anonymous.

This was followed by another field work undertaken between November 1986 and July 1987 in Nairobi, Mombasa and Malindi under the sponsorship of the International Development Research Center (I.D.R.C.) in Nairobi, Kenya. Interviews were conducted with a number of scholars in the field of African oral literature and mass media personnel on various aspects of theme and style in the Swahili taarab songs. Part of the survey involved examination of archival materials such as journals, files, and Swahili taarab musical instruments and recorded discs and tapes at the Kenya National Archives headquarters in Nairobi, the Voice of Kenya library and studios, as well as extensive use of the library resources at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University.

Between June and September 1991, field work was conducted in Mombasa, Kenya and Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar in Tanzania. This research trip was sponsored by the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa

(C.O.D.E.S.R.I.A.) based in Dakar, Senegal, and the project mainly involved updating data collected earlier as well as cross-examining identical resources in Tanzania. The writer visited and held interviews with scholars at the Institute of Swahili Research at the University of Dar es Salaam, and the Institute of Kiswahili and Foreign Languages, Zanzibar and the Center for Research in Oral Tradition and National Languages also in Zanzibar. Once again the writer used the occasion to participate in many live taarab performances and to hold face-to-face conversations with the taarab artists.

1:10 Anticipated Contribution of the Study

The present study will shed some light on the communicative competence of the Swahili taarab songs, and the song media in general, in carrying important sociopolitical themes. It is hoped that the findings of the study will help Kenyan cultural and communication policy makers in designing future oral media for use in the various areas of general development communication, especially in the use of various forms of indigenous, or traditional media. By focusing on the performance of the Swahili taarab songs as a medium in political communication and extending this potential to aspects of social life, the study hopes to make a contribution to the definition and function of oral song media in a Kenyan sociocultural setting.

Since most of the target audience for contemporary Swahili taarab songs is largely rural-based, relatively young, and often semi-literate, and since this group has no easy access to modern media like television, radio, film or printed material, the present study will make a vital contribution in highlighting the potential of the song as a traditional, face-to-face, oral, non-mechanical and cost-effective indigenous media.

In addition, it is hoped that, this study will provide useful data on Swahili oral literature and serve as a basis for further research into similar forms in the literature of other African communities. It will provide insightful commentary on the nature and function of the song as a public medium by stating how the role Swahili taarab

functions as an avenue for sociocultural and political expression in the Swahili and Kenyan environment. As a pioneer work in this field, the study will add a new dimension to the existing insights on the social role of popular traditional songs in a contemporary African society.

Today, Kiswahili serves not only as a vehicle for national communication in East Africa, but it is also increasingly assuming the status of Africa's continental lingua franca. This fact has been noted by, among many others, Mohamed Bakari (30) and Femi Ajo-Ade (31). The use of Swahili *taarab* songs as a medium for popular political propaganda in both Kenya, Tanzania, and Somalia, has elevated the status of this genre as a possible tool for mass mobilization for national development in these countries and beyond. The present study will make some contribution in highlighting the salient social functions of the songs by describing the positive strengths of the genre and its potential to serve even a wider range of sociopolitical goals.

In the realm of formal education, this study will assist in Kenya's national efforts to meet the requirements of the new literature curriculum under the newly launched system of education.(32) Under this new system, the study of African oral literature forms the core of the programs in literature at all levels of formal education. The present study will help fill the gap in the need for theoretical studies of oral forms of African literature and will be a step toward the documentation of these forms for further research, publication and dissemination.

The importance of research into traditional oral African material has been stressed over the years by many prominent African scholars including Okot P'Bitek (33), Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (34), Frantz Fanon (35), Taban Lo Liyong (36), John Mbiti (37), Mazisi Kunene (38), Wole Soyinka (39), Chinua Achebe (40), Ayi Kwei Armah (41) and others. This study is a response to their call to explore ways and means of promoting the authentic expression of Africa's cultural and political praxis. The writer considers the exposing of oral literary forms in indigenous African languages such as

Swahili taarab songs to scholarly inquiry a vital way of helping those languages grow and develop into viable vehicles of inter-ethnic communication. This study is a step toward the realization of this objective.

Therefore, in addition to the above, one could conclude that the study will not only provide useful information for sociocultural policy developers, but will also be a contribution in the field of formal education in general and in the research into and teaching of literature in Swahili and other major African languages.

1:11 Review of Literature

The literature related to this study is multi-disciplinary in nature and embraces various aspects of communication and literary theories. To date, a great deal of research has been done on many aspects of human communication and social development. Some studies have focused on sources, media or channels of communication, policies and effects. The present study differs from these works in that, while concentrating on the social functions and qualities of the the taarab song as a medium of sociocultural communication, it also touches on the problems related to the other aspects of the song as an art form. These aspects include style, language use, form and theme.

Apart from Rogers (1976) referred to above, there are other studies on media and effects in social communication that are relevant to this study. Examples of such studies include Shija (1989), Nwanko (1990) and Mlana (1991). These works stress the importance of careful choice of traditional and modern media in development communication efforts in Africa in order to ensure effective and positive communication. In addition, they show that in contemporary practice, the focus should be more on the needs of the receivers or target population than any other single factor. Thirdly, the studies show the importance of developing countries like Kenya opting for the most cost-effective indigenous media, given the scarcity of resources in these

countries. Thus, the importance of such media as the oral Swahili taarab songs. Mlama (1991) draws examples from specific projects and workshops carried out mainly in Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Cameroon, among other African countries, using popular theater, traditional songs and dances as means of facilitating communication on grassroots development. Her study underscores the use of such popular oral forms in reaching and involving the rural population in the grassroots development efforts. All these studies stress the importance of four main aspects of social communication: choice of medium, determining the needs of the target audience, ensuring high levels of effectiveness of the communication process and accessibility of the medium to the masses. The present study pays attention to these factors in assessing the communicative role of the Swahili taarab songs in contemporary Kenya.(42)

As noted elsewhere in this discussion, more scholarly research has been carried out on written Swahili poetry than on the oral forms such as taarab songs. A large part of the literature available on this subject consists of mere collections of various types of classical and modern oral Swahili poetry, often with scanty notes on the poems. This type of literature was aimed at making Swahili poetry available to a foreign readership as well as preserving the poetry in written form.

The second type of literature deals with the wider field of Swahili poetry and provides a general survey of the different genres of the poetry. There are also other general works that address the issues of theory and methodology from an ethnomusicological, socio-linguistic or literary point of view. Examples of this category of literature are discussed later in this section.

The premier work on Swahili taarab songs is Sheikh Shaaban Robert's short biographical story, Wasifu Wa Siti Binti Saad, which was published in 1958. Although this story was not based on an academic study of the genre of Swahili taarab songs, it offers a vivid account of the origins, growth, and spread of the Swahili taarab

movement in East Africa between the 1940s and 1950s which saw the secularization and commercialization of Swahili taarab in this region. In addition, the story serves as an introduction to the cultural environment which gave rise to the character and substance of the songs, and which has continued to nurture them. As the title indicates, this study is first and foremost the life history of Siti Binti Saad, the legendary queen of modern Swahili taarab songs, from Unguja (Zanzibar), who in the 1920s "liberated" herself from the "constraining" Swahili- Muslim village culture and joined hands with other artists (all male) to plunge into the new world of commercial entertainment. Their pioneering venture did not merely succeed in popularizing the songs, but also the Swahili language and culture.(43)

Among the earliest and most systematic anthologies of Swahili songs and oral poetry is W.H.Whiteley's Waimbaji Wa Juzi which contains many songs sung between the 1920s and 1950s in Zanzibar.(44) The work has a short but informative introduction, which stresses the importance of the songs as a source of archaic Swahili vocabulary and also gives detailed captions of each of the contributing artists, with brief notes on the contextual usage of the various songs. However, like Wasifu Wa Siti, this study was a collection and not at all intended to make a critical analysis of the songs.

Mohamed Seif Khatib's manuscript entitled, Taarab Unguja, provides the most detailed account of the Swahili taarab movement in Zanzibar and Tanzania, in general, from an historical perspective.(45) The study is very closely related to the article by S.S.Saleh entitled, "Nyimbo Za Taarab Unguja", and covers very much the same ground including, the early history of the taarab movement, the first taarab groups as well as various prominent themes covered by the songs generally. (46) None of these studies makes any attempt to define Swahili taarab as a genre and the credit for this task goes to A.A. Suleiman who makes an effort at defining "taarab" music in the Swahili tradition and sees it as "the distinctive music for the Swahili coast and the islands. Its

lyrics are often cast in the "mashairi" meter (quatrains) and three -lined stanzas of various forms"(47) Khatib's arguments follow the same reasoning as in his earlier unpublished seminar paper entitled, "Je, Taarab ni Fasihi Simulizi?" in which he tries to prove that Swahili taarab is an alien form that shares very little in common with authentic African forms. (48) However, this argument is not supported by evidence from primary data.

The two articles referred to above are similar to the one by Jan Knappert entitled, "Swahili Taarab Songs", published in 1977 which also carries the same themes. (49) Again, all these studies are not based on a sound literary theoretical perspective in their treatment of the Swahili taarab song texts and this fact marks the major difference between them and the present study which makes an attempt to bridge this gap by exploring the form and content of the Swahili taarab songs from a sociocultural and literary perspective.

In the category of general studies on Swahili poetry, one finds such works as Ibrahim Noor Shariff's Tungo Zetu (1988) which is a comprehensive literary survey of the main genres and themes in Swahili poetry. Shariff dwells on the problem of prosody and the social function of each genre. The study emphasizes the allegorical nature of Swahili poetic language and although the study is very diffused and, therefore, of a very general nature, it remains one of the most detailed surveys of Swahili poetry to be published recently.

The study by C.A.Campbell (1983) represents the the type of works which explore Swahili poetry from a sociological standpoint (50). This study is a dissertation research that focuses on the Swahili ngoma (dance) songs from a literary perspective. The most important contribution of this work is the insightful definition of the Swahili wimbo (song) from a sociocultural perspective. This is in sharp contrast to the earlier studies on this subject, such as Hichens (1941), Harries (1962), Nabahany (1978) and Knappert (1979), which tended to define the genres of Swahili poetry more from a

traditional prosodic point of view than a cultural one. The present study agrees with Campell's definition of the Swahili poetic forms based on the oral cultural criteria because Swahili and, indeed, African poetry in its entirety, was never based on any rules of versification as are written forms, but solely on orality or verbalization.

The orality of Swahili poetry and song has been strongly emphasized by, among others, Abdallah (1978) and Shariff (1989). These articles reach similar conclusions about the nature and function of Swahili oral poetry and songs as do the articles by Mohamed Khatib (1978) and Mkimbo (1978), both of which deal with various aspects of composition, performance and function of the forms.

There are a number of other relevant critical works that address Swahili poetry. Examples include, Topan (1984), Allen (1971; 1975; 1979a; and 1979b), Abdulaziz (1979), Kezilahabi (1976), and Shariff (1983). All these studies, with the exception of the collections by J.W.T. Allen, are based on systematic academic research and a number of them are revised versions of theses and dissertations. The studies support the fact that Swahili oral poetry is socially-functional and deals with every day happenings or topical issues in the wider community. They stress that although the poetry is traditionally derived, it is dynamic in both style and content. The present study refers to these observations and re-examines them in the light of the data gathered in exploring the form and content of the contemporary Swahili taarab poetry.

1:12 Scope and Limitations

The present study examines a representative corpus of contemporary Swahili taarab songs composed by leading Kenyan taarab artists in the post-independence era (1963-1990). A few songs composed before this period and others by non-Kenyan artists, especially Tanzanians, are cited wherever necessary for comparison. The bulk of the songs come from the Swahili community of Mombasa, Kenya's coastal island city. This area is the core of the Kenyan Swahili community and the most

artists, especially Tanzanians, are cited wherever necessary for comparison. The bulk of the songs come from the Swahili community of Mombasa, Kenya's coastal island city. This area is the core of the Kenyan Swahili community and the most geographically accessible of all the Kenyan Swahilized cities where materials from other areas are readily available. The inter-ethnic mixture of the Swahili population in Mombasa makes the town the most geographically representative of all Swahili districts in the country. The study concentrates on contemporary songs from Mombasa because not only were the songs and artists more easily accessible but, more importantly, these are the only songs in the genre that offer a wider perspective of the political and sociocultural life in post-independent Kenya.

The study analyzes only the style and themes in the taarab songs from a literary point of view and examines the role of the genre as a vehicle of sociopolitical communication. Although the aesthetic and musical qualities of Swahili taarab may play a greater role in enhancing its viability as a social medium, the study treats the song texts purely as poetical rather than musical forms. The study does not deal with the emotional and psychological impact the songs may have on the audience and since the songs come mostly from Kenya, the generalizations reached by the study are more widely applicable to the Kenyan situation than to Tanzania or Somalia .

Various field problems were encountered. For instance, the inaccessibility of the actual social contexts of a song or, in some cases, the actual composers of the songs, made it difficult to decipher the actual events that inspired the songs. Reliance on the unaided memory of the informers tended to encourage variation in the wording of the actual songs and affect the validity of the texts. Many secondary sources utilized including music libraries, record stores, archives and public libraries showed many inconsistencies and gaps in their documentation and organization, thus complicating further the scarce available commentary on the subject.

1:13 Definition of Terms

- Taarab:** is used to refer to the Swahili popular salon music. The songs may be recorded or, as often is the case, orally transmitted and are poetically metered and rhymed. In its Arabic original, the nominal root twaarab means to make music, to have a festival or to make merry.
- Shairi:** (plural: mashairi) means “poem” and Mshairi is a poet. The term could also refer to a singer or a composer of Swahili songs. An alternative name for a poet in Swahili is Manju. In this discussion, the term Mtia Mahadhi has been used to refer to the poet who only intones an already composed song. This is different from Mwimbaji (singer), who may only be a singer of the song composed and intoned or recited by other artists.
- Wimbo:** (plural: nyimbo) means song and is a genre of traditional Swahili poetry that includes both the metered and unmetered forms. For the purposes of the present study, Swahili taarab songs are treated as a category of wimbo.
- Ubeti:** (plural: beti) is the equivalent of the English concept of “stanza”. All Swahili taarab songs are composed in beti (singular: ubeti) stanzas.
- Msitari:** a metered line on a stanza also called, mshororo (Plural: mishororo)
- Kipande:** is the division of a line (msitari) within an ubeti (stanza). It is the equivalent of a caesura in classical English poetry.
- Mizani:** is the Swahili poetic syllabic measure which is roughly equal to a grammatical syllable.
- Kina:** is the rhyme which occurs at the end or middle of the line. All forms of traditional Swahili poetry are, as a rule, rhymed.
- Kituo:** is the last line in the stanza which, if repeated from one stanza to the next throughout the poem, becomes the kipokeo (plural: yipokeo) (refrain). Alternatively, the rhyme may be repeated in part and be called a Mkarara (from kariri meaning, repeat). Very often, the last line is not repeated from stanza to stanza and such line is known as a kibwagizo (plural, yibwagizo), which literally means “thrown about”. Any other Swahili poetic and critical terms that may come up in the discussion will be explained in their context.
- Utumbuizo:** a three-line poetic composition with end of line rhymes but no metric balancing which closely resembles the wimbo form.
- Ngonjera:** a form of rhymed, often metered and intoned political poetry mainly performed on mainland Tanzania.

Endnotes

1. Countries of the World and Their Leaders: Year Book. Vol.1 (Detroit: Gale Research Inc.), 755-762.
2. Not only did president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta write the famous classical anthropological works on Gikuyu and Kenyan cultural life: Facing Mount Kenya and Suffering Without Bitterness, but he also initiated the establishment of many cultural institutions and his government started a ministry of culture.
3. For a fuller discussion on the entymology of this term, see J.L.Krapf, An Outline of Kisuaeli Language with Special Reference to Kinika Dialect. 1850 , 35-50.
4. Chiragdhin, S. and Mnyampala, M., Historia Ya Kiswahili. (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1971), 25.
5. Mizra, S.and Strobel, M., Three Swahili Women. (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1989), 8.
6. Wilfred Whiteley, The Rise of a National Language. (London:Methuen, 1969), 2.
7. Aidha A. Salim, The Swahili Speaking Peoples of the Kenya Coast.(Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973), 9 and Nicholas C.S. The Swahili Coast. New York: Africana Publishing Corporation,1971),19.
8. Mizra, S. and Strobel, M., op. cit.(7).
9. Mohamed Hyder, The History of Kenya's Coast 1895-1965. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), 1-25, and Matthias Mnyampala and Shihabddin Chiragdin, Historia Ya Kiswahili, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1977), 105; A. H. Prins, The Swahili Speaking Peoples of Zanzibar and the East African Coast, (London: nternational African Institute, 1961),1-30 and Idha Salim, Swahili Speaking Peoples of Kenya . 1985-1965 (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973), 1-50.
10. Jan Knappert, Four Centuries of Swahili Verse. (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1979), 288.
11. For a fuller discussion on the dialects of Kiswahili, see Matthias Mnyampala and Shihabddin Chiragdin (Ibid. pp. 25-52), and also, Wilfred Whiteley, Swahili: The Rise of a National Language. (London: Methuen and Co., 1969), 72-76.
12. L.S. Senghor, "Africa and America" in Michael Samuel (ed.). Africa and the West. Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 9-25.
13. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Decolonizing the Mind:the Politics of Language. (Nairobi: Heinemann 1981), 3.
14. Jahn Janheinz, An Outline of Neo-African Culture. (London:Faber, 1961), 28.

15. Government of Kenya, Development Plan for Period 1988-1993. (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1988), 256.
16. Ibid.
17. J.W.T. Allen, The Customs of the Swahili People. (Berkeley, University of California Press), vii.
18. Mohamed Seif Khatib, "Je, Taarab ni Fasishi Simulizi" unpublished seminar paper, Institute of Swahili Research, (Dar es Salaam, 1979), 1-10.
19. Mohamed Bakari, "Language and National Identity", Unpublished paper, (Nairobi: Institute of African Studies), 6-8.
20. Ibid.
21. Wilfred David, Economics of Political Economy. (New York: Praeger, 1988) 30-35, and Conflicting Paradigms (New York: Praeger, 1985) 12-18.
22. Everett Rodgers, op. cit.
23. Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory. (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1983), 196.
24. See Ayi Kwei Armah, "Masks and Marx" in Presence Africaine. (1984), 50-66; Okot P'Bitek's Africa's Cultural Revolution. (Nairobi: Macmillan, 1971), 20-40 and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Homecoming. (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1972), 35-60.
25. Emmanuel Ngara, Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel. (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1985), 14-36.
26. Emmanuel Nagara, Art and Ideology in the African Novel. (London: Heinemann, 1985), 21.
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CHAPTER 2

Origin and Development of Swahili Taarab in East Africa

2:1 Introduction

This chapter consists of three sections each dealing with an aspect of contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs. In the first section, the origin, early history and spread of the Swahili taarab movement will be discussed. It is, however, worth noting here that there are two conflicting views with regard to the exact location where the music originated on the Swahili coast. One view has it that these songs started in the northern Kenyan coast around the cities of Lamu and Pate and attributes its introduction and development to the famous Swahili poet from Lamu, Mohamed Kijumwa (1860-1930) who, it is claimed, did not only introduce the songs but also pioneered in making the first Swahili kinanda, a kind of organ used to play taarab songs.(1) However, as discussed below, this theory has received very little support from scholars and critics in this field. The other theory, which appears to be more popular, traces the origin of Swahili taarab to Unguja (Zanzibar) during the reign of Seyyid Bargash (1870-1888).

In the second section, the performance and sociocultural context of the songs will be dealt with and this discussion will be based on field experience in Mombasa although local variations may occur from one Swahili community or city to another.

The third section examines the contemporary situation of Kenyan taarab songs prominent taarab groups.

2:2 Historical Background

There is a general consensus among many scholars of Swahili oral tradition that taarab on the East African coast was started by the musical groups organized by the Sultan Seyyid Bargash who ruled the island of Zanzibar from 1870 to 1888. (2) This ruler is said to have been socially indulgent and to have led a most luxurious and lavish

life style. He was a great lover of music and dance and it is as a result of this that he sent one of his outstanding palace poets, Mohamed Bin Ibrahim, to learn how to play and compose taarab songs in Egypt. Hitherto, many Egyptian taarab musicians had been invited to Zanzibar to perform for the royal family. Upon his completion of his training in Egypt, Ibrahim returned to Zanzibar to organize the first local groups of taarab players under the patronage of Sultan Bargash. This group performed in the famous palace building of the Sultan called "Beit-el-Ajab" (A Wonder House).

However, after the death of Sultan Bargash, the Swahili taarab movement suffered a big blow due to lack of patronage and promotion by his successors who included Seyyid Khalifa Bin Said (1888-1890), Ali Bin Said (1890-1893), Hamed Bin Thuwein (1893-1896) and the British trustee ruler, Master Rodgers (1902-1905).

It was after 1905, when Sultan Ali Bin Hamoud started his reign, that taarab and secular education began to take root on the island. This leader started a cultural revolution which emphasized the need to discard negative and unfruitful traditional and religious beliefs and to replace them with modern ones. He promoted western formal education and cultural renaissance.

In 1905 the first ever full-fledged Swahili taarab band, "Nadi Akhwani Swafaa" was formed outside the royal circles, and it was followed in 1906 by another group named "Nadi-el-Shuub". Subsequently, other groups sprung up on the island such as the famous band led by the renowned first Swahili woman taarab singer, Siti Binti Saad, and Mohamed El-Barwany's group called "Banati". Others were "Shamshi", "Duhani", "Royal Air Force" and "Royal Navy". Many Egyptian taarab artists flooded the island of Zanzibar to teach their local counterparts how to compose and sing taarab. The Egyptians brought with them many Arabic instruments of taarab and gramophone records which they used in their lessons. However, as time went by, taarab was popularized, commercialized and Swahilised in as far as the instruments used and the content of the lyrics were concerned. Swahili instruments of African

origin like zumari or zeze (flute), udi (a hollow-bellied gourd stringed instrument) resembling a banjo or mandolin) and a set of small drums called rika or "dumbak" replaced Arabic and oriental ones introduced by the Egyptian musicians. Most of these early groups, except the "Nadi Akhwani Swafaa", renamed "Malindi", have disappeared and have been replaced by many other young ones such "Nuru 'l Uyuni".

It is not absolutely certain when and how East African Swahili taarab spread over the whole Swahili coast, the immediate hinterland as well as far up-country towns like Tanga on the Tanzanian mainland. According to one source, taarab reached Kenya's north coast Swahili town of Lamu before spreading as far south as Zanzibar and Pemba islands.(3) However, this claim has not been fully supported by many scholars even though it appears plausible because, the Lamu poet, Mohamed Kijumwa, is thought to have been the first Swahili artist not just to sing and play taarab music on the east African coast, but also to make the first Swahili hand organ called "kinanda". In its early years of development, East African taarab was basically patterned upon the metrical and musical structure of Arabic songs mainly from Egypt. In most cases Arabic tunes were adapted and used to render Swahili songs. This practice has endured to this day and many groups still adapt tunes from Indian, Arabian and Persian films to match their Swahili lyrics.(4) However, Swahili taarab has been greatly Africanized in content since it was first popularized around 1905. Today, it is fully cast in Swahili poetry that reflects local Swahili and African cultural environment.

2:3 Performance of Swahili Taarab

Generally speaking, Swahili poetry bears very close resemblance to normal human speech, whether sung or intoned. Indeed, it can be described as a kind of heightened speech. This music depends largely both on its prosody and lyrical nature and the medium of performance. The interdependence of the music and the text or the

words is made manifest in the various aspects of the songs. For instance, the soloist often sings unaccompanied except for the few times when the chorus may cut in to sing a refrain. The lead vocalist's voice assumes a tense and often nasalized tone whose monophonic quality bears very close affinity with the tone of a native Swahili speaker in ordinary speech.

In addition, the songs are often sung at a single dynamic level of pitch with minimal variation. Mostly, the accented syllables are those that would be stressed in normal conversation. The regularity of the rhythm, metric systems and melodic shapes, as will be discussed in the next chapter which deals with diction, grammar and language use in the songs, also ensures monotony and, thus, similarity to speech. Therefore, the music of the songs, in a nut-shell, serves to sharpen the effects of the words in the text, as one critic observes: "The singer combines the music and the poetry to achieve more than he could with either music or poetry alone". (5)

Swahili taarab songs feature at many social functions and as pointed out elsewhere in this study, taarab means to make merry or festivities; to sing, vocalize or chant". It is, therefore, music meant for pleasant listening rather than for dancing and this is why it puts more emphasis on the lyrics and, especially, the choice of words. The figurative and philosophical language of the songs is, therefore, more highly valued than their musicality.(6) This is an important aspect of the songs because the Swahili, like other African communities, do not make any distinction between "song" and "poetry", as both art forms serve to communicate ideas through language by speaking or intonation, recitation or singing. Ulli Beier confirms this fact when he states: "A poem is a passage of jazz where execution is just as important as the text. I still think that the poem is not complete until it is sung, words and music together". (7)

As far as the social setting of Swahili taarab is concerned, it is possible to state that the songs require no fixed traditional cultural occasion to be performed because the songs presented are basically topical and can, therefore, relate to any given social

occasion, be it casual, organized, personal or social, light entertainment to welcoming or bidding farewell to important guests. This fact marks an important point of departure between taarab and other kinds of traditional Swahili dance forms such as unyago (puberty dance), jando (circumcision dance) or the spirit exorcism dance called, all of which are strictly context-bound and ritualistic forms. In addition to being a context-free form, Swahili taarab performers, unlike the performers of other traditional dances, wear no special costumes and do not recite any set formulaic opening or closing compositions such as those heard in, say, the kasida (religious poems) or in the maulidi (religious classes). The featuring of taarab on any occasion is, therefore, obligatory or optional depending on the nature of the event. It is invariably obligatory in weddings, political rallies and other such happy occasions but it is optional as a form of accompaniment to some types of work or recreational activities.

Often, Swahili taarab features as part of organized official political or social functions where specially invited groups perform according to an official program. In such circumstances, the artists may spend many long hours rehearsing, and often, they will have special numbers composed for the occasion. For instance, this writer was informed that the ceremonies marking the retirement of the Tanzanian first president, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and the inauguration of his successor, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, were dominated by Swahili taarab events all over the republic. Similarly, the ceremonies of the second installation of President Moi of Kenya and all major national ceremonies in the last decade or so have featured taarab performances as part of the entertainment.

On the Swahili coastal areas, election campaigns and other political activities are accompanied by performance of taarab songs. Wedding ceremonies, sports meetings, religious celebrations and of course, political rallies provide apt occasions for the performance of Swahili taarab songs which are not, as many people believe, only connected with ceremonies like weddings, as Knappert confirms: "The taarab songs are

not actually wedding songs, but they do often feature as wedding songs, especially the dance songs that appertain to the actual ceremonies.”(8) But this should not be taken to mean that all the songs are either modern or traditional. They consist of both types, as Knappert goes on to explain: “The taarab songs are usually of contemporary composition, although some songs are referred to as ‘very old’ which means that they are learned from grandparents”. (9)

As noted elsewhere in this study, Swahili taarab song texts are often written down before being sung and very often they are changed or re-written or adapted to suit the context of performance. This practice has resulted in a situation whereby a colon stock of proverbial expressions and phrases, metaphors, words or rhyming pairs have become part of the fixed opening or closing formulae in the songs. This feature of the songs stresses the orality of the songs whose authorship is often difficult to trace. This aspect also helps to preserve some of the very old songs by depositing the texts in the collective memory bank of the entire community rather than an individual artist.(10)

While traditionally the Swahili bards were known for their skill in making spontaneous compositions on the spur of the moment, taarab songs are mostly learned and rehearsed long before the public performance, although a few poets can still compose on the spot. For instance, the famous Mombasa poetess, Zena Mahamoud Fadhil, did on many occasions compose a verse on the spot at the request of the writer to demonstrate her accomplishment in the art of composition. She personally does not sing but composes for many musicians who use her poetry to make songs.

Many average Swahili taarab groups consist of between eight and ten members, and in many cases, both men and women. Mostly, taarab performances are held in the evenings in homes or in the open arenas or dance halls. Nowadays, many performances are held in hotel guest rooms, theaters, and also in big tourist resorts such as night clubs and beach hotels. From time to time, taarab shows are held for demonstration, competition or general exhibition. (11).

The musicians normally sit in two rows while some, especially the instrumentalists, such as the vocalists and technicians, remain standing. Speakers and microphones and other electronic devices are arranged neatly on the stage (if there is a stage) and the first task is invariably to test the acoustics and tune up the instruments. The songs to be sung may be contained in a hand-written book which is kept open in front of the vocalists or they may just be recited from memory. (12) The chorus joins in at appropriate moments to break the monotony of voice and give the vocalists the necessary respite. The whole performance of Swahili taarab songs involves very little movement of body parts, dancing or other physical responses to the music from the performers or the audience.

As noted in Chapter Six, which deals with the theme of the portrayal of women in Swahili taarab songs, strict Islamic practices deny women the chance of mixing freely with men, even in a taarab event.(13) Very often, there is a partition made of canvas or such other material separating women from men, even in domestic performances where only a small number of invited guests are in attendance. When women have to mix with men, a very rare occurrence, indeed, they seclude themselves to the farthest corner of the hall and ensure their faces remain fully covered throughout. Taarab performances are variably staged in both public and in strictly exclusive private premises where no uninvited guests are allowed. (14)

The actual musical performance of the songs presents a combination of sound and sight for the audience, consisting of lexical and non-lexical vocables, together with musical tones to form a fused medium. Since the taarab musicians wear no special costumes, the visual paraphernalia available to the audience is limited. Instrumentation is vital in the performance of Swahili taarab and the playing of the music in different notes takes most of the duration of a song. The lyrics are interwoven artistically with the interval and the singing. The drumming, especially the bass sound, provides the trimming in the rhythm, particularly, where no electric guitars are used. The interest of

the audience is mostly focused on the words contained in the lyrics and how the lead vocalist brings out the mood of the song through the clever employment of voice, facial expressions and other such physical and emotional gestures. As a traditional practice, good singing stirs a thunderous applause from the audience who rush to the stage after or during the song to reward the singer, normally with gifts of cash.

In comparison with other traditional Swahili dances referred to above, taarab performance seems to involve the least amount of dramatic and other effects and appears to be the most formal and Swahili musical performance of all. One gets the impression that all the movements and gestures are well rehearsed prior to the final stage performance. This characteristic of the performance of taarab seems to confirm the view held by many of the people interviewed for this study that the true force of the songs is not in their use of extra-linguistic devices but rather in the strength of the words in the lyrics. Because there is no dancing involved, the taarab audience remains glued to their seats and, apart from occasional clapping and applauding, there is very little direct physical or verbal interaction with the performers.

The Swahili taarab musical communication is very efficacious and is steeped in deep traditional Swahili metaphor and imagery. However, since the audience of contemporary Swahili taarab music is composed of a conglomeration of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, the musicians have to manipulate their performance to accommodate the tastes of all individuals in their audiences. The manipulation may involve choice of song theme, regulation of the degree of intensity of vocals or instrumentation, level of rapport and other musical and non-musical considerations.

To achieve the above objective Swahili taarab performers employ various techniques. For instance, like other traditional African dance songs, Swahili taarab utilizes the call-response singing style, with a leader singing first and a choral group joining in subsequently, as pointed out above. Skill in determining the point of

commencement and the appropriate tonal range and in retaining the repertoire accurately in order to command sufficient expertise for the admiration of the audience, is highly desirable.

The effort to Africanize and de-Islamize the poetry (15) in which the Swahili taarab music is cast as well as the instruments used, can be seen as a step toward making the art-form truly African and shedding its Oriental and Arabic influences. (16) For instance, the Swahili traditional organ kinanda, and Kibangala stringed instrument, as well as the various African drums, have, over the years, replaced the Arabic, Oriental and Western instruments.

To provide further musical variety, the group uses contrasting tones and pitches singing in unison and responding antiphonally with the soloist carrying the greater burden of ensuring the highest possible level of musical authenticity and improvisation. Tonal, harmonic and rhythmic organization and planning is displayed in the whole performance and to ensure a well coordinated product, word choice and voice variation is made to conform to the over-all basic pattern. The introductory note or pitch is often made using a key board or a harmonium before singing begins. When the right voice level is established, the lead vocalist and the ensemble enter into song. A different mood is set for each song reflecting the tone of the thematic discourse and the occasion of the performance. Some songs are open-ended, giving the soloist unlimited freedom to improvise items, as shown in Chapter 6, while some adopt very rigid or closed formula. But, all in all, the compositions are well-rounded, self contained entities, or "organic serials", as one critic describes them. (17)

The harmonic structure of the songs becomes complex as the singing unwinds and dissonance is alternated with consonance. The emotional tension unleashed by the song builds up to the highest and the loudest point of verbal and instrumental intensity, a kind of climax. This point is marked by the strongest playing of the rhythm in conjunction with harmony and melody blending. Rhythm playing heightens the tension

by its intensity as well as its straying from the regular down-beat until it attains a higher versatility and becomes unpredictable in the mind of the listener. Most Swahili taarab composers and players are “primitive”(18), in the sense that they have received no formal schooling or training in the art of composition. They, therefore, do not regard climax building as important in taarab music, whose soul, as pointed out above, is the words and not the musicality of the song. The anticlimax of a song as well as the ending come in a variety of styles, although, mostly, it is through the mutual consent between the lead vocalist and the rest of the performers. In other cases, the end is signaled by lowering of voices and the volume or loudness of the instruments following a cue by the leader.

Although the singing of Swahili taarab resembles ordinary human speech, it is not wholly akin to it and it has its own unique drama. It is not easy to define the abstract tonal units or the relationship between the attitude of the composer toward the song or the attitude of the audience toward the performers. It is not, for instance correct to assume that the audience only cheers when it is happy with the words of a song or the style of the entire performance. It may applaud because of the decor, the dress, the pose, the manner of speech or the mannerisms of one or more artists in the group and other factors unrelated to the performance itself. It is, however, a fact that the performance of Swahili taarab, compared to other kinds of dances in the Swahili tradition, is very rigid and offers very little room for interpersonal interaction between the artists and their audience.

The success of a Swahili taarab song, as intimated in the introductory chapter, lies in the work and genius of many artists who often work separately, including the composer, the musician who arranges the words musically and the artists who sing out the song with or without instruments. In addition to the composer's ability to use the Swahili language to convey a message, the success of the process requires the skill to

imaginatively and creatively carry the world of meaning abstracted in the song and convey it to an audience in an engaging and satisfying discourse.

2:4 Contemporary Situation

It has been clearly indicated that modern or contemporary Swahili taarab is a kind of a neo-traditional music form, that is, music that is essentially African in content, but which often uses foreign instruments and tunes (19). In this section, the prevailing situation with regard to the performance and the status of this music is briefly discussed with a view to highlighting the general direction or trend that the art-form is taking and the future prospects for its development.

The important social role that the Swahili taarab plays in the Swahili and Kenyan community has already been mentioned briefly. Due to the popularization and commercialization of Swahili music following the introduction of the recording industry in Kenya in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, taarab music has gained a foothold in the lives of many non-Swahili communities throughout Kenya. It no longer carries the tag of traditional Swahili music but, like all other oral materials in the language, it has been appropriated by a large segment of the Kenyan population. A random survey by this writer has demonstrated that Swahili taarab songs are becoming increasingly popular with non-Swahili groups widely distributed as far up-country as the Kisii, Luhyia, Luo and Kamba. Music stores selling Swahili taarab songs are to be found throughout the country, which means the audience for these songs outside the confines of the Swahililand is growing bigger.

Presently, there are many taarab groups in the Swahili coastal towns of Mombasa, Lamu, Malindi, Pate and Siu. In addition, there are other relatively unknown, but active Swahili taarab groups in Nairobi, Machakos and other up-country centers. Among these groups, the best known are those started in the early 1960s or before, which have dominated the Kenyan taarab scene ever since. It is such groups

that have taken the lead in recording their songs on discs and, in the last decade or so, on cassette tapes for mass commercial circulation.(20) Songs by these groups are aired very frequently on the national radio and, occasionally, on the television. The following are the main recording Swahili taarab groups in Kenya that are based in

Mombasa:

- (1) Maulidi Juma Musical Party
- (2) Zein Labdin Party
- (3) Malika Asha
- (4) Johar Orchestra
- (5) Juma Bhalo Party
- (6) Kadara Group
- (7) Ali Mkali Group
- (8) Munir Party
- (9) Zuhura Musical Party
- (10) Ahamad Bakar
- (11) Athman Hamza
- (12) Abu Omar
- (13) Chakacha Bena
- (14) Matano Juma

All the groups listed above, except Johar Orchestra, bear the name of the founder who is, in most cases, the leader of the group. There are other earlier groups such as Nyota or Lulu which were not named after their leaders. Only 2 of the 14 groups listed above are led by women artists, that is, Malika Asha and Zuhura, but a number of the groups include at least one woman singer. This is in sharp contrast to the composition of the main Tanzanian Swahili taarab bands most of which consist of women in the line-up, although, even in the latter case, male leadership still dominates. The leading Mombasa taarab groups are Maulidi, Matano, Juma Bhalo and Zein. The

most prominent Tanzanian taarab bands include Egyptian Musical Club, the oldest group on the mainland founded in the 1950s, Jeshi La Kujenga Taifa (J.K.T.), Al-Watan Orchestra, and Magereza, all based in Dar es Salaam. On the island of Zanzibar, there are only two main groups, which include Akhwani Nadi Swafaa, (also known as Malindi), possibly the oldest Swahili taarab band on the East African scene, and also the Cultural Orchestra. These two groups have been bitter rivals throughout their history.(21) There are many other taarab groups in various towns on the mainland, some of which are no longer very active such as Shababi or Young Novelty, as well as some old and well-established ones like the Tanga-based Lucky Star (later named, Black Star) and many more.

Taarab songs from Zanzibar, Tanga and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania are sold and broadcast in Kenya from time to time, although the survey done during this study showed no real competition between Tanzanian and Kenyan taarab songs in the market or in the media. An on the spot check done by this writer in the leading music stores in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar showed that Kenyan taarab songs sell widely in the Tanzanian market.

As will be discussed later in more detail, Swahili taarab songs have assumed a great political role in the last decade or so. A number of Kenyan politicians have been using some local taarab groups to compose and sing songs for them to help them endear themselves to the voters or to fight their perceived political foes.(22) In addition, groups from neighboring Tanzania have been visiting Kenya at the invitation of the same leaders to "popularize certain viewpoints of the politicians and to invigorate the local political climate". (23) For instance, after the installation of President Ali Hassan Mwinyi of Tanzania, many Tanzanian Swahili taarab groups, especially from the president's home island of Zanzibar, toured Kenyan towns in 1987 and 1988 at the invitation of the Mombasa district Kenya African National Union (K.A.N.U.) chairman, Sheriff Nassir. They sang many political lyrics in praise of the new era of

peace and harmony that, they claimed, was ushered in by the rule of President Mwinyi and President Moi.(24)

Similarly, during the official presidential opening of the Mombasa' K.A.N.U. headquarters and the second installation of President Moi in 1988, local Kenyan and foreign Swahili taarab singers teamed up to entertain the guests as well as the huge gathering of Kenyans during the ceremony which was broadcast live by Kenyan media and the international press. According to one reporter, many coastal and other Kenyan political leaders have come to recognize that, "taarab music with nationalistic poetry exerts an exceptional influencing power over Swahili speaking and other communities and, it is, indeed, an intrinsic instrument for spreading public education pertaining to political and religious affairs of the people". (25) One can say that the frequent visits of Tanzanian groups to Kenya such as Magereza, Culture, Nadi Ikhwani Swafaa, Jeshi La Kujenga Taifa (JKT), and others has had a very positive impact on the Kenyan taarab music, in general, and has encouraged Kenyans to aim at improving their skill in the art. This fact was confirmed by the above observer when he stated, "There is an urgent need for Kenya to compete on equal footing with her neighbors in the field of writing good and deeply moving nationalistic poems". (26)

The role of the media in promoting Swahili taarab deserves a brief comment here. Since independence, the Kenya Broadcasting Cooperation (KBC), formerly called the Voice of Kenya, has featured a weekly one hour radio program of Swahili taarab music on the Kiswahili national service on which songs by various artists are played and even commented on. The program is very popular and has been produced by one or the other of the many Swahili women announcers at the Voice of Kenya. (27) No regular taarab feature program exists presently on the KBC television, although taarab songs by different groups are shown occasionally. However, over the last 10 years or so, many regular and new subscribers to the various greetings and other request programs on KBC radio have shown keen interest in Swahili taarab songs. A

random check carried out by this writer for a period of three years (1985-1988) on the frequency of the airing of taarab songs on the national service station, revealed that for a typical week, out of an average of the daily requests and other features totaling about 400 songs, about 20 songs (5%) would be taarab. This average had risen to about 30 songs (7.5%) in 1990. By contrast, the Zanzibar radio (Sauti Ya Unguja) and television together with Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam, have devoted four times as much air time to Swahili taarab as Kenya.

The print media seems to have done slightly better in promoting not just Swahili taarab songs but Swahili poetry as a whole. For instance, the leading Tanzanian national newspapers such as Daily News, Mzalendo, Uhuru, and Kiongozi, frequently carry articles on taarab and even the texts of new taarab songs. But only one of the leading two Kenyan Swahili newspapers, Taifa Leo, carries a full page weekly column on Swahili poetry, in which, from time to time, a taarab song text may appear. It is rare to find any analytical or news article on taarab in the English press which enjoys a wider circulation in comparison to the Swahili press, especially in Kenya.

This state of affairs does not mean that the Kenyan mass media ignores oral African materials such as Swahili taarab songs. It simply is a reflection of the fact that there is no coherent national cultural policy in the country and the state takes little interest in the promotion and development of such oral materials as taarab. The official policy on information and broadcasting is not to find out what the Kenyans want to learn or what kind of information is newsworthy, but to tell them what the officials think or consider to be desirable news. This fact is well illustrated by the caliber of "news" carried by the government-controlled media. As one observer stated: "The daily digests of news cover speeches by leaders, propaganda trends including subversion and incitement to revolt." (28) But, despite, the low-key support that Swahili taarab has received from the establishment, its future seems bright because "It

has a great role to play in nation-building and entertainment and it has recently been extremely popularized even in the rural centers ." (29)

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Endnotes

- 1 Maalim Shaghafu, Personal Communication with Maalim Saghaff, a prominent Mombasa Swahili poet, musician and cultural critic, on July 23, 1991, at Mji Wa Kale, Mombasa. and also, R. Reusch, "How the Swahili People Came into Being", Tanganyika Notes and Records, (Dar es Salaam: Government of Tanganyika Protectorate, No. 34, 1953), 20-27.
- 2 S.S. Saleh, "Nyimbo za Taarabu Unguja" Lugha Yetu (Dar es Salaam: Institute of Swahili Research, vol. 37, December 1980), 35.
- 3 Jan Knappert, An Anthology of Swahili Love Poetry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972,) 1-10.
- 4 This writer witnessed in person as two Mombasa Swahili taarab groups who had been invited to participate in a world cultural festival in Germany, in August 1991, practised some of their songs using copyrighted music recorded from some Indian films. They used the style of instrumentation and tunes to fit in their Swahili lyrics.
- 5 J.W.T. Allen. Tendi (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1971,) 41.
- 6 Allan W. Boyd, "The Music of the Swahili of Lamu, Kenya". Bulletin of Folk Ways Records, 1986), 2.
- 7 Ulli Beier, (ed.), Modern Poetry from Africa, (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1963), 2.
- 8 Jan Knappert, "Swahili Taarab Songs" Afrika Und Band, LX, (1977), 1.
- 9 Ibid, p. 117.
- 10 Jan Knappert, A Choice of Flowers (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1967), 8.
- 11 For instance, the 1990 Kenya National Award for the best Music Performing and Recording Artist went to the Mombasa Swahili taarab singer and composer, Maulidi Juma Iha, who was among the artists interviewed by this writer in July 1991, in Mombasa, Kenya.
- 12 Although the writing of Swahili taarab songs before they are sung is common today, very few singers combine the skills of composing and singing, but, there are some notable exceptions to this rule, like the Dar es Salaam -based Abasi Mzee, and Mombasa's Maulidi Juma, Juma Bhalo and Ali Mkali, who compose and sing all their songs, while famous poets like Ahamd Sheikh Nabahan, Zena Mahamoud Fadhil and Ahamad Nassir Juma only compose verse for others to sing.
- 13 Jan Knappert, op. cit. p. 120.
- 14 For instance, in July 1986, this writer, with another male colleague, was barred from such an exclusive wedding reception featuring taarab dance in Mombasa, which was strictly for women only.

- 15 A good example to back up this assertion is the fact that in mid 1970s, Bibi Shakila, a famous taarab woman singer, recorded a Christian tune entitled, "Amri Kumi Za Mungu", (Ten Commandments of God) in collaboration with a Christian Choir group. The song became an immediate success because its style appealed to a wide national audience.
16. For discussion on instruments of Swahili taarab, see, Jan Knappert, Poetry in Swahili and Other African Languages, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 1-10.
- 17 Vida Chenoweth, "Music as Discourse", Ruth M. Brand (ed.), Word, (New York, International Linguistics Association, (Vol. 37., No. 1/2, 1985), 136.
- 18 Ibid. p. 137.
- 19 Washington Ormondi, "Is Communication Through Music on the Decline in Modern African Society?" A paper presented at the 3rd Conference on Communication in a Multi-Lingual Region, Nairobi, 1976, pp. 1-12.
- 20 Ibid. p. 6.
21. Personal Communication with Abasi Mzee, August 19, 1991, at Kariakor, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- 22 Personal Communication with Bibi Zuhura Swaleh July 20, and Maulidi Juma Iha, July 21, 1991, at Mombasa, Kenya. Both confessed that they had been approached many times by prominent local and national political leaders to compose songs on special dictated themes for the leader's personal political purposes.
- 23 Faraji Dumila, The Nyayo Decade, Vol.1 (Nairobi, 1989), 36.
- 24 The common Kenya-Tanzania border was closed between 1978 and 1984 due to political differences between the two states.
- 25 Faraji Dumila, op. cit.
- 26 Ibid. p. 37.
- 27 It is an interesting fact that mostly, it is the women radio producers at the Kenya Broadcasting Co-operation radio, such as Aisha Mohamed, Amina Faki, Hadija Ali, Mary Chelagat and Lena Kitheka who have been at the forefront in the promotion of Swahili taarab music via radio.
- 28 Robert L. Collision, World Bibliographical Series, (Oxford: Clio Press, vol. 1982), 110.
- 29 Personal Communication with Maulidi Juma Iha, see note (22), above.

CHAPTER 3

Style and Language Use in Contemporary Kenyan Swahili Taarab Songs

3:1 Introduction

Having introduced the Swahili taarab songs in the first chapter and traced its origin, growth and spread over the Tanzanian and Kenyan coast and its performance in the second chapter, this chapter explores the nature of the composition of the songs at the textual or literary level. The introductory section deals with the overall nature of the form and content of the songs as an artistic composition while the subsequent sections give a detailed analysis of the style and grammar of the songs in general. It is interesting to study swahili taarab songs today.

The tools of stylistics are often used in the study of written or oral literary texts such as Swahili taarab songs. These tools may be drawn from either linguistic theory or literary criticism and frequently, they come from both disciplines. In a study of this nature, the over-all aim is to understand the extent of the communicative power of the form or text under study and how diction and other artistic devices are employed to enhance that power. This chapter deals with this problem and adopts the multi-directional perspective which incorporates linguistic and literary approaches in an attempt to understand the form and style in the contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs.

The interpretive procedures for the analysis of an oral form such as the Swahili taarab are not easy to formulate. This is especially so because the oral materials often present forms whose nature and function and meaning cannot be wholly accounted for by literary or linguistic theory. Even though Choamsky (1965) notes that any utterance generated by the rules of the grammar of a given language is, as a rule, interpretable by the native speakers of that language, it is obvious that this is more applicable to formal usage of language than idiomatic, or metaphoric usage. The following section deals with some of the specific factors that complicate meaning in oral forms such as the taarab.

3:2 Problems of Language Use and Meaning in the Swahili taarab songs

The deeply allusive, figurative and metaphorical nature of the language used by Swahili poets, including taarab composers, makes it difficult to grasp the whole range of possible meaning intended by the artist. Thus, when a Swahili taarab singer sings the following song, it is impossible to account for all possible references made by the song text by relying entirely on the grammatical rules of standard Swahili:

Naona mwajisumbuwa, moyo wangu u shuwari
 Ni vishindo vya mashuwa, havishutuwi bahari
 (Mohamed Hamis Juma Bhalo, Vishindo vya Mashuwa).

(I think you are wasting your time, my heart is at rest
 It is the threats of a boat, which cannot shake the sea.) (1)

The allusive nature and the proverbial usage of language here is very clear. The complexity of the utterance is intensified not just by the singer's first person narrative style and the personification of the sea and the boat, but also by the fact that his imaginary adversary is only alluded to and not singled out. This means that it is not possible to tell whether the audience is one person or many, even though plurality is implied in the Swahili original. These are just some of the difficulties a critic of oral literary forms in African or other languages has to grapple with.

Another reason for adopting a literary and linguistic theoretical approach in studying creative literature is that creative artists are not always duty-bound to observe formal grammatical rules in creating their art forms. The forms so created, as will be shown later, cannot be accounted for merely by using formal grammatical rules, but they are best described in literary and fictional language. The figurative nature of language in an oral form such as the Swahili taarab song is not to be seen in isolation from other similar forms in the entire African oral tradition. As Dundes notes, "African oral literature provides an important social outlet for effective symbolic communication." (2) This symbolic language often presents an obstacle in the process of decoding the user's intended meanings especially if the interpreter comes from outside the culture in question.

Thirdly, in this kind of analysis, it is useful to distinguish between two main types of meaning: grammatical and contextual, or as they are often referred to, "signification" and "value" meanings. Specialized usages invented by poets as well as other creative literary artists may end up transporting their figurative or metaphorical meaning into the realm of formal lexicon. Many examples of this fact will be shown from the text of a number of contemporary Swahili taarab songs in this discussion. But, as many critics have pointed out, this is an important characteristic of not just Swahili oral poetry and songs, but also of oral literary forms composed in other African languages. Most traditional African poetic forms like the Swahili taarab Songs, are based on a fund of sociocultural and linguistic experience shared between the artist and the audience.

However, looked at as a specialized medium of artistic communication at the social level, Swahili taarab songs appear to be dissociated from the immediate social context and immersed in a mini-cosmology of their own. This means that the taarab artist fashions an artistic technique to communicate a hidden idea, using unconventional language forms (poetic language) under special circumstances. Thus, the theme, content, the medium and the code (linguistic apparatus) are specially chosen and designed for communication within the poetic register which differs significantly from ordinary every day conversation. This specialized nature of the form does not, however, cut it completely from the realm of social meaning of the Swahili community because the artists have to involve the people as the recipients of the content communicated via the instrument of the songs. Swahili taarab songs, therefore, still maintain their popular, instant appeal because, as Okpewho states, "Oral poetry achieves its force not only at the hands of the performer. Part of this forcefulness comes from the participation of the various persons (present at the scene of the performance) and the creative act taking place."(3) Even though taarab audiences do not actively dance to the songs, they, nevertheless, get involved so much that they often join in the choral singing and other verbal responses. Not only do Swahili taarab poets try to make their songs appeal to their immediate community, they also do their best to use the popular idiom, as will be shown later.(4)

To the extent that Swahili taarab songs are written in the national language of Kenya, Kiswahili, and that they are a popular form of entertainment, it can be said to help bring together Kenyans from many varied language groups and so, help minimize their social differences. As Ephraim Kezilahabi states, literature in mass languages like Kiswahili helps bridge the communication gap between the privileged few, who have received formal education in foreign languages and the masses.(5) Therefore, as pointed out in the second chapter on the performance of Swahili taarab, the decoding of the meaning of these songs will be incomplete without taking into consideration their actual social context.

Swahili taarab songs are largely polemic or topical, that is, they are composed in response to daily events. The forms referred to here are the songs and also some other type of amorous (unmetered) verse. There are two major types of songs in the Swahili tradition: the classical form which was normally written down in regular lines before being sung or recited, and the form in irregular lines and unequal syllables. Although the Swahili taarab songs belong to the first type, there are a few examples of the second category. Examples of both are cited as data in the collections by European critics such as Dr. Carl Velten, W.E. Taylor, Alice Werner, H.E. Lampert, C. Sacleux and E. Dammann.(6)

Obviously, it is impossible to deal with style and content separately in a literary form like Swahili taarab song. The message in the song is affected by, and affects the form and structure in which it is communicated. For example, diction, meter balancing, rhyming and line-division often dictate the type of sounds and, to some extent, the words the composer may use (Anyidoho 1982). On the other hand, the nature, importance, and urgency of the issue the artist would like to deal with may determine, to some extent, the form of poetic composition to be employed. As will be argued later in this discussion, some topical issues of the day among the Swahili render themselves more easily communicable using the short forms like quatrain, song, serenade, or lyrics and other literary compositions.

But, much as the poet may wish to camouflage the aspect of social reality he or she has chosen to highlight in a song, the choice of imagery and the suggested method of viewing it must conform to socially sanctioned and shared norms. For instance, in the following verse, the composer uses a familiar Swahili metaphor to communicate his own observed reality without explicitly giving away the moral he wants to deliver :

Kuna joka la mdimu, mdimuni limetanda
Haja yake siyo ndimu, latisha wenye kutunda
(Matano Juma, Joka La Mdimu)

(There is a lemon tree snake, coiled up the lemon-tree
Its aim is not lemon, it is to scare the pluckers)

The metaphor of the "lemon tree snake" in the above verse makes it possible for the hearer to interpret it in various ways. For instance, it could refer to the general "a dog-in-the-manger" mentality or a specific type of a self-centered individual. This aspect of Swahili songs and poetry, in general, underlines the futility of an attempt to interpret its meaning in terms of the total sum of the words of the text or simply from a single point of view. It is a testimony to the thematic and linguistic complexity of the songs.

In explicating the Swahili taarab songs, therefore, the study takes into consideration the fact that tying up the meaning in the songs with their compositional techniques is the basis of the sound and total appreciation of the form. In stressing this fact, David Dorsey states: "Poetry is also a linguistic exploration matching sound with sense, thought with technique, idea with ideogram. Appreciation of poetry is part and parcel of the technical analysis of a work of art. A knowledge of critical techniques subsumes presence of a critical plan. Therefore, adequate attention should be given to discussion about style image, diction, tone, versification and other poetic devices which make up poetry and which advance its comprehension and appreciation."(7)

The coherence and consistence of unity between language choice, technique and theme in Swahili taarab songs is an indication of the three distinctive characteristics of a literary creative form outlined by Kofi Anyidoho (1982) in an article that examines the relationship between the artist (singer or writer) and the oral traditional material. The main

characteristics marking this relationship include the biographical evidence, the internal evidence, and the corroborative evidence of the material. The first property indicates the level of direct personal contact the author has with the traditional lore being used while the second refers to the extent of his or her familiarity with that lore. The last characteristic refers to the fact that the idiom of expression chosen must bear independent traditional life in terms of style and technique.

In this analysis, textual and contextual meaning are intertwined so that while some measure of the textual meaning could be paraphrased, the full range of thoughts, feelings and attitudes invoked is often not discernible except by a thorough examination of the context of use. The songs are a form of temporal art in which the total meaning is delivered through a series of complementary or contradictory experiences carried in the various elements and techniques including metaphor, imagery, sound effects and so on. In this discussion, both the stanza and the whole song text are variably treated as the basic unit of analysis. The development of the text is traced stage by stage and the song is treated as an integral whole which has various divisions or stanzas. In the physical division of the text, various grammatical and literary poetic tools at the disposal of the contemporary Swahili taarab artist are examined, proceeding from a particularistic position to a generalization of the use of a given technique in the genre.

Apart from the complexity of meaning, there are other theoretical and practical problems related to the study of an oral poetic form like the Swahili taarab song. These have to do with the idea, motif or motifs which distinguish the form from other genres, relationship between dialect, idiolect and the over-all style of the text. (8). While some of the phonological, morphological and syntactic features in the language of the text may be predetermined by the dialect being used, for instance, Kiamu or Kimvita, the artist's idiolect is a product of the personal inclination toward the use of certain features more than others. For instance, a certain composer may favor the use of certain idioms, images, metaphors, alliterative sounds, or even archaic vocabulary. This inclination therefore gives rise to that artist's personal style which is governed by, among other factors, the type of

song and the function it is assigned. It is the sum total of these personal styles that constitute the distinguishable overarching style of the Swahili taarab song as a form.

However, it is obvious that these "personalized usages" or styles are based on the corpus of the traditional poetic norms of Swahili versification, as advocated and described by among others, Kaluta Amri Abedi in his classical study, Sheria Za Kutunga Mashairi, published in 1954. The adherence of the taarab form to such prosodic features and rules as meter balancing, rhymes and line divisions is a clear indication of the extent of the Swahilization of the form.

Another important problem is the degree of stylistic diversity and homogeneity between the sample of texts being analyzed which is necessary to enable the analyst to make confident generalizations on the stylistic composition of the whole form. If style is here understood to comprise the choice of words and the certain manner of arranging the words in conformity to or deviation from the mainstream or the "normal" style in the Swahili oral poetic tradition, then it will be argued that there has to be more conformity between the texts of the songs in order for them to be classified as belonging to the same taarab tradition. Therefore, a taarab artist's use of language and style is only a personally chosen alternative out of many possibilities available in the "standard" style in the tradition. Therefore, linguistic and poetic creativity seems to lie at the root of Swahili taarab and poetic composition as a whole.

A taarab artist's choice of certain literary and linguistic elements of style, has its freedoms as well as constraints. Although, as has been pointed out above, Swahili taarab songs are not always composed in strict compliance with standard Swahili grammatical rules and in most cases they are individualized and imaginative creations of the artists, their style of composition is still regulated by such pragmatic considerations as subject matter, form, channel and audience.

Since style and meaning in a verbal art like Swahili taarab songs is a complex product of the author's personal style and a number of other non textual factors, it is clear that the mere analysis of the style or diction in the songs cannot yield the fullest range of

meanings possible in a given text. The breaking down of the song text into allophones, phonemes, morphemes, phrases or lines in a song is done to gain access to grammatical, poetic, contextual, and sociocultural meanings. The general guide in deciphering meaning and its relationship to the style in these songs is based on the interpretation of the author's use of language in creating a given song text. This is important because in poetry, like all other forms of creative literature, language is employed for many varied reasons.

The complexity of style and meaning in the Swahili taarab song is aggravated not just by the economical and terse nature of the texts, but also by the poet's undeclared purpose in composing a given text. Very often, a poet may employ the song form to negate or assert a certain point of view but, the extent to which the poet succeeds in achieving the initial objective will depend on the ability of the interpreter to link the textual meaning to the authoral meaning, a monumental task, indeed. Additionally, the influence of the social environment on style and meaning of a verbal text such as a song is enormous. This is because the African oral tradition treats forms like the songs as a form of social speech event or utterance. As a result, in many traditional African societies, the solo poetic recitation, intonation, dramatization and choral singing have been institutionalized since time immemorial. The vocal nature of African music makes it even more lively in the linguistic medium. In other words, language becomes the soul of the songs and all other features are designed to enhance the ideas carried by the song because music is not just a form of entertainment but also communication. Language, therefore, gives Swahili taarab songs their distinctive features that characterize the style of the songs.

3:3 Style and Form in Swahili Taarab Songs

According to a number of modern Swahili literary critics, the form called wimbo (Plural: nyimbo) in the Swahili oral tradition can be understood in two major senses. (9) Firstly, wimbo refers to dance songs sung in various types of Swahili traditional celebrations. (10) The most important characteristic of this type of song is its lack of a systematic metric structure and internal rhymes. Although the rhythm of the songs may be

reflected in their syllabic organization, such songs often contain irregularities of rhyme or meter. For instance, the internal rhymes in the first two lines of the following verse are inconsistent:

Jogolo hana nyumba
 Kajenga barabarani
 Kajenga nyumba ya mawe
 Orofa ndani kwa ndani
 Hakuna manuware
 Ishindayo ya Landani
 Kwa yeyote sipumbai
 Fikira zako ni sana
 Silikuti silimai
 Wala silali hasona
 Nataraji walo hai
 Hawaachi kuonana

(Jogolo, has no house,
 He built on the road-side
 I built a stone-house
 With many storeys inside
 There is no submarine which is bigger
 Than the size of "Landani"
 No other lover can satisfy me
 I can get neither satisfaction nor rest
 I can not even sleep well
 I hope living people
 Can not avoid meeting)

(Nasor Khalifani, Personal Communication, Mombasa, July 20, 1986)

Additionally, the term wimbo (song) is also used to refer to the sub-genre of the oral Swahili poetic tradition. It is to this group that the contemporary Swahili taarab could be related. The most important difference between this type of poetic wimbo and the dance wimbo is that the former does not stylistically adhere to the dictates of the Swahili traditional poetic prosody like the latter does. Here is an example of the poetic Swahili wimbo in the three-line taarab form:

Kwa mwenginewe sitokwenda, hadhi nikakuvunjiya
 Kwani wewe nakupenda, kwa uzuri wa tabiya
 Daima nitakulinda, hadi mwisho wa dunia
 (Asha Simai, Nimetosheka)

(To another one I will not go, lest I degrade you
 Because I love you, for your good character
 For ever I will care for you, until the end of life)

According to a number of prominent Swahili poets and critics, traditional Swahili dance songs did not initially have any divisions to the line or vipande (singular, kipande) caesura nor was the line metered or the text divided into stanzas called beti (singular ubeti). The development of the form and style evolved through many historical stages. (11)

The various features found in the text of the songs today were introduced during these stages. The approximate order of the introduction of these elements was; the outer rhymes followed by the inner rhymes, meter-balancing stanzas, refrain lines and use of chorus refrains, in that order. However, while it is a well-known fact that oral African poetry, songs and proverbs were often rhymed, it is arguable whether meter balancing and complex rhyme schemes were essential in these forms in pre-literate times. It is, therefore, possible to conclude that since traditional Swahili songs were spontaneous poetic compositions which were rhymed but not in all cases metered, the taarab started not as a written poetic form but as an oral form which closely resembled similar compositions in the Swahili oral tradition.(12)

African oral songs and poetry relied on other verbal or oral devices like alliteration, onomatopoeia, and extra-linguistic factors for its communicative force rather than on textual features like metering or elaborate rhyming schemes. However, this is a subject which could best be investigated in a further study of the Swahili taarab form.

Even though the largest number of contemporary Swahili taarab songs are cast in the three-line structure, there are a number of songs in other structures like two and four lines. The following are examples of two-line stanza compositions:

Twambie maradhi yako, usisumbuwe waganga
Hutupi ukweli wako, wakaa ukitupanga

(Let us know your disease, do not bother doctors
You never tell us the truth, but you keep telling us lies)
(Maulidi Juma, Usisumbuwe Waganga)

Heko Mzee Kenyatta, rais mwema wa Kenya
Baba wetu mwokozi, kwa kazi uloifanya

Congratulations, beloved Mzee, the illustrious Kenya's president
Our deliverer, father, for the effort you made)

Whereas the lines of the stanza ("ubeti") remain quite regular throughout a song maintaining an equal number of lines or half lines, the chorus, quite often, takes a different structure. For instance, in the first example above, the first stanza serves also as the chorus. In the songs the chorus is a regular two-line stanza, very much like the other regular stanzas.

In this example however, the chorus or refrain is a single line which may or may not be repeated:

Utamu wake utamu, ajabu jama ajabu

(The sweat of it oh! the sweat, wonderful, oh! wonderful)

There are many taarab songs with the four-line structure which still retain the two-line refrain. Here is an example:

Kiberiti na petroli, iwapo umeviweka
Hivi vitu viwili, visije kukutanika
Kusalimika muhali, lazima pataripuka
Bora uvitenge mbali, hapo utasalimika

Iwapo umeviweka, vitu hivi hali yako
Ni muhali kusalimika, utazuka mripuko
(Said Mohamed, Kiberiti na Petroli)

A match and petrol-gas, if you have kept them
These two things should never come into contact
It is impossible to avoid it, an explosion will occur
It is better to separate them, then, you may be secure

(If you have kept them, these two things, your condition
It is impossible to avoid it, an explosion will occur)

There are songs with no refrains but which contain only main regular stanzas. Here is an example:

Kiwacha ulokihama, kwa hamaki na jeuri
Ukadhani kitakwama, wajenzi kutahayari
Ni bure zako tuhuma, imeshajengwa kwa ari
Leo uje kutazama, nyumba safi imejiri

Kwanza ulinihadaa nikakudhani mkweli
Sijasita kukuvaa, wala sijafanya siri
Nikawa nakukataa, nakataa nikikubali
Nikaiona dunia, mambo yalipodhihiri
(Ahmed Ally, Umezikanga Mbuyu)

(You forgot what you left, in an arrogant anger
 You thought it would get stuck and ashame the builders
 All your ill wishes are in vain, it has been built with devotion
 Come and see today, a good house has come into existence

First you cheated me, and I believed you were true
 I did not hesitate to believe you wholly, nor did I hide it
 Even when I refused, I refused, I refused halfheartedly
 I came to understand the world, when things began to happen)

By merely listening to a Swahili taarab song, it is almost impossible for one with no familiarity with or training in the Swahili poetic compositions to discern the arrangement of lines, rhyme schemes or measurement of meter. For example, a three-line song may consist of three whole lines with an internal rhyme, or three lines broken into six half-lines. In the following song, for instance, the text has three lines of 16 syllables each which have been divided into six short lines of eight syllables each. Some of the song texts obtained by the author which had already been written down by the poets had this arrangement.

Sitanyapa, sitanyapa
 Nikawapa waja kunema
 Kuogopa, kuogopa
 Aogopaye hapana
 Ni kutupa, ni kutupa
 Kumpa mtu hiyana
 (Nasoor Khalifani)

(I will not stalk, I will not stalk
 And give people something to talk about
 Fearing, fearing
 No one is afraid
 It is a waste, it is a waste
 Giving to a selfish person)

This style of short broken lines seems to be favored in other Swahili traditional dance songs like the chakacha, lelemama, Mkwajungoma, diriji.(14) Occasionally, one comes across a song which has both a two line first stanza serving as the refrain, and other stanzas having the regular three-line structure. In the flowing example, the refrain and the second stanza have two lines each while the third and the last stanza has three.

Karibia Ramadhani, mwezi mwema mtukufu
 Sote twakukaribisha, kwa moyo mkunjufu

Misikiti tusipite, na ibada tusiwate
 Na mema tuyatende, na maovu tusifwate

(4)		(8)
Ni uchungu	/	kungolewa jino zima
Walimwengu	/	wapita wakitusema
Mola wangu	/	nionee huruma.

(It is painful to have a healthy tooth out
Those gossips slander us
May God have mercy on me)

6	8
Pendo nyota njema,	wawili wakiridhia
Pendo huwandama,	mapenzi huwaingia
Hodari hushika tama,	pendo halimpi njia
Akakosa la kusema,	akaona pendo radhia

(Love is a lucky star, when two have agreed
Love sticks to them and goes inside them
Even the expert is astounded and overcome by love
He has no complaints but is satisfied by love)

There are a few more variations of balancing from the regular 8/8 scheme.

Although the exceptions to the 8/8 scheme are few, they are stylistically important because they indicate the poetic genius of the composing artist. For instance, the following is an example of a variation to the 8/8 rule in which the composer has divided the 16 syllables into three parts of 4/4/8. The division of the three segments is primarily to match the rugged rhythm of the lyric and is done by the skillful repetition of the first word. The dual internal rhymes further enhance the aesthetic value of the song. For example:

Menichenga, menichenga, kunitia papatiko
Nikizinga, nikizinga, uniwekee viteko
Si mjinga, si mjinga, toshwa na akili yako

(You have tricked me, you have tricked me
So when I turn, when I turn, you may scorn me
You are not a fool, you are not a fool, use your mind)

Sometimes, it seems as if the syllabic balancing is controlled or conditioned not just by the internal but also by the end-of line rhymes. For instance, in the following verse, the final words on each line can not be contracted without rendering them meaningless. The result is a second caesura that is longer than the first one. For example, while the first line in the following verse has 10/14 structure, the second line has 11/14):

Ingekuwa wanipenda sana, ungenipenda bado niko duniani 10/14
 Kwa nini wangoja uhai sina, uje unililie na mikono kitwani? 11/14
 (If you really loved me, you would do it when I am still alive
 Why wait till I am dead to cry for me with hands on your head?)

This may be taken as one of the very rare cases of a Swahili taarab song cast in the new form of blank verse (Mashairi guni) which the traditional school of Swahili poetry views as a perversion of Swahili prosody. (14) The rest of the song, and particularly the following verse, shows no sense of either rhyming or syllabic balancing:

Pendo mpende bado yuko hai	(11)
Pendo alopokee	(7)
Ukimpenda yuko kaburini	(11)
Umelitupa pendo lako hewani	(12)

(Love, love him (or her) when he (or she) is alive
 So that he (or she) may reciprocate
 If you love him (or her) when he (or she) is in the grave
 You have thrown your love in the air)

In the above lyric, there is no scheme of rhymes except the opportunistic use of ni in the end of the third and fourth lines. There are a number of Swahili taarab songs especially those from the Tanzanian tradition that use a different rhyme and syllabic balancing scheme for the verse and the refrain or chorus. The range of such variation is very wide and with many different traits. Here is an example,

Wahangaika, na kujitesa,	(5/5)
Unachotaka, kumbe si pesa	(5/5)
Kuadhirika, kwako si kosa	(5/5)

Utabaki hivyo hivyo, wakamatiya	(8/5)
Umekuwa mtu ovyo, usotuliya	"
Hivyo ndivyo uendavyo, ushazoweya	"

Kubadili ufanyavyo, ni ngumu njiya	"
Na utakavyo, takavyo, sikukuzuwiya	"
Kwa utendalo, suala, la kukwambiya	"

(You are worried and trouble yourself
 So all you want is money
 Your agony is due to your misdeeds)

You will remain just like that, restless
 You have become hopeless with worries
 That is your behavior, you are used to it
 To change your deeds is a difficult thing
 Whatever you like, do it, I have not prevented you
 Whatever you do, I have nothing to tell you)

In some songs, it is the chorus or refrain that shows more stylistic complexity than the verses or the stanzas. The refrain is an important feature of the Swahili taarab song which often exhibits such stylistic characteristics as use of varied syllabic numbers or repetition for emphasis for matching rhymes. For instance, in this refrain the two features are skillfully used:

Tulia utuwe, usitaharuki	(6/6)
Washikushituwe, hao manafiki	(6/6)
Mwana sidangane	6
Ni mimi na wewe	6
Sitaki mwengine	6

(Be still, do not be worried
Do not let them deceive you, those hypocrites
My darling, do not be confused
It is me and you
I do not want another one)

Some choruses use melodic sounds that become syllabic, as the following example shows:

Oh, huwezi, oh huwezi
Si mizizi, si mizizi
Hii ni bahati yangu

The melodic sound "oh" becomes syllabic in this chorus, so as to maintain the balancing at 6 syllables to the line. In this particular example, like in the previous one, there are no internal or terminal rhymes. Melodic sounds used in the Swahili taarab songs may vary from just a simple monosyllabic sound to the repetition of a phrase, like in this verse:

Lipi la ajabu, la kulaumiwa? (6/6)
Lipi la ajabu, la kulaumiwa? "
Lipi la ajabu, lipi la ajabu? "

(What is so surprising, that it has to be blamed?
What is so surprising, that it has to be blamed?
What is so surprising, what is so surprising?)

There are many examples of refrains using repetition and melodic sounds for balancing purpose which are cast in the regular 8/8 syllable scheme and other schemes. However, there are very few songs in this tradition in which the refrain has no syllabic balancing. In most cases, there is a strict observation of balancing. Here is a typical

example of regularity in balancing:

Yaua namna gani?	(8)
Yaua namna gani?	"
Bunduki bila risasi	"
Yaua namna gani?	"

(How does it kill?
How does it kill?
An unloaded gun
How does it kill?)

Certain choruses are stylistically so elaborate that through the use of a single refrain line call and response, the chorus can be prolonged by increasing improvised lines. In the following example, the chorus has been prolonged by feeding improvised lines (in broken lines) onto the refrain line "Yajenga nchi KANU". The members of the chorus sing out the opening line and then keep repeating it in response to the lead vocalist's improvised lines.

KANU eeh, leo KANU x 2 (Lead Vocal	(LV)
Yajenga nchi (chorus) (Chorus)	(C)
Rais wetu mpendwa	(LV)
Na makamu wa Rais	(C)
Mawaziri na wabunge	(LV)
Madiwani makonsella	(C)
Na jeshi letu la Kenya	(LV)
Na raia kwa jumla	(C)

(KANU eeh, today, KANU
Is building the nation
Our beloved President
And the Vice-President
Ministers and Members of Parliament
Civil leaders and Councilors
And the Kenya Armed Forces
And the citizens, in general)

The improvisations (represented by broken lines) consist of words that relate in meaning to the theme of the song, that is, KANU's leadership role in building the nation of Kenya.

In short, although Swahili taarab songs use regular syllabic measurements, the form often portrays a wide variety of styles in meter balancing, but as a rule, there is a high degree of adherence to the dictates of traditional prosody with regard to the use of this device. This is one of the most important characteristics of form in Swahili taarab as a sub-genre of oral poetic tradition. While a form like wimbo (non-poetic song) may or may not be syllabically balanced, the taarab is strictly balanced.

The other prominent prosodic property of Swahili taarab is the rhyming scheme. The most widely used scheme is the ab, ab, ab structure, in which the internal rhyme a and the end-of-line rhyme b respectively are identical in all the lines in a stanza. (15) That is to say, the internal rhymes resemble among themselves and the outer rhymes too. Here is an example:

Hupenda kuzieleza, hekaya zenye mithali
Na huba za kupendeza, muhibu kumfadhili
Hukaa nikayawaza, matendo yenye ukweli

The above flowing scheme with a similar internal and a similar outer rhyme is the most widely used and this is probably due to the fact that the regularity of the rhymes aids memory and retention. This is very important when it is considered that the songs are often very long and have to be committed to memory and recalled spontaneously for oral performance. Often the composer varies the ab, ab, ab scheme slightly in order to use a range of rhymes for linguistic and musical flavor, but such a variation is normally done on the stanza while retaining the ab, ab, ab arrangement, like in the following song:

Nikweleze, ili upate kufahamu
Nitosheleze, moyo uishe hamu
Mpeleleze, mwida akitabasamu

Aashikika ndege wangu mzuri
Anawirika, mithili yake hariri
Akitamka, utapenda akariri

Kama malaika, umbo lilo bora
Akiamka, umuone sura
Amemetuka, kama lulu mandhura

The variation of the internal rhyme scheme from ze to ka and the end of line rhyme from mu, ri and ra does not at all alter the basic ab, ab, ab scheme.

In most cases the rhymes in the stanza differ from those in the refrain like in this song:

Nasema yangu maneno, mpate sikia nyote
Na wala sio mfano, kupendeka kotekote
Dawa ya meno ni meno, akung'ataye, mng'ate

Mengi usiyatumai, nakweleza mbayana
Asoshiba hukinai, njaa humuuma sana

Often, it is essential to differentiate between melody words that may be repeated from the real rhymes. For instance, in the following verse, the word (moyo) is used as a melody sound and therefore, can be easily confused with the rhymes which are ri in the inside and ngu at the end of line

Moyo wangu sikhasiri, (moyo), na wala sione uchungu (moyo)
Wala usiyafikiri, (moyo), kwani ndio kilimwengu (moyo)

Kila mwenye kusubiri, (moyo), atapata lake fungu (moyo)
In many songs with 4-line compositions, the rhyme scheme may change to a,b,a,b,a,b, like in the following verse:

Twambie maradhi yako
Usisumbuwe waganga
Hutupi ukweli wako
Wakaa ukitupanga

However, there are very few examples of songs with the scheme a, b, c whereby each line contains three different rhymes, like in the following verse:-

Nashika zumari, niivuzie, kusikilika
Ilie uzuri, asikiae, apate cheka
Na alo jeuri, asingilie, ataghurika
Awe na nadhari, asijitie, choo chanuka

In this last example, there are three rhymes marking the end of each "kipande" (caesura) : ri, e, and ka. In the case where the last line is repeated throughout the song, the scheme could become aa, aa, aa, aa or aa, aa, aa, in a 4-line and 3-line text, respectively. This seems to be happening in this 4 line song, the first two stanzas of which are quoted below:

Halikai kikapuni, litapasukia ndani
Likipasukia ndani, kikapu hutakitamani
Utajuta moyoni, ulichukua la nini
Papai bovu jamani, atakayekula ni nani?

Ulikutapo shambani, linavutia mtini
 Rangi yake ya majani, utazidi kutamani
 Lakini si la thamani, limeharibika ndani
 Papai bovu jamani, atakayekula ni nani?

The scheme of rhymes like the use of syllabic balancing in the Swahili taarab seems to be different from that of other Swahili poetic forms like the "shairi" (quatrain). In the latter form, for instance, the scheme that seems to be favored is the ab, ab, ab, and bx in which the terminal rhyme x is the same throughout the verse. (16) However, this arrangement may be varied from one stanza to another and assume other structures. One of the most common variation is the ab, ab, ab, ba, where the terminal rhyme resembles the internal rhymes. Here are some examples of poems with both of these schemes:

Kumbifu lambile witi, kimbelebele waume
 Kiumbe mwanzo hajuti, majuto huja kinyume
 Mvundati ni mwanati, mgeni mzo mpime
 Yu utukuuni mgwame, hauza kapu kwa miyaa
 (ab, ab, ab, bx)

Barazani naingia, kesi kukata rufani
 Hukumu sikuridhia, macho kuvaa miwani
 Khamis nakuchagua, hakimu toa maoni
 Miwani mali ya nani, baina macho na pug?
 (ab, ab, ab,ba)

Two points are worth noting as far as the use of rhymes in the Swahili taarab songs is concerned. The first is that these rhymes are used to aid memory and also to enrich the aesthetic accomplishment of the text as a work of art. Secondly, the use of rhymes is an indication of artistic expression among the Swahili. This aspect of the language and literature is reflected not just in oral poetry, but also in forms like proverbs, riddles and idioms.

The other important feature of the style in Swahili taarab songs is alliteration which is a very useful poetic device employed by taarab artists in an effort to create certain desired audio effects in the hearer's mind. In doing this, the composer always has a clear idea of the effect he or she aims at achieving and so carefully selects appropriate sounds to heighten the intended effect. It is useful to state that the use of sound effects in verbal art

is a skill that helps the artist to capture and sustain the attention and emotional involvement of the audience to the performance in the case of verbal arts such as the taarab. For instance, the use of hard-hitting, rough-sounding, and difficult-to-pronounce alliterative sounds could allude to a feeling of anger, disgust, dislike, or disappointment envisaged by the composer. Consequently, the use of soft, soothing, quiet and soft-sounding musical sounds may be a pointer to the poet's delight. The first type of sounds is called alliteration while the second one is known as onomatopoeia. Both techniques are used in the Swahili taarab songs to enliven their musical and poetic quality.

In the following stanza, for instance, the alliterative use of e, le, and k, is prominent and tends to give the impression of solitude and deep personal spiritual reflection in the lyric, which is actually a kind of soliloquy in which the poet holds a dialogue with his heart, imploring it to have more patience, perseverance and restraint in worldly matters. The vowel sounds are equally soft and so is the voiceless velar sound /k/. The singer says:

Moyo wangu pole, kwa hayo yalokufika
Usipige makele, ovyo ovyo kupayuka
Kwako hayawi milele, na yeye yatamfika

(My heart, receive my sympathy for all that befell you
Do not make noises, and talk carelessly
This can not be with you for ever, it will happen to somebody else too)

In the example below, the poet indicates his anger and disappointment for being robbed of his wife by a rich and powerful rival, just because he is powerless and poor. The alliterative use of terse sounds like /l/ /k/, helps to create a melancholic mood which in turn alludes to the poet's sad experience.

Bilhaki wa bilhaki, niamuani nenende
Nijile kuwashitaki, ninyeng'enywe yangu konde
Nyinyi mna lakilaki, mimi ni chichi kipande
Waungwana msitende, na watenda waseni
(Maalim Hassan Mbega: Verbal Communication: Nairobi: 1986)

(You, the just, who give justice, judge me so I can go my way
I come to seek justice from you, having been robbed of my plot
of land

You have so much, but I have only this tiny piece
Gentlemen, do not do evil, and the evil doers you should avoid)

In the following example, the singer uses alliteration of /k/ and /p/ sounds to give the song a sense of urgency and finality. This type of alliteration is used here to enhance the sense of disgust the poet has for his lover and to reinforce his resolve to walk out on her rather than keep begging her. The use of /p/ here is very ideophonic alluding to the sound of the fall of foot-steps while walking:

Sitanyapa, sitanyapa,
Nikawapa waja kunena
Kuogopa kuogopa
Aogopaye hapana
Ni kutupa ni kutupa
Kumpa mtu hiyana

Si kukopa si kukopa
Wala si kuazimana
Kama kupa, kama kupa
Sitaki kubandukana
Takulipa, takulipa
Imebaki danganyana

Kwenda kapa, kwenda kapa
Ndugu, ah! zindukana
Nimehepa nemehepa
Situmai kukutana
Ya mfupa ya mfupa
Nyama sitaguguna

(I will not stalk, I will not stalk
So as to give people something to talk about
Fearing, fearing
No one is fearful
It is a waste, it is a waste
To give to a selfish person

It is not borrowing, it is not borrowing
Neither is it being loaned anything
But giving, but giving
I do not want to give what I have
I will pay you, I will pay you
Has turned into telling of lies

Trotting and trotting
Ah! my sister, wake up
I am gone, I am gone
I do not hope to meet you again
A bony piece, a bony piece
I will not eat a bony piece of meat)

Alliterative repetition of sounds seems to be a more prominent feature of Swahili classical poetry than contemporary taarab songs. The best example of the extensive use of this device is the poetry of the legendary classical Kenya Swahili poet, Muyaka bin Haji (1776-1840). In using repetition, Muyaka took great care in choosing and arranging his words, rhymes, and lines. His skill of combining sounds as a poetic technique seems to surpass that of his contemporaries and successors. (17) These two verses by the poet will suffice to illustrate this fact. The poet does not just expertly weave metaphorical and literal usage of individual words, but he also creatively derives new words embedded in the last words of each line and uses them to start the following line. The repetition of such sounds as /i/, /a/, /si/, /l/, is, indeed, very impressive in this verse:

Sili hikumbuka sili, sili tapishi hamiza
 Hambiza kama subili, mtima hagagamiza
 Gagamiza sihimili, moyo wangu hawezeza
 K'aki zake zingaoza, katu namba havisili
 (Muyaka in Abdulaziz 1776-1840)

In the above verse, the deliberate repetition of the voiceless velar fricative /s/ and voiceless lateral glide /l/ that catches the ear while the use of the voiced and voiceless palatal affricates /ts/ and /tS/ dominates the verse below:

Washika sichi na sichi, sichi ndicho sichi sicho
 Wala kimoja hulichi, tukajua upendacho
 Wapenda mawi huyachi, moyo huutiicho
 Muata kiwi hanacho, na chema kimpotele

From this and other examples, it is clear that alliteration, like balancing of syllables and use of rhymes is poetically determined or conditioned in both oral and written forms. But, like rhymes, alliteration is well represented in the style of other oral forms in Swahili and other African languages.

The use of onomatopoeia in Swahili taarab comes out best in love songs whose style is marked by flowery, pompous and grand-sounding language. This style of language use is marked by soft and musical sounds designed to persuade, convince, admonish, reassure or win over a lover. Here are some examples of use of the

onomatopoeic sounds drawn from different songs :

- (a) Ewe nyota ya shamsi, nami nakushitakia
Moyoni sina nafasi, wazimu kanikalia
 Niondolee nuhusi sije ikanifikia

My beautiful star, I would like to complain to you)
 In my heart, I am restless, I have gone mad
 Please, avert this danger, so that it does not befall me)

- (b) Muhibu nakuusia, ingawa mimi ni wako
 Ikiwa nimekukosea, usifanye maudhiko
 Wajua hino dunia, wema na waovu wako

(My lover I confide to you, knowing I am yours
 If I have done wrong to you, do not bear grudge
 You know in this world, there are good and bad people)

As is clear from these examples, onomatopoeic effect is created often through the use of diphthongs and voiceless soft sounds. However, the two devices which are mainly aimed at giving the song a smooth, soothing, and sensual appeal, are used rather sparingly in contemporary Swahili taarab songs.

3:4. Grammar and Diction in Contemporary Kenyan Swahili Taarab Songs

As pointed out in the introduction, this section is not meant to analyze in detail the grammar of Swahili taarab songs nor to relate the grammatical features isolated to a given theoretical model of traditional or modern grammar. Rather, the analysis is aimed at highlighting some basic and prominent linguistic and stylistic features that emerge from the songs as a complex art-form that is stylistically and linguistically elaborate and thematically meaningful. The overall aim is to show that a Swahili taarab song is a complex artistic form with a definite linguistic and literary structure. Where necessary and relevant, the taarab form is compared or contrasted with other modern or traditional Swahili poetic forms to demonstrate the level of similarity or difference.

Apart from verbal or sound techniques of rhymes, alliteration and onomatopoeia discussed above, Swahili taarab poets often employ the devices of repetition and parallelism. As demonstrated above, Swahili taarab poets are fond of repeating certain elements of sound ranging from melody words like "ah!", "ooh!", and "eeh!" to words and

phrases, lines and even stanzas. Repetition serves to stress and clarify items or concepts and can be employed in various forms in poetry. For instance, in the following examples, the repetition of the underlined word is merely used for stress:

Kasha langu la zamani, kasha lisilo kumbuu
Kasha muundo wa kale si muundo wa kisasa

(My old chest, a chest with no lock
 An old-styled chest, it is not modern style)

Pendo mpende bado yuko hai
Pendo alipokee
 Ukimpenda yuko kaburini
 Umelitupa pendo lako hewani

(Love, love him when he is alive
 So he may reciprocate your love
 If you love him when he is dead
 You have thrown your love in the air)

Many forms of repetition in these songs take the form of refrains as already shown and very often the repetition occurs through improvised lines or words.

The use of parallelism and linking of concepts is another important form of repetition in the Swahili taarab songs. By parallelism here is meant the usage of a word or phrase in similar positions in different lines and linking their meanings in a continuous style. In parallelism, elements may be repeated in initial, final or crossed positions. For example, in this line, the verb root -zaa (to give birth) implied in the abstract noun uzazi, is linked in the final position of the line by its infinitive form kuzaa.

Huku kupanga uzazi, si kuzuwiya kuzaa
 (This birth control is not the prevention of birth).

Parallelism can also be made with categories which are grammatically different like in this example where the possessive pronoun wako (yours) is paralleled in the final position with the locative form wako (They are at). But in the example above, the repetition of kasha (chest) in the initial position of the caesura occurs by paralleling the same word.

Kasha langu la zamani, kasha lisilo kumbuu.

In cross linkage, words or phrases may be paralleled by being repeated in both the final and initial positions in two consecutive lines. In the repeated segment, the order of the

words may also be changed. Here is an example:

Kwangu mimi hali, kwako nauguwa
Nauguwa kwako, kwa pendo la dhati

Of course, the possessive markers kwangu (on my side) and kwako (on your side), are paralleled.

In yet another form of linked repetition, the repeated word may be morphologically changed. In the following example, the linkage is used to heighten the poetic and musical effect of the song. The stems are used to derive nouns which are linked in meaning throughout the verse:

Mtu la kweli husema, nasema sitonyamaza
 Na kusema na kusema, nasema sitonyamaza
 Na kutengwa, na kutengwa, hutengwa lisofwatika
Lingepangwa, lingepangwa, mwenye kupanga huchoka
Kunisema kunisema, nisemani wanadamu

In the verse below, an original proverbial saying is linked by extension of the meaning in an improvised descriptive statement to complete the meaning in the whole line.

Dawa ya meno ni meno, akung'ataye, mng'ate
 Dawa ya moto ni moto, akuchomaye, mchome
 Dawa ya kisu ni kisu, akukataye, mkate

(The medicine for teeth is teeth, whoever bites you, retaliate
 The medicine for fire is fire, whoever burns you, retaliate
 The medicine for a knife is a knife, whoever cuts you, retaliate)

The parallel here is between the nouns meno (teeth), moto (fire) and kisu (knife) and the verbal forms constructed to link them.

Apart from the use of repetition, linkage and parallelism, Swahili taarab poets display a high level of creativity in their ability to explore and manipulate the morphology of words to satisfy a variety of prosodic goals as well as show off one's poetic and linguistic genius. The composition of songs and poetry in the Swahili culture is regarded as the highest level of linguistic and artistic expression and so each taarab artist feels obliged to prove his or her competence in the art. Among the most widely used forms of poetic license practiced in the Swahili tradition is the lengthening and contraction of words.

Lengthening as a technique is used normally with a lot of restraint so as not to

distort the morphology of the word to the extent of rendering it meaningless. The artist may lengthen a word by prefixing or suffixing. In either case, the new poetic word differs from the standard form structurally but not in meaning or grammatical category.

Here are some examples of some of the lengthened words occurring in a number of songs.

<u>Standard form</u>	<u>Poetic form</u>
shwari	shuwari (calm)
zidi	zidiya (exceed)
huenda	huenenda (it goes)
bibi	bibie (woman)
utajuta	utajjutiya (you will regret)
waliojitolea	walokujitolea (who volunteered)
Mola	Moliwa (God)
Tama	Kaditamati (end)

This type of lexical lengthening is primarily done to satisfy prosodic rules of either meter balancing or rhyming. In other words, the added syllables either fulfill the required number of sounds in a caesura or match the rhyme in the middle or end of line.

Shortening of syllables mainly serves the purpose of balancing whereby the artist trims down the excessive sounds to conform to the measurement in the composition. This has also to be done with skill and caution as pointed out above in order not to render the newly created word semantically meaningless. Here are some examples of shortened words:

<u>standard form</u>	<u>poetic form</u>	
uliye	ulo	(you (sing) who is at)
usione	sione	(do not think)
mlio	mlo	(you (pl.) who is at)
taabu	tabu	(suffering)
mke wako	mkeo	(your wife)
nawajulisha	nawajusha	(I inform you)
nitakusema	takusema	(I will report you)

Another morphological operation that Swahili taarab artists often use is the insertion of sounds to create certain rhymes. In most cases the words so created are not normally standard forms and their use is strictly poetical. To illustrate this operation, here are a few examples in which the intervocalic /y/ has been inserted:

<u>standard form</u>	<u>poetic form</u>	
kutia	kutiya	(to insert)
timia	timiya	(to use)
nia	niya	(aim)

njia	njiya	(way)
pia	piya	(also, too)
chukia	chukiya	(hate, resent)
pitia	pitiya	(revisit, go over)

Likewise, nouns derivatives (nouns derived from verbs) are often employed in the formation of rhymes. For instance, in the following examples, the rhyming sound ko is formed in this way:

<u>verb</u>	<u>derived noun</u>	
lalamika	lalamiko	(complaint)
ugua	uguliko	(anguish)
udhi	maudhi	(annoyance)
washa	mwako	(itching)
papatika	papatiko	(be unsettled)
hangaika	hangaiko	(worry)
sikitika	sikitiko	(be sorry)

For the purposes of obeying prosodic rules of rhyme formation, Swahili taarab artists coin certain poetic words that are completely unheard of in any dialect of Swahili. The use of such coinages, as in the case of lengthening and contraction of words discussed above, is poetically conditioned. Here are a few examples of such coinages:

<u>poetic word</u>	<u>standard word</u>
ruhu	roho (life)
majuruhu	majeruhi (wounded victims)
adhaba	adhabu (punishment)
mahaba	mahabubu (love)

Like their traditional literary counterparts, contemporary Swahili taarab composers use various qualities of tonality in Kiswahili, repetition and synonyms quite liberally for both stress and aesthetic purposes. In addition to this, the use of synonymous phrases give the texts a sense of variety and freshness. In the following examples, the synonymous phrases are underlined in both the original and the translation.

Swahibu usisumbuke, na kupoteza wakati
Hiyo ndiyo tabia yake, meizowea haiwati

Friend, do not bother and waste time
This is her behavior, she is used to it and can not leave it

Chako zuia situpe, simpe asokuwaza

(What is your own, hold to it, do not throw it wa?
Do not give to the one who does not regard you.)

Or

Wadudi anayeelewa mambo yote duniani
Anayajua ingawa valiyofichwa shimoni

(The Almighty, who knows everything in the world
God knows even what is hidden in a pit)

Or

Joka juu ya mdimu, lirnefanya ni makao
Li papo halifahamu, lasema na wapitao

(The snake on the lemon tree, has made it its place
It is ever there with no care, talking to the passersby)

Or

Kasha muundo wa kale, si muundo wa kisasa

(The chest made in the old style, not modern style)

Unlike in the case of synonyms whose main use is to underline meaning, the use of antonyms helps to highlight contrasted meaning and reinforce mood of the song. However, the use of antonyms is not as prominent as that of synonyms and repetitions. Here are some examples in which the contrasted segment is underlined:

Nyinyi mna lakilaki, mimi ni sichi kipande
(You have lots and lots, and I only this small piece)

The contrast between "you" and "I" and also "lots and lots" and "small piece" is indeed very sharp. In the following example, the usage of contrast is in the form of a puzzle ending with a rhetorical question.

Kuku kaza mtoto, yai litazaa nini?
Moto umezima moto, maji yatazima nini?

(A hen has begotten a child, what will an egg beget?
Fire has put out fire, what will water put out?)

Or

Kila asotowa chake, cha mwenziwe hakipati
Sikupi ila unipe, ni mtindo wa Mombasa
Ujuwe mambo si bure, yataka uwe na noti
Kila akupaye mpe, simpe asiyekupa

(Everyone who does not give, cannot get anything from other people
 I cannot give you unless you give me, it is the Mombasa style
 Remember things are not free, you need to have money
 Whoever gives you, reciprocate, do not give whoever does not
give you)

3:5 Impact of Style and Grammar on the Content and Delivery of Swahili Taarab Songs

The discussion on such stylistic features like rhyming, alliteration, onomatopoeia and morphological restructuring devices, including contracting and lengthening, is all directly or indirectly related to the whole realm of semantics or meaning in the Swahili taarab songs. Definitely, the use of synonyms and contrasted pairs of elements is a semantic technique for shaping and communicating poetic meaning. In this section, a general survey of some of the salient features of organizing meaning in contemporary Swahili taarab songs will be highlighted in an effort to make a comment on the overall effect of these techniques on the performance of the form as a medium of sociocultural communication in the Swahili community.

Generally speaking, contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs are presented in three categories: monologues, dialogues and narratives. The monologue and narrative forms are more widely used than the dialogue form. In the monologue forms the author often uses the first person singular to recount personal experience directly to the audience, while the narrative form may either be interactive (i.e. with the author addressing an imaginary audience) or a soliloquy in which the artist talks with herself or himself.

In the use of soliloquy, Swahili taarab composers favor the use of personification in which an idea or an object is given human qualities and serves as a passive object to be addressed by the artist. For instance, in the following examples drawn from songs by different artists, the human heart (moyo) assumes the status of a human being addressed by the artist. Songs of this nature form some of the best compositions in the entire repertoire and are basically used by the artists to draw serious didactic lessons for their immediate communities and humanity in general. Here are examples of three short verses using soliloquy as a style of delivery:

- (a) Nakukanya moyo, hebu tulizana
Kujitia payo, jua haina maana
Dunia ya leyo, kwani mapenzi hakuna
(Swaleh and Black Star Musical Club)

(I caution you my heart, be at ease
Being restless, is useless
In today's world, there is no true love)

- (b) Pole moyo wangu-pole, kwa hayo yaliyokufika
Usipige makelele, ovyo ovyo kupayuka
Kwako hayawi milele na yeye yatamfika

(My condolences to you my heart for what befell you
Do not make noise, or talk carelessly
This will not be with you for ever, it will happen to him too)
(Matano Juma)

- (c) Shiba upawalo, ewe moyo wangu
Na ulitakalo, lina dhiki kwangu
Kwa hivyo liwalo, mshukuru Mungu

(Be content with what you are given, my heart
What you crave for, is harmful to me
And so whatever happens, thank God)

Although used very sparingly, the dialogue technique seems to offer the Swahili taarab artist an even greater leeway for linguistic and literary creativity in comparison with other delivery techniques. It is surprising, however, that in the sample of over 100 songs analyzed in this survey, less than ten have used this technique. This aspect of the songs definitely requires further investigation. One of the possible reasons for this finding may be the fact that the stylistically elaborate and linguistically complex nature of a monologue composition is more demanding and time-consuming than the flowing direct narrative favored by most artists.

There are some few examples of dialogue songs that are cast in drama form. This type of song tends to capture the contrast and irony of the detail even more explicitly, and provide a stronger sense of comic relief. Almost all the songs of this type seem to carry very urgent and, therefore, topical themes. Here is an example of such a song in which the artist uses an old man and a young woman to explore the pros and cons of the problem of "sugar daddieys" and "sugar girls" in the contemporary Swahili community:

Mke: Sikilizeni makhluhi, (babu) nina maneno tanena
Kuna mzee ashiki, kibogoyo meno hana

Shikamoo haitaki (babu) kwa kupenda uvulana

Kwa kupenda ndogondogo mtu mzima hasidi
Wamemfanya kinyago (babu) masikini shuga dedi

Mume: Waeleze mahluki, (dada) nami sikukukataza
Ni roho haizeeki, mwenzio najiteteza
Shikamoo siitaki, (dada) sababu yanikomaza

Mke: Kishuga dedi cha kale, (babu) ewe kizere cha Mungu
Sinipigishe kelele, watekwa na walimwengu
Marika zako wa tele, (babu) waja fwata nini kwangu?

Mume: Moyo ukiwa wataka, (dada) ni vigumu kuushinda
Nami kwako nimefika, sioni tena pa kwenda
Kupenda hakuna rika, (dada) sinikataze kupenda

Mke: Jitambue u kizere (babu) uache mingi mikogo
Wajinyang'anyua bure, pesa nane za mihogo
Naona wachezwa shere (babu) kwa kupenda ndogondogo

Mume: Unganambia mwenzangu, (dada) hapo hujasema jambo
Na lau napokwa changu, yangenishinda kitambo
Mwenye kula peni langu, (dada) utamnasa mtambo

Mke: Mtu hali kama gogo, (babu) kwa wasichana ni kero
Pale uonapo zogo, elewa pana kasoro
Shetani wa ndogondogo (babu) hupungwa na barobaro

Mume: Sitolekeza kishogo (dada) ulimwengu wa kisasa
Pele uonapo zogo, elewa pana makosa
Shetani wa ndogondogo (babu) hupungwa na mwenye pesa

(Woman: Listen you rich men (Grandpas) I want to say something
There is a sexy old man who is toothless
He rejects the respectful greeting for the old because he
wants to remain young

By loving young girls, an old man antagonizes himself
He has become a laughing stock (Grandpa), poor old man

Man: Talk to the rich (sister) I am not preventing you
The heart never grows old, this is my defense
I reject the greeting for the old since it makes me feel old

Woman: Old sugar daddy, Poor God's soul
Do not make me angry, people are laughing at you
Your age mates are in plenty, what have you come to me for?

Man: When the heart loves, it is impossible to overcome it
I have come to you, and I have nowhere else to go
Love knows no age, so do not prevent me from loving

Woman: Realize you are old and stop showing off
Your self-praise is in vain, you have only a few cents!
You are beside yourself with craving for young women

Man: Even though you tell me, you have said nothing
If I were being robbed I would have stopped long ago
Whoever eats my cents will be caught by my machine

Woman: A man who looks like a log (aged), is a nuisance to girls
Wherever there is a quarrel, there are shortcomings
The devil of young women is exorcised by young men .

Man: I will not turn my face from today's life
Wherever there is a quarrel, there are mistakes
The devil of young women is exorcised by rich men.
(Sheikh Ahamad Nabahany, Mombasa)

As pointed out earlier, for some strange reason, the Swahili taarab artists tend to use the second and third person singular in their narration more than any other voice. This does not, however, mean that the other voices are totally ignored. Quite a number of songs analyzed in this study show that the use of declarative openings using the first, second and third persons in both singular and plural exists. Here are some examples of songs using each of these forms as their title lines:

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
First Person	
(a) "Sitanyapa" (I will not stalk)	(a) "Tulisalitika" (We were betrayed)
(b) "Nakuusia" (I advise you)	(b) Tubarizi (Let us hold a meeting)
Second Person	
(a) "Umenialika" (You have invited me)	(a) "Wengi mnauliza" (Many of you are asking)
(b) "Uhuru umeuleta" (You have brought independence)	(b) "Muelewao maana" (You who know the meaning)
Third Person	
(a) "Kuku Kazaa" (A Hen has given birth)	(a) "WapitaWakitusema" (They talk about us)
(b) "Anitia Wasiwasi" (She is making me worried)	(b) "Waulizeni Majura" (Ask the Foolish)

The use of the impersonal third person singular style in narration is very widespread in Swahili taarab songs. Similarly, the active voice is more often used than the passive one. Most of the title lines of the songs are in the form of declarative statements

using the impersonal third person singular voice, although some songs use various voices interchangeably. The main type of statements one comes across in these songs are declarations on observed personal or social types of experiences, precautions, advice and warnings, description of dilemmas and puzzling situations, invitation to re-evaluate situations, appeals and prayers .

In expressing various ideas, taarab composers use direct expressions as well as replacement of elements. This form of style is however subject to poetic and grammatical conditioning like in the case of rhymes and meter balancing. Especially notable is the technique of improvisation where the artist uses pronouns and indirect references to the subject or object of the statement and the extension of meaning.

For instance, in the example below, the use of indirect and direct reference to "chungu" (pot), and also the extension of the meaning in the main theme are all combined in the style of delivery of the verse.

Chungu hiki chanitesa, sina furaha moyoni
Mapisi kimeniasa, kwa churuchuru mekoni
Hakina ufa kabisa, chavuja namna gani?

(This pot troubles me, I have no happiness in my heart
It has prevented me from cooking, by licking into the fire place
It has no crack whatsoever, how does it leak?)

The subject "chungu" (pot) is indirectly referred to using pronominal markers ki and cha, while the forms kimeniasa (it has prevented me from) and the ideophonic phrase "churuchuru mekoni" (water trickling down in the fire-place) are all used to extend the meaning which is the fact that the artist's pot is leaking.

The use of such elements as the copulative -wa and conjunction na, as well the present form of the verb to be ni provide a useful link in the formation of internal and external cohesion in Swahili taarab songs. These elements become syllabic because they are a part of the words in the line of a verse. Here is an example of the use of the above elements together with the negative morpheme si:

Kusubiri moyo wangu, si jura tuza sikiyo
Na kunitia machungu, nikawa natuza moyo
Namshitakia Mungu, akulipe ufanyayo

(Tolerance my heart, is not foolishness, listen
Annoying me, yet I remain calm
Hoping that God will pay you for all your misdeeds)

Likewise, the use of other grammatical forms is employed in the composition of these songs to further strengthen their internal coherence. Examples of such elements that often appear in the texts include the complex form kwa, the prepositional associative morpheme -a, the quasi-verbal forms like the locative ni or katika, and the verbal clitics like the interrogatives -ni, -pi, and -je.

Here are some lines to illustrate the use of these elements for creating cohesion of meaning:

- (a) Ua langu la haiba, limenitoka machoni
(My flower of beauty, has gone out my sight)
- (b) Umengia jingi payo, kwa tungo kusimuliya
(You are much worried due to poetic recounting)
- (c) Huno na huno nitundepi, kila nitundao una maua
(This one and this one, which should I pluck, which ever I see has flowers)
- (d) Pendo mpende yu hai
(love, love him when he is alive)
- (e) Hudangana nifanyeni, akili hunipoteza
(I am at loss what to do, my mind fails me)

As in other forms of Swahili poetry, taarab songs exercise a great deal of word economy. This is normally done to fulfill prosodic rules as well as achieve maximum effect in the communication of meaning. As a result, these songs do not only use pronominal words and indirect references as shown above, but also deliberately omit a lot of elements such as subjects. This style does not necessarily give the poetry of the songs a sense of incompleteness or disjointedness. For instance, in the following verse, the poet employs the use of pronominal forms and also deliberately drops the subject markers in order to achieve economy of expression.

Kukupa langu mimi, maovu unitendayo
Nacha kuwapa usemi, wasojua ulo nayo
Lakini Mungu na Tumi, tanilipiya kwa hayo

(To give you my word, about the evil you do to me
I hesitate to give them something to speak about, those who do not know
your evil But God and the Prophet will avenge me for all that)

In Swahili taarab songs, like in the traditional poetic forms, the use of syntactic inversions is a prominent feature. This occurs mainly in the changing of the order of elements in the sentence from the normal subject + verb+ object (SVO) structure to the SOV and other sequences. Poets do this on the strength of poetic license that allows a poet to bend the rules of grammar to suit the dictates of poetic diction. Here are a few examples of this type of inversion:

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---|--|
| (a) | Walio matajiri
(Those who are rich /
(subject) | vyombo
the vessels /
(object) | vinawacheza
they play with)
(verb) |
| (b) | Hawatoki majiani
(They do not leave/
things
(subject+ main verb) | vya wenzao
the roadside/
(indirect object) | kuvizia
waylaying others'
(minor verb) |
| (c) | Unapotaka kukiunda,
(When you want to build it /
(Subject +independent clause) | pesa nyingi hupotea
much money is lost)
(main clause) | |

The omission of the direct subject in the verbal clause is widespread in the grammar of most, if not all, contemporary Swahili taarab songs analyzed in this survey. In all the cases, it is taken for granted that the omitted subject is understood by both the communicator as well as the audience. In the following clauses taken from different songs, the direct subject in brackets is omitted and replaced by various forms of the pronoun morphemes underlin

- (a) Na (watu) walio matajiri)
(And those who are rich.....)
- (b) (Watu) Hawatoki majiani kuvizia (vitu) yya wenzao
(They do not leave the roadside awaiting their fellows' things)
- (c) (Wewe) Zimekutoka imani
(You have gone crazy)
- (d) (Mume) Anayempenda mama ndiye baba
(He) Whoever loves mother is father

The sentence types that come out of the lines of Swahili taarab songs fall mainly into the following categories: statements of the declarative type using relative clauses, subordination with or without conjunctions and also conditional clauses. This discussion has already touched upon some of these categories and suffice it here to give only a single example of each of the types. In all cases, the type being exemplified is underlined in the statement:

- (a) Relative Clauses
Ilie uzuri asikiaye apate cheka
(Let it sound loudly so that whoever hears it may laugh)
- (b) Sub-Ordination
Ukimpenda yuko kaburini, umelitupa pendo lako
(If you love him when he is in the grave, you waste your love)
(Dependent clause) (Main clause)
- (c) Conjunctions
Yatimu yetu maisha na watu kusaidiya
(To fulfill our lives and help people)
- (d) Conditional Clause
Cha mtu hakifichiki kingafukiwa kiliko
(One's property can not be hidden even if it is buried down)

The strikingly extensive use of metaphorical and symbolic language in these songs has already been alluded to elsewhere in this discussion. These forms of expression are used to create different images that help to shape meaning at all levels: cognitive, expressive and affective. The levels refer roughly to the rational or logical grammatical meaning, the poetic or literary meaning, and the sensual meaning respectively. The artists use this type of language to set the tenor and mood of the song texts as well as create images that are both graphic and aesthetically complex, mentally puzzling and sensually appealing. In so doing, the artists take care to ensure that the language they employ is not analogous to every day life experience.

Most of the title or theme lines of the songs are deeply idiomatic, thus alluding to the philosophical nature of the style of their composition. The difficulty in deciphering such meanings in the songs lies mainly in the localized nature of their reference. Most of the songs are about topical issues occurring in a given time period and so it would be

impossible to understand the reference without any knowledge of the particular incidents or experiences. To illustrate this fact, a few examples of title lines are given with a brief comment on their possible reference. A large number of the titles are actually parts of well known Swahili proverbs or maxims. This fact underlines the philosophical nature of the language of the songs.

- (a) Tambuu mwachie kibogoyo
(Beetle chewing, leave it to the toothless)
Probably a warning to the youth not to indulge in activities associated with, or reserved for the aged.)
- (b) Kiivapo huonekana chunguni
(When food is cooked, it is recognized in the cooking pot)
(cf. The goodness of the pudding is in the eating)
- (c) Msione vinaelea mjue vinaundwa
(Do not just admire them (vessels) floating, they are made
An advice to the effect that good things have to be toiled for)
- (d) Sikuacha chungu kinateketea
(I did not leave the pot to burn out)
Probably a self-defense for an inadvertent mistake)
- (e) Chavuja namna gani chungu kisicho ufa?
(How does it leak, an uncracked pot
An expression of utter disbelief at an inexplicable situation.
- (f) Zizi la huba
(The shade of love)
Probably an endearment expression
- (g) Macho yanacheka moyo unalia
(My eyes are laughing)
My eyes are laughing but my heart is crying
A warning that appearances often deceive.
- (h) Kulekeza si kufuma
(Aiming is not hitting the target)
Having a set goal and achieving it are different things
- (i) Uzito wa nyonda
The burden of loving
It implies loving is a big and demanding commitment
- (j) Singetema, yamenishinda kumeza
(I would not have spit them, I could not swallow them)
Insults are often too bitter to bear)

Swahili taarab composers, like their counterparts in written poetry, draw a wide range of their metaphors from the flora and fauna of the Swahili environment. For instance, many of these metaphors are built around the names of coastal fruits like coconuts, bananas, mangoes, oranges and lemons. Other metaphors center around names of fishes, sea creatures and maritime life in general. Swahili traditional arts, beliefs, attitudes and material culture form the semantic world of these songs. This makes it imperative for the interpreter to have some familiarity with the Swahili culture and world view in order to be able to ensure a balanced and fair semantic decoding of the song texts.

Quite often, the artist creates an idea and weaves it into a theme around a certain object, thus making a symbol of meaning. Such symbols, like metaphors, function as facilitators of meaning and add to the aesthetic value of the form and style of the song. For instance, in the following verse, the poet uses an orange as a symbol of his love's object:

Leo nimedhamiria, chungwa kitoka kazini
Nikija tajitundia, tunda melipa thamani
Hienda kuangalia, chungwa halimo mtini

(Today I intend, to eat an orange after work
When I return I will pluck it, my valuable orange
Going to check, the orange is not on the tree)

Many Swahili taarab songs use different names of flowers as symbols of affection. These songs are marked by their vividly expressed imagery and compelling detail. It is worth noting that the Swahili tend to attribute some qualities to each different flower in their aesthetic cosmology and therefore these qualities come to have different meanings when used in appropriate contexts. The fact that the flowers appear in different seasons in different environments also helps to deepen the contrast between their beauty. In the following two verses, the poet lists different flowers that are native in the Swahili country and the major characteristic of each. He ends each stanza with the puzzling question as to which flower he should choose. The drawing of the analogy communicated by the flower symbol is left to the audience, who, the artist knows, understand the deeper meaning.

Waridi kwa yasimini, harufu zimeeneza
Mkapi na marehani, manukato hufukiza
Hayo ni mema jamani, rohoni yanipumbaza

Huno na huno nitundepi, kila nitundao una maua?

Changalia mhanuni, tumba zake hutepuza
Na kilua kitanzuni, mtini huipembeza
Mkapi nao ni shani, kikuti kimetepuza
Huno na huno nitundepi, kila nitundao una maua?
(Zein Labdin, Mombasa)

(The "waridi" roses and yasimini spread sweet scent
"Mkapi" and "marehani" spray nice perfume
All these beautiful flowers enlighten my heart
This and that one, which should I pluck, whichever I try has flowers?)

When "I see Mhanuni", its petals beautifully open up
The 'Kilua' in its buds, ever so attractive
The Mkapi is just wonderful, with sprouting leaves
This and that one, which should I pluck, whichever I try has flowers)

To illustrate further, here is a verse from a political song that makes use of imagery drawn from sea sailing, an art in which the Swahili have distinguished themselves for centuries:

Japo kwa kwenda mrama, mashuwa iwe hodari
Kuna siku talalama, dharuba zikishamiri
Mara mashuwa huzama ikamizwa na bahari

Asiyekuwa bahari husema asilojuwa
Na siku ikidhihiri, matataye na beluwa
Hakuna cha uhodari, si meli wala mashuwa

Even though it be expert in rolling
Some day it will come to grief, when the storms set in
Suddenly, the boat sinks and is swallowed by the sea

Whoever does not know the sea, speaks of what they do not know
But when the sea becomes rough and menacing
Nothing can beat it, boat or ship)

As pointed out earlier, most of the Swahili *taarab* songs use proverbial or idiomatic expression to convey meaning. This meaning is rarely easily fathomable and, as a rule, it is often intriguing and mind racking. Proverbial sayings are always very catchy and artistic. Their enigmatic, witty and terse style coupled with their philosophical meaning, always add flavor and freshness to the art of communication. This is the quality of African proverbs that prompted Chinua Achebe to proclaim in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, that "proverbs are the palm-wine with which words are eaten." (18)

In the examples below, the type of idiomatic statements used have strong sexual illusions and are not traditional Swahili proverbs. These statements show how poets, by

using popular expressions and catchy phrases are able to coin sayings that come to be transformed into proverbial maxims. Some of the new expressions are the poet's own original phrases that acquire popular character through the medium of the songs themselves. Here are a few examples:

- (a) Kisu chako hakikati, usiniharibie nyama
(Your knife is blunt, do not spoil my meat)
(Probably, a jibe by a woman at her inexperienced or clumsy lover).
- (b) Bunduki bila risasi, yaua namna gani?
(An unloaded gun, how does it kill?)
Similar to the previous statement, but the reference here is probably to an impotent lover).
- (c) Kinyozi na mnyolewa, aonaye raha zaidi ni yupi?
(The barber and the one being shaved, who gets more pleasure?)

A reference to the sexual satisfaction obtained from the sexual contact between a man and woman. Who gets more satisfaction?)

- (d) Ukitaka kula embe, kula embe zafarani
If you want to eat a mango fruit, eat the zafarani mango)
An advice to lovers to choose partners carefully and pick only those with specific good qualities)

Further discussion on the general and specific use of proverbial statements and idioms is given in the section on themes. One could only state here that some of the proverbs used are direct quotations of known traditional maxims while others are paraphrased. In the case of direct production of known proverbs, the artist builds the moral meaning of the verse around the theme of the proverb while in the partially quoted proverbs, the composer tries to expand or supplement the whole meaning of the original saying. (19)

The following are some of the traditional Swahili proverbs that appear repeatedly in a number of the songs studied in this survey:-

- (a) Kinyang'anyiro kitamu lakini kina mtanga
(Competition is good but it has its own problems)
- (b) Kulekeza si kufuma
(Aiming is not hitting the target)
- (c) Jino la pembe si dawa ya pengo
(An ivory tooth is not the solution for a gap)

- (d) Asopiga mswaki simpe chakula chako
(To the person who does not brush his or her teeth, do not give your food).
- (f) Kila mtaraji kingi hapati hata kimoja.
(Everyone who wants every thing, does not get even a thing)

All the proverbial sayings used in the songs share a number of literary and linguistic characteristics with other idioms in the Swahili language. These properties include, semantic ambiguity, a fixed syntactic formula, and a high degree of contextual flexibility and adaptability. This aspect of idiomatic language generally means that the interpretation of a given saying is intuitive and also context-dependent. This point is stressed further in the next chapter which deals with the interpretation of the various themes in these songs.

At the lexical level, Swahili taarab composers employ authentic African indigenous vocabulary as well as loans and adaptations absorbed into the Swahili language from various source languages. In the case of the sample of the songs from Kenya's Swahili coast, the African vocabulary comes principally from the northern dialects of Ki-Amu and Ki-Mvita, spoken around the Lamu and Momabsa districts. The loans are roots taken from Arabic stems, English and other sources plus a few adaptations and Swahilized loan words. By "authentic African" vocabulary here is meant the roots that are morphologically closer to the Proto-Bantu stems than any other source. Borrowing and adaptation or coining of vocabulary, is a property of language use in all fields and not just the linguistic or literary registers.

Although modern Swahili poems and songs are cast dominantly in the standard dialect, the forms composed before the standardization of the language (before the 1930s) are composed almost exclusively in the regional dialects. Additionally, this pre-twentieth century literature and poetry contains many archaic words which are no longer heard in modern speech. In this regard, the study of these old forms is of great interest to modern linguists and literary critics as it helps unearth many hitherto inactive but useful lexicon needed to develop the etymology of the language to match current and future needs. (20)

The following are a few examples of some of the dialectal stems appearing in a number of songs surveyed in this study with their standard equivalents:

<u>Ki-Amu</u>	<u>Ki-Mvita</u>	<u>Standard</u>
hamba	hamba	nikasema (I said)
ndia	ndia	njia (road, way)
hienda	hienda	nikienda (while I go)
hini	hini	hiyo (that)
haungii	haungii	haiingii (It does not enter)
twaifa	taifa	taifa (nation)
fanza	fanya	fanyia (do for)
mayonzi	majonzi	majonzi (sorrow)
nyezi	miezi	miezi (months)
vunda	vunda	vunja (break)
nta	nta	ncha (tip)
nti	nti	nchi (country)
swaumu	swaumu	saumu (holy fasting)
moya	moja	moja (one)
kuata	kuata	kuacha (to leave)
tini	tini	chini (down)
zijana	vijana	vijana (the youth)
swifa	sifa	sifa (praise)
ina	jina	jina (name)
nafusi	nafsi	nafsi (soul)
yambo	jambo	jambo (matter)
sute	sote	sote (all of us)
ndako	ni yako	ni yako (it is yours)
yuwa	juwa	jua (know)

In the following examples, some Arabic stems have been Swahilized by being given a Bantu syllabic structure of consonant/vowel/consonant, first in the regional dialectical form and then in the standard dialect.

<u>Arabic stem</u>	<u>Dialectical form</u>	<u>Standard</u>
ilim	ilim	elimu (knowledge)
faqar	fakhari	fahari (pride)
qitim	khitim	hitimu (qualify)
aqer	akhera	ahera (paradise)
qin	khini	hini (deprive)
ghafl	ghafla	ghafla (suddenly)
murad	muradi	mradi (provided)
qof	khofu /mikhafa	hofu (worry)
qifadhi	hifudhi	hifadhi (keep, protect)

Other Arabic roots have not acquired dialectical adaptation and retain their original Swahilized form in the standard Swahili. Here are a few examples:

Ilahi (God)
 taklif (trouble)
 muadhamu (honorable)
 ghururi (deceive)
 jamali (beautiful)
 fadhili (kindness)
 riziki (livelihood)
 hatari (danger)
 mahashumu (respectable)
 adabu (good manners)
 masakani (residence)

As far as the use of English loans in the Swahili taarab songs is concerned, the most striking quality is the ease with which the taarab composers translate English words into Swahili. The following words for example appeared frequently in many songs surveyed in this study:

<u>English</u>	<u>Swahili translation</u>
vote	voti
card (s)	cadi
sorry	sore
rudder	radda
sail	seli
boats	maboti
sugar daddy	suga dedi
sugar mammy	sugar mami
darling	dali
notice	notisi
books	mabuku

The following verse illustrates the use of such English translations (underlined) in a Swahili taarab song:

Metia fuli sitopu
 Fedheha nyingi siwezi
 Fahamu hapana hopu
 Ya kurinyuu utezi
 Mambo yakirichi topu
 Huwa mbaya bizinizi (21)

(I have put a full stop
 I can not bear so much shame
 Understand there is no hope
 Of renewing the relationship
 When matters reach the top (peak)
 It becomes bad business.)

The other type of vocabulary appearing in contemporary Swahili taarab songs consists mainly of the archaic or old forms mentioned above. This type of vocabulary is

almost completely absent in modern literature and, as hinted above, it is to be found almost exclusively in classical Swahili poetry and literature. Here are some examples:-

<u>archaic word</u>	<u>standard form</u>
twambe	tuseme (let us say/ speak)
mja	binadamu
nyonda	mpenzi/mapenzi (love)
mawi	mabaya (evil)
katiti	kidogo (a little)
nalicha	naliogopa (I fear it)
sudi	bahati (luck)
usono	utulivu (tranquility)
mnyalo	njaa (hunger)
nyota	kiu (thirst)
puliken	sikilizeni (you listen)
shungi	nywele (hair)
kuwanga	kuhesabu (to count)
tama	mwisho (end)
kikongwe	mzee (an old person)
hedaya	zawadi (present)
koma	acha (leave, put an end to)
ndwele	ugonjwa (sickness)

In stressing meaning, Swahili taarab composers do use other techniques apart from repetition, alliteration, ideophones, nominal and verbal conjugations. One prominent technique often used is the formation of cognates, e.i., words with a similar root but extended to make different word categories such as adjectives and nouns. Statements with cognates may take various forms including relativization, comparison or contrast, questions, imperatives, declaratives, subjunctives and so on. The following are some examples of cognates found in these songs. The roots are underlined in the Swahili original.

- (a) Nakuomba uombwao
(I pray to you who deserves to be prayed to)
- (b) Yaniumiza mapenzi, nimpendaye hajui
(Love is hurting me, and my love does not know)
- (c) Tulia utuwe
(Be at ease so that you can relax)
- (d) Kimako kumakiya
(Being grieved by grief)
- (e) Usijitie sumbuko kutaka kujisumbuwa
(Do not worry for just the sake of wanting to bother)

- (g) Ingawa wanisumbua, juwa sisumbuki
(Even though you bother me, know I can not be bothered)
- (h) Yangu ungayavunja, mimi yako siyavunji
(Even if you spoil my affairs, I will not spoil yours)

There are some songs that convey multiple meanings through the use of homographs and homonymns. These are words that have the same morphological or phonological structure but different meanings. This poetic device was very prominent in the work of many classical poets and is also often employed in modern writtern poetry (22). In the following example, the composer uses the same word tamu (sweetness) to convey three different meanings of the concept with an underlying comment on human nature.

Tamu imefasiriwa, tamu ni mara tatu
Kuna na tamu ya kutiwa, kuna na tamu ya kitu
Kuna na tamu ya hawa, ilomughilibu mtu

(Sweetness has been described, there are three types
There is an artificial sweetness and a natural one
There is the sweetness of desire that deceived man)

This chapter set out to explore some of the salient stylistic and linguistic attributes of contemporary Swahili taarab song in Kenya. Various aspects of poetic diction, style and language use have been highlighted including the use of metaphor symbolism, alliteration, onomatopoeia, meter balancing, rhyming, repetition, word choice and syntactical arrangements. The grammatical and stylistic nature of the taarab have been described from the traditional grammatical perspective and an attempt has been made to relate the form to other aspects of Swahili poetic creativity and imagination.

To conclude this discussion on diction, grammar, style and language use in contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs, one can only reiterate the fact that it is too vast an area to be covered fairly in a study of this scope. The main objective here has been to examine the above aspects and assess how and to what extent the Swahili taarab artists have been able to exploit them in their art. From the insights gained in this survey, it is possible to make certain broad generalizations on some of the outstanding stylistic and

linguistic attributes of Swahili taarab songs.

(a) The contemporary Swahili taarab song often displays its own typical prosodical and stylistic features, although it mainly utilizes the structural characteristics with traditional forms like wimbo (song). An example of a typical Swahili taarab poetic feature is the rigid use of the three-line structure with limited variation. Taarab form differs also from the traditional poetic forms in its manner of delivery or performance. Although the two forms are mainly orally delivered, taarab is mainly an instrumentalized form of music as opposed to chanted or recited poetry. Clearly, the area of the socio-psychological mechanics of oral performance as a field is outside the scope of this study and warrants a full-fledged survey of its own.

(b) At the morphological, syntactical and semantical levels, the taarab form is largely similar to the traditional forms. Both forms employ identical techniques including, inflection of words, changing of syntactic rules and use of idiomatic and deeply metaphorical language.

(c) The style in the taarab, like in the traditional forms, is greatly influenced by both the theme desired and the manner of delivery. For instance, an urgent and topical social issue is more likely to be communicated in the dramatic rather than the descriptive form.

(d) Although there exists a core of shared or common stylistic and poetic devices in the Swahili taarab tradition, the finer details of stylistic accomplishment are a product of individual creative imagination. The individual artist's literary and linguistic endowment dictates the level of artistic excellence he or she can reach.

(e) Both taarab and the traditional poetic forms deliberately use figurative language which intentionally deviates from the norms of the standard dialect in spelling, formation, construction and application. Normally, such deviations are aimed at achieving clarity, emphasis, humor and other similar effects. But, if taken to the extreme, some of these hidden usages could shroud the meaning and obstruct the audience from grasping the message in the song. (23)

(f) As for productivity, in terms of volume of output and also in terms of depth, diversity and quality of art, women Swahili taarab artists have more than equaled their male counterparts. It is however very interesting to note that the style of both male and female artists in taarab songs does not betray even the slightest gender-based attributes that could distinguish them. Perhaps, this aspect could form the subject for a future study.

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Endnotes

1. The translation of the taarab materials from the Kiswahili original into English in this study is entirely by the writer and conforms to the literal Swahili meaning in the texts as far as possible.
2. Alan Dundes. Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Critical Studies on Black Life and Culture. (New York: Garland Publishing Co. Inc., Vol.7, 1981), 258.
3. Isidore Okpewho. The Heritage of African Poetry. (Longman: London 1985), 35.
4. Jan Knappert. Poetry in Swahili and Other African Languages. (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1983), 83.
5. Ephraim Kezilahabi, quoted in Stephen Arnold, "Popular Literature in Tanzania", Kiswahili Vol. 51. (Dar es Salaam: Institute of Swahili Research, 1984), 68.
6. Jan Knapper. A Collection of Flowers. (Heinemann: Nairobi, 1967), 8.
7. Dorsey, David, "Teaching Critical Perception of African Poetry", L.Johnson (ed). Toward Defining the African Aesthetic. (Washington DC: Three Continents, 1982), 2.
8. Nett, B. Theory and Methodology in Ethnomusicology (London: Macmillan, 1964), 172.
9. Mulika, Journal of the Institute of Swahili Research, University of Dar es Salaam, (no.16, 1964), 46-74.
10. For a detailed discussion of the various types of Swahili traditional dances, see Campbell, C.A.A., 'Nyimbo Za Kiswahili: A Socio-Ethnomusicological Study of a Swahili Poetic Form.', Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Washington University, 1983.
11. See Abdilatif Abdallah's paper entitled, "Tanzu za Ushairi wa Kiswahili: Historia na Maendeleo Yake", Institute of Swahili Research, University of Dar es Salaam, 1978.
12. Chiragdin Shihabdin in his introduction to Ahamad Nassir's Malenga wa Mvita. (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1971), strongly asserts that Swahili songs and other poetic compositions have traditionally been structured.
13. Most of the contemporary songs sung in these dances are rhymed and metered. A good example is the following chorus of a "chakacha" dance song:

Shingo yako ya upanga
 Kukukosa ni kisanga
 Na unapo tabasamu
 Mimi hukosa fahamu
 Mwendo wako wa maringo
 Macho yako mviringo

(Your is neck is tall and beautiful
 To miss you (for me) would be grievous
 When you smile my mind stops thinking

You walk proudly
And have pretty round eyes)

14. Compare, for example, the arguments of Chiragdin Shihabdin mentioned above and the views of E. Kezilahabi in his anthology of revolutionary Swahili free verse, Kichomi, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1976).
15. The use of the Roman letters a, b, c, d and x to represent sound segments in the criticism of Swahili poetry is a very recent phenomenon associated with the new school. For instance, in his epical critical work entitled Sheria za Kutunga Mashairi, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1954), Amri Abedi uses syllables only.
16. For a fuller discussion of Swahili traditional prosody, see Abedi, Amri Kaluta, Ibid.
17. Abdulaziz, Mohamed Hassan. Muyaka: 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry (Nairobi, Kenya Literature Bureau, 1979), 72. A good example of the deliberate use of alliteration as a poetic device is in this verse by Abdilatif Abdalla where the voiceless velar stop /k/ is artistically alliterated to enhance the sense of bitterness the poet has at being punished for exercising his natural right to "speak". He states:

Kuno kunena kwa nini, kukanikomeya kuno?
Kwani kunena kunani kukashikiwa kani vino?
Kani iso na kiini na kuninuniya mno
Kanama nako kunena kwaonekana ni kuwi?

(Why has speech punished me so?
Why is speech condemned so much?
An unjustified condemnation and much disapproval?
Lo! so speech is seen by some as a bad thing?)

- Abdilatif Abdalla. Sauti Ya Dhiki, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973, 23.
18. Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart. (London: Heinemann, 1958), 38.
 19. Many critics have observed that Muyaka bin Haji invented and popularized the use of many Swahili proverbial sayings heard in modern speech, poetry and literature. His poetry (referred to above) is contains a large number of such sayings.
 20. The Institute of Swahili Research at the University of Dar es Salaam uses oral tradition and classical Swahili poetry and texts as one of the primary sources of authentic Swahili vocabulary.
 21. Topan, Farouk, " Oral Literature in A Ritual Setting: The Role of Swahili Spirit Songs in A Spirit Medium". Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation , (University of London, 1971), 53.
 22. For instance, the poems entitled, "Oa", "Sili", "Panda", "Kimya", and "Sichi" by Muyaka Bin Haji, op. cit.
 23. Penina Mlama, "Jinsi Sanaaa za Maonyesho, Taarab, Na Senema Zinavyoweza Kusaidia Kuimarisha Lugha ya Kiswahili", Lugha Yetu, No, 37, (Dar es Salaam: Institute of Swahili Research, December, 1980), 44 .

CHAPTER 4

Dominant Political Themes in Contemporary Kenyan Swahili Taarab Songs

4:1 Introduction

The use of Swahili taarab medium in mass political campaigns and other social activities has already been touched upon in the first chapter. This chapter will explore the range of political ideas and themes conveyed in contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs. The term “theme” here is used to mean “the prominent, coherent element or characteristic ideas that seem to have some relevance to a social or cultural problem”. (1)

The major themes dealt with include pro-establishment mass indoctrination, nationalism, defiance and struggle for political rights. The first section of this chapter looks at the theoretical aspects of language use in the field of political communication and how these affect the style of expression in Swahili taarab songs. The chapter ends with an examination of the notions of political commitment of the Swahili taarab artist vis-a-vis the wider role that the artist is expected to play in the task of mass political sensitization or awakening.

Generally speaking, the information communicated through the medium of songs can be put into two broad categories: purposive information which has direct and immediate impact upon the audience and consequential information, which is of a wider and more generalized nature. (2) According to Washington Omondi, the main goals of musical communication can be further classified into four broad types:

- (a) Primary goal: provision of basic physical needs.
- (b) Social goal: socialization and ideals of conformity to the set social norms or condemnation thereof.
- (c) Emotive goals: feelings, philosophical thinking, status planning and emotional expression, such as hatred, love, joy or grief.
- (d) Individual goals: the achievement of the individual song in terms of aesthetic values such as entertainment, enjoyment, personal commitment, spiritual

renewal or inspiration(3).

As a popular oral form, the Swahili taarab song can be described thematically as being concerned with everyday happenings in the Swahili community and Kenyan society as a whole. The form has an improvisory character and serves to record social and political tensions and struggles using a rhymed metrical style that is saturated with metaphors and symbols which resemble a secret linguistic code(4). In this sense, the taarab differs from the traditional Swahili wimbo (song) which, although is traditionally cast in a free poetic style, inclines more toward ritualistic values and events such as initiation or wedding rites. In this sense, therefore, taarab lends itself more to sociopolitical issues in contemporary society than the traditional wimbo which is strictly context-bound.

It has been pointed out that the soul of Swahili and African songs is not their musicality or formal features but rather the social background and content of the song. M.M. Mulokozi argues that "Swahili poetry can be identified not so much by its formal aspects, but rather by its historical determinants, the language medium and the cultural and social values that it expresses."(5) But the question that follows this assertion is, "Whose cultural values does a popular art form like Swahili taarab reflect or communicate?" It is a fact that in today's world, all forms of literature and art represent and reflect the interests and ideology of different specific social classes.

In attempting to answer the question of the kind of values reflected in the Swahili songs such as taarab, Reiner Arnold states that, "Swahili songs as a form of popular literature do not represent only the social or cultural values of the coastal Swahili community but rather it is part and parcel of the society and culture of the new nations of East Africa" (6). Therefore, it is possible to argue that since the Swahili taarab artists being part and parcel of the Kenyan society, they reflect the values and attitudes that exist in that society. It would be erroneous and unrealistic to expect these artists to reflect values that are at variance with the Kenyan tradition. As one critic observes, "The error has been regarding him or her (the artist) as a creature apart, who ought to view the world from some literary heaven. From this heaven, he or she is supposed to acquaint the lower,

insensitive beings with the divine knowledge.”(7) While one should not expect the Swahili taarab artist to do the impossible in the task of projecting a social vision through the medium of the song form, one is still within limits to expect the artist to differ from the masses of Kenyans by virtue of possessing a special talent of ability to overcome conventional myths and to seek a broader and deeper view of life. The artist is expected to possess the courage not just to purvey and parade commonplace facts but to provide a new, fresh and challenging way of interpreting those facts and assumptions.

It is, therefore, interesting to examine the extent to which the artist has used the taarab song to provide unique methods of viewing the society and determine how far these songs have served as a forum for free expression. To what extent, for instance, has the taarab helped the Kenyan masses to expose and condemn social ills as a vehicle of mass political sensitization which is a "powerful weapon in helping the people to fight with one heart and one mind?" (8) It is worth noting that, in contrast to Tanzania, where radical socialist ideology has dominated cultural life since the 1960s, in Kenya, the use of music for the purpose of mass propaganda, especially via the mass media, has been very minimal indeed. However, employment of the song form for political communication and indoctrination has gained popularity in the last decade since President Moi came to power.

4:2 Kenyan Taarab Artist and the Political Environment

This section of the discussion looks at some of the major themes in the Swahili taarab songs from Kenya and attempts to assess how far the contemporary Swahili taarab artist has continued to play the role of a sociopolitical observer and commentator in his or her society. It is the contention of the discussion here that the Swahili taarab artist, in contrast to the popular view, has become more of a performer than an orator, still critical, but no longer central to the life of the community, as the traditional griots once were. Commercialization of the music production and performance has compromised the professional nature of the role of the traditional artist, among other aspects. The popular view of the oral artist in the Swahili community is well captured by Ibrahim Noor Shariff

when he writes: " Mtungaji siku zote hupata shauku na jazba kutokana na mazingira yake, maisha yake, mapisi yake, ngoma zake, shida, furaha na lugha yake." (9) (A composer always draws inspiration from his or her surroundings, life, history, dances, problems, joys and his or her language).

However, the evidence gained from a critical examination of a sample of Swahili taarab songs indicates that the contemporary artist's commitment to serve the masses has been affected by both social and personal factors. Cultural and technological changes as well as the artists' concept of their mission have all combined to dilute the degree of devotion and dedication to the common social cause of their society.

The impact of monetary economy and its attendant pressure on the individual artist to fend for an ever growing number of dependents has placed a big financial burden on the musicians. Since many of them are unemployed and have received little or no formal education or training, they are poverty-stricken and often fall victim to the clever manipulation of rich politicians who entice them with financial rewards and make them compromise their professional ideals. As a result, many singers compose and sing songs praising the politicians and the establishment, not with any sense of sincerity in what they say in the songs but with only the aim of winning the favor of their patrons. Examples of individual singers who have fallen victim to these political financial snares, such as Maulidi Juma, Bibi Zuhura Swaleh, Juma Bhalo, and Matano Juma, were mentioned in the second chapter. Additionally, many artists clamor for and crave media coverage and often are prepared to tailor their songs to fit the dictates of media officials, thus compromising the ideals of their art for personal material gain.

The importance of Swahili as the medium of cultural nationalism and political activity in East Africa was mentioned in Chapter 1. The rich and long standing literary tradition in the language, especially the poetic heritage, points to the resourcefulness and adaptability of this invaluable Bantu language. Apart from being the recipient of many external cultural and linguistic inputs, Swahili is the only language from the region and, indeed, one of the few from the entire continent whose poetry and literature have made an

impact on the literature of other parts of the world. According to Shihabdin and Myampala, "Kiswahili leo kimeenea kama mto uliotanda.....Afrika" (10). (Swahili today has spread like a huge river that envelops the continent of Africa)

In exploring how far the contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab artist has carried the mantle of the defiant and radical stance of the classical Swahili political poets of the 18th and 19th centuries, one needs to examine how far it has been possible for the taarab artists, in the face of the alienating individualism and materialism of the present day capitalistic life-style, to explore and project visions of a better future, seek to establish shared social codes of behavior and explore ideologies that govern, influence or dominate political thinking in their society. (11) Conclusions regarding the degree of the artists' general and personal commitment to the cause of the Kenyan masses or the interests of the political establishment are drawn from an examination of a sample of songs by various artists.

4:3 The Question of Commitment in Kenyan Swahili Taarab Art

This section of the discussion looks at the different political views that the Swahili taarab artists try to formulate or suggest as a means of coming to grips with certain important political realities. In this sense, political communication and ideology is regarded as the common way of viewing and handling social reality through the medium of language in the songs.

The importance of the song as a medium of social communication among the Kenyan and East African Swahili reflects the fact that the Swahili community is still largely an "oral culture" in which verbal creativity and imagination as well as strong powers of mental retention, rather than the written word, plays a crucial role, the high level of literacy notwithstanding.

Two basic questions come to mind in discussing the political role of the Kenyan taarab. Firstly, how far has the alignment of some artists with certain politicians for patronage affected the performance of the poets as sociopolitical critics in their community? Secondly, what kind of audience does the Swahili taarab artist usually target and how does

the content of the songs affect the political behavior of this audience, if at all? Due to its limited scope, this study discussion will not deal fully with these basic and wide questions. Further research is called for in order to do justice to both questions, especially the second one.

Over the centuries, Kiswahili has distinguished itself as the undisputed medium of social discourse in Kenya and the whole of East Africa. Taarab poetry can be viewed as a kind of a socially sanctioned poetic form employed to articulate and represent sociopolitical reality as understood by an individual artist, as well as the relationship between that reality and the community or the individual, on the one hand, and the structures of power that control the society, on the other. These structures of control can be legal, economic or sociocultural. In their art, the literary and the oral Swahili artists are expected by their community to play the role of prophets of the collective Swahili world outlook or cosmology. They do not only create and recreate this cosmology but also attempt to interpret it through the medium of their songs. This view of the Swahili community fits the description of "an oral culture" which, according to Corcoran, uses verbal communication both as a form of entertainment as well as serious business (12).

The above two roles of the songs have one major objective: to communicate to the masses and the leadership certain pressing social issues. The extent to which he or she may achieve this objective is affected not only by public expectations and understanding of poetic composition as an art and the role of an oral artist, but also by the norms and wishes of the forces that control society. Therefore, the artist is not only called upon to conform to the rules of Swahili prosody, but also to observe the social values, attitudes and morals of the Swahili community, while paying due attention to the national, legal, religious and political mores. In evaluating the degree of political commitment of the modern Kenyan Swahili taarab artist, one must consider the prevailing popular tastes, attitudes, values and the role of other forms of verbal interaction that govern the lives of the bulk of the population such as popular music, dance songs, gossips. All these factors influence the Swahili taarab artist as a sociopolitical communicator.

The Swahili community forms a kind of a microculture which is coherent, and politically vibrant. It is a complex sociocultural set-up with many facets and the production of creative literature forms such as the taarab is but only one activity in the representation of this society. Like in any typical modern society, politics govern virtually every aspect of human life and endeavor among the Swahili and all other Kenyans today. All societal institutions including religion, the law, culture, economics and government are organized around some form of political principle. In discussing the political ideas, images and issues which are communicated to the general public via the Swahili taarab songs in Kenya, one needs to look at the level of the composer's authority, the sociocultural environment in which the songs are composed and the textual meaning of the songs. Additionally, one must try to avoid the temptation found in the theory of expressive realism which tends to equate literary activity and criticism of literature to a mechanical process of production and consumption. An analysis of the political ideas in the Swahili taarab song should, therefore, take into consideration the dynamic relationship between the artist, the society and the process of artistic creation.

Swahili taarab songs, like other songs in the Swahili and African tradition, in general, perform two basic functions. On the one hand, the artist demonstrates his or her skill in the creative, original and imaginative use of the Swahili language. This implies that in the poetic composition of the songs, as is shown elsewhere in this study, the artist uses language which is deeply metaphorical or idiomatic, and which is not strictly tied down to the rules of grammar or everyday speech. The poetic skill referred to here includes the ability to mold apt imagery and forms of expression that capture the imagination, aesthetic appeal and reasoning of the intended audience. On the other hand, the composer makes an attempt to share some deeply felt experience or idea with a view toward bringing about a desired change in popular behavior. He or she engages social reality and, by so doing, expresses satisfaction, approval, indignation or condemnation.

Although Swahili taarab songs share the heightened force of musicality and language with songs from other African communities, the soul of the songs, as stated in the

last Chapter, is not merely their musical qualities but rather their deep metaphorical or idiomatic language, which is as highly patterned as it is allusive. These characteristics of Swahili and African poetry and songs in general, have been discussed and analyzed in some detail by, among others, Finnegan (1970;1977), Chiragdin (1977), Abedi (1965), Abdalla (1979) Nketia (1955), Babola (1966), Kunene (1970), P'Bitek (1966;1968; 1971 and 1982), Okpewho (1987). It is these linguistic and poetic properties of the Swahili taarab that enable the poets to camouflage their reference to certain politically sensitive issues that they discuss in their songs.

4:4 Political Theme in the Contemporary Swahili Taarab Songs

An examination of the range and depth of the dominant political ideas reveals that Swahili taarab songs may be grouped in two broad categories: those dealing with narrow personalized issues or experiences with no social dimension or bearing at all, and songs with explicit political and social cultural vision. It is possible to find songs that could be placed in either category and, herefore, the two types are not in any way clear-cut or absolute. A close scrutiny of the language and the social setting of the Kenyan Swahili taarab songs indicates further that the first type of song is mainly meant for direct popular consumption as a form of light entertainment, a type of "pulp literature". The second type, however, seems to constitute a serious dialogue on social issues. This dialogue seems to be restricted to the intellectual group made up by the artists themselves. In many instances, the poets raise issues, provoke a discussion and invite or challenge their colleagues to respond.

Seen from the above perspective, therefore, political ideas in these songs could be interpreted as the particular individual artist's considered opinion, which he or she expresses consciously to provoke a public debate in response to an observed public experience. The artist makes an attempt to delineate an aspect of the complexity of the sociopolitical reality and composes a song to highlight that aspect according to his or her perception. Some of the commonly encountered themes with political overtones include

love and romance, moral or ethical issues, economic, religious, cultural problems and historical events.

The frequent shifts in style and language use in the songs make it difficult to fathom their total meaning. The main reason for the artists to prefer veiled language style is to conceal the real meaning of their compositions is mainly to escape any form of official censorship, which is not uncommon at all in most African countries, and which has often led to punishment of the authors. For instance, in the following song, the poet uses the metaphor of a ngoma (drum) and dance to allude to the chaos and disorderliness that have set in the life of the community as a result of poor leadership.

Enyi wahadhiri, pamoja na watalama
Mfanyavyo ni hatari, mnavyoipiga ngoma
Ipigeni kwa urari, watazamaji twasema

Mfanyavyo ni hatari, watazamaji twasema
Ipigeni kwa urari, watazamaji twasema

Balaa mwakaribisha, mwaifukuza salama
Japo twataka kukesha, pang'ae nuru na nema
Wachezaji watisha, twatishwa tunaotazama

Mpigo mwauharibu, ngoma nilisema
Wanasema wanabubu na viwete wenda wima
Izimeni taratibu, tutazamao twasema

Mpigo wao ulivyo, na uchezaji wa ngoma
Tofauti tena sivyo, sheria zinavyosema
Mchezavyo na mpigavyo, tunashindwa kutazama

(To you, teachers and experts
Your actions are dangerous, your style of drumming
Play it systematically, we, the observers say

Your actions are dangerous, we, the observers say
Play it systematically, we the observers say

You invite trouble and chase peace away
Even though we would like to dance till dawn
The players are menacing, they threaten us, the observers

You are spoiling the rhythm of the dance, I say
The dumb are speaking and the lame walk straight
Beat the drum slowly, we the observers say

Their style of playing and dancing
It is different and contrary to what the law states
The way you dance and play, defeats us, the observers)

In the above song, the poet is using the analogy of dance and drum playing to refer to the manner of political leadership in his society. Leadership is compared to a dance whereby the players set the pace and the rhythm of the dance. They are the determiners of the style the tone of the whole song and the dance atmosphere. The audience is again compared to the observers in a dance event who try to follow closely the steps set by the players and dance to the predetermined rhythm. But, the poet states that the observers know the rules of the dance and are able to tell when the rhythm has been broken and spoilt. They are familiar with the “normal rules” of the dance and cannot therefore, be expected to dance to a confused and chaotic rhythm. The leaders are to blame for this state of affairs and must bear responsibility for the results of their faults. The meaning here is almost obvious. Poor leadership means political and social disorientation and complete lack of any sense of direction or purpose. According to the poet, the result of political turmoil is anarchy and absence of any sense of social or personal decency. It means total breakdown of “law and order”, thus the idiom, “The dumb are speaking and the lame walk straight”. The moral of the song is simply that, although it may not appear so, the masses are aware of the norms and values under which they should be governed or led and are able to tell good leadership from a poor one.

The Swahili taarab poets naturally draw their political idioms and references from the flora and fauna of the Swahili geographical area. For this reason, it is not true to think, as some critics do, that these songs are ephemeral in nature or they are foreign-inspired. The following song, whose symbolism and metaphors are derived from typical Swahili surroundings, is an indication of the depth of sensitivity with which the contemporary Swahili taarab composers record and symbolize sociopolitical reality in their community through the medium of the songs.

In the following song, the artist uses subtle sarcasm and very sharp contrast to underline the fact that the weak can never hope to conquer the strong:

Ni mangapi twayajuwa, tuloona yakijiri?
Ela haya ya kuzuwa, tutayapinga dhahiri
Tokea lini mashuwa, ikashutuwa bahari?

Naona mwajisumbuwa, moyo wangu u shuwari
Ni vishindo vya mashuwa, havishutuwi bahari

Japo kwa kwenda mrama, mashuwa iwe hodari
Kuna siku talalama, dharuba zikishamiri
Mara mashuwa huzama, ikamizwa na bahari

Tuijuwavyo mashuwa, kiwa iko baharini
Japokuwa yenda sawa, imo bado hatarini
Mara hukosa hatuwa, ikaingiya majini

Asiyejuwa bahari, husema asilojuwa
Na siku ikidhihiri, matataye na beluwa
Hakuna cha uhodari, si meli wala mashuwa

(How many things do we know, whose origin we saw?
But these fabrications, we will oppose them openly
Since when has the boat rocked the sea?

I think you are wasting your time, my heart is at ease
Since when has a boat rocked the sea?

Even though a boat is skillful in rolling
One day it will wail, when the waves set in
In a flash, the boat sinks and is swallowed by the sea

The way we know a boat, when it is sailing
Even if it seems to move well, it is still at risk
Once it misses a step, down it goes into the water

Whoever does not know the sea, is very ignorant
When the sea becomes rough and menacing
Nothing can conquer it, ship or boat)

Here the weak are compared to the tiny boat which is always at the mercy of the ruthless and rocky waves and storms of the mighty sea, representing the powerful or the strong. Since the use of metaphor in Swahili and African literature in general gives the audience a wide scope in interpreting meaning, it is possible to infer several meanings in this song. For instance, the boat could refer to the poor as compared to the rich and the powerful or the analogy may mean the powerful (sea) is God while the weak (boat) could represent human beings. However, most of the people interviewed thought that the song portrays the masses as the all-powerful while the boat stands for leaders who are so

much drunk with power that they turn against the masses who elected them in the first place. Such people are like a boat trying to challenge the mighty sea! The reference in the lyric seems to allude to the class-nature of the contemporary Kenyan society. By reminding the boat that it cannot overcome the sea, the poet may implicitly be telling anti-people leaders to humble themselves because without the masses whom they despise, their leadership would not exist. Such naughty and know-all politicians who may be tempted to compete against the masses (sea), should remember that the "power" they hold emanates from the masses and their efforts to degrade the people are completely futile.

The use of symbolism here is very clear. By giving familiar physical things such as a boat, the sea and waves an objective reality in a fictional or poetic sense, the poet in this song tries to render this reality comprehensible and memorable. (13) This reality, which is fixed in the consciousness of the poet, is made to represent not just an abstract objective character of things but ordinary human nature. By using imagery and metaphors from sea travel, an art for which the Swahili are well known, the poet avoids using stale imagery that lacks precision. Such stale imagery is often found in poetic compositions which draw examples and references from unfamiliar environment. Thus, the appropriate use of fresh imaginative and convincing idioms and symbolism to represent sociopolitical reality is a hall-mark of quality in classical and modern Swahili poetry and songs. The symbolism so used, helps to impart a social meaning to ideas and events in the society.

Another popular way of representing political ideas in Swahili taarab songs is by use of rhetorical questions which often appear in the form of refrains. This technique is employed by poets to provoke public reaction and response to the sociopolitical issues of the day. (14) Such rhetorical questions compel, require and even demand a response. This explains the importance of questions in songs or poetry as carriers of vital messages. For example, in the following verse, the artist poses a double-edged question. On one level, the question is addressed to the self-centered individual who is a kind of a "dog in the manger". Such an individual, who is being blamed for being selfish and inconsiderate of other people, is compared to a frog that goes to live in the well while it has no useful

purpose for the water. By remaining in the well all the time, the frog keeps away others who may genuinely need to use the water. At another level, the “frog” may be a thinly-veiled sarcastic reference to a cheap, self-styled “leader” who, being over-zealous in his or her designs, tends to marginalise other people. The poet sings:

Chura nakuuliza, unipe jibu yakini
Kila inyeshapo mvua, wakimbilia bwawani
Huna nguo za kufua, wala huna sabuni
Nijibu nipate tua, maji utayafanyani?

Chura punguza vituko, naapa u hayawani
Umezua shokomoko, watu hawaelewani
Ukivunjika hukohuko, dawa atakupa nani?

(Frog, I ask you, answer me frankly
Whenever it rains, you run to the pond
You have no clothes to wash, nor do you soap
Answer me well, how will you use the water?)

Frog leave your mischief, I swear you are mad
You have caused chaos, people are divided
If you are hurt in there, who will treat you?)

In the East African political context, the issue of selfishness or lack of public accountability among the political leaders is a commonly articulated problem. Land grabbing and amassing of other public resources for individual use at the expense of the poor masses is widespread in this region. This sociopolitical evil has not escaped the notice of creative artists and other social critics. In the following song, the artist decries the greed of a small clique of local power elites who grab the national wealth for their own personal comfort at the expense of the poor masses. The song goes:

Najua mwanilaumu, mwenzenu kutojiunga
Nawajuza mfahamu, sababu ya kujitenga
Kinyang'anyiro kitamu, lakini kina mtanga

Ndipo nikaona kero, vita vya wale kusonga
Hujuma na madaguro, na kutaka kujitenga
Pato la kinyang'anyiro, nalicha lina mtanga

Eyni mlojitolea, wenzangu nawashauri
Mimi singeyakimbia, najua yana dosari
Mambo ya kupigania, hayana mwisho mzuri

Kinyang'anyiro kuambiwa, kina mtanga jamani
 Ndipo nikikiletewa, huniponyoka mkononi
 Na mwenye kukitukuwa, hukitwaa mtangani

(I know you are blaming me for keeping aloof
 I am telling you my reason for doing so
 Competition is good but it is dirty too)

I am disgusted and can not join their struggle
 Their exploits and dens for self-gratification
 Ill-gotten wealth, I fear it; it corrupts

Those devoted to it, I advise you, my friends
 I would not shun it, but it is evil, you know
 Such spoils bring no blessings

Grabbing things is evil, my people
 That is why what I grab falls off my hand
 And the one to get it, must pick it up from the soil)
 (Shakila and Black Star Musical club)

The composer compares the national game of "grabiosis", as the grabbing and amassing of wealth by individuals in East Africa has come to be baptized, to a game of kinyang'anyiro, the Swahili term for a fierce struggle for possession of something. The implied analogy is pretty much to a group of children rushing and pushing to reach for sweets thrown on the ground for them by an adult. One could take issue with the artist's attitude toward political corruption and grabbing of common wealth by a few individuals at the expense of the powerless majority. For instance, the artist seems to prescribe total abstinence from rather than a struggle for change within the corrupt social environment. This approach seems to suggest an escapist solution to a real and on-going sociopolitical problem. Secondly, the composer appears to take a "holier than thou" stance vis-a-vis her corrupt fellows, an attitude that does not seem to realize that this is not just a problem for the individual, but rather for the whole society and one that calls for a collective approach. The artist makes no call for the overhaul of the system that breeds or encourages such individualistic tendencies.

In sharp contrast to the stance taken by Shakila in the song above, in the following song, Maulidi Juma, one of the leading contemporary Kenyan taarab singers and composers, chooses to fight for his rights despite all manner of obstacles that may lie in his way:

Nendepi nikionewa, na maovu yazidi?
 Nendapo nadhulumiwa, nami kwenda sina budi
 Nenda watu wafikapo, kutumika nisilale
 Nikenda watu walako, naambiwa hapa usile
 Nendako nina sikitiko, sina wa kunipa pole

(Where can I go to escape oppression, while oppression is increasing?
 Wherever I go, I am discriminated, but I must keep on
 I go as far as the rest, slaving, with no time to sleep
 If I go where others are eating, I am told "do not eat here"
 I am ever in grief, with no comforter)

The message here is crystal clear: the weak in society should be prepared to fight and suffer for their rights. They should be armed with the necessary moral courage to denounce evil and struggle for common good and justice. This theme dealing with the essence and urgency of the need to fight for natural, sociopolitical and economic rights of each individual, is well represented in the entire body of Swahili poetry and prose and, indeed, in other other forms of literary expression in post-independence Africa. (15)

In the following verse, a similar call is made in even more forceful and explicit manner. The poet stresses that the oppressed must be prepared to make all the necessary sacrifice in order to reclaim justice, fairness, dignity and freedom.

Simama uitetee, usihofu vituko
 Alo nayo muandame, akupe kilicho chako
 Akipinga mlemee, mwandame aendako

Cha mtu hakifichiki, kingafukiwa kiliko
 Wala hakitumiliki, kazana utwae chako
 Siitupe haki yako, fahamu dhambi kwako

Siche kifaru na ndovu, wangazidi nguvu zako
 Teta nao kwa werevu, unusuru haki yako
 Sikae kwa upumbavu, kilicho chako ni chako

(Stand and fight for your right, fear not troubles
 Follow the one with it and grab what is yours
 If he/she resists, stick on, follow them all the way

One's right is inalienable, even if it is hidden
 Nor can it be finished, struggle to get your right
 Do not give up your right, it is a sin to do so

Fear neither elephants nor rhinos, even if they are
 mightier than you

Fight them intelligently to secure your right
Do not be naive, what is yours is your own)

The presentation of social and political issues affecting contemporary Swahili and Kenyan society in the medium of the taarab songs is often inspired by personal experiences observed by a particular individual artist. For example, by consciously and sensitively observing certain local or national activities, practices, behaviors or debates, the composer may discern some abnormalities or malfunctions and create a song to describe the perceived social ills. The song, therefore, becomes the tool with which the artist registers protest, calls for rectification and eradication of the socially harmful behavior or practice. Some female Swahili taarab artists from the Lamu district of Kenya composed the verse below to expose the intrigue and machinations that were put into force in order to rig the 1974 general elections in favor of certain candidates. This dishonest political behavior is a source of national shame and embarrassment, the song seems to underline:

Mwalikitumia khila
Na urongo mkiapa
Sasa hamba lahaua
Na mmekuwa hutanda
Pesa zenu tumekula
Na voti hatukuwapa

Mwalitukuwa hatuwa
Ya kututia tandini
Tandi twaliitanduwa
Tukawavika shingoni
Kadi mlizonunuwa
Hamkujuwa ni za nani

Fungani zenu siasa
Na yote mlolidai
Hiki kiti mmekosa
Korneshani udarai
Ubepari umekwisha
Na mapesa hayafai

(You used tricks
And swore any lies
Now you curse your luck
And have become desperate
We have eaten your money
But we did not vote for you

You took steps
To trap us in your snares

We disentangled ourselves
 And put the noose around your necks
 The votes you paid for
 You did not know whose they were

Put an end to your politics
 And to all your claims
 You have missed this seat
 End your tricks
 Imperialism is no more
 And money (bribes) cannot help you)

The corrupt practice of bribing voters to win an election or influence its outcome against an opponent is a notorious one in Kenya's local government and parliamentary elections. The poetesses in the above verse are conveying the moral that popularity or leadership cannot be bought because, the masses are not so naive as to sell their democratic right of electing the candidate of their choice.

In a capitalist political system based on personal cult and patronages, such as Kenya's, in-fighting, plots and counter-plots and other forms of political maneuvers are the order of the day and they become especially rife around election time. During this period, loyalty and attention is shifted from the people and the major issues and problems of the day to certain financial magnets and rich political power brokers, around whom the aspirants crowd to gain favor. Often, however, such patronages do not pay any dividends and the victims sooner or later agonizingly and shamefully come to grips with the reality of their situation. This fact is stressed in the verse below:

Wende kitatini
 Kwa Padri wao
 Kufanya hesabu
 Ya hasara yao
 Wapiziwe laana
 Kwa umoja wao

(They have gone to the palace
 To their benefactor
 To take count
 Of their losses
 They have been cursed
 The whole lot of them)

As hinted above, the political consciousness of the taarab singers does not appear to

be as critical and radical as that displayed by the poets who use writing as a medium. Indeed, many of the artists whose songs have been analyzed in this research show a relatively low level of political awareness and tend to conform to or just support the status quo. To many of them, all seems to be bliss! This type of singers and composers could be rightly described as a kind of court poets whose duty is to sing, drum up support and popular approval for the establishment; tell the rulers what they would like to hear. These artists tend to compromise commitment to social justice for political and material gain. They suppress the truth to win patronage.

The pro-establishment artists, as the following song indicates, compose songs couched in very flowery language calculated to elicit positive feelings and empathy from the audience in an effort to enhance the legitimacy of the subject of the song. Here is an example:

Heko Mzee mpenzi, Rais mwema wa Kenya
Baba yetu mwokozi, kwa kazi uloifanya

Mengi umetufanyia
Ambayo mazuri sana
Twasema leo twasema
Heko mzee Kenyatta twasema

Mungu akupe uzima, na afya ya duniani
Uzidi kutenda mema kwa salama na amani

(Congratulations Beloved Mzee , Kenya's glorious
President
Our saving father, for your devotion

You have done so much for us
So many good things
We say today, we say
Congratulations, Mzee Kenyatta, we say

May God give you life and good health
To continue the good work, in stability and peace)
(Shakila and Black Star Musical Club)

The objective of this brand of Kenyan politics, the song seems to suggest, is to cultivate personality cult and enhance the political image of particular leaders. When this practice in African politics is taken to the extreme, it becomes an empty ritual, a meaningless ceremonial art for mere personal gratification. It turns out to be a routine effort to build a formidable personalized rule or autocracy. The song above gives the impression of an artist making an attempt to lavish praise on an individual whose objective is to endear himself or herself to the people. This type of theme is also well represented in the written tradition.(16)

Pro-establishment poetry or songs and poetry tend to be dogmatic, subjective, prescriptive and didactic. For instance, the words in these songs are repetitive and sound hackeneyed. The following song expresses similar sentiments about President Moi (Kenyatta's successor) as those expressed on Kenyatta in the previous song:

Heko Mtukufu Moi, kwa kuiongoza Kenya
Nyayo, Nyayo, Nyayo, twaandama Nyayo zako

Mtukufu Baba Moi, shika usukani wako
Wananchi twafurahi, kwa uongozi wako
Twakutilia saine, tuko chini yako
Na Mola atakulinda, Raisi Moi uendako
Hao wanaojipinda, kuharibu jina lako

Ni bure wanayotenda, hayakupati uliko
(Shukrani Musical Club, Mombasa, Kenya)

(Congratulations President Moi, for leading Kenya
Honorable Father, Moi,
Nyayo, Nyayo, Nyayo, we are flowing in your footsteps)

Honorable Father Moi, take full control
We, the nationals are pleased with your leadership
We endorse you and are fully behind you

God will protect you wherever you go, President Moi
And those bent on tarnishing your name
It is in vain and will not affect you where you are)

Certain stylistic and linguistic characteristics stand out in these pro-establishment songs. The words used are prayerful, imploring, committal and all-inclusive in their intended meaning. The style is repetitive and tends to be redundant. It seems the song is not only meant to endear the leaders to those under their rule, but also to strengthen the legitimacy of that rule in the eyes of the public and create the impression that there is general contentment and satisfaction among the rank and file. For instance, the use of the inclusive and collective pronoun "we" in a declarative manner, gives the impression that the singer in the second stanza in the above song is expressing a popular consensus and a true national sentiment.

Like their writing counterparts in the Swahili poetic tradition, the taarab singers often compose long narrative poems ("tenzi") to highlight the lives and times of certain leaders and other notables in the society. The "utenzi" form is best suited for this function because of its short and easily rendered lines with end-of-line rhymes. The length of the form enables the composer to give the subject matter a deep and wide treatment. A good example of this type of composition in the song form is the one below by Zena Mahamoud Fadhil of Mombasa, which details the biography of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta entitled "Utenzi Wa Kenyatta". The poem consists of more than 500 stanzas.(17) Here are a few stanzas of the song:

Janii ya tafswili
Taeleza kiswahili
Nina hakika kwa kweli
Watu wote huweleya

Kwa hili sina mikhafa
Lugha hii ni yenye sifa
Karibu lote taifa
Wananchi hutumiya

Niseme ya muawana
Hadidhi ya waungwana
Baba yetu na mama Ngina
Mashujaa wenye niya

Mashujaa wasotua
Ambao walijitua
Hawakucha kubomoa
Popote kupindukia

Waliifuata ndia
Kwa baraka za jalia
Zikatimu zao nia
Uhuru wakautia

Walijipinda kwa kweli
Nafusi na yao mali
Vyote hawakuvijali
Ila haki kutetea

Tawaeleza mfahamu
Mambo yalotakadamu
Yalo kati na ya humu
Nyuma yalowapitia

(In great detail
I will narrate in Kiswahili
I fully trust
That all will understand it

In this matter, I have no fears
That Kiswahili is a great language
Nearly the entire nation
Uses the language

I will recount the illustrious deeds
Of the honorables
The father of the nation and Mama Ngina (First lady)
The devoted heroes

Our untiring brave leaders
Who devoted themselves
And did not hesitate to tear down
With great zeal when it was necessary

They stuck to the cause (of struggle)
With God's blessing
They realized their goal
They grabbed Uhuru (independence)

They really exerted themselves

Spiritually and materially
Not caring about anything
But to fight for justice

We will clarify it for you
The events that came to pass
What took place previously and at present
And what followed thereafter)

Not only do Swahili taarab poets compose patriotic songs to express what they perceive to be the desirable qualities of good political leadership, but they often take it upon themselves to expound, interpret, explain and endear the words of the leaders they consider to be models to the general public. Such poets assume that the average Kenyan does not fully grasp the meaning and the spirit of the “national motto” and “philosophies” of the establishment which are in need of such “explanation”. As a result of this tendency, many Swahili taarab songs in the taarab tradition today purport to “teach” Kenyans the various “philosophical” pronouncements of the political leaders. In the following example, Juma Bhalo, one of the leading taarab composers in Mombasa, Kenya, “explains” the meaning of President Moi’s motto of Nyayo (Footsteps):

Wananchi pulikeni, niwaeleze yaliyo
Msemo uliyo nchini, wa “Tufuateni Nyayo”
Ni wa maana juweni, yalo na mafanikiyo

Kama u Mkenya kweli
Katiba waikubali
Basi juwa jambo hili
“Fuata Nyayo”

Kiongozi wetu wa leyo, wa jamhuri ya Kenya
Maongozi aliyo nayo, na tuonayo afanya
Haki tuandame Nyayo, bila ya nyuso kusinya

Kuandama Nyayo zake, kwa haki na upendano
Ndilo jambo tukumbuke, duniani bora mno
Nasi tuwe nyuma yake, tuunge Nyayo mkono

Ufuataji wa Nyayo, ni kutenda yalo mema
Na yasiyokuwa hayo, iwapo tutaandama
Tujuwe maendeleo, yetu yatabaki nyuma

Nyayo ni kulea pendo, na kupenda bila chuki
Nyayo sio za mfundo, na kupaana dhiki
Nyayo ni vyema vietendo, umoja na kila haki

Nyayo ni sisi kukuza, uchumi wetu nchini
Na kuzidi kueneza, wenye kuleta amani

Ndizo Nyayo za mwangaza, popote ulimwenguni

(Fellow citizens, listen, I will tell you what is right
This motto of, "Let's follow Nyayo"
Is important and very beneficial

If you are really a Kenyan
And respect the constitution
Then understand this
Follow Nyayo

The current leader of the Republic of Kenya
His policies and what we see him doing
Truly, let's follow Nyayo without frowning

To follow his footsteps in truth and love
Is what matters, the most vital thing in the world
Let's be solidly behind him and support Nyayo

Following Nyayo means doing good
And what is contrary to this if we do
Then let's know our development will lag behind

Nyayo is practicing love and acting without hatred
Nyayo is not anger or provoking one another
Nyayo is good deeds, unity and justice

Nyayo means building our nation's economy
And spreading the gospel of peace
Such are the footsteps of light all over the world)

The words of this song, like those in the one below, portray a deep conviction and authority and assume an imploring tone, that make the verse sound like a speech by a party ideologue. In a similar fashion, another prominent Mombasa poet, Ali Mkali highlights the role of Kenya's ruling party, Kenya African National Union (K.A.N.U.). He sings:

Pulikeni wajamala, mlio katika penu
Za Kenya kulla mahala, niwape hizi fununu
Nawaomba kwa jumla, nyote kwa hisani zenu

KANU eeh, leo KANU.....yajenga nchi			
Rais wetu mpendwa.	"	"	"
Na makamu wa Raisi	"	"	"
Mawaziri na wambunge	"	"	"
Madiwani na Mameya	"	"	"
Na jeshi letu la Kenya	"	"	"
Na raia kwa jumla	"	"	"
KANU eeh leo KANU	"	"	"

Hapa sote kwa jumla, hatuna asi nafusi
Wambunge, makonsela, tu katika ufuasi
Wa chama kilo tawala, mwito wa wetu Raisi

Nampongeza raisi, pamoja na mawaziri
Waliounda vikosi, vya jeshi vikadawiri
Ili kutulinda sisi, Kenya ipate nawiri

Nampongeza makamu, mwenye moyo mkunjufu
Aliyeshika hatamu, akawa muaminifu
Namuombeya Karimu, azidi uadilifu

Yatupasa kujipinda, kulla tuliko mahali
Chama chetu kukulinda, kizidi kuwa adili
Ndicho chama kilounda hii yetu serikali

KANU ndicho kilounda, wanajeshi kukusanya
Ili wapate tulinda, na mengine ya kufanya
KANU kilileta tunda, la uhuru hapa Kenya

(Listen my brothers wherever you are
Throughout Kenya, I want to whisper this to you
I appeal to you all, out of your own will

KANU ooh, today, KANU is building the nation
Our beloved President “ “ “ “
The Vice-President “ “ “ “
Ministers and Parliamentarians “ “ “
Councilors and Mayors “ “ “
And the Kenya Armed forces “ “ “
And the citizens in general “ “ “
KANU ooh, today, KANU is building the nation

We here are all united, no single dissent
M.Ps and councilors, we are all followers
Of our ruling party, as is the call of our President

I congratulate the President and the Ministers
Who formed the battallions all over
To protect us, so Kenya may prosper

I salute the Vice-President who has a honest heart
Who took up office and remained faithful
I pray for him so he may be more faithfu

We should pull ourselves up, wherever we are
To guard our party so it may be strong
It is the party which has formed our government

It is KANU that formed our armed forces
To defend us and do other things
KANU brought the fruit of independence to Kenya

It is interesting to note that similar kind of messages seem to have dominated Tanzanian taarab poetry following Tanzania the adoption of “The Arusha Declaration” (“Azimio La Arusha”). The following song sets out to “explain” the meaning and spirit of the 1967 Declaration that ushered in a socialist system in the Union Republic. The song by

Kenya's Juma Bhalo states:

Napenda kuwajulisha, pia nyote ikhiwani
Azimio la Arusha, pamwe na utamaduni
Mno limeneemesha, neema sizo kifani

Ndugu zangu azimio, ni jambo lenye maani
Tanzania ya leo, sio ile ya zamani
Hivi sasa tuna cheo, kikubwa ulimwenguni

Ni jambo lenye fahari, mtu kujitegemea
Humwepuka kila shari, na balaa za dunia
Kwa uwezo wa Qahari, mambo yote hutengenea

(I would like to inform all of you
The Arusha Declaration and our culture
Have brought us uncountable blessings

My brothers, the Declaration is a milestone
Today's Tanzania is not like that of the past
We now have an important status in the world

It is a great pride to be self-reliant
It eradicates many problems and worldly cares
With God's help, all things come to fruition

The examples quoted above indicate that contrary to the popular assertion that Swahili taarab songs are merely a medium for discussing trivial personal matters like romance, sex, and cheap local gossip, the songs serve as vehicle for serious political debate.⁽¹⁸⁾ The examples quoted indicate beyond doubt that the form has been and continues to be used to express a wide range of weighty national political issues whose main aim is to raise political and ideological awareness among the Kenyan masses as well as sell the official ideological perspectives to them. To this extent, one could conclude that the contemporary Swahili taarab artist has continued to highlight the political issues of the day, a role played by many classical Swahili poets.

This discussion, however, has not fully answered some basic questions related to the treatment of political issues in these songs. There is need for further and more systematic analysis of this theme on a more inclusive and deeper level. Some of the fundamental questions are, for instance, What kind of public image do the political ideas and feelings expressed in the contemporary Swahili songs portray about the prevailing

Kenyan political climate? Could one describe these ideas as parochial, subjective, or insightful, balanced, informed and well enlightened? Are the sociocultural values inherent in the songs indicative of a society that is largely politically conservative, traditional, transitional or modern? Thirdly, do the taarab artists display an understanding of the socio-historical development of their community and do they argue their cases from a progressive, revolutionary, creative and pro-masses position or a myopic, individualistic narrow and subjective stance?

The recent practice of some politicians to use Swahili taarab songs for political propaganda, if not well integrated in the overall national sociocultural system, could result in a tendency to enhance personal political cult of some Kenyan power elites at the expense of development. This situation whereby a few taarab artists gain public limelight and material benefits through their association with self-seeking politicians may lead to what Corcoran calls "the segmentation of the society on the basis of power to control the linguistic and literary behavior of the masses". (19) It is impractical for these artists to faithfully serve both their political patrons as well as the masses, especially in a society with antagonistic and competing sociopolitical class interests such as Kenya.

It is also possible to argue that most contemporary Swahili taarab artists are not strongly committed to any ideological stance advanced by the political establishment. They have steered clear of political limelight and enticement of the self-seeking local political leaders and instead they have sought to articulate the larger aesthetic and human vision of the masses. These singers have attempted to use the medium of their songs to raise and sustain the moral and critical social awareness of the larger segments of their community. This is in contrast to the claim that popular oral forms such as Swahili taarab songs "tend to overwhelmingly be a medium for transmitting consensus rather than heresy; accepted ideas rather than intellectual departures." (20) The Swahili taarab artist to play fully the role one who can call public attention to social ills while "philosophizing and sorrowing" over the ills. In other words, the taarab artist has yet to advance beyond the level of merely exposing social evils and attempt to offer the community an insight into an alternative way

of organizing the society for a brighter future.(21)

In as far as the political role of the Kenyan Swahili taarab artists is concerned, it is probably more realistic to see them neither as complete pro-establishment ideologues nor as radicalised individuals calling for fundamental social change. Their songs are dynamic forms which are informed by prevailing issues in Kenyan public life and not just mere anonymous compositions handed down over generations. In addition, while the level or degree of the personal ideological commitment differs from one artist to another, the themes of other songs change to reflect the realities of the of the times.(22)

In conclusion, one agrees with Nwanko's observation that in order for the creative artists like the Swahili taarab singers to play an effective role in development communication, they have to come to grips with the fundamental sociopolitical issues and conflicts in the larger community. These conflicts do not just result from the impact of the national cultural transition the society finds itself in today, but, they are also a product of the clash of interests inherent in the country's bureaucracy and the manner in which the political establishment governs the Kenyan masses. Such clashes give rise to conflicting philosophical standpoints and values whose criticism and exposition ought to preoccupy creative and performing artists.(23)

The treatment of the various moralistic, religious and other social themes in contemporary Swahili taarab is explored in Chapter 6.

Endnote

1. Anne Biersteker, "Kazi Ya Ushairi: Post- War Kiswahili Poetry and the Construction of Nationalistic Identities in East Africa", Paper presented to the 33rd African Studies Association Meeting, (Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A, October, 1990), 1-5.
2. Washington Omond, "Is Communication Through Music on the Decline in Modern African Society?" Paper Presented to the Conference on Communication in a Multi-lingual Region, (Nairobi, Kenya, August 1976), 1-10.
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12. P.E. Corcoran, Political Language and Rhetoric. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 79.
13. Jack Goody, The Interface Between the Written and the Oral, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 23.
14. For example, Poetry by Mohamed Kijumwa, A.A. Nassir, Shaaban Robert, Ahamad Nassir Juma, Abdilatif Abdalla, Said A. Mohamed and Al-Amin Mazrui's Chembe Cha Moyo, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988), 1-30.
15. Examples of this type verse in the Swahili poetic tradition include, Amri Abedi's "Haki Yako" Diwani Ya Amri, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1965), 45 and Ahamad Nassir's "Uwatapo Haki Yako" in Malenga Wa Mvita. (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1971), 115.
- 16). For instance, a well-known Kenyan journalist and Swahili cultural critic, Faraj Dumila, has collected and edited many songs and poems on patriotic themes to celebrate the era of president Kenyatta and president Moi. The collections were published in 2 volumes under the titles, Wasifu wa Kenyatta, Wasifu wa Moi in

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CHAPTER 5

Sociocultural Themes in the Kenyan Swahili Taarab Songs

5:1 Introduction

This chapter explores some of the most dominant sociocultural themes in contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs. It is a fact that themes in African songs tend to center around matters of common concern in a given community. Kenyan Swahili taarab songs are no exception to this rule. As hinted in the last chapter, the content in these songs captures not just everyday life happenings but also traditional beliefs and customs of the Swahili and Kenyan society. This is true of both songs that can be characterized as carrying serious political themes, such as the examples discussed in the last chapter, and also songs associated with ceremonies and cultural rituals. It is worth noting that cultural themes are so inextricably tied up together that it is almost impossible to separate them. This fact is made clear by both Whiteley (1) and Knappert (2) as well as Meridian who stresses that themes in African songs generally encompass many closely-knit aspects of social life.(3) While bearing in mind the close thematic relationship of the songs sung in different times by different artists, the study groups the sample analyzed for sociocultural themes into three broad categories: love and romance, didactic themes, religious, current affairs and humor.

5:2 The Theme of Love and Romance

In this context, the concept of "love" is used in the sense of heterosexual relationship or erotic affection. Therefore, the term covers such aspects of relationship as courtship, marriage and expression of spiritual and physical fondness and admiration. Likewise, "romance" is used to refer to the exploration of deep mental and spiritual inclination toward a pleasurable love experience in the real human world. This meaning is to be differentiated from the Western one in which romance is often, if not always, associated purely with mere adventure, excitement and fantasy. In contrast, the romance to

be found in Swahili and African oral forms is built around real human social situations such as birth, funeral, naming, circumcision, harvest, sailing, receiving guests, war, sea voyages or other social activities.

While the songs may occasionally sound nostalgic and trivial in their reference, they dwell largely on real and tangible human environment. The Swahili language is deeply poetic and phonologically musical and romantic. This quality of the language serves the composer very well. In stressing the romantic nature of Kiswahili and the Swahili taarab songs, a leading taarab singer said:

The Swahili language being exceptionally romantic in its expression, is also highly poetic. Most Swahili-speaking communities are highly sentimental and their songs often reflect this. I sing romantic songs but I feel the word "romantic" is too limited. My songs explore deep human and divine feelings of love; one of the most tender feelings of the human heart. I use God's gift of a sweet voice for the benefit of humanity. I use it to encourage patriotism, nationalism and humanism among all who listen to me.(4)

Love songs in the taarab tradition are especially cast in metaphorical language and are often humorous and sharply sarcastic. In the following song, the singer is laughing at an elderly lady who belatedly "falls in love" with the aim of just grabbing a husband:

Tunda bivu, halitaraji kuanguwa
Jani kavu, huanguka chini kwa juwa
Mwenye kovu, asitumai kapowa

Lisokuwa, naomba usinitende
Kuitowa, roho yangu sijipinde
Utauwa, na mazikoni wenende?

(A ripe fruit needs no picking
A dry leaf falls due to sun's heat
A person with a scar should not expect to heal

I pray, do not do what is inhuman to me
To pluck away my heart, do not try it
Will you kill and attend the funeral (of the victim)?

The following verse is an example of a song expressing sentimental love. The singer is unhappy at having to part with a dear one. However, his self-pity is measured and not explicitly brought out. Animal imagery is employed to enhance the beauty of the

loved one:

Tausi kwaheri sana, ndege wangu maridhia
 Hali yangu waiona, sihitaji kukwambia
 Nifanyeje hali sina, siwezi kukuzuwia
 Tausi wanikimbia, wapi takuona tena?

(Tausi (dove) goodbye, my lovely bird
 My poor state is clear, no need to tell you
 Tausi, you are fleeing me, where shall I see you again?)

The sentimentalism in some songs is deepened by the exaggeration of the praise lavished on the subject. Such songs often portray love as an emotion with a strong driving force which is irresistible. Here is an example of two verses each selected from songs with this theme:

Yamiminika machozi, wallahi sijitambui
 Michirizi, michirizi, hata macho sifungui
 Yaniumiza mapenzi, nimpedaye hajui

Iwapo umesikia, nakwenda kinyume kwako
 Nakuomba maridhia, nirudi kiasi chako
 Kiasi kilotimia, ufurahi moyo wako
 Nami nitavumilia, kuhisi adhabu yako
 (Matano Juma, Mombasa, Kenya)

(Tears are flowing, God! I am beside myself
 Streams and streams of tears, I cannot even open my eyes
 Love is hurting me, my love does not understand)

If you feel I have wronged you
 I beseech you love, punish me to your satisfaction
 To satisfy your heart's desire
 And I will tolerate the burden of your punishment)

Using an even stronger metaphor, the singer in the example below further likens love to a destructive power that could easily wreck its victim.

Mapenzi ni kama donda
 Yaingiapo moyoni
 Nimechoka vumilia
 Leo nawapasulia

(Love is like a wound
 When it enters the heart
 I am tired of tolerating it
 Today, I will disclose it to you)

However, as strong as the force of love may appear, it is still a human phenomenon over which human beings command full control and ability to mold or destroy at will. This is the message in the closing line of this song in which the singer refuses to submit himself to the whims of his lover: He sings:

Siwi papa, siwi papa, kumeza ninachooona
(I will not be a shark to swallow whatever I see)

Love involves a process of give and take and lovers must be prepared to play their roles with devotion. It takes two to create a loving atmosphere where tolerance, understanding, patience, and forgiveness are the key factors. In contrast to the above verse, in this song, the lover expresses his readiness to humble himself and implore his lover to win her love:

Nampenda kweli, wazi nabaini
Na wala sijali, kuwa maguuni
Ni kitambo hali, pendo kanihini

Nami kunihini, pendo sitoweza
Najua moyoni, nitajiumiza
Ndipo haamini, kumbembeleza

Hili si ajabu, ambalo natenda
Wala si aibu, kusaili nyonda
Kwani ni wajibu, kwa wenye kupenda

Natatua wazi, kwake naumiya
Bila maonezi, nikimliliya
Tamu ya mapenzi, ni kunyenyekeya

(I sincerely love her, this, I declare
And I do not mind falling at her feet
For a long time she has denied me her love

I cannot stand this denial
Since, in my heart I know, I will keep suffering
And so, I choose to persuade her

What I am doing is not surprising
Neither is it shameful to implore my love
For it is the duty of a lover)

Similarly, the virtue of mutual trust as the foundation of a stable relationship, is stressed in the verse below in which the singer is urging her lover to make good his promises. To clarify her case, the poetess quotes the famous Swahili proverb, "Ahadi ni

deni" (A promise is a debt). The song goes:

Nyonda neno lako, hujatimiza,
Ni.wajibu wako, kulitekeleza
Kesho yako, itaniumiza

Uliyobaini, ahadi kunipa
Mbona sioni, sasa waniepa
Ahadi ni deni, mbona hujalipa?

(My love, you have not kept your word
It is your duty to fulfill it
Your "tomorrow" will hurt me

The promise you decided to give me
How come I do not see it and now you avoid me?
A promise is a debt, how come you have not paid?)

Among the Swahili, there are many ways of expressing love and affection. One of these is for a lover to truthfully and devotedly mourn his or her dead partner. Hypocrisy and pretense in a love affair characterize lack of commitment and are never tolerated even between a married couple. In the song below, a wife is rebuking her husband for his lack of sincerity. She stresses that nothing has any meaning or value in her life any more due to her discovery of her husband's noncommittal stance. She sings:

Chakula sioni tamu, kikumbuka mazoea
Huona ni kama sumu, tumboni mwangu kutia
Hakika nimefahamu, kifa hutonililia

Niliwaza ni karimu, kiona yako twabia
Kumbe wewe ni dhalimu, usiyekuwa na haya
Hakika nimefahamu, kifa hutonililia

(I find food tasteless, when I remember our love
It is like poison in my stomach
Truly, I have known, If I die, you will not mourn me

I thought you were kind when I observed your behavior
But lo! You are so cruel and shameless
Truly, I have known, If I die, you will not mourn me)

Quite often, taarab singers portray attributes of physical beauty as the sole object or basis of human love and affection. When taken to the extreme, this tendency could give a misleading impression that Swahili romance is motivated and shaped by physical rather than spiritual characteristics. This type of song has a deep sense of idealism and tends to idolize the object. Here is an example by Bibi Zuhura, a leading Kenyan taarab singer and

composer:

Rangi yako ya dhahabu (mpenzi)
 Iliyo safi takasa “
 Sauti ya taratibu “
 Yenye ladha isiyokwisha “

Mwili wako laini “
 Ambao umetakasa “
 Mfano wako ni jini “
 Ambaye ameumbika “

Macho ukinitazama “
 Mazuri yanapendeza “
 Midomo iliyo myema “
 Laini kibembeleza “

(Your complexion is golden
 It is sparkling clean
 A gentle beautiful voice
 With lasting sweetness

Your body is all smooth
 It has a glittering beauty
 You resemble a superhuman being
 Who is perfectly handsome

Your eyes, when you look at me
 Beautiful and pleasant to behold
 Your lips are handsome
 They are gentle when you beseech me)

Other songs use physical attributes of beauty in a metaphorical sense to represent human behavior. They lay emphasis on the desirability of positive, balanced and socially acceptable behavior as a prerequisite for a stable relationship. This attempt to match physical beauty with positive character is widespread in the Swahili taarab and poetic tradition. One therefore, comes across such lines as:

Nakupenda kwa umbo, pia na tabia zako
 Na wako urembo, washinda wenzako

(I love you for your beauty and character too
 Your beauty exceeds that of your fellows)

Or: Mpenzi mwenye adabu, usokuwa na harnaki
 Mzuri mtaratibu, kusema naye huchoki
 Asipokuwa karibu, moyo hauburudiki

(My well behaved love, who has no anger
 Beautiful and gentle, inspiring to talk to

Unless she is near me, my heart is not delightful

Personal advice and appeal for a wayward love is a common theme in Swahili taarab songs of love and romance. Such songs call for the highest form of self-restraint, discipline, fidelity and forgiveness and their tone is soft and persuasive. An imaginary foe is always in the background of the mind of the lovers, hence the often repeated call to “ignore” the machinations of this foe or foes. The following verses exemplify these aspects of the theme of love:

Ukanye moyo, usikhalifu, kwenye mahaba
Jichunge na taklifu, zina mswiba
Fanya kula uraufu, tupate twiba

Tena zidisha uaminifu, kwenye suhuba
Mambo yawe manyoofu, na matwilaba

(Restrain your heart, do not falter in our love
Guard against obstacles, they cause woes
Do everything possible, so that we can succeed

Again, be more faithful in our love
So that all can be smooth and we may fulfill our needs)

OR

Tuza sana moyo wako, uzidi kumakinika
Usijipe uguliko, wangasema watachoka
Kuwa wangu niwe wako, wazidi kuugulika
Bure yao watachoka, wangasema mafatani
Na mno watasumbuka, katu hatuepukani

(Stop worrying and be calm
Do not trouble yourself, let them talk, they will be tired
Be mine, and I yours, so they can be hurt more
They work in vain, even though our foes gossip
They are wasting their time, we will never part)

Some lyrics give general advice for lovers and close friends as to how best to handle matters from time to time within the context of the relationship. For instance, the following verse, which is very proverbial in its idiom, advises lovers to make resolute decisions when it comes to giving up or sticking on to a relationship. The singer stresses the need to exercise prudence and foresight at all times.

Akufukuzaye, hakwambii toka
Huona mamboye, yamebadilika

Waweza ukaye, huwezi ondoka

(Whoever is expelling you, does not tell you to leave
You have to perceive the changed circumstances
If you are able, stay, if not, go away)

Most, if not all Kenyan taarab artists, are Muslims and they draw freely from the teachings of their faith even in composing secular songs such as ones on love and romance. For instance, God's name is invoked for blessings upon lovers or in prayer for guidance and protection or salvation from formidable waves of life that threaten to sink the love boat. Here is an example:

Rabbi mwenyezi, dua takabali
Kwa haya mapenzi, ya sisi wawili
Lisitoke penzi, kutuweka mbali

Uzito wa nyonda, tulouchukuwa
Mungu akipenda, tutafanikiwa

(Glorious God, grant our prayer
For this love, of the two of us
May our love not dry up and cause us to part

The burden of love that we bear
If god wills, we shall succeed)

Swahili taarab love songs are not always on love and romance per se. Casual or ordinary friendship provides ready and popular subjects for these songs as well. Thus, many songs in this category deal with such themes as welcoming a friend, bidding farewell to a guest, praying for the safety of one's friends or relatives who are traveling, the success of an impending event such as an examination, circumcision of children, wedding, or the recovery of a sick one. In addition to the above qualities, most of the songs of this type stress such virtues as generosity, open-heartedness and sincerity. The two verses below, quoted from a song addressed to the composer's friend, highlight some of these characteristics :

Karibu mwenye jamali, upite bila mikhafa
Mikono yangu miwili, nakupokea wa swifa
Inshalla Moja Jalali, tukazidi sharafa

Ndu yangu ulo rafiki, twalosafiana niya
Kukushukuru sichoki, na M'ungu kukuombeya

Asante shafiki, hidaya nimepokea

(Welcome lovely one, come in with no hesitation
With both hands open, I receive you, honorable one
If God wills, we will grow in good character

My intimate brother, with whom I share confidence
I never tire thanking you and wishing you God's blessing
Thank you for your kindness, I have received the gift

It is not possible to explore each and every aspect of the entire spectrum of the theme of love and romance in the contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs. This discussion has established the fact that while love is portrayed as a closely guarded treasure in the lovers' hearts, and compared to all that is positive, beautiful and valuable in human life, it is also painted as an irresistible force that is capable of destroying and disorienting human life, if not well managed and directed.

5:3 Didactic Themes

In this study, the use of labels such as "moralistic" or "didactic" songs to describe various aspects of the instructions on social conduct communicated through Swahili taarab songs need not be taken to imply that the songs are dogmatic or outright prescriptive. Indeed, some of the songs in this category are among the most artistic logical, and convincing in the entire Kenyan Swahili taarab tradition.

Songs in this group are as thematically complex and semantically rounded as those in other categories and even the few that may appear as mere pieces of social or moral "sermons" still exhibit a high level of artistic sophistication, creativity and imagination. The main objective of these songs is to teach, advise, warn condemn, praise, assess and caution the community. In fulfilling these goals, the composers employ various approaches including issuing generalized commentary on the nature of human behavior, drawing lessons from the artists' personal experiences, using popular traditional idioms of reference.

In following the tradition built by the classical poets and griots, contemporary taarab artists view the world as the embodiment of the human experience in its totality. Past experiences are, therefore, used to clarify present realities and concretize their

meaning.(5) For instance, in warning people against leaning on the frail and ephemeral materialistic world, Mohamed Juma Bhalo sings:

Dunia ndiyo shujaa, walimwengu walisema
Ndiyo huitwa hadaa, huangusha waadhama
Huja yeyuka mkaa, hutia watu vilema

Kisa watu waliopo
Dunia haina wema

(The world is brave, so said the ancestors
It is cunning and can fell the most high
It turns red hot and maims the strong

The reason is the human beings
The world knows no virtue)

This verse echoes closely the words of many poets and especially the memorable poem by Muyaka bin Haji (1776-1840), the celebrated Swahili political poet who composed:

Dunia mti mkavu, kiumbe siulemele
Ukaufanyia nguvu, kuudhibiti kwa dole
Mtiwe ni mtakavu, mara ulikwangushile
Usione kwenda mbele, kurudi nyuma si kazi

(The world is a brittle tree, do not lean on it, mortal being
Nor cling-on it with a firm grip
It is a rotten tree and will soon drop you
Do not be overjoyed due to present luck, misfortune may be near) (6

Alternatively, morals are delivered in the form of general advice using popular idioms such as proverbs. This is a very commonly used method even in written Swahili poetry. In addition, common objects are used to symbolize certain moral truths or standards of behavior. These two aspects are illustrated in the verses below. In the first verse the moral is weaved around the Swahili proverb, "Kulenga sio kufuma" (Aiming is not hitting the target) while the second verse uses the analogy of building a house and compares it, by implication, to the art of learning how to live.

Kusimama siko kwima, wacha mizungu ipite
Kutafuna ni hekima, kula ni kumiza mate
Kulekeza si kufuma, ufumacho si upate

(Standing is not being firm, let shyness alone
Chewing requires wisdom, eating means swallowing saliva
Targeting is not hitting, you may miss what you hit)

Nawauliza maarifa, kujenga sijabaini
 Imeeneza kashifa, ishanitoka moyoni
 Nyumba imengia ufa, haina tena thamani

(I seek your advice, I have not mastered the building craft
 My house is scandalous, I no longer have confidence in it
 It has cracked and is no longer valuable)

Perhaps, the allusion here is to an unfaithful lover whose infidelity is threatening to wreck a relationship.

A number of songs with moral themes are related to life within the family institution. The family is not only the basic unit of the Swahili and other Kenyan communities but it is also the first and the most important socializing agent which shapes the behavior of the individual. There are many songs that touch upon the various aspects of life in the family from birth to death. For example, parental care and the difficulties of bringing up a child are the lessons in this verse:

Taabu ya kumlea, na mwana kumtazama
 Vizuri kumwalia, na kila lililo jema
 Manukato kumtia, afurahike mwana

Maradhi yakimjia, mwana akishikwa na homa
 Dawa kumtafutia, akimpa kwa huruma
 Kama nilivyowambia, uchungu ajua mama

(The troubles of rearing a child and caring for it
 Looking after it and giving it the best
 Spraying perfume on it to make it happy)

When the child is sick, for instance, when it has fever
 The mother secures drugs and tenderly treats the child
 As I have told you, it is the mother who knows the pains)

The moral of this song is based on the Swahili proverb, "Uchungu wa mwana aujua mzazi" (The pain of getting a child and rearing it, only the parent understands). The parental duty of bringing up a child includes instructing it on the morals of life so that it grows up knowing its rights and obligations in the society. Formal education at school cannot be expected to shoulder this responsibility all by itself and the parent has a duty to teach the child at home, even before sending it to school as the following song states:

Manufaa ya ilimu, uwape ya kuwatosha
 Siwafanye Bakhaimu, au kuwasikitisha
 Wasomeshe wakhairu, na wema kuwafundisha

Ilimu handa nyumbani, tangu wakishazaliwa
Wafundishe kwa imani, na huku nao kukuwa
Ukuwapeka shuleni, mengi wawe wayajuwa

(Beneficial education, give them enough of it
Do not make them ignorant or full of self-pity
Let them learn and understand, give them good education

Start education at home, as soon as they are born
Teach them frankly as they grow up
So as they start school, they know many things)

The other virtues stressed in the songs above include obedience and respect to the elderly and the authorities and to all the people the child may come into contact with in the community. Teachers and parents are not to be feared or treated with contempt as authoritative figures but are to be seen as benefactors and friends who wish the best for the child. Parents do not have to be biological ones because, in the polygamous Swahili society, often children have to be raised by foster or step parents after the divorce, separation or death of their blood parents. Many songs, therefore, emphasize that children must treat their step parents or step mothers as they would their biological parents, for this is a requirement in the Islamic teaching. Conversely, individuals who have been entrusted with the care of orphaned children, are expected to love and rear them as their own.

Respect for parents is taught as a religious law in these songs as well as in the written poetry. Both Islam and Christianity teach that respecting and obeying one's parents is a prerequisite for being blessed on earth and salvation in the world to come. This is the lesson in this song by Zena Mahamoud:

Nawaambia muyashike, wala musiyadharau
Ni akiba muiweke, yenye kuwatowa kiu
Kijana wazee wake hafai kuwadharau

Tawafundisha muyuwe, kwa ndia ilo njema
Heshima anda mwenyewe, kumpa baba na mama
Hapo ndio wenginewe, watakufuata nyuma

Anda wewe uwatunge, uwe ukiwaridhiya
Wanenalosiwapinge, yapokuwa si ya ndiya
Yakizidi uitenge, ni bora kuyepukiya

(I urge you to heed and not ignore these words
It is a useful advice it will help you

A child ought not to disrespect its parents

I will teach you to understand properly
Respect starts with you respecting your father and mother
Then others will follow your example

Start by obeying them and agreeing with them always
Do not oppose their word, even if it is improper
If things get out of hand, it is better to avoid them)

There are many songs that concern the institution of marriage. These songs stress certain qualities which the Swahili deem necessary for a marriage to thrive and endure. Songs on marital life abound in the Swahili *taarab* as pointed out in the last section on love and romance. The marriage institution among the Swahili is viewed both as a religious as well as a social one. As a socio-religious institution, marriage is seen as a holy matrimony which is celebrated and consummated in the fulfillment of a divine requirement. This is why the artist in the verse below prays for the blessing of a newly wedded couple in the following verse:

Nyumba yenu karibuni, mungiye bila khofu
Inshalla Mola Manani, tawazidia sharafu
Akhira na duniyani, tawapa ya utukufu

(Welcome to your house, enter freely
If the Merciful God wills, your life will be gracious
In paradise and on earth, God will give you respect)

The theme of domestic violence, such as the abhorrent practice of wife-beating, is rarely dealt with in Swahili *taarab* songs, perhaps because, the male-dominated Swahili culture sanctions this debasing behavior, as discussed in Chapter Six under the subject of gender relations. However, one comes across a few verses that condemn the practice like the one below:

Aghalabu unamvika, dhahabu elefu nzima
Mkeo akitamka, wampiga kama ngoma
Nimeamini hakika, waume hatuna salama

Nyumba hungia baraka, mke mkikaa vyema
Chumo huja haraka, hamkosi lote jema
Rhadhi ya mke hakika, yapita hata ya mama

(Suppose you lavish her with lots of gold
If your wife complains, you beat her like a drum

I have come to believe, we men are ungrateful

A home is blessed when you live well with your wife
Your income increases and you do not miss any good thing
A wife's blessing is greater than even a mother's)

Songs of general advice and comment on day to day living also form a substantial portion of the Swahili taarab repertoire. The themes touched on by this type of songs range from religious duties such as giving alms to the poor to being realistic, practical and in living one's life within one's means. In these two examples, the composer states that it would be more beneficial to teach the poor how to be self-reliant rather just to dish out alms to them every Friday afternoon (a Muslim practice required by their faith). In the second verse, caution is sounded regarding the need for self-restraint and avoiding unnecessary indulgence in life.

Saidia maskini, ukiwaona na haja
Wafundishe siwakhini, zenye kuleta faraja
Kwa pesa za mkononi, wataenenda na kuja

Wafundishe nzuri ndiya, wayuwe kufanya kazi
Wawe wajisaidia, watakayo matumizi
Hapo watajivunia, iwaondoke simanzi

(Help the poor, if you find them in need
Teach them, do not deny them anything of benefit to them
By giving them cash, they will go and come back for more

Teach them effective ways of earning their livelihood
To be able to help themselves with their needs
Then they will be proud and no more full of pity)

The showy individual who likes playing "rich", when he or she is actually poor, is compared to a person who treats copper as if it were gold. This pretentious and hypocritical behavior is harmful to the individual as well as the society at large. The verse goes:

Shaba sifanye dhahabu, kabisa nimekwambiya
Yapo yang'ara ajabu, na mato ikavutiya
Itakweteya aibu na mayuto kukungiya

(Do not equate copper with gold, I tell
Even though it (copper) is shiny when you see it
It will disgrace you and you will regret deeply)

In a similar way, the harmful behavior of meanness and exploitation of an individual by another is strongly condemned. People with these negative tendencies are warned that nothing comes out of nothing in this song by Zein Labdin of Mombasa,

Kenya:

Swahiba usisumbuke, na kupoteza wakati
Hiyo ni tabia yake, mezowea haiwati
Kila asotowa chake, cha mwenziwe hakipati

Chako zuia situpe, simpe asokuwasa
Usijitie matope, kwa kupenda kumang'asa
Sikupi ila unipe, ni mtindo wa Mombasa

(Friend, do not worry and waste your time
That is his behavior, it is part of him; he cannot leave it
A miserly person gets nothing from other people

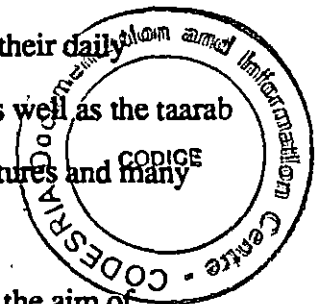
Hold on to your thing; do not throw it away or give it to a miser
Do not spoil your name for wanting to beg
I will not give you unless you give me, it is the Mombasa style)

5:4 Religious Themes

It has been pointed out that the Swahili community is predominantly Islamic and their deeply religious life-style is reflected in their art forms as well as in their daily activities and relationships. This influence is evident in Swahili poetry as well as the taarab songs. Many songs make direct or indirect reference to the Islamic scriptures and many others show a remarkable religious inclination.

In this section, a sample of Swahili taarab songs is analyzed with the aim of underlining the fact that among the Swahili, religion is not seen as a socially distinct or separate entity but rather as an integral part of practical daily living, a force that governs all human activity at both the individual and societal levels.

The name of God is invoked in a variety of situations and for different reasons. When musicians or other performers compete or rival each other for popularity and reward, it is common to hear each of them asking for God's help to overcome the rival or opponent. As a result, many songs with such titles as "Do Not Envy Me", "Ask God to Give You", "God is the Giver", "God is the Judge", "Livelihood is in the Hands of God",



“God, Protect Me from My enemies”, “ God Will Avenge Me” and so on, abound in the Swahili *taarab* tradition.

Similarly, ordinary acts such as social mannerisms of greetings, bidding each other farewell, welcoming a visitor, swearing, stressing, expressing a wish, confirming or condemning something, assume a religious and pious character. Any of these acts may involve the invoking of God’s name by mentioning or quoting one of the 99 qualities of God as listed in the Holy Qur’an. Each of the titles expounds a certain virtue of God.(7)

A strong belief in personal fate and destination often forms the focus of the themes of songs in this category. The divine will or the omnipotent force is portrayed as the final arbitrator in all human matters. The individual’s surrender to this force is therefore not a kind of pessimistic resignation but the affirmation of the highest authority of the Maker of the universe and all in it. Thus, in answering his critics and rivals, a singer takes refuge in this divine power and states:

Na kuimba sitowata
Labda Mungu atake
Na mwenye kunitafuta
Mimi naye tutete
Mola huyo simuweke
uwi wake ukate

(As for singing, I will never give it up
Unless God so decrees

Whoever maliciously seeks me out
To provoke me into a quarrel
God, do not spare him or her
Cut short his or her malice)

The omniscient nature of God as contrasted with the limited knowledge of the human mind is also a favorite theme in many *taarab* compositions. Many of such songs echo the words of this famous song by Mohamed Kandoro, a Tanzanian poet, when he said:

Wadudi anayaelewa, mambo yote duniani
Anayajua ingawa, yaliyofichwa shimoni
kusoma sikuelewa, kwa hivyo niachieni
Sili nisichotamani, sili ingawa ni dawa

(God Almighty knows everything in the world
God knows even what is hidden in the deepest pit

I am ignorant so forgive me
I do not eat what I do not like, I do not eat it even if it is medicine)

In the Islamic practice, Hija (Holy Pilgrimage) is one of the most important principles and all Muslims look forward to fulfilling this holy duty at least once in their life time. The individual believer gives the preparation for and implementation of the event an undivided mental and spiritual attention and the community sends off and welcomes back the pilgrims with feast and pomp. Above all, prayer is the key for the success of this religious retreat, the successful completion of which is believed to lead the pilgrim to be forgiven all sins. For instance, Zena Mahamud composed the following verse to offer prayers for her shoga (woman friend) who was going on Hija to Mecca.

Hukuombea kwa Mungu, sinyamai mara moya
Akupe kila fungu, na kheri ilotimiya
Ufanye hija mamangu, umzuru Nabiya

Madua sitoyakoma, siyatoi ulimini
Hakuombea Karima, akutie hifadhini
Inshallah wende salama, uregee salimini

(I pray God for you without ceasing even once
So God may bless you with every good thing
So you may make the pilgrimage and see the Prophet's grave

I say prayers incessantly, my tongue never rests
I pray so God may protect you
May God grant you a safe trip and return)

Among the most important events on the Islamic calendar is the Idd Ul Fitr celebration which marks the end of the holy month of fasting, "Ramadhan". This fasting symbolizes self-denial, a retreat into one's spirit for prayerful repentance. It shows the need to sympathize with the less fortunate members of the community. The festive mood at the end of the holy month of fasting indicates the feeling of great spiritual and physical renewal. It is an occasion marked with style and pomp including music, dance, new robes, food and fun. To live to see the end of the fasting month is the prayer of each believer, as the following song stresses.

Mola tunakuhimidi, kutuwezesha saumu
Tulifurahia Iddi, jamii waislamu
Tujaliye suudi, utakifadhi Karimu

Twakushukuru Jabari, swaumu kukamilika
 Hini Iddi ya futwiri, ilo na nyingi baraka
 Ndiyo siku yenye kheri, ya sisi kukutanika

Mwezi huu mtukufu, kwetu sisi Islamu
 Metuwekea Latifu, ni pambo letu dawamu,
 Hushinda nyezi alifu, kwa usiku walotimu

(God, we praise You, for enabling us to fast
 We celebrate the end of Ramadhan, all the Muslims
 Give us good fortune and protect us, gracious God

We thank you Powerful One, for the end of the fast
 Today we break the fast, on a day of many blessings
 A day of grace, for us to meet

This holy month, for us Muslims
 God set apart for us, for our eternal decoration
 This month is greater than all months spent sinning,
 when one observes all the days in it)

Occasionally, one comes across a song directly based on a Korani (or Biblical) story. For instance, the song below is a good example of a verse with multiple theme or sub-themes. While the song, which is composed by Matano Juma, stresses the need for believers to repent and seek God's guidance in life, it is also a prayer for the singer's love affair. The song is based on the story of Noah, a prophet who was sent by God to build a ship in which to save humankind before God destroyed the earth with floods. Due to their non-repentance, all the people were destroyed in the floods except Noah and his family and the animals he had sheltered in the ship. The song states:

Twakuomba ya Moliwa, ujuaye zetu ruhu
 Twakuomba kuokolewa, hali zetu majuruhu
 Kama ulowaokowa, kwenye safina ya nuhu

Twaangukia ghafura, mbele za utakatifu
 Utuvike zako nuru, njema ashirafu
 Kama ulowanusuru, kwenye safina tukufu

Pendo letu liwe sawa, lisiwe na khitilafu
 Tupakayo iwe dawa, kwa jinalo ya Raufu
 Kama ulowaokowa, kwenye safina tukufu

(We pray to you, God, who knows our hearts
 We pray for salvation from our battered condition
 As you saved those in Noah's ship

We repentantly fall before your divine presence

Clothe us in your light, divine light
As you saved those in the holy ship

May our love be righteous, with no blemish
May whatever we apply be a cure, in your holy name
As you saved those in the holy ship)

5:5 Songs On Current Issues and Humor

This final section of the chapter on themes in the contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs explores the taarab artists' concern with certain social issues of current importance in the Swahili community and in Kenya, in general. In this category of songs, the most remarkable characteristic of the texts is that they are cast in an extremely comical and humorous language. Therefore, the songs are appreciated more for their entertainment value than their content. The element of humor does not presuppose that the ideas and messages carried by these songs are in anyway less serious. Additionally, the assertion that songs in this grouping deal with current issues does not imply that all the songs analyzed so far in this study do not also address the same issues. The purpose here is only to stress the fact that, often, Swahili taarab singers are capable of commenting on fundamental social matters affecting their society in a casual and humorous manner.

However, not all examples in this section show a remarkable sense of humor. Some songs are subjective, intuitive, empathetic and impressionistic and represent purely the work of an individual artist creating a work of art based on personal experience rather than a composition intended for general social criticism. For instance, in addressing the need for the adoption of modern methods of family planning in order to curb the Kenya's fast population growth rate, a Mombasa poet, Zena Mahamoud Fadhil, who is herself a social health worker, composed two songs in which she emphasizes the importance of family planning. These two songs were selected from a large repertoire of compositions she has done on the subject. The first song explains the benefits of birth-spacing for the health of the child as well as that of the mother. It goes:

Mama akisha mazazi, mwana akija kwa wema
Huwa yeye hajiwezi, kupumua ni lazima
Yataka usaidizi, nguvu zake kuzichuma

Mwana akizawa juzi, ziwa kikosa kutama
Huwa kwake ni majonzi, akitopata la mama
Hili ndilo lake jenzi, muili kuwa mzima

Yafikirini malezi, nishughuli ya lazima
Yako juu matumizi, na ilimu ya kusoma
Dunia ya siku hizi, haifai kuwa nyuma

(When a mother has given birth safely
She is weakened and needs time to recover her health
She needs help to recover her strength

A baby born recently, if it is not weaned properly
It is a blow to the baby to miss its mother's milk
The milk is the baby's source of a healthy growth

Consider the burden of rearing a child, it is a must
It is very costly, and so is the cost of education
In today's world, no one can afford to lag behind)

The second song, with a similar message, outlines the rationale for insisting on family planning or child-spacing, as it is commonly called in Kenya. Additionally, the song starts by attempting to distinguish between the commonly confused concepts of family planning and forced population control.

Huku kupanga uzazi, si kuzuwia kuzaaa
Ni kupunguza malezi, kupata ya manufaa
Kwa njia za siku hizi, zenye nzuri tamaa

Pale akisha kuzaa, mama huwa amechoka
Huwa ataka wasaa, apate kupumzika
Yahitaji kushangaa, alee mwane hakika

Yataka kumtizama, kwa mali na kwa afya
Akue awe mzima, umfundishe ya ndiya
Na ilimu ya kusoma, apate kuendelea

Hebu fikiria leo, ya kesho ukiyapanga
Uzae uwatakao, uwezao kuwatunga
Majuto ni mjukuu, ndugu usiwe majinga

(Family planning is not birth control
It is minimizing cost of rearing children, to improve its quality
Using modern life style, which has many benefits
After giving birth, a mother becomes exhausted
She needs time to rest
She needs time to take care of the child

The child requires attention, material help and health care
So as to grow well and get proper moral instruction
It needs formal education for future progress

Think of today as you plan for tomorrow
 Give birth to the number of children you need, for whom
 you can provide
 Regrets come after the action, brother, do not be foolish)

The main objective of these two songs seems to be to reiterate the fact that "quality is better than quantity" when it comes to raising children. It is better to have few children that one can take good care of than many who will become a burden. The physical and emotional health of the child and the mother is stressed in addition to material needs, and while the songs do not display a marked element of humor, they present a fitting example of the use of popular song medium to communicate information of current national importance in contemporary Kenya.

Connected with the problem of Kenya's population explosion is the issue of the emergence of the new social phenomenon of "sugar daddies" and "sugar mummies". One could add sugar boys and girls. This fascinating but serious problem in Kenya and other African societies is a product of modernism and marked by the money economy which have brought about the commercialization of all aspects of social life including sexual relationship. The phenomenon has given rise to a host of other related moral problems which threaten the entire social fabric. Such problems include fornication, adultery, forced marriages, polygamy, marital infidelity, divorce, broken families, rape, incest, teenage pregnancies, school drop-outs and other related social problems.

Mohamed Khamis Juma Bhalo has captured this in a narrative song that is full of dramatic and poetic devices entitled, *Shuaga Dedi* (Sugar Daddy). The song is an open-hearted dialogue between a young woman and an old man, the sugar daddy. The former is defending the behavior of "sugar daddies" while the latter tries to criticize it as shameful and evil. The woman blames the social problem of sugar daddies on the selfish and lusty behavior of the immoral, wealthy elderly men who lure girls into cheap sex affairs with money and expensive gifts. The man counteracts this view by arguing that love knows no age boundary and there is nothing wrong with a man using his money to acquire whatever he desires, so long as he does not force a woman into any relationship. He seems to claim

it is a case of “a willing seller and willing buyer”. Here is the song in full which is characterized by a cutting sense of humor and sarcasm :

Mke: Skilizeni makhuluki (babu) nina maneno tanena
Kuna mzee ashiki, kibogoyo meno hana
“Shikamoo” haitaki (babu) kwa kupenda uvulana

Kwa kupenda ndogondogo, mtu mzima hasidi
Wamemfanya kinyago (babu), maskini shuga dedi

Mume: Waeleze mahuluki (dada), nami sikukukataza
Ni roho haizeeki, mwenzio najiteteza
“Shikamoo” siitaki (dada), kwa sababu yanikomaza

Mke: Kishuga dedi cha kale (babu), ewe kizee cha Mungu
Sinipigishe kelele watekwa na walimwengu
Marika zako wa tele (babu) waja fwata nini kwangu

Mume: Moyo ukiwa wataka (dada), ni vigumu kuushinda
Nami kwako nimefika, sione tena pa kwenda
Kupenda hakuna rika (dada), sinikataze kupenda

Mke: Jitambue u kizere (babu), uache mingi mikogo
Wajinyang'anyua bure, pesa nane za mihogo
Naona watezwa shere (babu) kwa kupenda ndogondogo

Mume: Unganambia mwenzangu (dada), hapo hujasema jambo
Na lau napokwa changu, yangenishinda kitambo
Mwenye kula peni langu (dada) utamnasa mtambo

Mke: Mtu hali kama gogo (babu), kwa wasichana ni kero
Pale uonapo zogo, elewa pana kasoro
Shetwani wa ndondogo (babu), hupungwa na barobaro

Mume: Sitolekeza kishogo (dada) ulimwengu wa kisasa
Pale uonapo zogo, elewa kuna makosa
Shetwani wa ndogondogo (dada) hupungwa na mwenye pesa

Woman: (Listen rich people (Grandpa), I want to say something
There is a lusty old man who is toothless
He rejects the respectful greeting for the old (Grandpa)
because he wants to appear young

For craving young girls, an old man antagonizes himself
He has become a laughing stock (Grandpa) poor Sugar
Daddy

Man: Tell the rich (sister) I am not holding you
The heart does not age, this is my defense
I do not want the greeting for the old folk because it
makes me feel old !

Woman: You old sugar daddy (Grandpa), God's old poor old man
Do not provoke me, the world laughs at you

Your age mates abound, what have you come to me for?

Man: If the heart loves (sister), it is hard to overcome it
I have come to you and have nowhere else to go
Loving knows no age (sister), do not forbid me to love

Woman: Realize you are old (Grandpa) and stop showing off
You are full of self-praise, with only fifteen cents from
selling cassava!
You must be beside yourself (Grandpa) with your lust
for young girls

Man: Even though you tell me (sister) you have said nothing
If I were cheated out what is mine, I would have stopped
a long time ago
Whoever eats my ten cents (sister), will be caught by
the machine

Woman: An old shriveled man (Grandpa) is a bother to girls
Wherever there is a quarrel, understand there is a shortcoming
The spirit in young girls (Grandpa) is exorcised by young
men

Man: I will not turn my face (sister) to modern life
Wherever there is a quarrel, there is a mistake
The spirit in young girls (sister) is exorcised by rich men)

In reply, the man states that it is actually the mature women who seduce young boys who constitute the root of the problem. In other words, the man argues, it is more shameful for old women to date young boys than it is for old men to date young girls! He sings:

Ajabu si shuga dedi, kutafuta ndondogo
Ajabu ni shuga mami, kuhonga mabarobaro

Nimeupima usemi, naona una kasoro
Ungavumisha uvumi, kwa wasichana si kero
Aibu ni shuga mami, kwenda na mabarobaro

Lisilo pambo gondoro, ngoja nikuelezee
Ambalo lina kasoro, nikweleze yakwelee
Kijana barobaro, kuoia mama mzee

Singeinua ulimi, maneno kuyakariri
Haya nisemayo mimi, naomba uyafikiri
Kijana kwa shuga mami, ajikatia umuri

Sichoki kukueleza, upate kunifaidi
Japo yatakutukiza, nakwambia sina budi
Kufuata yanayopendeza, kichuna na shuga dedi

Katika upelelezi, shuga dedi ana jina

Isitoshe ni mlezi, wa fani kila aina
Lakini haipendezi, kinyanya na mvulana

Usijifanye mkaidi, kiso na nta hakitomi
Japo wamwita hasidi, mtu mzima hasemi
Kiinyago cha shuga dedi, si kama cha shuga mami

(What is funny is not a sugar daddy looking for young girls
It is more funny for a sugar mummy to bribe young men

Looking at your statement, I find it faulty
No matter how loud you shout, girls are not bothered
What is funny is a sugar mummy to move with young boys

It is like an unembroidered pillow, listen to me
Which is incomplete, try to understand this
For a young man to marry an old lady

I would not lift my tongue to repeat these words
What I am saying, please, consider it
By marrying a sugar mummy, a young man is shortening his life

I am not tired of explaining to you, so you may benefit
Even though you may be annoyed, I must tell
What is more attractive, an old lady or an old man?

If you investigate, a sugar daddy is well respected
In addition, he has many responsibilities
But it is disgusting to think of a grandma with a young man

Do not be naughty, a blunt thing cannot pierce!
Even though you call him an enemy, a mature man will not reply back
An old sugar daddy is not like an old sugar mummy)

The use of thinly-veiled satire to mask anger or disappointment is a common feature in humorous taarab songs. For instance, in the following verse, the poet complains to his lover for giving him much less attention than he expected on meeting her. The metaphorical use of food and eating is both satirical and humorous.

Waniteza kiberiti, mimi nawe
Sikuja kunadi, usije tambuwe
Kula nisishibe, heri nisipewe

(You are playing games with me
I did not come to announce it, please, understand
To eat and be unsatisfied! It is better not to be served the food at all)

This verse echoes the words of a similar song by a legendary Swahili taarab singer from Zanzibar, Mbaruk Afandi, in which he voiced dissatisfaction at the reception he was accorded by his "host".(8) The poet makes it clear that basic rules of social decor in the Swahili tradition, whereby a visitor is given preferential treatment, were neglected. At another level of meaning, once again, one can discern sexual overtones in the use of the metaphors of food and eating. According to the source, the reference is a rebuke or ridicule of an untidy lover who probably appeared unprepared to receive the visitor.

Akhi umeanalika, kwa nasaha na baruwa
 Ukanitia njiani, kwako ukanichukuwa
 Mbaazi chakula gani, mgeni kukirimiwa
 Njaa ijaponiwa, mbaazi sili sitaki

My friend, you invited me, by persuasion and letter
 You caused me to travel and received me
 What kind of food is peas to give to a visitor
 Even if I am dying of hunger, I will not eat peas, I do not
 want them)

In the spirit of poetic rivalry, Swahili taarab poets often compose verses to rile their true or imagined rivals and thus assert their artistic accomplishment and superiority over them. In the following examples, the poet in the first verse proudly announces what he considers to be his outstanding qualities as an artist and scornfully warns his rivals to steer away from his cause. However, in his reply, the rival quotes a verse from a famous Swahili traditional song in which the poet compares himself to the kingly and majestic silkhaired Colobus monkey, Mbega, which is well revered among the Waswahili (native Swahili community). The poet proudly parades himself saying:

Mimi mwana vigambo, malenga mimi nimezofika
 Sichelei jambo, wangu usemi sitopomoka
 Ni fundi wa jambo, wangu ulimi kwa kutamka
 Mfungata sambo, mteza nami humzunguka

(I am the expert orator, I have come
 I fear nothing and my speech does not falter
 I am the skilled craftsman, with a trained tongue
 With my loins secured, I coil around my adversary

In reply to this challenge by Juma Bhalo, the Johar Orchestra sang:

Kitendawili tega,
 Msambe sisi waoga
 Kushindana nayo mizoga
 Shamba limeingia mbega

(If you have a riddle, set it
 Do not think we are cowards
 To compete with carcasses!
 In the field now enters the colobus monkey)

Although the Swahili, like other Kenyan peoples, engage in loose talk and gossip, malicious gossip and lying is a behavior that is strongly condemned. Likewise, abusive or uncouth language is outlawed by the rules of social morality and decor. To reflect this position, many taarab songs castigate people with these negative manners and often compare them to the scum of the society. For instance, in the verse below, a cheap gossip is equated to a person with a “dirty mouth”, one who does not brush his or her teeth and calls for the isolation of such individuals. The poet states that taking such a person into one’s confidence is like giving tasty food to a person with a smelly mouth. It is a waste since that person will not appreciate the flavor of the delicacy. The song states:

Unapotamka neno, fikiria siri yake
 Neno moja ovu, ni kubwa hasara yake
 Ni majuto kwa mfano, na kuwaudhi wenzake

Asopiga mswaki
 Simpe chakula chako

(Watch every word you say
 One evil word can cause much damage
 It causes regrets and hurts one’s fellows

A person who does not brush his/her mouth
 Do not give him/her your food)

There are other less pronounced sociocultural themes and sub-themes in contemporary Kenyan Swahili taarab songs which are not widespread. While most artists compose songs with a wide variety of subject matter, a few of them tend to compose songs centered around a limited scope of themes. It is interesting that, many weighty social issues affecting the Swahili community and the Kenyan nation at large such as the AIDS scourge, galloping economic inflation, unemployment, the nagging issue of official

corruption, poverty, landlessness and the historical democratization wave currently sweeping over the African continent have not attracted the attention of the taarab artists. This situation becomes more interesting because the same issues are addressed more frequently and with a greater sense of commitment by the poets who use writing as their medium and by other Swahili artists.

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Endnotes

1. W.H. Whiteley, (ed) Waimbaji Wa Juzi, Dar es Salaam: Institute of Swahili Research, 1966, makes no trial to classify the songs analysed by theme of form but merely lists them randomly.
2. Jan Knappert, A Collection of Flowers, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1967), 1-10.
3. Alan Merrian, African Music in Perspective. (New York: Garland Publications, 1982),70
4. Faraji Dumila, "Political Music", Yiva (Nairobi, June, 1977), 21.
5. Mohamed Hassan Abdulaziz, Muyaka:20th Century Popular Swahili Poetry (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1979) 63.
6. Ibid.
7. A.A. Nassir, Al-Inkishafi, (Nairobi: Longman, 1972), 29.
8. Maalim Hassan Mbega, Personal Commnication, (Nairobi, 22 August), 1986

CHAPTER SIX

The Images of Women in Swahili Taarab Songs

6:1 Introduction

In the conclusion of his article entitled "Images of Black Women in Modern African Poetry: An Overview" A. B. Rushing notes two important points. First, she argues that the dearth of positive images of African women in modern African poetry is caused by the composer's abandonment of such images in the traditional literary forms. This is why the images emerging now are a far cry from the 'healthy' imagery in the poetry and songs of P'Bitek and Nturu, she observes. Second, she notes that fiction is by far richer in details of gender relationships than the terse and highly structured poetic forms. The above contention seems to imply that modern African poetry is mainly composed by men who tend to ignore or misrepresent women in their zeal to deal with colonial and post colonial African cultures. This means that men poets slight African womanhood in total and the contribution of women to the development of the society and, therefore, only women composers can create poetry that projects the positive images of the African woman in the modern African society. (1)

A careful examination of the role played by women in the creation of oral literary forms and how they compare with those created by men, "is a problem which has not been sufficiently attacked." (2) The first section of this chapter addresses the treatment of the female gender in the Kenyan taarab and how this portrayal has contributed to the definition of the African feminist critical aesthetic. In the second section of the chapter a brief comment on the role of the Kenyan woman Swahili taarab artist in the entire taarab movement in East Africa.

The woman has often been the center of the symbolic world of many modern Swahili taarab poems and lyrics. Indeed, the woman, more often than not, is the subject and object of these songs. Swahili women taarab artists have made a considerable contribution to the development of taarab as a genre of Swahili oral poetry, (3) yet they

“remain beyond the pale of literary limelight” and African feminist criticism.(4)

Although as far as the creation of modern Swahili oral poetry and taarab songs is concerned, women have more than equaled their male counterparts, their success has not succeeded in changing the attitude of the men and the male dominated cultural values and attitudes toward women. In fact, the Swahili women taarab artists have yet to liberate themselves mentally and culturally from this sociocultural enclave. This study argues that Swahili women taarab artists, though a force to reckon within the Taarab movement, have remained in the periphery of the creative world in the sense that they have succumbed and submitted themselves to male stereotypes of the image of the woman and have continued to see themselves through the eyes of the male chauvinist. In many cases, especially in the Kenyan scene, Swahili women taarab artists tend to “serve as symbols or instruments for the male as he recreates his world and solves his problems.” (5) As a result of the male domination of the Swahili taarab poetic form and because of the failure hitherto of the woman taarab artist to use the form to liberate herself socioculturally, the woman is portrayed and portrays herself negatively in the symbolic world of this important Swahili oral poetic form.

In an attempt to locate the symbols and images of womanhood in the Kenyan Swahili taarab songs, which reflect the popular perception of a woman in Kenya, reference will be made to a sample of Swahili taarab songs composed by both women and men artists. The songs were principally collected from Mombasa although their singers and composers come from all the major Kenyan Swahili centers. The songs have already been publicly performed and/or recorded in discs and cassette tapes for commercial circulation. The analysis is informed by the African feminist critical perspective of C. B. Davies, Anne Adams, and Ogudipe, among others. (6) The discussion focuses on the critical review of the ideas and feelings of the Swahili woman caught up between the conventional Swahili-Islamic value system, on one hand, and the need to gain social consciousness and commitment to freedom and sexual equality, on the other.

Both traditional and contemporary Swahili taarab poetry exhibits two main

characteristics as far as theme is concerned. The first is the Islamic religiosity that surrounds the whole tradition. It is principally preoccupied with topical local issues of everyday living at both personal and communal level. Taarab is therefore an avenue for cultural expression of the Swahili way of life as an end in itself, as S.Chiragdin and Mathias Mnyampala assert in their work on the history of the Swahili. Deep religious ideas and feelings seem to permeate Swahili taarab songs whatever themes they convey. This is interesting, especially because religiosity is normally associated with classical (pre-20th century) Swahili Islamic poetry (7), but this influence is not completely absent in modern Swahili taarab poetry. 8) and could be explained in part by the fact that most of the artists are strong Muslims for whom Islam is a way of life.

The second salient aspect of this poetry is its 'oral' nature. Very few of these songs have appeared in print except occasionally in the pages of a few local newspapers where they may pass as 'poetry'. This is what M. Mulokozi points out: "Women poets do not appear in print, though we believe there must be quite a few writing in private as evidenced by the occasional appearance of poetesses...not to mention the superb taarab composers and singers". (9)

Although it is a male dominated society in all respects, East Africa boasts a number of accomplished women taarab composers and singers even though the names and accomplishments of many gifted song writers remain in the background. Modern Swahili taarab has assumed very competitive commercial dimensions and the various groups have become bitter rivals for patronage and public limelight. For this reason, some outstanding artists who lack political and financial backing are clearly disadvantaged.

Since the details of when, where, and for whom Swahili taarab is performed, have already been dealt in Chapter 2, the following quotation will suffice to summarize the sociocultural setting of these songs:

Taarab is the salon music of the Waswahili. It does not usually accompany dancing, but rather is heard when men or women are lounging during a wedding celebration, passing time until another

important part of the festivities begin.(10)

Like their male counter-parts, women artists of taarab use traditional or adopted tunes to compose entertaining as well as didactic pieces which they set to match various social occasions such as weddings, political rallies, welcoming guests and others similar events
(11)

The most prominent themes on Swahili taarab songs on women cover such diverse subjects as love, marriage, motherhood, family roles and other related issues. As will be stressed later in this discussion, religious sentiment saturates Swahili life in general and the taarab form in particular. Belief in fate and predeterminism seem to govern the life and being of the entire community. Even the choice of a wife depends on God-given luck. The divine will rules omnipotently with omniscient and omnipresent powers. The songs in this category imply that it is imperative for a man to marry a physically 'beautiful' wife, and by implication, unfortunate to marry one with the opposite of these qualities. This is the message in this song:

Wayandikapo usoni, zipaji zao hindi
Na mashavu zarani, yalofanywa mafundi
Nduza hela yatundeni, labuda hamuyatundi
Hondolea watu kandi, wanawake wa Kiamu

(When they appear, with their Indian-looking faces
Their cheeks have beautiful decorations done by
experts
Now be alert, perhaps you have been inattentive
It is satisfying just to look at Lamu women)

The implicit idea here is the widespread Swahili attitude that a woman who is physically "unattractive" (by male criteria) is not only unfortunate in life since she is unlikely to get a husband, but she is a liability to her family, on the other hand, who must bear the shame of having an unmarriageable daughter. Conversely, physically "attractive" women draw men to themselves from far and wide. It is interesting that no parallel songs were available to this author by women singers to show how the latter view the choice of a husband.

The Swahili Islamic world tends to treat a woman with a lot of sentimentalism which often borders on idolization, while submitting her to man's authority. (12) Of course, tradition and religion are used to rationalize and justify this attitude. One cannot help linking this aspect of Swahili life with the frequent reiteration of the theme of need to respect women by many Swahili poets, both modern and classical. For example, many renowned Kenyan classical and modern Swahili poets who use writing as a medium have composed poetry in which they invoke religious authority to justify their call to their daughters and to all women to be submissive and humble to their husbands. Curiously, such poetry is silent on the need for the husbands to reciprocate this respect.

These songs offer a good example of the tendency in both traditional and modern African society to cite customary practice and religion to reinforce the norms of male authority in socioeconomic and marital relationship, in an attempt to justify male domination over women. As far as Swahili Islamic philosophy is concerned, some songs suggest that male authority and influence go beyond earthly life and may determine a woman's destiny in the hereafter. This authority is presented as absolute and unquestionable and as if it was a reflection of divine will. As for the woman, the only way to maintain her marital intimacy and emotional support, it appears, would be to resign herself totally to male dominance. (13)

One is tempted to conclude that the frequent appeal by male poets for men to 'respect' women, does not always spring from a deep moral conviction on the part of the male poet to recognize the woman for what she is and for her contribution to the family and society, but it is rather an idealized, romanticized view of womanhood. There are two reasons for this assertion. First, there are very few Swahili taarab songs that explicitly advocate sexual equality and social freedom for women. In this regard, written poetry seems to have done better than taarab songs because it abounds in poems with this theme. Second, many of the songs available in this category tend to concentrate on the woman's biological functions of womanhood, physical attributes and temperament to the complete exclusion of her humanness or her contribution to the development of the community.

The bulk of modern Swahili taarab songs paint a very romanticized and nostalgic picture of womanhood, often dwelling on vivid and graphic descriptions of her bodily characteristics. These songs are rich in imagery and symbolism especially chosen to underscore feminine beauty and moral righteousness with such a wealth of detail as to give the impression of a woman as a perfect being. Images of pearls, birds, fruit, stars, angels, treasurable possessions and other valuables keep recurring in these songs with astonishing frequency. Here is a typical example:

Jicho limeona lulu haina kiasi
Hupotea akili hungiwa na wasiwasi
Ameumba jalali uzuri kamlambiti

Shani ukimtokeya, chumbani amejilisi
Uso ukimuangaliya, nuru hudhani shumusi
Kwa muruwa kakamiliya, meno yake almasi

My eye has seen countless jewels
My mind stops thinking and I become worried
God has bestowed beauty to decorate her

It is a wonder should you chance upon her
seated in her privacy
When her face you behold, its a glitter you
liken to the sun
A beauty so perfect, her teeth are simply
diamonds)

Modern Swahili taarab repertoire abounds in songs of this nature. But unlike in Western literature where romance is associated with adventure, excitement and fantasy, the Swahili taarab lyrics could be said to be romantic only in the sense of 'poetic romance' which is centered on the use of the allusive and figurative nature of the Swahili language. Thus, although the songs are normally topical, literal reference is strictly avoided in favor of imagery that is steeped in humor, sarcasm and irony. Anyone familiar with classical Swahili poetry will no doubt appreciate the allusive aspect of it. But this allusion belies a more serious vein in Swahili taarab poetry. As Asha Malika, a taarab queen from Somalia put it, the linguistic apparatus of Swahili language enables the composer to clothe the reference in deep metaphorical and philosophical idiom because "Kiswahili is exceptionally romantic in its expression and also highly poetic". (14)

From the available lyrics, one discerns a tendency by the women artists not just to accept negative descriptions of themselves by men poets, but also to describe men by using exactly the same physical attributes and drawing upon pretty much the same images. In this song, Zuhura, a well known Mombasa taarab poetess, confirms this tendency.

Ewe wangu muadhamu (mpenzi x3)	“
Uliye moyoni mwangu	“
Rangi yako ya dhahabu	“
Iliyo safi takasa	“
Sauti ya taratibu	“
Yenye ladha isiyokwisha	“
Mwili wako ni laini mpenzi	“
Amabao umetakata	“
Mfano wako ni jini	“
Ambaye ameumbika	“
Macho ukinitazama	“
Mazuri yanapendeza	“
Midomo iliyo myema	“
Laini kibembeleza	“
(You, my dignified master, (love)	“
Who occupies my heart	“
Your complexion is golden	”
Which is sparkling clean	”
Your gentle voice	”
With endless sweetness	”
Your body is smooth all over (Love)	“
It is perfectly clean	“
You resemble a super human being	“
Who is perfect in appearance	“
Your eyes when you look at me (Love)	“
Beautiful and pleasant to behold	“
Your lips are handsome	“
They are gentle when you beseech	”

In this particular lyric, the singer does lavish all manner of attributes of physical beauty on her lover to create an image of an ideal or perfect being, a flawless creature. This climaxes with the phrase, “You resemble a super human being who is perfect in appearance”.

As mentioned earlier, the bulk of the songs, mainly by Mombasa singers have a strong romantic element. However, the physical appearance of women is at times

portrayed in very negative terms. For instance, an 'unattractive' lady may be referred to as 'an over-ripe fruit,' "a rotten paw;" "a lean piece of meat," "a "leaking pot" or a "cracked wall". Such negative images are not the exclusive domain of modern Swahili taarab lyrics. One comes across such symbolism in the work of many classical Swahili poets such as Muyaka bin Haji and also in the lyrics of the many modern composers. In most of these lyrics, a woman's worth seems to hinge on the degree of her attractiveness to men. The more attractive and presentable, the more respected.

The connection between a woman's physical beauty and her moral character in Swahili taarab is as strong as it is curious. Thus, when a male Swahili taarab artist sings of the beautiful appearance of his lover, he also simultaneously alludes to her moral status. In this sense, beauty is total and cannot be seen only in terms of physical attributes or moral behavior. The two are interwoven and reinforce each other. This is why Swahili taarab repertoire is full of lyrics that underscore the fact that the beauty of a woman lies in her behavior, not her appearance. Little wonder, then, that a woman who has turned 'immoral' should be described as a rotten pawpaw fruit, even by her own fellow women, as in the following song by a Mombasa woman taarab singer.

Papai bovu jamani, halina bei sokoni
Halitakiwi nyumbani wala kupewa mgeni
Haliliki asilani, ela litiwe pipani
Papai bovu jamani, atakayekula ni nani?

Bei yake tofauti, bovu na zima sokoni
Zima kupata bahati, uchaguwe kwa makini
Ikiwa yako bahati, utalikuta pembeni
Papai bovu jamani, atakayekula ni nani?

Halikai kikapuni, litapasukia ndani
Likipasukia ndani, kikapu hukitamani
Utajuta kimoyoni, ulichukua la nini
Papai bovu jamani, atakayekula ni nani?

Ulikutapo shambani, linavutia mtini
Rangi yake ya majani, utazidi kutamani
Lakini si la thamani, limeharibika ndani
Papai bovu jamani, atakayekula ni nani?

(Bibie Zuhura Swaleh, Mombasa, Kenya)
(A rotten paw my people has no value in the
market

It is not needed at home, nor is it given to a
 visitor
 It is completely inedible, only fit for the
 waste basket
 A rotten pawpaw my people, who will eat it?)

It cannot be put in a basket, it will burst inside
 If it bursts in the basket, you will hate to see the basket
 You will regret in your heart, why you took it at all
 A rotten pawpaw my people, who will eat it?

Their prices are different, a rotten and a fresh paw
 To get a good one is luck, it requires careful choosing
 If you are lucky, you will find it stacked in a corner
 A rotten pawpaw my people, who will eat it?

When you see it in the garden, it looks attractive
 It has a natural green color, you will desire it
 But it is worthless, it is rotten inside
 A rotten pawpaw my people, who will eat it?)
 (Zuhura Swaleh, Mombasa, Kenya)

The number of songs in the taarab repertoire in which women poets perpetuate this male-designed negative image of a woman is enormous. In the sexual life, to take only one aspect of the themes covered by such songs, women poets present womanhood in purely physical terms, not very dissimilar from those used by male singers on the same subject. For instance, in this verse, the poetesses are comparing a woman to the "weaker" sex, one who is "killed" by the one with a loaded "gun". Hence the symbol of a loaded gun which can shoot and kill. The sarcasm is obvious in the rhetorical question, "An unloaded gun, how can it kill?" Man's sexual potency is symbolised by a gun in this example, but the woman singer stresses that only a "loaded" gun can kill. The question here should be, why compare women with the weak, the unarmed, the vulnerable? Although the woman in the song may be teasing a sexually impotent man, the choice of imagery puts the woman in a weak position.

Bunduki naidadisi, mlilo mbali itikeni
 Hayo si unafiki, ya ukweli yashikeni
 Bunduki bila risasi, yaua namna gani?

Yaua namna gani?
 Yaua namna Gani?
 Bunduki bila risasi
 Yaua namna gani?

Bunduki yajulikana, kama chombo cha zamani
 Na kuwa yatikikana, iwe na risasi ndani
 Lakini mwako hamna, atakayehofu ni nani?

(I suspect this gun, those far off listen
 This is not hypocrisy, it is true, take note
 An unloaded gun, how does it kill?)

A gun is recognized as an old (well known)
 weapon
 That is supposed to be loaded with bullets
 But yours is empty, whom can it scare?

How does it kill?
 How does it kill?
 An unloaded gun
 How does it kill?
 How does it kill?)

The imagery and symbolism are very identical to that used in another song with a similar subject and approach. The instructive phrase in this other lyric is, "If your knife is blunt, do not spoil my meat." Metaphorically, the woman sees herself as the meat and sees the man as the knife. Probably, both songs dismiss the hypocrisy of the ineffective showy man who professes to be what he is not. The sexual overtones of the symbolism, however, limit the application of the analogy and any critic cannot help seeing this as a tendency by the woman singer to debase female nature by describing it in such crude, male-fashioned imagery.

Apart from judging women on the criteria of physical characteristics and a male-imposed, rigid moral code, the Swahili Islamic culture's stiff sex education tends to inculcate into the woman a deep sense of guilt and shame regarding her sexuality and her sexual life. This is the main objective of the Swahili puberty ritualistic training (Unyago) in which the (Shagazi) (aunts) and teachers (Makungwi) instruct the adolescent girls on how to relate to men generally and all about sex behavior within the realm of marriage. Premarital and extra-marital sex among the Swahili, like in most other African communities, is strictly forbidden. Women may not expose any part of their bodies even to fellow women, except head and face, and complete nudity is forbidden, even between man and wife. Thus, a woman grows with a strong sense of a negative self-concept as far as her body and womanhood are concerned. One, therefore, is led to conclude that a woman in

the Islamic culture such as that of the Swahili, dresses primarily to cover the shame of her womanhood and secondly to please her husband. She can only derive personal pleasure and satisfaction from her dress or make-up only through the expressed approval of her man. Therefore, one may conclude, in the traditional Swahili-Islamic culture, a woman's dress is her protection against personal and social shame rather than an article of beauty.

As a result of this puritan approach to womanhood among the Swahili, sexuality is seen as potentially dangerous socially and something that requires stiff parental control and protection. In the song entitled "Kiberiti na Petroli" (A match and petrol), Said Mohamed of Mombasa compares the meeting of a young man and a woman to the dangerous "mixing" of 'fire' and 'petrol' gas.

Kiberiti na petroli, iwapo umeviweka
Hivi vitu viwili, visije kukutanika
Kusalimika muhali, lazima pataripuka
Bora uvitenge mbali, hapo utasalimika

Katu haiwi salama, jambo hili ni hakika
Kutokujali lazima, na wala hapana shaka
Tena taabu kuuzima, moto ukisha kuwaka
Moto wake ni hasama, mara utakasirika

Katu huzimi amini, japo kwa moja dakika
Kabisa ni fatani, mara moja huripuka
Utangia hatarini, huwezi kunusurika
Na jambo hili yakini, wengi limewafika

Wenzangu nakuasini, msije kuhadaika
Shetani yumo mbioni, moto upate kuwaka
Na jambo hili yakini, wengi limeshawafika
Majuto huja mwishoni, mara ushaghafilika

A match and petrol, if you keep them,
These two things should never come into contact
There is no safety, there is bound to be an explosion.
It is advisable to separate them to ensure safety

In the least it is safe, this fact is sure
If carelessly handled, there is no doubt they will explode
Again it is impossible to put it out, once the fire is aflame
The flame is ferocious, once it gathers momentum.

You can hardly put out the fire believe me, not even
for a minute.
Completely savage, it instantly bursts out
You will be in grave danger, from which there
is no respite

This misfortune has truly befallen many people

My fellows, I am advising you, so that you are
not deceived

The devil is up and about, to ensure the fire
burns on.

This misfortune truly has befallen many people
Regrets come later, after you have forgotten the fact)

The image of a positive love based on mutual trust and understanding between a man and a woman is rare to find in modern Swahili taarab lyrics. Love is often not shown as a uniting force that endures all life's temptations and sufferings. More frequently, the woman is the one on whom the duty of safeguarding 'love' and nurturing it to maturity falls while the man is portrayed as having no role at all to play in the covenant. One cannot help wondering why this one-sided view of love seems to persist in these songs. It is as if the artists are implying that men are morally stronger than women, and therefore, they are less likely to fall into any temptation which may injure the marital relationship.

This reasoning seems to explain why the image of a suffering woman, who has been jilted or mistreated by her lover is very common in Swahili taarab songs. This situation may be the result of the unquestioning loyalty of the woman lover who is expected to naively cling onto "her man" until the latter drops her by the wayside after finding a more "pleasant" partner. The woman suffers doubly when such a misfortune befalls her. She suffers spiritually and materially because she is dependent on the man. Little wonder then that there are hardly any songs in the repertoire that stress the importance of mutual trust and understanding between husband and wife over the need for material well-being. All this, one is led to conclude, boils down to what L. W. Brown (1981) sees as the narrow male possessive puritanism which stems from the male ego.

Sexual isolationism rather than integration, also seems to permeate written Swahili Islamic literature. In their brief but useful study published in (1982) entitled, Woman in Islam, S. Abdallah and Al-Hatimy point out that no decent Islamic society can thrive if the fires of sexual desire in the youth are rekindled every now and then. One way of rekindling the fires is unchecked gazing of the opposite sex which, according to the authors, creates the desire to sin. They strongly advocate strict and close supervision of

the sexually segregated adolescents in order to avert this "evil" plaguing sexual relationships. (15) In his observation of the same phenomenon, Saddique (1988) is even more categorical in condemning female nature as weak and evil in as far as sexual immorality is concerned. He argues that women who are products of society of 'Jahiliyya' (ignorance) are low in their own esteem. They are loose in their sex morality and would open themselves to any man who offers them an attractive gift. This prejudiced male thinking is well reflected in the modern Swahili taarab songs.

The "lover" and "beauty" images apart, the Swahili woman's worth is often seen in terms of her biological motherhood. The "mother" image is recurrent in Swahili taarab songs and its portrayal often borders on naked idolization of the woman. The woman is presented as having no other vital role to play except to fulfill her nature-given physical functions. She is primarily a mother and a child rearer, whatever else she may be or do, the songs seem to suggest. Such an image of the woman persists even in written Swahili poetry by male poets. (16) Such poems are marked by their graphic portrayal of conception, birth and the rearing of a child to adulthood, the moral being that women fulfill a very difficult and selfless task and for this, if not for anything else, they deserve respect, particularly from their offspring.

Another lop-sided image of womanhood that emerges from modern Swahili taarab songs is that of her complete dependence on man. This dependency is clearly presented in many songs in the context of marital life. In a nutshell, the woman is reduced to a cook, a waiter, a cleaner and a sexual object. In the polygamous Swahili community, the man has the final word in all legal and marital affairs, and the woman is left with only two weapons with which to ensure the continuity of her marriage and the unwavering loyalty of her husband. These weapons are her culinary artistry and her sexual skills. A Swahili woman owes it to herself as well as her relatives to 'satisfy' her husband in all possible ways so as to keep her marriage. This strange view of womanhood is suggestive of the Islamic thinking in which a woman is regarded as an emotional rather than a rational being. Her feminine charm and duty are the only tools to which a woman could resort in order to

recapture the admiration and approval of her carefree and, often, wayward husband.

From the above viewpoint, it appears as if among the Swahili, a woman is treated as a child who needs full parental (male) care, guidance and direction. Her lot is to obey and follow men's decisions unquestioningly, and failure to do so means risking the wrath of her husband and relatives. This is a classical example of the double-faced nature of the problem facing the majority of African woman today; a traditional culture with many gender-oppressive values and an equally oppressive modern patriarchal family institution.

From the large sample of modern Swahili taarab songs explored in this study, only a handful mention the recognition and appreciation of the enormous contribution made by women to the welfare of the society. To illustrate the magnitude of this contribution, in Kenya, over eighty-five percent of the population is rural-based, and agriculture provides the means of livelihood to over eighty percent of all the people. The mainstay of Kenya's agriculture is the small-scale farmer, and almost ninety percent of all the labor needs in small hold farming is provided by women. Given that Kenya, like many other developing African countries, derives the greatest part of its income from agricultural production, one is justified to argue that women are the most important single factor in Kenya's economic performance. But this fact notwithstanding, Kenyan women are still clearly disadvantaged socio-economically, politically and culturally. There are more poor and unemployed women than men. Their exploitation and oppression by the opposite sex is therefore a glaring socio-cultural problem.

It is, therefore, a most fitting tribute when a solitary taarab artist composes a song to portray women as the pillar of the socioeconomic progress of the Kenyan community. A good example is the following verse by Yessen and his Musical Party in which he celebrates the Arusha Declaration in Tanzania in 1967 and highlights one of the Declaration's underlying principles as the need to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. He stresses the fact that women have a leading role to play in achieving this ideal in all the young African nations. The song states:

Banati ndugu wa kike, mwatupa shauri gani?
Yafaa tuzitundike, nguo za usichanani
Tena majembe tuyashike, twendeni tukalimeni

Kulima ni jambo bora, asiyejua ni nani?
Ni kuondoa madhara, na pia umasikini
Nchi itakuwa bora, Azimio lishikeni

Kina kaka kina mama, maneno muyashikeni
Mvivu hana salama, atakuwa mashakani
Bwana Nyerere asema, mirija tuikatani

(Women, our sisters, what advice do you give us?
We should hang up our maiden robes
Then get hold of hoes and go to dig the land.

Farming is a valuable activity, who does not know it?
It is the way to fight suffering and poverty
The country will prosper, stick to the Declaration.

My brothers and sisters, heed my words of advice.
The lazy fellow has no place, and will be in trouble
Mr. Nyerere says, let's cut off the parasites)

This is the impression given by the following lyric in which a husband is at pains to “discover” the behavior of his wife which, to him, proves to be something very ‘elusive’ and hard to understand. In this instance, the feminine marital faithfulness is called to question. The husband’s “holier than thou” attitude is clearly discernible. Again, the choice of sex symbolism is both apt and imaginative.

Kuuliza si kashifa, nauliza nambiani
Nimekwisha maarifa, sijui nifanye nini
Chungu kisicho na ufa, chavuja namna gani?

Jamani haya mambo, ni mambo yatazameni
Nilitosheka kwa umbo, chungu nikakitamani
Ni kipya si cha kitambo, chavuja namna gani?

Pale niwapo napika, ajabu moja wendani
Maji huwa yamwagika, ningayatunza kwa makini
Chungu hakikupasuka, chavuja namna gani?

Maana ya kuwajulisha, mimi kwangu ni mageni
Chungu sikukigurisha, hakikwenda kwa jirani
Wala sikukiangusha, chavuja namna gani?

(Asking is not scandalous, I need your opinion
I am at my wit's end, at a loss as to what to do

An unbroken pot, how does it leak?

My people, this is funny, just look at it
I was attracted by its appearance, and
trusted the pot
It's new, not old at all, how does it leak?

When I am looking, very surprisingly
Water trickles down, however, carefully I
tend it
The pot was not broken, how does it leak?

The reason I tell you this, is because it is all strange
I never removed the pot, it did not go to my
neighbor's house
Neither did I drop it, how does it leak?)

Very often the women in Swahili taarab are presented as lazy people who are given to idle gossip; meddlesome and prying good for nothing busybodies. This view of womanhood is based on the male stereotype that women discuss only trivial matters and, very often, are responsible for scandalous gossip. In this verse, such a woman is compared to a frog who goes to the well as soon as the rain falls and pretends to be busy while it is just sitting lazily around, neither fetching water, drinking nor washing. To the singer, this mischievous behavior can only result in social chaos and disharmony. In the following song, the woman symbolised by a frog, is portrayed as an idle and mischievous character who rejoices at spoiling other people's happiness, who is ever poking her nose into other people's private lives in an effort to brew trouble for them. The metaphor of a frog may represent a woman who is not only self-centered but also one filled with hatred and jealousy; one who begrudges others even those things that she does not need, a kind of a "dog-in the manger" character.

Chura nakuuliza, unipe jibu yakini
Kwa kila inyapo mvua, wakimbilia bwawani
Huna nguo za kufua, wala huna sabuni
Nijibu nipate tua, maji utayafanyani?

Chura punguza vituko, naona u hayawani
Umezua sokomoko, watu hawaelewani
Ukivunjika huko huko, dawa atakupa nani?

(Frog I ask you, answer me frankly
Whenever it rains, you run to the pond
You have no clothes to wash, nor soap

Answer me satisfactorily, how will you
use the water?

Frog, stop your mischief, I swear you are
crazy
You have wrecked havoc, people are disunited
If you are hurt in there, who will treat you?)

This is yet another negative image of the woman articulated by a woman, and all this goes to show how far the male-fashioned value system in the Swahili culture has dominated thought processes across gender lines.

The negative impression of womanhood seems to have been popularized and internalized in the Swahili culture and, indeed, in all patriarchal African traditions. Therefore, it appears natural that such social evils as witchcraft are still associated with ill-hearted women rather than men. This is why a woman "with an evil eye" is always the first suspect when death in a family occurs. The following lyric by a Mombasa male singer underlines this theme:

Niliona ni ujinga,
Na mambo yakale hayako
Na watu nikawapinga,
Kwa chuki na maudhiko
Sanaa ya wakongwe wanga, duniani wakaliko

Bi. kikongwe huna haya,
Waniuliya mwanangu
Mola atanilipiya
Kwa haya matanga yangu

Kujiri aliyoyataka
Bi. kikongwe shuwari
Nami nampa hakika
Akae akifikiri
Naye zake zitafika
Na Mungu amsubiri
(Maulidi Juma)

(I thought it was ignorance
That old things were no more
And I opposed people
Who showed hate and anger
Especially concerning old witches
That witches still lived in the world

Old witch, you are shameless
You kill my child
God will avenge me

For this my grief

Her designs having been fulfilled
 The old witch is now calm
 Let her be, but remember
 She should be assured
 Her day is coming
 For her to meet her God)
 (Maulidi Juma and Party, Mombasa).

The assumption here is that the culprit is a woman whom the poet condemns outright. One encounters the same attitude toward women in the songs by women Swahili taarab artists, thus indicating the “*modi compli*” of the situation. Not only have such women accepted their debasement by menfolk, but they seem to have sanctioned it also.

The woman is not only portrayed in these songs as an object of man’s exploitation, but also as being completely under his will. Materially, the Swahili woman is presented as being completely dependent on man. Thus, the popular adage “*Mke ni nguo, mgomba ni kupalialia*” (A woman is clothing, a banana plant is tending). This maxim summarizes the sociocultural view of womanhood in the Swahili society. This view is neatly captured in the following song:

Mapigo ya mke jamani
 Tawambia sikizani
 Ni kula kwake na nguo
 Na maneno mema ya kituo

Mtimizie zake haja
 Mavazi na hata kula
 Wala simpe dhiki
 Tenda ya kustahiki

Tena fahamu sana
 Mke ni kama mwana
 Usije mpa mzigo
 Ambao abeba mume

(The beating of a wife
 I will tell you, listen
 It is clothing and also feeding her
 It is telling her nice things

Fulfill her needs
 Of clothes and food
 Do not cause her to suffer
 Do to her what is expected

You ought to understand well
 That a woman is a child
 Do not give her the burden
 Which a man would carry)

The condescending and patronizing male arrogance toward women is at its peak in this verse. The woman is not only portrayed as weak but completely inferior to man. The most ironical aspect of this scenario is the complete acceptance by the woman of the status quo as her predetermined, God-given lot. Thus when the pioneering Swahili taarab queen, Siti Binit Saad, was challenged by her male rivals for daring to venture into “man’s” world of professional entertainment in the second decade of this century, she did not see the conflict as a challenge to her womanhood but rather as a moral or intellectual issue. She thought her rivals were questioning her ability to perform as well as they did. No wonder, therefore, her response reveals her deep conviction and belief in Swahili fatalism. She sees her music career as her predetermined position in life, one which no mortal being, including herself, could alter. No amount of discouragement, she states could dissuade her from her destiny. She sang:

Uzuri si hoja
 Na sura jamali
 Kuwa mtukufu
 Na jadi kubeli
 Hasara ya mtu
 Kukosa akili (17)

(Physical beauty does not matter
 Being highly respected
 Nor is a good-looking face
 The greatest loss to a person
 Is to be ignorant)

Although she had not been ridiculed just for being “ugly and very poor” but especially for attempting to rival men in the art of music, Siti’s reply to her attackers shows she did not discern any gender issue in the accusations. Her attackers insinuated that her poverty and ugliness had driven her to a music career in order to earn a livelihood. In other words, she was not attractive as a woman and could only survive by singing for money, like a man!(18) She was further accused of having forsaken her home and marriage in the

village for monetary gain in the commercial urban life. Siti's reply was:

Si -kusudi langu
Kuvunja watani
Enyi walimwengu
Mwajua yakini
Apendalo Mungu
Haliwezekani

(It is not my aim
To break the family (migrate to the city)
You, fellow human beings
Know very well
What God has decreed
No one can change (19)

By trying to justify her leaving her village home to live in an urban environment ("breaking the home") by invoking fatalism or predeterministic will, Siti portrays a woman as a being who is at the mercy of superhuman forces over which she has no control. Siti does not come out openly to challenge her male attackers and tell them she had decided to follow the desires of her heart or to respond to her musical calling despite the male-engineered societal expectations of what her role as a woman ought to be. Instead, she is apologetic and can only explain her action having been decreed by divine will or fate. This image of the woman at the mercy of fate recurs in many modern Swahili taarab songs and one can only attribute it to the strong Islamic religious influence over Swahili life.

This chapter set out to investigate images of women as portrayed by both women and men Swahili taarab artists. The data used, though small, compared to the size of the repertoire available, is historically and regionally representative, and has helped to map out some of the issues, values and attitudes that characterize gender relations among the Swahili in contemporary Kenya and how these issues have been perceived and represented by Swahili taarab artists. On the whole, the examination of the sample of Swahili taarab cited brings out certain outstanding characteristics as far as the image of a woman is concerned. These could be summarized as follows:

- (a) Preoccupation of the woman within the confines of the domestic enclosure where the woman is a lover, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a mother and a housekeeper.

- (b) The woman as an object of man's physical, sexual, and social exploitation. In this role the woman is portrayed as being completely at the mercy of man, whom she must worship and please in order to earn his favor and protection.
- (c) The woman as a prisoner of the socio-religious and cultural institutions from which she has yet to emancipate herself.

Swahili taarab artists are creatures of their own culture and their songs reflect the traditional norms, values and attitudes of the Swahili-Islamic way of life. In this set-up, the subservient role of the woman is almost a foregone conclusion for the artist. Thus, the positive image of a woman resisting male and societal prejudices against women is rare in these songs. Individual women taarab artists may voice isolated protest against injustices like forced marriage, bride price, non-education of girls, family sex roles. But in all cases, call for reconciliation and compromise rather than agitation for collective positive action to change the fundamental social system responsible for these evils seems to be the practice.

There are hardly any Swahili taarab songs urging women to face up to discriminative traditional gender roles or even analyzing and coming to grips with these gender-based relationships. The Swahili taarab artists have yet to portray "real women" free of male stereotype images about womanhood and who are capable of self-assertion. They have yet to free the woman from the heavy blanket of social anonymity, domestic imprisonment, illiteracy and political seclusion.

Swahili taarab artists have not yet realized that women should not be presented as being content only with voicing conflicts between modern social values and the values of the traditional society. Women characters should be given the impetus to go a step further to point to the root cause of the conflicts, inequalities, and injustices against themselves and play a leading role in eradicating them. But to do this, the Swahili woman must be exposed to unlimited secular education, freed from the snares of traditional religious culture and she must acquire a high level of political consciousness. She must be fully integrated into the professional and career world of formal and informal economic sectors.

Most Swahili women live in the urban environment in which the formal sector of

the economy demands a large reservoir of skilled labor and where there is a better chance for exposure to labor and other forms of political activity. Yet, due to the oppressive nature of the socio-cultural value system, the Swahili woman is far behind her rural counter-part in as far as the level of critical sociopolitical awareness is concerned. The latter's socioeconomic and political awareness is comparatively sharper probably by her daily struggles to fend for the family, often under a much more harsh environment. Therefore, as a result of her stronger sense of self-reliance, the woman's economic dependence on man seems to be much less pronounced.

Although Swahili taarab songs are very popular as an avenue of social commentary, they still paint a very negative and low key image of women who have yet to redeem themselves in the eyes of the society. Only after this anomaly is corrected will the artists have proved the thesis put forward by D. B. Burness (1973) that only black women artists can view black womanhood positively as they only have a natural vantage and an unsurpassed natural familiarity with the woman's world.(20) This has yet to be realized as far as the portraiture of women in modern Kenyan Swahili taarab songs is concerned.

6:2 Swahili Female Taarab Artists

It is almost ironical that, whereas Swahili taarab has been formalized, commercialized and popularized by women artists today, many highly talented female singers, instrumentalists and composers have been relegated into oblivion and go completely unnoticed and appreciated beyond their streets or home towns. (21) In Tanzania, there are a number of all-female taarab groups like "Royal Air Force", "Navy", "Sahubul", "Lari", "Nuru", "Luyuni" and "Banati," but despite the presence of many prominent women artists in many Kenyan taarab bands, this writer did not come across a single all-female group in Kenya. Most women taarab artists in East Africa rose to fame during the period of nationalist struggle between 1950 and 1964, which has been described by Mohamed Khatib as "an era of extreme romanticism" in the taarab movement in this region. (22)

It is interesting to note that some scholars of Swahili oral tradition, like Mohamed Khatib, argue that Swahili taarab artists especially women, ignored the nationalist struggle, and, instead, concentrated on subjects such as love and romance. This view, however, contrasts sharply with that held by another critic and prominent taarab singer, Abasi Mzee, a Dar es Salaam based career taarab who has spent the best part of his life in the taarab movement. In an interview with this author, the artist stressed the role played by the taarab groups in mainland Tanzania during the country's independence struggle right from mid 1940s to 1960s. He singled out the songs by the women artists in a local taarab group named Egyptian Musical Club, well-known for their 1950s songs that spurred on the Tanzanians to liberate themselves from British colonialism. He pointed out that the club members worked very closely with nationalists such as Mwalimu Julius Nyerere in the course of the liberation struggle.

In both Kenya and Tanzania, women singers and composers have dominated the movement right from its inception, and despite the lowly public image that their male-controlled society and media accord them, they are still a force to reckon with in this oral art. For instance, the Kenyan taarab star, Bibie Zuhura Swaleh, was the first African woman in Kenya, and perhaps East Africa, to record a Swahili long play disc in the 1960s when she teamed up with other Kenyan pop music giants of the time such as Fadhil Williams, Daudi Kabaka and David Amunga.

Perhaps, the best known Swahili woman taarab singer today is Asha Abu Malika who originally hails from Somalia but lives in Kenya and Tanzania intermittently. In addition, there are many other prominent women singers in Tanzania whose songs have become household tunes throughout East Africa in recent times. One of them, Fatma Baraka, dubbed the "Grandma of Tanzanian Taarab", still "sings with deep feeling and conviction and has lately released many inspiring pieces although she is already in her mid-eighties." (23) There are many young stars in the movement in both countries and beyond whose fame in the art is on the rise and whose performance promises to surpass the high standards set by the founders of the East African Swahili taarab movement, such as Siti

Binti Saadi, over a century ago.(24)

This author did not come across any woman taarab artist in Kenya who was a professional or full-time musician. In fact, most, if not all, women taarab composers and singers came from very humble family and economic backgrounds and, in most cases, were either partially or wholly dependent on their husbands or had other jobs. A typical example is the case of the legendary Swahili taarab singer, Siti Binti Saad, who was employed as a pot-maker and seller in her small home village in Zanzibar. Everyday, she had to walk to and from their city to sell her delicate wares in order to help her poor family. (25)

Additionally, a good many of the women singers interviewed in this study are illiterate in English and compose their songs orally or ask literate women and men poets to write down the texts for them for use in the practice sessions with their groups. However, with the exception of only a few, many women singers are so well-versed in the art of poetic composition they can mentally compose and retain hundreds of pieces at any given time. Only one of them confessed that she consistently relied on a male colleague for textual compositions.(26)

Women singers are often looked down upon by their male counterparts and local male-female rivalries between artists are common in all the major Swahili taarab centers like Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu, Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar, Pemba. But these jealousies are regarded as arising from male chauvinism or commercial interests and are not seen as an obstacle to any group or individual artist. On the contrary, the women artists accept the rivalry and competition as fair challenges and opportunities for them to improve their artistic accomplishment. All the women singers interviewed in this study stressed the difficulty of combining their family roles of mothers, wives and housekeepers with the demanding task of professional or semi-professional entertainment. This difficulty is by no means confined to women oral artists like taarab singers but it is common to women working in both modern and traditional sectors of life today.

6:3 Summary and Implications

This study set out to explore the nature and function of Kenya's contemporary Swahili taarab songs as a medium socio-cultural expression. The origin, development and spread of the genre as well as its current social setting have been discussed. The study has also analyzed some of the salient features of the form style and language use in these songs. As far as the content is concerned, the study has discussed in some detail some of the most dominant themes and sub-themes in the songs, mainly, political and sociocultural themes. The treatment of gender relations as well as the role of female Swahili taarab artists were also highlighted.

As argued in Chapters Two and three, whatever their true origin is, taarab songs today are part of the Swahili poetic tradition and they have undergone many formal, structural and thematic changes which have made them "African" in the general sense of the term. Not only are the songs akin to other Swahili poetic compositions such as the mashairi, (quartrain) and wimbo (song), but they are fully cast in authentic Swahili and African idiom. Although there is strong evidence that Swahili taarab songs were first introduced into the East African coast on the Zanzibar island, it is possible, as other sources have asserted, that the genre was also received simultaneously in the northern coastal areas such as Lamu and Pate. (27) Similarly, the hypothesis of the oriental origin conflicts with that of the Egyptian source. If one takes the oriental theory, then one can justifiably claim that Swahili taarab was influenced by both the Arabic tradition and the oriental culture, especially, the Persian and Indian traditions. On the other hand, if the Egyptian theory is upheld, then, it is possible to state that Swahili taarab only borrowed the Arabic language and script in its initial stages of development but, it was otherwise truly African in form and content. In this case, it is easy to associate the taarab form with other Swahili song forms such as the mwasha and kinanda which preceded it.

The very term "taarab" is used slightly differently in the Swahili tradition from its original meaning in Arabic, from which it is borrowed. Whereas in the Swahili tradition

taarab is used to refer to a particular type of melody, dance or tune, the Arabs use it to mean all types of musical forms, any kind of happy or entertaining music. The word taarab comes from the Arabic verb root t'arab, which means "to be overjoyed". From the same root is derived Mutri (male singer) and Mutribah (female singer) Any musical instrument is referred to as Alat-al-taarab. Like in the case of many literary terms borrowed from Arabic into Swahili, the generic name taarab does not imply the form is Arabic. It is only a reflection of the literary or artistic origin of the genre.

The present study has examined Swahili taarab in the wider sociocultural and political context and explored the twin roles of the form as entertaining as well as informing the Swahili and the Kenyan audience. The study has looked at the scope of the literary, linguistic and cultural resources available to the taarab artist. The general linguistic and thematic similarities and differences between contemporary Kenyan taarab songs and similar forms in the classical Swahili poetic tradition have been drawn. This was done largely using insights from the socio-cultural critical theory as well as the communication and speech-act models. The study would probably have yielded slightly different results had it been wholly based on traditional, structural or transformational grammatical models. However, the use of perspectives from the models mentioned above has enabled the study to analyze in some detail the communicative dimensions of the Swahili taarab songs.

It is clear from this study that the taarab artists attaches a lot of importance to linguistic creativity and poetic artistry. This means that, like in the case of written poetry, Swahili songs put more emphasis on skillful use of language to convey precise but, by no means concise, socio-cultural or textual meaning. The artist in the taarab tradition draws on popular and novel usages of Kiswahili. To ensure this, the artist must keep abreast of the popular figures of speech in current use. As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o stated recently, the artist "needs to catch that phrase used in a bar, that phrase used in a restaurant, in a taxi, in the marketplace, in the shopping center. He needs to be in touch with the feel of the language, the rhythm, the music and all that." (28) There is need still to investigate further the psychological impact of the songs on the audience in as far as the perception of intrinsic

linguistic and sociocultural values in the songs is concerned.

This study has been guided by two hypothetical assumptions: that Kenyan contemporary taarab songs share some basic formal features with other poetic forms in the Swahili poetic tradition and that the songs have distinguished themselves as a forum of political and other themes thanks to some inherent properties unique to Swahili taarab as a genre.

The study has shown that while the taarab form may occasionally display a slight variation in the arrangement of lines and syllabic or metric balancing from its most closely related traditional forms such as wimbo, (song) and tarbia or shairi (quatrain), it shares all the other formal features in these forms. Like the classical forms, taarab has a topic, a theme, lines, caesuras, rhymes and a definite rhythm. In addition, it has a marked sense of external and internal structural and thematic development and uses Kiswahili in a unique but not an entirely exclusive style. The general indicators of mood or tone in poetry such as style, diction, sarcasm, comic relief or humor, are commonly found in both taarab and the classical Swahili poetic forms mentioned above. The use of both archaic and current lexicon, Bantu and loan vocabulary as well as English and other translations, is a feature common to both forms. Thus, taarab songs are an important source of useful vocabulary in Kiswahili. (29)

In contrast with Swahili written poetry, the taarab form has shunned experimentation with prosaic styles and diction in their composition. Such poetic styles borrowed mainly from Western traditions such as the "blank" or "free" verse, which have already been embraced by some Swahili poets using the written medium are still largely alien to the taarab art. (30) Probably, the orality of the songs as well as the fact that this poetic innovation has received very little critical attention, accounts, in part, for the resistance by taarab artists to these new forms of poetic experimentation.

The sample of songs analyzed in this study has indicated that thematically, the bulk of contemporary Kenyan taarab songs address mainly social and moral issues. Political and romantic themes seem to carry the same amount of weight in these songs while the

least attention is given to religious themes or humorous treatment of current issues. This broad picture shows that taarab songs are more widely employed in moral education than they are on political sensitization campaign in today's Kenya. To this extent, one could state that the songs have yet to balance their roles as a social medium which ideally should be used to "educate, criticize, sensitize, entertain and conscientize" the people. (31)

As a communication medium, the Swahili taarab songs are accessible to more Kenyans than songs or other oral forms in any other Kenyan language. These songs, are in many cases, presented in face-to-face situations where debate and open spontaneous discussion is possible, unlike messages relayed via the electronic or print media which tend to be more of one-directional communication than a two-way dialogue. In addition, the song medium combines well with other elements of popular culture or folklore such as drama, dance, music, game shows and this aspect helps to enhance the communicative potential of the Kenyan taarab songs. The sensitivity and realism of the content of the songs indicate that they are an effective means of presenting behavioral messages and that they are an appealing and culturally relevant forum. The study cited confirms the hypothesis that these songs are closely related to traditional Swahili poetic forms and is used to convey both political and socio-cultural themes in the Swahili as well as the Kenyan community.

Judging from the sociopolitical characteristics of Kenya's Swahili taarab songs and the stability and wide popularity that they enjoy today, it is possible to argue that since development communication is a "gradual and complex process, one that requires the society to examine and possibly alter fundamental customs and other patterns of behavior" (32), if well-coordinated as a medium, these songs have the potential to play an even greater role in the process of development in the post-colonial Kenya.

However, the study has not exhausted many important aspects of contemporary Swahili taarab including its musical qualities, psychological impact on the audience and the extent of its social contextualization. Perhaps, these aspects and other related issues could form the subject of further research in this area.

6:4 Recommendations

In order to encourage and sustain the increasing awareness of and interest in the traditional oral material in high-level scholarship, formal education and national cultural life and as an important step in the cause of cultural revival in Kenya, the present study suggests that:

- (a) The government of Kenya, in conjunction with other national, regional or international organizations, considers, as a matter of urgency, the establishment of a national body and an institutional frame-work to initiate, encourage, coordinate and promote research into, performance and publication of Kenyan oral materials in both performing and creative arts.
- (b) Harmonization and revitalization of the cultural studies, research and activities in the national public and private institutions of higher education, private bodies and the ministries of Culture and Social Services, Education, Information and Broadcasting and other relevant bodies.
- (c) Official registration of all formal and informal Swahili taarab and other popular music groups and individual performers for guidance and support by the government and other donor organizations to further develop their art for use in national development communication efforts.
- (d) Establishment and support of free national traveling theater groups, dance troupes and other talented performing and creative art organizations to be used in educating and sensitizing Kenyans on their role in national development using Kiswahili, Kenya's national language, as the medium of communication to promote national cultural unity.
- (e) Articulation and publication of a sound national cultural policy which reflects the goals of Kenya's national development and incorporates all aspects of Kenya's intellectual, spiritual and material culture.

These suggestions are aimed at assisting in the effort to develop an information and cultural infrastructure to provide a meaningful frame-work for Kenya's future

development, an objective which has been spelled out in the current national development plan. (33) There is a need to harness the great mass communicative potential in such oral forms as the Swahili taarab songs in order to ensure:

community enlightenment programs aimed at arousing political and social awareness, inculcating high ideals and learning techniques of development communication. It involves educating the masses on economic development, scientific and technological modes of farming, modern health care delivery, family planning, and the introduction of new dynamic social structures aimed at broadening the base of national development. (34)

Effective planning and extensive use of indigeneous traditional oral media like Swahili taarab songs would not only help reduce overall public expenditure in mass communication and improve informal community education programs in Kenya, but will be an effective way of engendering positive, productive and constructive sociocultural relationships among the majority rural Kenyans and the urban few, an essential step in ensuring practical and purposeful national communication for development.

Endnotes

1. Rushing, A. B., "Images of Black Women in Modern Poetry. An Overview" in Bell et al. (ed). Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature: (New York: Anchor Books, 1979), 1-15.
2. Davies C. B. and Graves, A.A. Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature (Trenton: African World Press, 1986), 16.
3. Some of the best known contemporary Swahili taarab singers and composers today are women. In fact, it was a woman, Siti Binti Saad, from Ugunja Island, who first ventured into commercial recording and
4. Davies, C. B. and Graves. A. A., op. cit. p.4.
5. Ibid., p. 3.
6. Ibid. pp. 1-25 and also Molaro, Ogudipe Leslie. "The Female Writer and Her Commitment" in Women in African Literature. (Trenton: African World Press, 1987), 5-14.
7. Good examples such collections or anthologies of classical Swahili poetry include Jan Knappert's J. W. T. Allen, W.H. Whitel, J. Lampert and L. Harries.
8. "Poetry" is here used in the sense of "oral" (unwritten) poetry as defined in Ruth Finnegan, Oral Poetry. (London:Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1-7.
9. Mulokozi M. "The Present State of Swahili Literature: A Survey", Arnold, S. (ed.) African Literature Studies. (Washington DC: ALA, Three Continents Press,1985), 173.
10. Boyd A. W. Music of the Waswahili of Lamu, Kenya. annotated collections, (New York: Folkways Records and Service Corporation, 1985), 1-15.
11. This has been the case in a good number of the recent records by the famous Mombasa taarab singer, Mohamed Khamis Juma Bhalo.
12. MwanaKupona Mshamu, "Utendi wa Mawanaknpona", A. A. Jahdhmy (ed.) Anthology of Swahili Poetry. (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1975), 25-40.
13. For example, Marc J. Swarz, "Culture and Implicit Power: Maneuvers and Understandings in Swahili Nuclear Family Relations", Myron J. Aronoff(ed) Culture and Political Change Brunswick New Jearsey,Transaction Books, New 1983), 19-38.
14. Dumila F. "Political Music: in Viva , (Nairobi, Junes 1977), 21.
15. Abdullah S. Al-Hatimys. Woman in Islam. (New Dheh:TaJ Company 1982), 36
16. For instance the poetry by S. Robert, Adilatif Abdalla. However, S. A. Mohamed has tried to counteract this negative perspective of womanhood in his poetry.
17. Robert, S. Wasifu Wa Siti Binti Saad. (Nairobi: Thomas Nelson,1967), 25.

18. Ibid., p. 31.
19. Ibid., p. 32.
20. D. B. Burness, "Womanhood in the Short Stories of A. A. Aidoo". Studies in Black Literature. (Vol. 4, no. 2, 1973), 22.
21. Anyidoho K. (ed) Interdisciplinary Dimensions of African Literature. (Washington DC: Three Continents Press 1985), 89-99.
22. Siti Binti Saad, born in Zanzibar in 1888, is regarded by the Swahili as the mother of Swahili taarab music in East Africa for her role in pioneering in recording Swahili songs and popularising the taarab form beyond East Africa. Following in her trail is a galaxy of Kenyan taarab women artists including, Malika of Somalia, Shakila of Tanzania, and Zena, Zuhura and others, whose fame extends far beyond their national borders today.
23. Mohamed Seif Khatib, Taarab Unguja. (Dar es Salaam: Forthcoming, Tanzania Publishing House, 1991), 54-56.
24. Faraji Dumila's article on "Fatma Braraka". The Nyayo Decade, (Nairobi, Vol.1, 1989), 36-37.
25. Although one of the leading women taarab composers from Mombasa, Kenya confessed to this writer that she had not given any formal training in the art of composition to any young woman, however, this writer, July 1991, at Mombasa, observed Zuhura Swaleh, another Kenyan pioneer Swahili taarab singer, instructing Stella Bute, a talented young woman on how to sing lead vocals.
26. Shaaban Robert, Wasifu Wa Siti Binti Saad. (Nairobi: East African Swahili Committee, 1958), 11.
27. Bibi Zuhura Swaleh, personal interview, Mombasa Kenya, July 20, 1991. By contrast, Zena Mahamoud Fadhil composes for both men and women artists.
28. M.I.B. Igel, "The Life and Works of Mohamed Kijumwa". Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation. (University of London, 1983), . 1-30.
29. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "The Language of Struggle". an interview in Transition. (New York: Oxford University Press, no. 54, 1991), 149.
30. P.O. Mlama, "Jinsi Sanaa Za Maonyesho. Taarab. Na Senema Zinavyoweza Kusaidia Kuimarisha Luhha Ya Kiswahili". Lugha Yetu: (Dar es Salaam, Institute of Swahili Research, No. 37), 44.
31. Ephraim Kezilahabi, Kichomi. (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1974), i-x.
32. A.G. Gibbe, "Fasihi na Jamii: Baadhi Ya Washairi wa Kiswahili". Kiswahili. (Dar es Salaam: Institute of Swahili Research. Vol.48, no.1, 1978), 10.
33. Steven Rabin, "Where the Government Has a Will, Ways Can Be Found", Washington Post. (Sunday November 17, 1991), C5.
34. Government of Kenya, National Development Plan 1989-1993. (Nairobi: Government Printer), 256.

35. R.L. Nwanko, "Communications in the African Development Context". Journal of Black Studies. (Vol. 20, No. 3, March 1990), 267.

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Appendix A: Cited songs recorded on discs up to December 1973: Courtesy: Voice of Kenya Library and Kenya National archives

<u>Label / Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Artist / Group</u>
Pwani 7-100 Star PIN	Sikitiko Nambie Bibi Nambie	Matano Juma Orchestra Morning
7-101 PIN	Pokea Salamu Roho Yangu	" "
7-102 PIN	Sultwana Janatu Naimu	Zuhura Swaleh "
7-103 PIN	Ni Anasa Nna Nini	" "
7-104 PIN	Hekaya Kama Malaika	Matano Juma Orchestra Morning Star
7-105 PIN	Hukuomba Mwenye Enzi Kivua Mato	Zuhura Swaleh "
7-106 PIN	Kifa Kifanana Ukane Moyo	Matano Juma Orchestra Morning Star
7-107 PIN	Mfano Wako Hapana Kama Zijiri	Zuhura Swaleh "
7-108 PIN	Wakati Safina	Matano Juma Orchestra Morning Star
7-109 PIN	Nikele Saa Na Dakika	" "
7-110 SABA	Tucheze Picha	" "
7-62 SABA	Viwili Havipendeki Mahaba Hakuna	" "
7-63 SABA	Chuki Usinifanyie Jeraha Lililo Moyoni	" "
7-72 SABA	Kifo Cha Mahaba Gunia Tupu	Lucky Star "
7-75 SABA	Macho Yanacheka Mwiba Wa Mahaba	" "
7-90 SABA	Kitumbiri Nakupenda Muadhamu	" "
7-107 SABA	Chumo Jema Ni Ibada Nani Aliye Kuiba?	Black Star "
7-108 SABA	Unanunia Nini? Part 1 Unanunia Nini? Part 2	Egyptian Musical Club "
7-111 SABA	Nalia Kwa Kufuru Mama Wa Kambo	" "
7-126	Uzione Vinaelea Huu Ni Wangu Wajibu	" "

Appendix B: Songs cited under Style and Language Use

(1) Mashuwa na Bahari (Mohamed Hamis Juma Bhalo: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1989)

Ni mangapi Twayajuwa, toloona yakijiri?
Ela haya ya kuzuwa, tutayapinga dhahiri
Tokea lini mashuwa, ikashutuwa bahari?

Naona mwajisumbuwa, moyo wangu u shuwari
Ni vishindovya mashuwa, havishutuwi bahari

Japo kwa kwenda mrama, mashuwa iwe hodari
Kuna siku talalama, dharuba zikishamiri
Mara Mashuwa huzama, ikamizwa na bahari

Tuijuavo mashuwa, kiwa iko baharini
Japo kuwa yenda sawa, imo bado hatarini
Mara hukosa hatuwa, ikaingiya majini

Asiyejuwa bahari, husema asilojuwa
Na siku ikidhihiri, matatye na beluwa
Hakuna cha uhodari, si meli wala mashuwa

(How many things do we know, whose origin we saw?
But, as for these fabrications, we will openly oppose them
Since when has a boat rocked the sea?

I think you are wasting your time
It is the noise of a boat and it cannot frighten the sea

Even though the boat be skilful in rolling
One day it will wail when the sea waves set in
In a flash, the boat sinks and it is swallowed by the sea

The way we know a boat, when it is sailing
Even though it may seem to move well, it is still at risk
Once it misses a step, down it goes into the water

Whoever does not know the sea is ignorant
When the sea becomes rough and manacing
Nothing can conquer it, be it ship or boat)

(2) Joka La Mdimu (Maulidi Juma: Radio Broadcast: Nairobi: 1985)

Kuna joka la mdimu, mdimuni limetanda
Wala Halitaki ndimu, latisha wenye kutunda

Joka juu ya mdimu, limefanya ni makao
Li papo halifahamu, lasema na wapitao

Wala halitaki ndimu, latisha wazitakao

Joka hilo limezidi, kutesa wana Adamu
Kwa hivyo hapana budi, lazima tulilaumu
Joka lafanya kusudi, wala halitaki ndimu

Wenzangu nawauliza, mnijibu kwa yakini
Joka lingatukataza, tusifike mdimuni
Kisa ndimu zikioza, joka litapata nini?

Joka kama hufahamu, ungalinda utashindwa
Ujuwe ni kazi ngumu, kutenda yasiyotendwa
Ingawa walinda ndimu, lakini ndimu zaliwa

(There is a lemon-tree snake coiled up on the lemon tree
It does not need the fruit but scares away those who pick it

The snake has made the tree its home
It is ever there, understand, talking to the passersby
It does not want the fruit but chases those who want it

The snake has become increasingly oppressive
We must all blame the snake
The snake does this deliberately since it wants no fruit

My fellows, I ask you, answer me truly
If the snake forbids us to go to the lemon-tree
When the fruit rots, how will the snake benefit ?

You snake, if you are ignorant, you will fail even if you guard the tree
It is difficult to do the impossible
Even though you are guarding, the lemons are still being eaten)

(3) Jogolo sina nyumba (Nasor Khalifani: Verbal Communion: Mombasa: 1986)

Kijongolo sina nyumba
Kajenga barabarani
Kajenga nyumba ya mawe
Orofa ndani kwa ndani
Hakuna manuwari
Ishindayo "Landani"
Kwa yeyote sipumbai
Fikira zako ni sana
Silikuti silimani
Wala silali hasona
Nataraji walo hai
Hawaachi kuonana

(Jogolo, I have no house
I built by the roadside
A house with storeys inside
No ship is bigger than that house

No other lover lover satisfies me
 I can get neither satisfaction nor feel at ease
 I cannot get a good sleep
 I expect those still alive
 Must come to meet)

(4) Kwako Nimetosheka (Zuhura Swaleh: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1987)

Mapenzi yako yatosha, raha nyingi sifa kwako
 Mazuri wanionyesha, alokupa Mola wako

Kwako nimetosheka, kinyume sitokwendeya
 Wala sitohadaika, na wale wapita njiya
 Huna ulipopunguka, mwili umetimiliya

Mapenzi ya ujanani, sisi tumeyaanziya
 Yaliyo na kila fani, sisi kuyafurahiya
 Bashaha zilizo ndani, pendo kulifurahiya

Kwa mapenzi waridhisha, mazuri ya kuvutiya
 Raha wanionyesha, Mola alokujaliya
 Nitakuenzi maisha, hadi nitapojifiya

Kwa mwengine sitokwenda, hadhi nikakuvunjiya
 Kwani wewe nakupenda, kwa uzuri wa tabiya
 Daima nitakulinda, hadi mwisho wa dunia

(Your love satisfies me, all manner of luxury you give me
 You share with me all the good that your God bestowed on you

I am satisfied with you and will not be unfaithful to you
 I will not be cheated by the passersby
 You lack nothing, your beauty is perfect

We started our loving right from our youth
 All sorts of pleasures we have shared
 Sharing the innermost joys of love

Your love really satisfies and is very attractive
 You have shown me all the joys that God gave you
 I will eternally admire you until I die

I will not love another and lower your dignity
 Because I love you for your good behavior
 For ever I will defend you till the end of the world)

(5) Twambie Maradhi Yako, (Matano Juma: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1986)

Twambie maradhi yako, usisumbuwe waganga
 Hutupi ukweli wako, wakaa ukitupanga

Hili ndilo hili silo, hutui watanga tanga
Twambie likuuwalo, usimalize waganga

(Tell us your disease, do not bother doctors
You never reveal your secret but keep telling stories

This is right, this is wrong, you never settle but keep roaming
Tell us what is killing you, do not visit all doctors)

(6) Kiberiti na Petroli (Said Mohamed : Cassette: Mombasa: 1989)

Kiberiti na Petroli, iwapo umeviweka
Hivi vitu viwili, visije kukutanika
Kusalimika muhali, lazima pataripuka
Bora uvitenge mbali, hapo utasalimika

Iwapo umeviweka, hivi vitu hali yako
Ni muhali kusalimika, utazuka mripuko

Katu haiwi salama, jambo hili ni hakika
Kutokujali lazima, na wala hapana shaka
Tena taabu kuuzima, moto ukisha kuwaka
Moto wake ni hasama, mara unakasirika

Katu huzimi amini, japo kwa moja dakika
Kabisa ni fatani, mara moja huripuka
Utangia hatarini, Huwezi kunusurika
Na jambo hili yakini, wengi limeshawafika

Wenzangu nakuasini, msije kuhadaika
Shetani yumo mbioni, moto upate kuwaka
Na jambo hili hakika, wengi limeshawapata
Majuto huja mwishoni, mara hushaghafilika

(A match and petrol, if you keep them
These two things should never come into contact
There is no safety and there is bound to be an explosion
It is advisable to separate them to ensure safety

It is not safe in the least and this fact is sure
If carelessly handled, no doubt, they will explode
Once the fire starts, it is impossible to extinguish
The flame is ferocious, once it gathers momentum

You can hardly put out the fire, believe me, not even for a minute
Completely savage, it just bursts out unexpectedly
You will be in grave danger from which there is no respite
This misfortune has truly befallen many people

My fellows, I advise you so you may not be deceived
The devil is up and about to ensure the fire burns on
This misfortune truly has befallen many people

Regrets follow later after you have forgetting the fact)

(7) Kiwacha Ulokihama (Said Mohamed: Cassette: Mombasa: 1988)

Kiwacha ulokihama, kwa hamaki na jeuri
Ukadhani kitakwama, wajenzi kutahayari
Ni bure zako tuhuma, imeshajengwa kwa ari
Leo uje kutazama, nyumba safi imejiri

Kwanza ulinihadaa, nikakudhani mkweli
Sijasita kukuvaa, wala sijafanya siri
Nikawa nakataa, nakana nikikubali
Nikaiona dunia, mambo yalipodhihiri

Wa sitara hasumbuki, Mola alinisitiri
Nilitoka kwenye dhiki, nikawa kwenye haki
Uloyataka kwa chuki, ni bure hayakujiri
Nilo naye hageuki, tumependana kwa ari

Lilokwisha pita jana, haliji mara ya pili
Mimi hulitowa maana, na wala silifikiri
Kwa heri ya kuonana, nakuombea umuri
Atake mwengine tena, usimdhiihaki

(If you angrily abandon what you have left behind
Hoping it will get stuck and the builders will be ashamed
Your malice is in vain, the house has been strongly built
Today come and look, a beautiful house has been erected

First you lied to me and I thought you were truthful
I did not hesitate to trust you or make a creche of it
And I kept opposing, denying as well as agreeing
I only realized the truth when things came to a head

A respectful person never suffers too much
God helped me out and I was happy once again
What you hatefully instigated did not happen
My current lover is committed and we love truthfully

What took place yesterday cannot happen again today
I no longer value it or even think of it
Farewell, we will meet again and I pray for your health
So that you may never trivialize your next love affair)

(8) Sitanyapa (Nasor Khalifani: Verbal Communication: Mombasa: 1986)

Sitanyapa, sitanyapa
Nikawapa waja kunena
Kuogopa, kuogopa
Aogopaye hapana
Ni kutupa, ni kutupa

Kumpa mtu hiyana

Sikukopa, sikukopa
Wala si kuazimana
Kama kupa, kama kupa
Sitaki kubandukana
Takulipa, takulipa
Imebaki kudanganyana

Kwenda kapa, kwenda kapa
Ndugu ah! zindukana
Nimeepa, nimeepa
Situmai kukutana
Ya mfupa, ya mfupa
Nyama sitaiguguna

(I will not stalk, I will not stalk
And give my enemies something to talk about
Fearing, fearing
No one fears
It is wastage, It is wastage
Giving something to a selfish person

It is not borrowing, It is not borrowing
Neither is it being loaned something
It is like a grant, It is like a grant
I will pay you, I will pay you
It has turned into lies

Running around, running around
Oh! my brother, wake up
I have gone, I have gone
A bony meat, a bony meat
I will not glean such a peace of meat)

(9) Karibia Ramadhani

(Zuhura Swaleh: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1985)

Karibia Ramadhani, mwezi mwema mtukufu
Sote twakukaribisha, kwa moyo mkunjufu

Misikiti tisipite, na ibada tusiwate
Na mema tuyatende, na maovu tusifwate

Islamtu twatambua, mwezi mwema Ramadhani
Mwezi uloteremshwa, Kuruhani duniani
Islamtu ni wajibu, kuheshimu Ramadhani

(Welcome Ramadhan, the holy month
We all welcome you, with happy hearts

We should not go past mosques or ignore prayers

Let us do good and avoid sin

We Muslims recognize the holy month of Ramadhan
The month that was sent to earth from heaven, according to Koran
We Muslims are required to respect Ramadhan)

(10) Ni Uchungu (Unknown Singer: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1987)

Ni uchungu, kung'olewa jino zima
Walimwengu, wapita wakitusema
Mola wangu, nionee huruma

Pulikiza, usizime yako taa
Si kuwaza, na kuchelea balaa
Siwe pweza, kujivutia makaa

Pato liko, ela wewe hutapata
Kaa kwako, sizingezinge na shida
Pupa lako, litakwetea ukata

Yaso sura, yote ndiyo utendayo
Kama jura, umezoba lipi leyo?
Kuna ghera, kusikiya upendayo

Nina hamu, moyo umezidi kwako
Si salamu, wala si sauti yako
Ewe tamu, natamani sura yako

(It is painful to have a healthy tooth out
Those gossips are talking about us
My God, have mercy on me

Listen, do not put out your lamp
I did not think of or fear trouble
Do not be the Pweza fish and bring trouble for yourself

Evil things, that is what you are doing
Like a fool what have you burdened yourself with today?
It is irritating to hear what you are after

I am excited and my heart is aflame
To hear your greeting or even your voice
You, my sweet, I long for your face)

(11) Ikiwa Hutaki Tutete (Maulidi Juma: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1985)

Ikiwa hutaki tutete, jikinge nikuonyayo
Mara nipa mara lete, huna shukrani moyo

Shiba upawayo, ewe moyo wangu
Na ulitakalo, lina dhiki kwangu

Kwa hivyo liwalo, mshukuru Mungu

Moyo sikatai, kupa utakayo
Ela sina rai, ewe wangu moyo
Kwa hivyo kinai, kwa uyapatayo

Moyo nisikiya, nikupe shauri
Hebu zingatiya, kisha ufikiri
Ndicho kiduniya, mawi na mazuri

Na matamaniyo, ubora punguza
Na uyatakayo, yakisha kuiza
Ewe wangu moyo, zidi kujikaza

Yakiwa yawayo, yasikugutusha
Sishindane nayo, kando jiepuse
Maana hu pekeyo, sijiduwaishe

Nakupa tamko, moyo nisikiya
Ndimi fundi wako, ukimiridhiya
Tosheka na chako, kingawa kibaya

(If you do not want us to quarrel, avoid what I will tell you
One moment you do not want something and then you want it
You are thankless, my heart

Be satisfied with what you get, my heart
What you want, will cause me trouble
And whatever happens, give thanks to God

My heart, I do not refuse to give you what you want
But I have no ability, my heart
Therefore, be contented with what you are given

Listen to me, I want to give you a piece of advice
Try to concentrate and think deeply
That is the way the world is, getting good and bad things

Try to cut down your desires
And what you want, if it proves unattainable
My heart, take courage

Whatever happens should not scare you
Do not compete with them (events), just avoid it
Because you are not alone, do not be fooled

I give you my word, listen to me, my heart
I am your expert, if you listen to me
Be contented with what is yours, even if it is inferior)

Menichenga, menichenga, kunitia papatiko
 Nikizinga, nikizinga, uniwekee papatiko
 Si mjinga, si mjinga, toshwa na akili yako

Kubanga, kubananga, na hali yako matako
 Nilitunga, nilitunga, diniani yaliyoko
 Si mjinga, si mjinga, toshwa na akili yako

Vya upanga, vya upanga, si rungu hata viboko
 Hivi songa, hivi songa, wakati wa mchafuko
 Si mjinga, si mjinga, toshwa na akili yako

Ni kurenga, ni kurenga, na kuchukua sumbuko
 Kula janga, kula janga, mimi hapa si mweleko
 Si mjinga, si mjinga, toshwa na akili yako

Cha mtanga, cha mtanga, hili kitumbua chako
 Sitotanga sitotanga, kukiomba tena kwako
 Si mjinga, si mjinga, toshwa na akili yako

(You have tricked me, to get me worried
 So that when I turn you amy trap me
 You are not a fool, you have enough intelligence

Destroying all there is in the world
 Yet needs still persist
 You are not a fool, you have enough intelligence

A war of swords is not like that of sticks or canes
 So get out of the way and keep off during trouble
 You are not a fool, you have enough intelligence

It takes aiming and painful effort
 Real suffering, I swear, it is not a joke
 You are not a fool, you have enough intelligence

It is soiled, this bread of yours
 I will not bother at all to ask you for a piece of it
 You are not a fool, you have enough intelligence)

(13) Mpende Bado Yuko Hai

(Zuhura Swaleh: Broadcast: nairobi: 1986)

Ingekuwa wanipenda sana, ungenipenda bado niko duniani
 Ningalipokea bila hiana, ningalihifadhi pendo moyoni
 Kwa nini wangoja uhai sina. uje unililie na mikono kitwani?

Pendo mpende bado yuko hai, pendo aliy okee
 Ukimpenda yuko kaburini, umelitupa pendo lako hewani

(If you truly loved me, you would love me while i am still in the world

So that I receive your love and kindly guard it in my heart
 Why wait till I am lifeless to cry for me with your hands on the head ?)

(14) Utabaki Hivyo Hivyo (Unknown Singer: Broadcast : Nairobi: 1988)

Utabaki hivyo hivyo, wakamatiya
 Umekuwa mtu ovyo usotuliya
 Hivyo ndivyo uendavyo, ushazoweya
 Kubadili ufanyavyo, ni ngumu njiya
 Na utakavyo takavyo, fanya sikukuzuwiya
 Kwa utendalo suala, sina la kukwambiya

Wahangaika, na kujitesa
 Unachotaka, kumbe ni pesa
 Kuadhirika, kwako si kosa

Hujui ukitakacho, unavamia
 Wataka bila kificho, huoni haya
 Kumbe ukitafutacho, ni kutumia?
 Na chochote kipitacho, wakirukiya
 Lako jicho, lako jicho, kwako ni udhiya
 Kukaa nacho hicho, kwako ni udhiya

Si mtu huaminiki, ushazoweya
 Japo upewe milki, ya kutumiya
 Upewacho hutoshaki, japo hedaya
 Ni bure hufadhiliki, kiruka njiya
 Mimi sitaki, sitaki, nitaumiya
 Siliwafiki, pendo la kugombaniya

(You will remain the way you are, suffering
 You have become indignified, restless
 That is what you enjoy, you are used to your behavior
 It is difficult to change your bad ways
 Do whatever you like, I am not preventing you
 Concerning your deeds, I have nothing to tell you

You are restless and perplexed
 So all you want is money?
 Your suffering is justified

You do not know what you want, you are just beating about the bush
 You openly and shamelessly display your greed
 So all you are after is to exploit
 And anything you see, you grab
 Your evil eye, has become a burden to you
 Your whole life, indeed, is a burden

You are hopeless and untrustworthy
 Even if you are given a fortune to use
 You are never satisfied, even if you are given the most valuable treasures

It is all in vain, since you cannot settle in one place
 I do not want your love at all, it will only hurt me
 I do not value love based on struggle for material gain)

(15) Tulia Utuwe (Matano Juma: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1985)

Tulia utuwe, usitaharuki
 Wasikusumbuwe hao manafiki
 Mwana sidangané
 Ni mimi na wewe
 Sitaki mwenhine

(Settle and be calm
 Do not let those cheats deceive you
 Darling, do not be confused
 It should be only me and you
 I do not want any other lover)

(16) Bunduki (Bibie Shakila: Broadcast: Nairobi : 1986)

Bunduki yajulikana, kama chombo cha zamani
 Na kuwa yatakikana, iwe na risasi ndani
 Lakini mwako hamna, atakayehofu ni nani?

Yaua namna gani?
 Bunduki bila risasi
 Yaua namna gani?

Tomu acha utukutu, usiku kuuchezea
 Hivyo si vyema mwezetu, mabaya kujitakia
 Bunduki isiyo kitu, huwezi kuitumia

(A gun is known as an old tool
 And that it is supposed to have bullets inside it
 But your gun is empty, whom can it scare ?

How does it kill ?
 How does it kill ?
 An unloaded gun
 How does it kill ?

Tom, do not be naughty and play around with darkness
 That is not good, our fellow, beckoning trouble for yourself
 An empty gun, you cannot use it

(17) Kanu Yajenga Nchi (Ali Mkali: Verbal Communication: Mombasa: 1986)

Pulikeni wajamala, mlilo katika penu

Za Kenya kula mahala, niwape hizi fununu
Nawaomba kwa jumla, nyote kwa hisani zenu

Kanu eeh, leo Kanu yajenga nchi
Raisi wetu mpendwa, yajenga nchi Kanu\
Na makamu wa raisi, “
Mawaziri na wabunge, “
Madiwani na makonsela, “
Na Jeshi letu la Kenya, “
Na raia kwa jumla, “
Kanu eeh, leo Kanu “

Hapa ni sote jumla, hatuna asi nafusi
Wabunge makonsela, tu katika ufuasi
Wa chama kilotawala, mwito wa wetu raisi

Nampongeza raisi, pamoja na mawaziri
Waliounda vikosi, vya jeshi vikadawiri
Ili kutulinda sisi, Kenya ipate nawiri

Nampongeza makamu, mwenye moyo mkunjufu
Aliyeshika hatamu, akawa muaminifu
Namuombeya Karimu, azidi uadilifu

Yatupasa kujipinda, kula tuliko mahali
Chama chetu kukilinda, kizidi kuwa adili
Ndicho chama kilounda, hii yetu serikali

Kanu ndicho kilounda, wanajeshi kukusanya
Ili wapate tulinda, na mengine ya kufanya
Kanu ilileta tunda, la uhuru hapa Kenya

(Listen my bothers wherever you are
Thoughtout Kenya, I want to whisper this news to you
I appeal to you all out of your own will

KANU ooh, today Kanu is building the nation
Our beloved President “ “ “ “ “
The Vice- President “ “ “ “ “
Ministers and Parliamentarians “ “ “
Councilors and Mayors “ “ “
And the Kenya Armed Forces “ “ “
And the citizens in general “ “ “
KANU ooh, today KANU is building the nation

We are all united with no single dissent
M.P.s and councilors, we are all followers
Of the ruling party, according to the call of our President

I congratulate the President and the Ministers
Who formed the army regiments throughout the country
To protect us so Kenya may prosper

I salute the Vice- President who has a honest heart
 Who took up office and remained faithful
 I pray for him to be even more trustworthy

We should pull ourselves together wherever we are
 To guard our party so that it may be strong
 It is the party which has formed our government

It is KANU which formed our armed forces
 To defend us and do other duties
 KANU brought the fruit of independence to Kenya)

(18) Papai Bovu (Zein Ahamed and Zein Labdin: Cassette: Mombasa: 1985)

Papai bovu jamani, halina bei sokoni
 Halitakiwi nyumbani, wala kupewa mgeni
 Haliliki asilani, ela litiwe kapuni
 Papai bovu jamani, atakaye kula ni nani?

Bei yake tofauti, bovu na zima sokoni
 Zima kupata bahati, uchague kwa makini
 Ikiwa yako bahati, utalikuta pembeni
 Papai bovu jamani, atakaye kula ni nani?

Halikai kikapuni, litapasukia ndani
 Likipasukia ndani, kikapu hukitamani
 Utajuta kimoyoni, ulichukua la nini
 Papai bovu jamani, atakaye kula ni nani?

Ulikutapo shambani, linavutia mtini
 Rangi yake ya majani, utazidi kutamani
 Lakini si la thamani, limeharibika ndani
 Papai bovu jamani, atakaye kula ni nani?

(A rotten pawpaw, my people, has no value in the market
 It is not needed at home nor is it given to a visitor
 It is completely inedible, only fit for the waste basket
 A rotten pawpaw, my people, who will eat it ?

It cannot be put in a basket, the fruit will burst in the basket
 If it bursts in the basket, you will hate the basket
 You will regret in your heart why you carried the fruit at all
 A rotten pawpaw, my people, who will eat it ?

Their prices are different, a rotten and a fresh pawpaw
 To get a good one takes luck, it requires careful coosing
 If you are lucky, you will find it stacked in a corner
 A rotten pawpaw, my people, who will eat it ?

When you see it in the garden, it looks attractive
 In its natural green color, you will desire it

But it is worthless, it is rotten inside
A rotten pawpaw, my people, who will eat it ?)

(19 Suga Dedi (Juma Bhalo and Asha Malika.: Cassette: Mombasa: 1985)

Mke: Sikilizeni mahuluki, (babu) nina Maneno tanena
Kuna mzee ashiki, kibogoyo meno hana
Shikamoo haitaki, (babu) kwa kupenda, uvulana

Kwa kupenda ndogondogo mtu mzima hasidi
Wamemfanya kinyago (babu) masikini shuga dedi

Mume: Waeleze mahuluki, (dada) nami sikukukataza
Ni roho haizeeki, mwenzio najiteteza
Shikamoo siitaki (dada) kwa sababu yanikomaza

Mke: Kishuga dedi cha kale, (babu) ewe kizere cha Mungu
Sinipigishe kelele, watekwa na walimwengu
Marika zako wa tele (babu) waja fwata nini kwangu?

Mume: Moyo ukiwa wataka, (dada) ni vigumu kuushinda
Nami kwako nimefika, sioni tena pa kwenda
Kupenda hakuna rika, (dada) usinikataze kupenda

Mke: Jitambue u kizere, (babu) uache mingi mikogo
Wajinyang'anyua bure, pesa nane za mihogo
Naona wachezwa shere, (babu) kwa kupenda ndogondogo

Mume: Unganambia mwenzangu, (dada) hapo hujasema jambo
Na lau napokwa changu, yangenishinda kitambo
Mwenye kula peni langu, (dada) utamnasa mtambo

Mke: Mtu hali kama gogo (babu) kwa wasichana ni kero
Pale uonapo zogo, elewa pana kasoro
Shetani wa ndogondogo, (dada) hupungwa na barobaro

Mume: Sitolekeza kishogo, (dada) ulimwengu wa kisasa
Pale uonapo zogo, elewa pana makosa
Shetani wa ndogondogo, (dada) hupungwa na mwenye pesa

Woman: (Listen rich men (grandpas) I want to say something
There is a sexy old man who is toothless
He rejects the greeting for the old so as to remain young

By loving young girls, an old man antagonizes himself
He has become a laughing stock (granpa) poor old man

Man: Talk to the rich (sister) I am not preventing you
The heart never grows old, this is my defense
I reject the greeting for the old since it makes me feel old

Old sugar daddy, poor God's soul
Do not annoy me, people are laughing at you
Your agemates are plentiful, why do you come to me ?

Man: When the heart loves, it is hard to overcome it
I have come to you and I have nowhere else to go
Love knows no age, so do not prevent me from loving

Woman: Realize you are old and stop showing
Your self-praise is in vain since you have only a few cents
You are out of your mind with your lust for young women

Man: Even though you speak, you have told me nothing
If I were being robbed, I would have stopped long time ago
Whoever eats my money will be caught by my machine

Woman: A man who looks like a log (aged) is a nuisance to girls
Wherever there is a quarrel, there are shortcomings
The devil of young women is exorcised by young men

I will not turn my face from today's life
Wherever there is a quarrel, there are mistakes
The devil of young women is exorcised by rich men)

(20) Kinyang'anyiro (Zuhura Swaleh: Cassette and Broadcast: Mombasa and Nairobi: 1986)

Najua mwanilaumu, mwenzenu kutojiunga
Nawajuza mfahamu, sababu ya kujitenga
Kinyang'anyiro kitamu, lakini kina mtanga

Ndipo nikaona kero, vita vya wale kusonga
Hujuma na madaguro, na kutaka kujitenga
Pato la kinyang'anyiro, nalicha lina mtanga

Eni mlojitolea, wenzangu nawashauri
Mimi singeyakimbia, mwajua yana dosari
Mambo ya kupigania, hayana mwisho mzuri

Kinyang'anyiro kuambiwa, kina mtanga jamni
Ndipo nikikiletewa, huniponyoka mkononi
Na mwenye kukichukuwa, hukitwaa mtangani

(I know you are blaming me for keeping aloof
I will tell you my reasons for doing so
Competition is good but it is filthy too

I am disgusted and cannot join the struggle
Their exploits and dens for self-gratification
Ill-gotten wealth, I fear it; it corrupts

Those devoted to it, I advise you, my friends

I would not have shunned it, but you know it is evil
Such spoils bring no blessings

Grabbing things is evil, my people
That is why whatever I grab falls off my hand
And the one to get it , must pick up from the dust)

Appendix C: Songs cited under Political Themes

(21) Ngoma (Malindi Taarab: Cassette: Mombasa: 1989)

Enyi wahadhiri, pamoja na watalama
Mfanyavyo ni hatari, mnavyoipiga ngoma
Ipigeni kwa urari, watazamaji twasema

Mfanyavyo ni hatari, watazamaji twasema
Ipigeni kwa urari, watazamaji twasema

Balaa mwakaribisha, mwaifukuza salama
Japo twataka kukesha, pang'ae nuru na nema
Wachezaji watisha, twatishwa tunaotazama

Mpigo mwauharibu, mwaifukuza salama
Wanasema wanabubu, na viwete wenda wima
Izimeni taratibu, tutazamao twasema

Mpigo wao ulivyo, na uchezaji wa ngoma
Tofauti tena sivyo, sheria zinavyosema
Mchezavyo na mpigavyo, twashindwa kutazama

(To you teachers and experts
Your actions are dangerous, and your style of drumming too
Play the drum systematically, we the observers say

Your actions are dangerous, we the observers say
Play it systematically, we the observers say

You invite trouble and chase away peace
Even though we would like to dance till dawn
The players are manacing, threatening us, the observers

You are spoiling the rhythm of the dance, I say
The dumb are speaking and the lame walk straight
Beat the drum slowly, we the observers say

Their style of playing and dancing
Is different and contrary to what the law states
The way you dance and play, defeats us, the observers)

(22) Mashuwa na Bahari (See No.1 above)

(23) Chura (Ikhwani Swafaa: Cassette: Courtesy, Dr. Chacha N. Chacha: Nairobi: 1987)

Chura nakuuliza, unipe jibu yakini
Kwa kila inyapo mvua, wakimbilia bwawani
Huna nguo za kufua, wala huna sabuni
Nijibu nipate tua, maji utayafanyani?

Chura punguza vituko, naapa u hayawani
Umezua sokomoko, watu hawaelealani
Ukivunjika hukohuko, dawa atakupa nani ?

Mwanzo nilisikia, ni mlinzi kisimani
Mtu utamzuia, maji akiyatamani
Akaja dada Rukia, na ndooye mkononi
Chura ukajing'atua, ukajisoza pembeni

Maji huwa najichotea, tena bila ya idhini
Wengine hujimwagia, maji ovyo ardhini
Chura unaangalia, huwafokei kwa nini?
Tena unachekelea, yatendwayo kisimani

Chura bora kuamua, wende kulima shambani
Mazao kujipatia, wende kuuza sokoni
Nguo kujinunulia, isitiri maungoni
Au ukitaka ndoa, nenda kae nyumbani

Chura nakuusia, nisikuone bwawani
Tena nisije sikia, umekwenda kisimani
Njiwe nitakutupia, likukong'ote kichwani
Ndipo utapotambua, hutakiwi kisimani

(Frog, I ask you, answer me frankly
Whenever it rains you run to the pond
You have no clothes to wash nor soap
Answer me well, how will you use the water?)

Frog, leave your mischief, I swear you are mad
You have caused chaos, people are divided
If you are hurt in there, who will treat you ?

First, I heard you are the guard at the well
Who would prevent anyone who wanted the water
Then came sister Rukia, her bucket in hand
Frog, you jumped up and hid yourself in a corner

I usually fetch the water without permission
 Others pour water carelessly on the ground
 Frog, you just watch, you do not scold them, why ?
 Again, you just seem to enjoy all that goes on at the well

Frog, you had better resolve to go to till the land
 To get some produce to sell at the market
 To buy clothes to cover your body
 Or if you want to marry, go and do it at home

Frog, I advise you, do not return to the pond
 Neither should I hear you went back to the well
 I will throw a stone and hit you on the head
 Then you will realize you are not wanted at the well

(24) Kinyang'anyiro (See No. 20 above)

(25) Haki Yako (Yassen and Party: Cassette: Mombasa: 1987)

Simama uiteree, usihofu vituko
 Alo nayo mwandame, akupe kilicho chako
 Akipinga mlemee, mwandame aendako

Cha mtu hakifichiki, kingafukiwa kiliko
 Wala hakitumiliki, kazana utwae chako
 Siitupe haki yako, fahamu dhambi kwako

Siche kifatu na ndovu, wangazidi nguvu zako
 Teta nao kwa werevu, unusuru haki yako
 Sika kwa upumbavu, kilicho chako ni chako

(Stand and fight for your right, do not fear troubles
 Follow the one with it and grab what is yours
 If the person resists, stick on, follow the person all the way

One's right is inalienable, even if it is hidden
 Nor can it be done away with, struggle to get your right
 Do not give up your right, it is a sin to do so

Fear neither elephants nor rhinos, even if they are mightier than you
 Fight them intelligently to secure your right
 Do not be naive, what is yours is your right)

(26) Khila (Lamu Women Group: Quoted by M. Mukimbo: Nairobi: 1978)

Mwalikitumia khila
 Na urongo mkiapa
 Sasa hamba lahaula
 N mmekuwa hutanda
 Pesa zenu tumekula
 Na voti hatukuwapa

Mwalitukuwa hatuwa
 Kututia tandini
 Tandi twaliitanduwa
 Tukawavika shingoni
 Kadi mlizonunua
 Hamkujua ni za nani

Fungani zenu siasa
 Na yote mlokidai
 Hiki kiti mmkosa
 Komeshani udarai
 Ubepari umekwisha
 Na mapesa hayafai

(You used tricks
 And swore many lies
 Now you curse your luck
 And you have become desperate
 We have eaten your money
 But did not vote for you

You took steps
 To trap us in your snares
 We disentangled ourselves
 And put the noose around your necks
 The votes you paid for
 You did not know whose they were

Put an end to your politics
 And to all your claims
 You have missed this seat
 End your tricks
 Imperialism is no more
 And money (bribes) is no longer important

(27) Heko Mzee Kenyatta (Bibie Zuhura: Cassette: Nairobi: 1987)

Heko Mzee Mpenzi, Raisi mwema wa Kenya
 Baba yetu mwokozi, kwa kazi uloifanya

Mengi umetufanyia
 Ambayo mazuri sana
 Twasema leo twasema
 Heko Mzee Kenyatta twasema

Mungu akupe uzima, na afya ya duniani
 Uzidi kutenda mema, kwa salama na amani

(Congratulations, Mzee, Kenya's glorious President
 Our redeeming father, for your devotion

You have done so much for us

So many good things
 We say today, we say
 Congratulations, Mzee Kenyatta, we say

May God give you long life and good health
 To continue the good work in stability and peace)

(28) Heko Mtukufu Moi (Shukrani Musical Group: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1987)

Heko Mtukufu Moi, kwa kuiongoza Kenya
 Nyayo, Nyayo, Nyayo, twaandama Nyayo zako

Mtukufu Baba Moi, shika usukani wako
 Wananchi twafurahi, kwa uongozi wako
 Twakutilia saini, tuko chini yako

Na Mola atakulinda, Raisi Moi uendako
 Hao wanaojipinda, kuharibu jina lako
 Ni bure wanayotenda, hayakupati uliko

(Congratulations Honorable Moi for leading Kenya
 Nyayo, Nyayo, Nyayo, we are following in your footsteps)

Honorable Father Moi, take full control
 We, the nationals are pleased with your leadership
 We endorse you and are fully behind you

God will protect you wherever you go, President Moi
 And those bent on tarnishing your name
 Their deeds are in vain and will not affect you)

(29) Utenzi wa Kenyatta (First 7 stanzas of the epic cited) (Zena M. Fadhil: Personal Communication: Mombasa: 1986)

Jamii ya tafswili
 Taeleza Kiswahili
 Nina hakika kwa kweli
 Watu wote huwelelya

Kwa hili sina mikhafa
 Lugha hii ni yenye sifa
 Karibu lote taifa
 Wananchi hutumia

Niseme ya muawana
 Hadidhi ya waungwana
 Baba yetu na Mana Ngina
 Mashujaa wenye niya

Mshujaa wasotua
 Ambao walijitoa
 Hawakucha kubomoa

popote kupindukia

Waliifuata ndia
Kwa baraka za Jalia
Zikatimu zao nia
Uhuru wakautia

Walijipinda kwa kweli
Nafsi na yao mali
Vyote wahakuvijali
Ila haki kutetea

Tawaeleza mfahamu
Mambo yalotakadamu
Yalo kati na humu
Nyuma yalowapitia

(In great detail
I will narrate in Kiswahili
I fully trust
That you all will understand

In this matter, I have no fears
That Kiswahili is a great language
Nearly the entire nation
Uses the language

I will recount the illustrious deeds
Of the honorables
The father of the nation and Mama Ngina (First Lady)
The devoted heroes

Our untiring brave leaders
Who devoted themselves
And did not hesitate to tear down
With great zeal whenever it was necessary

They stuck to the cause (of the struggle for independence)
With God's blessing
They realized their goal
They grabbed Uhuru (independence)

They really exerted themselves
Spiritually and materially
Not caring about anything
But to fight for justice

We will clarify for you
The events that came to pass
What took place previously and presently
And what followed thereafter)

(30) Fuata Nyayo (Mohamed Hamis Juma Bhalo: Cassette: Mombasa: 1986)

Wananchi pulikeni, niwaeleze yaliyo
Msemo ulio nchini, wa "Tufuateni Nyayo"
Ni wa maana juweni, yaliyo na mafanikiyo

Kama u Mkenya kweli
Katiba waikubali
Basi juwa jambo hili
"Fuata Nyayo"

Kiongozi wetu wa leyo, wa jamhuri ya Kenya
Maongozi aliyo nayo, na tuonayo afanya
Haki tuandame Nyayo, bila ya nyuso kusinya

Kuandama Nyayo zake, kwa haki na upendano
Ndilo jambo tukumbuke, duniani bora mno
Nasi tuwe nyuma yake, tuunge Nyayo mkono

Ufuataji wa Nyayo, ni kutenda yalo mema
Na yasiyokuwa hayo, iwapo tutaandama
Tujuwe maendeleo, yetu yatabaki nyuma

Nyayo ni kulea pendo, na kutenda bila chuki
Nyayo sio za mfundo, na kupaana dhiki
Nyayo ni vyema vitendo, umoja na kila haki

Nyayo ni sisi kukuza, uchumi wetu nchini
Na kuzidi kueneza, yenye kuleta amani
Ndizo Nyayo za mwangaza, popote ulimwenguni

(Fellow citizens, I will tell you what is right
This motto of "Let's follow Nyayo"
Is important and very beneficial

If you are really a Kenyan
And you respect the constitution
Then, understand this
"Follow Nyayo"

The current leader of the Republic of Kenya
His policies and what we observe him doing
Truly, let's follow Nyayo without frowning

To follow his footsteps in truth and love
Is what matters, it is the most vital thing in the world
Let's be solidly behind him and support Nyayo

Following Nyayo means doing good
And what is contrary to this if we do
Then, let's know, our development will lag behind

Nyayo is practising love and acting without hatred
 Nyayo is not anger or provoking one another
 Nyayo is good deeds, unity and justice

Nyayo means building our nation's economy
 And spreading the gospel of peace
 Such are the footsteps of light all over the world)

(31) Kanu Yajenga Nchi (See No.17 above)

(32) Azimio La Arusha (Mohamed Hamis Juma Bhalo: Cassette:Mombasa: 1986)

Napenda kuwajulisha, pia nyote ikhiwani
 Azimio la Arusha, pamiwe na utamaduni
 Mno limeneemesha, neema sizo kifani

Ndugu zangu azimio, ni jambo lenye maani
 Tanzania ya leo, sio ile ya zamani
 Hivi sasa tuna cheo, kikubwa ulimwenguni

Ni jambo lenye fahari, mtu kujitegemea
 Humwepuka kila shari, na balaa za dunia
 Kwa uwezo wa Qahari, mambo yote hutengenea

(I would like to inform all of you
 The Arusha Declaration and our culture
 Have brought us uncountable blessings

My brothers, the Declaration is a milestone
 Today's Tanzania is not like that of the past
 We now have an important status in the world

It is a proud thing for one to be self-reliant
 It eradicates many problems and worldly cares
 With God's help, all things come to fruition

Appendix D: Songs cited under Sociocultural Themes

(33) Tausi (Unknown Singer: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1986)

Tausi kwa heri sana, ndege wangu maridhia
Hali yangu waiona, sihitaji kukwambia
Nifanyeje hali sina, siwezi kukuzuwia
Tausi wanikimbia, wapi takuona tena ?

(Tausi farewell, my beautiful love
My poor state, you can see it, I do not need to tell you
What can I do, poor me, I cannot stop you
Tausi, you are running away from me, where shall I see you again ?

(34) Muhibu Nakuusia (Matano Juma: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1986)

Muhibu nakuusia, ingawa mimi ni wako
Ikiwa nimekukosea, usifanye maudhiko
Wajua ino dunia, wema na waovu wako

Iwapo umesikia, nakwenda kinyume kwako
Nakuomba maridhia, nirudi kiasi chako
Kiasi kilotimia, ufurahi moyo wako
Nami nitavumilia, kuhisi adhabu yako

Kwa Mola nakulilia, nione uhai wako
Mikono nakwenulia, uzidi umuri wako
Falau nakubaliwa, ningeomba pepo yako

(My love, I advise you, although I belong to you
If I have wronged you, do not be angry
You know in this world, there are good and bad people too

If you feel I have wronged you
I beseech you love, punish me to your satisfaction
To satisfy your heart's desire
And I will tolerate the burden of your punishment

I pray God to give you long life
I raise my hands in salute, may your days be increased
If I were permitted, I would request a paradise for you)

(35) Kurai Sichoki (Mohamed Hamis Juma Bhalo: Broadcast :Nairobi: 1986)

Nampenda kweli, wazi nabaini
Na wala sijali, kuwa maguuni
Ni kitambo hali, pendo kanihini

Maadamu nampenda
Kurai sichoki

Nami kunihini, pendo sitoweza
Najua moyoni, nitajiumiza
Ndipo haamini, kumbembeleza

Hili si aajbu, ambalo natenda
Wala si aibu, kusaili nyonda
Kwani ni wajibu, kwa mwenye kupenda

Natatusa wazi, kwake naumiya
Bila maonezi, nikimlilia
Tamu ya mapenzi, ni kunyenyekeya

Ama la zaidi, ninalowaambia
Siwi mkaidi kwa kunyenyekeya
Ni yangu hifadhi, tukiwa pamoya

Tamati siwezi, mangi kubaini
Lakini la wazi, nawapani nyinyi
Ndiye mliwazi, mwangu nafusini

(I sincerely love her, this, I declare
I do not mind falling at her feet
For a long time she has denied me her love

I cannot bear this denial
Since, in my heart, I know I will be suffering
And, therefore, I choose to persuade her

What I am doing is not surprising
Neither is it shameful to impore my love
Because it is the duty of a lover

What is more, I tell you
I will not be naughty since I must remain humble
This is my refuge, being together with her

Lastly, I can not reveal any more
But, what is obvious, I will let you know
She is the comforter of my soul)

(36) Rangi Yako ya Dhahabu (Bibie Shakila: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1987)

Ewe wangu muadhamu, (mpenzi x3)
Uliye moyoni mwangu (“ ”)

Rangi yako ya dhahabu mpenzi
Iliyo safi takasa “
Sauti ya taratibu “

Yenye ladha isiyokwisha “

Mwili wako laini “
 Ambao umetakasa “
 Mfano wako ni jini “
 Abaye ameumbika “

Macho ukinitazama “
 Mazuri yanapendeza “
 Midomo iliyo myema “
 Laini kibembeleza “

(Your complexion is golden
 It is sparkling clean
 A gentle beautiful voice
 With lasting sweetness

Your body is all smooth
 It has a glittering beauty
 You resemble a super being
 Who is perfectly handsome

Your eyes, when you look at me
 Are beautiful and pleasant to behold
 Your lips are handsome
 They are gentle when you beseech me)

(37) Tuza Moyo (Mohamed Kandoro: Disc: Kenya National Archives: Nairobi: 1987)

Tuza sana moyo wako, uzidi kumakinika
 Usijipe uguliko, wangasema watachoka
 Kuwa wangu niwe wako, wazidi kuugulika

Bure yao watachoka, wangasema mafatani
 Na mno watasumbuka, katu hatuepukani

Wewe wangu wa jamali, pokea huno waraka
 Waneni usiwajali, yao wanayotamka
 Na watuone wawili, na mwisho watakereka

Tutazidi kupendana, wakae wakielewa
 Wangazitia fitina, bure watajisumbuwa
 Alolandika Rabana, hawawezi, kulondowa

(Stop worrying and be calm
 Do not trouble yourself, let them talk, they will be tired
 Be mine and I yours so that they can be more hurt

Their words are vain, even though our foes may talk
 They are wasting their time, we will never part

My beautiful one, receive this message

Ignore the words of the gossips
Let them see us together so they become more vexed

We will continue to love each other, they better take note
Even if they instigate our separation, it will be in vain .
What God has decreed, they cannot take away)

(38) Shuga Mami (Zein Labdin: Cassette: Mombasa: 1986)

Nimeupima usemi, naona una kasoro
Ungavumisha uvumi, kwa wasichana ni kero
Aibu ni shuga mami, kwenda na mabarobaro

Ajabu si shuga dedi, kutafuta ndogondogo
Ajabu ni shuga Mami, kuhonga mabarobaro

Lisilo pambo gondoro, ngoja nikuelezee
Ambalo lina kasoro, nikweleze yakwelee
Kijana barobaro kuo mama mzee

Singeinua ulimi, maneno kuyakariri
Haya nisemayo mimi, naomba uyafikiri
Kijana kwa shuga mami, ajikatia umuri

Sichoki kukueleza, upate kunifaidi
Japo yatakutatiza, nakwambia sina budi
kufuata yanayopendeza, kichuna na shuga dedi

Katika upelelezi, shuga dedi ana jina
Isitoshe ni mlezi, wa fani kila aina
Lakini haipendezi, kinyanya na mvulana

Usijifanye mkaidi, kiso na nta hakitomi
Japo wanwita hasidi, mtu mzima hasemi
Kinyago cha shuga dedi, si kama cha shuga mami

(Looking at your statement, I find it faulty
No matter how loud you shout, girls are not bothered
What is shameful is a sugar mummy moving with young men

What is funny is not a sugar daddy looking for young women
It is more funny for a sugar mummy to bribe young men

It is like an unembroidered pillow, listen to me
Which is incomplete, try to understand this
For a young man to marry an old woman

I would not have lifted my tongue to repeat these words
Please, consider what I am saying
By marrying a sugar mummy, a young man is shortening his life

I am not yet tired of explaining to you so you may benefit
 Even though you may be annoyed, I must tell you
 What is more attractive, an old lady or an old man ?

If you investigate it, a sugar daddy is well respected
 In addition, he has many responsibilities
 But it is disgusting to think of a grandma with a young man

Do not be naughty, a blunt thing cannot pierce!
 Even if you call him an enemy, a mature man will not reply back
 An old sugar daddy is not like an old sugar mummy)

(39) Karibu Mwenye Jamali (Zena M. Fadhil: Personal Communication: Mombasa: 1985)

Karibu mwenye jamali, upite bila mikhafa
 Mikono yangu miwili, nakupokea kwa swifa
 Inshalla Mola Jalali, tukazidia sharafa

Ndu yangu ulo rafiki, tuloswafiana niya
 Kukushukuru sichoki, na M'ngu kukuombea
 Asante shafiki, hedaya nimepokea

Ewe wangu mahashumi, mwenye imani na kite
 Nimefurahika mimi, takwambia nisisite
 Ahsanta kunihami, kupamba wangu siyate

Tunu nimeipokeya, iliyonifurahisha
 Rabi atatuzidiya, kila kheri ya kutosha
 Inshalla yako hidaya, ni kipambo cha maisha

Kila nimeoyanena, M'ngu tatia kabuli
 Upate yenye maana, na kula njema dalili
 Takulipa Subuhana, kwa hizi zako fadhili

(Welcome, lovely one, come in with no hesitation
 With both hands open, I receive you, honorable one
 May God grant that we continue to prosper

My brother, my friend, we share a mutual trust
 I never tire of thanking you and wishing God's grace upon you
 Thank you for your generosity, I have received the gift

Oh! my respectful friend, full of feeling and compassion
 I am personally delighted, I tell you
 Thank you for giving me so graciously

A valuable gift I have received which made me happy
 May God add to us all in plenty all that is good
 God willing, your gift will be a blessing upon my life

May God grant all our prayers
 Give you every good thing and more

May God reward you for your kindness)

Appendix E: Songs cited under Portrayal of Women in Swahili Taarab

(40) Papai Bovu (See No. 18 above)

(41) Bunduki (See No. 16 above)

(42) Kiberiti na Petroli (See No. 6 above)

(43) Chura (See No. 23 above)

(44) Chungu (Unknown Singer: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1987)

Kuuliza si kashifa, nauliza nambiani
Nimekwisha maarifa, sijui nifanye nini
Chaungu kisicho na ufa, chavuja namna gani ?

Jamani haya mambo, ni mambo yatazameni
Nilitosheka kwa umbo, chungu nikakitamani
Ni kipya si cha kitambo, chavuja namna gani ?

Pale niwapo napika, ajabu moja wendani
Maji huwa yamwagika, ningayatunza kwa makini
Chungu hakikupasuka, chavuja namna gani ?

Maana ya kuwajusha, mimi kwangu ni mageni
Chungu sikukigurisha, hakikwenda kwa jirani
Wala sikukiangusha, chavuja namna gani ?

(Asking is not a scandalous thing, I need your opinion
I am at loss as to what I should do
An unbroken pot, how does it leak ?

My people, this is funny, just look at it
I was attracted by its appearance, and I admired the pot
It is new, not old at all, how does it leak ?

When I am cooking, very surprisingly
Water trickles down, however carefully I tend it
The pot was not broken, how does it leak ?

The reason I tell you all this is because it is strange
I never moved the pot and it did not go to my neighbor's house
Neither did I drop it, how does it leak ?

(45) Bi. Kikongwe (Unknown Singer: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1986)

Niliona ni ujinga,
Na mambo ya kale hayako
Na watu nikawapinga
Kwa chuki na maudhiko
Sana ya wakongwe wanga
Duniani ikeliko

Bi. Kikongwe huna haya
Waniuliya mwanangu
Mola atanilipiya
Kwa haya matanga yangu

Kujiri aliyoyataka
Bi. Kikongwe shuwari
Nami nampa hakika
Akae akifikiri
Naye zake zitafika
Na Mungu amsubiri

(I thought it was ignorance
That things of the past were no more
And I opposed the people
Who lived by anger and hatred
Little did I know that witchcraft still exists

Old witch, you are shameless
You have killed my child
God will avenge me
For this grief of mine

Her evil designs having been fulfilled,
The old witch is now relaxed
I however assure her
Let her remember
Her day is coming
Her maker is waiting for her)

(46) Mapigo Ya Mke (Unknown Singer: Broadcast: Nairobi: 1985)

Mapigo ya mke jamani
Tawambia sikizani
Ni kula kwake na nguo
Na maneno mema ya kituo

Mtimizie zake haja
Mavazi na hata kula
Wala simpe dhiki
Tenda ya kustahiki

Tena fahamu sana
Mke ni kama mwana

Sije mpa mzigo
Ambao abeba mume

(The beating of a wife
I will tell you, listen
It is through her clothing and her food
It is telling her nice words

Fulfil her needs
Clothing and food
Do not cause her distress
Do what is right for her

You ought to understand well
A wife is like a child
Do not give her a burden
Which a man would carry)

(47) Jicho Limeona (Matano Juma: Disk: Nairobi: 1987)

Jicho limeona, lulu haina kiasi
Hupotea akili, hungiwa na wasiwasi
Ameumba jalali, uzuri kamlambiti

Shani ukimtokeya, chumbani amejilisi
Uso ukimuangaliya, nuru hudhani shumusi
Kwa muruwa kukamiliya, meno yake almasi

(My eye has seen countless jewels
Every time I see her, my mind goes blank and I get worried
God has so graciously endowed her with beauty

It is so wonderful to chance upon her, seated in her privacy
When her face you behold, it is like the sun's glitter
A beauty so perfect, her teeth resemble diamonds)

(48) Wanawake wa Lamu (Mbaruk C.Talsam: Disc: National Archives: Nairobi: 1987)

Waonekapo usoni, zipaji zao kama wahindi
Na mashavu za rangi, walizofanya mafundi
Ela nanyi yatundeni, labda hamyatundi
Watu wenda Shela, kama kwa wanawake wa Lamu

(Their faces look like those of Indians
Their cheeks have beautiful decorations done by experts
Now, be alert, perhaps you have been inattentive
People are going to Shela just to get Lamu women)

(49) Uzuri si hoja (Siti Binti Saad: Quoted from Shaaban Robert, Wasifu Wa Siti Binti Saad .Nairobi: Nelson, 1967), 25)

Uzuri si hoja
 Na sura jamali
 Kuwa mtukufu
 Na jadi kubeli
 Hasara ya mtu
 Kukosa akili

(Physical beauty does not matter
 Nor does an attractive face
 Being highly-respected
 Or coming from a noble family
 The greatest blow to a person
 Is to be ignorant)

(50) Si Kusudi Langu (Ibid. P. 32)

Si kusudi langu
 Kuvunja watani
 Enyi walimwengu
 Mwajua yakini
 Apendalo Mungu
 Haliwezekani

(It is not my aim
 To break my family
 You, fellow human beings
 Understand very well
 What God has decreed
 No noe can change)

Appendix F: Biographical notes on Taarab Artists Interviewed

- (1) Abdurahamani Ma Hindu. Arguably among the first generation of Swahili taarab artists on the East African coast. She died in 1986 in Mombasa at about 90 years of age. She was an authority in the playing of uddi, the stringed instrument and composed dozens of popular verses in the tradition.
- (2) Akida, Salim. A renowned Swahili poet, author and critic. He is now a retired civil servant who has served for many years as the Chairman of the Tanzania National Council for Kiswahili Development (BAKITA). He was a member of the research and editorial committee that prepared the first dictionary of standard Kiswahili in 1981.
- (3) Baruwa, Abdalla. The late famous Swahili poet and an expert in traditional African medicine culture and he authored many articles and books on Swahili language and culture.
- (4) Harnis, Mohamed. Popularly known as "Juma Bhalo", the Mombasa-born artist is arguably one of East Africa's best known Swahili taarab singers and composers today. He plays the organ and sings. In addition to being a career musician, he also runs a music store in Mombasa city.
- (5) Jemadar, Ali. A well-known Kenyan teacher and Swahili novelist. He is a leading authority on Swahili verse, language and culture.
- (6) Kibao, Salim. Born in 1933 in Tanga, Tanzania, Salim Kibao is a refined Swahili poet known best for his epical poem on Kenya's independence struggle, Utenzi wa Uhuru wa Kenya. Like Akida, Kibao served in various capacities as an expert in Swahili at the Swahili research Institute, University of Dar es Salaam and in other Swahili institutions in Tanzania. He is now retired.
- (7) Khan, Khamal. A prominent Kenyan Swahili scholar, teacher and author. He is now deceased.
- (8) Maulid, Juma. A leading career taarab artist in Mombasa Kenya who started singing and composing in early 1960s. He was the first Kenyan taarab singer to win the 1991 Musician of the Year Award in the country.
- (9) Mbega, Hassan. A teacher by profession, Hassan Mbega was born in Tanga, Tanzania but lives in Kenya. He has authored many works on Swahili poetry and participates regularly on radio talk-shows that discuss matters related to the Swahili language, literature and culture.

- (10) **Mkali, Ali.** A Mombasa-based taarab singer and composer who works for the Kenya Ports Authority in Mombasa. He is best known for his political lyric : "Kanu Yajenga Nchi" ("Kanu Is Building the Nation")
- (11) **Mzee, Abasi.** A Tanzanian career taarab artist based in Dar es Salaam. His musical career goes back to the late 1950s when taarab songs in Tanzania were composed mainly to politically awaken the masses in the struggle for independence.
- (12) **Nabahany, Ahamad.** A well-known Swahili poet and critic. He is a retired civil servant who has authored several works in Kiswahili as well as toured many countries in the world giving well-received lectures and interviews on Swahili studies. He has played a pioneering role in the development of Swahili technical vocabulary and often composes songs for various taarab singers in Mombasa and beyond.
- (13) **Nasoor, Khalifan.** A retired taarab careerist from Kibokoni, Mombasa who sang between the 1950s and 1970s.
- (14) **Saghaf, Maalim.** A retired taarab composer and instrumentalist from Mombasa who is well-versed in the history and performance of this musical form.
- (15) **Yahya, Othman, S.** Currently the Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Dar es Salaam, Dr. Othman hails from the Zanzibar Island where she gained a lot of knowledge of traditional and modern Swahili music.
- (16) **Zein, Labdin** A leading contemporary Kenyan taarab singer and composer. He is famous for his skill in playing the Swahili traditional musical instrument called the Uddi.
- (17) **Zena, Mahamoud.** A retired social worker, Zena is perhaps a kind of Kenyan taarab's unsung heroine who has composed many songs and poems sung by famous artists in the movement. Although she does not sing, she has a rare gift in the art of versification and her compositions represent the best in the tradition today.
- (18) **Zuhura, Swaleh.** Born in Majengo, the Swahili sector of Nairobi city, she is a pioneer woman taarab singer in Kenya who rose in her career to become the first popular singer to record a long-play disc in East Africa in Kiswahili in the mid 1960s. She has teamed up and recorded songs with many famous Kenyan popular singers such as Charles Sonko, Fadhil Williams, Nashil Pitchen, Peter Sotsi and David Amunga . In 1991, she toured the republic of Germany with her group where she took part in the World Folklore Festival.

