

Music in Kenyan Christianity: Logooli Religious Song. Jean Ngoya Kidula. 2013. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 17 b&w illus., 53 music exs, index, 312pp.

Kidula's extensive research into Logooli¹ Christian music-making has culminated in a thorough study of the effects of western Christian missionary work on Kenyan local culture and music. Her book begins by introducing the reader to Logooli culture, drawing on research from expert scholars and her own experience of growing up in a Logooli village. From the beginning of the book we are presented with an "insider's" voice, rather than a foreign scholar's point of view. As a result, the text gives valuable background insight that informs the textual and musical analyses throughout. A luminous example of this is Kidula's knowledge of traditional Logooli story-telling songs and their effect on the textual structure of Christian localised choruses (89 - 90).

The book is carefully structured around five stages of the historical development of western musical genres in Africa. These are the Logooli encounter with missionary Christianity; early Christian Logooli hymnody (also broadly termed as "book music"²); accommodation and adaptation of "book music"; syncretism and the development of local "songs of the Spirit"; and contemporary Logooli music. Broadly these five categories seem to mirror Krabill's six stages of musical encounter and development,³ categories which formed a part of *Music in the Life of the African Church*, of which Kidula was co-editor.⁴ The Epilogue ties all these stands together beautifully, showing how, over a period of one hundred years, localisation has helped to transform Western hymn genres into far more palatable musical styles for the Logooli and many African Christians.

An important theme comes to light from the beginning of the book. This is the aesthetic and spiritual disregard the missionaries showed towards local forms of religion and music-making. While the missionaries' good intentions cannot be denied, the devastating effects of their "Christianising" on cultural norms are clearly articulated. See, for example, the discussion on Logooli circumcision rites, a tradition rich in local music-making (65–66). As a result, Kidula comments, "Few indigenous songs [now] celebrate the rite" (page 66). One gets the impression that there is a deep sorrow for the loss of aspects of rich cultural traditions in the transition to Christianity. However, the reader is acutely aware of Kidula's non-judgemental attitude towards the missionaries. Instead of adopting a negative attitude, she chooses to celebrate the tenacity and creativity of her people in relation to the demands placed upon them by the Christian foreigners. Thus, by the end of the book, the destruction of Logooli musical culture is actually turned on its head by systematic analyses of present practice. What Kidula

¹ The Avalogooli are a cultural group found in the far western region of Kenya.

² A term directly related to Christian institutional education and the necessity to read the Bible.

³ Krabill's six stages are: Importation; Adaptation; Alteration; Imitation; Indigenization; and Internationalisation. See King, Roberta, et. al. *Music in the Life of the African Church*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008.

⁴ King, Roberta, et. al. *Music in the Life of the African Church*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008.

shows the reader is that local culture often trumps its colonial dominators by gradually morphing foreign structures until they absorb local expressions of being.

One of the great strengths of the book is Kidula's textual analyses. Hymnologists will be interested in the transformation many well-known English hymns have undergone in translation to Logooli. A striking example is the third verse of "Hark, my soul, it is the Lord" which, in the Logooli context has been understood to give teaching on the morality of babysitting (99). Kidula cleverly includes the original English texts, followed by the Logooli translation, often followed by a re-translation back into English. As a result, the full force of the contextual changes in translation quickly becomes apparent. Another interesting aspect of the textual analyses is when the tonal implications of the Logooli language clash with the melodic contours of Western melodies (171 and 231). While this is a fairly well-known phenomenon in mission hymnody, apparent also in Southern African, in her analyses Kidula explains exactly how the natural pronunciation of particular words are changed when sung with particular melodies. She explains that Logooli speakers who are not accustomed to these idiosyncrasies need to be told which meaning is actually intended by the translators.

The depth with which Kidula analyses each of her examples — musically, textually and theologically — is what makes this book stand out. The theological explanations behind the texts are valuable, especially in the "spirit songs" where cultural connections with Biblical stories may sometimes be obscure to non-Logooli readers. The music itself is carefully transcribed and discussed, highlighting significant attributes. Here the discussions about body rhythm and movement are particularly important. Often non-sounding rhythms are not included in transcriptions nor are they apparent in sound recordings since they cannot be seen or heard. To counter this Kidula carefully explains the complexity of the rhythmic intentions of the singers. Again and again this component of the analyses adds a dimension of understanding which enhances the overall description of each song/hymn. Having the original text and music of the Western progenitors of certain hymns is also a helpful element of the analyses. Readers will be struck by just how radically both music and text have been adapted to speak more authentically to local people.

Kidula's gift is to give a human face to her meticulous work. Short anecdotes pepper the book and add a dimension which is not often discernible in academic works. Here the Epilogue deserves special mention. In this short chapter we are given a glimpse into the Logooli tradition of singing in community and just how integral it is to life in general. The reader is told of a group of participants who agree to be recorded for academic study. However, they become so involved in singing and praying, that they completely forget about the original intention of the gathering. It is, I think, what many ethnomusicologists dream of: permission to record, but without the barrier of self-awareness, or the notion that the group should present only their best numbers.

There are only a couple of slightly confusing terms which could be addressed in future editions. The first is the phrase "middle-of-the-road". It appears frequently enough throughout the text to be of importance, and yet it is not defined. Clearly it

denotes a moderate position, but the reader is never given an example to fully describe what it means in the Logooli context. It could mean any number of things to different people. To an Anglican, it may mean that hymns and choruses are sung in worship (as opposed to just hymns, or just choruses). To a Pentecostal it may mean singing choruses and “spirit songs” (as opposed to just choruses or just “spirit songs”). Theologically “middle-of-the-road” also has different meanings in different contexts. Another term which confused me slightly was “church drum” (e.g. 93). Is this a side drum (94)? Or is it a *kidindi*? I surmise that it is most likely the latter, but this is never made explicit in the text. Nonetheless, these are small issues in a book which is otherwise thorough and insightful.

Kidula’s book comes at a time when the study of Christian music in Africa is growing rapidly. In recent times there has been an increasing interest in the localisation of Western hymns and songs by specific cultural communities. In a sense, what seems to be emerging is a new voice within some communities which, while it has not rejected the colonial mission music, has allowed local structural, textual and musical elements to bubble to the surface and completely engulf the original material. What is unique about this particular book is that the author is from the host community. Often ethnomusicological studies are conducted by someone outside of the study’s control group, i.e. foreigners. While this can lend a sense of objectivity to a study, it can also lead to misrepresentation or misunderstanding of cultural norms. Here we are offered a rare and authentic glimpse into a world which, for many of us, is inaccessible and beyond our capacity to fully understand. Jean Ngova Kidula has given us an authoritative study informed by her own experience that provides valuable information regarding the effects of the colonial encounter on church music in a specific cultural context. This book adds significantly to existing scholarship.

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References

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