**EXPLORING THE NEW *OHANGLA* MUSIC IN THE CONTEXT OF URBANIZATION: The Search for Relevance for Sustainability.**

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**Abstract**

*Ohangla* music can be traced to the Luo community of Kenya. Over the years, it has changed in form and texture with the rise of new generations and new demands on the artists. The initial intentions, which were basically socio-cultural, have been overwhelmed by emerging economic trends and needs. In the process, even both instrumental form and manner of performance have been affected by generation changes and the new economic trends. Presently, the older and renowned *Ohangla* artists are Jack Nyadundo, Tony Nyadundo, Osogo Winyo and Onyi Papa Jey. These artists established themselves in the *Ohangla* industry with numerous musical compositions and styles which formed the benchmark for this genre of music. There were, of course, earlier and much older artists who performed mainly in social places for entertainment with little or no tangible monetary profits to count. However, many other artists have since risen to popularity gaining a competitive edge with the older ones. They have established their styles, content and approaches which though borrow largely from the older generation, have a unique twist that makes them stand out in their class. These younger artists are driven by the need to meet the emerging needs of contemporary listenership and monetary intentions. This paper examines some of the dynamics involved in balancing between indigenous styles and practice and the modern market-driven trends among these artists considering that their performances are both gainful and leisure activities. The shift in generations has brought into picture interesting questions about content development, language use, instrumentation, and reliance on media for projection by the artists. Relying on the Theory of Recontextualization in music by Dora A. Hanninen (2003), the study will examine the performances of two selected *Ohangla* artists in Nairobi to highlight how their musical performances reflect a transformation from the indigenous to modern *Ohangla* music. Observation method will be used in this investigation. It is hoped that this paper will enlighten the scholarship on the dynamism of *Ohangla* music in specific and music on general.

**Introduction**

Historically, *Ohangla* music was a Luo ritualistic music which was played during funerals and ceremonies such as the birth of twins or visits to in-laws. The name *Ohangla* remains contested to date. Some people argue that that it traces its origins to the slender canonical drum whose membrane is made from the dried skin of the monitor lizard (Ketebul Music, 2017, page 247). Joseph Oloo, an informant and a veteran *Ohangla* musician from Ugenya, argues that the name was first used in the 1940s to refer to an emerging dance style which was vigorous, but lacked dignity or propriety because it was marked by sexual overtones in its content or lyrics and dance movements. Hence the elders spoke thus about its style: *“Ma en miel ma ohangore manade?”* (What a weird and exaggerated dance!). The idea implied here was that the dance was too sexually explicit in both content and movements.

Another argument by Ochieng’ Onumo, an elderly musician from Alego, was that both the name and style of the music was brought in during the migration of the Luo from Busoga in Uganda. The position was supported by the fact that in Central and Eastern Uganda, they used similar drums as those used in *Ohangla*. These were called *omugaabe*, *engalabi* and *mudiri* among the Baganda and Basoga. A *benga* pioneer, Ochieng’ Nelly, separately argues that the music was influenced by that of the neighbouring Luhya community and was therefore not a purely Luo music.

In South Nyanza, the *Ohangla* drum was known as *kalapapla* because the word seemed to mimic the sound of the drum. *Kalapapla* was referred to as *sigudi*, the Luo articulation of the Luhya musical dance known as *isikuti*, in which drums similar to *Ohangla* were played. Again this implies that the genre was came from the Luo’s Luhya neighbours. Other informants observed that it was possible that the *Ohangla* gained its own character as a Luo dance and later gave way to other Luo musical styles such as *bodi, dodo* and *ramogi*.

**Thesis**

There is a difference between modern *Ohangla* music and the indigenous one because the latter was drum driven, more vigorous and fast in tempo. It was also characteristically dominated by authentic traditional instruments. However, that former was is typically much slower in tempo, leans more towards *rhumba* and uses more Western instruments. The younger and more modern *Ohangla* players have tamed the wild dance music, rebranded it and refocused its function. The modern *Ohangla* has changed so much that it appears like a totally new genre except for the name. For example, in many cases the keyboard has replaced the traditional drums, the metal ring (*ongeng’o*) and *ajawa* (shakers). During recordings, additional computerized sounds have been used to make the music more exotic while in the process drawing it further away from the indigenous components and function.

In Kenya, indigenous music have followed ethnic contours. The country has 42 tribes with unique values, beliefs and cultural practices. These components characterize the different musical styles of Kenya. With the emergence of new norms, which are either borrowed from the West or from intercultural experiences, these musical styles have changed tremendously. The styles have undergone changes in the face of urbanization and emerging economic challenges and needs giving rise to new idioms known as *neo indigenous* (Ongati, 2008, page 11) styles. Such new styles defy the indigenous contexts of performance thereby changing the indigenous music into modern ones, a process known as *recontextualization* (Schippers, 2005, page 30). In indigenous contexts, such music were restricted to specific occasions, events and functions. Such ceremonies included funerals, weddings, marriage, child naming, initiations and general recreations. In addition, the audiences were homogenous and sometimes defined along gender and age lines. The performances were also typically participatory due to the communal nature of the communities involved.

These fundamental indigenous characteristics have significantly changed with time. *Ohangla* musical dance is now performed in totally different contexts and to an audience with no common cultural denominator (Omondi, 1992, page 5). The venues include nightclubs, bars and restaurants in both rural and urban centres. The artists are now more concerned with producing music that fits the taste of contemporary audience than aligning the music to its indigenous setting and purpose. This change of practice is influenced by time, money and audience demands unlike it was in the indigenous settings.

In essence, *Ohangla* tends to live in two different worlds; the modern and the traditional. The current *Ohangla* appears heavily influenced by *benga* and *rhumba* in the manner in which it parodies the two styles. This paper investigates the historical flow of *Ohangla* music in Kenya and the dynamics in the management of the new business demands which treat the performance of *Ohangla* as work and the leisure related aspects which border on entertainment both to the artist and the audience. These are considered in terms of content development, language use, instrumentations, media use and projections by the artists. Ethical issues are also an important segment in the performance process especially in a setting that is both work and leisure oriented.

It is hoped that this research will reveal the dilemma between the search for fulfilment in work and the demands upon the artist to provide entertainment to his or her audience. These are challenges that bedevil every artist in the popular entertainment industry.