Affliction and Frightened Laughter in the Song "Covid" by a Kenyan Gusii musician, Henry Sagero

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Abstract: **Laughter in the face of affliction and looming danger can be an outrageous act bordering on taboo. Indeed, any attempt to make light of a matter as grave as Covid-19, a pandemic that has occasioned endemic fright and a global existential crisis of a magnitude never witnessed before, can only confirm one's callousness or, at best, be evidence that the concerned party has lost it and is now displaying signs of severe mental distress. Fear, anxiety, distress, panic and terror would be the more typical reaction, some art produced in the aftermath of Covid-19 reveals a tendency towards the comic. A case in point is the song "Covid" by Henry Sagero. The present paper seeks to examine the aesthetic value of humorous representations in life-threatening circumstances with reference to the song titled "Covid" by Henry Sagero of Bonyakoni Kirwanda Band—a popular music artist from Kisii County, Kenya. The focus will be on establishing the link between the artist's perception of the existing threat, his conception and deployment of humorous images and, ultimately, the audience's anticipated participation (or reaction thereof) in the ensuing humorous enterprise. With the purposively sampled song, the study pursues a descriptive and analytical approach aimed at revealing how artistic responses and choices within the phenomenon of popular art have not only been influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic but also the extent to which they contribute to collective societal resilience and survival. Theoretically, the study is grounded in semiotic and psychoanalytic tenets that enable us to view meaningful existence.**

Key words: **pandemic, Gusii community, aesthetics, imagery, humour, popular art, semiotics, psychoanalysis**

I. INTRODUCTION

Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand

Mark Twain (in Zolten 1988)

Pandemics have had an intermittent manifestation in the long history of humankind. They have, at different times and with varying intensities, ravaged civilisations and communities. Severe ones such as Smallpox, Influenza, HIV/AIDS, Ebola and, now, Covid-19 have disrupted entire social orders while mild, and often cyclical, ones such as polio and measles have occasioned immense distress and trauma. A look at past artistic creations among Abagusii reveals the community's artists have, occasionally, provided personal accounts of their people's horrifying experiences in the hands of various past epidemics. In modern Africa, works by such Rhumba maestros as Franco (Attention Na Sida—1987) and Oliver Mtukudzi (What Shall We Do?—1999) stand out. In Kenya, renowned Musicians such as Princess Jully (*Dunia Mbaya*, 1998) and Longombas (*Vuta Pumzi*, 2005) fashioned messages on HIV and AIDS that attracted many listeners in Kenya and beyond. It may therefore be important to study how artistic messages are drawn from and suited to times of adversity and their aesthetic effectiveness thereof. In the present paper, we undertake a close reading of Henry Sagero's song, "Covid", with the intention of looking at how the artiste's deployment of humour fits in pandemic art within the modern context that is influenced more and more by popular culture. It is an attempt to examine how, as Zolten (1988) puts it, an otherwise infamous act of "mocking death and ridiculing tragedy" (4) ends up being something that people find aesthetically rewarding.

The Miriam Webster Online Dictionary defines "aesthetics" as a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of art and taste, and also with creation and appreciation. In that regard, pandemic art, just as for other related genres such as elegy, becomes effective or truly "beautiful" in the eyes of the "appreciator" when it meets certain (if unconscious) minimum essential qualities. Artists, as foremost appreciators, seek to meet those mutual, albeit often undeclared, qualities. A quick survey of the Gusii community's earlier works associable to the genre in question reveals a general quest to spread awareness, capture the reality of the prevailing hard times (in some kind of lamentation), emotively commiserate with the affected and also, to inspire temerity and hope. The fact that the said artistic creations are still performed on occasion may indeed be an indication that they still satisfy the aesthetic taste of, at least a section, the community's members. A case in point is a folk song from the traditional Abagusii community entitled *Ekebwe Ngiakura Manga Inse (Fox Howls from the Floor of Manga Ridge)* The song goes, in part:

Ekebwe ngiakura manga inse

Eee Manga inse, ekebwe ngiakura

Ekebwe ngiakura manga inse

Eee Manga inse,

Baba motengera nyangweso

Ndindindi

Translation

Fox howls from the floor of Manga Ridge

Yes, from the floor of Manga Ridge, the fox has howled

Fox Howls from the floor of Manga Ridge

Yes, from the floor of Manga Ridge

My mother who dances for the locusts

Ndindindi

In the folk song above, a fox is reported howling from the lowest point of the Manga Ridge in the heart of Gusiiland. The ridge, which is listed as a monument by the National Museums of Kenya, was considered a shrine and the special seat of *Engoro* (the supreme being of Abagusii). The ridge was also a fortress symbolising the community's organization and security. In colonial times, the ridge housed the first community court referred to as *Ritongo*—meaning "where the elders converged" (The Standard, February 15th 2017). It, therefore, inspired hope for justice and dread in equal measure.

Legend has it that there exists a bottomless hole, known as *Engoro ya Mwaga* which connects the ridge with the shores of Lake Victoria. It is from this bottomless hole the fox is said to be howling. The community considered a fox to be a mischievous animal of crooked ways and whose howl, let alone sighting, portended disaster. In such circumstances, calamity had to be forestalled with immediate hounding and elimination of the animal. Indeed, to date, Abagusii believe that anyone that succeeds in taming the wily beast must be either of crooked ways themselves or a fierce sorcerer. The song, therefore, warned of an impending natural calamity. Although rare, such calamities would take the form of a locusts attack—which the song above alludes to—an epidemic, etc. in the case of locust attacks, it was mostly women who were engaged in efforts to keep the attacking armies away by whatever means possible but typically by keeping watch and engaging in various acts, such as song and body movement to scare or drive them away whenever they approached. In the song, therefore, the watch party is being asked to be ready because their song and dancing skills will soon be required. Away from expressing collective misery, therefore, pandemic art also served to put members of the community on high alert and mobilise them as well.

Besides the song above, there exists a repertoire of oral texts which indicate that pandemic/affliction art is not a new phenomenon among Abagusii. For instance, a heartrending story is told about *Esao-sao*—the 1893 civil war between Abagusii and their neighbours the Kipsigis. In the story, the many years Abagusii endured attacks from their hostile and more powerful neighbours, and the great losses suffered, are described in harrowing detail. Similarly, there are also cleansing songs which were performed following the Malaria outbreak of 1877, and, later in 1892 during *Enyamoko Oborwaire* (the year of great small pox). Expressions of pain, grief and loss recur in the songs. The mood and general atmosphere of the performances was unmistakably melancholic and penitent. Above all, a desire for a return to normalcy and balance of everyday life is communicated in the carefully chosen words. It may then be subsumed that there exist demonstrable patterns and conventions in Gusii pandemic art. With the said conventions in mind, therefore, a link between the past and present artistic strategies in pandemic art from the community, generally, and Henry Sagero's "Corona" song, in particular, may be pursued. Thus, the specific questions the study sought to answer include: how is epidemic perceived in Henry Sagero's song "Corona"? How does the artist fit or break away from the established tradition? In what ways does the contemporary cultural context influence Sagero's art? What does the use of humour in a popular pandemic song signify?

"Man Pepe" Henry Sagero and the cultural context of his art.

Henry Sagero is widely acknowledged as one of the most successful musicians to come out of Gusiiland yet. At just 42, Sagero is tipped to match his comparatively more successful forerunners, namely the late John Arisi Osababu of Bonyakoni Kirwanda Jazz Band and Christopher Monyoncho of Kegogi Jazz Band. Sagero's energetic approach and interest in social change, marked with ingenious expression, have immensely contributed to his popularity. The musician has released a string of popular songs that lead his audience to reflect on numerous topical issues. One such song is "*Omogusii Omokimbizi*" (Internally Displaced Persons of the Gusii community). This is one of his most political songs in which Sagero, according to Ondara (2017), not only draws attention to tribal and violent nature of Kenyan politics, but also highlights "the resilience of Kenyans" (1). His other song, *Eng'ombe Ne'ngima* (The cow is still whole) almost singlehandedly propelled him to fame and further revealed his charming eloquence.

As a musician, Sagero has not thrived on an aesthetic vacuum. His music may, undeniably, have fallen under the influence of a rich cultural and artistic traditions of the Gusii community. As already evident above, Gusii musical traditions had plenty of room for the serious and the melancholic. Equally, Sagero, being of a latter day generation of musicians, has inevitably sourced some of his techniques from the modern pop culture models which are firmly grounded in advancements in technology and the commodification of art. It is a modernised entertainment milieu in which Sagero has to learn to favourably compete with such maestros as likes of Kofi Olomidhe, Okatch Biggy, Femi Kuti, Diamond Platnamz, among others. He, therefore, has to make deliberate moves to win over a more liberated audience which is not easy to move with the mundane and colourless. Ultimately, it may then be considered that Sagero's music, in general, and his song "Corona", in particular, draws from two distinct traditions: "the old" and "the new", represented by the varying demeanours emphasising melancholic communication vis-à-vis a more relaxed and jocular approach, respectively.

II. THEORY AND METHOD.

This present study of Sagero's song "Corona" is anchored on two theoretical constructs: semiotics and psychoanalysis. *The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1987)* defines semiotics as a "study of patterned human communication behaviour including auditory and facial expression, body talk, touch, signs and symbolics. As Mboya (2019) puts it "semiotics [is] generally defined as the science

of signs" (2). Indeed, concerning music as part of a semiotic system, Mboya further affirms:

> Semiotics most significantly provides the root understanding that enables the adequate handling of both the verbal and musical elements of song, separately and together, as and when necessary. Since, in semiotics *anything* that can be perceived as representing something else by a number of people is a sign, the verbal and the musical elements of song are, therefore, because they signify "things" outside themselves, (configurations of) signs. (3)

With this, the study should reveal the perceivable meaning of what the artist does or says.

To be able to answer the questions how and why the musician does or says certain things and why the audience is likely to react in a particular manner, the study relies on psychoanalysis. According to Zolten (1988), the traditional link between humour and psychology began with Sigmund Freud's work, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). In this seminal work, Zolten avers, Freud thinks of "jokes as symbolic constructs, systems of meaning, some of which could be linked to the content of the unconscious mind" (3). This kind of argument is significant because it enables us to look at the social import of humour employed in the song under study.

In terms of methodology, this study targeted musical compositions around both past and recent pandemics. The item we subject to analysis is purposively sampled on the basis of its humorous disposition. Equally, Sagero is the only contemporary Gusii musician to have so far come up with a song on Covid-19. The selected item was sourced on Youtube, transcribed and translated before being subjected to close reading and analysis within semiotic and psychoanalytic frameworks.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There exist many studies focusing on how artists have, in their various contexts, responded to pandemics and other natural disasters. The presence of such focused interest has helped to generate useful data on the unique features contained in this distinctive genre of art inspired by human affliction. The literature under review reveals two main approaches from the manner in which researchers and critics have dealt with the matter of pandemic art. The first approach centres on the content of pandemic art and the immediate circumstances of its creation. The other approach centres on how style in pandemic art is fashioned to achieve particular effects on the target audience. By all indication, though, there seems to be no limitation to both the direction and the influence studies on pandemic art can take and wield.

In a paper that is significantly pivotal to the present endeavour, Okigbo (2017), while employing archival and ethnographic methods, attempts a historiography of epidemic music in South Africa covering such historical epidemics as Influenza, smallpox and HIV/AIDS. The gist of his study is in how persistent sociocultural conditions like race and ethnicity, economics, and spirituality can account for regularities in people's responses to disease. He demarcates his scope as follows:

> This article, based on archival and ethnographic study centred on South Africa, offers a glimpse into the historical uses of music in times of epidemics stretching over a period of three hundred years. Over this period, the territory known today as the Republic of South Africa experienced several documented epidemics, including smallpox (1713 to the late nineteenth century), Rinderpest epizootic (1896–1903), syphilis (1880–1950s), malaria epidemic (1904), Influenza (1918–late 1920s), and, of course, HIV/ AIDS (1982–present). All of these events likely included rich and multi-layered artistic responses. Here, however, I focus on smallpox and influenza, which have the most extensive extant evidence of musical response. (89)

Okigbo's study is important because it offers a worthy model of interlocution on the phenomenon he refers to as "performances of disease" (91). Much as the study in question leans more towards a historiography, its objectives and findings are resonant with the current study. The researcher further avers:

> Music was being used, and is still being used, to articulate issues such as the loss of traditional values, to provide commentary on faith and religion, and to express perspectives that touch on interracial relationships in the contexts of disease epidemics. Through a close, often text-focused reading, I suggest that sociocultural factors such as race, economics, and spirituality comprise important frameworks for constructing meanings around the issue of health and in the context of epidemics. (90)

Indeed, pandemic art is a multi-layered response which, if examined closely, can reveal meanings and aesthetics that may go beyond the pandemic that triggered it. Finally, Okigbo opines that his use of "historiographical approach helps to reveal parallels in the songs, showing the sociocultural and political processes that shaped health discourses under the various epidemics, thereby also revealing the persistence of social constructions in community experiences over time" (93).

Okigbo's arguments and conclusions are supported by an earlier work by Mboya (2009) in *Sex, HIV/AIDS and "Tribal" Politics in the Benga Music of Okatch Biggy.* In the paper, Mboya argues that the celebration of sex in the music of Okatch Biggy in the 1990s, a time when HIV/AIDS was doing great damage in Kenya, had political undercurrents. Indeed, Mboya's is a clear connection between sociocultural factors and pandemic art. Ultimately, Mboya argues that the celebration of sex in Okatch Biggy's music is not only "psychological denial…, [an] ego defence mechanism, but also a response to the ethnicised politics of the post-colonial Kenyan state. He concludes:

> I want to amplify the point that the 1990s, as the decade of the reintroduction of multi-party politics in Kenya, was also a time of heightened ethnic awareness. To the Luo, HIV/AIDS was a health, cultural and political problem that threatened to destroy them and the world as they knew it; it even was perceived as a weapon that their rivals and enemies could use to destroy their future. It would therefore seem that by destroying "raha" in his *Benga* Okatch Biggy affirmed Luo ethnic pride and courageously led a significant number of Luos in "remembering," "imagining" and "dreaming" a non-oppressive, relatively familiar world in which they (could once more) live(d) as proud and whole people. (10)

Thus, Mboya reads aesthetics of defiance in Okatch Biggy's *benga*. He views Biggy's stance of defiance in the face of looming danger as not only powerful but ironically "pro-life". To his hypnotized listeners he preaches, though indirectly, a strong will to defy the forces that threaten to decimate them; to cling to "their world" and refuse to give up their identity and dignity. Mboya's approach (of focusing on the artist's aesthetic intentions and the strategies he employs to achieve them) has influence on the present study.

Another study that focuses on the artist's message, intentions and strategies (overall aesthetics) in pandemic art is Chitando & Chitando's two pronged thematic analysis of Zimbabwean Music, in *Songs of Pain and Hope: HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwean Music.* First, the scholars look at how traditional music responded to threats to health and well-being and also how music empowered communities to face war, pestilence, disease and death. Additionally, they examine how contemporary music seeks to equip society to face the AIDS pandemic where they see changing attitudes—from the initial denial and stigmatisation, to the current calls for respect for people living with HIV.

Similarly, Kyker, in "*What Shall We Do?" Oliver Mtukudzi's Songs about HIV/AIDS*, while studying four of Mtukudzi's songs, observes that the musician is known for his distinctive musical style with lyrics that tend towards social commentary. The substance of the said study is in the examination of Mtukudzi's dilemmas of self-representation as well as his compelling personal narrative and deep understanding of linguistic nuance. The expectations of the study are stated as follows:

> Mtukudzi's lyrics often resist the pat messages some have considered appropriate for use in HIV/AIDS campaigns. Thus, while Mtukudzi's music remains popular, it also contributes to a dialogue about the expectations of HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns, the allowance of individual expression, and the question of effectively addressing anti-AIDS messages to the public. The chapter discusses four of Mtukudzi's songs: "Todii," "Mabasa," "Akoromoka Awa," and "Ndakuyambira," all of which illustrate his multifaceted musical portrayal of HIV/AIDS in an environment where issues such as the languaging of HIV/AIDS and the relationship between gender and agency have been tainted with politics.

The aesthetic approach in Kyker's work is also stimulating because of the manner in which he emphasises the role of the artist and his/her personal touch on pandemic art. Kyker's conclusion is that the artist's mastery of style, portrayals and intent are not only always reflected upon their works but also key in guiding the audience's response.

Finally, there is Stone (2017), in "*Ebola in Town": Creating Musical Connections in Liberian Communities during the 2014 Crisis in West Africa,* whose interest lies on both the emotional impact of pandemic art and the "importance of music performance and other sonic sources that provided warning, ameliorated suffering, and promoted mental health during the outbreak" (1). Stone's is an important contribution because of the manner in which it addresses attributes of pandemic art that go beyond mere entertainment. It is in the background of studies such as Stone's, and the foregoing, that we find the impetus to add to existing knowledge in pandemic art by looking at the use of humour in Sagero's "Corona" song.

Humour in "Corona" by Henry Sagero.

In this section, we turn our focus on the significance of humour in and, partly, on the performance of the song under study. We adopt Attardo's definition of humour as "whatever a social group defines as such" (Dore 2018, 3). Actual analysis is, nevertheless, preceded by full transcription and translation of the song as follows:

Corona

Sageeeero, Senio	This is Sagero, Senior!
Ritang'ani ira ng'ora toramanyana	first, listen as we introduce ourselves
Koraira ng'ora!	please, let's pay attention!
Motakoraira ng'ora!	Will you not pay attention?
Bari bakobata chisimi koratiga	those on their phones should stop
Na moin' aria nainwe nkoga more	on that sides, you too are making noise
Koraira ng'ora!	Please, pay attention for a while

Ekrecha keraiga getomanyie amarieta	this demon here will tell us its full name
Aye gwatantanirie ense iga,	you, that has confused the entire world,
Ing'aki okorokwa?	What is your name?
Karona	Karona
Erieta rinde?	Your other name?
Bayes	Bayes
Erita rio'rorera ria ndiriri?	What's your birth name?
Covid	Covid
Coffin 'sanduki, ecoffin yegetondo gose'ng'aki?	Coffin? A box for a corpse, or what?
Covid	*Covid*
Emiaka ne'renga obwate rende gaki	How old are you then, please?
19	19?
Inee, nontebie ase kwaiboreretwe?	Excuse me, will you tell us where you were born?
China	China
Gokorera. totebie'ngo chinse gwatareire	Finally, tell us all the countries you've visited
USA	*USA*
Richar'eri, otagete gototebia USA yoka?	Idiot, liar! USA alone?
Sibokango enkoro ototebie	Open up your heart and tell us
Chinse chioonsi gwatareire	All the countries you've been to
Italy, Iran and Spain.	Italy, Iran and Spain.
Potelea mbali, shetani wewe!	Get lost, you devil!
Oooi! Oooi!	Oooi! Oooi!
Corona ne'ndwari embe	Corona is a terrible disease
Lakini nabo egotangeka	But it can be avoided
Sagero, tinatagete inyetere Corona	Sagero, I didn't want to sing about Corona
Ntaraitona amang'ana aisaine	Before checking all the details
Kwanza ntagete toraigwana	I first want us to agree
Corona tari ensagara enkungu omouko	Corona is not a blind female lizard
Corona nero endwari entang'ani	Corona is the first disease
Koyetantania ense na'koyeura amaiso	To confuse and blind the world
Ntigane'ngo mbatebie Corona ne'yemo	Let me tell you Corona is one of those
Yabanetwe ase Ebuku	Prophesied in the Bible
Obotantanu ense yonsi tiyamanya	Confusion everywhere, the world failed to know
Endamwamu yomonene teri gotiemerwa	Nobody can dare God's wrath
Kayaikia kera egento ensinyo	and when things turned for worse
erio ekaba korondo mabongia korana	Then the gambling came to a hasty end
Egento ekemo giaitire ense nobosiereria	Disobedience is the one thing finishing us
Kimwatebigwa mokire nyomba	You were told to stay indoors

Mwasoka isiko mwatwa ne'meswago Then you get out to be beaten with buttons

Mwatebigwa tagokwanania You are told not to shake hands

Abande mwanyaunyuntana nagosagusana-maima But you kiss and touch instead, too bad!

Mwatebigwa beka emaski You are told to put on masks

Abande mwabeka ebisenderea baba Then others choose to put on braziers

Mwatebigwa esabera esabuni You're supposed to wash hands with soap

Mwaonchokera echang'a konywa na gwesabera Then you drink and wash your hands with alcohol

Chisemi echi ng'ai mokorusia bono? Where do you get such wisdom?

Buna corona yaika asande yakkonyete Since it came, there are ways Corona has been useful

Chingige konye chiaitire enseye locusts that had ravaged the country

Chionsi chigaaka mbuna they all took flight

Ukimwi cancer na malaria chiosi When HIV/AIDS, Cancer and Malaria

Gichiaigwa Corona chigaaka mbuna Heard about Corona, they all took flight

Abalshababu nechibomu bonsi When all terrorists with their bombs

Kibaigwa Corona bagaaka mbuna Heard about Corona, they all took flight

Obocheuri bwabakungu nabasacha The mischief of women and men

Bwanyomaine bonsi bokamanyekana Married secretly came out

Nabaria twegenete ense enigma and all those we thought we could trust

Kobaigwa Corona bonsi bagaaka mbuna When they heard about Corona they all took flight

Abanyagetari namariogo Doctors with their medicine

Bagaaka mbuna they all took flight

Abarai nechibodyguard *Leaders with bodyguards*

Bagaaka mbuna They all took flight

Ababani ne'chipastor Foreseers and pastors

Bagaaka mbuna They all took flight

Abanyanabi na'baganga Charmers and fortune tellers

Bagaaka mbuna They all took flight

Abamasai ne'bibuyu Maasais and their jerricans for herbs

Bagaaka mbuna They all took flight

Siasa ne'chikampeini Politics and campaigns

Bagaaka mbuna They all took flight

Ebinyabororo no'bosisa *Boils and scabies*

Bagaaka mbuna They all took flight

Ebianda ne'sese Worms and tuberculosis

Bagaaka mbuna They all took flight

Chikanisa ne'ebirabu Churches and nightclubs

Bagaaka mbuna They all took flight

Abanamusiki na'abateri Musicians and singers

Bagaaka engoma	they played their drums
Eye ne'tindi	This one is tough
Corona	Corona is tough
Nyeite egoite	Beat it before it beats you

In the foregoing song, a number of genre-specific features that identify it with pandemic art may be noted. For instance, while keeping within tradition, Sagero draws from the rich tradition of Gusii pandemic aesthetics which, as already demonstrated above, emphasises the expression of affliction and its alleviation. Nonetheless, the song also reveals an attempt by the artist to, while playing his traditional role of responding to the immediate problem, suit his art to the taste of a contemporary audience. This, in our view, accounts for the light-heartedness and humour in the song under our study. In a number of ways, therefore, Sagero keeps within and steps out of tradition as discussed in detail below:

Traditional aesthetics of affliction and empowerment in "Covid" song

Traditional aesthetics, as already discussed above, essentially entail a conservative approach of dealing with anguish and affliction. Sagero, having chosen to record a calamitous historical occurrence is thus expected to do so as any other member of the community could: freely, but without overly violating the medium developed over the years. He is not only bound to be intelligible to his target audience but also act as the community's link to the past, present and future. It is this situation that may lead the artist to appropriate certain conventions that relate to expressing pain and affliction as illustrated in below.

Right from start, Sagero does not equivocate on the gravity of the prevailing situation and the havoc the plague is certainly going to wreak on the community. This is, indeed, in agreement with Kang (2019), while quoting Aldous Huxley, who affirms that anyone dealing with a sad incident should at least be able to "distil some pure moment of crisis from the ruck of life around it" (120). In the opening lines of the song, Sagero seeks to warn his audience on the risks they face. Perhaps conscious of the demographics of his audience, he pleads with those distracted by various things including phones to pay attention:

Corona

Sageeeero, Senior	This is Sagero, Senior!
Ritang'ani ira ng'ora toramanyana	first, listen as we introduce ourselves
Koraira ng'ora!	please, let's pay attention!
Motakoraira ng'ora!	Will you not pay attention?
Bari bakobata chisimi koratiga	those on their phones should stop
Na moin' aria nainwe nkoga more	on that sides, you too are making noise
Koraira ng'ora!	Please, pay attention for a while
Ekrecha keraiga getomanyie amarieta	this demon here will tell us its full name
Aye gwatantanirie ense iga,	you, that has confused the entire world,
Ing'aki okorokwa?	What is your name?
Karona	Karona?

Clearly, Sagero is out to educate and empower his audience on the impending danger. "This is not a joke! We can't continue living as we have been," seems to be his clarion call. Along with conveying life-saving messages to his audience, Sagero captures, albeit comically, the emergence of the scourge and how it has plagued communities:

Emiaka ne'renga obwate rende gaki	How old are you then, please?
19	19
Inee, nontebie ase kwaiboreretwe?	Excuse me, will you tell us where you were born?

China	China
Gokorera. totebie'ngo chinse gwatareire	Finally, tell us all the countries you've visited
USA	*USA*
Richar'eri, otagete gototebia USA yoka?	Idiot, liar! USA alone?
Sibokango enkoro ototebie	Open up your heart and tell us
Chinse chioonsi gwatareire	All the countries you've been to
Italy, Iran and Spain.	Italy, Iran and Spain.

Indeed, anyone listening to the song in the future will know the origin of the plague and how it spread. In that sense, the son becomes an important source of history.

In addition, Sagero deploys what may be characterised as spiritual aesthetics. He understands his chosen role to provide both healing and direction to his people. He starts by stressing that what he is about to tell them is as a result of intense soul searching, and, even, of divine revelation. Indeed, the sermonic undertones of the song are clear right from the initial stages of the performance in which Sagero turns out in full cleric regalia complete with a bishopric mitre and a staff:

Oooi! Oooi!	Oooi! Oooi!
Corona ne'ndwari embe	Corona is a terrible disease
Lakini nabo egotangeka	But it can be avoided
Sagero, tinatagete inyetere Corona	Sagero, I didn't want to sing about it
Ntaraitona amang'ana aisaine	Before checking all the facts

In the song's enactment, the scourge is portrayed as an innocent looking malevolent demon camouflaged in a mire, perhaps lying in wait for her next victim. Even with only her eyes above the mire, Sagero, "the priest", still sees through the disguise and locates the demon. He likewise can't be deceived by her soothing voice and cunning responses. While mimicking an exorcist, Sagero then compels the demon to come clean on her mission. This is followed by a quote from the bible on how God's wrath was going to fall on all rebellious beings. He ends with clear instructions on what humans would do to save themselves:

Corona tari ensagara enkungu omouko	Corona is not a blind female lizard
Corona nero endwari entang'ani	Corona is the first disease
Koyetantania ense na'koyeura amaiso	To confuse and blind the world
Ntigane'ngo mbatebie Corona ne'yemo	Let me tell you Corona is one of those
Yabanetwe ase Ebuku	Prophesied in the Bible
Obotantanu ense yonsi tiyamanya	Confusion everywhere, the world failed to know
Endamwamu yomonene teri gotiemerwa	Nobody can dare God's wrath
…….....	
Egento ekemo giaitire ense nobosiereria	Disobedience is the one thing finishing us
Kimwatebigwa mokire nyomba	You were told to stay indoors
Mwasoka isiko mwatwa ne'meswago	Then you get out to be beaten with buttons
Mwatebigwa tagokwanania	You are told not to shake hands
Abande mwanyaunyuntana nagosagusana-maima	But you kiss and embrace instead, too bad

To this extent, the artist is not only truthful to the happenings of the time but also committed to helping out his people to regain their hope. Besides obedience, their escape seems pegged on how well they complied with the laid down Covid-

19 safety protocols: keep hands clean, stay at home, keep a safe physical distance, wear a mask, get vaccinated, etc.

Humour as an outgrowth of Pop-Culture aesthetics

In conventional pandemic art, juxtaposing a grave subject with the comical would be unusual indeed. A focus on amusement and drawing fun, mirth and laughter from almost any situation is one of the outstanding features of pop-culture aesthetics. Collins (2012) while describing popular music in Ghana, asserts: "By popular I mean commercial, staged and professional performance styles that arose initially in the urban and coastal areas of Ghana in the late nineteenth century as a trans-cultural fusion of local and imported artistic elements" (1). In this regard, Zolten (1988) seems to agree with Collins when he says: "People tell jokes to draw attention to themselves. And the jokes are well received, the rewards are that much more" (6). Indeed, Sagero's populist tendencies in his delivery of "Corona" are self-evident and result two main effects:

Humour and the aesthetics of distraction

The psychological load epidemics place on victims may not be gainsaid. Any form of distraction at this time can only be helpful. As Kang (2019) has put it, distractions are not meant to cause a permanent lull, but rather to "create new sensations and perceptions through which critical awareness can be activated" (66). This is indeed true as concerns Sagero's deployment of humour.

Endamwamu yomonene teri gotiemerwa	Nobody can dare God's wrath
Kayaika kera egento ensinyo	and when things turned worse
erio ekaba korondo mabongia korana	Then the gambling came to a hasty end
Egento ekemo giaitire ense nobosiereria	Disobedience is the one thing finishing us

Having his audience asking questions about what may be happening, may not only find solutions but also offers momentary relief from stark reality and anxiety inspired by looming uncertainties.

Humour and the aesthetics of resilience

Laughter in the face of danger, as already indicated, can offer some temporal lifting and provide a sense of security. Mboya (2019) terms this "a feel-good moment in the shadow of death". This particular aspect of humour can support resilience and survival. Ability to laugh at self, focus much less on the negative and acknowledge the funny forms a crucial part of resilience and survival. This is however not irrational laughter but one marked with a measured level fright which ensures the addressees not only put their guard up but also continue to look at the plague from a more life-sustaining perspective. Sagero goes:

Buna corona yaika asande yakkonyete	Since it came, there are ways Corona has been useful
Chingige konye chiaitire enseye	locusts that had ravaged the country
Chionsi chigaaka mbuna	they all took flight
Ukimwi cancer na malaria chiosi	When HIV/AIDS, Cancer and Malaria
Gichiaigwa Corona chigaaka mbuna	Heard about Corona, they all took flight
Abalshababu nechibomu bonsi	When all terrorists with their bombs
Kibaigwa Corona bagaaka mbuna	Heard about Corona, they all took flight
Obocheuri bwabakungu nabasacha	The mischief of women and men
Bwanyomaine bonsi bokamanyekana	Married secretly came out
Nabaria twegenete ense enigma	and all those we thought we could trust
Kobaigwa Corona bonsi bagaaka mbuna	When they heard about Corona they all took flight
Abanyagetari namariogo	Doctors with their medicine
Bagaaka mbuna	they all took flight
Abarai nechibodyguard	*Leaders with bodyguards*

Bagaaka mbuna	They all took flight
Ababani ne'chipastor	Foreseers and pastors
Bagaaka mbuna	They all took flight
Abanyanabi na'baganga	Charmers and fortune tellers
Bagaaka mbuna	They all took flight
Abamasai ne'bibuyu	Maasais and their jerricans for herbs
Bagaaka mbuna	They all took flight
Siasa ne'chikampeini	Politics and campaigns
Bagaaka mbuna	They all took flight
Ebinyabororo no'bosisa	*Boils and scabies*
Bagaaka mbuna	They all took flight
Ebianda ne'sese	Worms and tuberculosis
Bagaaka mbuna	They all took flight
Chikanisa ne'ebirabu	Churches and nightclubs
Bagaaka mbuna	They all took flight
Abanamusiki na'abateri	Musicians and singers
Bagaaka engoma	they played their drums
Eye ne'tindi	This one is tough
Corona	Corona is tough
Nyeite egoite	Beat it before it beats you

In the part quoted above, credibly conceived images of human limitation become humorous. Things are now "standing on their head" and even the most sophisticated have no choice but to run and seek cover. The strategy of making fun of people's reaction in the face of danger invokes what Zolten refers to as the "put-down" effect which, according to him, "is at least a small victory in the midst of defeat" (4). With this kind of emotional safeguard, the audience has, at least, a chance to endure the pandemic along with its emotional afflictions.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, a few important deductions may be made concerning the aesthetics of Gusii pandemic art, in general, and, particularly, those in Sagero's song, Corona. First, it may be clear that pandemic art among Abagusii goes back many years and is, therefore, a fairly established tradition. There are, however, clear parallels in the manner in which past and present artists have shaped the genre in line with obtaining circumstances. Whereas earlier compositions focused on recording the community's losses and reaction to the affliction, Sagero's response seems to go beyond mere messaging to introduce a more relaxed demeanour clearly keen on exciting his audience, regardless.

It may thus be espoused that the nature of contemporary pandemic art tends towards the hybrid. In other words, it is immersed in the traditional approach as much as it has benefitted from a more contemporary model that seems to focus more on the contemporary audience's expectations. Sagero, in his song, relies on traditional models to meet the primary purpose of comforting and educating members of the community while, simultaneously, inducing the popular aesthetic to ensure his modern audience get the level of amusement they desire. This also indicates that, like all other genres of art, Pandemic art is transient and responsive to changes in both culture and taste in the ever dynamic society.

Specifically, humour is the main source of amusement in the song in question. It is achieved mainly through making fun of the pandemic and the manner in which people reacted to it. This is heightened through improvisation and hyperbole. Indeed, Sagero, by deploying comic relief, has made a choice to inform and yet still entertain in a manner consistent with the expectations of his contemporary audience. Through entertainment, the artist ensures his audience is lifted from a state of perpetual despondence and are reenergised enough to carry on with their lives, even though with caution. Comical pandemic compositions are, therefore, a welcome addition to mitigation measures instituted by the authorities.

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