

Tuning the Kingdom: Kawuugulu Musical Performance, Politics, and Story Telling in Buganda. Damascus Kafumbe, 2018. Rochester: University of Rochester Press. 31 illustrations, 23 musical examples, bibliography, index. 151 pp.

Damascus Kafumbe's *Tuning the kingdom* is a fascinating ethnography on *Kawuugulu*, a composite term for a royal music and dance ensemble of the Buganda kingdom, in Uganda, East Africa. As one of the longest surviving oral forms of the Buganda, *Kawuugulu* is explored as a mirror of Buganda's history and survival through competing forces of missionisation, colonisation, and post-independence violence. Although there are earlier studies on Buganda (Cooke 1992; Kagwa 1934; 1949; 1971; Kasirye 1959; Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2005; Nsimbi 1956; Roscoe 1911), Kafumbe provides a contemporary perspective of the socio-political, hierarchical structure and social relations of the Buganda as evidenced in *Kawuugulu*. Based on field research in the Buganda kingdom, the author interrogates the significance and nuances of the convergence of music performance, storytelling, politics, and aesthetics in *Kawuugulu*. The phrase, "tuning the kingdom", is used metaphorically to illustrate socio-political ruptures, transitions, continuities, and to draw correlations between socio-cultural changes in Buganda kingdom and *Kawuugulu* performance.

By mirroring the Buganda monarchical structure and hierarchy, *Kawuugulu*, which is also primarily hereditary and exclusive to the Aboobutiko clan, paints a portrait of how multi-levels of belonging, access, and participation are established and negotiated. Through an interrogation of the system of inclusion and exclusion in *Kawuugulu* performance, Kafumbe illustrates how access to *Kawuugulu* and other forms of power relations presents an analogy of wider clan access and control dynamics, as well as power relations in Buganda kingdom. The argument of *Kawuugulu* as a reflection of Buganda is further substantiated by human and non-human actors, symbolisms, paraphernalia, and other performance artefacts, which offer different socio-political meanings.

Tuning the Kingdom is arranged in five chapters. It has a Preface and Introduction that sets the tone for the book. This part of the book describes the motivation for the research, fieldwork negotiations, and the context of the book. The author begins by exploring the political history of Buganda, including the missionisation enterprise in Buganda as a harbinger of colonialism and other cultural disruptions in Buganda. Written in English but interspersed with Luganda—a variant Bantu language, the book, with its fluid, narrative style, animated by a plethora of pictures, makes for an easy and interesting read. Through vivid description, the link between *Kawuugulu* performance and the socio-political life of Buganda kingdom is illustrated. The significance of *Kawuugulu* ensemble, which extends beyond entertainment to include its very crucial role of protecting the Kabaka (head of the kingdom), is also described. Through the primary use of what the author refers to as "nuanced interpretations" or multiple accounts of human and non-human storytelling, a major source of *Kawuugulu* repertoire is generated.

Following the Preface and Introduction is Chapter One, which explores contemporary expressions of *Kawuugulu* music and dance. The author eloquently

situates himself within this space, highlighting the negotiation of his liminal identity and how this influences his access to *Kawuugulu* indigenous knowledge. Chapter One also unpacks a multi-layered, complex web of relationships expressed in simultaneities of exclusion and inclusion, tensions that emerge, and the divergences in matrilineal and patrilineal links. By citing multiple etymologies of the name, *Kawuugulu*, the author demonstrates links between the name and structure of *Kawuugulu* and Buganda political structure. Further correlations are established through the ensemble structure and organisation of *Kawuugulu*, as in, for example, the arrangement and varied prominence of a set of six drums, which are central to *Kawuugulu* performance. The chapter also discusses the classification, hierarchy, construction, style, organisation and tuning of the drums, including their roles and levels of significance, with two out of the six drums identified as dominant drums. I find the representation of *Kawuugulu* drums as living bodies, ancestors, kings, relatives, spirits with agency, striking. Their status is reified in their perceived supernatural ability, which enables them to play until certain conditions are met, and the reverence they hold, including their ability to regulate access to *Kawuugulu*. In a sense, this aligns with studies against a dominant human-centric approach to ethnography and music research and proposes a multi-species approach that decentres the human (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, Silvers 2020). This approach recognises human and non-human actors as existing with mutual interdependence in a musical cosmology.

The system of intra-clan politics and *Kawuugulu*, particularly, the relationship between *Kawuugulu* and different strands of Butiko society, are examined in Chapter Two. Due to its centrality to power and royalty, *Kawuugulu* is presented as a prototype of clanship in Buganda and as a fulcrum that holds different layers of the Aboobutiko clan and indirectly, other clans, together. Described in this chapter are the multiple origins of *Kawuugulu*, different themes of *Kawuugulu* music repertoire, *Kawuugulu* performance context, and musical notations which the author describes as an approximation at best. This chapter further illustrates how *Kawuugulu*, particularly the primary drums, *Kawuugulu* (female drum) and Kasajja (male drum), mirror gender hierarchy, authority, leadership dynamics, and corroborates *Kawuugulu* as an analogy of the Aboobutiko clan.

Chapter Three engages the relationship between *Kawuugulu* and royal politics. In particular, the privileged and often coveted access of the *Kawuugulu* ensemble to the Kabaka based on their prerogative of protection and entertainment of the Kabaka. The Buganda kingdom is one whole with authority distilled into smaller clans, occupying different roles and varying levels of prominence. This chapter further details the multiple origins of the other royal drums which are similar yet in conflicting accounts. The complementarity of drumming, dancing and politics is explicated in this chapter through a description of the various *Kawuugulu* associated dances, their origin, body movements and their embedded politics and history. The author frames this as an “analogic” relationship, that is forged by the fusion of drum rhythms, songs, and dances. In addition to their music-making and entertainment value, *Kawuugulu* drums

are considered catalysts for the institutionalisation and sustenance of royal power and hierarchy. This chapter consists of songs with translations, musical examples, and performance contexts. In addition to the musical examples, links are established between the songs and a story that occurred or established practice in Buganda. The author concludes this chapter by describing contemporary presentations of *Kawuugulu*, the dance, and how they reflect a contemporary performativity of power and social relations in Buganda.

Chapter Four examines *Kawuugulu* and inter-clan politics. The author explores in more detail the centrality of storytelling, which is a tool for class distinction, thereby reinforcing hierarchy, exclusion and inclusion in *Kawuugulu* performance. These stories are mostly rendered as songs with themes of familial, clan, marital affiliations, and historical events in Buganda. Each song/story is followed with a description of the song, its context, performance boundaries, and multiple, rich underlying history. These stories also demonstrate how kinship and clanship ties are established, strengthened and maintained through blood, marriage, and other performative actions. Despite the institutionalisation of clan or kin ties in Buganda, they only become legitimised by performative practices such as ritual, music, and other acts of reciprocity. For more access, the musical examples embedded in this text are mostly structured in the call and response style, and similar rhythmic and melodic patterns, thereby enabling access to its musical technicalities. Clan inclusion/exclusion as power, secondary and primary means of belonging, and how social status, identity, clanship, and social mobility, are established and negotiated through, for example, rituals or initiation rites such as the Mukago are further explored in this chapter.

The last chapter, which is mostly a summary and conclusion, echoes the synergy of music performance, storytelling, and politics in Buganda. While *Kawuugulu*, similar to the Buganda kingdom, has experienced disruptions, and near annihilation, its survival and sustained significance is predicated on its embodied, internalised practice and its regulatory and exclusive practices. The supernatural dimensions of *Kawuugulu* performance are considered an important means of sustaining its power and socio-political currency. As one delves further into the book, themes that jump at the reader include power relations, negotiation of power, identity, musical politics, exclusivity, access, and dualism. The concept of dualism, mostly referenced as “double”, reinforces the idea of each living being as a double, with the double being different things, ranging from animate to inanimate objects.

This book excels in its accessible and narrative style of articulating Buganda history and, to an extent, a particular East African culture. The author’s embodiment of Buganda culture, and his liminal status as a cultural insider-outsider, are valuable and shines through the book. I reckon that this facilitates a balance of the sense of “cultural exoticism” and exaggerated “cultural esoterism” that sometimes characterises writings about one’s culture and those of others. In addition to its unveiling of the rich and nuanced Buganda culture, the book succeeds in corroborating the notion of music-making in many African societies as an event, connected to other cultural practices, that

transcend simplistic renderings as art for art's sake. While the author does a good job in his style of delivery, the use of thick descriptions, and sustaining the attention of the reader, the unusually long preface and introduction, given the length of the book, and the repetition in certain sections, appears monotonous. Although *Tuning the kingdom* is focused on a kingdom in Uganda, I think within a globalised world, the book would benefit from a connection of *Kawuugulu* to the broader context of modern-day Uganda politicking, and the contemporary status of the Buganda. Further, a reference to duality or “twoness”, which features prominently in the book and in many African cultures, such as the Yoruba and Igbo of west Africa, would have been valuable for a comparative discourse. Overall, *Tuning the kingdom* is a great addition, especially in the manner it extends and bridges the gap in previous scholarship on Buganda society. Its compact length, concise style, generous use of images, illustrations, and appendices makes for an enjoyable and animated reading experience. I consider this book particularly useful for those interested in the Buganda culture of East Africa, the politics of power and identity in music performance, and the politics of indigenous knowledge transmission.

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