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Ring-tunes and Caller-tunes: New Media's Sustenance of Song Performance Tradition as Women's Strategy for Domestic Conflict Management among the Baganda of Uganda¹

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Abstract

Scholarship on conflict management, resolution, and transformation within and outside theatre, performing arts studies, and the field of ethnomusicology, has mostly addressed international, national, cross-cultural, and community conflicts (Bergh & Sloboda, 2010; Demirdöğen, 2011; McClain, 2009). However, as Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo (2003) have noted, while domestic violence against women has been researched, there is limited documentation on the strategies women use to prevent domestic conflicts escalating into violence. Notably, research on expressive arts as they relate to conflict has primarily focused on top-down interventions—artists involved in peace projects (Belkind, 2014), music workshops led by music activists (Johnston, 2013) and multicultural festivals organized by Non-Governmental Organizations, NGOs (Bassalé, 2013). This article explores the use of theatre, musical and artistic expressions in addressing domestic conflicts.

Introduction

Ring-tunes and caller-tunes have become an alternative mediator for contemporary women who cannot find time to sing lullabies to their children, and as a strategy for addressing family conflict. These tunes are dynamically

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redefining song performance tradition as a strategy for managing conflict. They are cultural performances because by being sites of communication, they offer a stage for constructing cultural meanings for the potential audiences (de Vries & van Elferen 2010: 62). Since the ring-tune and caller-tunes are 'communicative performances' (de Vries & van Elferen 2010: 61), through the tunes, call-receivers get messages that they are expected to interpret. The phone owner selects the song and through the specific excerpt, the ring-tunes and caller-tunes express the phone owner's feelings. Indeed, some of the women studied in this research had multiple ring-tunes they had assigned to different numbers in their phone contacts relating to the kind of relationship they had with the owners of the numbers.

While Uganda is celebrated as one of the first African countries to embrace gender equality—Uganda had the first woman vice president from 1994 to 2003 – this gender equality activism has not translated into fundamental changes in gender relations. Even in contexts where women are empowered, the control of women's speech and communication about domestic conflict still exists as a 'hidden transcript' (Scott, 1990). This article, focusing on the Baganda of central Uganda, is based on ongoing research on how, through history, women in Africa have used expressive arts, especially song, to mitigate conflict turning into domestic or family violence. I borrow Titon's concept of 'affect', which he uses to refer to the song's 'power to move people' (1988: 8) when the song is performed. Song performance, in this case, is not just for listening or entertaining but also for meaning making and is meant to produce reactions from both the audience and the performer. Indeed, the song is a mediator between the performer and the audience. Baganda women have always used song performance as a method of managing conflict from turning violent and as a means of transmitting positive social-cultural values that address conflict management. Today, however, caller-tunes and ring-tunes played on mobile phones have been adapted to sustain a song performance tradition used to manage conflict. In the context of this discussion, caller-tunes are tunes ('music') that callers hear when the phone they are calling rings. On the other hand, ring-tunes are tunes ("music') that a phone-call receiver hears when his/her phone rings. Caller-tunes are used as sound alerts of an outgoing phone call heard by the caller and the ring-tunes are the tunes used as sound alerts for an incoming phone call. Ring-tunes would be heard by the call-receivers and the people around them – intended and unintended audiences. These sound alerts are clips of song (tunes) edited from digital songs. I have categorized them as mobile phone music since they are created, disseminated and consumed digitally through the phone. I refer to them as caller-tunes and ring-tunes rather than caller-tones (sometimes called hello-tones or ring-back tones) or ringtones respectively, because they are melodic but not monotone. While there are instrumental ring-tunes and caller-tunes, this discussion will focus on tunes with text. Much as ring-tunes, caller-tunes and mobile phone music may be

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studied in relation to identity construction, political agency, marketing, environmental impact, and quality of the musical elements (Kanwal, Mahmood, Kinat & Jabeen, 2016; Ying, Lung, Chiat & Hee, 2013: 913), the present discussion concentrates on women's strategic use of ring-tunes and caller-tunes to manage domestic conflict. I examine ring-tunes and caller-tunes as a self-liberating expression, communicating agent and as a tool of self-healing in the context of managing domestic conflict turning violent.

Since mobile phones are intimate (Wei, 2007), they present unique challenges of studying ring-tunes, caller-tunes, and mobile phone music. For example, for this research it was not easy to have face-to-face interviews because most participants did not see it necessary to meet me since they felt they could answer all my questions on phone. The nature of phone interviews limits the observation of the participants' facial expression, which would have provided more data that informs the analysis of their audio responses. Besides, while I could easily access them on phone, they were not in fixed physical locations. In this case, the study of ring-tunes and caller-tunes calls for the redefinition of the concept of the field, which I propose to call the digital field since it is not possible to contextualize the physical geographical location of the informants. Most participants preferred to be anonymous as they did not want to expose their privacy.

Context of Domestic Conflict and its Management among the Baganda

The Baganda speak a Bantu language, Luganda. Within their patriarchal social structure, the assigned roles, identities, and kinship relations define women's positions. Implicitly, domestic conflict is rooted in the social-cultural constructions of roles and relations between men as husbands, fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law, and women as wives, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law and the other gendered relations. (See Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2005, 2009 & 2013). Marriage is a communal activity, and a woman is not only 'married' to her husband, but also to in-laws and friends of the husband. The Baganda's conceptualisation of marriage as man owning a woman strengthens men's control over the woman's productivity and reproductivity, as well as her decisions about the economic and social family issues and personal feelings.

The Baganda, like other cultures in Africa, employ cultural arts, among other media, to establish women's positions in decision making as a way of managing domestic conflict. They use proverbs as idioms to complement speech, or as sources of material for song texts to provide a channel for communicating the gendered conflict management strategy. For example:

Empanga ebbiri: tezisibibwa mu luwombo lumu [Two cocks are not tied up in the same *luwombo* (singed banana-leaf); meaning, Two masters cannot

reside in the same house] (Walser, 1982: 141, proverb no. 1558)².

In this proverb, the *luwombo* is a special style of preparing beef, chicken stew and peanut sauce wrapped in smoked banana leaves and then steamed in a pan covered with banana leaves. Since in Luganda a cock is a metaphor for a man and a hen for a woman (See Tamale, 1999), this proverb emphasises that a wife should not be allowed to make family decisions since a house with two masters cannot be harmonious. Implicitly, the wife cannot express her views or make decisions without the consent of the husband, unless they are relating to kitchen matters because otherwise this would destabilise the harmonious existence with the husband. The action equates to steaming two “cocks” in one singed banana-leaf.

The Baganda share the *Ubuntu* philosophy, which they refer to as ‘*obuntu bulamu*’—humanness, with other Bantu cultures south of the Sahara. (See Nussbaum, 2003: 2). While *obuntu bulamu* plays a core role in managing and resolving conflict, women, because of their gendered roles, are more socialised to uphold *obuntu bulamu* values than men do. Indeed, from childhood, women are trained to have virtues of compassion, patience, tolerance, humility and subtle persuasiveness, gentleness and self-control. This kind of socialisation promotes more preventative and less confrontational strategies for conflict management. The Baganda place greater emphasis on family life as a foundation for community and *obuntu bulamu* is placed in very high regard to promote the maintenance of harmonious communal life. Significantly, creating and sustaining positive mutual relations in a family (immediate and extended) is core to conflict management among the Baganda. In this way, despite any level of conflict that may exist between her and the husband or the in-laws, the success of a woman in any marriage relationship is measured by how peaceful her home is. Silence about domestic conflict is usually imposed onto women as a strategy for containing conflict. In fact, as Ssewanyana asserts, although conventional conflict management processes require equal and open discussions with both parties, ‘traditional African cultures [emphasise] the confinement of disputes and their settlement amongst the immediate parties and families [to encourage] unity and cohesion in society’ (Ssewanyana, 1997: 50). Notably, to train women as peace-making and peace-building wives, the Baganda promote the *Ssenga* (paternal aunt) Institution through which young women are given ‘tips’ on how to handle husbands for the desired success of their marriages (Tamale, 2006). Traditionally, the paternal aunt of the bride-to-be managed the *Ssenga* Institution.

In their attempt to control women’s verbal expressions about domestic

² Other proverbs go: ‘*Bakulu babiri ab’empiiija: si kyalo...* [Two masters who are jealousy of each other do not guarantee peace in the village’] (Walser, 1998: 74, proverb no. 0821); ‘*Tufaanane: sikyalo...* [Two people who say “let us be equals” do not provide peace in the village (because each one is jealous of the other’s progress)] (Walser 1982: 456, proverb no. 5098).

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conflicts, the Baganda ironically use women instructors or *ssenga*, preparing girls for marriage to literary and metaphorically silence them using proverbs and idioms such as, *eby'omunju tebitotolwa* (domestic misunderstandings are never ever divulged outside the home). In fact, during the pre-marital rituals the *ssenga* instructs the bride-to-be: 'A man is never to be answered back'. This rule is non-negotiable. As they grow up, Baganda girls are made to imbibe this rule of behaviour and other codes of humility and silence through proverbs, folktales, and songs. For example:

Ekisirisa afumba: ajja okulya takimanya. ['one who comes to eat does not know what makes the cook silent', meaning that the wife probably had difficulty with her husband] (Walser 1982: 125, proverb no. 1371).

Significantly, songs are used to enhance the learning and memorization of the rule of silence. One song that has been passed on from generation to generation is *Ebyo Munju* (The Issues of the Home).

<i>Eby'omunju</i>	<i>Eby'omunju bino</i>	The issues of the home, these issues of the
<i>ebyo munju</i>		home
Wajjangala		Wajjangala,
<i>Eby'omunju tebitotolwa</i>		The issues of the home should not be spoken
		out [they are secrets]
Wajjangala		Wajjangala

Singing this song enhances the girls' abilities to memorise and store gendered information until such a time when they need to practice the rule. Indeed, as Golwa asserts, the 'African value system does not grow in a vacuum but feeds and grows on enduring human values, implanted in children at tender ages through storytelling, songs, proverbs and myths' (2013: 86).

It is ironical that in the absence of open communication and denied open space and a voice by the patriarchal culture, Baganda women have managed to prevent potential family conflicts escalating into violence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, to evade patriarchy's control over their expression, women have needed to use negotiated spaces to manage gender-based conflicts and violence. For instance, while there is no immediate and direct feedback, their song performance practice provides alternative ways of communication where face-to-face communication is not a choice. Historically, they have used indigenous songs including lullabies and folktale songs as arenas for mediating conflict in ways that mitigate violence since they 'can say publicly in songs what you cannot say privately to a man's face' (Ssewanyana, 1997: 52). This strategic approach to domestic conflict management, or 'smoothing' as Olekalns et al. (2008: 83) call it, emphasises compromise and the reinstatement of social harmony at the expense of justice.

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In their study on gendered appropriation of the mobile phones, Lemish and Cohen (2006: 192) note that men use mobile phones as 'a body organ, an extension of their self'; for 'accessibility to others'; while women users are 'more concerned about people being able to reach them'. Women, more than men, tend to use the mobile phone to express not only joy, but also the conflict within themselves and their surroundings, 'for managing household roles from a distance', for them 'to facilitate these traditional roles' (193). One of the ambitions of most young and old women in both rural and urban settings is to acquire a mobile phone (Interview, Sarah Musoke (not real names) 8 July 2016). There are various mobile phone companies in Uganda, but by August 2017, the most popular companies were Mobile Telephone Network (MTN), Airtel (a merger of Warid and Celtel phone companies) and Africell (formerly Orange Phone Company).³ A number of women interviewed for this study subscribed to more than one phone network (a combination of MTN and Airtel phone networks was common) because it is cheaper to make phone calls to someone on the same network.

My research reveals that women use ring-tunes and caller-tunes as agents to communicate their feelings and tell narratives of conflicts with husbands, friends, neighbours, and people around them, in general. The ring-tunes and caller-tunes provide a possibility of communication with no limitation of geographical space. Because caller-tunes have become more than sound alerts of incoming and outgoing phone calls, mobile phone companies provide caller-tunes as branded products. For example, presenting its CallerTunez product, one of MTN's adverts is: 'Express yourself with MTN CallerTunez. No more boring and ordinary dialling [*sic*] tones when your callers phone you! Instead let them hear your favourite tune'⁴. MTN explains, 'CallerTunez is the service that offers MTN subscribers the unique ability to personalize their ring back tones'.⁵ The main reason why the women that I interviewed personalised their caller-tunes is to express themselves and release stress. Further, the possibilities of being able to

³ For the past five years, the mobile phone media has become very popular in Uganda not only for the purpose of business development, especially the mobile money service (Komunte Rwashana & Nabukenya, 2012; Maree, Piontak, Omwansa, Shinyekwa & Njenga, 2013), but also as a partner in social communication. By June 2016, ten years after the Uganda government's liberalization of the telecommunication sector, the country had 22,034,837 mobile phone subscriptions, compared to 340,851 subscriptions for fixed phones in the same year (Uganda Communications Commission 2016: 6).

⁴ <https://www.mtn.co.ug/Services/Value%20Added%20Services/Pages/MTN-Tunez.aspx>
Accessed 7 May 2017

⁵ <http://www.mtnonline.com/products-services/value-added-services/callertunez-reloaded>
Accessed 7 May 2017.

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change the tunes to suit the different contexts the women find themselves in makes this mobile phone music a useful tool for communication, thus, offering them a sense of individuation, and therefore, agency. ⁶ The creation of caller-tunes and ring-tunes generally involves a process of selecting a song, downloading or recording from a live music performance and editing. Usually, tunes are selected from songs originally mediated on either television, radio, the Internet, CDs, other formats of recorded music, or recording of a live music performance. After selecting the song, the creator of ring-tunes and caller-tunes then selects the specific section of the song depending on the intended message to be communicated. The selected section of the song will determine the maximum duration of the ring-tune or caller-tune. However, the exact duration depends on how long the phone owner allows the phones to call or ring before they answer the phone. The creation of caller-tunes is still a reserve of the phone companies, and so, individual subscribers are not yet able to create their own caller-tunes. Most participants studied either created their own ring-tunes or acquired them from friends who had created them or who got them from their friends, through a chain of sharing. This sharing allows the migration of ring-tunes among people sharing similar life experiences as the tunes dynamically define their users. The hands-free application enables the amplification of ring-tune and caller-tune messages wherein the amplified sound creates a possibility of extending the audience beyond the phone owner. When the hands-free application is switched on, the ring-tunes and caller-tunes become louder, which enables the people around the ringing and calling phones to hear the message communicated, make meaning of, and react to it.

I have referred to this process of creating, sharing, making meaning of, and reacting to ring-tunes and caller-tunes as a performance comparable to singing a lullaby to a child. According to Merriam, music sound is "the result of human behavioural processes that are shaped by the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the people who comprise a particular culture" (1964: 6). What one hears as ring-tunes and caller-tunes are a result of several processes including, selecting of a song, creation, production, listening to, sharing, and meaning making and this process is concluded by the reactions of the creator and audience of these ring-tunes and caller-tunes. This conceptualization of performance expands the conventional notion of performance, which looks at performance in relation to 'genres of performance in the theatrical tradition... [as including] theatre, mime, dance, dance-theatre, and film (Dixon & Smith, 2007: 4). The possibility of digital and mobile technologies deconstructs the concept of performance, which requires the physical presence of a performer and audience in one place with a designated

⁶ The evolution of the digital technology has enhanced the creation of ring-tunes from digital songs. According to Ying et al. (2013: 914) 'Radiolinja, a Finnish mobile operator known today as Elisa, created the first downloadable mobile ringtone service in 1998'.

stage and audience space. Since a person can reach and be reached by phone wherever and whenever he/she is, this enables invisible performers and audience to interact on a space-less stage. Significantly, adapting Dixon and Smith's concept, I refer to this performance process as 'digital performance', which in their view, can be defined as 'performance works where computer technologies play a key role rather than a subsidiary one, in content, techniques, aesthetics, or delivery forms.' (2007: 4) While this definition is in relation to the incorporation of digitally created, and manipulated projections into 'live theatre, dance, and art performance', it resonates with the technological process of creating and disseminating ring-tunes and caller-tunes. In this context, the use of the computer in the creation of ring-tunes and caller-tunes is 'a significant tool and agent of performative action and creation' thus redefining the concept of performance' (ibid.).

Auslander's idea that the phenomenological status of music 'for listeners is [one] of a performance unfolding at the time and in the place of listening' (2004: 5) informs my view of digital performance. Performance is a process, which begins at the conception of an idea to create a ring-tune or caller-tune, and extends to the creation itself, its dissemination, consumption and the interpretation of the created product. In the next paragraphs, I discuss how ring-tunes and caller-tunes mediate domestic conflict.

Singing to Mitigate Violent Domestic Conflict

The adaptation of ring-tunes and caller-tunes to sustain the tradition of song performance as a strategy to mitigate domestic conflict from turning violent, underlines the inevitable functions of song performance in the conflict management process. Songs are a greater socialization force than verbal language, and as Egblewogbe (1975: 111) explains, when adopted they "[become] like normal language events, a vehicle of cultural accumulation and historical transmission, 'a great force of socialisation'". In contexts where open dialogue is not permissible, their inherent power to express 'deep-seated feelings not permissibly verbalised in other contexts' (Ssewanyana, 1997: 52) transforms them into a powerful media in the conflict management process. Significantly, children's songs, and games that hold hidden philosophies of the Baganda and offer a safe space for women who are usually the performers, to narrate the contexts in which they care for their children. Specific elements of the lullabies are used by women to address domestic conflict, counter violence or intended violence, to offer relief and the ability to enact a sense of agency. While the musical elements target the crying child, the text is for the husband or the other people within the geographical limits of this performance. The dialogic relationship between the audience and the song is underlined by the fact that the performer is the mother, and the primary audience is the crying child. The

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secondary audience may be the husband and other people within the surroundings of the crying child and the singing mother. This dialogical relationship between the performer and the audience is presented diagrammatically in Figure 1.

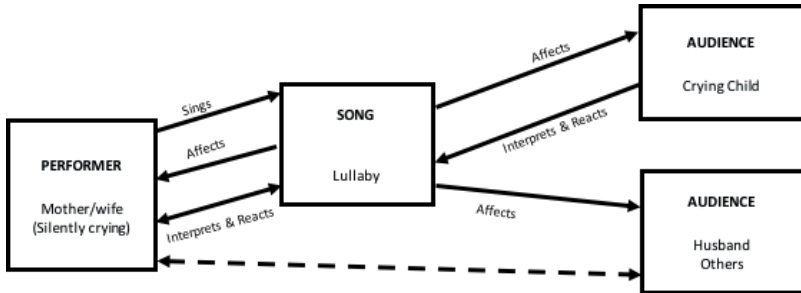


Figure 1: Song (Lullaby) Mediating Domestic Conflict

The crying child triggers the mother to respond with a lullaby, which she either creates or selects from an existing repertoire of lullabies. The lullaby affects (moves) the child by soothing it and it interprets and reacts to the song by keeping quiet and eventually sleeping. The secondary audience, and in the context of this discussion, the husband, hears the lullaby, receives the message and interprets it. In most cases, he reacts by commanding the mother/wife: 'take away your crying child.' Certainly, this reaction is not necessarily about the textual message the wife/mother is communicating. Although the husband may not respond directly to the issues the mother/wife is raising, the wife draws satisfaction from the fact that her muted voice has eventually spoken out through singing the lullaby. In this case, singing to the child becomes the media of communicating to the husband. By singing to the child, the mother also listens into the lullaby, and she reacts to its soothing ability by eventually sleeping when the child sleeps.

For the mother/wife (who is silently crying because of domestic stress), the performance of a lullaby addresses two aspects of conflict management: 1) it offers a safe space for speaking about the conflict; and 2) it has psychological effects of calming down anger and relieving the stress. When the mother/wife sings a lullaby, it soothes ('affects') the silently crying wife, who interprets it and reacts to it by calming down.⁷ While the soothing musical qualities of a lullaby are aimed at making the baby to keep quiet and eventually sleep, the deep-seated meaning of the text is intended for the husband (see also Senkoro 2005: 2 & Karbo & Mutisi, 2008: 2).

In the context of the lullaby sung by the mother, the crying child becomes the

⁷ Also see my discussion of the Baganda women's use of the lullaby 'Omwana Akaaba' (The Child is Crying) as a space to address issues about sex in their marriages (Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2013: 122).

shock absorber for the mother's miseries. Although silent, and unable to understand the mother's issues, the child plays the role of the absent husband, whom the wife was instructed never to express her discontent and differing opinions and views. *Sirika, sirika* (Keep quiet, keep quiet) transcribed below is a good example of a common lullaby that may offer psychological release.

<i>Sirika, sirika</i> (Be quiet, be quiet)	
<i>Sirika sirika</i>	Be quiet, be quiet
<i>Nkwokere ekkovu</i>	So that I burn for you a snail
<i>Maama bwanadda</i>	When mother comes
<i>Nti omuwadde ki?</i>	(And asks that) What have you given it?
<i>Muwadde akawuka</i>	I have given it an insect
<i>Akaliza abato</i>	That children cry for
<i>Baa, akaliga kanywa taba</i>	<i>Baa</i> (sound of the sheep) the sheep is smoking tobacco
<i>Baa, akaliga kanywa taba</i>	<i>Baa</i> (sound of the sheep) the sheep is smoking tobacco

This lullaby is usually sung when a child is crying for something to eat or drink. Like other lullabies, it is sung repetitively until the child keeps quiet and even eventually sleeps. Here, the caretaker is telling the crying baby to keep quite with the promise that she will give it something to eat. In Figure 2, I give a descriptive notation of this lullaby to illustrate its musical characteristics as they relate to its potential to create a calming effect.



Figure 2: Descriptive notation of *Sirika Sirika*

Like most lullabies, *Sirika Sirika* has the musical characteristics that have the potential to attract the attention of the child and soothe it. The slow tempo in a metre of a compound time and the swing movement adapted by the singer provides a calming effect to a crying baby. The repetitive nature of the song makes it easier for the child to follow. The opening motif ends on D and the closing phrase ends on G, making an intervallic relationship of a perfect fourth, which is the case for all the phrases. Further, the undulating as opposed to ascending or descending melodic contour offers a calming effect created by the

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gradual musical movement. Moreover, all the phrases end on a strong beat. Undeniably, since the child does not understand the text of the song, the message from the text is not intended for it, therefore, in this case, *Sirika*, with a stress-releasing affect, communicates to a stressed mother. Releasing emotions constitutes basic steps towards managing conflict, which makes the lullaby a participant in the domestic conflict management process. However, in a context where most traditional spaces have been invaded by modern life, the ring-tunes and caller-tunes have been adapted as new spaces to continue a performance tradition of mediating conflict.

Caller-tunes and Ring-tunes: New Performance Media for Domestic Conflict Management

To mediate domestic conflict, digital performance functions in a dialogical relationship between the mobile music, the wife and husband, the primary audience, and other intended and unintended audience that happen to be within the performance contexts of the ring-tunes. The ring-tunes and caller-tunes 'affect' the wife and husband, and both interpret and react to them, albeit in different ways. I represent this dialogical relationship diagrammatically in Figure 3.

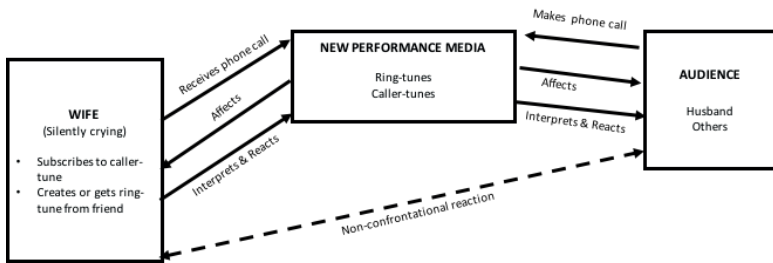


Figure 3: *New Media Mediating Domestic Conflict*

The wife subscribes to caller-tunes and creates or gets ring-tune from a friend through the digital performance process discussed above. The husband calls her and hears the caller-tune that she ascribes to his number, which he interprets and reacts to it in ways that may not be directly confrontational. Even silence is satisfactory to the wife who seeks to speak out in a non-confrontational way. When her phone rings, the ring-tune reminds her of the message of the caller-tune and she derives satisfaction that the caller has received the message. Moreover, listening to the ring-tune releases her from stress, which she interprets and reacts to by calming down and maintaining her prescribed silent voice.

Most of the women interviewed created ring-tunes from the popular Gospel musician, Judith Babirye's music, frequently played on radio and TV, and performed in many Christian churches. Most women interviewed related directly with Babirye's songs that narrate stories resonating with their lived experiences.

Caller-tunes based on Babirye's songs constitute 10% of the general and recommended ranks of the MTN CallerTunez.⁸ These include *Mukama Nwanira* (God Fight for Me); *Omusaayi Ggwe Yesu* (The Blood of Jesus); *Maama Wange* (My Mother); and *Oliko Favor* (You are favoured [by God]).

Ring-tunes derived from Babirye's music communicate messages that link networks of friends and family (See de Vries & van Elferen 2010). 'Mrs. Margret Katende'⁹ articulates this communicative performance:

One time, a good friend sent me a song on WhatsApp and asked me to listen to it carefully. Some of the words of the song are: 'Let me trust only you my God. I cannot trust the people of this world anymore'. This text is from a song entitled: *Nze Kanesige Ggwe Mukama* (Let Me Trust You God) sung by Judith Babirye [...]. My friend said: 'Margret, listen to that song; I have sent it to you; listen to it carefully.'

I listened to it carefully and I realized that it was not just a song, but he wanted to send me a message, although he did not want to face me. My friend's message was relating to a relationship with his wife. It is I who connected the two and eventually they decided to live together. When they got a conflict, my friend thought that I was responsible for their misunderstandings, which was not true.

[...] I called him and told him 'thank you for the song, but the accusation is not true.' It was clear that he did not want to directly confront me because he responded thus: 'Oh no, I only sent you the song, just a song nothing more'. Later we talked in detail and the issue was resolved in a very calm way (Interview 8 July 2016).

Katende's experience illustrates how mobile phone music opens new avenues of engaging with domestic conflict. The music provided a space for reflection and being mediated on a portable and mobile gadget, Katende had the opportunity to play and replay the message in non-confrontational contexts, which face-to-face communication with conflicting parties could present. Katende meditated over the message and came up with the alternative solutions to mitigate the would-be conflict.

This research reveals that ring-tunes and caller-tunes intended to address conflict have psychological effects that can calm down conflicting parties when they call or receive calls from each other. 'Mrs Ruth Kakooza', who extracted a 28-

⁸ <https://www.mtn.co.ug/Services/Value%20Added%20Services/Pages/MTN-Tunez.aspx>. Accessed 7 May 2017.

⁹ For editorial reasons, the real names of the respondents interviewed for this study have not been used.

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second chorus of Babirye's *Mukama Nwanira* (God Fight for Me) also attributed the choice of her ring-tune, to its calming effect.

<i>Nwanira</i> ([God] Fight for me	
<i>Mukama Nwanira</i>	God fight for me
<i>Nwanira tobaganya kunsekerera</i>	Fight for me, do not allow them to laugh at me
<i>Abayiganya emmeeme yange</i>	Those who hunt after my soul
<i>Mukama baagala kunzikiriza</i>	God, they want to destroy me
<i>Mukama, nkusaba nwanira</i>	God, I pray, fight for me
<i>Otegulule emitego gyaabwe</i>	Destroy their traps
<i>Nsaba obakwase ensonyi</i>	I pray that you shame them
<i>Ontweereze ebigere byange</i>	Make me firm on my feet

In her response to the question why she decided to use a ring-tune created from *Mukama Nwanira*, she states:

I needed to always be reminded that there is no one else who could intervene in her case. The music calmed me down and whenever the phone rang, it reminded me that the God I choose to believe in would handle my situation. I had a group of elders that I could go to, but I did not trust they would fairly resolve my problem. The damage had already been made and I could not reverse it. Besides, the person with whom I conflicted was also one of the elders. The song helped me to be non-confrontational and I kept calm. With time, my anger subsided, and I was able to talk to him in a calm way. Because I did not confront him before other elders, he was humbled and eventually he came to me and apologized. If I had gone for arbitration, he would not have apologized because of pride and could not agree of his mistake before his fellow elders (Interview, 7 July 2016).

In the absence of a face-to-face communicator, the caller-tunes provide space for uninterrupted listening, an important communication strategy in conflict management. When I asked 'Tereza Musoke' about her choice between singing the song of the ring tone and creating a digital recording she responded:

Yes, I can also sing, but if I sing it, I may not meditate upon it [the ring-tune] because my focus would be on my singing. It is hard for me to sing along the playing music and get the interpretation of the message of the song. When I hear something, it is easier to reflect on it than when I am the one singing or speaking (interview, 8 July 2016).

Another participant, 'Jane Kizito', further underlines the ring-tunes and caller-tunes role as intermediary voices:

At one time when I had a conflict with my husband, I chose my caller-tune as: 'Is It Too Late to Say Sorry?' by Justin Bieber. I wanted to apologize but I did not know how to start. Sometimes it is not easy to talk to someone that you have annoyed. It depends on the prevailing situation. You have to use all means to convey the message. Whenever he called, I had to wait until he had listened to the caller-tune to the end before I picked up the phone. Sometimes, I would not pick up the phone and make him call me again so that he can listen to the song again. The song helped me a lot; we eventually sorted out our differences (Interview 8 July 2016).

It was not possible to interview Kizito's husband to find out his interpretation of the song, but Kizito told me that the song created a platform to begin a dialogue that would resolve their conflict. While defending Kizito's situation, 'Maria Muwonge' explained: "It is hard to speak to people that are stressed when you are also stressed. It is important that both parties calm down before beginning any meaningful and peaceful communication about a conflict" (Interview 9 July 2016). Thus, the caller-tune was beneficial to Kizito because she believed that the husband, her specific audience, had received the message of the need to resolve their conflict. She had a predetermined meaning for the husband and repetitively played the message whenever her phone rang.

Conclusion

My discussion in this article has been those expressive arts and songs such as ring-tunes and caller-tunes form a powerful communicative medium in contexts where conflict cannot be openly discoursed. Mobile music as a new media offers opportunity to sustain a folk performance of a non-confrontational communication of domestic conflict. In her writing, Carla Ganito contends that technology, and in this case mobile phone music, can empower women in entering expressive sites that were initially closed off to them, which I believe has relevance to the discussion of the new media soundscape of ring-tunes and caller-tunes. Listening to women's ring-tunes and caller-tunes communicates a lot about their family situations, which they would otherwise not be able to verbally share with an audience outside of their domestic environment.

In an era where conflict has defined homes, villages, communities, nations, regions and continents and searches for lasting conflict resolutions have so far been futile, there is need to reconsider those methods that mitigate violent conflict. Where communication is impeded by distance or fears of open dialogue as in some cases with wife and husband, this mobile music bridges these limitations. By appropriating song as their alternative non-verbal voice, women strategically reject the prescribed silence and reinvent a new means of communication that is non-confrontational. Moreover, song is not only a voice but

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also their space for liberation from stress and offers self-healing as strategy of managing conflict. Because of their unprecedented role as non-confrontational voices (seemingly silent voices as prescribed by the Baganda patriarchal), the ring-tunes and caller-tunes as new song performance media offer even a more effective tool of managing conflict turning violent. Because they transcend geographical limitation and time scope, the messages can be performed anywhere, any and time. The sender of the message can allow the message to be repeated (by not picking up the phone) as many times as she wants without the receiver of the message branding her 'a nagging', albeit assertive woman'. Therefore, a closer look at the songs, ring-tunes and caller-tunes, among other expressive and communicative arts, shows that women's approach to conflict management, using ring-tunes and caller-tunes, which functions as the silent voice, has been cast into new voices of expression and new terms, and could develop to new levels in the future.

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