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Thematising COVID-19 pandemic: A reading of selected songs of a popular Borana musician

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic is a global phenomenon that has ravaged the world population for the past two years. Because of its newness and overwhelming impact, many aspects of the infection by the COVID-19 virus and its effects remain obscure. One of these aspects is the communal responses to it among societies that are rural and marginal to world events such as the Borana of North East Africa. Yet exploring this field promises the discovery of vibrant knowledge. Thus, a number of oral artists have used their mother languages to compose songs to educate the vulnerable masses on the disastrous consequences of the disease and how to mitigate them in the interim. This paper analyses one such song by a popular Borana musician who goes by the stage name of King Sama entitled “Koronaan Dhukkub Bada” (COVID-19 is a Deadly Disease) and teases out not only the didactic message formulated and voiced by the singer but also the stylistic nuances by means of which it is encapsulated and disseminated. The singer informs, educates and cautions the community in the face of the calamity the disease has proven to be and appeals to the people to recourse to discipline, the mercy of god, and the vitality of tradition and culture to overcome a situation whereby humanity could be on the verge of extinction.

Keywords: Borana, COVID-19, mother tongue, pandemic, performance, songs

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Public Interest Statement

The Borana community is the largest sub-ethnic group of the Oromo-speaking people. They are a Cushitic linguistic group in Kenya. Other Oromo communities in Kenya include the Gabra, Orma and the Sakuye. The name Borana means 'free', in reference to their nomadic nature. In spite of the above, this study analyses one such song by a popular Borana musician who goes by the stage name of King Sama entitled "Koronaan Dhukkub Bada" (COVID-19 is a Deadly Disease) and teases out not only the didactic message formulated and voiced by the singer but also the stylistic nuances by means of which it is encapsulated and disseminated. The singer informs, educates and cautions the community in the face of the calamity the disease has proven to be and appeals to the people to recourse to discipline, the mercy of god, and the vitality of tradition and culture to overcome a situation whereby humanity could be on the verge of extinction.

Introduction

Since the advent of COVID-19 virus pandemic in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, the disease has spread like wild fire leaving death and economic destruction in its wake, even in areas far flung from its place of origin. According to World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) over six million people have died worldwide with infection figures of over five hundred and fifty million to date. In Africa there are over nine million infections. Kenya has an infection figure of over three hundred and thirty thousand and fatality figure of over five thousand and increasing. According to some analysts these figures are underreported and the reality is much graver. The unprecedented global pandemic precipitated diverse reactions from governments, institutions, organizations, communities and individuals. To address the challenges posed, the World Health Organization (WHO) gave guidelines called Covid-19 protocols in its endeavour to contain the spread of the disease. These were largely adopted by Ministries of Health in countries the world over in which hand washing, wearing of face masks, observing of social distances were the hallmark. New vocabularies emerged and entered social discourses. Terms like social distance, quarantine, self-isolation and lockdown assumed new meanings in the context of the pandemic. People who previously went to their places of work were ordered in so-called partial or total lockdowns to operate from home. Most public spaces, shops and markets were closed to facilitate the compliance with the order. Since man is a social animal, the self-isolation imposed and enforced by authorities had a far reaching social and psychological impact. For instance, in Italy, it was reported that at the height of the pandemic when such isolation had taken toll on people, residents of housing flats started singing from their balconies and were joined by many others in search of human interaction and companionship. One author reports:

A large number of Danish citizens are watching each other singing from inside their respective living rooms. Over the last number of weeks, there has been lot of singing. We tried to emulate the Italian way (Ulfstjerne 2020, p. 82).

Singing became a bonding force for humanity which saw itself on the verge of dissolution. Some recorded their song performances and broadcasted them in the various social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. The song under review was composed by a Borana singer by the stage name of King Sama during those tense moments when there were partial lockdowns in Kenya,

and when very little was known about the mechanisms of the virus. The song as event is entertainment and recreation as well as a stimulus to its listeners to reflect on their circumstances (Rosenberg 2011, p. 115). King Sama's song on COVID-19 has now made its way to people's homes, vehicles, radio cassettes, FM vernacular stations and in social media outlets such as YouTube. The song is performed against the backdrop of doubts spread by the conspiracy theorists who purport that the disease is non-existent and that it was a fabrication of the government to access donor money. This misleading information was readily absorbed by many people out of ignorance and the fact that the disease had not affected them at the time.

King Sama's bio data is not easily available though there is some information that can be gleaned from oral sources. His real name is Abduba Wako. He was born in Iddilolaa, a small market town in southern Ethiopia, some twenty kilometres from the Kenyan border town of Sololo. In his formative years he crossed the border and studied in Kenya for a short stint of time and even lived in Nairobi before he went back to Ethiopia. While in Kenya he was able to learn the Kiswahili language, which explains the presence of Kiswahili words in some of his songs. In Ethiopia he created a music base for himself in a town call Yaballo, some two hundred kilometres from Moyale border town of Kenya, where he runs a Borana Music studio. There is paucity of material on his family life but it is known that he has two children whom he has exposed to the public space through co-option into his music performance, with stage names of Prince Wako and Princess Elesh. In addition to the secular music, he also sings the gospel music, himself being a Pentecostal Christian. It is worth noting that he uses the ancient honorific of king, prince and princess as a trope of differentiating himself from the common people who form his audience. In some instances, he spells his name 'Sama' as 'Summer', thus anglicising it, making him gravitate towards an admiration of western way of life symbolised by the nomenclature. By calling himself king and his children prince and princess, and anglicising his name as 'Summer', he is assuming an identity that puts him above the ordinary mortals in a posture of self-aggrandizement. As Bob White writes in relation to Zaire music, many of these self-fashioned layers of identity reference the world of politics and the language of power using terms such as king, papa, grand, owner or boss, and these words often come alongside images every bit as striking (2008: 232). Even if this is done with a certain dose of innocence in the case of King Sama, at the very least the naming reflects an admiration of things from abroad, master names included, as well as a measure of self-distrust and a subordination of the local to the foreign. But the self-elevation to the status of a 'king' also allows the musician to speak with authority on the subjects of his choice.

Apart from the song under review, the singer has several other songs under his name about love, politics and other socially relevant themes. This repertoire is important as background to the COVID-19 song because it endows the composer with an aura of significance, in the sense that whatever he sings about is of social relevance, topical, and therefore worthy of attention. In addition, the COVID-19 song seamlessly fits into that repertoire, making it a consistent whole.

In one song, he sings about peace and appears to be reconciling warring factions in society against fighting and harbouring ill feelings for neighbours. He also sings about Oromo unity in a song entitled *Tokkumma* (Unity), where he urges all the Oromo sub-tribes to be united as Oromo and build nationalism based on their presumed origin.

In *Qaadhaaba* (Hustle), he sings of the everyday hustle of ordinary people to put food on the table. He glorifies people who wake up early and head to work, struggling and foregoing their sleep in search of daily upkeep. The image of the baboon fending for itself on a daily basis is used here, where he beseeches god to make his hustling as productive as that of the baboon which does not come out empty handed. What little he gets he is grateful for and asks god to bless it for him. He appears

satisfied with the fruit of his labour even if it deprives him of sleep: "I cannot sleep as I am looking for what to eat". He philosophizes that "a hungry stomach cannot let the owner sleep" and hence it behoves on everyone to work hard towards self-sustenance. Although life is deemed as dependant on work, the speaker tells us that one's income is in the hands of god and that man can only receive what is provided by the deity.

In *Oddu Hinfeddu* (I don't like Gossip), he is categorical that he does not condone idle talk. He prioritises work by drawing on the proverb, *huyi qamnat waya iraa dubbi qamna* (it is better to be busy with work than to be busy with talk). The kind of talk castigated here is the gossipy one where people take upon themselves to vilify others as the singer says "loading me with mud". In the singer's opinion, there are people who destroy others' lives by fabricating lies about them. To him these type of people "wear out their shoes in search of gossip", as they are always on the move from one place to another looking for what rumour they can gather and broadcast. He opines that they are hate-mongers and rumour-peddlers who do not revere god. But unfortunately for them, god does not answer their evil designs and desires of bringing ill luck on people. He advises his audience that work is superior to empty talk which he detests. He condemns people banding around malicious messages to destroy others at the expense of work.

Additionally, he has many love songs which he has composed and performed where the beauty of women is praised. In some of the love songs the singer is so nostalgic that he cannot bear the separation from his lover and begs that he should be taken to where his lover is. Yet in another love song he conceives of love as an ailment that requires treatment from the one being loved. For instance, *Atiin Maan na Tolchitee* (What have You done to Me) is a love song that appears to be puzzled about the love potion that has been applied on the speaker and which has made him desperately crying and craving after his beloved. He confesses that he is behaving in an unusually juvenile manner bordering on insanity, as is evident in "you make me cry like a child and run after you like a crazy man". He imagines his lover as "the warmth of cold season", and without her he is confused, groping in the dark like a blind person. The unrequited love leads to isolation and depression where eating becomes difficult leading to a state of starvation and emaciation. He is love sick and his visiting medical facilities does not reveal any known medical condition. He grows weak and lean, admitting that "all my clothes are loosely fitting".

In *Jalalatina Tolche* (It is Love that Forced Me), the musician confesses that he was compelled by love to "travel at night in the bush like a hyena" in search of his lover. He is restless and suffers insomnia "following and crying" after his loved one. For this he gets despised by his friends and relatives. He foregoes the friendship of those close to him and chooses to be with his lover even when he is laughed at derisively and talked about disparagingly. He avoids annoying his lover and therefore could kneel and beg her for forgiveness though this gesture belittles him in the eyes of other people. He vows that he will not leave her for anyone. He uses words like 'cry', 'follow', 'kneel', 'beg' as a sign of his readiness to put himself at the feet of his lover, despite the condescending impression that these acts create in the public domain.

The song *Daalu Tiya* (My Brown One), enable the singer to extol the many qualities possessed by his lover. He confirms that these qualities are inexhaustible and he views his lover as a unique creature of god. He describes her hair which he compares with the tail of a horse and her teeth which he says white like camel milk. He informs that her eyes are decorated with rings of black and white and concludes with the lips which he opines is "chiselled out by the creator for kiss". Her laughter is described as a mild smile and her looks are unstarling but a series of blinks. He uses the metaphor of

“a malaria sickness which shakes him in spasm” whenever he thinks of her. He wishes that he could abduct her on horseback and gallop away.

Kootina Waalin (Come with Me), develops the same love theme in which the lover’s good qualities are stated. He admires her walk and gait which he says, “does not hurt the earth”, as it is gentle and graceful. The thin waistline is compared to that of an arrow for its slenderness. The singer conceptualises his lover as “my heart, without you the body is sick”. He pleads with his lover to “come and treat me”, apparently to relieve him of the pains of love. The lover praises many of her physical features such as the eyes and other body compartment which god has endowed her with.

Attin Faggo Jirta (You are Living Far Away), captures the singer’s own sorrow state, having been physically separated from his lover. This comes in form of deep thoughts that force themselves on him, sometimes leading to depression. He sees himself on the verge of insanity, where he confesses of “speaking to myself”. He is haunted by the memories of shared intimacies such as kisses and telephone conversations which etched themselves onto his memory. The singer talks of his agonies of living in a space from which she is absent since everything reminds him of her. The reason for separation is however put down as the necessities of life where people have to fend for themselves. He finds it impossible to transcend the memory of shared sweet moments such as kisses, play, banter and her physical attributes which endears her to him. Although he wishes to “pluck you from the phone and take you away” apparently to physically possess her, he knows the impossibility of realising his desire and urges her instead “not to stop calling him” as a way of keeping each other company.

“Ayyo Maale” (Without Mother), appreciates and outlines the role of the mother in society. He specifies some of the many critical tasks the mother performs, making her toil the whole day and sweat out the entire season. He expresses the importance of the mother by “looking left, right, everywhere”, and concludes that “the earth cannot be trodden without her”. He draws on the Borana folklore and myth to argue that even the strong, wise and famous men who populate Borana history are birthed by mothers. We are told, “the brave like Dido Gawale, wise like Liban Waata and famous like Jatani Ali are sons of women”. In an intuitively gender-conscious way, he emphatically affirms the interdependence of men and women. In a society where the patriarchal myths of male characters like Dido Gawale, Liban Waata and Jatani Ali are held in high regard and are reified, he urges the audience to see the mothers in the same light and accord them a similar respect and adoration. In the Borana legendary discourse Dido Gawale was believed to have been the strongest man that ever lived as Liban Waata was regarded as the wisest. Jatani Ali was a contemporary Borana leader (a provincial governor) in the Ethiopian government before his untimely death at the hands of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s state operatives who assassinated him in Nairobi in 1992. He was immortalized by a life-size statue of him in Yaballo town, the professional residence of the musician. Owing to her hard work and resilience, the mother lives like a common worker and a slave who draws water, hews wood, cooks and labour in the farm. He suggests that a mother should not be reduced to the status of a slave as her importance in society surpasses all.

From all these songs, one can conclude that King Sama is very passionate about educating people on the themes of love, work, gender and unity among people for social substance and progress. It was thus a characteristic move when he went on to create a song on the topical issue of the COVID-19 pandemic.

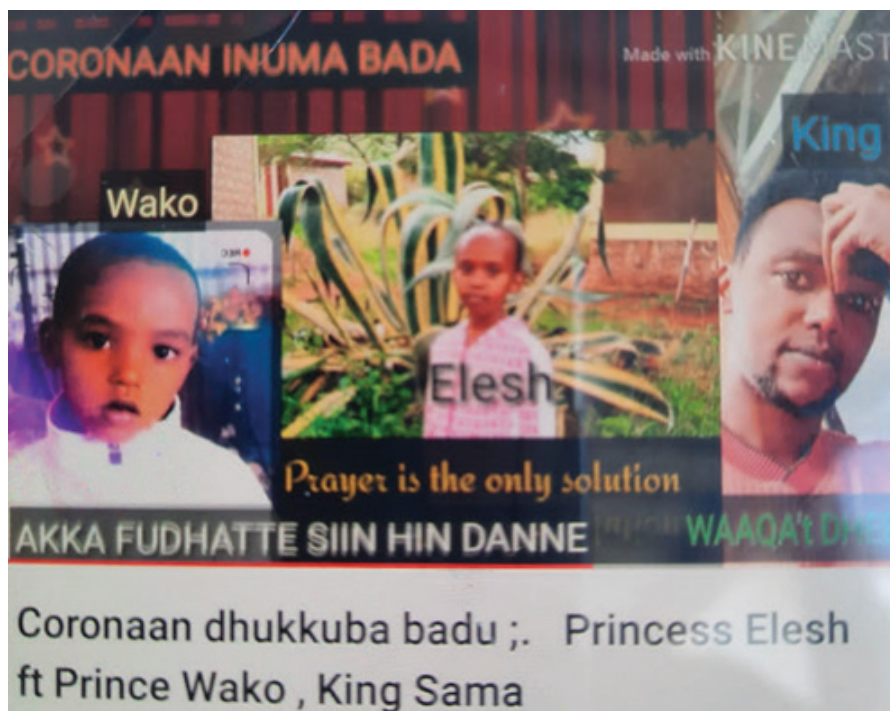


Fig.1 King Sama, Princess Elesh and Prince Wako, the performers of the COVID-19 song

Performing COVID-19 in Mother Tongue

In “Korona song”, he uses the voice of two youngsters (a boy and a girl) whose photos appear in the video of the performance of the song (see Fig. 1). The youngsters are called by their stage names of Prince Wako and Princess Elesh. The use of the two youngsters who indeed are his own children enriches the song’s vocal qualities in what appears to be a collaborative venture. Effectively the multivocality leads to acceptability by the varied audience of young, old, male and female, in addition to indicating that the disease can affect and afflict all and sundry. Indeed, popular dance music travels relatively free across the social and cultural barriers of ethnicity, class, age and religion (White 2008: 31). The singer is also capitalizing on the innocence of the children to pass his message as an authentic and incontestable truth. The song uses a chorus or refrain that underscores the deadly nature of Covid-19 that has no known cure:

Koronaan	COVID-19
Dhukkubhama	is a deadly disease
Qorsahinqabu	it has no cure
Naamijeesa	it kills someone
Waquumchalaatnaambasa	it is only god who can save us

Performance as an act of addressing audiences constitutes those audiences as a particular form of collectivity (Barber, 1997). The singer asks his audience whether they have heard of a disease called COVID-19 and whether they know its mode of transmission and how to prevent it. This is a preamble that not only contextualises the song but also prepares the audience for the messages he wishes to impart and the lessons he intends to inculcate. As Finnegan writes songs can be used to report and comment on current affairs, for propaganda and reflect and mould public opinion (1970, p. 272). In this case the singer reports to the audience as a matter of fact the stark reality of COVID-19’s lethal

characteristics and its indiscriminateness.

The singer states resignedly that in the circumstances, it is only god and the prayer to him that can save humanity. This is clearly imprinted on the CD where the photographs of the performers also appear. The use of the word *korona* indicates that the disease does not have a local name other than the descriptive deadly disease, attesting to its newness in this culture. The refrain is repeatedly sung after every stanza to emphasise to the audience the danger to which they are exposed. As Okpewho says, repetition has an aesthetic and utilitarian value to mark a feeling of excitement or agitation whether in the sense of utmost delight or deepest anxiety and fear (1992, p. 72). The six stanzas discuss some important aspect or other of the disease. The singer resorts to the superior power of god to help men survive the pandemic. Through the chorus, the singer sets the stage to instil not just fear but caution in the way people go about their day to day business. In addition to informing the public that COVID-19 is real and not a hoax, the songs warned that the virus is very infectious (Thompson et.al 2021, p. 7). He is emphatic that COVID-19 is a deadly disease that kills since it has no cure, thus setting the tone for the gravity of the situation the society finds itself in. The lack of cure for the COVID-19 affliction underpins its deadliness and the necessity to turn to god for intervention.

He directly addresses people who are his assumed audience with "I will tell you something, remove wax from your ears":

Waa sitihihima	I will tell you something
Guuri guraa bafadhu	remove wax from your ears
Hintu faatini gorsa	do not underestimate the advice
Kanfudadi	accept it as given
Ilmenaamadua	human children from death
Iraahambisi	Spare them

The singer appeals to the audience to listen and hearken without any encumbrances such as wax in the ears. In Borana parlance, those who cannot heed to advice are seen as having sealed their ears with wax. Wako (2011) cites a song in which men urge women to remove wax in their ears to bear witness to their insults without hindrance. The removal of wax from one's ear is a common phrase that is metaphorical for listening keenly and with undisturbed concentration. The singer is acutely aware that some people disregard vital advice and throw caution to the wind and hence contract the disease. In so saying, the singer conceives of his singing enterprise as a lesson to be imbibed by his audience for the sake of their own good. The acceptance of advice and living by it presumably results in "human children will be spared" from the perils of death. The speaker is of the view that how individuals perceive his message and enact it has a bearing on the death/life situation that society faces. For the singer it is by accepting his advice that the hearer can play a part in saving humanity that is under a serious threat of extinction from the COVID-19 pandemic.

He prescribes what needs to be done to mitigate the dire situation of COVID-19 virus:

Fulla korra anqadhi	place of meeting avoid
Afuur nama hanqadhi	breathe of people avoid
Nam quufahu hanqadhi	a person who coughs avoid
Hachi fagoot baqadhi	run far away from him
Ilaaf afani funaan ke hidhadhi	eyes, mouth, nose of yours cover
Harkaka ke dhiqadhi	wash your hands

This is drawn predictably from the Ministry of Health protocols on COVID-19. The singer asks his audience to avoid meeting places, the stuffy human breath, in addition to covering their mouths, nose and eyes. The mandatory hand washing is also emphasised. These apparently simple instructions are the major precautions known to man to ward off the raging deadly virus. The singer advises his audience to literally “run far away” from anyone who looks suspicious by virtue of exhibiting such known COVID-19 symptoms as coughing. One will recall for instance that at the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, there were reports of even health workers literally taking to their heels on encountering suspected COVID-19 cases. He uses repeatedly the word *hanqadhi* (avoid) for emphasis and creates a rhythmic pattern with other words like *baqadhi* (run), *hidhadhi* (tie) and *dhiqadhi* (wash) which sound alike to instruct his audience on how to take care of themselves in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The song is evidently didactic in nature. Through it, the singer becomes a societal instructor and teacher where strategies to guide against the spread of the disease are pedagogically imparted to the people as a panacea to their problems and tribulations. As Rosenberg says in another context, the performative, interactive and socializing nature of song makes it a uniquely effective medium for educating the people (2011, p. 114).

The singer cautions his audience on the prevalence of the disease and the fact that it does not spare friends and relatives:

Fira fixxa nama hin lagatu	friends and relatives cannot be safe
Duresaaf iyessa jede	rich and poor it cannot say
Naam hin hanqatu	and discriminate
Waqati jira jete	do not say there is god
Kara kesa irafini	and sleep on the road
Sobamte hegadhi	be careful not to be cheated
Koronnann si hinyatini	COVID-19 may eat you

Nor does it discriminate on the basis of social status, as everyone, rich or poor are prone to it. This dispels the fantasy that the disease only affects the rich since it was transmitted through the air travel that is a preserve of the rich. The singer thus warns his audience not to let their guard down. The imagery used is one of “sleeping on the road”, thus making one vulnerable and susceptible to an accident comparable to letting one’s guard down and getting COVID-19.

He addresses people who seem to believe that they are protected from COVID-19 through a special connection. The improvised lyrics and artistic performances serve to affirm the reality of the COVID-19 risk and enhance public acquiescence in spite of emerging resistance to government enforcement control protocols (Mulemi 2020, p. 28). Again, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the early stages of the history of COVID-19, people in Moyale and Marsabit, that is the home area of the singer, refused to wear face masks, citing a belief that their ritual leader, *Abbagadda*, has warded off the disease on their behalf. Sadly, this was exposed as wishful thinking. Marsabit and Moyale suffered their dismal share of the COVID-19 blows by losing many high-ranking officers, prominent elders and ordinary citizens. The audience is thus being told not to throw caution to the wind, even though god has not forsaken his benign presence in their midst even in this calamitous situation. The last two lines warn individuals to be extra careful. The poet singer configures COVID-19 as consuming people, sucking the life out of them and throwing them to the soil. In some instances, he even curses the disease as if it is a living entity, with words like “may god remove you from this earth”. The singer personifies the disease and sets it against god, and hopes that the disease will be

defeated and routed out of the world.

Informing the audience of the spread of a dangerous “sinful disease” that has untold disastrous effect on human population, the singer performs:

Dhukkubi chubu	the sinful disease
Ya laf qabate	has spread all over
Ilme nama	human children
Muruq toche afanti haqate	gobbled them into its mouth
Mana hin baina	do not leave home
Waaqa kadada	pray to god

He introduces the supposition that the disease may be the result of people’s sinful acts for which god is punishing them. The disease eats up all and gobbles them, an image that foreshadows mass deaths. He advises that people should stay at home and pray. The singer proceeds to focus on another aspect of the COVID-19 protocols, underlining and explaining it. This is social distance and the paces that are considered safe between the people:

Waal hira fafagada	stay far from one another
Ejata ag lama sadii afuri	steps about two three four
Wal ira fafagada	stay far from one another
Fayan abaa kara	health is wealth to owner
Faya jabefada	look after your health
Horin hinbitani faya	wealth cannot buy health

In strict conformity with the worldwide accepted protocols, the singer recommends the observance of a distance of between two to four steps between people to keep the spread of the virus at bay. Popular music is often pregnant with messages, metaphors, symbols and signifiers (Lwanda 2003). In this regard, the singer has appropriated the traditional proverb wisely by invoking and talking about the importance of health “*fayaan abba kara*” (health is wealth to the owner). The statement implies that if one is healthy, then s/he can work and produce wealth. It is for this reason that in the next line he asks his audience to look after their health since it cannot be bought with wealth. He understands the predicament of unhealthy human beings who are forced to spend a lot of money traversing the world in search of cure.

In a partial reversal of emphasis, he negates the greatness of the disease as he holds the view that greatness is attributable solely to god, who is also the only supportive pillar for the vulnerable humanity:

Dhukkub guda hinbenu	we do not know a great disease
Waqumat nu basa	god will save us
Korma korbasa qalada	sacrifice bull and he-goat
Isumat nu ofolcha	this will help us
Afan lufa lakimna	we should avoid sacrilegious language
Alayoot nu sokkoa	god will save us
Yoo sun homa hintanu	that way we will be alright

Performance serves as a bridge between the antiquated and the contemporary (Schutzman, 2006). In this connection, the singer does not appear to be at a loss to come to terms with COVID-19. He is not in a defeatist mood due to its newness and enigmatic qualities. Through performance the singer is able to connect the contemporary problem of COVID-19 with other problems in the past, for which the traditional ways of the forefathers have provided answers. For example, in the case of another deadly disease – AIDS – the power of the ancestor is mobilized in confirmation and revision of tradition to negotiate the rapidly increasing deaths (Oike 2008, p. 82). Thus, he beseeches people to resort to the traditional religion where a bull and a he-goat are sacrificed to invite god's intercession. As Siundu (2010, p. 73) opines elsewhere, the song urges the audience to "momentarily, if symbolically, return to their roots". The singer believes that disaster such as the COVID-19 pandemic may have been precipitated by unbecoming behaviour on the part of man. Hence, he advises that people should desist from uttering sacrilegious language and submit to god to secure their place in the world. The singer imagines a causal relationship between some forms of desecration of the world and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In his view there is need for people to retrace their steps and revert to their ancestral ways in warding off perils like the one they experience. As Ndege et al. (2019) tell of Kiyuyu popular artists, the poets immerse themselves in the real historical phenomena positioning themselves as spokespersons of a particular upheaval. King Sama appears to play that role for the Borana with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. He prescribes a return to the traditional cultural beliefs where intercessional animal sacrifice is idealized as a time-tested solution to the present problem of COVID-19, in a manner similar to what Mutonya (2013, p. 79) observes when he reports that Kamaru advises people to make sacrifices to the god of Kirinyaga as a way of warding off the political calamities.

Conclusion

The singer/composer King Sama navigates the new terrain of the COVID-19 pandemic and finds an appropriate idiomatic expression in the mother language of his primary audience. This endeavour is an indication of his versatility and creativity. He interrogates the meaning of the new pandemic and starts a dialogue with his audience by asking them directly what they know about COVID-19, though as a rhetorical question. He then proceeds to show a way out of the deadly impact of the disease by directing their attention both to the officially prescribed methods of avoiding and combating it as well as by returning them to their rich heritage of solutions to life-threatening encounters. The latter, culture-bound way of responding to the pandemic, is particularly important. As Simatei affirms in connection with the Kalenjin popular song, the singer/performer has to respond to the challenges of the moment by reworking and repacking cultural symbols, historical pasts and folkloric themes (2008, p. 3). In this case, King Sama locates the dialogue within a Borana cultural discourse by using not only the Borana language but also its imagery and metaphor. By naming COVID-19 as 'dhukub daaba' (crooked disease), King Sama acknowledges its uncontrollable nature in terms of spread and resultant mass fatalities. In its crookedness, COVID-19 is particularly elusive to counter-action based on science and continues to render people extremely vulnerable. But people are not doomed. His song teaches his audience that they may yet come on top of the disease provided that they are extra careful. He voices both the danger and the hope present in the prevailing situation. He does so in the language of the mother, which the audience clearly understands and which has an inordinate power of persuasion.

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Author Biography

Fugich Wako is an Associate Professor of Literature in the Department of Literature Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Egerton University. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Degree in Literature, specializing in Oral Literature. The PhD was earned at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. He was supervised by the eminent Professor of Literature, Professor Isabel Hofmeyr. Prof. Wako received his Bachelor's and Master's of Arts in Literature from the University of Nairobi, Kenya. He has taught at Egerton University for 27 years teaching both the undergraduate and postgraduate students. He has also supervised many postgraduate students at both Master's and PhD levels at Egerton. He has also been an external examiner where he has examined students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Masinde Muliro University, Moi University and Maseno University, among others. In addition, he has also been in academic leadership positions such as the Chairman of Department of Language and Linguistics, Dean Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Director of the University's Nairobi City Campus. His area of interest is orality, African Literature, Gender and Cultural Studies.

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