

BOOK REVIEW

Jean Ngoya Kidula. *Music in Kenyan Christianity: Logooli Religious Song*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. 289 pp. Note on Spelling and Orthography. List of Abbreviations. Appendices. Glossary of Terms. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$30.76. Paper. ISBN: 978-0253006684.

In his landmark study *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Orbis Books 1989), the late Lamin Sanneh discusses how both linguistic and cultural translation is essential to the transmission of the Christian faith across geographic and demographic boundaries. Jean Kidula's study *Music in Kenyan Christianity: Logooli Religious Song* is an intimate and close ethnographic illustration of this principle of vernacular and cultural translation through the function of music. Kidula shows not only how music functions as a model of translation, but also how the transmission of music acts as the catalytic, leavening agent for the spread of the gospel. Because of its flexibility and malleability, music also confers agency to new generations, empowering them to reimagine the faith using the cultural materials available to them. We see this evolving and consolidating trope through this finely woven narrative, which includes vignettes and portraits of distinguished composers and performers such as Gideon Mwelesa and Arthur Kemoli, who are household names in the Kenyan musical scene.

In seven chapters that are rich with Logooli linguistic cues, Kidula demonstrates the steps of musical transformation among the Avalogooli, and by extension, analogous developments in other African societies that underwent contemporaneous contact with missionaries, the gospel, and social change. Through this sociohistorical narrative, Kidula demonstrates how Logooli music by and for congregations has evolved from its humble beginnings of dialogue with African culture to the specialized community of the choir, gospel groups, individual composers, and arrangers, which has thus facilitated the acceptance of the Logooli Christian repertoire into the larger national Kenyan civic and academic life (227).

In Chapter Two, titled "Assembly," Kidula discusses the broad background of the Avalogooli, a land-based sub-tribe of the Luhya people, among whom music is a persistent marker of continuity, a pedagogical tool, a source of entertainment, and a resource in play, work, ritual, and religion. Thus,

when the missionaries and their religion arrived, they found, as Kwame Bediako has argued in *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh University Press 1995), a ready substructure in the primal religious sensibilities as a fertile soil in which to plant the gospel. Avalogooli believed in the existence of a Supreme Being, *Esai*, or *Emungu*, and ancestral spirits, who acted as intermediaries with God. Rites of birth, circumcision, passage, marriage, and funerals were all closely intertwined with religion, and with that, musical performance furnished the glue for the consolidation of a collective religious identity.

In the chapter “Encounter,” Kidula discusses the introduction of Euro-American Christian music and missionary activity in Kenya in general, a story familiar to students of World Christianity. Of the many missionaries who came through Kenya and formed comity agreements, the Quakers evangelized the Avalogooli, followed later by the Pentecostals. The story is told how education, medical care, and social uplift became integral to evangelization, and in turn yielded not only vibrant church communities, but also new social institutions, along with new rites and ceremonies. Educated Avalogooli became a newly minted cultural class, who would go on to become teachers and clerks among communities that had not adapted as rapidly to the new world. New religious practices such as Sunday services and multiple religious meetings and ceremonies, with varying musical expressions, became occasions to express or learn faith, among other things.

In the chapter “Consolidation,” Kidula turns to Christian religious genres. Missionary hymns, “songs of the book,” were translated into Logooli and Swahili as a means of teaching catechism and doctrine. Avalogooli who converted to Pentecostalism or formed breakaway churches generated new “songs of the spirit.” Spontaneous choruses and refrains, erupting as occasion invited, are also part of the repertoire. In recent decades, “gospel” music, recognized by instruments, contemporaneous stylistics, and mass distribution has joined the catalogue, not only among the Avalogooli but also in Kenyan society in general and as a pan-African and global phenomenon (78). Bodily movement, traditional instruments, and affect are incorporated into the singing as the Spirit dictates. Choir performances, *tsikwaya*, became a staple feature of religious experience.

In “Accommodation,” Kidula further discusses the adoption and use of book music, hymns, in their capacity as theological pedagogical tools. She examines the particulars of professional music performance in great detail. What is telling in this chapter is the apparent hybridity produced by the reproduction of the original genres in their Euro-American setting, including musical writing precision, the effect of praxis on occasion, and the agency of performers. This chapter, full of familiar hymn texts re-expressed in Logooli, is extraordinarily rich for those who are well versed in the intricacies of textual musical production, including style, tune, and meter.

In “Syncretism,” Kidula takes us into the world of the Pentecostal church and their songs of the spirit, which are associated with revival meetings, termed as spiritual, and reflecting musical and religious syncretism. Although

these generally consist of short and independent refrains, subject to improvisation, Kidula discusses their remarkable adaptability in composition and their capacity to teach new musical, linguistic, social, or religious concepts. She shows how they draw deeply from scriptural narratives. They are no less a theological genre than the more structured and polished hymns and choir performances.

In her chapter on “Invocation,” the author links Logooli Christian songs to the dynamics of the Kenyan education system and the popularizing impact of mass media. She discusses groundbreaking Logooli musicians and their broad contributions to a larger repertoire of Kenyan music. The most ubiquitous of the forms discussed is choir performance, *Makwaya*, (183), a specialized choral fusion of Logooli (or any other Kenyan community) with Euro-American compositional styles. The style and product are nurtured by particular composers such as Anglican layman Graham Hyslop and the much-loved composer Arthur Kemoli, both of whose biographies are discussed in detail in this chapter. Kemoli’s musical authority is recognized in adapting and arranging African folk, ritual, and Christian tunes for “high art consumption” (189). This is another rich chapter for functional musical aficionados. This detailed study is of interest to scholars of World Christianity, religious and cultural studies, and African studies as well as to lovers of music in general.

Wanjiru M. Gitau 

Palm Beach Atlantic University, West Palm Beach, Florida, USA

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Wanjiru.Gitau.M@gmail.com

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