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## Evolutions, Transformations and Trends in Kalenjin Traditional Songs

Charles Kipng'eno Rono 

Department of Literature, Linguistics, Foreign Languages and Film Studies, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya

### ABSTRACT

Since the production of the earliest Kalenjin traditional albums in the 1920s, the community's traditional songs have evolved and transformed. This article traces this historical process by considering how these songs developed from folk songs performed during *Kambaget* (sports competitions) and from the earliest compositions of Bekyibei arap Mosonik, Kipchamba arap Tapotuk and their contemporaries, to the modern-day Kalenjin popular hits. The article documents the earliest recordings of Kalenjin music tracks as well as the bands, and traces the legacies of Kipchamba's Koilong'et Band from the artists of 1940s and those of the later decades through to the younger generations of the 1990s, 2000s and today. This is done in order to determine the zones of contact as well as departures from prototypical and popular Kalenjin traditional songs. Taking the 1990s liberation of the airwaves as focus, this essay analyses the extraordinary variety and complexity of "The Oldies" and compares these to contemporary artistic products that have recycled aspects of this historical canon.

### ABSTRACT IN KALENJIN

Koboch komongunetap tyenwokikap kigaa chetai eng' bororyetap Kalenjin eng' 1920s, ko kikopit walet neoo eng tyenwokichutok. Chikilisyoni kowekse batai sikochikil olekipitunen wallet kongeten tyenwokik chetai chepo bororyet che kikityeni eng ureryetap *Kambaget* ngachangan ko tyenwokikap tyenindet netai Bekyibei arap Mosonik, kopoto tyenindet Kipchamba arap Tapotuk ak tyenik che kityeni tugul eng kasartanyin akoi tyenwokikap kasari. Chikilisyoni kosirei tyenwokikap Kalenjin chetai keta kopoto bandisyek cheterter. Kora kowenyeyi chikilisyoni kosupet newoo nekinyor banditap Kipchamba nepo Koilong'et kongeten tyenikap 1940s akoi tyenikap kasari ngachangan ko chengeten 1990s, 2000s akoi nguni. Yoe chikilisyoni kounitok si kotyem kokon keret eng olekipwotyin kokituyechi ak kopesyen tyenwokik chukitai ak chupo kasari. Kou notok, kokerei iinei boroinde nekiip katyaknatetap chepchepinwekap koristo nekipit eng' 1990s, ako nitok kotyemei koweny ole kiu tyenyokikap keny ak kokerchin ak tyenwokichupo kasari, eng inei ko olewekundo tyenwokichu ep kasari ole ki u tyenwokik che kitai.

### KEYWORDS

Kalenjin traditional bands;  
Kalenjin folk songs; Bekyibei;  
Kipchamba

### KEYWORDS IN KALENJIN

Bandisyekap tyenwokikap  
Kigaa Chepo Kalenjin;  
Tyenyokik Che kipo Keny eng  
Kalenjin; Bekyibei;  
Kipchamba; Yetunet;  
Wekunetap ge

## Introduction

The Kalenjin<sup>1</sup> music industry has grown by leaps and bounds since the 1920s and much of the new material, both in terms of form and content, would not have been accepted earlier. The industry is at the moment saturated by the influx of songs recorded and produced by artists who aim to respond to the demands of contemporary society. The spatio-temporal dimension of music is crucial and therefore this article moves through the Kalenjin music scene both in time and space to outline the evolution, transformation and trends of Kalenjin traditional music. Because of the growing number of contemporary secular artists, it is not feasible to carry out an analysis of each and every artist, and so for my comparative analysis, I pick the artists who were both inspired and molded by their predecessors and are thus self-consciously part of a Kalenjin musical tradition.

In the course of the analysis, the article documents how the methods used in writing the history of music have shifted, from oral performance to notation, then to music being recorded and stored, and disseminated utilising various mediums of sound transmission. The question of evolution in relation to musical forms has been examined by Ian Cross in a study that acknowledges the fact that musics (his term) are culturally situated and “make sense as musics only if we can resonate with the histories, values, conventions, institutions, and technologies that enfold them” (2012, 17). While the above understanding of evolution is anthropological in nature, Cross repurposes his understanding and argues for a substantive relationship between musics and evolutionary processes and uses archeological evidence to argue that music is indeed “an evolutionarily adaptive behaviour” (2012, 20). In a broader perspective, James Ogude and Joyce Nyairo (2007) edited a volume that examined the evolution of popular music at different historical moments in East Africa. In his own chapter, Ogude (2007) traces the dissenting voice of D. O. Misiani’s music right from the years of Kenyatta to those of Daniel Toroitich arap Moi. This evolutionary aspect of Kalenjin secular music can be traced back to *Kambaget*, the pioneering event partly known to have laid a foundation stone for the Kalenjin community’s music industry.

## **Kambaget: The Pioneer Event of the Kalenjin Music Industry**

Karin Barber has argued that popular culture in Africa is best understood in terms of the everyday lives of ordinary African people. According to Barber, African popular forms of expression such as music arise from the ground and in most cases are linked to historical processes because they are “socio-historical fact(s)” (Barber 2018, 3). The earliest Kalenjin music artists were believed to have been Bekyibei arap Mosonik (Nyaunya) and Wilson arap Laboso. With the assistance of Cheriro Kiptoo arap Korgoren and arap Chumo, Nyaunya was inspired by the Chicago blues singer, guitarist and harmonica player Jimmy Rodgers, and so Nyaunya styled himself as Chemirocha (a Kalenjinised version of Jimmy Rodgers) as he released the “Chemirocha 1”<sup>2</sup> folk song. The name Chemirocha became popular in 1948 when a group of Kalenjin folk singers and dancers recorded a track that praised Chemirocha’s (Jimmy Rodgers’) excellent dancing techniques. In the 1948 “Chemirocha” song track by Chemutai (erroneously written online as Chemutoi) arap Ketienya and Kericho Girls, the singers praise “*mararetap Chemirocha*” (Chemirocha’s dancing style). Jimmy Rodgers’ dancing skills were regarded as so extraordinary that he

was said to dance “*kot koput suruali*” (until clothes fall off).<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 2014, the Singing Wells Project, working in association with International Library of African Music (ILAM), spearheaded a mission to repatriate these folk songs of the Kipsigis people, and through this repatriation, the fascinating story behind the song Chemirocha is uncovered.<sup>4</sup>

Amanda Petrusich (2017) writes that Hugh Tracey, a British-born ethnomusicologist, travelled to Kapkatet, Kenya, in 1950 to record the native songs of the Kipsigis. According to Petrusich, Tracey “collected three vernacular songs about a creature called Chemirocha, a mystical half-man, half-antelope figure,<sup>5</sup> beloved by Kipsigis for his lunatic singing and dancing”. The girls sang and danced while Ketienya, the only male member of the group, played *Kibugandet*, a four-stringed lyre that was later replaced by the introduction of guitars and pianos. But before the arrival of Hugh Tracey and his recordings of these folk songs that were made for ethnographic purposes, the Kalenjins were practising *Kambaget*. This was a sports competition which involved activities like throwing knives and spears over trees while singing and dancing by jumping up and down. The practice of recording started after the ethnomusicologist’s arrival. Initially a ten inch 78 rpm shellac was used, which became the standard by the 1930s. Later this was replaced by vinyl 45, in the early 1950s. The 45 was a significant change in format because it was virtually unbreakable, compared to the delicate 78s.<sup>6</sup>

Examples of folk songs that benefited from being recorded and which are now available online include that of the trio of artists Bekyibei arap Mososnik, arap Chumo and Cheriro Kiptoo arap Korgoren. These songs include “Iyan wee Kimoino”, “Chemirocha 1”, “Sebei Bekyibei”, “Nitiren Notera”, and “Kang’et Chorwet”, among others.<sup>7</sup> Nyaunya is alleged to be Kipchamba arap Tapotuk’s maternal uncle. Kipchamba’s biographical information reveals that Kipchamba spent the better part of his early life with his grandfather Nyarinei arap Tangus. He refers to “*koretapopule arap Nyarinei*” (the land of my uncle arap Nyarinei) on his track, “Ng’engwek”. One of the paraphernalia with which Nyarinei arap Tangus is said to have rewarded Kipchamba is *Chepkese*,<sup>8</sup> a traditional guitar; and in Olchore Lekulei’s<sup>9</sup> rich analysis of Kipchamba’s “Kwena” track on Kipchamba Memorial Organization’s<sup>10</sup> Facebook page, Kipchamba acknowledges *mamanyun neu arap Kenduiwo* (his arap Kenduiwo-like maternal uncle) for rewarding him with a cow. One of Kipchamba’s maternal uncles is said to be Nyaunya, and he is believed to have later introduced Kipchamba to the world of music and acted as his role model from a young age since Nyaunya was the village’s reigning champion in the aforementioned *Kambaget*. Owing to the performative nature of Nyaunya’s songs, they partly lacked the documentation that his successors such as Kipchamba and his contemporaries enjoyed.

Notable among these earliest compositions are works by Wilson arap Laboso. Nyaunya in his “Iyan We Kimoino” mentions arap Laboso together with other artists like arap Silatei and arap Cheruiyot who might have been notable contributors to the early Kalenjin music scene. With the benefits of a trained broadcaster, arap Laboso is said to have sung just after Nyaunya arap Mosonik and he recorded his first tracks in 1959. However, little is known about his composition and in the research for this article I discovered his “Chelang’at”, “Chebokion Kiyai”, “Riretap Musaiga” (Musaiga’s Dam), “Kipsigis ak Nandi Ong’iyomege” (Kipsigis and Nandi, Let’s unite), “Yerwokine ak Chito”, “Ng’et Kebe Imbar” (Wake up and let’s go and farm) and “Sitimet, mi Ng’oino” (Electricity in Ng’oino).<sup>11</sup> The discovery of these songs was based on personal interviews I had with Francis Chemirei (1949–),

Chamgei FM Presenter Olchore and Julius Mashorupu arap Langat who recited them to me as they clearly remembered them. However, the “Chebokion Kiyai” track is available online.<sup>12</sup> His “Kipsigis ak Nandi Ong’iyomege” became famous during the days of Voice of Kenya since the track became a Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Kisumu signature tune while the “Chelang’at” track was used as a signature tune in the *Kipeles* Drama Series on KBC Kisumu.<sup>13</sup> In his “Chebokion Kiyai”, Arap Laboso demonstrates his best skills in folk music and the music’s harmonious incorporation of rhythm and the song’s body of singers created an irresistible dancing mood.

Apart from the notable Bekyibei and his peers, the Kipsigis community also had the duo of Kipkoskei arap Chepkwony and Kipkemoi arap Sitonik who are responsible for “Ho Jambo bwana”, “arap Tapartele Oleiy O laleiy O” and “arap Chemonget” tracks together with Cherondet arap Ng’asura of “Kongoi Maitoling” and “Katuiyo” tracks. While introducing the song “Kongoi Maitoling”, (Thank you, My Darling) Hugh Tracey says that arap Ng’asura sings to the girl of his heart and he calls her his calf, and Cherondet could not pronounce well the phrase “my darling” and he instead calls her *Maitoling*. A calf in Kipsigis dialect is *moita*, and when the British came with their English romantic phrase *my darling*, the phrase to artist Cherondet arap Ng’asura sounded like *moita* (calf) and in this sense the musician uses homophonic words to construct metaphoric polysemy where attributes of a calf and those of a darling are merged. Reflecting back on the entire Kalenjin community, young folks to date can still refer to their darlings as *moita*. In the track “Kongoi Maitoling”, he interchanges *maitoling* (my darling) with *moitanyun* (my calf):

<i>Kipo kor po arap Tengecha</i>	We belong to Arap Tengecha’s land
<i>Kongoi we Choni Marindas</i>	Thank you Choni Marinda
<i>Kongoi maitoling</i>	Thank you my darling
<i>Haloo moitanyun</i>	Hallo my calf

In the course of this article’s research, I realised that while Kipsigis had their own music pioneers, the Nandi community of the southern part of the larger Rift Valley had their own artists too, who include Akito arap Yeko and his “Chepchoni Marinda” and “arap Chepsiolei” tracks, and Kipkeino arap Rop with his “arap Kapero” song. What is so unique about these tracks is that particular tracks like “Chepchoni Marinda” and even “Chebokion Kiyai” were commissioned and recorded with the assistance of Hugh Tracey and these recordings were later compiled in a series named *African Popular Music in 78 RPM*.<sup>14</sup>

Initially, *Kambaget* was a mock fight that raiders undertook before they set out for an actual attack. Folk songs in Kalenjin land were sung only on special occasions and every event had its own folk song. “Chewen”, for instance, was sung only when old men had dressed themselves beautifully and each of them was out to participate in a dancing competition that determined who among them was the best dressed. Equally, “Chebokion Kiyai” was one of the folk songs sung every year just after the Kalenjin people had taken in their harvest. In the context where I collected details about “Chebokion Kiyai” folk songs, Kipsigis people from Bureti (now Bureti Constituency) used to celebrate their good harvest in parts like Koiyet in Roret, Chemaoui and Soromitik, and according to

Julius Mashorupu arap Lang'at, Mzee Tamokige arap Lang'at (commonly known by the name arap Lianat) from Cheboin, Temuren arap Tong'oi from Chemosit and arap Chebang'o from Kapsang'ai were the greatest team leaders of 1950s. Other soloists who assisted these forerunners included Moliolo arap Langat from Tepkutwet, Kimananga arap Rutto from Koiyet and Nyautenge arap Ng'eny<sup>15</sup> from Kaproret, though Nyautenge later dropped and joined the Kenya Rifles (KR). Nyautenge occupies a unique position since after leaving KR, he became *Boiyot/Kipisyo* (the old man who performs every single task during all the initiation mini-ceremonies), a task he actively performed from 1975 until 2018, and is remembered well for leading special folk songs like "Cheptirtmet", a song that the initiates, parents and others sing as they move in circle around a family altar called *Mabwaita*. While Tamokige arap Lianat was a gifted drum beater, Temuren arap Tong'oi and arap Chebang'o were the day's celebrated soloists and their voices were unequalled even after their demise. Both arap Chebang'o and arap Tong'oi were renowned soloists from Bureti, but arap Chebango held the champion's flag in Bureti and beyond to the neighbouring Belgut. In fact, a song called "Menderetap Chebang'o"<sup>16</sup> (Chebango's Flag) was composed in his honour and in the song, Julius Mashorupu arap Lang'at<sup>17</sup> says that arap Chebang'o's high-ranking singing prowess was exalted, and that singers and dancers mainly sang the song to anyone who dares challenge the eminent soloist. Tamokige arap Lianat's rare skills in drum beating are remembered well, for he had a unique technique of beating first while facing left as he let his right-hand ear attune to the drum in a posture that simulates someone fine-tuning a radio set. As if unsatisfied, he would turn the other way round and while facing the right-hand side this time, his left ear was keenly listening to the tune that his drum-beats generated, and once he was satisfied, he could then face forward as his extraordinary beats took everyone to the dance floor. Julius Mashorupu arap Lang'at remembers how well Tamokige arap Lianat could tune his drum-beats to the sweet voices of arap Tong'oi and that of arap Chebang'o, and once the folk song had ended, he would slightly lift himself off the ground, twist his neck a little backwards as he asked the cheerful crowd "A lianat ooh leh?" (Folks, how am I?). And that is how he got his name arap Lianat.

The exact recording of the "Chebokion Kiyai" track is not known, though according to *African Popular Music in 78 RPM*, "Chebokion Kiyai" is one of the recordings made between 1925 and 1955. Mzee Julius Mashorupu arap Lang'at presupposed that it might have been made in the late 1940s because he heard the track in 1950 soon after his father, Meshak arap Marisin, bought a Vintage Duosonic Record Player known then as *Chepkiinyit*.<sup>18</sup> Nyaunya and arap Laboso are therefore believed to be the first music composers from the Kalenjin community who laid the foundations for composing, recording and production of the songs known to-date as "The Oldies". In 2005, however, Kipchamba arap Tapotuk video-recorded the folk songs of 1950s and 1960s and these songs include "Chewen", "Ehoiyee", "Kamaiywa", "Kigolosyo", "Kotich Got", "Kiprop" and "Kibeen Kalya Soiwo". The video versions of these folk songs<sup>19</sup> feature the community's famous musicians like Kipkwomburiot, Siraria, Kanam, Chemiri, Segeri, Kones, Legeno, Oriang'o and Kipchamba himself. While Mzee Moris arap Mainek (1938-) and Segeri arap Talam sung before Kipchamba arap Tapotuk, Kipchamba's triumphant entry into the music scene subsumed both under his Koilong'et Band.

## Kipchamba arap Tapotuk: The King of Old Music

While the aforementioned artists predate Kipchamba arap Tapotuk by some years, Kipchamba's artistry is more influential. By and large, Kipchamba was and is still the giant of Kalenjin music. While there are many reasons for this, perhaps the most important is that Kipchamba's tale famously attempts to set the record straight with regard to musical depictions of the past history and culture of the Kalenjin people. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Kipchamba alone ruled the Kalenjin music airwaves and in my own work (Rono 2019) and that of Peter Tirop Simatei (2010), we argue that he not only utilised the opportunity but he also exploited his musical prowess to tell the history and culture of the Kalenjin people. Though his songs are now available online, their recording and production years pose a great challenge to researchers who might want to undertake spatial-temporal analysis on them. Even an approach, such as is taken in this article, to trace the evolution and transformation of these musical forms together with theoretical ideas, requires knowledge of the particular periods during which the songs were recorded. Kipchamba formed Koilong'et Band, collaborated and sang together with Kipkwopuriot arap Riro ("Mo Ureeren Emenyon", "Eputana Moricho"); Moris arap Mainek ("Moset Iyamboloo", "Sukukuu Kamorir", "Tabararik", "Moru Kericho kioru Kimare", "Kapkulimben Dip", "Tapletgoi", "Emenyon Koloo", "Itembe", "Siling' Somok"); Oriang'o arap Chepkwony and Francis Sonoiya Langat ("Chepkomet", "Ng'omitun Raini", "Ibirchininei Boiyot", "Cheptirorit", "Chepkosiom", "Tulwetap Morut", "Obwat Koolet", "Kenderwa Maiywek", "Opot Chemetet", "Bakach Chebaigeyat Sikilai"); Pole Sitonik ("Kapyugoi"), and Segeri arap Talam ("Kibwat Luk", "Ng'echerok", "Sosimo")<sup>20</sup> and when their musical collaboration collapsed, Kipchamba continued singing alone. In the course of his singing career, Kipchamba was joined by a number of other bands. In Kass FM where I worked as an audio technician between 2008 and 2011, "The Oldies" songs (of the 1980s and before) were loosely known as "Kipchamba Songs" because tracks by Kipchamba's contemporaries were not documented under their names and so it is difficult to differentiate and distinguish theirs from Kipchamba's. A case at hand is Pole Sitonik's tracks such as "Masian" or "Ng'olset", songs that he produced under his own History Kumbuka Band but these tracks are digitised under Kipchamba Memorial Organization, the YouTube channel that presumably disseminates Kipchamba arap Tapotuk's own recordings. This will of course confuse younger generations and any other audience who isn't acquainted well with "The Oldies" category.

Of any Kalenjin music band, none has equaled Kipchamba's Koilong'et Band and this is attributed to Mzee Kipkwopuriot arap Riro from Olbutyo who is known by many, including by Kipchamba himself, as the engine behind very many narratives that require further explanation. The name Kipkwopuriot literally means the Queen Bee who sources life. True to the literal meaning, Kipkwopuriot arap Riro was a writer and producer who had in-depth knowledge of Kalenjin culture. He could sometimes blend Kipchamba's song nicely. On occasions when asked to clarify some issues related to some songs, for instance in his track "Ng'echeretab arap Bwoyo", Kipchamba talks about *Kiperperit*, a dynamite-like invention that Kalenjin people could have used to overturn mountains. In this song, Kipchamba asks his listeners to find much more information about *Kiperperit* from Kipkwopuriot arap Riro.

Oriang'o arap Chepkwony, who passed on in 2012, briefly teamed up with Joseph Rono to form Chepkulo Band in late 1970s and co-sung "Kokoyakitu Kwonyik", "Kwonyikap

Kimintilil” and “Obot Mongoit” among others. Both Oriang’o arap Chepkwony and Joseph Rono of Chepkulo Band later teamed up with Mwalimu Anthony Koech in Mokyolok Band to record “Kibel got Lesebeth” and “Ibur Komie Cicilia” among others too. Pole Sitonik joined Koilong’et Band in 1970s and he jointly composed and recorded a number of hits like “Kongoi Kapyugoi, Sabengwony”, “Kamet ak Lagok”, “Tibichu” and “Roptap 1961” but he later peeled off and founded his History Kumbuka Band in 1980s. Pole Sitonik was a former horse-rider cum trainer in horse-riding based at a White settler farm in Ngong-Kajiado in the 1960s and his nick-name “Pole” is synonymous with the famous Polo horse race that was part of his training. Among the tracks that Pole Sitonik recorded under History Kumbuka Band are “Ng’etkonda”, “Masian”, “Taplaige ak Chesanga”, “Ilonguke” and “Ng’olset”. The “Ng’olset” track presents a cultural conflict between Kipsigis and Western traditions in which the *Meskwen* (Missions) detest the eating of cow’s blood, but according to Sitonik’s father (as said in the track), blood is edible because it comes from the cow just like the edible meat and milk. Francis Chemirei arap Koech joined Koilong’et Band in 1978 and he recorded volumes of songs together until Kipchamba’s demise in 2007. During his time however, other artists of different Band names joined Kipchamba and virtually all of their compositions and their Band names have been subsumed by Koilong’et Band. This study has discovered that while Kip-suter Band is one of the Bands in “The Oldies”, more details about it couldn’t be traced and future researchers can document details about the said Band and so more about the artist I came to know just as Charles, the alleged Band owner.

### **Kipchamba arap Tapotuk’s Contemporaries**

Though Kipchamba arap Tapotuk (1937–2007) appeared to have been the only Kalenjin singer during “The Oldies”, a host of other Kalenjin artistes composed and sang during his time. Owing to their rootedness in Kalenjin history and culture, Kipchamba (and by extension, other artists of his time) can arguably be said to be canonical, prototypical and are too “high” to be corrupted by the new generations “because none of his songs has been recreated by its consumers to feather their own nests” (Rono 2019, 64). Kipchamba’s contemporaries include: Solomon Manori (1939–) of Chemaner Band (“Tibik”, “Chepkosa”, “Chemolel”, “Kimekeyat”, “Chepkesesiot”, “Chepnonndindet”, “Mongetko”, “Chepkorir”); Charles A. Chepkwony of Kolu Band (“Sakao Selele”, “Ya Lembech Lagochu”, “Obore Sikiryet”, “Ngotunige Lagok”, “Koyote Ng’omnot”, “Pikap Sondu Monyalil Sigiryet”, “Chemosi”, “Kilyano Ratanga”, “Pelina”, “Wuiyee my Lover”, “Kasimano Pilista”, “Magtalena”); Hanga arap Soi of Kimuchul Band, Tumbalal arap Sang of Ureeren Band; Paul Temugo arap Sang of Kotestes Band; Paul Busiene of Bandap Tai Sound Band; Chuma arap Tugat of Waka Waka Band; Kiptangus arap Koske and Micah arap Sigilai of Kuresoi Band (“Tekisto Kipkalwal”, “Chepkwony Chelangat”, “Barnatet Tinet”, “Tumwekab Kwonyik”, “Chepkondok”, “Chito Ko Chito”, “Alice Chepkoech”, “Kibolion”, “Kwodayun Esther” “Chepkoech”, “Chepkeleliot Sesge”, “Chepto Ne Kisoman”); Joseph arap Kosiom, Samwel arap Cherose and Francis arap Chesimet of Korara Boys Band, (“Jepokeyo”, “Nairobi”, “Kongoi Kap Mosop”, “Ogas Lagochu”, “Iya Iyai Marindet”); Dr Alexander arap Kering’ of Kaplele Sounds Band; Joel arap Kileges (1947–) of Jamasis (Chamasis) Band and Joseph Rono of Mokyolok Band (“Kararan Chomyet Batiem”, “Jane Chemarus”). This list might, however, look too inconsequential for anyone to take note of it, but for



anyone who understands how jumbled “The Oldies” category can be would consider this not merely as an encyclopaedic approach but as a much needed portal into comprehending Kalenjin’s traditional songs of the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s. Bearing in mind that the dot.com generations of now and the coming futures rely and will rely heavily on digitised materials, the most probable YouTube channel could be Retlaw, one of the channels that has compiled these “Oldies” songs and uploaded them in three parts as *Kalenjin Rhumba (Oldies) Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3*.<sup>21</sup> Because these songs are only combined as one and have got no voice-over that can guide YouTube’s consumers, the historical perspective that this study takes has greatest potential to guide future studies on “The Oldies” songs.

Information on these Kipchamba’s colleagues is so scant that they pose a challenge to scholars who are interested in a fair examination of Kalenjin’s traditional music in the 1980s and beforehand. From a series of mainstream and social media interviews on Kalenjin musical artistry, through scholarly works on these musicians, to other myriad of engagements that aim at offering some profound insights into the community’s music scene, none has put Kipchamba arap Tapotuk’s coevals into perspective. Ambrose Kimutai Molel is the newest entrant to strut on to the field and try his luck, but he hasn’t done much yet despite the profundity of his Keljin TV’s insight into these artists.<sup>22</sup> Kimutai Molel’s attempts are derailed by the aging artistes who, despite being resourceful persons, are too amnesiac to remember well what prevailed during the heydays of their productions. Though there are attempts in the three interviews that Kimutai Molel has done so far with Solomon Manori, Moris arap Mainek and Joel arap Kileges, there is still a challenge to get to the bottom of the real tracks recorded by Kipchamba’s peers, particularly recording dates and at some point, the interviews appear to rehash preceding information. In this Oldies category, Paul Busiene and Isaia arap Kenduiwo of Bandap Tai Sound Band (“Morut”, “Boisiek ak Chumbek”, “Segerek”, “Maendeleo”, “Loberberot lagokap biik”, “Kap Lngwenda-74”, “Tapkokwa”, “Chebkeber”, “Lemeny”, “Cherongos”, “Cheklek”), Paul Temugo, Alexander arap Kering’ and Joel arap Kileges from Merigi are virtually forgotten. After founding Kong’asis Band in 1977, arap Kering’ conscripted his brother Joel arap Kileges and they both recorded good number of songs, among them “Barnotik ab Chepseon”, but arap Kileges carved a niche for himself and founded his own Jamasis Band, and Alexander arap Kering’ went his way and formed Kaplele Sounds Band. Famed for his song “Achomane Kirengit ite Molo” that was recorded under his Kaplele Sounds Band, Alexander hails from Itembe in Kaplele near Kapisoge in Bomet Town.

Alexander Kering’ made a name with his famous track “Chepkurgat” besides other tracks like “Mica Mastamet”, “Tekisto”, “Chepkeliot Sesge”, “Kibolchon Kwondanyun” “Achomane Kirengit ite Molo” and “Itembe”. On his part, Joel arap Kileges recorded “Alice Chepkwony”, “Nekonyitot D. T. arap Moi”, “Rais D. T. Moi”, “Office ak Spitali”, “Lewenet”, “Sugar Mummy”, “Eliza Moya”, “Chesiele”, “Rotekap Kwonyik”, “Ruben Kipkora” and others. Paul Temuko arap Sang (1958–) of Kotestes Band<sup>23</sup> was initially a traditional herbalist (courtesy of his maternal grandfather) and was overshadowed by his late brother Samuel Kiptesot arap Sang of Junior Kotestes Band despite releasing hits from late 1980s to date. In an interview with *Konyon Netebes* YouTube Channel, Temugo accuses music producers of wasting his music career, citing middle-men brokers who connect the artists like him and the owners of recording studios. His latest song, to my

knowledge, is “Rirek eng’ Segemian”, a 2019-track that responds to inter-tribal clashes that often erupt in parts of Segemian in Narok County. He began singing in 1988 when he recorded first with Chandarana Records in Kericho and he has a number of hits under his name and was later joined by Rodgers Kipsalat Johana Rutto. They sung together for some time before they parted ways in the early 1990s. Temugo together with Rodgers recorded songs like “Aninyon Ooh Recho”, “Jane Chanenyun”, “Chemutai”, “Mang’ok Mungu”, “Matirib Lakwet”, “Kikabuken Chesang”, “Merire Chepkoech”, “Roda”, “Tekeltich”, “Sindala”, “Anna”, and “Tabutany”, among others. Chuma arap Tugat of Waka Waka Band and Kiptangus arap Koske and Micah arap Sigilai of Kuresoi Band are missing in the history of Kalenjin traditional music despite arap Tugat recording soul-arresting hits like “Taplanda” “Nyoetapkat”, “Sikik”, “Chebosungyot”, and “Biikap Kenya” among other songs. Arap Koske and arap Sigilai recorded songs like “Mekanika Jeng Gari Safi”, “Sisi kwa Sisi”, “Kristina”, “Sauti ya Chingili” and “Kumbaru”, and others. The two artists of Kuresoi Band occupy unique positions in Kalenjin “Oldies” because of composing some of their songs in Kiswahili language, perhaps to underscore the changing nature of traditional songs. “Mekanika Jeng Gari Safi” for instance is rendered purely in Kiswahili language with a piece of advice to *makanika jenga ngari safi, inderepa endesha ngari nzuri, ili tufike kwetu salama* (mechanics service the car well and drivers drive well so that we arrive safely) emphasising that *pole pole ndio mwendo* (hurry hurry has got no blessing). We have to note so far that the artists in “The Oldies” category are from the interior of Bomet and Kuresoi and while those from Bomet like Kipchamba conform to the expectations of the roles of traditional music, those from Kuresoi deviate a little, using foreign languages as we have seen above. What follows then puts this deviation into perspective.

### **Bridging the Old and the New: Hanga arap Soi and Tumbalal arap Sang**

Although platforms like YouTube have assisted in promoting music, the mushrooming vernacular FM Radio stations have also played a vital role in making sense of the kind of music they play. In contrast to YouTube, radio stations like Kass FM contextualise and categorise these songs. While some continuity programmes like *Kass Nam Anam* play only the latest hits, *Kass Heshimu Ukuta* plays the Oldies only (from the 1980s and before) while *Kass Keny Age* plays songs that are neither old nor new (from the early 1990s to mid-2000s).<sup>24</sup> Closing the chapter of the aforementioned Oldies and perhaps ushering in another chapter on *Keny Age Ni* (Another Old Age) are Hanga arap Soi and Kiptangus arap Koske of Kimuchul Band, and Tumbala arap Sang of Ureeren Band. These artists present hybridised (both in content and form) music in that while they are of the older generation and laid the foundation for the modern-day hits, they have also innovated, for example by including references to romance in their lyrics.

Joel arap Kileges of Jamasis Band, for instance, appropriates romance in his “Eliza Moya” but he does so in good taste and with a sense of propriety that emulates Kipchamba’s style. Kalenjin secular songs, known all along as historical and cultural artefacts, have evolved since the 1990s, and have been transformed into entertainment objects paying more attention to sexuality as in the case of Afisaa Junior whose “Botan” (to vibrate) uses explicit sexual metaphors. The shift away from historical and cultural commitment to Kalenjin secular music was brought about by the liberated airwaves of the 1990s

and changes in technological advancement had a great impact on indigenous communities like the Kalenjins. They were exposed to new lifestyles that didn't conform to their conservative way of life. Before radio freedom, the national broadcaster Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) operated under the government's watch and what went on air was being censored. A good number of Kalenjin secular musical numbers produced from the 1990s onwards would not have passed the government's "decency" test.

Molded by Kipchamba arap Tapotuk of Koilong'et Band, Philip Sigei of Chei-Long'et Band was among the artists in the second phase in the growth of Kalenjin secular music in early 1990s. Both his band name and that of his tutor Kipchamba have the inflections of the shield, *Long'et*, and in an interview with Bore Mista of Kass FM, Philip Sigei attributes his success in music to Kipchamba and sometimes styles himself as *arwetap Kipchamba* (Kipchamba's Mentee). In order to show the relationship and the relevance of his artistry to that of Kipchamba, he chose to call his Band Chei-Long'et, and through his Band, Philip Sigei continues the legacy of "The Oldies". What happened with "The Oldies" was that Kipchamba and his contemporaries created lyrics with anecdotes that suited their context in their own times but when the same lyrics are transposed to modern contexts, audiences struggle to make sense of them. Chei-Long'et, therefore, released tracks like "Solobchot", "Ng'erat Lakwet", "Ng'oro Kugo", "Siruan Ng'oisit Bakule" that invoke and appropriate "The Oldies" register. A number of his tracks like "Ng'erat Lakwet" and "Solobchot" for instance repurpose the historical and cultural concerns of "The Oldies" in order to fit the modern age. "Ng'erat Lakwet" for instance invokes the outdated female genital mutilation ceremony that involved the dressing of a female initiate with *Munyawa*, the traditional circumcision attire. Released when the traditional initiation ceremony in Kalenjin land was dying out, the song helps to recuperate the lost culture and though thematic concerns in the song reflect "the Oldies", the beats give it a modern flavour that stimulates the audience to first enjoy the song and secondly to learn from it.

In an attempt to protect Kipchamba's legacy, Philip Sigei mentored Geoffrey Rotich of Makiche Boys Band; Paul Kipng'eno Korgoren (*Chwarachwara*) of Olesoi Band; Angeline Chepkoech, Elizabeth Chepkorir and Stella Cheronno of Kalenjin Sisters; Margaret Chemeli (known for her "Mr. D" track), and Beatrice Memoi of Kapchumbe Sisters are among the artists in this category. These artists are committed to relaying the history and culture of the Kalenjin people, and they also perform their songs with a relatively slow and sedate tempo. This legacy and continuity resulted from the fact that some of them were either modelled by the legends or worked together with the earlier generation's superstars.

Even though Kipchamba in his old age appeared to have been outdone by the new and upcoming artists, he emerged again into the field just before his untimely death in 2007. Besides simulating an actual marathon in his "Kipchamba Ninja", he too invokes *Chepusya*, *Kipkatit*, *Kitinchi*, *Kawaset* and *Kimoet* – the various and famous types of *Kambaget* (wrestling competition) that the Kipsigis community of the South Rift performed in search of the community's most skilled wrestlers. In the early 1900s to just after independence, members of the community staged this wrestling competition at Kapkimolwo, the cultural cradle of Kipsigis community in Longisa, Bomet County. The wrestling festivals, which drew people from far and wide, saw the elders like Nyongi arap Chepseng'eny from Kapkimolwo presiding over the crowning of the wrestling champion, a title that was highly revered. Kapkimolwo Longisa has been popularised by a traditional song that has

become internationally known, “Kapkimolwo Longisa Igere Ra Lelo”, a folk song sung in praise of Bariro Lelo arap Sitonik, the renowned *Chepusya* wrestler who held the title of that wrestling champion for a very long time. His agility and ability to spring and somersault during the *Chepusya* mini-Olympic game was praised not just in his local Kapkimolwo area but even went beyond Longisa, disposing all those who knew his fame of bringing down men in a wrestling contest to compose the song “Igere Ra Lelo” (Today, You Will Meet Lelo) in his honour.

In his “Kipchamba Ninja” song, Kipchamba transposes the mock-wrestling scene to the music field and in this collaboration with Juliana Koskei of Nyim Koloo Band, he begins by Kalenjinising the English style of starting off a race:

<i>Oini Ma Ke Set</i>	Get on your marks
<i>Ker Sach</i>	Get ready
<i>Ptooh</i>	Go

In this track, Kiphamba calls himself a champion. The track demonstrates his heroism in the music race with the supposedly able youths, as he challenges them not to slack off (*matorustage*), because they will be surprised to see Kipchamba emerging the winner in lane one if they fail to do what the community expects them to do as musicians. In the interjections that accompany the climax as the song ends, Mzee Kipchamba, who now calls himself Kiptoset, Mr Ninja, says the dot.com generation does not scare him:

<i>Ng’o wirchon Chepusya, Owirchi Kipkatit,</i>	when they challenge me with <i>Chepusya</i> I try <i>Kipkatit</i>
<i>Kowirchon Kipkatit ii, Awiren Kitinchi,</i>	When they too try <i>Kipkatit</i> , I respond with <i>Kitinchi</i>
<i>Kowirchon Kitinchi, Awiren Kimoet,</i>	When they too respond with <i>Kitinchi</i> , I do <i>Kimoet</i>
<i>Kowiran Kimoet ii, Opoisyen Kimanwar ak awas,</i>	When they do <i>Kimoet</i> , I use <i>Kimanwar</i> , then I kick
<i>ak aiiskotenen Kipcholol, ak otesyi kipkowirir, awir ...</i>	and I escort with <i>Kipcholol</i> , then I add <i>Kipkowirir</i> , and I run ...

Thus he emerges as a music race winner. In the lyrics above, Kipchamba Mista Ninja tells *sonjoek* (youths) that however much they display their music skills as if in a fierce *Kimoet* mock fight, he says with conviction that he is emerging as the winner since these *sonjoek* cannot outdo him in rare skills like those of *Kimanwar*, *Kipcholol* and *Kipkowirir*. Kipchamba’s triumph in the “dot.com era” is however supported by the alliance he has made with the young Juliana Koskei, his co-singer whom Kipchamba had invited to join him so as to add some contemporary flavour to his old voice. As the track ends, Kipchamba claims that the youths have surrendered to his music prowess, adding that he had not even needed to use all his stylistic agility such as *toro* and *kiptotirit* techniques.

The return of Kipchamba indicates the cyclical evolution and reinvention of Kalenjin traditional music. Younger performers know the traditions, and promote the sense of the recycling nature of Kalenjin traditional music by also reproducing and referencing older band names and songs.

## Notes

1. Although this article claims to examine Kalenjin traditional music, it is indeed focused on Kipsigis, one of the seven dialects of the Kalenjin community. This is because, virtually all secular artists hail from the southern part of Rift Valley, a region occupied mainly by Kipsigis, and outside the Kipsigis community, many people may have to scratch their heads a little to come up with the name of secular artists from these other dialects.
2. Apart from Nyaunya (who sang with Cheriro arap Korogoren and arap Chumo) and Ketienya, there are different tracks of "Chemirocha" sung by various artists including Cheruiyot arap Kirui who died in 2021 and Cherondet arap Ngasura.
3. According to the details from ILAM field card number D6L 22, Chemirocha has been turned into a local version of the god Pan with the feet of an antelope, half beast, and half man and he is urged by singers and dancers to do the leaping dance familiar to all Kipsigis so energetically that he will jump clear out of his clothes. For more information on this, see Chemirocha (III) in the South African Music Archive Project ([ukzn.ac.za](http://ukzn.ac.za)).
4. For more information on this repatriation, see LOST SONGBOOKS – Returning Hugh Tracey's recordings to Kenya (Part 1 – CHEMIROCHA) – YouTube
5. Apart from the "Chemirocha" track which captures this mystical figure, Charles A. Chepkwony's song "Chemosi" also tells a narrative of Chemosi, a half-man half-animal creature.
6. For more information on recording and storage, see Shuker (1994), parts of chapters two and three.
7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-EhOzSEv44>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02TswoMZUcQ>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqMVW2S7IGk>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jt7BeBVLwxI&t=1s>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-n5TxT6HpY>
8. In a personal interview with Olchore Lekulei on 7 June 2020, he said that arap Tangus appreciated Kipchamba by gifting him a heifer for the good work he did while staying with him during his boyhood. On seeing this, his maternal uncles Oriop Nyarinei, were not pleased at all and denied him the cow. They claimed that it was not possible for a sister's son to be given a cow. But after lengthy antagonism with his sons, the grandfather gave in and instead gave Kipchamba a *Chepkesem* and said: "Have this my grandson, it can also become a cow," and off he went. Thus Kipchamba's life in the music industry began.
9. Olchore Lekulei is Chamgei FM's radio presenter and he is fanatical about any aspect of Kalenjin culture. His credibility on what he comments about on Kipchamba Memorial Organization is attributed to the benefits of the insights of coming from the same place as most of the Kalenjin secular artists.
10. Though there could be a number on Facebook Groups created by suspicious publics, this became one of the trusted pages since it was created, managed and administered by one of Kipchamba's sons. However, the posts on the page are not said to be credible but they are necessary signposts in research on Kipchamba's artistry.
11. Though I have attempted to give the translation of these tracks, I have left others untranslated since I presuppose that the English version of the name may not be necessary at all, but I give interpretations/translations where necessary.
12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s53sE4gepml>
13. During the days when the only media outlet in Kenya was the then Voice of Kenya, now Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, Kisumu station was mandated to broadcast in Kenya's ethnic languages while the main Nairobi Station used English and Kiswahili.
14. The African 78rpm collection was established with the help of Paris-based DJ Greg de Villanova and these collections include recordings made by Hugh Tracey, Chebokion Kiyai being one of them. For more information, see African 78rpm Recording Collection, UCSB Library.
15. Charles Kipng'eno Rono, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LONo\\_ktSJhQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LONo_ktSJhQ); this video shows Nyautenge arap Ng'eny conducting a traditional blessing ceremony before pupils of Cherinyit Academy in Kaproret in 2019. Equally useful for reference is this video about a similar blessing conducted by an old man in an unnamed location in the northern part of

- Rift Valley, Charles Kipng'eno Rono, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/XRYsXjH3bE>. The latter video was in circulation on one of the WhatsApp groups of Kipsigis Unity in Eldoret.
16. This was a white garment, with some decorations, and in a manner that simulates a flag, it was tied to the tip of a long stick. Arap Chebang'o is said to have been holding it up while singing along the roads as he was heading to markets like Cheboin, Roret and Kapkelek around Bureti, and he would also hold it up as he sang while heading to Belgut for a singing competition.
  17. Personal interview I had with him on 21 May 2020.
  18. The record player has a spring just at the base of the plate that holds a cassette disc. It is recharged by turning round a handle hooked to the spring. As the handle rotates, it coils the spring until it coils no more and so the handle rotates no more. I was hence called *Chep-kiinyit* because to turn the handle round is to *Ki-iny*. It plays the disc when the coil starts uncoiling, hence rotating the plate that carries the disc.
  19. Kenyan Music. (n.d.) Best Of old Kipchamba music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvy1vnrR0C0>
  20. The song tracks mentioned don't necessarily mean these are only tracks that Kipchamba co-produced with the said artists. These are just a few examples among many other tracks and the aim here is to clarify the particular co-artists and the particular songs they co-produced with Kipchamba.
  21. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh55zTyZ\\_WI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh55zTyZ_WI), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqHDJ5Ovk38>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxBLpC7fffw&t=2671s>
  22. Ambrose Kimutai Molel is the founding Director of Keljin TV. The local TV "station" was founded in 2020 and it mainly uses YouTube to reach its wider audience. It was founded on the basis of documenting the history and culture of the Kalenjin people and since its launch, the TV station has made a number of strides which include interviewing personalities known in the Kalenjin land as knowledgeable about matters related to the community's ways of life.
  23. The Original Kotestes Band of Paul Temugo has so far reproduced three other Kotestes Bands and these include Junior Kotestes, Second Junior Kotestes and Young Junior Kotestes. The name Kotestes came into being after Paul Temugo collaborated with Kipsalat Rodgers; Kotestes is a hypocorism for Koiwo and Takitech, the places the two artists hail from.
  24. *Nam Anam* programme runs every Monday to Friday between 10:00 AM and 12:00 PM; *Heshimu Ukuta* runs every Monday to Friday between 3:00 PM and 6:00 PM, while *Kass Keny Age* runs only on Saturdays between 10:00 AM and 12:00 PM.

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## ORCID

Charles Kipng'eno Rono  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8699-2551>

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## Discography

Note on discography: Because of the challenges in verifying the exact details (especially recording dates) of the tracks referred to in this article, it has not in all cases been possible to verify whether a recording was on CD, MP3, MIDI, Cassette, or Vinyl.

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- "Kibolion", "Kwodayun Esther" "Chepkoech", "Chepkeleliot Sesge", "Chepto Ne Kisoman", "Mekanika Jeng Gari Safi", "Sisi kwa Sisi", "Kristina", "Sauti ya Chingili" and "Kumbaru".
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