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A critical analysis of thematic concerns in Ronald Ontiri Onchuru's popular music

Joel Atuti Osubo & Charles Kebaya

Department of Linguistics and Languages, Machakos University, Kenya

Corresponding email: atutijoel37@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0190-2255>

Abstract

It has been argued that music plays a pivotal role in shaping societies and cultures across the world. Music is considered an essential aspect of human civilization and has the power to influence the political, social, moral, and cultural fabrics in society. At the core of our everyday experience with music, we use it to relax, express ourselves, come to terms with our emotions, and generally improve our well-being. Thus, music has evolved into a tool for healing and self-expression, often dictating how we, as individuals, take steps to impact society. Based on this realization, this article examined how Ontiri Bikundo deploys style in his popular music to foreground particular thematic concerns among the Abagusii community. Ronald Ontiri Bikundo is one of the popular musicians among the Abagusii of western Kenya. The study was premised on the understanding that music is one of the tools available to any creative artist in articulating issues affecting society. Consequently, it sought to identify and analyze various thematic concerns in Bikundo's purposively sampled popular songs. This article reveals that Bikundo brings to the fore various issues including HIV/AIDS, hard work, love, and moral decadence in the Abagusii society. The article shows that Bikundo uses popular music to advocate for change, urge for cultural tolerance and promote social cohesion in society. The article concludes that music is a social phenomenon and medium by which we not only shape our environment but impact on society.

Keywords: cultural tolerance, healing, popular music, social cohesion, self-expression, social phenomenon



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Public Interest Statement

Music has the power to connect with and influence people in a way that feels fundamentally different from other forms of communication. Humans often feel that “no one understands them” or knows how they “truly feel.” Many resort to music to find connections with others to express themselves or find a sense of understanding among peers. Music’s effect on the self is far-reaching, tapping into our memories, subconscious thoughts, emotions, and interests. Through music, artists explore various issues affecting the community and often provide their artistic vision to the challenges facing community. Consequently, this article examines how Ronald Ontiri Onchuru aka Bikundo uses music to address various issues afflicting the Abagusii society.

Introduction

Karin Barber (1997) observes that African popular art appeals to a wide varied of audiences to which they speak to because they are authentic, independently generated forms of entertainment produced and consumed locally. Further, Barber observes that these art forms “are telling us about society” (p.34) and require that we do not just appreciate “their aesthetic qualities in some vague way, but engaging with them in a specific and detailed attempt to ‘read’ them according to their own conventions” (p.34). Indeed, this study ‘reads’ Ronald Ontiri Onchuru’s, popularly known as Ontiri Bikundo, popular music as a response to Barber’s postulations and to unravel how the popular artist engages features of style to explore various issues affecting the Abagusii society.

While examining how popular art frames public discourse, Kebaya (2018) observes that popular art forms such as cartoons, jokes, comics and music “engages in particular expressive practices” (p.112) in society today. As Kebaya aptly puts it, these popular art forms express “a people’s fears, misgivings, pains, joys and convictions are depicted with authentic accuracy” (p.112). Often times, these expressions are audacious, forthright, and are in direction opposition to power and systems of governance as reflected in public discourses in society. Further, Kebaya opines that popular art are susceptible to different interpretations by different people because they “endowed with greater dynamism and vitality, and are at the centre of representing the cultural outputs of a people” (p.113). Guided by these observations, and the observation that there is an enormous literary output from the popular music among the Abagusii today, the study ‘read’ the diverse ways in which Ontiri Bikundo brings out thematic concerns affecting the Abagusii society.

Popular music, as a work of art, has the primary purpose of providing entertainment in the society. However, besides mere entertainment, music addresses various issues affecting society (Kebaya, 2022). Popular musicians employ language creatively to address various challenges in the society. Song provides popular musicians with a platform where they present, debate and articulate possible solutions to the various issues affecting society. Society grapples with issues such as low education standards, political instability, and social ills like corruption, moral decadence and cultural alienation. These issues are aptly captured and articulated in popular music among the Abagusii. However, this study was concerned with how Bikundo, one of the popular musicians among the Abagusii, deploys various features of style to address various issues affecting his society. The primary focus of the study was on how Bikundo employs various stylistic features in the selected songs not to merely entertain his audience but to also to identify and offer possible solutions to the conflicts in the society. By focusing on the selected popular songs, the study examined various themes that the popular artist foregrounds in the society and how he uses language creatively to bring out these themes.

Akivaga and Odaga (1982) observe that “songs like stories and proverbs are about the people’s condition of life and wisdom of the people” (p.69). In the process of creating, an artist shall focus on what is happening around him/her or on the day to day activities that take place in the society. In this regard, a close examination of Bikundo’s selected popular songs in this study depicts his ingenious use of style in expressing the various social realities inherent in the Abagusii society. The study was further

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anchored on the fact that popular music is a work of art, and like any work of art, it reflects the values of the society from which it stems. Jane Nandwa (1985) in “The Oral Artist and his Material” observes that artists draw their material from the immediate environment and societal experiences. This indicates that various issues that occur in the society at a particular time provide the necessary impetus for most of the creative works of art in the society. Artists, who are members of the society, observe various social realities creatively and fashion these social realities through language and then render them to the society. As Nandwa further observes, the artist chooses his/her material to suit his/her audience and strives to communicate the message in the most effective way and which is desirable both to him and the immediate audience. This involves a creative and deliberate use of language to express the various issues that affect society. The deliberate and creative use of language becomes the style of the artist uses to not only to depict the social issues affecting society but also foregrounding the social issues. This formed the basis of this study as it sought to explore thematic and stylistic features in Bikundo’s popular music.

In carrying out their roles as teachers, popular musicians like Bikundo discern various issues of concern that affect society and engage their imagination and creativity to express these realities through their music. This involves a creative manipulation of language in such a way that the intended audience does not feel offended or betrayed through the music. The creative manipulation of language becomes his/her style of articulating the societal sensibilities. To the popular musicians, style is a tool that enables one to articulate various issues in society whereas music provides a platform where these issues and their respective solutions are canvassed. Based on this background, this study sought to examine feature of style in Bikundo’s popular music and how it addresses various socio-cultural issues affecting the Abagusii society. It also sought to interrogate possible solutions that the musician provides to various issues that affects the Abagusii society.

Ronald Ontiri Onchuru’s Biography

Ronald Ontiri Onchuru, popularly known as Bikundo, was born in 1976 in Nyaribari Chache constituency, Kisii County. His parents passed on before he was 10 years old and he only managed to complete primary education. He was not able to continue with secondary education due lack of school fees. While in primary school, Bikundo participated in music competitions to the national level. This gave him an opportunity to perform for the then President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi at State House during the national music Galla festivals.

Ontiri Bikundo started his career in music together with the late Dismas Nyangau Onsoti in the 1990s with the famous song *One Day Morning*. The duo sang traditional folk songs while strumming Obokano and traditional drums in community theatre spaces. Bikundo and his former colleague the late Dismas Nyang’au are widely known for rubbing some MPs from the region in a wrong way with their song *Abachumbe Ng’ai Mwachiete* (MPs where did you go after getting elected), as they hit out at MPs for failing to fulfil their election promises.

After the untimely demise of Dismas Nyangau Onsoti, Bikundo continued to sing the traditional folk songs. However, after attending intensive music training at the French Cultural Centre in Nairobi, Bikundi has now moved from traditional folksongs to Afro fusion. Due to his style of composition and rendition of his popular songs, Bikundi participated as one of the finalists in the 2006 Spotlight on Kenyan Music project. His captivating stage presence, witty lyrics and interactive delivery has endeared him to a broad base of Abagusii fans. So far, he has 16 Albums to his credit.

Critical studies focusing on Bikundo’s popular music

Available studies on Ontiri Bikundo popular music are anchored on a linguistic perspective. Victor Ntabo, Naom Nyarigoti and Moses Gathigia compare selected popular songs of Christopher Mosiomi and Ontiri Bikundo in interpreting human being metaphors in Ekegusii popular songs using cognitive metaphor approach. The scholars engage the idea of conceptual mapping to understand how the two

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artists conceptualize human beings in their popular songs. While the said scholars engage a linguistic stance, the current study seeks to embark on a literary appreciation of Bikundo's use of language to portray various issues in the Abagusii society. Worth noting is the fact that metaphors have been examined in this study from a literary perspective.

Victor Ondara Ntabo (2019) in "A Categorization Strategy for Objects Metaphors in Ekegusii Pop Songs" uses the principle of Great Chain of Being metaphor (GCBM) to categorize various objective metaphors and Cognitive Linguistics (CL) as a framework to reveal the meanings of the categorized objects metaphors in Ekegusii pop songs. In his analysis, Ondara focuses on evaluating object metaphors in Bikundo's Obwanchani (Love) and concludes that Bikundo metaphors are embodied and situated in a specific environment, making it possible for the meaning of some of the metaphors used to elude the audience. However, Ondara's study does not examine how the metaphors identified bring out certain thematic concerns in Bikundo's music. Whereas Ondara examines Bikundo's music from the Great Chain of Being metaphor point of view, the current study presents a literary appreciation of Bikundo's popular music. To do this, it investigates how Bikundo employs various features of style to foreground particular thematic concerns in society through his Music.

Thematic concerns of Bikundo's popular music

This section explores various themes portrayed in Bikundo's popular music:

HIV/AIDS

Literature, as Wilber Scott notes, is not only the work of a person, "but of an author fixed in time, and space, answering to a community of which he is an important" articulate part (Quoted in Tilak, 9). This means that literature is shaped by the needs of the society at a particular time. Writers, being members of the society, cannot simply turn their backs and ignore societal needs. One of such issues is the issue of HIV/AIDS, a crisis that artists have added their voices in order to educate society of its dangers through their works. The fact that the pandemic continues to ravage members of the society despite the mechanisms that have been put in place to create awareness on infection modes is an indicator that there is still need to educate, create awareness and sensitize the people on the effects of the pandemic. By manipulating a wide range of linguistic and literary choices at their disposal, artists have spoken about cultural practices that enhance the spread of the disease like wife inheritance, polygamy, and unprotected sex, among other risky habits, which continue to be practiced in society today.

The article acknowledges existence of creative works by Kenyan writers that have dealt with the theme of HIV/AIDS. Joseph Situma, for example, explores the theme in his novel *The Mysterious Killer*. He portrays a country, which is in a deep mourning. People are dying at an alarming rate yet they cannot fathom the cause. The village awakens to the loss when Cecilia, a city dweller, returns to Nkulu suffering from a mysterious disease. Many villagers believe she has been bewitched. Three bulls are offered as a sacrifice to the departed ancestors. The sacrifice fails to restore Cecilia to good health. She sends Rachel her niece, to Wauzi to consult a well-known medicine man. Rachel enters the medicine man's house and is shocked to see a python coiled around a sooty pet. The medicine man invokes the spirits of the ancestral goddess and gives Rachel mixed herbs for Cecilia. The herbs do not work a miracle for Cecilia to get well. She eventually dies.

In Situma's world, the characters are not ready to accept that HIV/AIDS is real. The characters seem to be buried in their traditional beliefs and they are not ready to accept the reality, neither are they ready for change. Similarly, in Marjorie Oludhe's novel *Chira* characters do not fully accept the reality of HIV/AIDS. They perceive AIDS as a taboo disease, which attacks people who have gone against the norms of the society. At the end of the novel it is not clear whether AIDS is real or not, though people die emaciated from a mysterious disease they do not understand.

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In *Confessions of an AIDS Victim*, Carolyn Adalla examines how HIV/AIDS has closed doors for Catherine Njeri. Catherine Njeri, a beautiful, young and intelligent woman, learns with shock and utter disbelief that she is HIV positive. This means many things to her; she cannot go ahead with her plans to study for her Masters degree in the USA and she has to start thinking like somebody who is at the end of her life. In a heart-breaking style, she makes the revelation to her longtime friend, Marilyn, in the form of a letter. The confessions are frank and provide a lot of factual information about AIDS in Kenya as Njeri's life unfolds. Njeri's future is ruined. She cannot pursue her ambitions.

Meja Mwangi, in his novel *The Last Plague*, reflects on the conflicts that arise from HIV/AIDS. The novel examines the impact of HIV/AIDS on a small village known as crossroads. Immediately we start reading the text, we are presented with a pervading sense of solitariness and desolation. Outside the teahouse, he is whiling away time and playing what is ordinarily a game of two people on his own. The oldman poses "How do you do it. How do you play droughts all by yourself? It's impossible "He quips" but I do it...it is quite simple .You see the left hand has no eye to see what the right eye is up to..."(2). This shows that people are trying to cope with the state of desperation.

The analyses of the above creative works show that Ontiri Bikundo follows a rich tradition in the Kenyan society regarding the representation of HIV/AIDS in creative works. In his song *Speed Governor*, Bikundo warns both men and women about the existence of HIV/AIDS. He advises his audience to take care of themselves. On the one hand, he metaphorically says men should put on "speed governor" and tie their dogs, implying that they should control their sexual desires. On the other hand, he tells women to buckle their belts, meaning they should not give in to unsavory sexual urges. Additionally, he advises women to close their gates and thermos so that the tea inside does not get cold, that is, not to open up their bodies carelessly for they could get infected with HIV/AIDS. This is shown in the following lines:

Abagaka beka speed governor
Abang'ina mwensi gaki siba emechibi
Abaka mwensi siba chise
Abang'ina mwensi mosieke ebbiita

Ng'ora ng'ora speed governor
Ng'ora ng'ora gosibete emechibbi
Ng'ooora ng'ora ebara nenkora
Ebitongo mbiroo speed governor

Men wear speed governor
Women also wear belts
All men tie your dogs
All women close your gates

Slowly slowly speed governor
Slowly slowly while tying your belt
Slowly slowly there are pot holes speed governor

Bikundo also warns against matatus that neither have seat belts nor speed governors. He metaphorically uses matatus to refer to people who may be infected with HIV/AIDS. He says they may not be easily identified by looking at them physically, just like a ripe fruit that is attractive from outside but if one takes a bite, he or she will find a worm inside. Through the use of the matatu and the rotten fruit, Bikundo urges the Abagusii society to take caution. This comes in the following lines:

Chigari chiachire chitabwati emechibi
Speed governor echinde nchibwati
Isiko nekieni ime birogo mbiyo
Sieka etamosi echae tendeka
Enyamoreo gaki yachire
Ng'ora ng'ora speed governor
Sieka etamosi echae tendeka

Rotunda ritobu ndire nerikonde
Isiko ribariri ime rigundo
There are matatus/ vehicles without safety belts
Others don't have speed governor.
It looks beautiful from outside, but inside there are no seats
Close the thermos so that the tea will not cool down
Enyamoreo please has come.

Slowly, slowly speed governor
Close the thermos for tea not to get cold.
A ripe fruit has a worm
Outside it is ripe but inside it has gone body

The singer also tells men and women to be satisfied with what they have in their houses, their spouses. Even if they have problems in their relationships, they should persevere instead of living a carefree life, being unfaithful and get infected.

Enyomba yao gaki neba egotwa
Sukia egetanda gaki aye omongwana orare
Erinde mambia bookie ogende ekebarua

Even if your house rains inside
Push your bed and sleep brothers
So that tomorrow you wake up and go to job

It should not be lost that there is stigma HIV and Aids-related stigma and discrimination towards HIV/AIDS Abagusii which has been found to undermine effective implementation of HIV and Aids interventions in Kisii County (Maroko et al 2020). Bikundo rises above entrenched stigma in society to educate his listeners about the dangers posed by HIV/AIDS and asks them to take care of themselves. He urges them to use protection as symbolized in the song.

Hardwork

Bikundo celebrates hard work in his popular songs. In the song *Seito Gusii* (Our homeland Gusii), he elaborates on the theme of hard work when he sings of how Abagusii work hard in order to improve their standards of living. Bikundo urges people to embrace any jobs available and not to discriminate. He observes that white collar jobs are rare and very competitive. Whether learned or not, Bikundo urges the youth to embrace any readily available job in order to sustain themselves and their families. In the spirit of indiscrimination, Bikundo urges those who are not able to secure white collar jobs to turn to

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farming as a living. He praises the fertile soil in Gusiiland and posits that those who make a living from farming are much better than compared to those in white collar jobs. Bikundo catalogues a variety of crops planted in the region as a testimony of the fertile soils.

In order to emphasize his message, Bikundo goes on to criticize young men who decline to work in hotels claiming that they are real men. The young men posit that duties and chores in restaurants are not meant for real men but for women. Bikundo catalogues the chores such as putting charcoal in an oven, baking, serving tea and mandazi, washing utensils or even slaughtering a hen. All because he feels are not meant for a real man. He also does not want to be bossed around by his manager. He says that such men are lazy. From the song, we get to learn that the men are lazy hence the basis for choosing certain jobs. Besides refusing to work in hotels, such men do not want work in building and construction sites because they think the job is hard. Bikundo sings that such men cannot do mortar mixing, carry cement or carry the building blocks. The man also does not want to be bossed around by his manager. He cannot work in the hotel because the manager abuses him neither can he work in masonry for the same reason. Put simply, such men calling themselves real men do not want to do anything, thus:

Egasi yoteli
Bikundo tinkonyara
Omosacha bori
Beka amakara riko
Omosacha bori
Reta amache tinkonyara
Reta amandasi tinkonyara
Nyenya engoko tinkonyara,
Sibia chisani tinkonyara,
Egasi yoteli tinkonyara omosaccha bori
Mara ninde roche omosacha bori
Mara renta amache omosacha bori
Mara ninde riko omosacha bori
Nabo enga mochengo tinkonyara

Work in a hotel
I will not be able to do it a real man.
Put charcoal into the oven, a real man
Bring water, I can't be able
Bring Mandazi, I can't be able
Slaughter that hen, I can't be able
Wash the utensils, I can't be able
Work in a hotel I can't be able to do it a real man.
I can't be able to do it, a real man.
Often, going to the river a real man,
Always bring water, a real man,
The manager a buses me, a real man,
It is like masonry I can't be able

In this regard, Bikundo encourages Abugusii youth to work hard and not to choose the type of jobs they can engage in. For society to move forward, the productive workforce must be fully engaged. White collar jobs are scarce which means youth should settle on any job at their disposal in order to make their ends meet.

Moral Decadence

Each society aims to achieve high moral standards and it will pride itself if morality is manifested in society. Morality covers a lot in human behavior and entails acceptable code of conduct in society. As pointed out in article three, Bikundo explores various strands of moral decay in the Abagusii society. Such manifestations pertaining to the loss of moral direction in life are evident in sexual perversion and its attendant problems like unwanted pregnancies, abortions, venereal diseases, and HIV/AIDS. Bikundi highlights how sexual perversion has brought untold miseries and irreversible losses to the society both at personal and communal levels.

The first loss is the negation of the divine purpose of sex and how this has brought disrespect and disgrace to the society. Bikundo laments the effects of unwanted pregnancies resulting into unwanted babies in the song *Chichokora* (Street Urchins). He points out that some of the street children are as a result of unwanted pregnancies. He views this as both a moral and social tragedy as it erodes the good values of the Abagusii society. He further points out that money comes in to corrupt sexuality by offering easier options of avoiding responsibility. Among these is abortion that Bikundo highlights in the song. He shows how abortion has been used an avenue to hide from sexual perversion. Unfortunately, some of these unsafe abortions are costly to the parties involved as they try to avoid the public shame of raising illegitimate children.

Bikundo points out that apart from abortion, sexual perversion has created the complex problem of single motherhood, particularly among the youth. This is a multi-faceted problem according to Bikundo. In the song *Chichokora* (Street Urchins), Bikundo talks of ladies who are impregnated and abandoned by their lovers. They are left to fend for their lives as they raise their children. Majority of these ladies who become single mothers are not only vilified but also alienated in the society. Hence, the single mothers often lack food, financial, emotional, social and material support from society at large since they are often considered social outcasts.

Tied to single motherhood and sexual immorality are problems of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and orphanhood (in cases of deaths due to AIDS). In his song *Speed Governor*, Bikundo recounts the effects of HIV/AIDS in society. Bikundo sings of a reckless young man in society who prides himself in infecting others with HIV/AIDS virus. The scourge reduces investments and savings due to higher healthcare expectations while labour productivity declines due to the death of experienced workers in society. Bikundo therefore urges the use of protection and contraceptives if the youth cannot tame their appetites for sex. However, he is quick to point out that the two control sex measures should not be misused or abused. In this regard, he talks of how youth sacrifice their lives at the altar of sexual promiscuity fortified by the use of contraceptives and condoms. He adds that the use of contraceptives abets sexual immorality making sex rather casual and deprives it of its original divine purpose. Youth seem to be beguiled into sexual perversion due to contraceptives and condoms. Bikundo urges wisdom and patience as key aspects towards indulging in sex.

Such moral decay has not spared the institution of marriage that is shown to be plagued with moral irresponsibility in Bikundo's popular music. Bikundo shows how sexual incompatibility and communication failure cause marital instability in families often leading to domestic violence and adultery. Bikundo sings of the pervasive marital infidelity that abrogates patterns within which married people are supposed to live happily and productively showing how the situation exerts detrimental pressure on the mental and physical conditions of spouses. In such situations, male spouses wretch their marriages by their persistent absence from home. From such marital instability, the afflicted spouses emerge bruised, morale depleted to cause low self-esteem while infirmity of purpose pervades their minds.

Moral decadence is multi-faceted for some of it arises from the chronic drug abuse evident in Bikundo's music. Bikundo presents desperate lives of men destroyed by alcoholism. In the song *Obosisa* (Scabies), Bikundo talks about reckless drinking and its effects. The singer talks about a man called

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Onchomba who got drunk to point of climbing to the ceiling to sleep there. It was due his drunkenness that he did something outrageous as such. His wife was startled by the noise of a choking man when she lit fire.

Onchomba akaimoka akagenda konywa amarwa
Akanywa amarwa tata, akanywa akagoita
Agatang'ana gocha agika nyomba
Agasoa irongo onchomba akarara
Omorugia amachia gocha kare nechinguru
Akairana agasoa riko agachia gouta
Erioki rigasoa irongo bamura imbatebie
Onchomba machia koigwa agasua gokorora
Omorugi agatama baminto ogokura, inkieke
Kiabeire, ebarimo nere irongo

Onchomba went to drink beer,
He came early to the house
Climbed to the ceiling
Onchomba slept
When the wife come with vegetables
She went to the fire place to light fire,
Smoke went to the ceiling
Boys I tell you,
Onchomba started coughing
The wife ran away shouting
There is a a madman at the ceiling

Alcoholism is one of the problems facing society today. The effects of alcoholism have been devastating on the well-being of society. Young men walk around like zombies because they have been ravaged by alcohol and therefore are estranged from the society. Worse still, human interactions in their lives are sharply reduced while continued alcoholism threatens to destroy their health. Bikundo, therefore, delves into alcoholism and provides a way out. He goes ahead to warn Onchomba that if he doesn't stop climbing the ceiling when drunk, he will choke and die:

Onyoni Onyoni tiga mbatebie
Onchomba tiga ngokanie naende tosoa irongo
Aiye tata, baminto mbatebie
Aiye Onchomba, onchomba tiga ngokanie
Tokorina irongo ga chinsa chiarire
Mogoroba yaya Onchomba togochia irongo
Bamura nagokania irongo erioki ndigokong'eta tata
Natigire, abanto batebe ekwang'ententwe
Erioki okongusu rimo igo, gwasumura
Rigosokera korwa chimioro kabere, gatato mama nakure

Onchomba let me tell you
Don't enter the ceiling
Oh dear friends

Let me tell you
Don't climb to the ceiling
When it is late in the evening
Brother I tell you
At the ceiling
Smoke will choke you dear.
I have left,
People will say you
Were strangled
You will inhale smoke,
The Third time you will die.

What emerges from Bikundo's music is worldview towards moral decance in society due to pervasive false morality manifest in the secularization of life. The various moral issues highlighted here are a clear testimony of the context which Bikundo is creating and performing for. Society has assumed the moral guard without providing a way out of untowardness. Society has become nefarious and blind to its follies as many of its members lead deceptive and ruinous lives. Thus, besides providing solutions to the individual members of society, Bikundo reminds society of its collective role to ensure the well-being of its members and to provide reproach to those who have lost the moral compass. As social fabric, society needs to come together to direct, reproach and appraise its members.

Social Cohesion

Bikundo is perturbed by the deteriorating social cohesion in the Abagusii society. Often times, social cohesion is grounded on existing solidarity and connectedness forged on the strength of relationships among members in society. Abagusii society has a close knit aspect of social cohesion. As an ordering feature of society, social cohesion is considered as the interdependence between members of the society, shared values and commonalities. It spurs connections between families, individuals and groups of people in society. In the song *Onkendi*, Bikundo laments that his brother Onkendi no longer visits them. Rhetorically, he wonders what his holding his brother back from coming home even when he needs assistance from. Apparently, the brother, Onkendi, does not attend any social functions such as funerals and fundraisings. Thus, Bikundo is calling out his brother to come to his aid in his hour of need:

Nigo nkumetie tori gochi matanga
Nigo nkumetie Onkendi tori gochi mochango
Tocha komboria Bikundo obaba kai kware gaki kai kware ekero nare
nobokong'u

Inche ndoche Bikundo ninde nobokong'u
Inchwo bwango abana baminto inchwo bwango
Inchwo bwango inwe mokwane amang'ana aya
Mokore bwango omento oyo ndoche nkong'ita are yaa

I am wondering why you don't go to funerals
I am wondering why you don't go to fundraisings
Don't come to ask Bikundo of mother
Where you were please where you were when I had a problem.

Me Bikundo I see I have a problem

Come quickly
My brother comes quickly
Do fast I see
There a person who is going to kill me brother.

This is a clarion call for family to stick together when confronted with various adversities. Bikundo is convinced that he will be able to overcome his “eminent death” if his brother comes to his aid. He therefore projects a vision that a cohesive family is able to confront and overcome various challenges.

Bikundo emphasizes the idea that if people from any given community come together for the universal good, the results will always be remarkable. In the Song *Seito Gusii* (Our Homeland Gusii), Bikundo rallies the community towards working together. He points out that collective consciousness is critical for their economic progression. Thus, for him, working together in various cottage industries in the Abagusii region will spur growth for the region as a whole. He encourages people to remain resolute and determined in what they do like: women who are involved in fruits and vegetables farming, the young boys who are involved in brick making, butchery, carpentry, metal work, transport services among many other income generating activities. In this song, Bikundo underscores the need for the Abagusii people to work collectively and relentlessly towards the betterment of the society. If people come together at home and in their places of work, social cohesion will be achieved and this will ultimately better society.

In the song *Esigwechi* (Sewage), Bikundo laments about how people look down upon Bonchari, one of the clans in Kisii County. They think that Abanchari do not know anything and whenever they pass, people point fingers at them:

Omoisi bwa abanchari
Baito gaki nachaiwe
Ba mura ase ngoeta
Abanto nigo bakondama
Oyio nominchari
Noyonde oeta
Abanchari naborubwo nki bamanyete

Son of Abanchari
My people please I have been
Looked down upon
Boys where pass people abuse me,
That one is Omochari
Another one passes
Abanchari what do they know

Bikundo goes ahead to show that Abanchari have acquired formal education and are professionals like doctors and profesors and therefore should not be looked down upon. This exemplifies hindrances to social cohesion when the Abagusii profile their members based on the mannerisms of their clans or the physical surrounding. He therefore asks the larger Gusii region not to look at Abanchari as a waste (sewage). Bonchari is also considered as a place where sewage from all parts of Kisii is dumped:

Ogosoma osomete bono aye are daktari gose eprofessor,
Buri onye ekebaki onye tar ekegwankwa,
Nkai ogotonya bono ariende omanyane korema

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Okage gwaikire gusii onye tari Suneka,
Egeti gie chindege ekio kere Bonchari

The education you have as a doctor or professor
You are neither an eagle nor a butter fly,
Where will you land?
You be contented that you have
Reached Gusii
Were it not for Suneka Air strip,
Located at Bonchari,

In the song *Esigwechi* (Sewage), Bikundo states that the physical environment of Bonchari is very productive. He also indicates that the sewage dumped at Bonchari is a source of wealth and employment to many in the area. He foreexample shows that the sewage is a source of fertilizer which will be sold to earn more money to the region. Gusii region as a whole will benefit from this fertilizer and its people will work at Bonchari. Bikundo therefore urges the Abagusii people not discriminate other clans but to embrace them as they are. They need to co-exist together and work as unit for the growth of the community. In the song, Bikundo shows how the various Abagusii clans will greatly benefit from Bonchari. Therefore, the clans should view each other as brothers and should work together as a unit. In this way, Bikundo urges the community to cultivate social cohesion among its members for the growth of the community. Members of the community should foster a sense of belonging and good neighborhood.

In the song *Echirani/Neighbor*, Bikundo amplifies virtues of good neighborhood when he juxtaposes neighbors with two different mannerisms. In the song, the Bikundo talks of one neighbor who is always quarrelsome and spiteful and other who is caring and fosters peaceful co-existence. For instance, the singer talks about a neighbor who ate all the eggs which were laid in his house by the singer's hen without leave some for the owner of the hen. When the owner inquired about his eggs, the neighbour threatened him with cutlass.

Engoko yane egacha mwao ekabeka amagena
Echirani okaimoka okaria amagena onsi
Chiraniyane ngokoboria kwanduta omoro
Omoro mbwone emenyete naki bomongokora

On the contrary, the neighbour's dog lives in Bikundo's home. Whatever the he eats, he gives a little to the dog. When he is taking meat, or kales or dagaa, he throws some to it to eat:

Chirani esese yao n'ga mbwoneemenyete
Inche tindi konyeboria bwone emenyete
Chirani esese temanyeti gose ntoetaine
Chirani esese yao emanyete rituko inkoria enyama

Rituko nkorina omena esese yao emanyete
Rituko nkorina esukuma esese yao emanyete
Ebudget yane nyomba esese yao emanyete

The neighbor is shown as one who always stocks trouble with his neighbors as he picks up quarrels now and again. Thus, Bikundo is asking for the kind of medicine that he will use to heal his neighbor from these qualities. Bikundo shows a number of social ills committed by his neighbor such as

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insulting and wishing death upon his wife, and blocking the pathway so that Bikundo's family will have no place to pass to the river:

Nkai ngochia eriogo echirani riebitina
Erinde ndwari echirani ebwene ebitina
Chirani akaimoka akarama omorugi one
Aye gaki okamorama chaga akwe
Chirani juzi okaimoka okarema rikori
Twaregochiera roche naki bono ngokora

It is quite clear that the extent of selfishness of Bikundo's neighbour is profound. However, Bikundo juxtaposes the neighbour's behavior with his own to highlight poor relations and failures of good neighbourhood. In this way, Bikundo urges the Abagusii community to embrace their neighbors and live as brothers and sisters.

Conclusion

This article has analysed various thematic concerns articulated in Bikundo's songs. The analysis revealed that the popular musician canvasses various issues affecting society such as HIV/AIDS, hardwork, poverty and love among other issues affecting society. It also showed that the various concerns articulated in Bikundo's songs are informed by the changing dynamics in the Abagusii society. This article also analysed how Bikundo projects his artistic vision through the various solutions he recommends to the issues affecting society in his music. The article showed that Bikundo articulates his artistic vision to diverse issues such as moral decadence, social cohesion, failed neighbourhood and socio-economic empowerment activities, which was in line with objective three of this study. The study showed that Bikundo urges for a cohesive society which is conscious to its moral and socio-economic wellbeing. In this way, the study revealed his social vision as well as his commitment to the society.

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Biographies

Joel Atuti Osubo holds a Bachelor of Education Arts degree in English and Literature and is currently pursuing Master of Arts in Literature at Machakos University, Kenya. His research interests are in popular music and oral literature. Charles Kebaya teaches Literature at Machakos University.

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