

The role of litungu player in the Bukusu community of Western Kenya

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Abstract:

Musicians in many African traditional communities have been regarded as important resource persons because of the role they play in entertaining their communities. Seemingly times are changing, and the role of the musician, the Litungu player (Omukhupetungu) in this case, is gradually losing value. The study therefore sought to carry out an ethnographic study on the Omukhupetungu with a focus on ascertaining the significance of his role in the Bukusu community. A study on the role of the Omukhupetungu therefore, would be a step towards advocating for his rightful place in society. The study adopted the theory on functionalism advanced by Durkheim (1938) and Parson (1951) to mirror the concern of the study. Functionalism here focuses on the structure and workings of society where functionalists see society as made up of inter-dependent sections which work together to fulfill the functions necessary for the survival of society as a whole. People are socialized into roles and behaviours which fulfill the needs, and if not filled, the society will be lacking in a way. The study was based on a descriptive research design. The location of the study was in Kanduyi Division where the sample was drawn from the accessible population of litungu players and their audience. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to identify litungu players and their audience. Primary data consisted of responses, which were obtained by use of interview and listening schedules while secondary data was drawn from published sources. Collected data was systematised, qualitatively analysed and presented in descriptive format, to answer the research questions outlined in this study. Findings of the study showed that the Litungu player assumed musical, social, educational and entrepreneurial roles in the Bukusu community. He sang songs that addressed different themes that related to historical events, story telling, leadership and politics, good and bad deeds, and current issues in the Bukusu community. The study established that the Litungu player in the Bukusu community was a highly regarded person and therefore he was invited to ceremonies and functions of the community, to perform which in return earned him economic gains in form of gifts. The study recommends that the Litungu player should constitute part of regional music performance industry as opposed to using music that is borrowed and not necessarily relevant to indigenous people of Africa. The study further recommends that the Litungu player be invited to institutions of learning to educate young musicians on how to play the Litungu and compose its music, for consumption by both traditional and contemporary Kenyan societies.