

THE GĪKŪYŪ MŪTŪRĪRŪ:
PRESERVING A PIECE OF KENYA'S AGRARIAN PAST THROUGH FLUTE MUSIC

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Abstract

The Agĩkũyũ people of Kenya are one of the largest people groups in Kenya. However, systematic repression of Gĩkũyũ culture led to many traditional elements being forgotten, put aside, if not lost completely. The mĩtũrĩrũ, a bark flute used when herding and in certain ritual dances, was one such element. The mĩtũrĩrũ was initially a temporary instrument, which evolved into more permanent bamboo versions. These may have between two and six finger holes. Another version, called a "spider web mĩtũrĩrũ" has no finger holes but has a paper membrane over one end to create a buzzing timbre effect.

Research was carried out in Kenya during May and June of 2015. The mĩtũrĩrũ was found at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, where the elders made and played on bark, bamboo, and spider web mĩtũrĩrũs. Interviews took place there, and initial recordings were made.

Investigation also considered the use of traditional music in Kenyan Primary Schools. There are annual traditional music festivals in which students participate. Students perform traditional dances and vocal songs as well as instrumental selections. Music teachers, as well as traditional music practitioners were interviewed for background on preparation and performance. These festivals, in addition to certain church settings, provide ideal opportunities for a re-introduction of the instrument to Kenyan culture.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I first encountered the Agĩkũyũ on my initial trip to Kenya in 2006. I was travelling with a group working on a children's program at a school in Kikuyu Town. The *fundi* (craftsmen) who helped with some of the construction aspects often worked as they sang, and they taught us a song in Gĩkũyũ. This was my introduction to Gĩkũyũ music: joyous singing, combined with movement; songs of praise to make the work we were doing more enjoyable. I loved every minute of it. As a classically trained Western flutist, I began to inquire about a Gĩkũyũ flute on my second trip to Kenya in 2014; after all, most cultures seem to have a flute of some sort. Time and time again I was told: "No one plays that mũtũrĩrũ anymore." This was disheartening, considering I spent most of my time in a more traditional Gĩkũyũ village, Gatamaiyu. Even here, which is much closer to the agrarian lifestyle most Agĩkũyũ lived prior to colonialism than the more urbanized Kikuyu Town, the mũtũrĩrũ was unheard of.

In May and June of 2015 I returned to Kikuyu Town hoping to find the flute that no one played. Kikuyu Town made an ideal base of operations for me: I was familiar with the surroundings, it was close to transportation, supplies, and medical care if necessary, and it was situated near several schools with prominent music programs. Since the Kenyan Primary School music curriculum makes mention of the mũtũrĩrũ, I hoped to have access to the textbooks and perhaps even find students learning to perform the mũtũrĩrũ. Kikuyu Town is also centrally located, making trips to other Gĩkũyũ villages and cultural sites relatively easy. Beginning with the local music teachers and branching out to Gĩkũyũ cultural experts, I made a plan to track down the mũtũrĩrũ.

Statement of the Problem

The Agĩkũyũ (or Kikuyu) are one of the largest people groups in Kenya (*Columbia Encyclopedia*, 2015; Kariuki 2001, 19). The mūtũrĩrũ is a traditional flute of the Agĩkũyũ people. According to Jomo Kenyatta in his seminal and comprehensive book on Agĩkũyũ culture, the mūtũrĩrũ was played by men guarding the millet fields before harvest (Kenyatta 1962, 91). During my last trip to Kenya, however, any question I had regarding the instrument was met with a similar response: “No one plays that anymore.”

So much of the Gĩkũyũ cultural memory has been lost to colonialism as well as Westernization. Beginning with an emphasis on English language and culture (Thion’go 2003, 18) after the British began to take control of Gĩkũyũ lands in late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Kariuki 2001, 48), Gĩkũyũ culture was systematically repressed. Traditional dress, music, and language were viewed as insignificant and unrespectable; early missionaries typically “assumed that no civilization had previous existed in Africa. They were inclined to regard western values and customs as identical with Christian morality” (Kariuki 2001, 62-63).

However, the *mūtũrĩrũ* is given prominence above the other instruments in Kenyatta’s description of Agĩkũyũ traditional musical instruments (Kenyatta 1962, 90). Assuming this is an accurate conclusion, preservation of the mūtũrĩrũ, both physically and figuratively, is a key part of the preservation of traditional Gĩkũyũ music. The ways and contexts in which the mūtũrĩrũ is currently used can illuminate how the Agĩkũyũ have adapted to Westernization and urbanization.

While the flute may not be frequently used in its traditional function when guarding the millet fields, it may be finding other functions in Agĩkũyũ culture. In addition to documentation

of traditional styles of performance and instrument-making, an understanding of the various ways in which the functions of the mūtūrĩrũ have been transformed provides a look at culture change within Agĩkũyũ society.

Need For Study

Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, one of the most prominent Agĩkũyũ authors, writes quite freely of his experiences as a young Gĩkũyũ man under British colonialism. Much of his non-fiction writing speaks to issues of race and the balance of power in matters of culture. In one such work he calls for a restoration of indigenous African languages (Thiong’o 2003, 52). This research aims to carry his suggestion further by preserving and documenting a restoration of an indigenous Gĩkũyũ instrument. This research could also be viewed as a response to Kariuki’s call to integrate instruments such as the mūtūrĩrũ in Gĩkũyũ Christian churches (Kariuki 2001, 188). The decision to preserve an element of any culture must ultimately come from members of that culture; I hope to simply show the Agĩkũyũ that there is outside interest in their mūtūrĩrũ and aid in the documentation of any preservation they should choose to endorse.

Research Questions

Such an undertaking involves a multitude of questions. What social, economic, or demographic factors have led to the mūtūrĩrũ’s decline in traditional Gĩkũyũ culture? Very few changes in culture are the result of one single defining factor. Understanding the cause and effect of several small changes in Gĩkũyũ society and Kenyan society as a whole can give a broader perspective on the decline of the mūtūrĩrũ.

What does the use of the mūtūrĩrũ in an educational setting say about contemporary opinions of Gĩkũyũ customs? The existence of school music festivals in Kenya also presents both a possible source of research and an arena in which a mūtūrĩrũ renaissance could occur.

Understanding the procedures of learning and performing traditional music in this context sheds light on priorities. The weight given to the mūtūrĩrũ when compared with other traditional instruments could be an indication of the concern for the mūtūrĩrũ's preservation, or it could be an indication of the availability of information regarding the instrument. Other questions hang on the answers to these questions; such answers could heighten understanding of culture change among the Agĩkũyũ specifically, with broader cross-cultural applications as well.

If the mūtūrĩrũ is no longer played, what would a revival of the tradition look like? Any revival takes a form that is different from the original; the context, if nothing else, will be different. If the instrument and the songs it played are preserved anywhere, the issue of archive access determines who can take part in any resurgence that does occur. Reconstruction depends on the availability of knowledgeable elders and their motivation to conserve the repertoire and tradition. How the mūtūrĩrũ will fit into the conservancy efforts already in place also needs to be taken into consideration.

Regarding the instrument itself, I am concerned with the ways in which the instrument itself and its performance may or may not have changed. Issues of gender restriction and my status as a cultural outsider have the potential to limit the flow of information; however, the acquisition of one or more instruments is important in understanding the tradition. Whether the construction is standardized in terms of dimensions and number of holes also provides insight into the mūtūrĩrũ's function in Gĩkũyũ culture. An instrument with standardized (consistent) tuning, for instance, may indicate an instrument designed to function as part of an ensemble. An

instrument without such consistent tuning could point to an instrument designed more for solo or leisure play.

Limitations of Study

This study is limited to the Agĩkũyũ people of central Kenya, in the vicinity of Nairobi and Kikuyu town. Agĩkũyũ in other areas of Kenya will not be discussed for the purposes of this study, nor will diasporic Agĩkũyũ and/or other Kenyans. Depending on the findings of the study, further research among other Gĩkũyũ groups may be beneficial but are not within the scope of this study. The study was also limited by my time in the field, which was six weeks.

Assumptions

This proposal assumes that the traditional use of the mũtũrĩrũ has declined significantly and may in fact have vanished. This proposal also assumes that the mũtũrĩrũ currently exists in some form in Kenya, whether through a revival of traditional music education in primary schools, or in the memory of Agĩkũyũ elders, or in some other as of yet unknown function. I am also operating under the assumption that the instrument is, in fact, in danger of being lost to memory and that there are Agĩkũyũ who would wish to preserve it. Should these assumptions be proved false, the direction of the research will adjust to fit the circumstances that exist.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

There are forty-two different ethnic communities in Kenya. Of these, the Agĩkũyũ are the largest group (Kariuki 2001, 19). To clarify, a discussion of the variations in the spelling of the word “Agĩkũyũ” is necessary. In his ground-breaking ethnography of the Agĩkũyũ people, Jomo Kenyatta explains that the standard Western spelling of ‘Kikuyu’ is, in fact, incorrect. The proper spelling when referring to the ancestral land is “Gĩkũyũ.” When referring to the people, the proper spelling would be “Agĩkũyũ” (plural) or “Mugĩkũyũ” (singular). To ease confusion, Kenyatta compromised by using the term “Gĩkũyũ” to mean the land as well as the people, whether plural or singular (Kenyatta 1962, xv). I have chosen to use Agĩkũyũ when referring to the people and Gĩkũyũ as an adjective; however, when quoting other sources I have preserved the spellings used by those authors.

History

The Agĩkũyũ have a long and well-known history. Before the coming of the British colonists and European missionaries, the Agĩkũyũ were a people with an oral tradition (Mutonya 2010, 252; Kenyatta 1962, xvi). Kenyatta says,

The cultural and historical traditions of the Gĩkũyũ people have been verbally handed down from generation to generation. As a Gĩkũyũ myself, I have carried them in my head for many years, since people who have no written records to rely on learn to make a retentive memory do the work of libraries (Kenyatta 1962, xvi).

The Agĩkũyũ also use proverbs and ambiguous language with multiple levels of meaning as a part of their oral tradition of storytelling (Mutonya 2010, 252).

Kofi Agawu reminds ethnomusicologists who would study African oral cultures that “The deck is thus stacked in favour of those who write, not those who know” (Agawu 2007, 259). African writers come up against a bias towards the written word when preparing works for publication (Agawu 2007, 261), and students of African music struggle to find written literature available for review. Rather than bemoan this fact, we need to heed Agawu’s warning that there is a “feeling, rarely voiced but almost always acted upon, that the North theorizes while the South provides data. African scholars thus become informants rather than theorists of their own traditions” (Agawu 2007, 261). Western scholars often need to be reminded that oral cultures such as the Agĩkũyũ have a rich and full account of their histories.

Kana Dower asks a very pointed, but necessary question about the nature of anthropology and African Studies in particular. When anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and other researchers in the realm of the social sciences speak for the people whose lives and culture they have become a part of, the insider/outsider dynamic comes sharply into focus. And so, Dower’s frank and honest question: “...if the natives could speak for themselves, should the non-natives, especially the white ones, shut up?” (Dower 2005, 31). The question of insider versus outsider is not unfamiliar to Africans. Kenyan students at prestigious boarding schools, for example, are aware of their positions as both insiders and outsiders within their own country and culture (Dower 2005, 32). African ethnomusicology in the post-colonial era is fraught with the complications of misunderstanding and miscommunication at best, racism and its horrors at worst.

Creation Mythology

The Agĩkũyũ's history is so rich, in fact, that there is more than one account of how the Agĩkũyũ came into being. Judy Garcia outlines a story in which a man had four sons, and each son was told to choose from the father's belongings. The Gĩkũyũ ancestor chose a tool for digging. "The tool became a significant symbol in the identity of these agricultural people" (Garcia 2005, 25-26). This may be less a creation story and more a symbol of the lifestyle of the pre-colonial Agĩkũyũ people, and indeed, the Agĩkũyũ are even today in more remote villages still dependent on the *shamba* (a long strip of land for farming subsistence crops) as the main supply of food for the family.

The more prevalent myth, however, centers on *Kĩrĩnyaga* and *Mũkũrwe wa Gathanga*, the land which *Ngai* (God) gave the man named Gĩkũyũ. *Kĩrĩnyaga* (Mount Kenya) was created by Ngai "as his resting place when on inspection tour..." (Kenyatta 1962, 5). Ngai took Gĩkũyũ to the top of *Kĩrĩnyaga* and showed him a place in the center of his country that was filled with fig trees, which he called *Mũkũrwe wa Gathanga*, and told Gĩkũyũ to make his home there. Ngai told Gĩkũyũ to call upon him whenever he was needed by making a sacrifice and raising his hands towards *Kĩrĩnyaga* (Kenyatta 1962, 5).

Upon his arrival at *Mũkũrwe wa Gathanga*, Gĩkũyũ found that Ngai had given him a wife named Mumbi. They had nine daughters and no sons. Having no son upset Gĩkũyũ, so he called upon Ngai. He was told to make a sacrifice at the fig tree and then take his wife and daughters back home. Gĩkũyũ was to then return to the fig tree, where he would find nine men waiting, who would marry his daughters. They did so, creating the *Mbari ya Mumbi* (the Clan of Mumbi). As the family increased in size, it was decided that each daughter would gather her descendants and create her own *mbari*. While this would seem to indicate that Agĩkũyũ culture is matriarchal

(and indeed, the clan names are still named for the nine daughters of Gĩkũyũ), Agĩkũyũ society is now patriarchal (Kenyatta 1962, 5-7, 10).

Godfrey Muriuki references ten original Agĩkũyũ clans, claiming that while there are several opinions on the exact number of clans (he gives the range from nine to thirteen clans), Muriuki feels the correct number is actually ten. Muriuki bases this on the nine original clans, descended from Gĩkũyũ's nine daughters, plus the addition of the clan *Aicakamuyu*, descended from a girl who became an unmarried mother. According to Muriuki, "The myth of Mbari ya Mumbi was only relevant when it was vital to foster solidarity and unity within the Kikuyu community. This usually occurred in time of deep internal crisis..." (Muriuki 1974, 113). Many countries and cultures find their origins become more meaningful in times of strife; that the Agĩkũyũ should do so as well is not surprising.

Societal Divisions

Agĩkũyũ society is regulated by three categories: the family unit (*mbari*) which includes a man, his wives, children and grandchildren; the clan (*moherega*), which is several *mbari* groups who are related; and the age-grade or *riika*. The *riika* includes the initiates who have gone through the circumcision rites together (male and female); they become part of the same age set (Kenyatta 1962, 3). "They act as one body in all tribal matters and have a very strong bond of brotherhood and sisterhood among themselves" (Kenyatta 1962, 4).

The *riika*, according to Muriuki, was the "aspect of the Kikuyu society that contributed most to the bond that linked up all the Kikuyu and made them feel they were a single people. Its importance cannot, therefore, be overemphasized..." (Muriuki 1974, 110). He describes Agĩkũyũ society just before the arrival of the British as "patriarchal, uncentralized and highly egalitarian." He describes the *mbari* as the foundation of the social structure, and the *riika* as the foundation of

the political structure (Muriuki 1974, 110). It was into this utopia-like agrarian land that the colonists came, but they did not come without warning.

The Arrival of the Europeans

A medicine man lived in pre-colonial Gĩkũyũland. His name has been reported as Cege wa Kibiru (Muriuki 1974, 137) or Mugo wa Kibiru (Muhoro 2002, 15; Kenyatta 1962, 41). Kibiru predicted that strangers with pale skin, colorful clothes like butterflies, and fire-spitting sticks would come from the east (Muhoro 2002, 15; Muriuki 1974, 137; Kenyatta 1962, 41). They would bring with them an iron snake that “would spit fires and would stretch from the big water in the east to another big water in the west of the Gĩkũyũ country...” (Kenyatta 1962, 42). Kibiru predicted that after this, both the Agĩkũyũ and their neighbors would suffer and would turn on each other (Kenyatta 1962, 42). Kibiru warned them against hostility towards the strangers, as they would be no match for the fire-sticks nor could they move the iron snake the strangers would bring (Kenyatta 1962, 42; Muriuki 1974, 137). Muriuki claims the Agĩkũyũ were indeed hostile to these white settlers who brought with them the railroad, regardless of Kibiru’s warning. Fighting did occur between the Agĩkũyũ and the traders with their guns spitting fire, resulting in massacres of Agĩkũyũ people (Muriuki 1974, 138).

With the arrival of the European colonists and missionaries, life for the Agĩkũyũ began to change. The reasons for this and the ways in which Agĩkũyũ traditional life began to shift are many. The decline of traditional instruments in Kenya is not in question. Most people I spoke to while in Kenya looked surprised when I asked about the mũtũrĩrũ, or any traditional instrument for that matter. Part of the difficulty has been finding written literature concerning a culture that has been, until the past several decades, an oral culture. Remember Agawu says, "The deck is

thus stacked in favour of those who write, not those who know" (Agawu 2007, 259). However, when those who read and write begin to learn about "those who know," finding sources can be difficult. In reviewing what literature is actually available about the mūtūrūrū, several different factors appear to have contributed to the slow abandonment of traditional instruments.

Connection to the Land

For the Agĩkũyũ people, land is paramount. Their connection to the land is deep and vital; the connection is in some ways reminiscent of the connection Native Americans and First Nations Canadians have to their land. Kenyatta describes the relationship between the Agĩkũyũ and their land like that of a child with its mother. The land provides for the people during their lives and cradles them when they are dead. "Thus the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it. Among the Gĩkũyũ the soil is especially honoured, and an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth" (Kenyatta 1962, 22). So then, whether the removal of the Agĩkũyũ from their lands occurred by force (such as when the colonists relocated many Agĩkũyũ) or voluntarily (such as the migration to urban centers by many Agĩkũyũ youth since independence), it is not surprising that separation from the land has had a profound effect on traditional culture.

Judy Garcia describes the Agĩkũyũ connection to the land as a reflection of the structure of their greater family unit. "For the Kikuyu, land ownership is the most social, political, religious, and economic factor" (Garcia 2005, 33). Kariuki asserts that by 1930 the Agĩkũyũ had lost control of their land, which was now in the hands of the Europeans (Kariuki 2001, 53). The Imperial British East Africa Company, or IBEAC, instituted British control and administration of Kenya in 1895 (Muriuki 1974, 136), instigating a mass displacement of the Agĩkũyũ people in Central Kenya. Those without land rights were known as "squatters." Squatting is similar to the

land-borrowing *ahoi* system in Agĩkũyũ culture. Under *ahoi*, Mũgĩkũyũ individuals could form an agreement with the person holding the hereditary right to a parcel of underused land and cultivate that land in return for gifts. The hereditary landholder could take back control of the land at any time (Garcia 2005, 34, 36).

The Effects of Land Loss

As this land grabbing by the Europeans continued, antagonism built up among the Agĩkũyũ towards those who had made them *ahoi* in their own land. “More so, deep disaffection was created in them because it...was on the land that their ancestors lay. The alienation of land meant that the Agĩkũyũ had been deprived of their right to practice their traditional religion” (Kariuki 2001, 55). This land issue was one that led directly to the Mau rebellion, the rebellion against the colonial state. Mau Mau’s goal was to have the stolen lands returned (Garcia 2005, 34).

Gerhard Kubik discusses the effects of the loss of land and the subsequent urbanization on traditional life and specifically traditional music (Kubik 1981, 87). Njenga Kariuki also lists the move to cities and towns as a factor in the erosion of traditional life. “Urbanization has contributed to the detachment of Gĩkũyũ land to which the people are mystically bound” (Kariuki 2001, 97-98). Young people moved away to urban or mining centers and began to mix with an ethnically diverse community (Kubik 1981, 87). The move from traditional villages to towns and cities inhabited by people from multiple tribes has led to the Agĩkũyũ finding identity in ways beyond their tribe. The severed connection to the land also severs ties between a people known for their communal ways, and for those who have moved to urban centers the broken connection facilitates an erosion of their “firm cultural roots” (Kariuki 2001, 97).

The Loss of Traditional Instruments

In addition to the destabilization of Agĩkũyũ traditional life and culture, Kubik also shows how urbanization affected traditional East African musical instruments and music. The traditional instruments began to disappear or be modified.

In the cities and places of work migrant workers often used industrial waste to build instruments in imitation of the traditional ones. The appearance of these began to change considerably... There arose among the groups of workers a kind of music which mirrored the social position of men in a changed environment (Kubik 1981, 89).

Other factors sped the loss of traditional instruments and music besides the movement of the Agĩkũyũ away from their ancestral lands. Paul Kavyu describes the spread of technology and technologically based music (such as transistor radios) as having a large effect on the use of traditional instruments and music in Kenya. When the rural areas of Kenya gained access to electricity in the middle of the 1970s, the landscape of music in these areas changed. The media, both local and global, suddenly had a new market in which to promote music (Kavyu 1997, 628). Kenyan artists as well as international musicians had new audiences in the villages. With electricity came new opportunities for aid, as well. This aid had ripple effects in a community. “Since developmental aid is mainly technological, the population is gradually changing from traditionally based to technologically based entertainment” (Kavyu 1997, 628).

Technological Advances

The notion of “technologically based entertainment,” so common to us now in the twenty-first century Western world, had serious ramifications for African music. Transistor radios were suddenly widely available in East Africa. Steven Friedson mentions “the ubiquitous radio” that is prevalent throughout the Tumbuka community he studied, and also laments that

there, too, the playing of traditional instruments “was becoming a dying art” (Friedson 1996, 103). Perhaps the ever-present radio took the place of leisurely music making.

The record industry also benefitted from the spread of technology in Kenya. Not only did "neo-traditional music forms" have "commercial value" (Kubik 1981, 89) but the record player became a status symbol for a new class of East Africans. A new ideal arose with “the bourgeois home of the African middle class which was becoming more and more prominent at the time—the white-collar workers with the status symbols of a suit, a tie and a (Christian) monogamous marriage” (Kubik 1981, 90). The record industry was a double-edged sword, cutting both ways. On one hand, the potential for preserving and finding new audiences for (or renewing old interest in) traditional music was possible, but on the other hand, it encouraged the Westernization of many East African homes.

The Influence of Westernization

The arrival of the British colonists as well as the missionaries from other Western countries opened the door to the vast array of influences that would come to bear on the Agĩkũyũ people.

Administrators, settlers, traders and missionaries poured into the Kikuyu country bringing with them what was, in the Kikuyu’s eyes, a new and strange way of life with its sometimes incomprehensible demands and ideas. Gradually the Kikuyu realized that they had to come to terms with the new order and the period between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the end of the First World War witnessed the attempt, on their part, to adjust themselves to rapidly changing circumstances and environment (Muriuki 1974, 136).

The arrival of the British affected the Agĩkũyũ in ways other than their removal from their ancestral lands. Kavyu cites colonization as a key component in the decline of traditional music:

The colonial contribution to late-nineteenth-century musical taste in Kenya in some cases started with suppression of certain sociocultural institutions: traditional initiations, religious activities, military institutions, and others. In some areas, these institutions died out because they could not compete with those supported by the colonial system... With the arrival of European music, styles unrelated to local traditional music in content and form came into local existence. Christianity introduced congregational hymn singing, four-part harmony, and Western instruments like the piano and brass instruments (Kavyu 1997, 626).

Wakaba also views colonization as a factor in the culture loss among the Agĩkũyũ. “The British colonial policies in Kenya, for example, subjected distinctive Agĩkũyũ cultural practices to considerable change... Such indoctrinations resulted in suppressing the indigenous cultural practices and traditions of the Agĩkũyũ community” (Wakaba 2009, 15). So there were specific attempts to change Agĩkũyũ cultural practices, such as circumcision, in addition to the kinds of cultural change that come through contact with outsiders, as in the case of the record player.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, the first novelist to publish a work in Gĩkũyũ, sheds light on the roots of colonialism and how colonization affected the African people. Thiong’o believes colonialism was, at its core, primarily an economic pursuit, “for nobody colonises another for the aesthetic joy of simply doing it” (Thiong’o 2003, 52). Such commodification of people and land is a pattern repeated globally throughout history.

The horror of colonialism is not just the dehumanizing of an entire people group, but the subsequent attempt to remake the colonized peoples in the image of those who are subjugating them.

Colonialism tried to control the memory of the colonized, or rather, to borrow from the Caribbean thinker, Sylvia Wynter, it tried to subject the colonised to its memory, to make the colonised see themselves the hegemonic memory of the colonising centre (Thiong’o 2003, 52).

Power issues are at play, not only in terms of physical and political domination, but also through “cultural subjugation... the ultimate goal being to establish psychic dominance on the part of the

coloniser and psychic submission on the colonised.” For Thiong’o’s part, he calls for a restoration of African languages (Thiong’o 2003, 52).

Such a restoration is necessary because of the language restrictions placed on students in colonial and mission schools. Students are not allowed to speak their mother tongues at high school, whether in class or not (Dower 2005, 146-147). “Because most high schools are boarding institutions and the language rule applies inside and outside class...students are essentially barred from speaking African languages other than Swahili for nine months of every calendar year” (Dower 2005, 147). Language becomes yet another currency of power, although for the Kenyan, it is a currency that impoverishes while it enriches. “In the context of global inequality, English empowers *and* diminishes Kenyan individuals and communities” (Dower 2005, 150).

Thiong’o has vivid memories of his school days and the language restrictions placed upon him and his classmates. The idea that the Gĩkũyũ language could not advance him academically was drilled into him; his language was uneducated and primitive. “Gore to the students who spoke Gĩkũyũ; glory to those who showed a mastery of English. I grew up distancing myself from the gore in my own language to attain the glory in English mastery” (Thiong’o 2004, 14). His use of English became the norm for him, even in his writings on independence; however, others not under the influence of colonial schools had kept the Gĩkũyũ language alive (Thiong’o 2004; 14, 15).

Colonization then is much more than a land or economic issue. The psychological dominion is as profound, and often more so, than the political dominion (Thiong’o 2003, 52). Musically speaking, this dominion changed the soundscape of Kenya. Local bands were formed under colonial power and influence. Western instruments were brought in, and young people were taught Western musical styles on Western instruments. “In this way there arose in East

Africa, in various places, a tradition of playing European instruments which became an important basis for subsequent popular music, even if its effect was only indirect” (Kubik 1981 87).

Christianization and the Effect on Culture

The effect of the early Christian missionaries often goes hand in hand with that of the colonists. Kariuki says that for the Agĩkũyũ, the missionaries and the colonists were, in effect, the same—both took land from the Agĩkũyũ (Kariuki 2001, 5, 56). But, like the colonists, they took more than the land from the Agĩkũyũ. They too tried to mold the Agĩkũyũ into what they deemed acceptable, “civilized” people.

The missionaries, with the cooperation of the imperial administration, were probably most directly responsible for the modification, suppression, or even disappearance of many aspects of traditional culture and music in most of the African societies....the theory that supported the action of most of the early Christian missionaries in Africa was that everything African or indigenous was bad and contrary to the Will of God, and that everything European or foreign was good and acceptable to the Will of God (Wakaba 2009, 17-18).

Missionaries treated indigenous customs as completely antagonistic to the Christian faith (Wakaba 2009, 17-18). The early missionaries sought to remove Gĩkũyũ Christian converts from their culture, believing such a severance necessary to conversion. Not only were the converts moved to new communities within the mission, but they were told to renounce their traditional culture as a requirement for faith in Christ (Kariuki 2001 68, 72). The missionaries also fell prey to the attitude of Western superiority and ethnocentrism that pervaded most of Western society. Gĩkũyũ Christian converts were told that their traditional instruments were the tools of the devil and evidence of their primitive status. “Instead, Western music, which was considered to be superior and the carrier of true civilization, was introduced to the community, while music that

was not morally and spiritually uplifting *according to Christian standards* was discouraged and prohibited” (Wakaba 2009, 18; emphasis mine).

The association of Christianity with various Western cultures and societies is not a new misunderstanding, but in the case of the early missionaries to the Agĩkũyũ people it went beyond the issue of culture to a gross misunderstanding of the Gĩkũyũ worldview. The Agĩkũyũ did not worship their ancestors, (*ngoma*) as the first missionaries mistakenly believed, but rather one Creator God whom they knew as Ngai. For the Agĩkũyũ, the *ngoma* “is merely a form of the belief of the soul. Tribal sacrifices was [sic] of two kinds: the act of communion with a deity and the sacrifice of offering to the spirits” (Garcia 2005, 26). The missionaries, however, insisted that the Agĩkũyũ worshipped the *ngoma* and that *ngoma* were evil spirits. When they translated the Bible into Gĩkũyũ, the word “devil” was translated “*ngoma*,” and “hell” became “*kwangoma*,” which means “the devil’s abode” (Kariuki 2001, 63). The combination of Christianity and a Western-style educational system have combined to affect even the more remote Gĩkũyũ villages, where “the community no longer practices any of the annual ceremonies” (Wakaba 2009, 24).

Interest Among Young People

Even after independence was achieved, the influence of the Western world continued to affect Gĩkũyũ culture. Another factor in culture loss among young Agĩkũyũ is the desire to travel to, study in, or even live in the Western world, especially the United States.

The consequences of these foreign ambitions have resulted in psychological conflicts between accepting indigenous or Western culture, and a lack of interest among many students in their own traditions and customs—a development surprisingly encouraged by some of the educated parents that has resulted in a greater tendency and preference for Western ways of dressing, mannerisms, culture, arts, films and dances, and an inability amongst the youths to speak their own indigenous languages as fluently as they speak

English or ‘Sheng’ (a mixture of English and Kiswahili languages). The overall effect of all these foreign adaptations has been the undermining of the pre-colonial cultural perspectives and ideals (Wakaba 2009, 21-22).

Economics may also have played a role in the slowing interest among younger Agĩkũyũ towards traditional instruments. Graham Hyslop says traditional instrumentalists in Kenya accept gifts for their performances, and their lifestyles reflect this. He suggests that such a lifestyle would be unlikely to attract the younger generation who have other options besides the rigorous training on traditional instruments. “The dance band is often a more attractive proposition, where some facility with the guitar will demand much less skill, and command much greater material reward” (Hyslop 1972, 55).

National Music

Kubik looks at a slightly different side of the issue and views it from the point of view of the creation of various national music ensembles in East Africa.

National culture is emphasized while ethnic differences tend to be obliterated... The music played by these national ensembles is generally a palette of the most various traditional music form adapted for the stage and above all intended for consumption outside the country itself (Kubik 1981, 85).

In a nation like Kenya, with forty-two different tribal entities inhabiting one country (Kariuki 2001, 19), creating a “national” music that includes the styles of every ethnic group would be impossible.

Agĩkũyũ Response to Westernization

The Agĩkũyũ people responded in various ways to colonization and Westernization. As has already been shown, this meant in some cases adapting to the European influence. This was the case as well concerning circumcision rites. The loss of circumcision rites meant the loss of

the music that accompanied the rituals. Many of the early Christian missionaries saw circumcision as a form of slavery; it was, in their eyes, a removal of a girl's will (Peterson 2004, 86-87). Politically speaking, agreeing to the circumcision ban was a way to make Gĩkũyũ leaders seem more European. "The circumcision ban was the surest way to pass the British audit of respectability" (Peterson 2004, 88).

Music was lost but also gained. The young people began *muthirigu*, a dance song that "became an anthem of resistance until the 1950s when the Mau revolutionary struggle started" (Kariuki 2001, 78). *Muthirigu* was a multi-layered resistance song; banned by the British government, it served as a form of defiance. The song also opposed the Christian church and was derogatory towards uncircumcised girls, who were known as *irigu* (Kariuki 2001).

Not all Gĩkũyũ responses to Christianity were negative, however. African Indigenous Churches sprang up as a result of "the failure of the mainline Christian churches to accept the necessity of inculturation" (Kariuki 2001, 4). Gĩkũyũ independent churches sought to preserve certain aspects of traditional culture that the missionaries had rejected, such as circumcision rites (Kariuki 2001, 4). Kariuki recommends Gĩkũyũ churches take inculturation further and incorporate traditional Gĩkũyũ instruments such as the *njingiri* (bells), *kigamba* (tin rattle), and the *mũtũrĩrũ* (flute) "to enhance rhythm and spontaneity (Kariuki 2001, 188).

Outsider Analysis of African Music

African music is typically depicted as functional in nature, as opposed to European art music, which is portrayed as contemplative. African ethnomusicology generally considers the activity associated with a particular music as a key part of the musical analysis, "whereas analysis of European music...can concentrate on the music itself...It does not require a great

deal of imagination to see the distinction between functional and contemplative is deeply problematic” (Agawu 2001, 8). Agawu uses the example of children’s song games—the use of rhythmic play, for example: “these and many other genres of music make clear that close listening is not the exclusive preserve of elite audiences in metropolitan settings” (Agawu 2001, 8). Agawu advocates abandoning categories and characteristics, as they are “burdened with meaning...we do not perceive in a vacuum” (Agawu 2012, 121). Rather than beginning from an assumed point of difference, the goal in studying African music should be “notional sameness” (Agawu 2012, 126).

Sameness prepares an understanding of (modern) African culture as a form of improvised theater, a makeshift culture whose actors respond to social pressures on an ad hoc, ongoing basis. It is not a culture of frozen artifacts imbued with spiritual essences...Sameness carries the threat of hegemonic homogenization analogous to the cultural effects of the movement of global capital. What I am arguing for, however, is not sameness but the hypostatized presumption of sameness, which in turn precedes action and representation...Restoring a notional sameness to the work of ethnomusicology will go a long way toward achieving something that has hitherto remained only a theoretical possibility, namely, an ethical study of African music (Agawu 2012, 125, 126).

A balance is necessary; a study of African music need not completely disregard the aspect of traditional music that is, or was historically, functional. Wakaba reports that for the Agĩkũyũ , at least prior to colonization, “there was a pragmatic approach to music making...part of its meaning must be sought in the social contexts in which music was performed” (Wakaba 2009, 86). Like Western music that is functional on some level, a film score or a mass, for example, the purpose the music was originally intended to serve needs to be part of any analysis. That does not mean the music cannot also be contemplative, or enjoyed simply for any aesthetic value, it simply means the function is a part of the whole musical experience. So it is with much of traditional African music, Gĩkũyũ music included.

Gĩkũyũ Music

Gĩkũyũ music was an integral part of the traditional life and culture. “In brief, Gĩkũyũ life was unthinkable without the joy of singing, dancing, and musical expression...” (“Gĩkũyũ” 2009, 8). Music was a means of recalling history; James Wilson expresses this as the “role of music as a cultural transmission of oral history...” (Wilson 2006, 365). The Agĩkũyũ elders describe their childhood homes and schools in clear detail; music is a vital factor in such recall (Wilson 2006, 365). In his article on Joseph Kamaru, the Gĩkũyũ singer, Maina wa Mutonya says that “Kamaru sees the role of the musician in society as the custodian of traditional culture” (Mutonya 2010, 238). Furthermore, for the Agĩkũyũ, cultural memory and history is tied to the ancestral land. “In the case of a Kikuyu collective memory, the physical location and development of a Kikuyu community were important components of remembrance” (Wilson 2006, 366). Music is a part of the Gĩkũyũ ritualized identity and song was a daily part of Gĩkũyũ traditional life. Songs were used at various community events. “Images of these events and the bonding songs related to them are the stimuli that today encourage many elders to remember” (Wilson 2006, 372).

Music is a “bonding agent” for the Agĩkũyũ; it is a way of looking at life both past and present (Wilson 2006, 371). All aspects of music were “participated in by all members of the community” (“Gĩkũyũ”, 8). Music, at least in pre-colonial Gĩkũyũland, was an event that took place whenever there was an important life event such as a birth, death, or initiation. “Everyone was not only expected to participate, but also to be able to lead the music, at least for a short time; inability of whatever kind was usually mocked” (Wakaba 2009, 11). The Agĩkũyũ children were always present at the dances and learned the songs and dances through observation and imitation (Wakaba 2009, 12).

In 1910 W. Scoresby Routledge described the Agĩkũyũ as “a race...gifted with the musical ear” (Routledge 1910, 111). Although, as mentioned, Wakaba has defined Gĩkũyũ music as functional, he also describes it as a means by which the community engages in social commentary. Also, “To the Agĩkũyũ, traditional music was as much a medium for expressing feelings and moods as that of any people in the world” (Wakaba 2009, 12), although the quality of the music was judged on functionality rather than aesthetics (Wakaba 2009, 13).

Gĩkũyũ traditional music reflected the values and culture of the pre-colonial era. Topics included the ancestors, Ngai, heroes, the land and animals surrounding them, and praise songs for popular members of the society (Wakaba 2009, 56). Gĩkũyũ traditional music served as a tool for community education. Children first learned Gĩkũyũ history and their family genealogies through the lullabies sung to them by their mothers (Kenyatta 1962, 97). Gĩkũyũ songs often praised proper community behavior, or denounced improper behavior (Wakaba 2009, 12-13). The Agĩkũyũ often sang songs while they worked. This served as encouragement both for themselves and those they worked with (Kenyatta 1962, 78).

Traditional Gĩkũyũ dances were without instrumental music; rather, they were accompanied by vocal music (Kenyatta 1962, 89) although some dances were performed with rattles attached to the dancers’ legs (Kavyu 1997, 624; Kenya 1962, 132). Pre-colonial Agĩkũyũ performers would use special make-up and body paint. Their costumes would be made from either animal hides or plant material. The men would either carry a horsetail flywhisk or a sword sheathed at their waists (Wakaba 2009, 121). Traditional Gĩkũyũ music was classified by the context in which the songs were sung, whether by certain age groups, (*mariika*) by specific gender, by occasion, or by ceremony. Generally, songs for a certain *riika* could be sung by either gender, although a few exceptions did exist. Ceremonies included such events as marriage,

births, and initiation. Celebrations occurred during the dry season (Wakaba 2009, 77).

Sometimes there would be competitions for the various *riika* to test how well they perform the songs and dances that tell of *Gĩkũyũ* history (Kenyatta 1962, xvi). The leader of the *riika* was also the “chief composer and organiser of songs and dances...The warrior dances and songs served two main purposes, namely, enjoyment and drill for physical development” (Kenyatta 1962, 197).

Koina kaara were praise songs the warriors would sing about themselves after a battle. A warrior who had not killed an enemy could not sing the *koina kaara* (Kenyatta 1962, 199). The *Agĩkũyũ* would also sing songs during the “collective weeding.” A team of men would work together on each of their fields in turn. Songs were sometimes sung in competition with workers in other fields (Kenyatta 1962, 58). Songs had other purposes as well, such as the constitutional songs sung by the ceremonial elders. “All the words of the drafted constitution were put into song-phrases, for as there was no system of writing, the songs served the same purpose as the newspapers do in the Western world” (Kenyatta 1962, 185). In this manner *Gĩkũyũ* songs had a similar purpose to the Mande musical tradition of the *jelis*. *Jelis*, according to Eric Charry, “retain political history and genealogies and convey this kind of knowledge through singing...or speaking...usually accompanied by music” (Charry 2000, 91). The use of music to preserve history and genealogies underscores how very important these kinds of musical traditions are to the identity of these people groups.

Songs for Initiation Ceremonies

Perhaps the most important of all *Gĩkũyũ* rituals was the initiation ceremony. This took place over an extended period of time, with different songs involved at each stage of the ritual.

The *korathima ciana* is the blessing of the children. As the initiates walk home, they sing songs. They are greeted with songs when they arrive home as well.

The day before the physical operation a ceremonial dance called *matuumo* is performed. The girls who are being circumcised wear a bell (*kegamba*) on their right legs and walk slowly in procession to the home where the circumcision (*irua*) will happen, singing songs as they go. The *matuumo* happens at the home of *irua* before noon and goes on throughout the rest of the day. The initiates, their family, and friends all dance and sing. Other members of the community watch. Occasionally a ceremonial horn is blown, while an arch of banana leaves is built, serving as a portal for the ancestral spirits. Then the girls head to the sacred tree, accompanied by senior warriors and the women. They sing ritual songs as they process. As the girls approach the tree, the horn is sounded again. This time the horn is a signal for the boys to begin their race to the sacred tree. They will climb the tree and break the top branches, which the girls will collect. The boy who reaches the tree first is considered the leader of his *riika*, and the girl who reaches the tree first is the one most courted for marriage. As they leave the sacred tree, they do not look back. They are leaving their childhood behind, and as they go, they sing songs regarding proper adult community behavior (Kenyatta 1962, 132-136). Then the initiates rest until the next day.

The songs sung on the day of the operation are sad and gentle. The initiation is a change in status not only for the child, but if this is the first child to be initiated in his or her family, then the parents also move up in societal status. They all sing anxious songs, wondering about the future. (Kenyatta 1962, 139).

After the physical operation, the sponsors of each initiate sing songs to their charges while they recover, encouraging them and telling of their own experiences and reminding them that they will soon heal. "These songs have a great psychological effect on the minds of the

initiates” (Kenyatta 1962, 142-143). After they have healed, they spend most of their time for the next three or four months (depending on their clan rules) traveling to different districts singing *waine*, the initiate’s song (Kenyatta 1962, 145).

Features of Gĩkũyũ Vocal Music

Several characteristics mark Gĩkũyũ traditional music. Proper enunciation is one. “Indeed, clarity of textual delivery as well as correct pronunciation of Agĩkũyũ vowels and consonants are among the trademarks of an effective traditional folk singer” (Wakaba 2009, 74-75). Gĩkũyũ songs also make use of vocables such as *Haiya*, *Iivo*, *Hui*, and *Hae* (Wakaba 2009, 99). The songs are usually sung in unison, with the men singing an octave below the women. There is only the occasional harmony of a minor third, perfect fourth, or perfect fifth. Gĩkũyũ music also features a kind of speech-singing, “a speech-like approach that can be described as half-singing/half-talking” (Wakaba 2009, 102). There is also a rhythmic freedom, especially for the leader in call-and-response style songs, which are also popular in Gĩkũyũ music (Wakaba 2009; 106, 108).

A driving rhythmic force in Gĩkũyũ traditional music is syncopation (Wakaba 2009, 108). Repetition is also important.

This is not because the artists in the society are unable to create text and music with fuller content in the Western sense, but because the society’s aesthetic taste delights in repetitions...most African cultures view time in music rather in a cyclical manner (Wakaba 2009, 110).

Rhythm and dance are tied together in Gĩkũyũ traditional music. No word for “music” in Gĩkũyũ is distinct from dance and performance (Wakaba 2009, 120).

An important genre of Gĩkũyũ songs that developed during colonization is that of protest songs. *Muthirigu* and *Mwomboko* are songs that function as oral histories, recounting the origin

myths, as well as functioning as songs of protest against colonialism (Muhoro 2002, 102). They also include songs that protest against the neocolonialism that emerged after independence (Muhoro 2002, 104). These songs used a combination of religious and political content, so as to be able to reach members of the culture regardless of their age and political savvy. “Furthermore, these songs and public performances served as a healing ceremony to resolve conflicting opinions and agendas of how best to assemble political support among the masses” (Wilson 2006, 373). These songs of resistance sometimes transcended the religious divide between traditional Agĩkũyũ and those who had converted to Christianity. This “music of resistance and freedom was contagious” (Wilson 2006, 378). Other songs composed during this time served not only as protest but as historical accounts; these include songs written during the Mau rebellion and those written by prisoners in the detention camps during this time (Wilson 2006, 380-82). “Moreover, songwriters and singers within Kikuyu communities were revered as special leaders whom the community held responsible for recording the good, the bad, and old and new events...” (Wilson 2006, 382).

Gĩkũyũ Instrumental Music

While Gĩkũyũ song seems to have adapted and thrived since the arrival of the Europeans in Kenya, traditional Gĩkũyũ instruments are rarely played (“Gĩkũyũ” 2009, 8). Hyslop reports, “Instrumentalists in Kenya almost invariably make their own instruments” (Hyslop 1972, 50) and that, at least in the case of stringed instruments, knowledge is passed down in families (Hyslop 1972, 49). The Agĩkũyũ have a string instrument called the *wandindi*. It has two strings, one of which serves as a drone (Kavyu 1997, 625). Kenyatta lists only four types of musical instruments in the Gĩkũyũ community: drums (*kehembe*), small rattles (*njingiri*), large rattles

(*kegamba*) and the *mūtūrĩrũ*. He does not consider the ceremonial horn to be musical in nature (Kenyatta 1962, 90). Both the article “Gĩkũyũ” and Isak Dinesen’s account of her time in Kenya mention the use of flutes at dances (“Gĩkũyũ” 2009, 8; Dinesen 1989, 156). Kenya specifies the exact opposite, which is that vocal music, rather than musical instruments, typically accompanied traditional dances (Kenyatta 1962, 89).

The *Mūtūrĩrũ*

Kenyatta says this about the *mūtūrĩrũ*: “As far as music is concerned, we can say definitely that the flute is most prominent, and it can be said that a Gĩkũyũ plays his flute with a great sense of humour” (Kenyatta 1962, 89). The *mūtūrĩrũ* was not played professionally, however humorously it may have been played. Rather, during the dry season when the millet was ripe, a man would spend the day in his fields protecting his crop from the birds until it could be harvested. Millet was an important crop to the Agĩkũyũ, as it was used to make *ochoro wa mwere*, a drink used in ceremonies (Kenyatta 1962, 90). The *mūtūrĩrũ* was used to pass the time in the fields and to amuse the women in the surrounding fields (Kenyatta 1962, 90; Senoga-Zake 1986, 152). The women would give the *mūtūrĩrũ* player gifts of thanks (Kenyatta 1962, 91). The use of the *mūtūrĩrũ* in this context—a leisure activity—suggests that the radio could have become a replacement for the music provided by the *mūtūrĩrũ*.

The *mūtūrĩrũ*, however, was rarely used when herding. It was often forbidden, for fear of defiling the herds with the evil spirits that might be drawn to the sound. Playing the *mūtūrĩrũ* inside was also a taboo (Kenyatta 1962, 91-92; Senoga-Zake 1986, 152); whether the taboo extended to other forms of music is a question for further research that could possibly give insight into the decline of traditional instruments. As agrarian life gradually gave way to

urbanization, people began to spend more time indoors. If the taboo against certain playing forms of music held influence, and less time was being spent outdoors, a decline in certain types of music seems inevitable.

Boys or young men usually played the *mūtūrĩrũ*. “There is no taboo which prevents an old man from playing a flute, but it is one of those social etiquettes which divides various activities according to age, and it is therefore out of place...” (Kenyatta 1962, 92). Whether these gender and restrictions would apply should the *mūtūrĩrũ* make a resurgence in Agĩkũyũ culture is another question for further research.

The *mūtūrĩrũ* is approximately 30 cm (12 inches) long (Senoga-Zake 1986, 152). It is constructed from a *mũkue* or *mũgio* twig (Ibid; Wakaba 2009, 123; Kenyatta 1962, 90). The bark is loosened and the stem removed. The tube of bark that remains forms the flute. The *mūtūrĩrũ* is generally a temporary instrument, with new ones being constructed as needed. Some, however, are made from bamboo and are kept longer (Kenyatta 1962, 90). The number of holes is not set: Senoga-Zake gives it at between four and eight, with no specific measurements between the holes (Senoga-Zake 1986, 152). Wakaba sets the number of holes at four (Wakaba 2009, 124), while Kenyatta specifies four, six, or eight holes, per the maker’s preference (Kenyatta 1962, 90). The *mūtūrĩrũ* is held obliquely; with the thinner end at the lips, the air is blown down into the tube (Senoga-Zake 1986, 152). Further information regarding the construction, performance, and cultural significance of the *mūtūrĩrũ* will fill the gaps in academic knowledge of East African aerophones.

Other Gĩkũyũ Flutes

Although Malcolm Floyd mentions the preference for transverse flutes in Kenya (Floyd 2005, 136), none of the Gĩkũyũ flutes found in literature are transverse. The *biringi* is a Gĩkũyũ children's flute made from pumpkin straws or *mwariki*. The *biringi* has two holes and is held vertically, with the air being blown across a v-shaped notch in the top (Senoga-Zake 1986, 156). Floyd also asserts that the Agĩkũyũ have panpipes (Floyd 2005, 137). Wakaba calls the Gĩkũyũ panpipes *firingi*. The tubes are made from castor oil plant stems or bamboo tubes. A tree bark string ties the tubes together (Wakaba 2009, 123-124). In his audiobook "Teach Yourself Gĩkũyũ," William Mwangi uses the word *firingi* for the whistle, the word *karubeta* for flute, and *mũtũrĩrũ* for trumpet (Mwangi 2012, Track 20). The word "firingi" seems an odd linguistic choice because there is no "F" listed among the consonants used by the Gĩkũyũ language (kasahorow, Location 27); however the "B" is not pronounced as a hard "B," so perhaps this accounts for the confusion. This discrepancy over spellings and names of various flutes could benefit from further research.

Conclusion

The *mũtũrĩrũ* may not hold the same musical prominence in Gĩkũyũ culture as the protest songs, for example, but it is an instrument that reflects the agrarian nature of traditional Gĩkũyũ life. Its use during the millet harvest, so significant to Gĩkũyũ ritual, further cements its importance. Kenyatta himself gives the *mũtũrĩrũ* primacy in his treatment of Gĩkũyũ instruments (Kenyatta 1962, 90), demonstrating that the instrument does not only have symbolic importance but also musical importance in traditional Gĩkũyũ music. The *mũtũrĩrũ* should be preserved as

other Kenyan flutes have been (Hyslop 1958, 35); either through recordings, transcriptions, preservation of the instrument itself, or preferably, all of the above.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Descriptions of Research Tools

Different questions require different methods of research. What social, economic, or demographic factors have led to the mūtūrūrū's decline in traditional Agĩkũyũ culture? This question deals with culture change, and so a qualitative research design such as ethnography best fits. The ideal way to collect this data was through interviews with culture members to ascertain their opinions of the decline. Observation of local school music festivals was a large part of determining the presence of the mūtūrūrū in those festivals, as well as the suitability of the festivals for future mūtūrūrū performance.

What does the mūtūrūrū *sound* like? Once an instrument and a mūtūrūrū player was found, this question was answered and documented using audio and video recordings. Transcription and analysis of the recordings followed, which were then member-checked for accuracy and misconceptions on my part. I also began to learn to perform on the mūtūrūrū myself.

What is the construction of the mūtūrūrū? A measuring of the instruments themselves and analysis of construction design and materials was performed. Interviews and face-to-face teaching by culture members were necessary to learn how and why the mūtūrūrū was constructed. Ideally, I would have preferred to learn the construction of the mūtūrūrū as a participant, by constructing my own mūtūrūrū as well as purchasing a bamboo or wooden one. This would have allowed for comparison of the construction and sound of different instruments. However, this was not an option for me on this trip; the elders were re-discovering the mūtūrūrū along with me, as I will show in the next section/chapter. I hope to be able to construct and perform along with

the men on future visits.

Fieldwork Procedures

I contacted several area music teachers, who agreed to let me interview them. These teachers were interviewed because Kenyan music textbooks list the *mūtūrĩrũ* in their indices as part of traditional music units (referenced in Floyd 2005). This helped clarify the question concerning the *mūtūrĩrũ*'s current use in Agĩkũyũ culture. In addition, these teachers were a valuable insight into the culture and procedure of the school music festivals.

Several traditional music festivals took place during my time in Kenya. While these festivals did not provide the opportunity to hear the *mūtūrĩrũ* being performed live or introduce me to musicians who may perform it in other contexts, it was valuable to observe these festivals and gain a better understanding of the context in which much of Kenya's traditional music is being performed.

In addition to the teachers and the festivals, my residence in Kenya was close to the Thogoto Home for the Aged in Kikuyu town. Many of the residents were Agĩkũyũ, which was to be expected given the location of the home. I visited this home on a prior trip and returned this visit with a translator to interview any residents familiar with the traditional performance of the *mūtūrĩrũ*. While I expected this to be the most likely place to locate a traditional *mūtūrĩrũ* player given the age of the residents and the home's location in an area that is primarily Agĩkũyũ, this was not the case.

Participants in Study

The participants were Agĩkũyũ elders with knowledge of the traditional and/or pre-colonial mĩtũrĩrũ construction and performance practices. Participants also included Kenyan music teachers who incorporate traditional instruments such as the mĩtũrĩrũ into their curricula. Practitioners of traditional music, such as performing dance troupes, were interviewed and observed. Local cultural centers also provided opportunities for discussion and observation.

How Data Was Collected

For data collection I used interviews, audio and/or video recordings, observation, transcription and analysis, and member checking. I began with interviews as soon as I arrived in Kenya. I set up interviews with the music teachers within the first week and attended festivals as they were scheduled.

Interviews led to other opportunities for observation and interviews. Internet searching was what finally led to the discovery of the mĩtũrĩrũ. I had been searching towns suggested to me by various interview subjects and friends and came upon the website for Murang'a County (Murang'a County Government 2015). Upon learning that there was a cultural center at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, the Gĩkũyũ origin site, I made plans to visit. There, the elders remembered the mĩtũrĩrũ and made several for me in addition to performing so I could record. Transcriptions of the music were member-checked by Agĩkũyũ. No indigenous methods of transcription were shared with me, so a modified Western style was used.

Member checking was a valuable resource. Conclusions, transcriptions, and assumptions were checked with Agĩkũyũ to clarify and ensure accuracy. I also made contact with professors in Kenyatta University's music department, which has a reputable African instrument collection.

These local experts were a good source of information, as well as a repository for mūtūrĩrũ instruments I recovered.

Challenges in the Field

Researching a music tradition that is on the verge of extinction poses inherent challenges with the first and most obvious being the difficulty of finding the instrument itself. When I first arrived in Kenya, everyone from traditional music practitioners to university ethnomusicologists told me that finding an instrument, let alone anyone who could play it, would be difficult. In fact, I was encouraged by professors at Kenyatta University to change the focus of my research to the chivoti, which is much more prevalent in Kenya today. This was discouraging, naturally.

The fact that the mūtūrĩrũ seemed to be virtually unknown to many people that I had expected to be knowledgeable was also discouraging and forced me to change research tactics. The choreographer at Bomas of Kenya, the national cultural center, was not even aware that the Agĩkũyũ had a flute, let alone information about its construction or performance. The elders at the Thogoto Home for the Aged also provided little information. Halfway through my fieldwork I began searching the internet out of desperation; none of my expected contacts (nor the contacts of my contacts) had been able to provide any concrete information on the mūtūrĩrũ. This change of tactics was ultimately successful but was certainly unplanned.

Once the mūtūrĩrũ was finally located, another challenge presented itself. The most senior elders, those with experience in performing more complex mūtūrĩrũ music, were all very old. This made it difficult to arrange meetings. On more than one occasion I arrived at the appointed time and place to find that the elder was sick or unable to perform due to his age. I eventually ran out of time for these reschedulings and was unable to meet the “expert” elders. While I was able to get information, instruments, and recordings from less senior elders, I hope

to return to interview and record the senior elders, those men who continued playing the mūtūrĩrũ into adulthood.

Conclusion

Understanding the various and complex ways in which a culture undergoes changes has profound applications for any society. Transformation is always occurring; preserving pieces of the past does not hinder that. Rather, preservation allows culture members to hold onto their traditional roots while moving forward in a modern world. Finding new ways of playing old instruments and honoring the wisdom of elder musicians maintains a balance of past and present which is vital to the health of any people. Given the distinction the mūtūrĩrũ has among traditional Gĩkũyũ musical instruments and knowing the nuances of the factors of the decline in traditional mūtūrĩrũ playing teaches a great deal about the importance of cultural memory. An understanding of the new performance contexts for the mūtūrĩrũ speaks volumes about the values of the Agĩkũyũ. The various ways in which the mūtūrĩrũ was and is currently performed, the construction of the instrument itself, and even the very sound of the mūtūrĩrũ holds clues to Gĩkũyũ cultural memory. Ultimately, it is as Thiong'o has stated: "A people without memory are in danger of losing their soul" (Thiong'o 2003, 50). This memory is necessary not only for the Agĩkũyũ, but for all of us. Colonizer and colonized, industrial or agrarian: the past shapes the people we will become. This is reason enough to trace changes in global cultures. The mūtūrĩrũ is a small window into the Agĩkũyũ's past and present; what is seen through that window may speak to people near and far.

Chapter Four

Research Findings: Performance Contexts

Introduction

Scholars have discussed the fact that music is a vital part of life in Africa for generations; this fact was further confirmed in my conversations with musicians, researchers, and music teachers in Kenya. Ken Maisiba, a music teacher at Utumishi Academy in Gilgil, explained that “As an African, we cannot do without music. Our life revolves around music” (Maisiba 2015). He went on to explain that there is music for all aspects of African life: birth, initiation, marriage, working, and death.

Mr. Ng’ang’a, the music teacher at Moi Girls’ Secondary School, claimed that African traditional song is “part of our life” (Ng’ang’a 2015) and, as such, is a key component of social life. Songs use metaphors and euphemisms, rather than direct language, to condemn societal vices and address contemporary issues. Further, even those with an understanding of the language may miss the message if they do not understand the “deep language” (Ng’ang’a 2015).

The form of traditional music in Kenya may have changed in recent years. The radio, one factor in a changing musical landscape, has itself changed in recent years. According to John Lugaka, music teacher at the prestigious Alliance High School in Kenya, traditional Kenyan music often aired on the government-sponsored station. This music included recordings of performances at the school music festivals. Now, however, many more stations are available, each catering to a different genre (Lugaka 2015).

Factors in the Decline of Traditional Music

Maisiba maintained that modern life and urbanization have affected traditional music in contemporary Kenyan life. This is especially evident in what Maisiba referred to as “sacred folksongs.” These songs, he explained, are not historically about the “Christian God,” however Christian lyrics have been superimposed onto the sacred folk melodies. He referenced Gĩkũyũ praise songs for Ngai or the sacred *mikoyo* tree as examples. When asked if Christianity is a contributing factor to the decline of traditional folk music he answered, “Very much” (Maisiba 2015).

Many people in Kenya directed me to “Bomas of Kenya,” a local cultural center in Nairobi. “Bomas,” as it is generally called, has two main components: a daily music and dance performance and a series of small villages set up in the traditional styles of the forty-two different ethnic groups of Kenya. (Some people groups are only represented by one small home, rather than a village.) These homes give the center its name; “Boma” is Kiswahili for “homestead” (Bomas of Kenya 2014). Many people go to Bomas to experience traditional Kenyan music. The day I visited, Luo, Maasai, Gĩkũyũ, Embu, and Pokot songs were performed. Few instruments were used in the dances; some have percussion (including the Gĩkũyũ *kigamba*) and a one-stringed fiddle. The sound was electronically amplified, though this is probably not necessary in the cement-floored round building designed to look like a large hut.

Places like Bomas of Kenya, however, should be taken with a grain of salt. John Katuli, an ethnomusicologist at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, had concerns about the authenticity of traditional music in certain venues. He warned that performers will often give Westerners what they think the Westerners desire. He explained that that rhythm and intonation of music in performances such as at Bomas or certain UNESCO presentations he had attended were adjusted

to fit Western musical tastes. Maisiba agreed that even African musicians are influenced by Westernization, regarding the music of their heritage as “primitive.” Maisiba claimed that no one wants to specialize in African music and he felt that the school curriculum had contributed to this problem by not covering traditional music as deeply as it should. Maisiba saw the current curriculum as unbalanced with vast amounts of time dedicated to the history and analysis of Western music and composers and comparatively little time devoted to African music and composers.

Maisiba cited modern instruments as a further example of the effects of modernization on Kenyan youth. He claimed most of his students were more interested in learning modern instruments. Ng’ang’a’s experience with his students was somewhat different, however. He said more students wanted to join his traditional performance groups than he had room for. Ng’ang’a’s concern was that traditional music only occurred in an educational setting or certain special occasions. The Central Province peoples (including the Agĩkũyũ) are drifting from their traditions.

Cultural Preservation Measures

Work is being done to correct this drift. Raymond Mackenzie, a teacher in Kenyatta University’s music department, shared with me his personal involvement in cultural preservation. Besides teaching traditional Kenyan instruments at Kenyatta and performing in several traditional music groups, he began a cultural center to collect and preserve the “things” he felt were going to disappear (Mackenzie 2015). He combined his passion for traditional ways with his concern for the local youth; the center gave them a place to not only learn about the old musical traditions but also a chance to perform at local hotels to earn extra money.

Unfortunately, the center shut down after about ten years due to the difficulty of running it from Nairobi (the center was in Malindi, which is on the coast). Plans are being made to re-open it.

Through their determination, people like Raymond Mackenzie will be the core and foundation of cultural renewal in Kenya. Another such person is Charity Muraguri, a lecturer at Thogoto Teachers College. Muraguri organized traditional dance troupes that competed in various national competitions. She insisted that many people are now going back to their cultural traditions. Even the new constitution which Kenya enacted in 2010 includes a section on culture, and traditional music is now a goal of education in Kenya. This, however, is just a start. Muraguri, like many of the educators I spoke with, feels that more traditional music is needed in the curriculum, and what is there needs to be more in depth. Muraguri said she formed her performing groups as a way to meet the growing demand for cultural music, although, as she said, the demand dictated what dances (and therefore what instruments) were maintained.

The work of Mackenzie and Muraguri are just two examples of ways that Kenyans are attempting to preserve their culture and their music traditions. Traveling performing groups and cultural centers are drumming up interest and excitement in the old ways as well as providing new venues for the old traditions. Through this forward thinking many Kenyan instruments and traditions have already been preserved. One case in point is the Mijikenda *chivoti*, a flute that is taught at Kenyatta University and performed at music festivals and other functions throughout Kenya.

Traditional Music in Kenyan Schools

Since it is clear that the education system is a major factor in the preservation of Kenyan traditional music, I began my research with local music teachers. John Lugaka, the music

teacher at Alliance High School, said that the information in the syllabus is limited. Traditional music was taught, but each instrument was only mentioned along with the ethnic group of origin. Typically, little else was included. This means that there was a breadth of information (Kenya has forty-two people groups) but little depth. It was a way, according to Lugaka, of “ensuring that we don’t lose everything” (Lugaka 2015). Maisiba at Utumishi Academy explained the current curriculum further. He explained that only the second half of the syllabus dealt with the history and analysis of African music. Because of the intrinsic ways in which music is woven into African life, he felt it was vital to bring traditional music in to the classroom. When asked to elaborate on what an analysis of African music would entail, he explained that this involves categorization according to function. His students would examine a song to determine if, for example, it was an initiation song for a boy or for a girl, or if a marriage song was for the fetching of the bride from her home or a song to welcome her to her husband’s home. When working with his students, Maisiba began from the known. He had in his classes students from across the nation and various ethnic groups; these students were sent to research their own songs and then come back and sing for the other students, who took notes while they listened.

Ng’ang’a, at Moi Girls’ Secondary, said they taught oral literature in his school, including songs and narratives. The festivals, he explained, are simply a performance of this literature. Most of what he taught is Gĩkũyũ because he estimated that ninety-five percent of the student body was Agĩkũyũ. They also taught songs from the Kisii, the Kalenjin, and the coastal peoples.

Music Festivals

The school music festivals make up a large part of the effort to preserve traditional music in Kenya. I had hoped to find students performing pieces on the mũtũrĩrũ. This turned out not to

be the case; however, I hope that the festivals can be a vehicle for future mūtūrĩrũ performance. The festivals have different categories of performances, not unlike a typical North American school music festival. Maisiba explained that I was more likely to find a wide variety of instruments at a county level festival. However, even at the sub-county level there are a range of categories from folk songs and dances to instrumental performances and even singing games for the younger children.

Maisiba provided a glimpse into what is involved in preparing a folk song. The teacher would go into a village, choose a song, and then train the students on that song, giving it what Maisiba called an “artistic touch” (Maisiba 2015). This is part of what makes a performance “good” in terms of the festival. Because a village performance of a particular song would likely involve a good deal of repetition (repetition being a key characteristic of traditional African music, according to Maisiba), the teacher would look for similar or related folk melodies that could be woven into the performance. The goal is to have three to four minutes of performance time. Also, Maisiba maintained that there was no way to sing an African folk song without dancing. He insisted that it was impossible to “divorce a dance from an African folk song like that” (Maisiba 2015). Dances were varied as well for artistic purposes, he explained.

Authenticity is another key criterion for festival adjudication. Apparently, students would occasionally try to “trick” the judges by trying to pass off a vocal ensemble song as a solo song, for example. To guard against attempts like this, the adjudicators must be familiar with the musical styles of all the tribes in Kenya. When asked how the judges acquire such a depth of knowledge, Maisiba explained the nature of oral literature. The adjudicators would go to the elders of the village, specifically to a man not less than eighty years old. Younger than that, he

said, and they would speak to music that had been influenced by Christianity. Many of his colleagues are now writing books to preserve the knowledge of the aging and dying elders.

Ng'ang'a at Moi Girls Secondary also listed authenticity as an important criterion for adjudicators. He said it was important to have a dance that matched the tribal origin of the music as well as the correct facial expressions; a happy face while performing a dirge, for example, would not receive high marks. Other marks are for elocution, voice projection, the quality of the soloists, and audience connection. A good song, he said, is one the audience enjoys.

After our interview I was allowed the privilege of watching the Moi Girls' group practice. A young girl walked out to the center of the group, seemingly shy, but then her whole countenance changed as she announced the first song. In fact, I was taken aback by her smile and loud voice. She announced a Gĩkũyũ traditional song. Ng'ang'a had explained that although songs from the Kisii, Kalenjin, and Coastal peoples were taught, his group tended to perform Gĩkũyũ songs at festivals as most of the girls were Agĩkũyũ and scored better on those songs. The girls appeared to be well coordinated during their practice of this song, and a second song is introduced, a "sacred song." I understand enough of the language to realize this is a sacred Christian song, which is not surprising because of what Maisiba had previously explained about sacred folk songs. In addition to dance, this song also included ululations. I found myself looking forward to hearing these girls perform at the festival at Alliance.

The first festival I was able to attend is the one in Gilgil town, at Utumishi Academy. Because he is the music teacher at the host school, Maisiba was involved in several aspects of putting on the festival but still took the time to meet me at the gate. He escorted me to Hall One, where performances of the Singing Games category were taking place. Hall One was a large cement building with metal roofing; the sound reverberated perhaps a little too well. The crowd

chatter was often overwhelming despite the repeated attempts by an announcer to quiet the audience.

I was expecting African singing games, as these are common for young children. I was surprised, therefore, to hear various renditions of “This is the Way We Wash Our Hands” and “The Mulberry Bush.” In fact, this is rather confusing. There was obviously a great deal of planning and choreography that had gone into the children’s costuming and movements in formation. Most students were dressed in school uniforms, although some of the girls had fancy Western-style dresses. Simple props such as hoops and balls were used, and the children were divided into age groups from three to five and six to eight years old. The younger children prized volume and enthusiasm over pitch; the older groups had more of a discernible melody. After several performances in a row of English songs, I began to wonder if the category for this performance was, in fact, for English folk songs. No program or schedule was made available, but through several attempted surreptitious glances finally I saw that yes, this was “Western Style Singing Games,” and that “African Style Singing Games” was next.

Though all the children sing with enthusiasm and energy, a marked difference in costuming and props between schools was evident. Some seemed to have elaborate costumes with all the girls in matched beaded braids. One Catholic school had a large painted bus that accompanied “The Wheels on the Bus.” Such groups were in stark contrast to the children in worn school uniforms; not unlike in North American schools, money affects the education these children receive.

Just when the hours of sitting on the hard bench in a crowded auditorium while listening to repeated renditions of “Ring Around the Rosy” had worn thin, the “African Style Singing Games” were announced. The children began lining up, and many were in facsimiles of

traditional dress complete with intricate face paint and mock earrings. One group performing a Luo dance even included feather headdresses for the boys, while other groups had grass or fiber skirts and wristlets. Some groups performing in this category, however, wore their school uniforms.

The songs performed included a Luo Dance, Gĩkũyũ and Kiswahili counting songs, and other traditional Gĩkũyũ songs. The children used props such as banana leaf dolls. Many of the songs were in call and response form (or perhaps more accurately, a call and echo).

Different trainers seemed to have different approaches while their students performed. Many were content to watch from the sidelines and only gave direction for moving the children on or off the stage. One lady beside me, however, insisted on standing for the whole performance and frequently waved her hands in various gestures to her students. Trainers for the older students I would see on another day at Alliance High School took a far different approach; some were even completely invisible, as far as I could tell.

Like the festival at Utumishi, the festival at Alliance took place in several different halls. As with most buildings in Kenya, the primary materials are cement and stone; this makes for lively acoustics. When I arrived at Hall One, the crowd noise was audible from outside the building and a large group of students blocked the stairs. They seemed to be coming and going at all points of the performance, not restricted to the break between groups as would be typical at a North American festival. The hall was lecture-style with a stage at the front; chairs were laid out on the expanse of floor in front of the stage, and rows of raised seating were at the back of the hall. A long judges' table sat directly in front of the stage. The floor and walls were again cement or cement block. Even here, brick walls instead of fabric drapes angled out on either side of the stage, as if mimicking a drawn curtain.

I arrived in the middle of a performance, so I was unable to hear which people group the song belonged to. Even after this point, due crowd noise, the performance was difficult to hear. Fortunately, I was able to piece together observations about the different styles of performances. The Gĩkũyũ songs had the ululations I have come to recognize and expect; the Kipsigis song featured what sounds like very high pitched “yips.”

The audience was very involved in the performances. Despite all the chatter, they did seem to be enjoying the music; each group was enthusiastically applauded. A performance of a Pokot song added humor; during the song two boys in the middle of a formation pretended to throw spears at the audience. The gasps from the women near me caused the rest of the audience to chuckle. Whistling and cheering typically accompanied the applause at the end of each performance.

After the set of performances, one of the judge stood to make some comments. Hearing what he was saying was difficult because of the crowd noise, but I was able to determine that much of his commentary matched what other teachers had told me to expect. For example, the dance that is chosen must be appropriate and relevant to the culture. He stressed the importance of formations and the purposeful use of props. Any instruments used must be meaningful to the culture. Here again is another place the mūtūrĩrũ could find a rebirth.

After a category of European-style choral works, the festival moved to traditional African instruments. Three performances appeared to use the Gĩkũyũ one-stringed fiddle called the *wandindi*, although one of the students called it a Luhya instrument (many of the people groups have a one-stringed fiddle, so this is not surprising). Another student performed on the Luo nyatiti (a plucked lyre); electronic amplification would have helped the audience hear this

performance. This is another possible avenue for the mūtūrĩrũ, though the six-holed version would likely be more appropriate for solo performance.

The second day of the festival at Alliance, a large crowd of students standing on one of the soccer fields drew my attention as I walked towards the main hall. The sound of a flute and percussion instruments came from inside the crowd of students. Was this finally a student playing a mūtūrĩrũ? No, this was a *chivoti*. In addition to the flute and drums a one-stringed fiddle was also used. The boy playing the *chivoti* was quite good, and I watched until the song finished before heading to the main hall.

Upon arrival, the “Small Choir” category groups were singing their way through English folk songs and other classical Western works. The conditions in the hall continued to be as distracting as they were before. The festival organizers had added a microphone for the judges’ comments; however, a loose wire or some other issue caused noise and feedback throughout the performances.

During the instrumental category, I was excited to see the boy with the *chivoti* walk out. He played a lovely solo, and once again I saw the potential for the mūtūrĩrũ. Two percussionists followed in turn, one male and one female, each playing a solo. Each student performed in his or her school uniform, rather than the costumes that the groups performing the traditional folk songs wore.

A large ensemble came out next. This group was a percussion ensemble that included something like claves, a shaker, gourds, six large drums, a xylophone, and three performers each holding a smaller drum. The audience whooped so loudly when the performers began to dance that the judges actually stopped the performance. The audience was told to keep silent during the performance or else the group will not be adjudicated. The crowd managed to keep quiet

enough for the group to perform. After the first number, a few more members joined them for a second number including someone playing a metal ring, a one-stringed fiddle, an animal horn, and the *chivoti*. Many of these instruments were painted a matching pale blue.

Gĩkũyũ Culture

Food, drink, and hospitality are key parts of Gĩkũyũ culture. During my stay in Kikuyu town I ate mainly chicken and beef with vegetables. Goat is also popular in Gĩkũyũ cuisine. Cabbage and kale are common vegetables served with a meal, as is *irio*—which is, quite frankly, my least favorite Gĩkũyũ dish. *Irio* is mashed potatoes with greens mixed in so completely that the potatoes are as green as if they were dyed with food coloring. Corn kernels are mixed into this as well.

Sugar cane was served as the noon meal at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga and was often sold at roadside stands. When I was first presented with a stalk, it had the bark still on. When the women realized I have not eaten sugar cane before, they took it back, cut the bark off, and quartered it. I asked how to eat it; I had always understood the point was to suck on it but I saw people chewing on it. Everyone nodded when I asked if I was supposed to bite it, so I did. The first few seconds tasted sweet but then it was exactly like eating a stick, which it is. Each bite I chew longer and longer, but it became increasingly more difficult to swallow. Finally an old woman came and sat down next to me. She made sure she had my attention and then took an overly large bite of her sugar cane. Wondering if I was supposed to take larger bites, I kept watching. She made sure she still had my attention and then very deliberately pulled the wad of chewed sugar cane out of her mouth. With a flourish she threw it behind her, then looked at me with a grin. Finally I understood; the point is to chew it but not swallow.

Taking *chai* is an activity that happened almost any time I visited anywhere, be it a family's home, a school, or the home for the aged. It is also appetizing to Western tastes. Chai is a sweet milky tea, which is occasionally spiced; it is actually not unlike the tea my grandmother would let me drink as a child. Indeed, even very young children in Kenya take chai. The Agĩkũyũ consider it an honor to have a houseguest, and to decline to take chai would have been considered rude on my part.

Many of the homes are small wooden structures, often containing only a handful of rooms. Many have pit latrines outside the home, rather than a toilet inside. The people I met were excited to have me in their homes, and gave me tours of each room. After the tour I would be told to sit in the living room while chai was made, sometimes served with buttered bread. It would not be unusual for a small television to be on and for my hosts and me to watch a program or two together. If chai was not served, then milk or juice would be.

In a traditional Gĩkũyũ village, at least the one set up at Bomas of Kenya, the grandmother's house is nearest the gate. According to the information at Bomas, this was because she was most likely to be awake during the night and so she made a good night watchwoman. Granaries for each wife were in the center of the family circle. The husband's hut sat behind the grandmother's, and the wives' huts were behind the granaries. The first wife had a comparatively large hut, bigger than the other wives' or even the husband's hut. In the sacred grove at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, we were told that the Mama's hut faced *Kirinyaga* (Mount Kenya), while the man's hut faced west. There is a sacred tree in the middle of the grove, and visitors are not to wear shoes inside the grove, which is still used for certain ceremonies.

In the village of Gatamaiyu, the homes were no longer circular thatched huts but were rectangular roofed homes. Family groups still kept their homes close together, although no

longer in a circular compound. Tea was one of the cash crops grown by many Agĩkũyũ on their *shambas*, which grew food both for the family's use and for sale. Tea was one of the most popular crops in Gatamaiyu as it sat at a high enough elevation for tea growth, although this popularity was waning. Many of the younger generation were turning back to food crops; "you can't eat tea," they told me. The village was approximately forty-five minutes from Nairobi and was still very traditional in some ways. Typically, certain activities were communal in spirit, such as a house moving. During my 2014 visit to Gatamaiyu, I was privileged to witness this event. After a family's property lines had been redrawn, redistributing the brothers' land, some of the houses no longer sat on land belonging to their owners. The Gĩkũyũ solution to this was to quite literally move the house. A large group of men and women gathered early one Saturday morning. The foundations had already been dug out from under the homes; so large groups of men simply lifted the house up and carried to it the new location. As communal practices begin to fall by the wayside, often the cultural aspects that accompanied those practices, such as music, will often fade away, especially if not given another avenue in which to exist. This idea was confirmed by other Kenyans I spoke with, such as Ng'ang'a and Maisiba, and is discussed further below.

Body language is another area that provided interesting insights into Gĩkũyũ culture. One night at dinner, a female friend kept turning her entire body away from her college-aged daughter. When she spoke to her daughter from this position, she craned her neck around to see her daughter but kept her body turned away. I thought she was turning toward a portable heater that was placed near our table because the night was getting chilly. Another friend later explained to me, however, that the mother's reaction was due to our topic of conversation; we had been discussing the age at which the younger woman thought she would like to begin a

family. Sex, even when discussed in such a roundabout or veiled manner, is not often spoken of. Her body language was apparently an indication of her unease with the topic, at least officially. As she occasionally contributed to the conversation herself, perhaps her embarrassment was not total.

There were other instances of different gender roles. At a goat party I attended my final evening in Kenya, the men rarely served themselves. One of the women (not the woman whose home we were at but rather her friend) seemed to be acting the part of hostess by making sure everyone's drinks were filled and fetching plates of food for the men. The women, on the other hand, seemed able (and were expected) to get their own food. Maisiba at Utumishi Academy had assured me that my gender would not play a role in my ability to research, listing a Japanese woman he knew who had been researching the Luo *nyatiti*. I am curious, however, as to how much being a female played into my inability, especially at first, to explain the instrument I was searching for. As it was an instrument played by young boys and young men, perhaps the *Agĩkũyũ* I spoke to at first simply assumed a (white) woman would not be interested in such an instrument but rather brought what they thought would interest me.

Gĩkũyũ Traditional Music

According to Maisiba, Gĩkũyũ traditional music, like most African music, has no definite composer. The music is handed down generationally and is categorized according to function. The story of *Mugo's Flute* (van Stockum 1966) is likely based in reality, Maisiba said, as it would have been possible for a young boy to play his flute while herding, such as Mugo is described as doing (van Stockum 1966, 72).

Another category of song I witnessed is a Gĩkũyũ song of thanksgiving. This was performed at Bomas of Kenya with the women dancing in a circle around one woman in the middle. The song gives thanks for all living things. The women mimicked different animals such as goats and pretended to lick salt stones. The men arrived with kigambas on their legs and knives tucked into their belts. The kigambas were the only instruments used in this performance.

According to Charity Muraguri, the *mwomboko* dance is another example of a dance that has been maintained. Mwomboko means “dance with pride” and was performed by men older than seventy years of age (Muraguri 2015). This dance uses the accordion, an instrument that was borrowed and adapted from the Europeans (Muraguri 2015).

The accordion has become a very popular imported instrument in Gĩkũyũ music (Kavyu 1997, 625; Senoga-Zake 1986, 19); the *kigamba*, *shoro*, and *wandindi* are other instruments still being used according to Muraguri. The kigamba is the most prominent, she says, and indeed I saw evidence of its use almost everywhere. It is one of the few instruments at places like Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga and Nyahururu and the only Gĩkũyũ instrument used the day I visited Bomas of Kenya.

According to Muraguri, Limuru town is an important area for traditional music. Limuru is located approximately ten minutes’ drive from Kikuyu town. Community theater groups began performing traditional dance in Limuru when Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the famous Gĩkũyũ author, first began a group. In Limuru the traditions are passed on to the young people; however, in this area the kigamba and the shoro are more popular. The area immediately around where I was staying, in Kiambu County, would not have been an area where the mūtũrĩrũ would have been used extensively, Muraguri explained. It would have been much more popular in the Nyeri area

where more bamboo is available along the rivers. This does not explain why the bark mūtūrūrū would not have been used, except that they are fragile and temporary.

Traditional Clothing

Nelson Kagari and Samson Karanja described the clothing that would have been worn during the traditional ceremonies and dances, such as a necklace, ankle jingles, a hat, and a sisal fiber skirt. The hat, jingles, and skirt were shown to me. The hats were made of either banana leaf or animal skin; only males wore the animal skin hats. Feathers, such as from an ostrich, would be attached to the banana leaf hats. The ankle jingles, worn by the mūtūrūrū player, added a rhythmic element as the flutist would stomp his foot.

Conclusion

Many traditional elements of Gĩkũyũ culture are in decline. The reasons for this range from the side effects of technological progress to intentional colonial repression. Several people are working towards cultural preservation in various arenas, from the annual school music festivals, to classroom curriculum, to cultural centers. This work has gone a long way to safeguard the full and rich heritage of Gĩkũyũ. The mūtūrūrū is one component of this heritage, ready to take its place in current preservation efforts.



Figure 1: Animal skin hat



Figure 2: Banana leaf hat

Chapter Five

The Mūtūrĩrũ

When I arrived in Kenya many people told me the mūtūrĩrũ would be difficult if not impossible to find. Both John Katuli and Raymond Mackenzie at Kenyatta University expressed concern that I would not find anything, even going so far as to suggest alternative research possibilities. John Lugaka, at Alliance High School, was more optimistic that the mūtūrĩrũ still existed somewhere, although he also suggested it will be hard to locate. Charity Muraguri called it “rare” (Muraguri 2015).

Differences in Terminology

This reception was especially discouraging, especially when other instruments were continually brought out in place of the mūtūrĩrũ. At Nyahururu the workers at the cultural center insisted on showing the wandindi (the Gĩkũyũ stringed instrument), even after being asked specifically for the mūtūrĩrũ. They then proceeded to bring a kigamba and a shoro (the ceremonial horn). This confusion between a shoro and a mūtūrĩrũ persisted throughout my research. The elders at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga happily confirmed they had a mūtūrĩrũ and then proceeded to bring out a shoro. Even when an oblique flute was pantomimed, the elders insisted on showing me the shoro. Mwangi, the driver, also referred to the mūtūrĩrũ as a “trumpet” on the recording of “Karicha.” Muraguri stated that the mūtūrĩrũ was occasionally made from a cow’s horn, but that bamboo was more prevalent. This could account for some of the transposing of terms. This flexible shift in terminology (flute/trumpet/horn and mūtūrĩrũ/shoro) is intriguing; whether this is simply a language and/or translation issue inherent

in the two languages or whether something deeper is involved, such as organological classification differences, remains to be seen. Perhaps they can be substituted one for the other because both are aerophones. The terms seem to be interchangeable to the Agĩkũyũ regardless of whether English or Gĩkũyũ is being spoken.

The difference in terminology, which perhaps hindered communications at times, ended up being what led to the actual finding of a mĩtũrĩrũ. Frustrated by being shown yet another shoro at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, I took out my chivoti which was still in my bag from my lesson at Kenyatta University earlier that morning. I played it, both as a chivoti and then mimicking a mĩtũrĩrũ. The combination of the sound of the flute, the appearance of the bamboo, and the vertical “playing” of it seemed to finally trigger understanding. Unfortunately, the elders did not have a mĩtũrĩrũ on hand, but quickly explained that they could make them.

Construction Process

We quickly agreed on a price, and I was told the process would take about an hour. After a brief explanation, the men agreed to allow photographs. Several pictures were taken of the initial bamboo cutting. After this the men left without explanation, leaving me unsure if this is

because I am a foreigner, a woman, or some other misunderstanding.



Figure 3: Cutting of bamboo at Mukurwe

The men finally returned with the mūtūrĩrũ; it looked right, but no one seemed able to actually play it. Once again the men left, this time to find an older man who is apparently “the expert.” After a while the sound of a flute wafted from beyond the trees, and soon thereafter “the expert,” Kagari, was introduced. Kagari demonstrated the mūtūrĩrũ he had just made from a plastic tube. When questioned if he could make the bamboo flute playable; he agreed and began to work on thinning the bamboo tube. The men left once more, but this time only went as far as the other side of the hut in front of me. Mwangi and I wandered over to watch; the men were thinning the bamboo tube with a variety of long metal objects including what appeared to have once been a long drill bit and another long thin metal rod.

Bark Mūtūrĩrũ

Kagari got the bamboo mūtūrĩrũ in fairly good playable condition, and then one of the men helping him brought over what finally convinced me I had found men who knew the

traditional mūtūrūrū: he brought a tree branch, scored it, and then slowly pulled the tube of bark off of the branch. This is how Kenyatta describes the mūtūrūrū's construction (Kenyatta 1962, 90). This action finally clarified how bark was a viable material for flute tubing. The man slid the bark gently up and down over the branch causing the sap to froth and bubble. With the bark still on the stick, notches were made for finger holes and a length was agreed upon by the men. This mūtūrūrū was longer than the bamboo one, and the sound was lovely when they played it. They gently scraped the bark to smooth it and oil it with old motor oil, of all things. The bark version was meant to be temporary, "just for a day" according to Kagari (Kagari 2015).

The temporary nature of the instrument brings up interesting questions that warrant further exploration. Had the Agĩkũyũ never switched to a bamboo version of the mūtūrūrū, the temporary nature of the instrument could very well have been a contributing factor in the decline of the flute. Perhaps the fact that new instruments were quickly and easily constructed led them to be taken for granted by the Agĩkũyũ, and this in turn led to their eventual near abandonment. The impermanent beginnings of the mūtūrūrū may possibly have underpinned Agĩkũyũ thought on the flute and its maintenance. However, the very change to bamboo as a raw material seems to indicate, at least at one point, the desire to preserve the instrument beyond the ephemeral. The fact that one mūtūrūrū at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga was even made of plastic suggests that the raw material had more to do with available objects than any symbolic meaning attached to the material. Another question that comes to mind surrounds the six-holed mūtūrūrū and whether or

not it ever existed in bark form.



Figure 4: Making a bark mūtūrūrū

Materials Used

Several different kinds of trees are mentioned as the kind used to make a mūtūrūrū. Senoga-Zake calls it *mukey* or *mugio* (Senoga-Zake 1986, 152); Kenyatta also claims *mokeo* or *mogio* is used (Kenyatta 1962, 90). Antony Wanyoike told me that *mokeo* was bamboo, which seemed odd. Why would Senoga-Zake refer to the material as *mokeo* in the entry for one instrument, but use the term *bamboo* in the next, as he does in his book *Folk Music of Kenya* (Senoga-Zake 1986, 152)? Mackenzie explained that *mokeo* is in the bamboo family, although not bamboo itself. John, one of the elders who is a resident at the Thogoto Home for the Aged, told me that mūtūrūrūs were constructed from the bark of *murangi* tree. Muraguri, meanwhile, claimed that the mūtūrūrū was typically made from bamboo, but that a cow's horn could also be used. She explained that bamboo gave a better sound, however, and was more readily available

than the horn. And, as discussed above, bamboo changes the fleeting quality of the mūtūrĩrũ, giving it a more permanent existence.

Finger Holes

Opinions also varied on the number of finger holes. Mackenzie claimed that mūtūrĩrũs had only three or four finger holes and seemed uncomfortable when I insisted Kenyatta listed as many as eight (Kenyatta 1962, 90). Kagari, Mukurwe's expert, showed me a mūtūrĩrũ with six holes, which was used by those who continued to play the mūtūrĩrũ past boyhood. The men at Mukurwe use no standard length or bore for the instrument, and finger hole placement is approximate. They did explain to me that the larger the bore hole, the lower the pitch of the instrument. Although approximate, the sizing of the finger holes uses a pattern. The top finger hole (closest to the mouth) is the wider of the two on the standard mūtūrĩrũs used by boys at Mukurwe. On the six-holed mūtūrĩrũ, the top hole is again the widest, and the holes get incrementally smaller going down.

Quality Concerns

Mackenzie was less than impressed with the quality of mūtūrĩrũs I first acquired; as these were still rough on the inside, I understood and shared his concerns. However, as the men at Mukurwe consulted with those older than them, they refined the instruments. The ones I buy later at Mukurwe seem to be of both a better quality, and easier to play.

Variations of Standard Mūtūrĩrũ

Six-holed Mūtūrĩrũ

The six-holed mūtūrĩrũ was the version used when young men continued to play beyond childhood. Karanja said that the “expert” would have played this. This was the term the men at Mukurwe often used to describe someone particularly skilled at the mūtūrĩrũ. They seemed to have two levels of “experts.” Kagari and Karanja were considered “experts” because they knew of the mūtūrĩrũ. However, there was a second level of skill, the “expert’s expert” as it were. Few of these men are left; these are the ones who continued to play the mūtūrĩrũ as young men. Kagari also described the six-holed version as “higher” than the other one. Based on the earlier conversation about bore holes, he was referring to a level of difficulty, a value judgment on the skill required to play it, rather than the relative pitch of the instrument.

“Spider Web” Mūtūrĩrũ

The men at Mukurwe also showed me a type of mūtūrĩrũ not found in any of my previous research. They called this a “spider web” mūtūrĩrũ. Made of bamboo, it is held transversely. One end is closed, covered in a paper membrane. Whether an actual spider web was ever used for this flute was never fully explained to me. However, the idea would not be out of the realm of possibility. Friedson describes the *ng’oma* drum used in Tumbuku healing which uses a *nembe-nembe*, a spider’s nest which is inserted into a hole in the body of the drum (Friedson 1996, 199). Kagari uses glue to attach the membrane, but told me that traditionally they would have used gum from a cedar tree. The embouchure hole is in the center of the instrument. The men were unable to get this type to play, but Kagari insisted that it would resonate “like a loudspeaker” because of the membrane (Kagari 2015).



Figure 5: A collection of Mūtūrūrūs at Mukurwe

Organology

Bamboo Mūtūrūrū

Length	17 inches
Diameter	13/16 inch
Bore hole diameter	1/2 inch
Wall width	1/8 inch
Finger hole diameter	1/4 inch
Distance from center of bottom hole to bottom	3 and 5/8 inches
Space between finger holes	2 and 3/8 inches
Distance from center of top hole to top	8 and 7/16 inches



Figure 6: Bamboo mūtūrūrū

Bark Mūtūrūrū

Length	15 inches
Diameter	1/2 inch
Bore hole	Approximately 1/2 inch
Wall width	< 1/32 inch
Finger hole diameter	1/4 inch
Center of bottom hole to bottom	2 and 7/16 inches
Space between finger holes	2 and 3/4 inches
Distance from center of top hole to top	8 and 5/8 inches



Figure 7: Bark mūtūrūrū

“Spider Web” Mūtūrĩrũ

Length	11 and 1/4 inches
Diameter	7/8 inch
Bore hole	1/2 inch
Wall width	1/8 - 1/4 inch (uneven wall—width varies)
Embouchure hole diameter	5/16 inch



Figure 8: Membrane of "Spider Web" mūtūrĩrũ



Figure 9: Side view of "Spider Web" Mūtūrĩrũ

Six-holed Mūtūrūrū

Length	16 inches
Diameter	7/8 inch
Bore hole	11/16 inch
Wall width	App. 1/8 inch
Finger hole diameter	Varies
Center of bottom hole to bottom	1 and 1/8 inch
Distance from center of top hole to top	8 and 5/8 inches



Figure 10: Six-holed mūtūrūrū



Figure 11: Attaching the membrane to a "spider web" mūtūrĩrũ

Context for Mūtūrĩrũ

Muraguri claimed that one of the reasons the mūtūrĩrũ is rare now is because one of its uses was as part of the circumcision rituals. Boys did the Mumburo and Ruhia dances during these rites. During Ruhia they would play the mūtūrĩrũ while they hit a horn strapped to their backs. This music was used to “psych” up the boys before they headed into the river for circumcision (Muraguri 2015). Kagari also stated that the flute was used in these ceremonies. As the rituals fell out of use, so did the music associated with those rituals. This is not unheard of, naturally. Merriam suggests that religious music often is less affected by culture change than other music by the very fact that it is crucial to certain rites; on the other hand, “recreational

music fulfills other needs which are not highly rigidified” (Merriam 1980, 307-308). The mūtūrūrū was played in both of these contexts, but as the rites in which it was involved fell out of use, the instrument did not benefit from the same kind of culture loss buffer that Merriam describes.

The mūtūrūrū had function outside of the circumcision rites, as well. Muraguri stated that the mūtūrūrū was used for leisure and in children’s songs, as well as while the boys watched the livestock graze; Kagari and Karanja confirmed the mūtūrūrū’s use in herding. Jonathan Stock describes the loss of songs for rice weeding in China. As farming techniques shifted from the communal to the individual, the need for songs decreased (Stock 2009, 371). The Agĩkũyũ experienced similar shifts from communal farming and herding to more urbanized ways of life; Stock’s assertion applies here as well. “A better standard of living has resulted, but so has a decline in collective singing” (Stock 2009, 371-372). Space also affects music. Adam Krims examines the ways in which urban space influences the music made there (Krims 2012, 144-145); surely agrarian space affects the music made there as well. As that space changes, so does the music; sometimes in overt ways and other times in more subtle ways.

The mūtūrūrū appears to have been played in other ways besides ritual and herding contexts. One of the men at the Home for the Aged, John, said that he did not play the mūtūrūrū himself. He did, however, play in a band with a friend who played the mūtūrūrū while John played the guitar and some drums. Perhaps this is the kind of playing that Kagari and Karanja’s “expert’s expert” would have engaged in. An older man in the village of Gatamaiyu claimed the mūtūrūrū, along with the shoro, was used when people were gathering.

Kagari also stated that the mūtūrūrū was used in several songs that employed mixed instruments, such as the wandindi, the kigamba, and smaller ankle jingles. The flute, according

to Kagari, had no specific meaning or symbolism when used in these ceremonies. When I asked about the mūtūrĩrũ's use in traditional religion, a discussion arose on the use of the flute in Christian music. Though this was not my intention with the question, discovering that the mūtūrĩrũ was used in church music after the introduction of Christianity was intriguing. This might be something to follow up on later.

Performance Quality

Another important element to understand is distinguishing a good performance from a mediocre one; Kagari discussed the qualities of a good mūtūrĩrũ player. He spoke of interest levels; like in a classroom, he said, the one who is interested will want to learn more. An “expert” continued to play, created new songs, and practiced frequently.

Up to this point, the interview had been in English. To take this question further and learn exactly what elements made a performance good, Mwangi translated the question into Gĩkũyũ. Several hand gestures were thrown in, as well. Kagari answered that the sound is what is important. The “style of playing,” he said, is also key. “How he appears to be,” added Karanja. He swayed as if pantomiming a performance. It was unclear if the expressive movements themselves are important or if Karanja was using those movements to symbolize expressive playing. The movements themselves may be important; while I studied the *chivoti* (a Mijikenda flute) at Kenyatta University, Mackenzie indicated that moving while playing is important. I had hoped that the performances by the senior “experts” would clear this up; as that was not possible, I hope to follow up on that during future trips.

Kagari and Karanja added that a good performer would attract an audience. Quality is judged according to the creativity in pitch choice, Karanja explained; varying between high, low,

and medium pitches was a good performance. When asked if a melody line would typically be smooth and gradual or with larger intervallic jumps, Karanja said a smooth line was preferred.

One of the men pulled a bunch of leaves from his pocket and offered some to the others. They each took several and chewed on them. These *makado* leaves are to moisten the mouth. The Agĩkũyũ chew these to help them whistle and play the mūtũrĩrũ.



Figure 12: Makado Leaves

Gender Issues in Performance

Ng'ang'a at Moi Girls Secondary School had never seen a mūtũrĩrũ. When asked about the gender of performers, he said the girls did not traditionally play the mūtũrĩrũ. At Mukurwe, Kagari explained that the girls would typically have been dancing while the mūtũrĩrũ was being played. Karanja spoke up at this point, saying that the girls did not have an interest in playing the mūtũrĩrũ but had they wanted to, they “were not refused” (Karanja 2015).

First Performances

To finally be recording mūtūrūrū music was exciting, even if the situation surrounding the recording was confusing at first. When the senior expert was unable to play due to health issues, Kagari and Karanja decided to play songs for me to record. The mūtūrūrū, they said, can currently be used for any song. “Blow a song you know,” they said (Kagari 2015, Karanja 2015). The men changed notes on the beats; as there are only two pitches, they seemed to be trying their best to match the higher pitches with the higher parts of the melody. Two mūtūrūrūs played at once; though the men explained that traditionally, only one would have been played at a time. Since the pitch is not standardized, only having one instrument play at a time would make sense. They played through several songs, explaining the title and some of the background of each song.

Method of Transmission (Pedagogy)

When asked when he learned to make and play the mūtūrūrū, Kagari answered, “Since my childhood” (Kagari 2015). Before he attended school, he and the other young boys would use the mūtūrūrū while they were tending the goats. The older boys knew how to play, he said, and they taught the younger boys how to make and play the mūtūrūrūs. This seems similar to van Stockum’s story where Mugo’s older brother taught him (van Stockum 1966, 12). Even after attending school, Kagari said, they were still taught how to play traditional music on the mūtūrūrūs.

The music was passed on orally; older boys taught younger boys songs that they themselves had been taught as young boys. A boy could also compose a new song himself and

teach it to the others. When I explained the difficulty I am having with the embouchure, Kagari demonstrated the proper embouchure. I need to “whistle” into it, apparently.

Not all young Agĩkũyũ learned the mūtũrĩrũ, as I observed. After Kagari and Karanja once more wandered off, one of the old men came and sat down near Mwangi and me. By his advanced age and the fact that he was holding one of the walking sticks that Karanja had described on our first visit as a symbol of authority, he was likely an elder. He watched us for quite a while; Mwangi had at this point left to go find Kagari and Karanja. The old man picked up one of the “spider web” mūtũrĩrũs; judging by his age and his seeming interest in the flutes, he conceivably played the mūtũrĩrũ in his youth. I handed him the six-holed mūtũrĩrũ, hoping I have accidentally stumbled upon an “expert,” and asked him if he knew how to play. He did not speak English, so gestures had to suffice. He tried to play the mūtũrĩrũ, but could not get a sound from it so he smiled and handed it back to me.

Mwangi, who grew up in the Rift Valley area, also had never played one until we visited Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga. However, on our third visit to Mukurwe, he picked up a mūtũrĩrũ and began to try to play. He found a tone rather quickly. Given my years of (Western) flute performance and the many weeks I had spent up until this point trying to get a sound out of the mūtũrĩrũ and other oblique flutes I had acquired, I admit to feeling rather inferior. I had expected to be able to learn the mūtũrĩrũ as quickly as I had learned the chivoti; this was an unfair and unrealistic expectation on my part, of course and was a catalyst in helping me reframe my thinking and conceptualization of the mūtũrĩrũ.

Later on, I decided to try to play the six-holed mūtũrĩrũ while waiting for Kagari and Karanja. While watching Mwangi and the other men play, I realized how much larger their lips were than mine. It occurred to me that if I tried to approximate their embouchures by literally

making my lips as big as possible, I might have some success. So I pushed my lips out as far as possible and was excited when the instrument sounded. Observing the men playing was by far the most effective method of learning for me. When the men finally explained that their expert was unable to come to play for me, Kagari and Karanja revealed that the old man had also taught them about the mūtūrīrūs, showing them some adjustments that needed to be made to the hole sizes. On the original mūtūrīrūs the men had made, the holes were all the same size. The old man had explained to them that they needed to be larger at the top and get gradually smaller.

Factors in the Decline in Usage of the Mūtūrīrū

In a culture as rich and varied as that of the Agĩkũyũ, one thing is rarely the single cause of change. Blaming Westernization/colonization/Christianization for the decline of traditional instruments such as the mūtūrīrū is all too easy. Certainly, influence from the West played a major role, but to argue that this influence was the sole factor in any culture change is to continue the assignation of superiority to the West. Certainly, horrible things have been done in the name of Christianization and colonization, and the global north has done much to influence the culture of much of the global south, East Africa included. These truths should not be denied or downplayed. But to hold these up as the only aspects of culture change is to persist in denying the Agĩkũyũ a voice; to assume that they had no choice in what elements they incorporated into their culture is to take credit where none is due. Is *Mwomboko* a European dance because it involves a European import, the accordion? Such a statement is absurd of course, and yet the mwomboko is a perfect example of a fully Gĩkũyũ form of music that has incorporated Western elements. Just as the West cannot take all the credit for songs such as the mwomboko, neither can it shoulder all the blame for culture change in the Agĩkũyũ. Moreover, why is it that the act

of incorporating elements of a foreign culture *enriches* Western culture, but the same incorporation dilutes African cultures? This double-standard hints at an underlying arrogance in Western thought.

Urbanization

Urbanization is one factor that has affected the use of the mūtūrĩrũ. The instrument was traditionally played by men guarding the millet harvest or boys tending their goats. With fewer people living in a traditional agricultural setting, these contexts for performance became increasingly rare. This conclusion was affirmed by Maisiba, as well as others. Muraguri also explained that the physical act of clearing areas for settlement often eliminated the very bamboo (and assumably the *mokeo* trees) necessary for constructing the mūtūrĩrũ.

Modern Farming

In addition to urbanization, those who remained in rural areas were affected by the introduction of modern farming equipment. Maisiba asked a pertinent question. “Who would hear a musical instrument being played while machinery was running?” (Maisiba 2015). Furthermore, he added, the rise of machinery changed the fabric of community farming. Whereas before people would work as a community on one shamba at a time, the introduction of modern equipment made for a very individualistic notion of farming, thus removing the social aspect and with it the opportunities for music making. This fits with Stock’s assessment of Chinese weeding songs as described earlier. Ng’ang’a concurred that when the context for a music is gone, such as the community harvesting of the Agĩkũyũ, the music often disappears. Ng’ang’a, however, directly (and completely) attributed this to outside influences. He said that

because the Agĩkũyũ were the first to embrace Christianity, they became the first victims of “Western culture” (Ng’ang’a 2015).

Other Factors

Muraguri listed several factors in the decline of the instrument. One is a preference for Western instruments, which have replaced the mūtūrĩrũ in certain functions. In other cases the shoro has replaced the mūtūrĩrũ; Muraguri believed that, contrary to Kenyatta’s book (1962), the mūtūrĩrũ was never a prominent Gĩkũyũ instrument.

Education is another component to the decline in mūtūrĩrũ playing. The school system, the benefits of which few would argue, also keeps boys from the herding they would have typically done, again removing another context for mūtūrĩrũ performance. Boys who are not herding are also not playing the flute.

While the Agĩkũyũ found new contexts, such as church music, for some of their traditional instruments, the mūtūrĩrũ did not fit the new music, either. Karanja pointed out that the mūtūrĩrũ does not fit easily into Western-style music; “you know,” he said, “do, re, mi...” (Karanja 2015). The accordion and mouth organ, once introduced to the Agĩkũyũ, became the instruments of choice for music. Kagari said that as new instruments were introduced, the “old ones are abandoned” (Kagari 2015). He added that there was “no real reason” for this, simply that the newer instruments kept their interest (Kagari 2015). Other Gĩkũyũ friends also mentioned their interest in learning Western instruments during their youth, such as the trumpet or the guitar. Unless the West is prepared to claim that Western music is so intrinsically interesting in and of itself that no one could possibly resist its charms once introduced to it, we

have to allow the Agĩkũyũ and others the freedom to choose new music to incorporate in their culture as we do here in the West.

Physical Factors in Dance and Ceremony

Muraguri explained that the way the dances themselves were carried out affected the continuation of the mūtũrĩrũ. She felt that because Gĩkũyũ dances use a lot of footwork and verbalization, playing an aerophone would be difficult. The verbal chanting is much more attractive, according to Muraguri. She claimed hands, mouths, and feet are prominent instruments in Gĩkũyũ dances.

Elaborate funerals where an aerophone could have been adapted for use are not part of Gĩkũyũ culture, said Muraguri. She explained that the Agĩkũyũ would throw someone who was dying as far as possible into the forest, and let the hyenas take care of the rest. The purpose of this, she said, was to keep away evil spirits. This is not the case currently, however; I walked and drove past a Gĩkũyũ cemetery on a daily basis during my stay in Kenya. Perhaps this is still an area where mūtũrĩrũ performance could be introduced.

Other Kenyan Groups with Flutes

The fact that other tribal groups in Kenya have maintained the use of their traditional flutes gives hope and a blueprint for possible ways in which the Agĩkũyũ can reintroduce their mūtũrĩrũ into both revivals of traditional use as well as new contexts for performance. The Tharaka people, for instance, have maintained one of their dances that uses only the flute (Muraguri 2015). The Akamba have a flute very similar to the mūtũrĩrũ, which they call the *mutulilu* (Floyd 2005, 150). Besides the similarity in spelling, the Agĩkũyũ pronunciation of the

letter "R" often sounds similar to the "L;" there being no "L" in the Agĩkũyũ alphabet (Kasahorow, 2014). The Kamba are a tribe that is closely related to the Agĩkũyũ ("Kamba," 2015). The instruments are used in different contexts but are similar (Katuli 2015).

Other people groups with almost identical flutes include the Maasai, the Teso, and the Turkana (Mackenzie 2015). The Mijikenda chivoti has retained popularity among its people in traditional dances such as the Sengenya (Mackenzie 2015, Muraguri 2015), but the chivoti has also worked its way into Gĩkũyũ songs. Muraguri has herself used the chivoti in Gĩkũyũ songs, for lack of a mūtũrĩrũ. Gĩkũyũ children learn the chivoti for the school music festivals.

Conclusion

The mūtũrĩrũ has great potential for revival in the current Kenyan cultural climate. Elders such as Kagari and Karanja seemed eager to recapture the instrument of their youth, and as discussed in the previous chapter, there are already performance contexts in place. If the knowledge held by the most senior elders, the "expert's experts" who played the six-holed mūtũrĩrũ, can be passed on then the mūtũrĩrũ has the potential to take its place along the chivoti, the Tharaka flute, and other Kenyan flutes.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

Finding and possibly reviving a once temporary instrument that has fallen out of regular use undoubtedly poses challenges. The physical challenges of finding men who still remember the mūtūrĩrũ are great; finding men who had been experts at it is almost impossible. Health issues prevented the two senior experts Kagari and Karanja had found from performing. One morning one of the men had been taken to the hospital; another morning dental issues prevented a different man from performing. I hope to be able to visit these men again in the very near future. The health of the men who are the only repositories of this knowledge may occasionally make research opportunities difficult to schedule, but this is the very reason that this research is so important. These men are quite literally the only libraries this information is housed in; if it is not passed on, it will be lost. Kagari and Karanja have begun to access much of this information; I hope to record some of the repertoire for the six-holed mūtūrĩrũ.

School Music Festivals

The popularity and widespread participation in the Kenyan school music festivals make them an ideal vehicle for the revival of the mūtūrĩrũ in a traditional sense. Students are already encouraged to speak with cultural elders regarding songs and dances they study. The importance of maintaining tribal musical and dance traditions is already entrenched in the school curriculum. The vastness and diversity of Kenya's culture, with forty-two different people groups, explains why an instrument that had long been put by the wayside has been overlooked in festival performance. However, with the commitment to preservation already in place among Gĩkũyũ

elders, passing on the knowledge is all that is needed to preserve the mūtūrĩrũ. If the elders at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, and potentially in other areas such as Nyeri, commit to teaching young people the mūtūrĩrũ, then that instrument can find its way into the annual festivals. Muraguri called these festivals important “forums for transmission” of traditional culture (Muraguri 2015).

Potential preservation has a few possible avenues. Traditional dances are already part of the festival; to add the mūtūrĩrũ back into dances it was traditionally a part of, such as *ruhia*, would be a relatively easy feat. It would simply be a matter of making mūtūrĩrũs, as well as the knowledge of how to construct and use the instruments, available to the students’ coaches. Given the importance of authentic cultural preservation, as expressed by conservationists such as Muraguri, Katuli, and Mackenzie, as well as the desire for authentic festival performances as expressed by teachers such as Maisiba, Lugaka, Ng’ang’a and others, I feel that the time is ripe for the re-introduction of the mūtūrĩrũ into the appropriate dances at festivals.

Both Kagari and Karanja indicated to me on our last visit to Mukurwe that they were excited about continuing to learn about the mūtūrĩrũ from the experts they had found and that by the time I returned on my next trip to Kenya, they themselves would be “the experts” (Kagari 2015, Karanja 2015). Furthermore, if experts on the six-holed mūtūrĩrũ could be found or if men like Kagari and Karanja do maintain and continue their re-education in mūtūrĩrũ production and repertoire, then the mūtūrĩrũ could also take its place in solo instrument performance. Gikũyũ students would be offered the opportunity to solo on their own flute, rather than the Mijikenda flute, if they so choose.

Again, precedent already exists for this process. The category for performance on traditional African instruments is in the music festivals; students perform on nyatiti and chivotis

regularly. Finding a way for students to access the knowledge of the elders in Mukurwe, which admittedly is rather off the beaten path, is key to this. Whether it is a matter of bringing students to Mukurwe or bringing the knowledge to the schools through experts new or old, this can be worked out on the ground in Kenya. The music teachers, as well as the coaches for traditional dances and performances, will be able to properly determine the best way for this learning to take place.

The school music festivals provide a way to quite literally expose the mūtūrĩrũ to more than double the traditional performers. Whereas only boys typically played the mūtūrĩrũ in the past, no gender prohibitions currently seem to be in place to keep a young girl from learning the mūtūrĩrũ. Moreover, if Gĩkũyũ students learn to play the chivoti, nothing should keep students from other ethnic groups from learning the mūtūrĩrũ, thus further widening the pool of potential performers.

Performers of Traditional Music

Practitioners of traditional music, such as Muraguri, are maintaining many of the cultural instruments of various Kenyan people groups. Muraguri felt that the mūtūrĩrũ was “fertile ground for research” (Muraguri 2015). She hoped to be able to add the mūtūrĩrũ to her own performances and wanted to challenge other practitioners of traditional music to do the same (Muraguri 2015). While the actual work of reintroducing the mūtūrĩrũ and other at-risk instruments is mainly up to traditional practitioners like Muraguri, ethnomusicologists have an opportunity to provide an outsider's view. This can often create the impetus needed to recover lost instruments and traditions. Gĩkũyũ traditional music is currently performed at weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies, and political gatherings. The mūtūrĩrũ is not performed in these

contexts, but Muraguri hoped to see the instrument regain some prominence because of its historical importance in functions such as the circumcision rites discussed earlier.

Muraguri felt that the mūtūrĩrũ could find a place in the sacred folk songs, the old melodies that have Christian lyrics added to them. She felt the mūtūrĩrũ could be used effectively in this context in solemn moments, such as during depictions of the crucifixion of Christ. Muraguri felt the mūtūrĩrũ “needs to take its place” among practitioners of traditional music and dance (Muraguri 2015). Other churches also present potential opportunities for mūtūrĩrũ performance. Because of the mūtūrĩrũ's association with ruhia and other circumcision rites, contextualization issues may cause problems. Gĩkũyũ traditional churches, for example, worship Jesus in a Gĩkũyũ context. Members are given Biblical names, and the services are exclusively in the Gĩkũyũ language with Gĩkũyũ music and dances (Antony Wanyoike, email, 2015). The mūtūrĩrũ would need to be contextualized in a similar manner. This may not be terribly difficult, given that the mūtūrĩrũ was also used outside of the circumcision rites simply for entertainment purposes. African Indigenous Churches (AIC) are another potential avenue for new mūtūrĩrũ music. These kinds of Christian worship services have great potential, not only for mūtūrĩrũ music but for contextualizing Christian worship for Agĩkũyũ believers.

Research Benefits

Several groups will benefit from this research and further research on the mūtūrĩrũ. Muraguri felt that she personally would be able to use new knowledge of the mūtūrĩrũ in her own traditional performances and that other traditional music practitioners would gain as well. Cultural centers such as Bomas of Kenya and the Riuki Cultural Centre would also profit. Neither Bomas nor Riuki have mūtūrĩrũs on site, nor do they have knowledge of the instrument.

In fact, when Muraguri called the choreographer for Bomas during our interview to ask about the mūtūrĩrũ, the response was, “You mean the Kikuyu had a flute?” (Muraguri 2015).

In June of 2015, I deposited the mūtūrĩrũ I acquired in the traditional instrument collection at Kenyatta University in Nairobi. Other mūtūrĩrũs were donated to the World Instrument Collection at Liberty University in September of 2015. The archives at the National Museum in Nairobi are another possible repository for the instrument. I was not aware that the archives existed until the end of my trip; I hope to visit the Museum the next time I am in Kenya. At this point, I am unsure of whether or not the archives contain information on the mūtūrĩrũ; I suspect not, but I need to confirm this and compare any information that is there with what I discovered in my fieldwork. If, as I suspect, the archives contain no information on the mūtūrĩrũ, then material should be placed there for preservation and for access by the Agĩkũyũ.

Conclusion

The mūtūrĩrũ is a traditional instrument that for numerous reasons was almost forgotten. Colonization and Westernization certainly factored into this potential loss; modernization of agricultural practices and urbanization—both influences of the global North—along with Christianization undoubtedly played a large part in the decline of the mūtūrĩrũ. More specifically, the mūtūrĩrũ and instruments like it were affected by a notion within early missionary efforts that the Christian faith was equivalent with European culture. Unfortunately, this is a notion that continues to linger. Contextualizing Christian worship with traditional Gĩkũyũ instruments such as the mūtūrĩrũ can make inroads into restoring these instruments to their communities. Culture is in a constant state of flux; change may not be immediately apparent over decades, but all culture changes on some level. To expect that the mūtūrĩrũ would be

revived in a manner identical to its traditional usage is naïve; however, exciting possibilities exist for new ways that the Agĩkũyũ can reincorporate the mūtũrĩrũ into their ever-changing culture. School music festivals, traditional performance groups, and churches are some avenues, but ultimately the Agĩkũyũ themselves must decide if the mūtũrĩrũ becomes a living artifact, changing to meet new cultural needs or a monument to a part of their cultural history in local museums and universities.

Appendix

Glossary of Terms

Agĩkũyũ. A Bantu ethnic group, the largest of 42 ethnic groups in Kenya (Kariuki 2001, 19).

ahoi. A system of land borrowing in Agĩkũyũ culture (Garcia 2005, 34).

Kamba. A Bantu ethnic group of Kenya, related to the Agĩkũyũ (“Kamba,” 2015).

Kĩrĩnyaga. The Gĩkũyũ name for Mount Kenya, it is said to be the resting place of *Ngai*. It is also called Kere-Nyaga (Kenyatta 1962, 5).

mbari. A division in Agĩkũyũ culture consisting of a family unit: a man, his wives, his children and grandchildren (Kenyatta 1962, 3).

moherega. A larger grouping in Agĩkũyũ society of related *mbari* (Kenyatta 1962, 3).

mokeo. Also **mogio.** A shrub whose bark is used for constructing flutes and strings (Kenyatta 1962, 311-312).

mutulilu. A flute of the Kamba people of Kenya (Floyd 2005, 150).

mũtũrĩrũ. A flute, traditionally temporary in nature due to its construction from the bark of a *mokeo* branch (Kenyatta 1962, 90). Four, six, or eight holes are used. More recent *mũtũrĩrũs* may be constructed from bamboo or even a dark wood (van Stockum 1966, 19, 62).

Ngai. The Gĩkũyũ god. Also called *Mogai*, meaning “The Divider of the Universe” (Kenyatta 1962, 5).

riika. Another division in Agĩkũyũ society of men and women who have gone through the initiation rites at the same time (Kenyatta 1962, 3). This is an important bond in Gĩkũyũ culture (Muriuki 1974, 10).

shamba. A long narrow strip of land used in farming; typically each family works their own *shamba*.

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