

CLASH OF INTERESTS AND CONCEPTUALISATION OF TAARAB IN EAST AFRICA

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Remarks on aspects of *taarab* such as its history, nature, definition, and change appear prominently and repeatedly in nearly every previous study of the subject. Some of these remarks, however, serve more to expose a clash of interests rather than provide untainted facts about its conceptualisation. For example, a remark about *taarab* being popular music of the Islamic Swahili people of the East African coast and islands¹ is tarnished by impropriety of basing religion² as the substance of the matter, while undermining *taarab*'s accretion of sense of entertainment, profane, sensuality, adoption of Western values and secularisation. Shereef's appropriate distinction goes: "[T]he music [at religious occasions] – if you really want to call it music ... nobody would call that *taarab* because you are not there to enjoy and dance ... You are there to have religious feelings. Your concentration, your feelings are more important than your physical enjoyment" (cited in Topp 1992:45).

Ascribing *taarab* to 'Islamic roots' has a misleading effect of 'sorting out' performers and audience(s) on the basis of their religious affiliations. Something that is not easily amenable in East African social and cultural realms, not to mention the ambiguity in the term 'Swahili people', making it even harder to validate the claim. A more encompassing view to include the cumulative effect of global musical and lyrical influences in *taarab* becomes even more inapt to push it closer to Islamic confines. The so-called Islamic roots have been overborne by *taarab*'s vitality making it the most dynamic and versatile musical type in Africa. Thus, Daniel's broader view of the nature of *taarab* (1994:3), albeit his assertive claim about American influence on it, cannot be more emphatic: "[S]ignificantly, several national musical traditions have allegedly played a role in its origins and growing popularity, among them those of Egypt, Turkey, Yemen, Arabia, and India, not to mention African heritage. What these studies have neglected, however, is the role American musical film influences have played, also significant, the important government interventions in the support and popularisation of *taarab* [...] but according to two leaders of Mombasa's oldest existing *taarab* unit, *Johar*, jazz films played a significant roles in their musical conception and their band's history".

Graebner's later remark (2001:129)³, showing affinity to Daniel's (3-6) and to certain extent Topp's (1992:108-142), distances itself from initial stance. Here *taarab* is described

¹ Graebner's essay (1999:349) was mainly written to inform a non-academic audience.

² Perhaps because the music has acquired, as its roots, the art of vocalisation derived from *tajwid* and *kasida* recitation.

³ Used as notes in his presentation: *The Production of History: A new Look at the Development of Taarab in the first Decades of the 20th Century*, on the 10th of May, 2001.

from a historical point of view (1928-1930) as ‘marked by heterogeneity with different traits in which foreign influence is not overly tributary, but all kinds of local rhythms like *msondo*, *goma*, and *kumbwaya* attributed to Swahili musical sensibility and influences from the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen & Gulf Countries) and to a lesser degree, influences from Western, Indian and Pan-Arabian music.’ The strength of this remark is in its recognition of *taarab*’s diversification, complexity, versatility as well as its being poised to exploit local and global influences. The thrust of the remark, however, is weakened by the use of the phonograph record and industry (1928-1930) as the ‘sole’ basis for the conceptualisation of *taarab*. Indeed, the phonograph record as providing ‘hard data’ may give certain objectivity in any scientific probe of *taarab*, but total disregard of other sources, say, oral and other interlocking ones necessary for its elucidation, may in fact mar the explanatory adequacy of the study and hence a blurred glimpse of the situation. Topp (1992:22) emphasises: “[A]lthough kiSwahili is one of Africa’s major languages, there are comparatively few scholarly studies in any discipline – apart perhaps, from linguistics – that discusses the waSwahili in detail, and very little work has been done specifically on their music. This paucity of secondary sources emphasised the importance of oral information”.

Using phonograph records as his basis, Graebner describes an aspect of Siti’s group while attributing it to *taarab* of this time as a whole. The fact that Siti’s version of *taarab* was heavily influenced by local rhythms and those of Arabian Peninsula and less by Western, Indian and Pan-Arabian, should not necessarily be accidental. First, whereas in the 1950s onwards, transcultural flows flooded Zanzibar and East Africa in general, in the 1920s media and modernisation influences were just emerging in the region. Few media gadgets that were in circulation among the middle class then served ‘only’ a rudimentary role towards modernisation. It is logical therefore to assume that in the 1920s there was little foreign influence to talk of. This explains *taarab* of *Majumba ya Mawe*’s affinity to global music and lyrical motifs compared to *taarab* of *ng’ambo* and rural area. Second, *taarab* of *ng’ambo* area, gradually and deliberately was connected to commercial strategy of the recording companies as a result of its vibrant ‘exotic’ and ‘global’ mixture.

The commercial recording of *taarab* at this time was possible by a combination of two theoretical impetuses. One sees the product of local cultures as inherently superior to internationally distributed cultural forms, since these forms are pure and hence spontaneously and authentically express the local culture. Another, underscores the productive value of musical syncretism – that is the fusion of different musical styles associated with different cultures. The fact that Siti’s group was placed at the ‘fore’ of the music industry bespeaks not only of the established fame of its artists, but also of the ‘foresight’ towards financial gains on the part of the recording companies. In the words of Rosselson (1979:41): “[T]he belief that money can make anyone a star is probably unfounded. Usually a group will have achieved some local popularity in pub, club, or dance hall before an enterprising manager or A and R man pick them up. But without commercial backing, the climb to the top is impossible”.

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In the same vein, Fair's slightly exaggerated statement (1994:149) is blunt about the lucrative potential of *taarab*: "[W]hen Siti's records hit the market, the sales figures of His Master's Voice in East Africa skyrocketed. From Zanzibar to Mombasa, Lamu, Ujiji and Lubumbashi thousands of households which never owned a gramophone suddenly went out and bought one."

Much the same as Siti's group was performing before it was sought to sign any contract, other groups not sought for the same purpose, were also performing for other purposes in Zanzibar town. Though no 'concrete evidence' is available for this claim, the oral interviews made during my field work and Shaib Abeid's biographical and historical notes on *Ikhwan Safa Club*, are explicit about groups like *Ikhwan Safa & Nadi Shuub* being actively performing at this time under the auspices of young men from wealthy families in *Majumba ya Mawe*. These groups and perhaps others, performing simultaneously with Siti's, were not drawn to the alleged zeal of 'revolutionising' *taarab* towards 'indigenisation'. They were simply pursuing a method of entertainment that fitted their audience and this was done by drawing musical and lyrical motifs mainly from Egyptian *taarab*⁴ – but not as claimed – to an extent of not utilizing at all other global and local musical and lyrical sources. Graebner's notion of 'pre-*taarab*' (2001:2) with its emphasis on 'pristine features' and 'homogeneity' seems to have no firm standing in this regard.

Two chapters of Fair's thesis and one in her subsequent book (2001) attempt at defining *taarab* in relation to gender and socio-political concomitants. The chapters, as intended, succeed in highlighting the politics and gender aspects of this music complex, but risk an overemphasis of socio-political and gender variables, giving the impression that the conceptualisation of *taarab* is inevitably dependent on these. Topp's thesis, the most comprehensive and informative about *taarab*, indeed draws descriptive power from a wide range of parameters: histories, instrumentation, performance, styles, functions etc., but only in so far as these serve the 'accentuation' of the role of gender and class politics in the conceptualisation of the music complex 'taarab'. Topp sums it up (1992:3): "[T]hree categories of *taarab* are identified and described: an *ideal* modelled on Egyptian forms of urban secular music, serving the affluent, Arab-oriented sectors of the society; a counter style known as *kidumbak* (Topp claims this type to be a modern version of Siti's *taarab* style), that was developed by people of African descent as a result of their exclusion from the ideal, originally by politics but more recently by economic limitations; *taarab ya wanawake* leaning aesthetically towards the ideal, but in performance style towards Africanisations of *taarab* which is fully realised in *kidumbak*. This analysis places these categories of *taarab* on a continuum, with ideal and *kidumbak* at opposite ends, and *taarab ya wanawake* at the centre".

⁴ As Fair (1994:160) observes: "Egypt, from the time of the Fatimid caliphs, had become the centre of Arab culture and the arts. While this status greatly suffered under the Ottomans, by the early 19th century Cairo had once again claimed its place as the music capital of the Islamic world."

Hers is indeed a workable continuum giving room for ‘spanning’ in terms of ‘nearness’ and ‘departure’ from the ‘parent-form’, but too general and rigid to clearly mark other points. Though in her thesis varied aspects of *taarab* have been copiously described as influencing its nature, in the final analysis the continuum posits only limited criteria for its conceptualisation. As it is, the continuum is not sufficiently eclectic to allow the plotting of other categories and sub-categories on the basis of criteria other than those put forward in oppositions as ‘*sub-urbs / rural : Stone Town / urban*’, ‘*Arab : African*’ and ‘*male : female*’. Topp’s approach suffers ‘divided attention’ and lack of real interest in *taarab* in totality, but only in so far as it serves ulterior motives. Okpewho’s reaction (1979:1) on the problem of divided attention in the study of African art affirms: “[U]ntil very recent times, traditional African art of all genres was studied exclusively by anthropologists and art historians. Often, they did not go beyond identifying the art by region of origin or distribution; otherwise, they rather made inadequate attempts to deduce a community’s life and thought from nature and content of its art. They seldom tried to get to the roots of the aesthetic principle on which the art was executed; as a result they generally devised blanket theories that had an exotic appeal but were incapable of giving us an insight into the fundamental creative spirit that brought such art to be”.

Interest and attention to class and gender as defining criteria for the conceptualisation of *taarab* masks not only *taarab*’s nature, variability and adaptability, but also the mechanism of ‘class society’ itself in which money and other remunerations play a dominant role. In such a situation it is likely to find not only the music that springs from and is part of the life of a community with its own recognisable identity, idiom and culture; or the music that puts concerns and feelings of the community at the fore, but also the music of ‘empty ditties’ or ‘banal sentimentality’ and worst – of ‘boot-licking’. For example, even during the time when money did not matter much, the music that Shaaban and Siti played did not always identify itself with the community’s ethos or sympathise with the deplorable condition of the majority of citizens. They did sing songs of glorification of the monarchy and British governance. The following songs from Jahadmy’s *Waimbaji Wajuzi* (1966:1,5) are indicative:

<i>Ni zipi zilizo</i>	<i>zenye uweza</i>
<i>Zama zinajiri</i>	<i>hazitosoza</i>
<i>Zimebaki zema</i>	<i>ndiyo masaza</i>
Which epochs are so hospitable than this	
Indeed epochs do endlessly recur	
Only good ones last, in memory they remain! (my translation)	
<i>Twamsifu Mngereza</i>	<i>na Jenerali Smati</i>
<i>Bara 'meitengeza</i>	<i>'meondoa tofauti</i>
<i>Milima 'meilaza</i>	<i>kwa suudi na bahati</i>
<i>Hawajui pa kuketi</i>	<i>chaka limengia simba</i>

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We praise the British and General Smart
They did well to end the discords on the mainland
They flattened the mountains with intent and luck
They (enemies) do not know where to sit,
the bush is infested with lions. (my translation)

From the outset, *taarab* exhibited ‘keenness’ to change, hence heterogeneity of styles which ought to stand as genres and sub-genres in their own right. These sub-categories should not be subjected to any exiguity couched in the prefix ‘pre-’ or conservative tags. For example, though *Ikhwan Safa*, established 1905, has the longest history and a record of proliferation of variety of songs subjected to complex processes of cross-fertilisation, reinterpretation, rearrangement, experimentation with musical lines using African, Arabic, Indian and Western instruments, global lyrical forms and themes, shift of scales and styles of vocalisation and variability according to change of media and change of socio-political milieu, Topp (1992:152) confidently, asserts that although *Ikhwan Safa* was the first club in Zanzibar, it has never been innovative. Perhaps according to her, ‘innovation’ of *taarab* must mean to *Africanise* and not to *indigenise*, to assume an ‘exotic mode’ or sound very different from the mainstream, or to undergo change in the ‘great divide’ of performer / audience with the dance element as a way of making *taarab* typical ‘African’ music – whatever that means. Hence the thinning of instrumentation to one violin instead of ten; the preference to *dumbak*, not bongos or a tea-chest bass, not the Western double bass and the necessity to introduce African instruments like *cherewa* and *mkwasa*.

‘Tradition’ and ‘innovation’ are elusive terms as Nwachukwu-Agbada (1997:125) – albeit an analogy to Igbo literature – view them differently: “[T]he term tradition and innovation ... [r]efer to what Ubesie met as he grew up in the Igbo tradition and the use he made of them in the process of his writing. In Ubesie’s work, tradition is a combination of the impact of the literary heritage that his Igbo culture affords him, his exposure to English literature and history through reading, as well as familiarity with the writings of Igbo authors of both Igbo and English expressions. Innovation results from regenerative use to which an author puts tradition, the modification and expansion that a writer imposes on what is available and known”.

The merit that Topp gives to *kidumbak* as being innovative against the alleged static tendency of ideal *taarab* is derived from a generation of ethnomusicologists who criticise the negative influence of Anglo-American forms (European harmonic systems, African-American rhythms, rock instrumentation) on local, indigenous music(s). However, globalisation theories (e. g Keily & Marfleet 1998) have recently shown the aesthetic value of ‘hybridity’ and ‘syncretism’ in music. There is nothing wrong in ideal *taarab* to branch off into sub-categories for specific functions and roles, the way all complex music(s) of the world or in fact art in general does for various reasons. It is not proper that a certain music type should be belittled just because it is the music of the so called élite or it closely identifies with Arabism or with

any other foreign styles. If resisting change or remaining structurally intact and pure is a merit of some sort, then none of the music(s) of the world qualifies the label 'purity'. After all syncretism, to give a few example, is found to be a feature in Turkish, Arabic, Pakistan, Indian, Indonesian, Malaysian, Spanish, Latin American, Greek and Bulgarian musical cultures. African beats are even today entrenched in the music repertoires of other cultures as evidenced by the music of Latin America, the Caribbean, *Sūr* and *Salala* in the Sultanate of Oman, Yemen, Kuwait and other Gulf States. Hesmondhalgh (1998:168) takes this point further: "[W]hether discussing the musical cultures of Africa or rural England, many writers have felt that 'folk' music(s) are authentic cultural resources, which need to be protected against any influx of modern, commercialised sounds. The orthodoxy in studies of popular music(s) over the last fifteen years has shifted, however, to stress fruitfulness of musical cross-fertilisation. Cultural studies have come to see all cultures as 'hybrids' of older forms, and the idea of a pure, uncontaminated tradition as problematic, and even dangerous".

Taarab is an 'art', and as such, it has first and foremost, an 'aesthetic function'. Its designation as a 'social fact' (Topp 1992:23), has only an additive and supportive role that makes it more complex and elusive. We therefore need to provide a holistic model that can encompass both extra- and intra-structural criteria for its conceptualisation, a model that takes all concomitants that have direct and indirect bearing on it. Some as extra-structural, secondary and supportive criteria, but others as defining intra-structural criteria for the conceptualisation of *taarab*. Although the criteria of 'ethnicity', 'class', 'gender' and 'geography' (*majumba ya mawe* and *ng'ambo*) do help in giving a better grasp of the concept of 'taarab', *taarab* itself is independent of these variables in its conceptualisation.

This essay, therefore, aims at revisiting the notion of *taarab* in an attempt to concretise its conceptualisation on the basis of various variables that affect change in its structure. The relevant variables are *convergence, divergence, linguistic constraints, formal conventions, spontaneity and preparedness in composition, actualisation and performance, instrumentation* (i. e number of instruments and how they are played), *the art of vocalisation, the performer / audience divide, stage organisation, setting, occasion, functions and media influences*. In the description of various categories of *taarab* we shall take these variables randomly in relation to the categories. For the purpose of avoiding much attention to every category of *taarab*, however, we prefer to take on 'group styles' – hence our concentration on three phases: the period of the inception of *taarab* in Zanzibar, the period prior to 1905, through the 1920s up to the 1940s when the phonograph record and then the sound film was introduced, from 1950 to the 1960s when the radio was introduced, and from the 1970s to-date – the period of the impact of the tape-recorder, video-recorder, TV – and most recently the period of the influence of satellite television.

Our analysis is based on theoretical conceptions of genres by Dubrow (1982), Fowler (1991), Finnegan (1976) and Okpewho (1992) in written literature and 'orature'. A combination of ideas emanating from these tenets make it possible to look at *taarab* from different

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perspectives. Although *taarab* has often been regarded as a ‘music genre’, it can as well be considered as a genre in orature. First, on the basis of its ‘extemporaneity’ in composition, performance, and transmission. Second, from being tied up with the aspects of occasion and active audience in its actualisation (Finnegan 1976:1-25). Third, from extra- and paralinguistic features as its accompaniment in the actualisation involving fusion of the lyric, music, body language, body movements, costumes and setting.

The notion of ‘convergence’ bespeaks of ‘closeness’ and hence the ‘relational placement’ or sharing of common features in a category. ‘Divergence’ implies ‘distance’ – a way from the ‘parent-form’, signalling transformation far from ‘parent-form’, though still retaining some shared features. Fowler’s literary generic definition (1991:151) offers a relevant analogy to *taarab*: “[L]iterature has always been organised in genres, that is, in groups of works – tragedies, comedies, epigram and the like – that belong together because they stand in the same tradition. Each genre is characterised by certain features, certain constellations of formal qualities; so that its members share many resemblance(s)”...

From the outset (before 1905) *taarab* existed both as music of patronage (Finnegan 1976:81-110) and amateurism. In both cases, it has maintained its entertaining role throughout, while performing variedly, depending on whether it serves private (i. e. successive royal families in the past; the ruling party and the government in the post-revolution Zanzibar, Tanzania as a whole and Kenya) or public patronage (i. e. individual citizens, groups and clubs) – or whether it was performed for numeration or for ‘sheer’ entertainment and pastime. No one version of *taarab* existed during this period, hence it is misleading to assign the arrangement of a particular type to the whole *taraab* complex in the 1905 to the 1940s. There was no ‘one’ arrangement as that in which people sat down around the musician in a circle to sing verses. This definitely cannot be plausible in reference to the *taarab* performed at the royal palace or at courts of wealthy families in *majumba ya mawe*. The actualisation of *taarab* at the palace and *majumba ya mawe* was, presumably, organised on performer / audience divide where, on the one side, were the performers (i. e. a soloist, the musicians and the chorus) and on the other, the audience. Indeed, it was the recording companies in 1928 to 1930 who preferred this formula and hence adopted it to suit the commercial recording of *taarab* songs. Topp’s idea of spontaneity (1992:83) in the creation of lyrics can only be attributed to the *taarab* of *ng’ambo* where the influence of orature was predominant. However, the word ‘spontaneity’ here is not used in the same meaning as that in orature, for what happened contrary to ‘oratory’ meaning of spontaneity, was that a song already learnt by heart was reproduced with minimum improvisation. We cannot envisage a *taarab* song whose lyric and music are wholly composed there and then.

There are three reasons for *ng’ambo taarab* to have affinity to orature. Firstly, as mentioned above, media influences were on the threshold between the 1920s and 1930s, being introduced chronologically, starting with the phonograph record in the 1920s, the sound film in the 1930s/1940s, the radio in the 1950s, the cassette, TV and video in the 1970s. Secondly,

only high and middle classes had access to the new media of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. It is obvious then that, compared to the version of *Ikhwan Safa* and *Nadi Shuub*, the *ng'ambo* version of *taarab* was more detached from global influences though not fully. Third, there are many examples of syncretistic fusion in the world arts where transposition of the local is domineering. The logical explanation is given by Schimmel (1982:17) in her defence of *marşyas*: the famous Urdu poetry in which the sufferings of Imam Husain and his family before and during the battle of Karbala are poetically described in great length: “[T]he *marşiyas* writers were, to my feeling, however, perfectly justified in their approach, for it has been a tradition not only in Islam, but in all major religious traditions to interpret the main events of sacred history on a local level so as to give people the feeling of actual participation in them and not merely as spectators who gaze at an exotic, fascinating or awe-inspiring event far removed in time and space.”

In *ng'ambo* area, Siti's group performed for pastime or was hired not by the royal family or aristocrats, but by anyone with the purpose and means of providing entertainment during initiation, marriages and other festivities. But the quality, content and form of entertainment provided by this *taarab*, was obviously quite different from that provided by *taarab* of *majumba ya mawe*. We have to take the cultural scene of Zanzibar at this time and perhaps even today, as being dual – élitist and populist. The delight of *ng'ambo taarab* was derived from accruing less global influences, but from participation involving syncretism that drew heavily from orature. By so doing it engulfed several thematic ‘underlying(s)’ – ridiculing, censuring the scandalous, actualising the purgative, asserting one's interest and outlook, teaching and learning of old and new ideals and conduct, recording life and history and indulging in social critique. Both the artist and audience derived pleasure in their different roles. Thus, by virtue of its ‘psychodynamics’ (Ong 1997:31-75) and the absence of literacy, the oral artist (the singer of *taarab* songs) served the role of being not only an entertainer, but also of a journalist, chronicler and politician. The audience on the other hand, was not only the consumer, but also the informed part, the active recipient of the most topical and current messages shared by virtue of being at close proximity to daily phenomena and occurrences. Okpewho (1992:109-110) opines:

“Perhaps nobody enjoys this psychological release quite as much as the artists themselves; for a start, the tales of fantasy are products of their own creation or recreation. But the more interesting thing about it is that somewhere between the lines we see the aspects of the artists' own lives reflected either directly or indirectly [...] A much wider service provided by oral literature (orature) is to give the society – whether isolated groups within it or the citizenry as a whole – a collective sense of who they are and to help them define or comprehend the world at large in terms both familiar and positive to them. The justification for this kind of service is essentially that as society develops and becomes increasingly complex, a variety of interest groups inevitably emerge, each united either by similar professional concerns or by knowledge that its members derive from common stock. To protect these common interests, they often tend to develop and circulate pieces of oral information (whether in songs or in stories) that will help them feel a sense of security in the face of other contending groups within the society.”

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When Siti's group played in *ng'ambo* area, 'information' was disseminated in a variety of oral forms moulded in *expressive* and *narrative* songs, having love themes [*Ilahi* (12)], gossips and comic renditions [*Sikiza Sahibu* (11)], satires and momentous incidents [*Ilahi ya Wadudi* (24)], musical outpourings of religious and moral nature [*Huu Mwezi Mtukufu*(8)], reworked oral tales [*Hii Hikaya ya Abunuwas* (55), *Hadisi Bibi-na Vijakazi Vyake-Zamani* (54)], gnomic, proverbial and enigmatic songs, songs depicting gender, ethnicity and social criticism [*Randa Kijini Randa / Mchangani* (16), *Nauliwani / Mtoto Aliliya Kwao* (23), *Hili Shairi la Umasikini Hufanyani* (31)], songs of innuendoes and reproaches, chronicles and historical records [*Imetokea Ajabu* (9), *Kila Alo-Mas-ul* (10), *Ya Rabbi Naidhihiri* (13)] – documented in Jahadmy (1966).

In spite of the fact that some of the songs of *ng'ambo taarab* are 'topical', portraying mainly social events other than love affairs, the love theme in its varied manifestations was indeed prevalent in this *taarab* as it also was in that of *majumba ya mawe*. What must be emphasised in response to the alleged 'Arabism' in the *taarab* of *majumba ya mawe*, however, is the fact that not all songs of both categories were in Arabic, romantic and sentimental in orientation. Swahili songs with social and 'comedy' content were also composed and sung in *taarab* of *majumba ya mawe*. After all, Swahili was already a dominant language as it was also the language of most of the activities in the palace itself and the only language of other Arabs in *majumba ya mawe* and *ng'ambo* who had already lost their indigenous language. In fact the whole culture was by now becoming more and more popular and linguistically inclined towards Swahilization. That notwithstanding, the performance of Siti's group was equally enjoyable in the two camps as these artists transfused influences from both into both. The songs *Kila Alo-Mas-ul* (10), *Azizi Wanikondesha* (19), *Shehe Sijilo* (46) and *Kigalawa* (59) are indicative.

The notion of a 'clear cut division' between *majumba ya mawe* and *ng'ambo* versions of *taarab* of the 1920s to 1940s as propagated by some scholars arises as a result of a clash of interests between those set to perpetuate the 'Arab myth' in Swahili cultural studies and those who want to decry this myth in favour of 'Africanisation'. There is certainly a middle ground marked by cross-fertilization, synthesis and syncretism – a phenomenon that occurs worldwide. Abdulaziz (1979:8) is more explicit about this:

„The Arab-Islamic component did not superimpose itself but acted as a strong cultural stimulus to the development of this urban form of African culture. Past historians have often failed to acknowledge the African initiative in the formation of Swahili culture. To them it would appear, every aspect of urban living represent remnants of direct Arab presence. In any given period the Arab population element must have been very small, compared to the population of the local inhabitants. Indeed the trend on the Coast has always been the Swahilization of the Arabs rather than the Arabization of the African Muslim inhabitants, in such facets of culture as language and mode of living in general. This trend has been so forceful that most Arabs on the Coast, who have settled here within the last two centuries or so, have lost their original culture and language and completely adopted Swahili culture. Even the most recent Arab immigrants, like Hadhramis from the Southern Arabia, often referred to as Washihiri by the Swahili, seem to

lose their language and culture very rapidly, some within a couple of generations, and adopt Swahili language and culture, and to large extent abandon the ways of their ancestors.”

Structurally, the lyric of *n'gambo taarab* of the 1920s through the 1940s, maintains, to a certain degree, the conventions of Swahili poetry marked by symmetry and structural rigidity. Signs towards 'writing' as part of *taarab's* preparedness are observed in Shaaban's use of statements like '*nilitoa shairi*', '*nilitunga shairi*' and '*hii ni barua aliyopelekewa bibi mmoja*' in *Waimbaji wa Juzi*, all pregnant with a sense of composing or writing poems and not improvisation. But a certain amount of flexibility for deviant rendering in terms of lineation, rhythmic patterns, rhyme schemes and sound organisation is here and there observable. A plausible explanation to the violation of some of the rules is that the poems were sometimes composed to fit certain musical lines that otherwise were not in consonance with the traditional form of Swahili poetry. The extreme case of this being the song *Hadisi Bibi-na-Vijakazi Vyake-Zamani* (54), *Hii Hikaya ya Abunuwas* (55) and *Kigalawa* (59).

The Lamu version of *taarab* at this time had a closer affinity with Siti's style in many ways. First, they shared at least one composer cum musician (i. e. Mbaruku) and some of the songs (e. g. *Mpenzi Wangu Hawezi*) which were composed in Swahili and sung in a mixture of local and Arabic musical lines. They also exchanged invitations to perform in Lamu, Mombasa and Zanzibar. In fact, the connection between Lamu and Zanzibar *taarab* started long before Siti came into the scene. Shaib Abeid's personal manuscript of the history of *Ikhwan Safa* which is also the history of his activities in *taarab* from 1905, offers an evidence. Shaib Abeid (26-29) observes: “[S]isi tulianza kujifunza nyimbo hizi za Kiarabu na za Kiswahili [...] na nyimbo za Kiswahili (tulijifunza kupiga) kwa mahadhi ya Lamu mengi, maana wakati huo sana tukitumia kwa mahadhi yatokayo Lamu na mashairi ya kiasili na nyimbo za mikasa” ... “[W]e started to learn (to play) these Arabic and Swahili songs ... and as for Swahili songs we started to learn (how to play them) by using Lamu melodies, for at that time we very much used *mahadhi yatokayo Lamu* and traditional poems and comical songs...” (my translation).

Kidumbak, a highly transient and unorthodox variety of *taarab*, was started in 1930 (Topp 1992:176) in *ng'ambo* and rural area with the sole function of being performed in 'wedding' in which 'dance' was a major component. The detachment of this version from the parent form – Topp insists – has *class* and *gender* implications. According to her the very formation of *kidumbak* was a result of Africans being excluded from ideal *taarab*. If this was indeed true, then it would be difficult to explain the existence of Siti's group that comprised of Africans who were sponsored by men of Arabian origin. Not only that, but before a splinter group of *Michenzani Social Club*, Bakari Abeid, Masauni Yussuf, Masoud M. Rashid and other Africans who were not only members of *Ikhwan Safa Club*, but participated in the performance of *taarab* – and not only in singing or playing instruments, but also in composing lyrics and music. There also were many Arabs who were excluded from ideal *taarab* simply because they could not be members of relevant clubs of ideal *taarab* for a good

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reason. While the question of ethnicity, race and economic status played a certain role in the recruitment of members in a club, it was *talent*, *connection* and *promotion* that played a greater role. It was these prerequisites that made Siti what she was. Thus, the formation of *kidumbak* is not necessarily a matter of segregation, but a result of a specific *utilitarian* demand. The shift from ideal *taarab* to *Kidumbak* took place so as to modify the ideal *taarab* to purvey features conducive to an oral and performative context in which an active role of the audience was significant. *Kidumbak* is therefore a category of ‘dance’ *taarab* and not ‘listening’ *taarab*. It provides both the delight of melodies, live reproduction of *taarab* lyrics and dance mode. Also the reason why this music variety adopts *thinning* in instrumentation – one violin for melody, *dumbak*, *cherewa* (rattles) and *mkwasa* (sticks) for percussion effect and *sanduku* (tea-chest bass) for pitch, is not so much that one is poor or an African (though many Arabs were poor in pre-revolution Zanzibar), it is the fact that the emphasis is on the *dance mode* and not ‘significantly’ instrumental and vocal accompaniment. Words and their messages matter little in *Kidumbak*, as Rosselson (46) maintains in his analogy to the rock music: “[Y]et control of technology is only one problem in rock music. The nature of the idiom itself is the other. The message of rock music is that the words do not matter. The style matters, the froth, the bubbles, the colours [...] the sound, the bodily movements, the beat – these matter.”

All this said, it does not mean that politics has no role to play in the conceptualisation of *taarab*. In fact, factors like number, types and method of playing instruments, transmission of *taarab*, occasions, type of audience and functions, the fluxes of global influences, the media impact, emphasis on national and regional identities, government’s intervention and manipulation, are all entities pregnant with political agendas. In fact, despite broad geographical and historical gaps revealing a number of exceptions, differences and anomalies – in terms of its evolution, subjection to local and global influences as impetus for changes in production, structure, form and style and its socio-political affiliations – *taarab* music shows congeniality with other types of popular⁵ music in Africa. The Lamu version of *taarab*⁶, for example, claims origination from pre-war local traditions (Graebner 1999:350), but like its counterparts, did finally emerge from chrysalis of proto-development during the Second World War

⁵ Graham’s (1996:1) generic characteristics of ‘popular music’ (highlife in Ghana, *rumba* in Zaire, *juju* music in Nigeria and *makossa* in Cameroon) as being essentially modern, performed by professional musicians, using electric instruments, urban-based and dance-oriented, accords very well with the features of *taarab* in general and with the commercialised sub-category called *mipasho* – meaning telling things openly and point blankly – in particular.

⁶ This proposition – political and already suggesting a clash of interests – remains, as far as we are concerned, a conjecture, since the claim and elucidation of the origin of this particular *taarab* is flimsy and putative. However, the fact that part of *taarab* repertoires of Lamu and to certain extent of Mombasa, constitute of the most authentic traditional Swahili poetry and beats such as *vugo*, *goma*, *lelemama*, *chakacha*, *randa*, *vave*, *mkokoni*, *kishuri*, *nbongwe* and *kumbwaya* deserve the attribute of ‘original’. Shaib Abeid (30) – one of the greatest artists and a most prolific composer of *taarab* lyrics and music in Zanzibar, who, in his biographical notes, gives a historical account of how *Ikhwan Safa* was founded in 1905 and affirms the purity of the Lamu version. It is important to note that Shaib Abeid’s personal manuscript of the account of *Ikhwan Safa*’s history which is also the history of his participation in the club’s organisation, offers a highly authentic history of the club and his participation.

and in the immediate post-war years to transform itself into new syncretistic forms⁷ (Graham 1996:1). Everywhere in East Africa, this was done through the recitation of *kasida* in Qur'an schools, regular official and non-official events involving the military and local brass band (including the famous *Beni ya Kundemba*, *Salim Band in Zanzibar* – our emphasis) and bands in Mission schools⁸.

The *taarab* of the 1950s and 1960s had different triggers⁹ for its structural change and development. The best picture of the *status quo* in terms of musical and cultural situation in Zanzibar is given by Gurnah (1997:116-142) who, rejecting the idea of shaping international culture only by means of machinations of economic and political imperialism or the diffusion of 'popular' culture, has this to say about his life in Zanzibar in the 1950s. The long quotation emphasises its 'revealing thrust':

„Growing up in Zanzibar in the 1950s, I was lucky from the outset to experience international culture. Zanzibar Town was then a cosmopolitan urban *entrée-port*, which for several centuries handled trade between the Mid and Far East and the eastern seaboard of Africa [...] In the nineteenth century, Sultan Said partially ruled along the most of the Indian Ocean coast from Oman to Mozambique and traded with people on the coastal settlements between the two. This 'merchant prince' chose Zanzibar as the seat of his government, where several great cultures routinely mixed and exchanged goods and ways of living. If for now we leave aside how it was possible for these cultures to mix, the depth of our core learning experience in the 1950s was, therefore, shaped by African and Arabic cultures and articulated by Indian, Western and Chinese cultures [...] The first sounds I wriggled to as a toddler I heard on Radio Cairo. Every local café tuned into Arabic love songs by Mohammed Abdul-Wahab and Farid El-Atrash before evening prayers. As cups of strong and bitter Arabic coffee were consumed, these singers eulogized about the moon's ability to mend their broken hearts or rescue them from drowning in their own bitter tears. Sometimes men at the cafés became sufficiently moved by a particular taunting phrase to interrupt their game of dominoes or a political controversy, assume a love-pained expression and sing along with love-bitten poet. In extreme cases, serious men disrespectfully – but maybe not intentionally – articulated their Quranic Stanza with an odd lunar phrase. Women had their sessions too, which included a little dancing, but as a nosy little boy I was dispatched on harmless errands out of the way, and I never suspected the truth [...] There was no 'bookish' tradition of music in Zanzibar; sound, meaning and performance were the main ways people related to it. In this atmosphere at the age of 6 or 7 I learnt to sing Kiswahili *taarab*, though my immaturity allowed me only partial understanding of the innuendo and fierce but highly amusing war of words hidden in the lyric of competing clubs or writers [...] As a 9

⁷ Khamis Salim Khamis (1996:4) puts this more emphatically as follows ... "Socially Islam had a significant impact on a majority of Zanzibaris. It changed their perception and attitudes as they adapted themselves not only to Islam but also to Muslim practices [...] Besides, in Qur'an schools children started to perform Islamic ritual music including the singing of *Kasida* in social and religious celebrations. In this way they were prepared to admire and accept some elements of this new culture. Until today most of the best singers in *taarab* and other traditional music (including the renowned Siti bint Saad) went through this orientation."

⁸ The writer of this article attended UMCA primary school for a number of years where he was taught how to play drums. He also saw *Salim Band* that was a professional band then hired for marriage ceremonies and other festivities. It played all sorts of Western and Afro-Cuban beats like waltz, tango, rumba, chachacha, mambo etc in the 1950s.

⁹ Here it means external factors that trigger change in the *taarab*'s structure.

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year-old in the mid-1950s, I stumbled over Harry Belafontes's version of calypso. My older cousin who wanted to go and study in Trinidad bought a record player on which we ceaselessly played and danced to 'Hold 'Em Joe'. Around the house were also records of the mellifluous Latin bands for Hollywood of Xavier Cugat playing such waist twisters as 'Mambo Jumbo', 'Linda Mujer', 'The Peanut Vendor' and 'Mambo Negro'. Rock and Roll followed OK Jazz and other 'Congolese' and Kenyan bands. Elvis was king in our household in Malindi (or was it Sir Cliff?) as much as he was in Iowa or Liverpool. My brother later reneged to the Rolling Stones; unbelievable. In my late teens I listened to American jazz, especially Satchmo, and a little swing, but mercifully held against Bing Crosby; but at no time was even 'foreign'. The grandson of a deposed Sultan three houses away (still waiting for the British to allow him resume his crown) used to sing along with Bing. We used to accompany him loudly in distorted voices, which rather proved him into drunken abuse about us and our whole lineage."

Seven factors that influenced Zanzibar urban cultural situation in the 1950s and 1960s are discernible from the quotation. First, the continuity of Islamic codes affecting every aspect of Zanzibar life, but now grudgingly giving way to new voices, new forces and new ideas. Second, the intensification of trade including that of phonographic record and sound film, allowing continual fluxes of global music into *taarab* from Egypt, Yemen, Kuwait, India, USA, Western Europe and Congo. Third, the introduction of new Western instruments like guitar, double-bass, cello, accordion, mandolin, bongos, drum, and band in *taarab*. Fourth, the shift from the use of Arabic scales (*maqāmāt*) to Western 'diatonic' scales. Fifth, the introduction of the radio¹⁰ with its penetrating influence. Radio was now heard in *ng'ambo* and rural area, in cafés, shops, social clubs and at *Raha Leo* grounds where in the afternoon, people would sit to enjoy fresh air and listen to *Sauti ya Unguja* (The Voice of Zanzibar) live programmes being aired in full blast from the broadcasting station.¹¹ Sixth, the development of a stratified socio-political landscape whose cleft was widening into rival blocks. Seventh, the burgeoning of dissident sentiments among women expressing gender inequalities.

It is from this background that we see a profound change in *taarab* during this time compared with the former times, not only in structure and style, but also in functions. Especially in Zanzibar, but also in Dar-es-salaam and at least in *Johar* group in Mombasa, *taarab* songs were 'composed' mainly from blending the local beats and those derived from Egyptian, Western, Indian, Jazz and Afro-Cuban influences. Even clubs from *ng'ambo* area now drew heavily from external sources. There were, however, some differences in the style of groups and clubs. For example, the *taarab* versions of *Ikhwan Safa* (located at Kokoni in *majumba ya mawe*) and *Ghazzy* (located at Mwembetanga in *ng'ambo*) were closer in organisation, and musical and lyrical orientation, with *Ikhwan Safa* tapping heavily from Egyptian *taarab* and

¹⁰ Topp (1992:117) notes a similar situation in Egypt. She echoes Racy's observation (1976) that "[B]y 1932 enthusiasm within the recording industry was dwindling and films and radio were becoming more important mass media, not only within Egypt itself but in other areas of the Indian Ocean such as India and indeed East Africa." Perhaps in South Africa, too, since Topp (1992:179) tells us that "[...] *Kwela* began in South Africa in the early 1950s when formal groups of young musicians started playing American swing music learnt from films and records."

¹¹ Topp (1992:127) affirms: "by far the majority of people, however, hear records over, as they have done since 1951 when Radio Zanzibar first began to transmit."

Western musical styles and *Ghazzy* tending a bit more towards the *taarab* of Yemen and the Gulf States. *Ikhawan Safa* and *Ghazzy* would rarely use Afro-Cuban beats (e.g. *chachacha*, *pachanga* and *bolingo*) as *Michenzani Social Club* and *Young African Social Union (YASU)* would use them in addition to Egyptian and Western music – the mainstay of all these groups. One reason for this is that political affiliation was becoming stronger with *Michenzani Social Club* and *YASU* seeking to identify more with the so called indigenous African culture.

Political themes must also be a way of distinguishing at least *taarab* songs, if not the whole of *taarab* organisation. From almost its inception *taarab* became closer to articulating politics. We have already shown a poem in which the Sultan and the British rulers are praised. Here is another example from *Waimbaji wa Juzi* (51) in which social criticism is self-evident:

Si Mji Haukaliki

1.

<i>Si mji haukaliki</i>	<i>una miba unachoma</i>
<i>Na ahera hakwendeki</i>	<i>tumetanguliza dhima</i>
<i>Na mambo hayanyooki</i>	<i>kula siku twalalama</i>
<i>Lipi sisi la salama</i>	<i>hata tukarudi hali?</i>

This isn't a town to stay, it has thorns, it prickles.
And to the next world is scary to go,
for the sins committed posthumously.
Things never get better,
and we end up always complaining.
What is there to save the situation,
so that our condition returns to normality. (my translation)

5.

<i>Zimeadimika kazi</i>	<i>hapana ila rikwama</i>
<i>Na sisi hatuiwezi</i>	<i>kutweka na kusukuma</i>
<i>Turuzuku ya Azizi</i>	<i>Ndiwe Mruzuku Umma</i>
<i>Lipi sisi la salama</i>	<i>hata tukarudi hali?</i>

Jobs have become scarce.
Nothing but the pulling of *likwama* cart.
And we haven't the strength
to do the pulling and pushing.
Give us means of livelihood God.
You are the Provider of the masses.
What is there to save the situation
so that our condition returns to normality.
(my translation)

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A deliberately calculated strategy to make *taarab* a propaganda medium was worked out soon after the Zanzibar revolution in 1964, as artists were compelled to compose political songs if they ever wanted their songs to be aired over Radio Zanzibar. Actually, it was not just a matter of composing songs, but a whole of Zanzibar musical culture was manipulated and geared at fulfilling this task. *Taarab* and *ngoma* were restructured and reorganised to play the role of ideological apparatus. *Ngoma* culture for the first time was introduced in schools, police, army, party branches and even government ministries and departments. *Taarab* and *ngoma* became necessary ingredients in party / state functions and ceremonies.

Mombasa *taarab* is also defined variedly. Matano's and Zein's groups are distinguished by incorporating heavily local beats, though at times they do show substantial global influences. *Johar* is unique in being versatile, composing music along lines of influences from American Jazz, Egyptian *taarab*, Western and sometimes local *ngoma*. Juma Bhalo's and Maulid's group tended towards Indian beats influenced by Indian film industry more popular in Mombasa.

The Tanga version of *taarab*, according to Askew (2000:21-38), was initially influenced by Siti's songs, a fact that does not extricate it from Zanzibar influence though Askew tried hard to down play it. However, Tanga *taarab* does show obvious divergence from Zanzibar influence as it should. The 'dispersed' influence of any art can be shown to be a mere prick for *taarab* to sprout variedly in new grounds. Every ground has optimal conditions for the growth of a particular form. The conditions with which *taarab* evolved in Zanzibar were vastly different from those of Tanga, Dar-es-salaam, Lamu and Mombasa. The aristocratic and élitist tendencies in the pre-revolution Zanzibar, the sharp social and cultural stratification between urban and rural area and the influxes of Islamic, Arabic, Indian and Western values were not quite the same elsewhere in East Africa. For example, the dictates for the inception and subsequent development of the *taarab* of the 1920s to initially include Arabic verses and tunes, were not just the result of Egyptian influence disseminated in the media, but of the palace's imposition as well. However, neither art – in this case *taarab* – nor socio-cultural conditions necessary for the existence of a certain version of *taarab*, are static, hence, it did not take long for the *taarab* played in the palace to be disseminated outside it to the suburbs and rural area, where it was transformed into what Askew (27) calls 'a more casual, more organic process of *taarab* development.' The conditions for the inception and development of *taarab* in the pre-revolution Zanzibar were therefore not applicable to other places in East Africa. No trained ear is therefore needed to distinguish Mombasa *taarab* from that of Zanzibar or Mombasa *taarab* from that of Tanga. Their distinctions are too obvious. Thus, whereas the problem of 'origin' remains quite elusive, the distinction of various groups, genres and sub-genres can be safely established not by seeking to relate these to gender and class politics, but by scrutinising their lyrical forms, idiom(s) and by taking into account the number and type of instruments by a group and how this group uses particular instruments and how local or global musical lines or their fusion, function in different contexts of performance.

Though it does not come out vividly in Askew's essay, there has been no one strand of Tanga *taarab* from its inception. The alleged Tanga tradition described on page 29 of her article as consisting of not more than 10 members, using electric guitar and key board for melodic counterpoint to the vocalist, electric bass for harmonic reference, bongos and Western drum kit for rhythm and various percussion instrument like tambourine, rattles and *claves*, contradicts with its precursors, namely the *taarab* of the *Young Novelty* and *Shabaab al-Wataaan* that preferred instruments of multicultural origin like *fidla* (violin), *tabla*, mandolin, double bass and clarinet (28). We would therefore suggest that for *taarab* to be called *taarab* it must show at least one major feature that is common to all other versions. The feature ascribed by Askew (31) to *taarab* as being 'unstable and prone to fission and fusion' is common to all forms of *taarab* that have existed variedly at different times and places. That is why we see features on modern *taarab* from Mombasa, Tanga and Dar-es-salaam reciprocating and influencing Zanzibar versions.

The main feature of *taarab ya wanawake* (women's *taarab*) – considered to have started in Zanzibar since 1930 is the deployment of verbal 'qualms' and the language that draws attention to itself, a creation of tropes and imagery for accentuating the 'foregrounding' in the lyric¹². The lyric expresses *ushinde* (rivalry) derived from a long standing Swahili cultural tradition of urban *ngoma za ushinde* such as *gungu*, *lelemama*, *unyago*, *beni*, *bomu*, *kunguwia*, *ndege* and *changani*. The history of *ngoma* in East Africa is such that when for certain reasons, one *ngoma* phases out, another that inherits the features of rivalry appears. The lyric of women *taarab* is however, particularly distinctive for the expression therein of jealousy, competition, obscenity, wishful thinking and material quest. The extreme case of rivalry, jealousy, competition and abusive ring of the lyric is seen in the verbal exchange between women groups of *Nur el-Uyun* and *Royal Air Force*. Here is the vexing:

<i>Piloti wakumbuka</i>	<i>usiseme huelewi</i>
<i>Kakayo kaolewa Chwaka</i>	<i>kwa magoma hoihoi</i>
<i>Mambo yalipochafuka</i>	<i>kenda uzia Dubai</i>

(Surely) pilot you remember (it all) tell me not you don't
 Your brother¹³ was married in Chawaka with pomposity and merry making
 When the scandal broke loose he went to prostitute himself (herself?) in Dubai.

The reply strives in vain to obscure:

<i>Kumezuka papa¹⁴ kuu</i>	<i>si jike wala si dume</i>
<i>Lina miguu mitatu</i>	<i>na mikono yake minne</i>
<i>Wafunikeni watoto</i>	<i>papa lisiwatafune</i>

¹² Note that my interviewees do not regard some of these as poetry at all since they violate some prosodic rules and are not crafted skilfully to approximate maximum artistic effect. They are only verbal outpouring of abuses and insults relying mainly on percussion and 'hijinks' for their vitality and effect.

¹³ Rumours have it that the brother was homosexual.

¹⁴ This symbolism is used in reference to Nur el-Uyun the alleged lesbians or the female genitalia.

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A big fierce shark has emerged, neither female nor male

A three-legged shark with four hands.

Protect your children so that they would not be ripped off by it.

The most important category of *taarab* in the contemporary sense is the so called ‘modern’ *taarab* existing in different shades and hues. It constitutes versions like that of *Twinkling Star* group in Zanzibar whose songs are composed following Western scales. The Dubai-based group of soft-sounding *Dumbak Music Masters* and *Oman’s Leo Band*, both using Western scales but inclined more to modern Arabic pop styles of the Western type. Also the various categories of Tanga and Mombasa *taarab* with powerful acoustic effect and quicker tempo for dance purposes and *mipasho* the ‘explosive’ type that has gone fully ‘electric’ with the lyric subverting the strict verse rules and the content that is shifting from sentimental songs to crude rivalry songs in which issues are personalised and language becomes abusive, insulting, sexist and draws attention to itself. The salient features of the modern *taarab* are: the commercialisation of *taarab*, the use of Western instruments (keyboard, electric guitar, electric bass guitar, Western drum kit, and various percussion instruments like tambourine, rattles and *claves*), the thinning of instrumentation and orchestration for commercial advantages, the narrowing of the performer / audience divide since now the audience does not sit down but dance on the floor, the drawing on the musical beats from local repertoire and sometime Afro-Cuban sources, the *high jinks*, the lyric that tends to be written in loose blank verse form that uses oral techniques – the lyric that is normally plain, transparent, and blunt to issues that used to be private and personal in the Swahili culture. Here is the example¹⁵:

Tena Raha Kama Nini

Watuache hatutaki mambo yetu

Mimi naye twatamba tunakula vitu¹⁶ vyetu

Watuache hatutaki mambo yetu

Mimi naye twatamba twafaidi raha zetu

Mambo yanataka ufundi sio wewe kibandiko

Daima mimi mshindi sina haja ya tambiko

Ya 'we kinying'inya Kinying'inya kwa hapa hutavuna

Ya mambo huyawezi Kinying'inya kwa hapa hutavuna

Kinying'inya umepigwa teke Kinying'inya kwa hapa hutavuna

¹⁵ The lyric is reproduced in this length so as to give a complete picture of its change and the registered *innuendo*.

¹⁶ The word *kitu* here, especially in Zanzibar cultural background, means an act of sexual intercourse.

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Nimemzibua mtoto nimemzibua kiasi nimempeleka nyumbani mimi nyumbani

Nimepanda naye Sii Basi¹⁷

Yenye raha baharini

Na sikumpa nafasi

'memplaza mapajani

Si wewe ulomghasi

shonga usojiamini

Simbururi yeye kaongoza njia

Wala hajali urojo¹⁸¹⁹ kauzowea

Na maji ya pwani anaogelea

Udi wa mawaridi anapendelea

Kichakicha mtoto mpaka baharini

Asumini kwake ni maua ... (eeeh)

Hakubali kuvaa na jua

Tena shuti raha kama nini!

Watuache hatutaki mambo yetu

Mimi naye twatamba tunakula vitu vyetu

Watuache hatutaki mambo yetu

Mimi naye twatamba twafaidi raha zetu

Na halua²⁰ mtoto na halua ya Gidemi²¹

Na halua ya mageni na halua ya Gidemi

Imemplaza uani yeye uani

Imemplaza uani darling!

Hajitambui hasemi!

Aona yuko peponi.

Na mengineyo sisemi

ya siri yeye na mimi.

Si wewe bingwa wa ngumi

mahaba si yako fani!

¹⁷ Describing a voyage from Dar-es-salaam to Zanzibar in a boat called 'Sea Bus.'

¹⁸ Slimy and stinking vaginal secretion associated with loose women and prostitutes. Perhaps the singer was referring to an accusation.

¹⁹ Fumigation of 'udi' can mean part of paraphernalia in preparation for a sexual act.

²⁰ The word *halua* here means female sexual organ, echoing the famous Pemba song, '*Halua haina makombo*' meaning the female sexual organ is freshly enjoyed by all men who sleep with the same woman at different times. This, of course, contradicts with *urojo*.

²¹ Gidemi was the owner of a *halua* shop in Malindi, Zanzibar. He was reputed for producing the best quality *halua*.

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*Si wewe bingwa wa ngumi,
Mapenzi si yako fani
Udi wa mawardi¹⁹ anapendelea*

*Simbururi yeye kaongoza njia.
Wala hajali urojo kauzoea.
Na maji ya pwani anaogelea.
Udi wa mawardi anapendelea.
Kichakicha mtoto mpaka baharini
Asumini kwake ni maua.
hakubali kuvaa na jua.
Asumini kwake ni maua ... (eeeh)
Hakubali kuvaa na jua*

Tena shuti raha kama nini!

*Mambo sote ooo,
wataka useme nini?
Mtoto kwangu amepagawa
Tumefika Marekani
Tukaishia Omani
Vitu vimekolea
hataki nitoke ndani (mimi)
Oooo, aaaa vimemkolea
hataki nitoke ndani darling l'aziz*

*Mwiga²² sasa umenoa wewe,
asema wewe wa nini!*

<i>Mtoto kafika</i>	<i>keshafanikiwa amepagawa</i>
<i>Hodihodi hazitaki</i>	<i>keshafanikiwa amepagawa</i>
<i>Mimi nimemdhiniti (darling)</i>	<i>keshafanikiwa amepagawa</i>
<i>Ninampa kila haki</i>	<i>keshafanikiwa amepagawa</i>
<i>Kizaizai kimepindua</i>	<i>Mwiga huna lako jambo</i>
<i>Mimi nimemtengua</i>	<i>Mwiga umevimba tumbo</i>

²² Meaning 'imitator'.

What a Captivating Moment!

Leave us alone, poke not your nose in our affairs,
he and I strut proudly, eating our things!
Leave us alone, poke not your nose in our affairs,
he and I enjoy the pleasure of it

The affair needs someone with the skill,
not you dirty rag!
I'm always the winner,
I need no self-praise.

The way you nonentity take the affair,
you wont reap a thing here nonentity!
You can't really manage the affair.
Nonentity you wont reap a thing here!
Nonentity you have been booted out.
Nonentity you wont reap a thing here!

I've prompted the handsome,
I've prompted him quite enough
I've taken him home!
Yes I have taken him home.
I've travelled with him in the Sea Bus,
across the Ocean in a boat full of luxuries.
And I didn't let him waste time,
I made him lie down on my thighs.
It is not like you who harass him!
You a partner without self-confidence.

I am not dragging him.
He himself leads the way.
He doesn't care,
he's used to the slimy stuff of the prostitute.
He is swimming in the sea water.
Aromatic fumigation of *udi* he enjoys.
I took him and closely hug him, closely hug him

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to my body on our way to the port!
Jasmine is his favourite flower, and he wont
put the garland on against the sun rays!

And the shot! A captivating moment!

And sweet meat and sweet meat of Gidemi's brand!
And sweet meat of the novelty and sweet meat of Gidemi's brand!
Made him sleep (after eating it), made him sleep at an open court!
Made him sleep my darling!
He is startled, he doesn't speak
He feels the pleasure of paradise!
And I wont tell others
of his secret and mine!
Not you the champion of boxing,
love is not your domain!
Not you the champion of boxing,
Romance is not your art.

I'm not dragging him,
he himself leads the way.
He doesn't care,
he's used to the slimy stuff of the prostitute!
He is swimming in the sea water.
Aromatic fumigation of *udi* he enjoys.
I took him and closely hug him, closely hug him
to my body on our way to the port!
Jasmine is his favourite flower.
And he wont put the garland on
against the sun rays.

And the shot! A captivating moment!

The affair is mutually,
what are you trying to say?
The handsome has gone crazy for me!

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We have travelled to America,
and we ended up in Oman
(My) thing is properly seasoned,
he doesn't want me to go out
Indeed (my thing) is properly seasoned,
he doesn't want me to go out darling ... the worthy!

Finally, Mwiga you've won nothing,
he says what are you for!
The handsome is in good hands.
He's succeeded (in getting my love) and has gone crazy.
He does want people to come in to intrude.
He's succeeded (in getting my love) and has gone crazy.
He is under my control darling.
He's succeeded (in getting my love) and has gone crazy.
I give him his every right.
He's succeeded (in getting my love) and has gone crazy.
My love spell has revolutionised him,
there's nothing you can do Mwiga!
He is in my grip at last,
Mwiga you are disfigured! (my translation)

With the introduction and intensification of new media from the 1970s – first, the cassette-recorder and then video-recorder and television (including satellite television), a dramatic shift of both *taarab* lyric and musical structure has taken place. Actually, it was during this time that we witness similar occurrence elsewhere. For example, Hesmondhalgh (1998:170) observes analogous exchange and reciprocity between music and media in India:

„With the arrival of the cassette-recorder, the domination of film music and GCI (the Gramophone Company of India) began to be challenged. At first, cassettes were common only among the middle class. In the 1970s, a modern form of India song called the *ghazal* became popular amongst this class. Like many recording industries in the developing countries, Indian recording companies were unable to break into profit because of pirate recordings. But the *ghazal* was a subtle genre which required a good quality of sound, and cheap but legal (rather than badly copied) cassettes began to sell among the middle class. GCI still controlled the form, but the mould was beginning to break. In the early 1980s there was a boom in devotional musics and regional styles issued on cassettes by small independent companies. These cassettes were cheap to reproduce; the companies did not need to invest in the expensive pressing equipment required to press vinyl. The power requirements for the cassettes-player were simpler too, and player / recorders began to sell among other, poorer social classes. The explosion in genres continued

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as independent record companies found new markets.“

The new versions of ‘modern’ taarab like *mipasho*, *rusha-roho* and *taa-rap* show sharp contrasts with ideal *taarab*. *Mipasho* takes on vibrant local beats in ‘hijinks’ designed to offer a dancing situation and combining music with scathing and sometimes obscene lyrics. *Rusha-roho* being fully mediated devoid of live performance, play tape-recorded *mipasho* songs for dance purposes in which mainly women are participants. *Taa-rap* whose main converging feature with ideal *taarab* is the traditional verse and a type of vocalisation realised in a mixture of *taarab* and rap styles. The *mipasho*, *rusha-roho* and *taa-rap* are good examples of commercialised *taraab* geared at what Askew (31) calls a type of *taarab* in search of *maslahi*²³. It is in this light that we see, especially *mipasho*, moving towards foul and erotic blank verse juxtaposed with vigorous music and sometimes sexually explicit movements of women behinds, typical of Western music programmes of the like of MTV, MTV2, Pop and Viva – also feeding on sensationalism and sexism. Hiebert and Reuss (1985:169) observe: “[T]he mass media are business enterprises not supported by taxpayers or subsidised by governments. They need to sell and to make profit to stay in business. Sex and sensationalism have therefore become a staple ingredient in much mass communication in order to gain an audience and earn profit”.

Mipasho can therefore, be regarded as an assault on tradition especially of certain quarters of the coastal societies. It is a type of *taarab* that is geared at attracting certain segments of the audience²⁴ fascinated by ‘dance’ and ‘words’ of the lyric depicting rivalry, sexism and cynicism. It provides, so to say, escapism from the reigning postmodernist pessimism brought about by stark globalizing tendencies.

The audience is also an important element in delineating *taarab* into different categories. The audience is split into segments on the basis of age, sex, education and on whether one wants to be a listener of *taarab* music or a dancer of its beats with a possibility for someone to be a devotee of both. It is therefore totally misleading to paint a picture that the ideal *taarab* is disliked in the rural area²⁵. In my interviews I got people from very interior places in Unguja, Pemba, Tanga, Mombasa and Lamu who responded negatively towards *mipasho taarab*.

Any art, as a living body, must grow, metamorphose and diversify if it is to survive. But art does not do this haphazardly or without due regard to its role and function. The fact that all the versions of *taarab* must be measured on the basis of their being near to or distant from the ideal *taarab*, means that the ideal *taarab* has a historical and contemporary significance. It is the yardstick with which other versions are measured and with which the society is gauged in terms of progression and retrogression. If ideal *taarab* has a history of survival of over 97

²³ In an interview I made with Othman Soud, the prolific and perhaps the best composer of lyric and music in the *mipasho* version of TOT group, he told me that he now lives completely on *taarab*. He is now engaged in *taarab* professionally, a move that has resulted in improving his life and standard of living tremendously.

²⁴ Topp (1992) claims that the majority of this segment are divorced women.

²⁵ See Fair (ibid) and Topp (ibid).

years, it has proven its popularity and its place in the world of East African music. Other versions of *taarab* have their own importance in so far as they serve functions other than those of ideal *taarab*. Whether these can be called *taarab* or not depends very much on how distant they stand from the continuum in terms of their cultural configuration and those who propagate them want to call them.

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