

# Culture, creativity and practice

## (E)valuating the Kenya Music Festival as a transnational music space

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### Introduction

Performance being an integral part of the social lives of Africans, a festival that is predominantly music-oriented is not a new concept in their societies. Over time, the wave of change that has largely been catalyzed by civilization, modernization, urbanization and industrialization has escalated the idea of festivals to establishments beyond the traditional ritual-contextual institutions. This is the case in learning, religious, corporate, media and entertainment organizations, where festivals are held for exhibitiveness as well as competitive reasons. A unique characteristic of the proliferated festival is its ability to not only open up space for diverse music concepts in terms of creativity and performance but also enhance artistic, social, economic and political negotiation and interaction.

The Kenya Music Festival (KMF) is such an instance that provides an all-inclusive platform where music from many cultures of the world is performed. Apart from its diverse musical (re)presentations, the festival nurtures talent, is a cultural repository and serves as an avenue for testing and developing creativity. Whereas the festival's creativity is competitively evaluated, this paper views the KMF as a transnational music space with regards to its history, participants and, importantly, content that has over time defined its existence. This paper, therefore, seeks to demonstrate how different aspects of the KMF uniquely position it as a transnational music space. While it provides a distinctive opportunity for musical and cultural interaction, the paper is further concerned with the impact of such transna-

tional collaborations, especially on the creative processes of music that are presented at the festival.

This paper is based on a tripartite methodological approach. Part of the data presented here is a result of my lived experience at KMF, having participated in it since 1986 as a performer, director (both choir and poetry), adjudicator and administrator. In addition to my participatory role as a researcher, I have also gathered data (via written notes and recordings) over time. Not much has been documented and/or published about the festival; nevertheless, this paper also drew substantial information from a few written sources (journals and conference papers) as well as KMF documents (annual syllabi and guidelines for adjudication). More information was sourced via interaction with members of the KMF community, who have lived this experience over time. Information from published sources and other members of KMF was necessary for the sake of diversifying opinion, thereby reducing levels of subjectivity. The descriptively presented information contained in this paper, therefore, is as a result of a triangulation of my own experience, published sources and responses from other participants in KMF.

In terms of presentation, the paper starts with an explanation of pertinent concepts, namely music festival and transnationalism. This is followed by a brief description of the people who contribute and shape the Kenya Music Festival in terms of organization, administration and management. The core of the paper is manifested in the discussion of the transnational dimension of KMF regarding its history, content, community and discourse. An interesting notion at this point is how the transnational facts affect the creativity and the diversity of music at the Kenya Music Festival. The paper concludes with reflections on how important concepts of culture, creativity and practice have been to the idea of transnationalism at the Kenya Music Festival over time.

## Concepts

The Kenya Music Festival features a series of performances ranging from African folk music, instrumentation and dance, Western classical music, oriental and other world music. The KMF is also inspired by a unifying theme that changes annually. Such unification is further captured in the objectives of the organization, which guide the nature of expected performances, con-

duct and procedures. It is also notable that this is a competitive fete, where participants are rated against each other.

From a literal perspective, defining a festival can be viewed as bringing festivity with and/or in music, or music into festivity. From whichever side, it is a means of perceiving the collaborative aspect of festivity and music making. Participants and other players gather at the KMF to celebrate world cultures through music, which makes it a festive venture. Participants exhibit their artistic gifts and abilities which are celebrated by all who attend. Given its competitive nature, winning brings merry to the makers of the music. KMF also provides an opportunity for people from different parts of Kenya to travel to new places, meet friends, colleagues and new people, a situation that further brings a festive effect. In this regard, KMF may be viewed as an opportunity where music brings festivity to a people, as festivity enriches the musical experience that comes with artistic creativity, novelty and growth. The preceding definition that reveals its interactive, competitive, inter/intra-cultural, creative and multi-nationalistic nature of this festival lends KMF a unique space in the debate on transnationalism.

Transnationalism in most cases is associated with the interaction and relationships between different political states that are defined by citizenry. A pertinent question is whether economic, political and cultural processes between people of a single nation-state can achieve transnationalism in their practices, a concern that may be approached from the perspective of how nations are made. In citing Anthony Smith, the author of theories of nationalism, Brubaker distinguished the most well-known forms of nationalism as: "between voluntaristic and organic, political and cultural, subjective and objective, liberal and illiberal and civic and ethnic forms of nationalism." (1999: 55)

The later form of nationalism was pertinent to this paper in that it sought to qualify the reference to ethnic communities as nations, their interaction thus qualifying as a form of transnationalism. The preceding proposition has been used by scholars such as Makila (1978), who refers to the different sub-divisions of the larger Luhya community of Western Kenya as sub-nations based on the autonomy of their social, economic and political organizations. Many nations exist in the world, and many have been formed on an ethnic basis, although diplomatic demands euphemize such by referring to them as civic nations.

Over time, the term transnationalism has been innovatively defined and redefined to suit varied concepts. From an ideological and discursive view, Jackson (2004) for instance views transnationalism as being composed of social spaces that can be occupied by a wide range of actors, not all of whom are directly connected to transnational migrant communities. Drawing from preceding opinions, this paper views the KMF's concept, its ideology, processes and actors as a social space that allows for the exchange and creation of artistic ideas in a transnational guise despite the actors not belonging to migrant communities. Moreover, the participation and interaction of people from different cultural, ethnic and other backgrounds as communities in the festival enhances the concept of transnationalism. In part, the preceding proposition is qualified in the discussion of who and what the KMF is.

## **The Kenya Music Festival (KMF)**

This is an annual fete that brings together pupils, students, teachers and lecturers for a music making and poetry extravaganza. Though competitive in nature, the festival envisages encouraging the study of music, providing a forum for mentoring and nurturing performers, preserving Kenya's cultural heritage and promoting quality of performance in music, dance and elocution (Ministry of Education 2017). The festival incorporates people from learning institutions only, a development that was realized in 1988 when Kenya Music and Cultural Festival (KMCF) was created from the KMF to accommodate participants from non-learning institutions (Musungu 2012). Re-making the KMF as an education-based event was a strategy towards better organization, administration and an effort to achieve its largely education-oriented objectives.

The Kenya Music Festival is administered by a national executive committee that is appointed by the minister of education. The committee is responsible for the organization, administration and management of the festival. Such committees are replicated at lower levels, that is, regional, county and sub-county levels, for the sake of easier management through the devolved system. This inter-institution competition starts at the lowest level (the sub-county) after which the winners are promoted to participate at a higher level (the county), to the regional then to the national level, which takes place in August every year.

The respective executive committees appoint adjudicators (from among the music teachers) who evaluate the performances. For the sake of maintaining standards, relevance and a unified approach in the adjudication process, the adjudicators are usually trained during a one-week workshop every year. The festival exhibits a wide-range of artistic (re)presentations, which have been stratified for ease of evaluation. For instance, folk music is a category that is further classified according to the ethnic communities that display similarities in idiomatic expressions. Such categorization is replicated for the dances and instruments.

## History

A brief highlighting of the main events of the festival will be necessary to elicit discussion about how such history reveals the concept of transnationalism in KMF. According to Hyslop (1955), Kidula (1986) and Musungu (2012), KMF was founded in 1927 by British settlers as a leisure activity to entertain their families, and they mainly performed Western classical music. The authors reveal that up until 1952, Africans were incorporated in the festival to perform a folksong and a Western set piece. Apart from African music, the festival gradually accommodated oriental music in the late 1950s. In the 1960s, the festival incorporated African instruments, where solo performers featured. In 1968, the responsibility for KMF was handed over from the British Foundation for Music Festivals to the Ministry of Education, which ran it in collaboration until 1988 when it was completely detached from the mother festival (British Foundation for Music Festivals). Since 1988, the KMF has been administered by an executive committee appointed by the minister of education. This committee draws from representatives of teachers in primary and secondary schools, polytechnics, colleges and universities, people with disabilities and the marginalized communities, all within the education sector. An important development just before the handover took place in 1987, when the festival brought on board elocution in the English language and later in the Kiswahili, French and German languages.

During the entire period that the KMF was affiliated with the British festivals, adjudicators were always brought in from Britain to judge the performances. To date, the festival is administered under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, under the patronage of the president of the Republic

of Kenya. A unique historical fact about this festival is how new categories have been introduced over time. It has been a challenge to establish the exact dates on which the categories were introduced. This was occasioned by the lack of documentation of these facts. The informants, therefore, tried to relay what they could remember, although in a number of instances, levels of agreement were not achieved. The situation prompted the presentation of such data within time ranges as shown in table 1 below.

*Table 1: Development of KMF categories*

Years	Category
1927-1950	Western classical music
1950s	Incorporation of African participants +Set piece (Western classical song) and African folksong
Late 1950s	+Oriental music
1960s	+African instruments
1970s	+Singing games, African dances, 1977/78 - original compositions and adaptation and arrangement of African melodies
1980s	+1987 - Poems (English, Kiswahili, French and German languages) and adaptation and arrangement of pop music
1990s	+Poems in African languages, adaptation and arrangement of sacred pop tunes and pop music from the rest of Africa, instrumental ensembles
2000s	+Special compositions on varied themes and categories for impaired participants in all areas of music and elocution
2010s	+Arrangement of pop music with instrumental accompaniment

The table above gives an impression of how new categories have been introduced in the KMF over time. The + sign at the beginning of the second column means that the previous categories have been maintained as new ones were added. The addition of new categories has unfolded on the basis of creative demands but not a specified number in a given time. The increase of categories has indicated a further growth in the number of participants. According to Musungu (2012) the festival in 2012 had over 500 classes involving

more than 80,000 performers at the national level, compared to two classes in 1927 and about five at independence (1963). *The Star* newspaper further reported that the festival attracted 120,000 participants to the 2018 National Festival held at Dedan Kimathi University in Nyeri County (Muchiri 2018). At the lowest qualification level (sub-county), *People Daily* newspaper reported that in 2018 an estimated 1.5 million participants took part (Muraya 2018).

Hyslop (1955) observes that the objectives of the festival (especially at the prototype stages) were to encourage the study of music, preserve traditional Kenyan music and promote the talents of upcoming musicians. The inception of KMF may thus be regarded as a transnational concept, not just because it was started by the British settlers, but because of its presentation in a relocated environment with a different philosophy of performance. In essence, African festivals broke their boundaries into a new realm of festivity with the KMF. Whereas over time the festival has accommodated and largely become African in practice, the philosophy of performance employed is new insofar as the music is no longer located within the traditional rituals but rather reflects modern ones based in educational institutions. Apart from being translocated from the ritual-based scenario, the current festival situation allows for fewer performers on stage and a contemplative audience. This is a shift from the traditional scene where all gathered people participated for the sake of inclusivity as opposed to staging a few with a perfected skill.

It is the objective of the festival to focus more on music education, career and artistic development, as well as the preservation of Kenyan heritage. Compared to the African concept, music festivals are also geared towards education but from a more holistic and social perspective as opposed to a skill and artistic orientation. It is not the interest of this paper to draw distinctions but rather to show how the concept of the festival has brought on board varied philosophies, objectives and practices in space and time. The introduction of British music culture to the Africans was foreign and so was performing African music based on a British philosophy. One could argue that the KMF is a negotiated space where over time different cultures have interacted in a “give and take” manner to achieve an identity that does not embody any of the respective cultures in total but rather shows profound characteristics that unite them.

The handing over of the KMF to the Ministry of Education further broadened this space. It can be argued that given their cultural background and training, the British settlers' thinking was different from the Kenyan ones. It

can, therefore, be suggested that the administrative change ushered in a different system of thinking and philosophy about how KMF was to be run, its objectives as well as its content. The festival was transformed to have a more Kenyan face regarding its objectives, participants, content and especially performance practice. This was realized in the expanded repertoire whereby African instruments both solo and ensemble, dances, solo and choral folk-song, popular music and elocution in different, especially Kenyan languages were incorporated in the festival. Whereas previously only a drum or rattle had been used to accompany folksongs, injecting a more African spirit into the music allowed for any and all Kenyan traditional instruments to be used.

As previously mentioned, traditional music festivals focused on holistic education for the entire community. Perhaps this concept has gradually been brought back to the festival where different institutions partner with the KMF so that certain pertinent information is communicated through music and elocution. In 2017 for instance, the festival participants presented items with themes about road safety, environmental waste management, countering violent extremisms, promoting ethical culture and national cohesion. While the paper will discuss the role of partnerships and sponsorships later, it is worth noting at this point that it forms part of the history of this festival as a form of a shift in thinking as a result of the KMF being handed over to the Ministry of Education. Such change is partly motivated by the traditional philosophy of the role of music in society and that of society in music, where they complement each other for the sake of better conformity and tranquility.

The introduction of elocution is evidence of how the African spirit was further injected into the KMF by the new administration (Ministry of Education). It is common practice that performance in traditional African settings incorporates many arts together (song, dance, instrumentation, poetry, narration, drama, visual arts). Having a festival that showcases song, dance and instrumentation was, therefore, lacking some of the essential ingredients of the composite nature of African performance. That is arguably why elocution and chanting were brought on board as a means of filling the void.

## Content

The KMF has continued to create new meaning based on ever-changing and renewed content. The festival currently features varied categories for performance by participants. The categories draw from African, Western, Oriental, and Islamic vocal, instrumental music and dance, elocution in English, Kiswahili and other African languages, French, German, Arabic and sign language. Within the African category, it is worth noting that Kenya, for instance, has 43 known ethnic communities, all of which present their music in the festival in different classes. Communities from other African countries also have a place at the festival. For Western classical music, there are solo performances for the respective voices, choral performances as well as solo and instrumental music. The expansiveness of the content presented at the KMF requires 12 days of performance for the festival to be complete. The table below shows how the different genres of music are categorized in the festival.

*Table 2: KMF classifications*

	Description of work	Number of Participants
1	Vocal solos	1
2	Vocal ensembles	2 to 16
3	Choral music	30 to 42
4	African folksongs	30 to 42
5	Original compositions	30 to 42
6	Singing games	16 to 24
7	African traditional cultural group dances	16 to 24
8	Western traditional cultural group dances	16 to 24
9	Western Instrumental music	1 to 12
10	African instrumental music	1 to 12
11	Oriental instrumental	1 to 12
12	Solo verse speaking	1
13	Choral verse speaking	16 to 24

(KMF Syllabus, 2017)

The table shows how the respective content defines what the categorized participants can perform based on the idiomatic uniqueness. In the same table, the number of participants is a determining factor in how suitable the performances would be rendered, and that is why it is of fundamental consideration. The categories are further split for easier administration and technical facilitation. For instance, African folksongs and dances are further categorized by the respective ethnic communities. The Western and Oriental instruments are categorized by the mode of playing and sound production. Table 3 below shows an example of categorization in English verse speaking for secondary schools to demonstrate how the web of categories in the KMF reveal the diversity and transnationality of the festival over time.

*Table 3: English elocution classes*

Solo elocution—boy or girl	Choral elocution 16-24 members
Set verse form 1	Set verse
Set verse for learners with cerebral palsy	Set verse for mentally challenged
Set verse form 2	Original composition being presented for the first time
Set verse for the visually impaired	Special composition - Nurturing self-esteem and responsibility among students
Set verse form 3	Special composition - Promoting price stability, sound national payment system and vibrant financial sector
Set verse form 4	Special composition - Promotion of national and public service values
Set verse for learners with autism	Special composition - Countering violent extremism and counter terrorism
Public speaking junior	Special composition - Environment -waste management
Public speaking senior	Special composition - The invaluable role of teachers in promoting ethical culture through dissemination of values
Public speaking for learners with cerebral palsy boy or girl	Special composition - No violence against children is justifiable
News reading	Special composition - My country, my pride, my future
Verse speaking accompanied with acoustic instruments	Special composition - Community policing
	Special composition - Inculcating the culture of road safety to the youth and general public

(KMF Syllabus, 2017)

The table shows two major categories (solo and choral) of English verse speaking for secondary schools. Under the solos, different levels of ability stratify the participants. Under the choral section, the themes of the compositions further differentiate the classes. From the table, secondary schools participate in 25 categories in English verse speaking. But then verse speaking is done in Kiswahili, German, French, other African languages and Arabic. Some of the English categories apply to the other languages, but peculiarities exist that may not apply. For example, in Kiswahili there are instances of singing or chanting. Not all levels participate in all the categories above. Nursery schools, for instance, do not participate in special compositions. In replicating the above categories for primary schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities, not all apply to the secondary school ones. Given the particularities, I did a head count of the 2017 edition of the KMF syllabus and found that for each language there is the following number of elocution categories across nursery, primary, secondary schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities:

*Table 4: Number of elocution categories per language*

Language	Number of categories
Kiswahili	106
English	95
Sign language	33
French	26
Other African languages	24
German	14
Arabic	10

(KMF Syllabus, 2017)

The above adds up to a total of 308 categories in elocution only. The example of elocution here demonstrates the multiplicity of categories found at the KMF. Such multiplicity is found not just in the number of classes but also in the number of performers. A unique example is the category for the visually impaired and learners with cerebral palsy as revealed in table 3. Elocution in a music festival is attributed to the African philosophy whereby many arts are embedded and performed as one. In this case, they were separated as a form of creating specialty, diversity and nurturing learners

in specific areas of art. Such is also replicated in the curriculum where music is a separate discipline from poetry, which is categorized under literature. It is, however, still called a music festival due to its history and initial objectives. The KMF may end up being referred to as a music and elocution festival over time. A unique revelation of table 3 is the themes of the special compositions in the choral category. Their political, economic and social inclinations are a strategic approach by the festival to involve the learners in current issues, to use the festival as a marketing tool on such issues as well as to assume and/or ascribe corporate social responsibility and community building.

During performance, the festival emphasizes the need for maintaining idiomatic characteristics of the respective cultures from which the performances are drawn. Given the stratification of the performances based on their cultural idioms, the festival adjudicators look out for not only the artistry (creative packaging of musical elements) but also for strict adherence to culture-specific modes of presentation. This is revealed in dance styles, instrumentation, song modes and other performative elements that should reflect how the respective communities uniquely manifest themselves. In watching the festival one can, therefore, be subjected to a variety of music traditions with differing levels of artistry, intensity, sound, color and dance movements among other performative characteristics. Interestingly, not all performers present that which comes from their culture. It is common, for instance, for participants from western Kenya (who are predominantly Luhya) to perform Pokomo music from the coastal part of Kenya. This is done as a form of intercultural sharing, interaction, appreciation and serves to educate learners about the country's cultural diversity. It is also an effort to complement classroom teaching about the music cultures of Kenya, thus serving as an alternative approach to education.

Regardless of whether a person is performing music from her or his community of origin or not, the evaluation of performances at the KMF is largely based on how the participants adhere to the categorization guideline, and maintain idiomatic relevance, artistic novelty as well as innovativeness. I sampled comments from selected adjudicators to establish what they considered in their judgement. With specific reference to folk songs, the following were common issues that they looked out for:

- pitching of the song for ease of participation by the choir,
- the role of the soloist in directing the performance,
- choral unity of the singers,
- uniformity of the accompanying dance styles, patterns and formations,
- appropriateness of the instrumental accompaniment,
- rhythmic, melodic and textual variety,
- idiomatic and cultural relevance of the chosen performative features,
- effectiveness of costuming.

To achieve evaluative skills, competence and relevance, selected practicing musicians and poets gather at an annual week-long conference in which they are trained. Referred to as adjudicators at the KMF, these trained musicians and poets watch and listen to performances, at the end of which they critique, award marks and rank the participants. Depending on standards, performances are usually marked out of 100 per cent, and my experience shows that low ranking performances score no less than 78 per cent and the highest (very good) up to 95 per cent at the national level. At lower levels, it is common for the participants to be scored lower on account of insufficient preparedness and lesser competition. The result of their work is presented first with a short oral demonstration concerning how their performances were evaluated, followed by an announcement of marks awarded and the respective positions of the participants. An important question is what impact such exposure has on the performers and ultimately on the future of the festival's creative process.

It has been observed that in a number of instances the idiomatic characteristics of selected communities are borrowed from others. Given the demands of the festival, it is possible that such borrowing is necessitated by the need to make the performances more captivating for the participating groups to win. It is possible that due to a lack of creative ideas, some performers simply borrow from others, oblivious to the idiomatic differences. A captivating category at the KMF, for instance, is the "adaptation of popular music" for choral performances. This music features dance styles drawn from pop music performances. Given its captivating nature, such dance styles are gradually finding their way into folk music, which traditionally shows different styles of performance that are idiomatically unique to the respective cultures. Such stylistic borrowing makes it easy for adjudicators to evaluate, as cultural non-conformity renders participants irrelevant. In

those instances where a large number of the participants show non-conformity, adjudicators are relegated to looking more so at performative elements than idiomatic and cultural relevance. This situation indicates a gradual shift of idiomatic expression that with time may signify further changes in musical expression.

Another influence has been that of Western music on folk music. It is common for a “folk song” to be presented in form of a medley, where short “songlets” are joined to form a complete song. Most of the groups typically end with the song that they started with, an indicator of the sonata influence. Others make use of a main song from which they depart and return to in different instances, indicating a borrowing from theme and variation of Western classical music. While this is folk music supposedly unique to Kenyan communities, there is remarkable evidence of form and structure from other parts of the world.

With regard to choral music, conducting is a norm for Western classical music, and it is practiced at the KMF, too. But what happens when music that depicts traditional idioms of Kenya is performed with the aid of a conductor? The conducting draws more than hand movement to show the choir how pieces are performed, but also incorporates movement in the form of dance. Perhaps such influence is a result of the natural process of African music performance, where song and dance are complementary. It could, therefore, be difficult for a conductor to stand still and only wave her or his hands when the music is tempting enough for dance to be elicited. The conducting experienced in some instances at the KMF may, therefore, be regarded as a form “director participation” not conducting as it is within the Western classical domain. Directing in this case gives it a more holistic dimension where the leader makes use of gestures and performative mannerisms beyond the conducting box, fully participating in the performance yet not directing it.

The foregoing examples demonstrate the effects of cultural exchange as experienced at the KMF. It can be argued that it is possible to identify characteristics of the respective music cultures and/or practices in a given performance at the KMF. But it is also true that the cultural exchange coupled with consistent practice has resulted in a musical character that is uniquely KMF and/or Kenyan. A remarkable performance technique that can ably qualify the foregoing submission is realized in the “adaptation and arrangement of pop music”, where the singers vocalize the instrumental timbres. This is dis-

tinctively a KMF product that arguably has been perfected in Kenya, courtesy of the creativity, culture and practice within the KMF space.

## **KMF community**

This paper regards members of the KMF community as the people who in whatever way have contributed to writing the success story of the festival. Historically, mainstream communities are based on common heritage, language, culture and territorial placement. In this case, however, the KMF is considered a community based on a shared artistic commodity and processes in musical arts, an opinion that is shared by Shelemay, who believes that “shared habits bind people into social groups according to specific aspects of the self (gender, class, age, occupation, interests).” (2011: 355) This being a community, different members are charged with varied responsibilities. The conscious or unconscious isolation of any of the members of this community would lead to a malfunction of the whole.

As shown in the historical description above, the KMF was started by the British settlers who formed an important part of the community not just as players but as initiators of the concept, the culture they cultivated (based on their home culture) and the influence they have had on the subsequent members of the KMF. At its early stages, an important player in the KMF was Graham Hyslop (1910-1978), the then officer in charge of music and drama in the Kenya colony. Hyslop in many ways defined how performances were and are carried out to date. The officers (mainly the executive secretary) who came in after him maintained, built on and improved the technical and administrative structures that he left behind.

The other members include the teachers who train and direct participants during the performances. They are also drawn from all parts of Kenya as well as from outside. The performers include nursery and primary school pupils, secondary schools, colleges and university students, as well as teachers’ and lecturers’ clubs. The community extends to adjudicators, officials from the Ministry of Education and the president of Kenya, being the patron of the festival. Many other interested groups occasionally join the KMF community by partnering and sponsoring the festival, hence diversifying the community.

Currently, the KMF is held annually in a different region of Kenya on a rotational basis. An institution in one of the cities in the chosen region is then charged with the responsibility of hosting the festival. It can be argued that the hosting institutions and environments momentarily become part of the KMF community. This is based on the fact that at the given point, the hosting community consumes KMF products, just as the KMF consumes their products. Such exchange creates a sense of connection, shared values and communion. It is possible that after the festival, the hosting communities' knowledge about the KMF brings them closer together, making it easier to relate with and increasing appreciation of what it entails. Chances of making lasting community ties cannot be dispelled.

An interesting feature of this community is how participants are programmed to perform. The dramaturgy of the KMF is designed so that the nursery schools are the first. They are then followed by primary schools, who perform alongside teacher training colleges (TTC). The middle days of the festival are dedicated to polytechnics and diploma colleges. The last set of performers are usually secondary schools who perform alongside universities and university colleges. The reasoning behind this dramaturgy is that TTCs train primary school teachers. Performing at the same time as primary schools provide an opportunity for the student teachers to interact with their prospective learners in advance. It is an early opportunity to understand the primary school pupils with regards to performance. The same is true for universities which train teachers for secondary schools.

Another reason is that universities and secondary schools show higher levels of performance given their level of artistic maturity and availability of resources. Them coming last gives the festival a chance to end on a climax. Such a climax is not only achieved by the performers but also by the type of music presented. It is common, for instance, that arrangements of pop music categories are presented last because of their competitive and entertaining nature. At the end of the festival, selected exemplary performances from all levels come together to present a finalist concert that is non-competitive. From the gala concert, a few of the more exemplary performances that are also based on culture-idiomatic diversity are selected for presentation to the president of Republic of Kenya, who is the patron of the festival. The last two instances show how the festival brings unity. After all the competitions in separate instances, performers come together to form a team that puts on a common non-competitive concert. The festival fosters unity in diversity.

Members of the KMF community described above show varied ages, levels of musical ability and experience, different cultural backgrounds as well as diverse personal and professional affiliations. Such a complex web of community members not only positions KMF as a transnational space based on diversity but exemplifies the miscellaneous impacts on the practice and creative process of the festival as well as the resulting musical culture. The fact is that music as the central commodity, process and activity plays an important role in identity and community formation, an opinion shared by Turino who states that:

music, dance, festivals, and other public expressive cultural practices are a primary way that people articulate the collective identities that are fundamental to forming and sustaining social groups, which are, in turn, basic to survival (2008: 95).

## Integrated discourse

Drawing from the content of the KMF, it is evident that a wide range of music is presented at the festival, the themes of which are equally diverse. Seemingly, the performance of folk, art, dance and instrumental music focuses on reproducing what was composed several years back. It can be argued that such pieces are chosen for performance due to their technical and artistic relevance and not for what they communicate as such. Re-performance of music from the archive in essence brings the pieces to life and gives them a sense of artistic renewal in the current society. A pertinent concern for this paper is that apart from its artistic endowment, to what extent does the KMF delve into current societal issues? The concern is based on the fact that the festival is education-based and brings together people from diverse cultures, hence the need for discourse beyond artistic presentation.

On mentioning the phrase music festival, one would immediately switch into performance mood, hearing sounds and seeing people in artistic action. It is, however, interesting to note that the Kenya Music Festival communicates more than its musical sound. It is currently a norm that the festival has an overriding theme each year, where performances, speeches, merchandise and all activities of the festival focus on communicating the same. In 2017 for instance, the festival theme was “Enhancing National Unity, Cohesion and

Integration through Kenya Music Festival". It is, therefore, imperative that the different participants not only see the artistic substance of the festival but also their social and corporate responsibility towards better nationhood. It is in the interest of the international community that while international ties are fostered, the peaceful co-existence of people of the respective nations be achieved. KMF ably takes an important position in not only supporting this debate, but being a practical example of unity, cohesion and integration. This is noted in the way participants come together to compete in a friendly environment that is devoid of gender, regional, ethnic, racial or any other form of discrimination. By friendly competition it implies that winning or losing is not a recipe for enmity but rather presents an opportunity for participants to learn from each other, embrace each other's gifts and talents and importantly nurture talent as they build a community of artists.

It has also been observed recently that many persons and institutions partner with KMF with a view to supporting, promoting and sponsoring the festival all while engaging in alternative discourse concerning emerging issues in the society at national and international levels. The partners sponsor certain themes which are repackaged into songs and poems for performance at the festival. At the KMF, these are referred to as special compositions. But what is special about them? The focus of the compositions is to communicate pertinent information, hence the need for strategic thematic packaging and development of the songs/poems, yet not compromising their artistic relevance. What is more, the intention is for the performers themselves to know, internalize and practice what they seek to communicate through the special compositions. This brings a unique dimension of educational philosophy where learners are immersed in art from which they acquire important novel ideas outside of the mainstream classroom scenario. In this case, art and performance may be considered as an alternative or complementary classroom.

Over the years, organizations from the political, human rights, business and social sectors (among others) have been part of such discourses at the KMF. In 2018, for instance, a number of institutions sponsored themes that participants composed and performed (Ministry of Education 2018). Table 3 demonstrated some of the topics that addressed varied current social, economic and political issues. To give them the desired prominence, such topics were performed under special composition categories. Such topical issues are pertinent to the current society not only in Kenya but across the world.

By the KMF providing a stage where such issues are presented in an artistic manner, the festival further positions itself not only as a music fete but as a platform for social, political and economic discourse. Art, in this instance, is employed to provide more efficacy to communication given that it reaches out to more people and is communicated by the people who are affected by the issues. Given the affective nature of music, artistic presentation lends the message to the desired recipients with ease and efficacy, hence enhancing the chances of better communication. Whereas such information is meant to correct certain issues in society, it also acts as a form of social control where through art young people learn to uphold certain virtues, hence preventing future negative occurrences.

Until 2005, the festival was held at the Kenyatta International Conference Center (KICC) in Nairobi, an infrastructural identity for the city that serves as a tourist attraction, as well. The center was a strategic site for the festival given that people from different parts of Kenya and the world were able to attend the festival as part of their touristic undertakings. In the process, the KMF became part of the touristic venture at the KICC where the diverse cultures of Kenya were exhibited on this international platform. It can be argued, however, that the international center ended up packaging KMF as a global commodity that would still attract many people even if it was held outside the KICC.

In 2006, the executive committee decided to stage the festival in different parts of Kenya on a rotational basis. Given its already achieved reputation, the festival moved its community away from the KICC, hence developing a new and more integrated community in the process of its mobility. While this may be viewed as a way of promoting local tourism, international tourists are also obliged to visit more parts of Kenya courtesy of KMF. The holding or staging of the music festival in different parts of the country also enables the participants to know their country better as well as to break ethnic nations' borders and tensions, thereby promoting better cohesion. Additionally, the people of the respective parts of Kenya are able to enjoy the music, and they also learn from the themes, especially from the special compositions that are presented in the festival. The KMF may be viewed as a strategic platform for diverse emerging social, political and economic discourse in the world.

## **The impact of the transnational space on creativity and diversity of music**

The KMF is a unique space that has had a far-reaching impact on many aspects of Kenyan society. It is for instance notable that the nation is comprised of 43 known ethnic communities that similarly exhibit distinct musical cultures. Given such diversity, one would be concerned about whether there exists a Kenyan choral identity. As previously discussed, the presentation of the diverse music of Kenya has facilitated a substantial borrowing from the respective cultures. It can, therefore, be argued that while each musical culture that is presented at the KMF has its own uniqueness based on idiomatic particularities, there are certain aspects of performance that can be clearly regarded as born out of the festival, over time constructing a Kenyan choral identity. In terms of staging folk songs, the performers arrange themselves in a semicircle of two lines, which is a complete departure from the traditional formations. Related to the folk songs are the dances, which are always started off stage. In the process of the performance, they make geometrical patterns as well as representations of letters of the alphabet. While this is regarded as a form of variation for the sake of artistry, it can also be a means for complementing and incorporating other areas of learning in performance, hence forming a transdisciplinary approach to education.

Western classical music is a genre that was the first on stage at the KMF and has existed at the festival for a long time. Currently, it continues to grow as more categories of classical music continue to be introduced into the festival. The music practiced at the KMF is based on theories that many choral directors have read in books. Few had the opportunity to interact with the early British musicians who showed them how such music should be performed. The current group of musicians, though, includes a fair share who studied in Europe or America and therefore have first-hand experience of classical music performance practices. Perhaps technology has equally been a good tidings for the KMF, given that many can now watch via the internet how classical music is practiced. It is, however, common knowledge that classical music is not as well internalized as the folk music of Kenya, which most musicians have grown up with.

To this end, the practice of classical music at the KMF has also been subject to substantial influence from the folk practices of Kenyan music. In terms of vocal rendition, it is common to hear choirs with broadened voices

and gliding approaches. As pertains conducting, the influence of African rhythm has led to an observable emphasis on the individual details of the rhythmic elements. A number of directors conduct while tapping their feet or snapping their fingers. Where the music calls for dance movement, the conductors unconsciously incorporate the entire torso movement. In a number of cases, conductors also sing along with the choir, perhaps alluding to the communal nature of African music. Whereas conducting has a specific character in the Western classical tradition, its employment at the KMF has experienced a shift that to a large extent is identifiable as a Kenyan choral identity.

Further influence is observed where musicians adapt Kenyan folk melodies, which they re-arrange in a Western classical style in terms of melodic, rhythmic and thematic development as well as the entire form and structure. The most common structure that was mainly propagated by the early British musicians is the Sonata form, which is notable not only in arrangements but also in performances of folk songs. Notably, “songlets” are joined in a medley to form one song, where the starting piece will also be employed as the ending. Apart from rearranging folk melodies, KMF musicians also compose in traditional Kenyan rhythmic idioms, albeit based on Western classical techniques. The most developed arrangements are the adaptations of pop music, where the singers vocalize the instrumental sections of the music. Such compositions and arrangements have over time distinctively come to achieve a character that in a number of ways borrows from Western classical music but then completely depart from it, especially when it comes to performance. African dance, instrumentation, ornaments, dramatization, among other visual and performing arts, are extensively employed in the execution of such songs. To this end, performance on stage shows a marked departure from the classical tradition, giving it a face that is distinctively Kenyan.

The foregoing discussions reveal how the KMF, through cultural interaction, has negotiated a Kenyan choral identity that is evident in dance, folk music and art music. The identities have been realized in the internal components and structure of the music, most markedly in terms of its performativity. It can be argued that perhaps the presentational aspects have mainly been shaped due to the traditional Kenyan music influence, which is primarily performative. It is possible to identify the specific idiomatic characteristics of the cultures from which they have been borrowed. It can, however, be presumed that the way the respective idioms have been combined has been

and is an ongoing process that is identifiable as Kenyan. The KMF has, therefore, fostered an identity construction for Kenyan choral music by localizing Western music while at the same time “exoticizing” local music.

## Reflections

The Kenya Music Festival as a transnational space has been nurtured by three important concepts: culture, creativity and practice. The KMF model was born from a British culture but later incorporated Kenyan musical cultures as a means of making the festival more inclusive. Over time, musical representations from different cultures have defined the content of this festival. Given its interactive nature, the practice of the respective music at the KMF has led to the creation of newer cultures which share identifiable characteristics with their mother cultures yet are unique on their own. This paper views the KMF as a pot that is bringing together cultures due to the creativity and practices employed at the festival.

The day-to-day running of the festival has also gradually been transformed into a culture in and of itself. In terms of schedule, the festival is well programmed in the activities of the Ministry of Education, where one can anticipate it at specific times. The way music is performed at the KMF has a definite mannerism where the entire fete starts with an assembly for the performance of the Kenyan national anthem, opening prayers and a briefing about the program of the day. On stage, the participants start by introducing their work before their performances. A typical introduction is: “honorable adjudicators, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. On stage is school A ready to present...”. This has been practiced so much over time that one is able to anticipate what the participants will say. It is also common for adjudicators to start their public evaluation speeches by thanking the participants, highlighting positive aspects of the performance before moving onto the negative ones and the ratings. The running of the festival has thus become a culture with a defined liturgy due to continued practice.

The interactive nature of the festival has also had an impact on the creativity it exhibits. This has been realized in the way participants follow advice from the adjudicators, such that subsequent performances largely put into practice that which they have been advised. The participants keenly watch each other’s performances so that they can try to imitate the winning group.

Such imitation has led to similarity in the way performances are done at the festival but has also improved on the creativity, thus leading to higher standards. It is also noted that music teachers play a big role in the innovation of newer ideas in the performances at the KMF. The interaction of cultures has equally contributed to the borrowing of ideas that has given rise to hybrid music performances.

The KMF can be viewed as a commodity and a process. Culture, practice and creativity are concepts that have over time strategically nurtured and positioned the KMF as a transnational music space. This has been realized in the way cultural integration and interaction have been fostered at the festival. Such interaction has over time created and recreated new cultures within the existing ones. The development of the KMF has largely been based on creative novelty, which when practiced over time has resulted in the emergence of certain musical identities. Importantly, diverse content and creativity have been fused to not only render artistic products but to communicate pertinent information to and within the society. Based on creativity, culture and practice, the transnational space at the KMF has in many ways helped the festival to achieve its artistic objectives as well as other pertinent societal roles and obligations.

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