



An Analysis of Indigenisation Dynamics of Kenya Army Band Martial Music

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Abstract

The weakening of British rule and the eventual emancipation of Kenya from colonial control brought the promise of a free nation able to validate its indigeneity through art, culture, and music. However, the Kenyan army band martial music has not fully realised this potential. Sixty years after independence, the Kenya army band plays British-style music and has slowly adapted to indigenous music. This paper is part of a continuing study at Langata Garrison in Nairobi, the home of the Kenya Army Band. The study employed a qualitative approach and a case study research design to analyse selected martial music scores. The guiding theory for this study is Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory, which aims to deconstruct colonisation elements through decolonial listening. The study reveals that while some progress has been made in incorporating Indigenous music, a more deliberate and broad-based approach is needed to cut the umbilical cord of the colonised from the coloniser.

Introduction

European powers met at the Berlin Conference in 1884-5 to discuss and formalise the colonisation and division of Africa. As a result, the continent underwent a period of boundary demarcation and significant colonisation, leading to far-reaching social, political, and economic subjugation of African nations (Emielu, 2011; Bulinda, 2014; Monareng, 2023). Kenya became a British colony, and the British imposed their rule on the country. The colonisers established the King's African Rifles, which consisted of native soldiers, as a display of military strength and to maintain control over Africans. These soldiers were given the status of protected persons rather than complete British subjects, serving as armed servants of the foreign government in reducing Africans to servitude while being commanded by the British to exert power over Africans (Parsons, 1999; Longair, 2024a). Additionally, the British introduced their language, values, culture, limited education, and religion, dismissing African practices as heathen and pagan. This imposition of British laws and values became oppressive, leading nationalist movements such as *mau mau* to agitate for freedom (North et al., 2024).

After gaining independence, Kenya's governmental institutions were modelled after the British legislature, judiciary, and executive, including the security and defence forces. The Kenya Defence Forces, as currently instituted, was derived from the pre-independence British military formation known as the King's African Rifles (Herbert & Sarkissian, 1997; Bulinda, 2014; Sitienei, 2018; Cullen, 2023). The musical culture of the Kenya army band is fashioned after the British armed forces and was utilised in a range of military contexts, including military camps, ships, aerodromes and battlefields, canteen huts, hospitals and Prisoner of War (POW) camps (Hanna, 2020). The Kenya Army Band is



one of the oldest music ensembles in the country, having operated under different administrations from colonial times to the present day (Njagi, 2022).

Although the band's music is frequently performed at public and state events, creating the impression that it is indigenous to Kenya, a closer examination reveals its predominantly British style interwoven with foreign influences. The band initially embraced British music and British-style uniforms, performing pieces in British styles composed by music directors who were graduates of the Royal Military School of Music at Kneller Hall in London. According to Bulinda (2014), this demonstrates the impact of colonialism and the nation's ties to its colonial past.

Over time, the band gradually integrated local elements into the structure of the British ensemble. This paper analyses the indigenous components of the band's martial music, offering a fresh perspective on the Kenya Army Band's unique approach. It emphasises the dynamics involved in the indigenisation of this genre, exploring how traditional and local influences shape the band's sound. The paper highlights the band's distinctive fusion of Western and Indigenous musical elements, as well as the impact of this blend on both their creative expression and cultural significance.

Method

The study used a qualitative approach and a case study research design. Although a repertoire of ten scores was available, the research focused only on five scores to conduct an in-depth analysis. The researchers obtained approval to conduct an in-depth qualitative content analysis on a purposive sample from the Kenya Army band's Principal Director of Music. While previous research focused on interviews with music directors and arrangers, this study emphasises the scores by the music directors and arrangers to highlight elements of indigenisation. The Kenya Army Band was also observed during performances at the Agricultural Society of Kenya (ASK) shows. The data was accessed from the Kenya Army Band Library and reflects the music performed previously and currently.

The researchers conducted content analysis to explore how indigenous elements were integrated into the martial music performed by the Kenya Army Band. As one of the military ensembles in Kenya, the researchers were mindful of the context of their study and employed the basic principles of autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, confidentiality, and honesty (Bracken-Roche et al., 2017; Schuman et al., 2021; Mehta et al., 2023).

Analytical and conceptual framework

The study is anchored in Dylan Robinson's "Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory" (Robinson, 2020), which consists of two parts. *Hungry listening* is a concept derived from *Halq'eméylem* words that refers to a colonial orientation characterised by a tendency to devalue Indigenous music, necessitating different listening perspectives, also known as positionalities. The second aspect of the theory is *Resonant Theory*, which emphasises the relationship between the listener and sound, advocating for a subject-subject relationship and ethical accountability in listening. This theory challenges the colonial stereotype of Indigenous music, which has also impacted those who were colonised, thereby offering an alternative perspective for experiencing Indigenous music while promoting the decolonisation of music.

Dependency Syndrome

While maintaining ties to the colonial past may be considered acceptable in some instances, there is concern that doing so could lead to underestimating one's capacity and fostering an excessive reliance on external sources for assistance. The most troubling issue is the practice of sending music directors abroad for training despite the presence of an established music school. This undermines the potential for developing local talent and squanders the opportunity to enhance local capabilities in music



further. It raises questions about resource allocation and the long-term sustainability of martial music in Kenya.

Within Kenya Army band circles, a dichotomy exists between martial and African music, with the former regarded as superior. The military musicians in Kenya's army band have been socialised to place a high value on martial music compared to other genres, thus upholding British social values, art, culture, and philosophy. This raises concerns regarding the impact on the identities of those involved. Munyaradzi (2024) refers to this original sin, first identified by Mazrui, as dependency syndrome, and while acknowledging it, Langmia (2023) describes it as a never-ending cycle.

Cultural erosion

It is common to undervalue indigenous cultural values in comparison to those imposed by Western influences. This situation is exacerbated by globalisation and the incessant consumption of easily accessible online content. Consequently, this trend may lead to a generation that does not subscribe to any specific set of values. According to Onyeji (2006), the risk of cultural decline and even extinction in African nations, including the loss of traditional practices such as playing the *oja* instrument, poses a significant concern that warrants attention. We believe that the recent unrest led by Kenyan youth known as Gen Z exemplifies the erosion of African values and a disregard for cherished African culture. The youth claimed to be tribeless, leaderless, and without religious affiliation.

The Kenya Army band plays a crucial role in either preserving or jeopardising cultural heritage, as it prominently promotes Western-style music to the detriment of Indigenous music. Despite this significant threat of cultural erosion, Yekini-Ajenifuja (2022) offers hope that within the realm of culture, music, fine arts, and drama are the most feasible elements capable of unveiling new horizons. The martial music of the Kenya Army band can invigorate and revitalise cultural preservation through the adoption of a considered process of indigenisation.

Indigenisation dynamics of Kenya Army Band Martial music

a) British-style elements in Kenya army band martial music

The British armed forces band performed in diverse military contexts; their dominant genres include military marches, patriotic songs, popular music of the era, and religious hymns (Hanna, 2020). The march genre was essential because it was designed to inculcate morale, inspire troops, and help maintain discipline during and after the war. March music was widely used within the empire and the colonies abroad, where music was assigned to specific regiments as their identity mark and in theatres of operations (O'Keeffe, 2024). Their repertoire was designed to provide music for all daily life, from waking up to mealtimes.

The Kenya Army band's martial music comprises brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments. This instrumentation has been preserved since the King's African Rifles era, continuing the traditional British military band arrangement. This continuation symbolises the ongoing cultural dominance of the West. As these instruments are not produced locally, the military is forced by prevailing circumstances to import them from abroad, incurring considerable costs.

The tradition of performing music with this specific configuration of the military band originated from a decision made in Britain during the 19th century. According to Bourassa (2015), the Royal Military School of Music (Kneller Hall) was established in 1857 to standardise British military music, as illustrated in Figure 1. The military band flourished during wartime, captivating audiences with its

grandeur and vibrant performances in open-air concerts and parades employing this setup (O’Keeffe, 2024).

Reeds

- 2 flutes and piccolo
- 2 oboes and English horn
- 2 bassoons and contrabassoon
- 1 E-flat clarinet
- 8 B-flat clarinets or A clarinets
divided in any manner desired or fewer in number if so desired.
- 1 alto clarinet
- 1 bass clarinet
- 2 alto saxophones
- 1 tenor saxophone
- 1 baritone saxophone

Brass

- 3 cornets in B-flat and
- 2 trumpets in B-flat, or
- 5 trumpets in B-flat (5 players total)
- 4 horns
- 3 trombones
- 2 euphoniums
- 1 E-flat tuba
- 1 BB-flat tuba, or
- 2 BB-flat tubas, if desired

Other instruments: percussion, harp, celesta, piano, organ, harpsichord, solo string instruments and choral forces as desired.

Figure 1: Woodwind and Brass Instruments of a martial band provided by Sharp

Since then, directors of the Kenya Army Band have continued to receive their musical training from Kneller Hall and various military music schools abroad. This prompts the question of whether there are inadequate high-quality institutions in Kenya to provide this training locally. Could this be why African instruments and music are not included in the repertoire? Dependence on training from Britain and other countries may result in a military band music education that leans towards Western systems, with insufficient emphasis on indigenous instruction. Conventional music notation and note reading are the standard in the Kenya Army Band, leaving little room for age-old oral transmission methods and other techniques, such as call-and-response, to convey indigenous knowledge, thus hindering improvisation and spontaneity.

The march form is the principal structure of the British military band. It consists of two main sections: the march and the trio (Warfield, 2011). Typically, a march form begins with a 4-bar introduction establishing the mood. Following the introduction is the first subject, usually 8, 16, or 32 bars long in the original key, which is frequently repeated. The second subject contrasts with the first, typically around 16 bars long and characterised by softer dynamics. The following section is the trio, which features the melody of the march and often includes changes in key, time signature, or dynamics. This section is usually about 32 bars long. The final part of the march form is the coda or recapitulation, occasionally preceded by the break strain, bridging it and the trio. This concludes the march by returning to the trio theme with slight modifications.

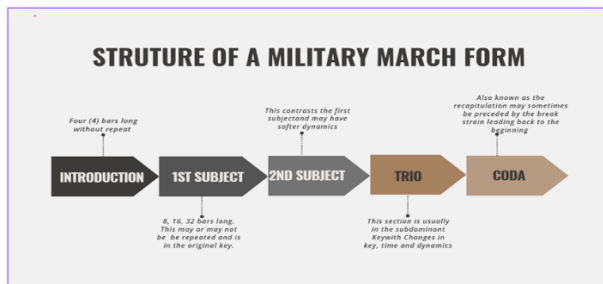
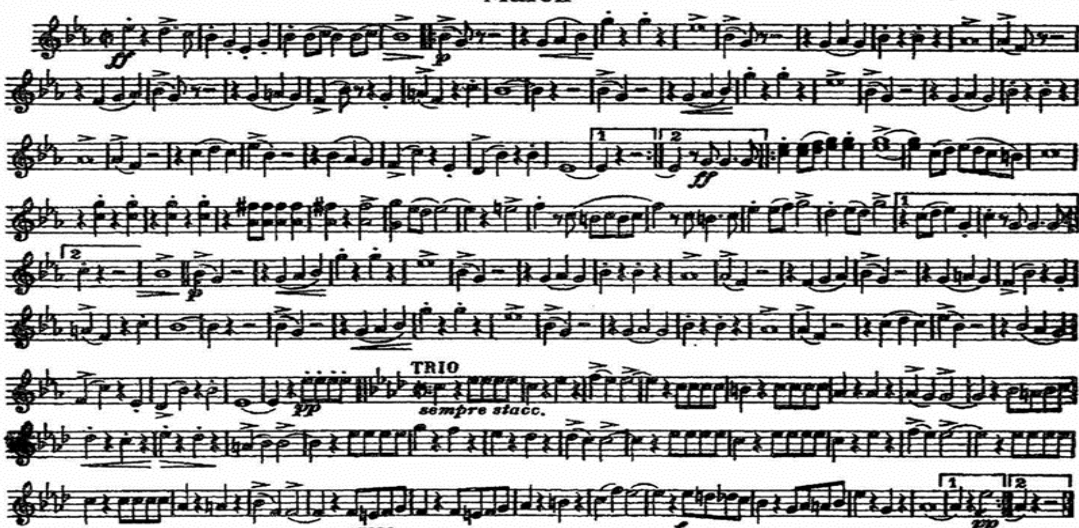


Figure 2: Structure of a March as created and popularised by John Philip Sousa (Source: authors, 2024).

SOLO & 1st B♭ CORNET COLONEL BOGEY KENNETH J. ALFORD
 March



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Figure 3: Colonel Bogey March: An excerpt of a standard march performed by a Kenya army band from British martial music

The renowned British composer Kenneth J. Alford, often referred to as the British March King, composed this Colonel march. He adhered to the established conventions of the march form, as previously outlined. A distinctive motif is repeated throughout the march, making it memorable. In Kenya today, this march is recognised by some older generations who remember a Kiwi commercial advertising the shoe polish brand of the same name. The march forms part of the Kenya Army’s martial music repertoire and is frequently performed during public events, becoming familiar to a considerable Kenyan audience. Bars 1-4 serve as a bold introduction, while Bars 5-36 present the first subject, contrasted with softer dynamics. The break strain occurs early, between the first and trio subjects, spanning the following 16 bars. The melody returns to the first subject before eventually transitioning into the trio in staccato.

b) Analysis of African elements in Kenya army band martial music

Rhythm is a crucial element of African indigenous music. In contrast to Britain's straightforward and simple rhythms, distinct African rhythms consist of complex patterns of interlocking polyrhythms and cross-rhythms (Olátúnjí, 2007; Mutuku, 2007; Munyaradzi & Zimidzi, 2012). Furthermore, Aydin (2024) asserts that rich African rhythms have influenced global genres and styles such as Jazz, Swing, Rock 'n' Roll, and Reggae. Polyrhythms were examined to ascertain whether the Kenya army band’s martial music still adheres to British march-like rhythms. It was found that the band continually adapts its music to perform with “marchable” rhythms, which ultimately detracts from its “Africanness.”

Full Score

ZUMBUKUKU

Arr. M.N. MAKADIA

Figure 4: An excerpt of a Kenyan Coastal song with complex polyrhythms

The use of indigenous languages in music composition and performance creates a unique dynamic. It is essential to utilise these languages to forge connections with diverse audiences across the past, present, and future. In contrast, Wa Mberia (2015) posits that languages serve as crucial vehicles for cultural transmission, identity formation, and value creation. Requesens-Galnares (2023) asserts that colonisation, globalisation, assimilation, and demographic changes threaten Indigenous languages, pushing them towards extinction. These languages are vital for preserving indigenous peoples' cultures, identities, and traditional knowledge. The United Nations has declared 2022-2032 the decade

for indigenous languages to protect them from extinction. Palmer (2024) concurs with Requesens-Galnares that Indigenous peoples' right to choose to use their languages to realise self-determination and exercise autonomy over matters that concern them. The authors of this paper agree that the responsibility lies with local communities to choose to use their native languages in sharing their music and connecting with audiences as a safeguard against extinction.



Figure 5: An excerpt of a Kikuyu Benga song arranged for the Kenya Army Band initially composed in 1978 by John Ndichu

The cultural significance of an ethnic group encompasses its artistic expressions, ceremonies, and community events, which often carry cultural and deep spiritual meanings. These traditional elements contribute to the identity of a group of people, reflecting their values, beliefs and historical narratives, influencing their perspectives of themselves and the world around them. Our analysis identified a specific cultural concept in the indigenous song from Western Kenya called *Mwana wa mberi*, which is sung. The song was initially performed to celebrate the birth of the firstborn, sung accompanied by the traditional fiddle, the *Ishiriri*.



Figure 6: An example of a song sung for specific cultural reasons but is played by Kenya Army band on public occasions

The term "ngoma" is Swahili and refers to two separate yet intertwined concepts for Western readers: music and dance. In African culture, music and dance are inseparable; one is rarely experienced without the other (Human & Van Niekerk, 2014). In a solemn event, such as a burial ceremony, an African is unlikely to remain stoic and unmoved. Instead, it incorporates body movement and dancing alongside the singing. When assessing the Kenya Army Band's martial music capability to integrate dance movements into their music, the band noted they must respect the uniform and the drill and not "desecrate its sanctity". However, the flairs and flourishes performed by the Drum Major are insufficient to achieve this integration.



Figure 7: A Photograph of the Director of Music, Drum Major, with a couple of band members of the Kenya Army Band (Sitienei, J., et al 2018)

Indigenous African music relies heavily on instrumentation and accompaniment, including various membranophones, idiophones, aerophones and chordophones (Fajinmi et al., 2022; Pizà, 2023). Therefore, instruments form the basic structure of indigenous African music. When the colonialists captured Africa, they found Africans with their music and musical instruments. They resorted to collecting and donating them to museums (Longair, 2024b). This may account for the fact that despite the many years of their existence and the fact that the nation is now a sovereign and independent state, none of the indigenous Kenyan instruments have been absorbed into the modern military band instrumentation. Occasionally, however, music is instead transcribed to suit the costly Western musical instruments.



Figure 8: An excerpt of *Kisumu 100*, a piece composed at the centenary celebration of Kisumu city

The tonality of African music is based on the pentatonic scale (Okafor, 2018). However, the repertoire of the Kenya Army Band contains fewer African soundscapes on the pentatonic scale. In the available scores studied, the music of the Kenya Army Band is based mainly on the Western diatonic scale.

c) Proposed indigenised composition model

The current military band scoring system is strict and inflexible, providing a template for composers and arrangers to follow. This restricts the inclusion of non-traditional instruments in the score. This study suggests working beyond these limitations and introducing a concept called "unbridled scores," which involves incorporating indigenous instruments into the score. The focus would be on using indigenous instruments as the primary instruments, with Western instruments adapting to the key and style of the African instruments.

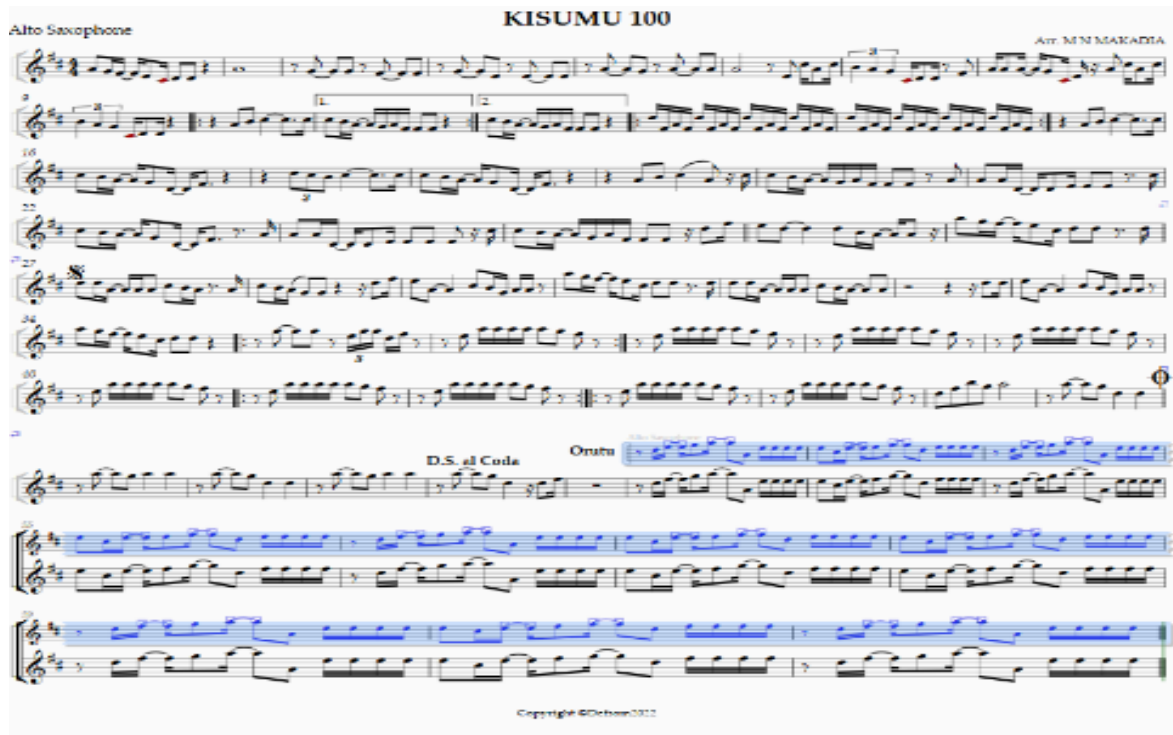


Figure 9 In this score, the part played initially by Orutu and scored for Alto Saxophone is restored to the original instrument.

Including an instrument ensures the music is performed in the music is performed from an indigenous perspective and context.

Results

Indigenous elements

This study emphasises the presence of indigenous elements in the Kenya army band’s martial music, including complex African rhythms, the use of indigenous languages and the cultural significance of traditional songs.

The study revealed that despite many years of independence as a nation, the military band instrumentation lacks essential African instruments for representing authenticity and Africanness. Instead, score parts for African instruments are arranged for performance by unrelated Western instruments.

The original language of the music performed may be indigenous, but this is unknown once the instruments perform the music without the choral part.

British Influence

The study illustrates that British martial band music considerably impacts the martial music of the Kenya Army Band. This influence is apparent in pedagogy, music composition, and performance. The British military band has imparted style, form, equipment, and training to the Kenya Army Band, resulting in a distinctly Western march form. When orchestrating indigenous songs, the Kenya Army Band adjusts to Western culture.



Fusion of Western styles and African Style

The Kenya Army Band's martial music repertoire showcases a remarkable blend of Western and African styles. This study indicates that the balance of this blend tends to favour Western influences over indigenous Kenyan ones.

Discussion

Cultural Dependency

The reliance of the Kenya Army band on British training and musical instruments indicates a dependency that hinders the full realisation of indigenisation towards an authentic indigenous sound. This raises the question of the purpose of independence and sovereignty if the former colony relies on the coloniser. It fosters a narrative that explores whether, as a nation, we can genuinely create and export Kenya's authentic music to the world. This study argues that it is time to liberate ourselves from this cultural dependency and showcase our unique musical heritage on the global stage.

Cultural Erosion

The predominant preference for Western music and instruments over indigenous Kenyan musical traditions within the Kenya Army Band raises serious concerns. It poses a significant risk of eroding Kenya's rich and diverse cultural heritage. This cultural dependency threatens to devalue and overshadow the unique musical expressions that are integral to Kenya's identity, thereby hindering the preservation and celebration of its vibrant heritage.

Potential for Change

Despite the obstacles, the Kenya Army Band has the potential to purposefully integrate indigenous elements, thereby significantly enhancing cultural preservation and identity. This strategic approach enriches the musical landscape and is a powerful testament to the band's commitment to honouring and celebrating Kenya's rich cultural heritage.

Conclusion

After analysing the selected music of the Kenya Army band, we assert that the music played carries colonial undertones and promotes a colonial culture that hinders decolonisation. Our study has shown that, although some progress has been made in integrating Indigenous music, a more deliberate and comprehensive approach is essential to sever the ties between the colonised and the coloniser. This will facilitate decolonisation and enrich the band's music, shifting towards embracing and prioritising indigenous musical practices and instruments. Such efforts will help preserve Kenyan cultural heritage and nurture a unique and authentic musical expression.

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