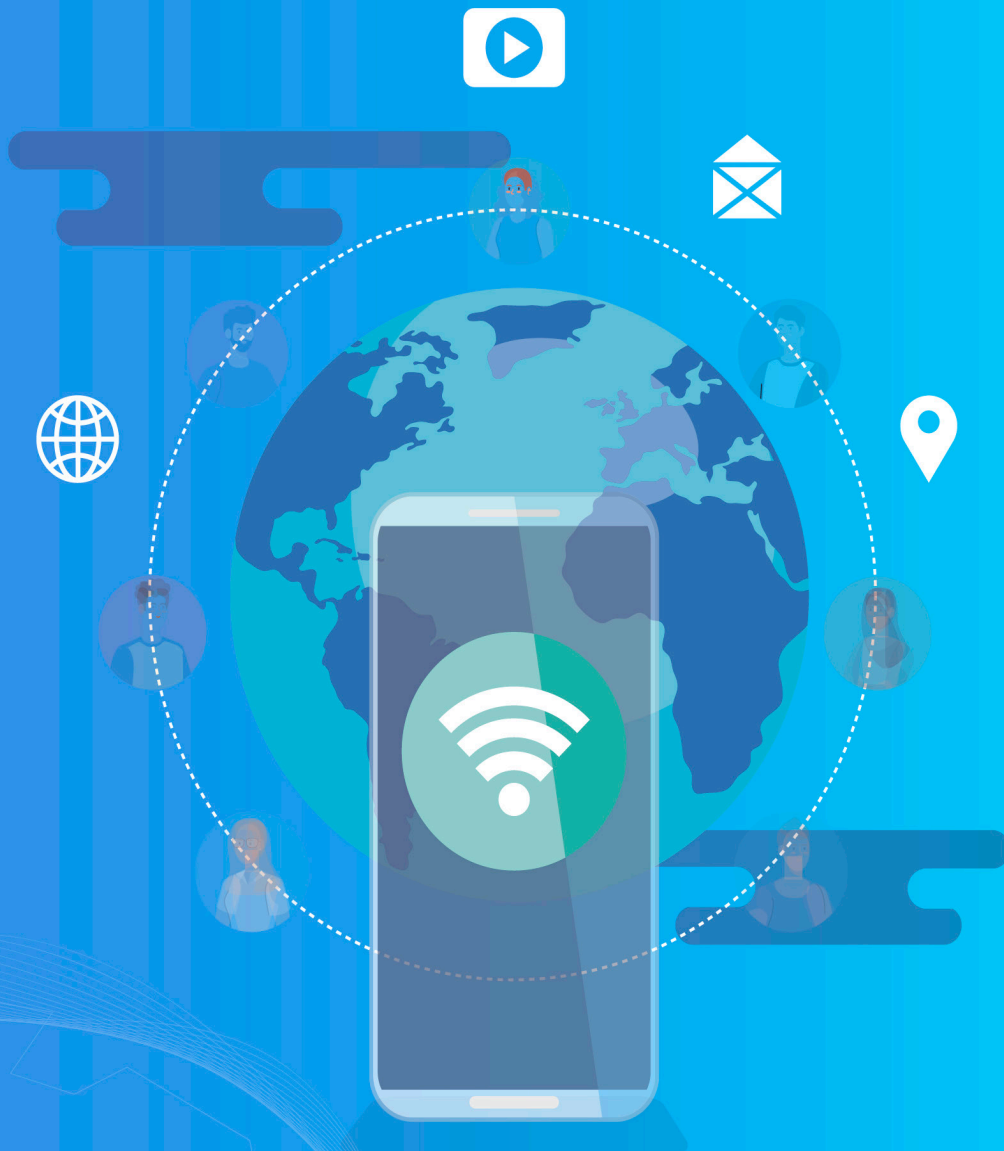




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Esoteric Meanings in Contemporary Luo Music: A Qualitative Textual Analysis of Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* Song within Ohangla-Afro Fusion and Intercultural Communication

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Luo popular music has increasingly evolved beyond entertainment into an important communicative medium through which musicians negotiate identity, morality, cultural memory, spirituality and social commentary. Among emerging Ohangla-Afro Fusion artists, Tony Ndiema who distinguished himself through lyrical compositions characterized by symbolism, metaphor, layered narratives and culturally embedded expressions that invited multiple interpretations. This study critically examines the esoteric meanings embedded in *Oluthkuonda* song, situating the composition within contemporary Ohangla-Afro Fusion and intercultural communication scholarship. Guided by Semiotics, Symbolic Interactionism, Reception Theory and Intercultural Communication Theory, the study adopts a qualitative textual analysis of the song alongside recent literature on Luo oral traditions, African popular music and audience reception. Rather than interpreting the composition literally, the study argues that *Oluthkuonda* song employed symbolic language to communicate moral reflection, resilience, identity formation and existential struggles while allowing listeners to negotiate individualized meanings according to their cultural experiences. The study further demonstrates how digital media platforms have expanded the circulation of Ohangla music beyond Luo-speaking communities, transforming Tony Ndiema's compositions into intercultural texts consumed by diverse audiences across Kenya and the diaspora. The study concludes that contemporary Luo music increasingly functions as a repository of indigenous knowledge in which metaphorical language, symbolism and hidden meanings preserve cultural values while adapting to globalization and digital communication.

INTRODUCTION

Music has historically functioned as one of humanity's most sophisticated symbolic communication systems. Beyond its aesthetic value, music communicates social memory, cultural identity, spirituality, political thought, morality and indigenous knowledge through linguistic and non-linguistic signs. Across African societies, musical performance has traditionally served as an oral archive through which communities preserve history, reinforce social norms, negotiate collective identity and transmit cultural philosophies from one generation to another (UNESCO, 2022; Oluoch, 2023).

Within the Luo community of Nyanza region in Kenya, Ohangla music has undergone remarkable transformation from a ceremonial performance tradition into one of East Africa's most vibrant contemporary musical genres. Originally associated with communal celebrations, weddings and cultural ceremonies, modern Ohangla has incorporated Afro-pop, Benga, Rumba, gospel influences and digital music production while retaining its indigenous rhythmic identity. This evolution has enabled Ohangla musicians to address contemporary themes such as love, leadership, social justice, morality, family relationships, economic survival and cultural identity while remaining firmly rooted in Luo cultural expression. Recent scholarship similarly observes that Ohangla continues to function as an important medium

for cultural transmission and community consciousness despite its modernization (Nyandieka, 2026).

The contemporary transformation of Ohangla has also expanded its communicative significance beyond the Luo community. Through digital media technologies, indigenous musical narratives increasingly reach multilingual and multicultural audiences across Kenya, East Africa and the global diaspora. Consequently, contemporary Ohangla has become an important vehicle of intercultural communication where local cultural symbols interact with global audiences whose interpretations are shaped by different linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds (Chigwendere & Louw, 2022; UNESCO, 2022).

Among the musicians who contributed to this transformation was Tony Ndiema, whose musical compositions combined traditional Luo storytelling with Afro Fusion instrumentation and contemporary production techniques. His songs frequently employed metaphorical language, symbolic imagery, proverbial expressions and culturally embedded narratives that encourage audiences to interpret meanings beyond the literal text. Such lyrical construction reflects longstanding traditions within Luo oral literature, where communication often relies upon symbolism, analogy and indirect expression rather than explicit declaration. The effectiveness of these communicative strategies

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depends largely upon listeners' cultural competence and interpretive abilities.

One composition that particularly demonstrates this communicative complexity is *Oluthkuonda* song, released as part of Tony Ndiema's *Nice & Lovely* album in 2022. While the song may be appreciated at the entertainment level, its linguistic construction and symbolic imagery suggest multiple interpretive possibilities that extend beyond literal meaning of "my cooking stick". Because no peer-reviewed scholarship has specifically examined the symbolic dimensions of *Oluthkuonda* song this article deliberately approaches the composition as an original qualitative textual interpretation rather than a reconstruction of the artist's intended meaning. Such an approach aligns with contemporary reception-oriented scholarship, which recognizes that meanings emerge through interaction between texts, performers, audiences and their sociocultural environments.

The study further argues that the increasing digitization of Ohangla music has transformed indigenous Luo musical compositions into intercultural texts. Streaming platforms including YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Apple Music, Spotify and Boomplay now expose Ohangla music to audiences who may not possess native competence in Dholuo, thereby encouraging multiple cultural readings of the same composition. Digital dissemination has therefore expanded both the geographical reach and interpretive diversity of contemporary Luo music while strengthening its contribution to intercultural dialogue and indigenous cultural preservation (UNESCO, 2022; Nyandieka, 2026).

This study therefore critically examines the metaphorical and esoteric dimensions of *Oluthkuonda* song through the complementary lenses of Semiotics, Symbolic Interactionism, Reception Theory and Intercultural Communication. It argues that Tony Ndiema's composition demonstrated how contemporary Luo musicians continue to employ indigenous symbolic systems as sophisticated communicative strategies capable of preserving cultural memory while simultaneously engaging diverse audiences within an increasingly digital and globalized cultural landscape.

Tony Ndiema and the evolution of Ohangla-Afro Fusion

The evolution of contemporary Ohangla music reflects broader processes of cultural adaptation, musical hybridity and technological transformation within African popular music. While pioneers such as Okatch Biggy and Tony Nyadundo established Ohangla as one of Kenya's most influential indigenous musical genres, contemporary artists have expanded its expressive and communicative potential by integrating Congolese Rhumba, Afro-pop, Benga and digital production techniques. Rather than diluting its indigenous identity, this hybridity has enabled Ohangla to remain culturally authentic while engaging increasingly diverse audiences across Kenya, East Africa and the global diaspora (Nyandieka, 2026).

Among the artists who significantly contributed to this transformation was Tony Ndiema (Anton Okoth Ochieng, 1989–2026), an Ohangla musician, songwriter and bandleader whose career exemplified the convergence of indigenous Luo musical traditions and contemporary African popular music. Through his leadership of the Batoto Ba Rhumba (BBR) Band and productions such as *Ajema Mtoto wa Asembo* and *Nice & Lovely*, Ndiema established a musical identity that combined traditional Luo rhythms, Dholuo lyrical expression and contemporary Afro-fusion aesthetics, thereby extending the reach of Ohangla beyond its traditional cultural setting (K24 Digital, 2026a, 2026b).

The scholarly significance of Ndiema's work lies not merely in his commercial success but in his ability to transform Ohangla into a sophisticated medium of symbolic communication. Unlike many contemporary popular musicians whose compositions primarily emphasize entertainment, Ndiema consistently employed metaphor, proverbial language, narrative ambiguity and culturally embedded symbolism to communicate moral reflection, social responsibility, perseverance, family relations, leadership and communal values. His compositions therefore align closely with African oral aesthetics, where communication privileges symbolic expression, contextual interpretation and philosophical reflection over direct exposition (Finnegan, 2023; Oluoch, 2023).

Ndiema's music illustrates how indigenous musical traditions continue to function as dynamic knowledge systems rather than static cultural artefacts. His compositions preserve Luo epistemologies by translating indigenous philosophies into contemporary musical forms that remain intelligible to younger generations while retaining their cultural authenticity. Music therefore functions not simply as entertainment but as a communicative archive through which historical memory, cultural identity, ethical values, and indigenous knowledge are preserved and transmitted across generations (Dei, 2022; Finnegan, 2023).

Ndiema's artistic practice also exemplifies the concept of cultural hybridity within intercultural communication. By combining traditional Luo musical structures with contemporary Afro-fusion arrangements, he created communicative texts that simultaneously address local and global audiences. This hybridity should not be understood merely as musical innovation but as a strategic communicative process through which indigenous identities remain visible while becoming accessible across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Martin & Nakayama, 2024). Consequently, his compositions demonstrate that cultural continuity and modernization are not mutually exclusive but can coexist through creative adaptation.

The intercultural significance of Ndiema's music has become even more pronounced within contemporary digital environments. Through platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Spotify and Apple Music, Ohangla increasingly reaches audiences possessing

different levels of linguistic competence and cultural familiarity. Native Dholuo speakers may recognize culturally embedded metaphors and oral traditions, whereas multilingual Kenyan and international audiences often engage initially through rhythm, melody, and performance before gradually encountering the cultural philosophies embedded within the lyrics. Such layered interpretation illustrates the central premise of intercultural communication that meaning is culturally negotiated rather than universally fixed (Martin & Nakayama, 2024; Samovar *et al.*, 2023).

However, the globalization of Ohangla through Afro-fusion and digital media also raises important scholarly questions. While hybridity has expanded the genre's audience and strengthened its global visibility, commercialization and platform-driven music consumption may encourage greater emphasis on entertainment than on the symbolic and philosophical depth that characterizes indigenous musical traditions. Digital algorithms often privilege popularity, brevity and audience engagement, potentially reducing opportunities for audiences to appreciate the culturally embedded meanings contained within vernacular compositions (Lindgren, 2023; Nyandieka, 2026). This tension between accessibility and cultural depth underscores the importance of examining contemporary Ohangla not only as a musical genre but also as a communicative system through which indigenous knowledge is continually negotiated within digital societies.

Against this broader artistic and communicative context, *Oluthkuonda* provides an appropriate case through which to examine how metaphor, symbolism and esoteric communication operate within contemporary Ohangla-Afro Fusion. The composition encapsulates Ndiema's characteristic integration of Luo oral philosophy, Afro-fusion aesthetics and intercultural communication, making it a valuable cultural text for understanding how contemporary African popular music preserves indigenous knowledge while facilitating dialogue across diverse cultural communities.

Problem Statement

Although African popular music has attracted growing scholarly attention, research on contemporary Luo music, particularly Ohangla-Afro Fusion, has largely remained within the domains of ethnomusicology, folklore, cultural heritage, intellectual property, music technology and performance studies (Awuor & Owano, 2024; Nyandieka, 2026; Ochieng, 2022). While these studies have significantly advanced understanding of the historical evolution, preservation and cultural significance of Ohangla music, they provide comparatively limited insight into the communicative processes through which metaphor, symbolism, and esoteric meanings are encoded in contemporary Luo musical compositions and interpreted by diverse audiences.

The gap is equally evident at the theoretical level. Although Semiotics, Symbolic Interactionism, Reception

Theory, and Intercultural Communication have been widely applied to literature, film, journalism, advertising and digital media, their application to contemporary Kenyan vernacular music remains limited (Martin & Nakayama, 2024; Samovar *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, little is known about how symbolic meanings are constructed through Luo musical narratives, negotiated across different sociocultural contexts, or transformed as indigenous musical texts circulate within contemporary digital environments.

Recent scholarship further demonstrates that digital platforms have expanded the production, circulation, visibility and reinterpretation of indigenous African music by facilitating cultural preservation and audience participation (Adedeji & Röschenhaler, 2024; Izu, 2026; Van der Merwe, 2026). However, existing studies have largely focused on platformization, streaming economies, music entrepreneurship and digital preservation, leaving the communicative processes through which online audiences interpret symbolic, metaphorical and esoteric meanings in vernacular musical texts substantially unexplored (Mutie, 2022; Nyandieka, 2026; UNESCO, 2022).

A review of accessible scholarly literature identified no peer-reviewed study specifically examining Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* from the perspectives of metaphor, symbolism, esotericism, audience reception or intercultural communication. Consequently, the symbolic and communicative dimensions of individual contemporary Ohangla compositions remain insufficiently understood. This article addresses these interconnected empirical, theoretical, disciplinary, and digital communication gaps by providing the first known qualitative textual analysis of Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* song. By integrating Semiotics, Symbolic Interactionism, Reception Theory, and Intercultural Communication Theory, the study repositions Ohangla-Afro Fusion as a significant object of communication and media scholarship and contributes new knowledge on symbolic communication, indigenous epistemologies, and intercultural meaning-making in contemporary African popular music.

Objectives

- To examine the metaphorical, symbolic and culturally embedded expressions through which esoteric meanings are constructed in Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* song.
- To interpret how Luo indigenous knowledge, oral-cultural traditions and social meanings are represented through the lyrical and narrative structures of *Oluthkuonda* song.
- To analyze how the cultural hybridity of *Oluthkuonda* song creates possibilities for intercultural meaning-making within contemporary Ohangla-Afro Fusion.

Theoretical Framework

This article is anchored in four complementary theoretical perspectives: Semiotics, Symbolic Interactionism, Reception Theory and Intercultural

Communication Theory. Collectively, these theories provide a multidimensional framework for understanding how symbolic meanings are encoded in Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* song, how audiences interpret those meanings and how the song functions as an intercultural communicative text within contemporary Ohangla-Afro Fusion. Rather than assuming that musical meanings are fixed or universally shared, the framework recognizes that meanings emerge through interaction among the composer, the musical text, cultural symbols and diverse audiences (Martin & Nakayama, 2024; Samovar *et al.*, 2023).

Semiotics and Musical Symbolism

Semiotics, principally associated with Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, examines how signs communicate meaning within particular cultural contexts. Contemporary semiotic scholarship argues that language, music, gestures, colours, sounds and artistic performances function as sign systems through which societies construct and communicate shared realities (Chandler, 2022). Within music, meaning extends beyond lyrical content to include rhythm, repetition, vocal delivery, instrumentation, silence and culturally recognizable symbols that listeners interpret according to their social experiences.

From a semiotic perspective, *Oluthkuonda* song may be understood as a network of interconnected signs rather than a literal narrative. Its metaphors, proverbial expressions, repetitive structures and culturally embedded imagery operate as symbolic codes requiring interpretation beyond their surface meanings. Such symbolic words such as “amanyo wendo mong’ega toko sambusa tee, ani rambaya wewe.., an amanyo wendo mong’ega idho gorofana, amanyo wendo mong’ega ywayo handbrega ” reflects longstanding Luo oral traditions in which indirect language, metaphorical speech, and figurative expression communicate wisdom, morality and social philosophy more effectively than direct statements (Oluoch, 2023). The semiotic perspective therefore enables the article to examine how linguistic symbols within *Oluthkuonda* song generate multiple layers of meaning while remaining grounded within Luo cultural knowledge.

Furthermore, semiotics recognizes that signs remain polysemic, that is, capable of generating multiple meanings depending on the interpreter’s cultural competence and contextual knowledge (Chandler, 2022). Consequently, the same metaphor within *Oluthkuonda* song may communicate nostalgia to one listener, resilience to another, and spiritual reflection to yet another audience. This interpretive openness forms the foundation upon which esoteric meanings emerge within contemporary Luo musical compositions.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead and later advanced by Herbert Blumer, proposes that human beings construct social reality through shared

symbols and continuous social interaction. Meanings are neither fixed nor inherent within objects themselves; instead, they arise through interpretation, negotiation and lived social experience (Carter & Fuller, 2023).

Applied to contemporary Luo music, Symbolic Interactionism suggests that listeners do not merely consume songs passively but actively participate in constructing meaning. Musical symbols contained within *Oluthkuonda* song acquire significance because audiences interpret them through their personal experiences, cultural memories, linguistic competence and everyday social interactions. A particular metaphor may evoke memories of family life, traditional values, personal struggle or communal identity depending upon the listener’s social background.

This perspective is particularly relevant because Luo oral literature has historically relied upon symbolic communication that assumes shared cultural knowledge between speaker and audience. Consequently, the meanings encoded within Ndiema’s compositions become intelligible primarily through interaction between the musical text and listeners’ cultural experiences. As societies modernize and audiences become increasingly multicultural, these interactions generate new interpretations while preserving the song’s cultural authenticity.

Reception Theory

Reception Theory, developed principally by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser during the late 1960s and 1970s, shifts analytical attention from the producer of a text to its audiences. Rather than viewing artistic meaning as fixed by the creator, Reception Theory argues that meaning emerges through interaction between texts and readers or listeners, whose interpretations are shaped by historical, cultural and social contexts (Lindgren, 2023).

This theoretical perspective is particularly appropriate for analyzing *Oluthkuonda* song because contemporary Ohangla music now reaches audiences possessing diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Native Dholuo speakers may immediately recognize culturally embedded proverbs and metaphorical references that remain unfamiliar to listeners from other ethnic communities. Conversely, non-Luo audiences may interpret the same composition through broader emotional, musical or philosophical experiences without fully accessing its indigenous symbolic meanings.

Reception Theory therefore explains why *Oluthkuonda* song simultaneously accommodates multiple interpretations without diminishing its artistic coherence. The song functions as what Eco (1989) described as an “open text,” inviting audiences to negotiate meanings according to their own cultural horizons. Such interpretive plurality constitutes one of the defining characteristics of esoteric communication, where symbolic language deliberately accommodates different levels of understanding among different audiences.

Digital media further reinforces this reception-oriented

process. Through YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Spotify, Apple Music and other streaming services, listeners increasingly comment upon, reinterpret, remix and redistribute musical compositions, thereby extending the interpretive life of songs beyond their original production contexts (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2022). Contemporary audiences therefore become active co-creators of musical meaning rather than passive recipients of artistic messages.

Intercultural Communication Theory

Intercultural Communication Theory provides the fourth analytical pillar of this study. Contemporary intercultural scholars argue that communication is fundamentally shaped by cultural values, language, identity, worldview, historical experiences and contextual expectations rather than by linguistic exchange alone (Martin & Nakayama, 2024; Samovar *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, messages that appear straightforward within one cultural setting may acquire entirely different meanings when interpreted by audiences from different cultural backgrounds.

Within contemporary African music, intercultural communication increasingly occurs through digital technologies that expose indigenous cultural products to global audiences. Ohangla music, once performed primarily within Luo cultural ceremonies, now circulates through international streaming platforms where audiences encounter unfamiliar linguistic expressions alongside universally recognizable emotional experiences. This expansion transforms contemporary Luo music into an intercultural communicative resource capable of promoting cultural understanding while preserving indigenous identity.

Tony Ndiema's Afro-fusion compositions exemplify this transformation. By combining traditional Luo rhythms, indigenous language, and modern musical production, his music simultaneously addresses local cultural realities and broader human experiences. Songs such as *Oluthkuonda* song therefore become intercultural texts whose symbolic meanings transcend ethnic boundaries without abandoning their cultural origins.

Intercultural Communication Theory further recognizes that successful communication depends upon cultural competence, contextual awareness and interpretive sensitivity (Deardorff, 2023). Listeners possessing greater familiarity with Luo language, oral traditions and symbolic conventions are likely to derive deeper esoteric meanings than audiences encountering the music primarily through its melody or rhythm. Nevertheless, both groups participate in meaningful communicative engagement, illustrating the capacity of Afro-fusion music to bridge cultural differences while maintaining indigenous authenticity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualizes popular music not merely as entertainment but as a complex communicative and cultural system through

which individuals and communities construct identities, negotiate meanings, transmit values and engage with people across cultural boundaries. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study because *Oluthkuonda* song is approached as a cultural text in which metaphor, symbolism, indigenous knowledge and interpretive ambiguity interact with audience experience. The study further situates the song within the transformation of Ohangla from a culturally grounded Luo musical form into an Ohangla-Afro Fusion genre circulating within contemporary digital and intercultural environments.

Globally, Graham and Ward (2024) developed a critical discourse perspective that conceptualized music as symbolic action rather than merely as a system of signs conveying meaning. Drawing on documented cases involving the deployment of music by authorities in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, the authors demonstrated how music can operate as a culturally charged communicative force associated with power, behavioral influence and social exclusion. Their analysis is particularly relevant to the present study because it establishes that music can be examined as communicative action embedded within specific cultural and social contexts. However, Graham and Ward focused primarily on institutional uses of music and did not examine lyrical metaphor, indigenous symbolism or audience interpretation within African popular music. This leaves room for the present study to investigate how symbolic action operates at the textual and cultural level within Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* song. Sumerau and Mathers (2025) in their study on Music and the Social Construction of Self, examined the relationship between music and identity construction in everyday life using four years of participant observation and 25 in-depth interviews. The study identified three forms of identity work through which individuals used music in public settings: Defining who they were, explaining how they felt in relation to their identities, and narrating previous life experiences that had contributed to their present sense of self. The findings demonstrated that music constitutes an important symbolic resource through which individuals construct and communicate identities in social interaction (Sumerau & Mathers, 2025). This perspective is relevant to the present study because it supports the symbolic interactionist proposition that musical meanings emerge through interaction between symbolic resources and people's social experiences. However, Sumerau and Mathers concentrated on identity construction in everyday musical engagement rather than the textual interpretation of metaphor, indigenous symbolism and esoteric meanings within culturally specific African musical compositions. The present study extends this perspective by examining how culturally embedded symbols and metaphorical expressions in Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* create interpretive possibilities within Luo cultural and intercultural contexts. Digital technologies have further complicated musical meaning by allowing culturally

specific compositions to circulate among audiences far removed from their original linguistic and cultural environments. Muchitsch and Werner (2024) examined the mediation of musical genre, identity and difference within Spotify using multimodal discourse analysis of genre metadata, playlist curation and media discourse, with particular attention to bubble grunge and rap français. The study established that streaming platform do more than distribute music; Spotify's algorithmic and human curatorial processes rearticulate genre classifications and consequently influence patterns of recommendation, consumption and constructions of identity and difference. Similarly, Gagne (2024), through 15 qualitative interviews with young people aged 17–19, examined how increased accessibility and mobility of music through streaming technologies have transformed the relationship between musical preferences and identity construction. The study found that increasingly individualized and diverse musical repertoires complicate the traditional conception of musical taste as a straightforward “badge” through which young people communicate identity. Together, these studies demonstrate that digital technologies increasingly mediate relationships among music, identity, genre and audience practices. However, while Muchitsch and Werner focused on algorithmic mediation of genre and Gagne concentrated on youth identity and musical preferences, neither examined how metaphor, symbolism and culturally embedded meanings within an indigenous African musical text are constructed and potentially interpreted across cultural contexts. The present study addresses this gap by examining how such symbolic and esoteric meanings are constituted within Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* song and how its Ohangla-Afro Fusion context creates possibilities for intercultural meaning-making. More directly related to intercultural communication, Li (2025) examined popular music as an instrument of cultural exchange through contemporary media platforms. The study found that participants exposed to culturally diverse popular music on TikTok demonstrated higher levels of cultural awareness, tolerance and interest in other cultures than those in the control group. Li therefore concludes that popular music circulated through digital platforms can facilitate intercultural interaction and contribute to broader cultural understanding. The finding is particularly relevant to indigenous genres such as Ohangla because digital circulation potentially enables locally grounded musical texts to communicate with audiences who do not necessarily share the language or cultural background in which the music originated.

However, global digital circulation also presents contradictions. Although streaming increases access to culturally diverse music, algorithms and platform classifications may privilege commercially successful genres and culturally dominant musical conventions. Muchitsch and Werner (2024) demonstrate that streaming categories participate in constructing identities and differences rather than functioning as culturally neutral systems. Thus, digitalization simultaneously creates

possibilities for intercultural communication and risks simplifying culturally complex musical forms. This tension is important to *Oluthkuonda* song, whose metaphorical and culturally embedded Dholuo expressions may be accessible at different interpretive levels depending on listeners' linguistic and cultural competence.

Within Africa, scholarly studies demonstrates that popular music remains deeply connected to cultural identity, social commentary, indigenous knowledge and technological transformation. Contemporary African musicians increasingly combine indigenous languages and musical traditions with transnational genres and digital production, creating hybrid cultural forms capable of speaking simultaneously to local and global audiences. This process makes African popular music particularly significant for intercultural communication because cultural hybridity enables musicians to preserve local identities while participating in broader cultural exchanges.

Van der Merwe (2026), examining Afrikaans music in South Africa, demonstrated how streaming platforms have transformed the production, circulation and consumption of culturally and linguistically situated popular music. The study found that streaming creates opportunities for historically marginalized musical communities to reach wider audiences, although algorithmic recommendation systems can reproduce established patterns of cultural dominance. The findings demonstrated that increased digital visibility does not automatically eliminate cultural inequalities. Instead, indigenous and vernacular music must continually negotiate between cultural authenticity, commercialization and platform visibility.

African digital music scholarship also emphasizes the economic and cultural transformation associated with streaming. Adedeji and Röschenhaler (2024), studying Nigeria's music industry, show that streaming services have altered relationships among musicians, intermediaries and audiences. Digital platforms facilitate wider circulation of African music while simultaneously creating new forms of brokerage and control within the music economy. Such findings are useful for understanding Ohangla-Afro Fusion because the genre increasingly exists within a comparable digital environment in which indigenous cultural expression interacts with commercial production and transnational circulation.

Studies of African musical texts have further demonstrated the continuing importance of metaphor, symbolism and culturally embedded language in communicating social realities. Osubo and Kebaya (2023), in their analysis of Ronald Ontiri Onchuru's popular music in Kenya, established that metaphor, symbolism, personification and idiomatic expressions were deliberately employed to foreground social themes such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, hard work and love. Similarly, research on contemporary East African Kiswahili environmental songs found that metaphorical expressions enabled musicians to combine entertainment with environmental communication, public education and appeals for positive behavioural change.

In Uganda, Lwanga (2024), through an analysis of Bobi Wine's Tugambire ku Jennifer song, further demonstrated that the social meaning of African popular music extended beyond the composer's intention and developed through relationships among musical expression, socio-political context and listeners. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that African popular music functions simultaneously as aesthetic expression and culturally situated communication through which musicians articulate social experiences, identities, moral concerns and collective realities. This scholarship supports the present study's treatment of esotericism in Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* song not as meaningless obscurity, but as a communicative process in which metaphor, symbolism and culturally embedded expressions create possibilities for layered interpretation.

Osubo and Kebaya (2023) is particularly useful because it directly addresses metaphor, symbolism and idiomatic expression in popular music. Their study found that these devices communicate social realities rather than merely decorating musical language. Lwanga (2024) then strengthens the audience/reception dimension of your argument because the author explicitly argues that musical meaning does not terminate with composer intention but also involves effects and meanings generated in relation to listeners.

The literature therefore reveals two important tendencies. First, African popular music continues to function as a repository of cultural identity and indigenous knowledge despite increasing globalization. Second, digital technologies have expanded the geographical and intercultural spaces in which African musical texts are encountered. Nevertheless, much recent African scholarship has concentrated on the transformation of music industries through streaming economies, digital platforms, cultural identity, audience accessibility and changing patterns of music production and consumption. For instance, Adedeji and Röschenhaler (2025), through digital ethnography and field research in Nigeria, examined streaming services primarily in relation to copyright, piracy, platform brokerage and the changing Nigerian music economy. Similarly, Van der Merwe (2026), drawing on interviews and data from Spotify, YouTube and TikTok in South Africa, focused on how streaming platforms influence the visibility, consumption and cultural positioning of Afrikaans music, including marginalized vernacular forms. While these studies significantly advance understanding of digital circulation, music economies, cultural identity and genre transformation in Africa, they devote comparatively limited attention to close communication-oriented analysis of the metaphorical, symbolic and esoteric structures of individual vernacular songs. Consequently, how culturally embedded musical symbols generate layered or multiple interpretations within particular African compositions remains comparatively underexplored (Adedeji & Röschenhaler, 2025; Van der Merwe, 2026). This gap provides a basis for examining how metaphor, symbolism and culturally embedded

expressions create interpretive possibilities within Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* song. Consequently, questions concerning how culturally embedded musical symbols generate multiple interpretations remain comparatively underexplored.

In Kenya, studies have demonstrated growing attention to indigenous music, digital transformation and the cultural significance of popular musical genres. Ochieng (2022), in a study of the origins and evolution of Ohangla in Siaya County, examined the cultural, social and economic transformation of the genre as well as the influence of technological developments such as radio, television and the internet. The study established that Ohangla had evolved considerably in its performance settings, audiences and technological mediation. This provides important historical and cultural grounding for understanding the emergence of contemporary Ohangla-Afro Fusion. However, its primary concern was the genre's origins and evolution rather than the communicative processes through which symbolism and metaphor create layered meanings within individual songs.

Osubo and Kebaya (2023) provided closer evidence of the communicative significance of figurative expression in Kenyan popular music. In their analysis of Ronald Ontiri Onchuru's compositions, the researchers identified metaphor, symbolism, personification and idiomatic expressions as important stylistic devices through which themes including poverty, love, hard work and HIV/AIDS were communicated. Their findings demonstrated that Kenyan vernacular musicians use figurative language not simply for aesthetic embellishment but as a mechanism through which socially significant meanings are constructed. This finding strongly supports the present study's focus on the metaphorical and symbolic construction of *Oluthkuonda* song. Nevertheless, their study examines stylistic features within a different Kenyan musical and linguistic tradition and does not address esoteric interpretation, intercultural reception or Ohangla-Afro Fusion.

Recent research specifically addressing Ohangla provides further evidence of the genre's cultural significance. Nyandieka (2026), through a systematic review of 30 sources, examined Ohangla in relation to culturally responsive artificial-intelligence music assessment. The study argued that Western-Centered computational approaches can misrepresent Ohangla because they inadequately account for its complex polyrhythmic structure and community-centered cultural functions. Importantly, Nyandieka conceptualized Ohangla as a form of social technology associated with cultural transmission and community bonding. The study consequently underscored the need to interpret Ohangla according to the cultural epistemologies from which it emerged rather than imposing universal musical categories upon it.

Digitalization has simultaneously changed the broader Kenyan music industry. Eisenberg (2025) observed that Kenya's popular music sector has been significantly reshaped by digital production, mobile technologies and phantomization. These developments have expanded

opportunities for production and distribution while introducing new questions concerning ownership, rights holders and the commercial organization of musical creativity. For contemporary Ohangla musicians, such developments imply that culturally localized music can circulate far beyond traditional performance spaces. The uploaded study similarly recognizes that platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Spotify and Apple Music have widened the potential audience for Ohangla, including listeners who may possess varying levels of Dholuo linguistic and cultural competence.

Despite these contributions, significant gaps remain in Kenyan scholarship. Existing studies have principally examined the history and evolution of Ohangla, performance practices, technological transformation, cultural preservation, intellectual property, digital music industries and more recently, culturally responsive technological assessment. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to Ohangla as a communication text in which metaphor, symbolism, ambiguity and culturally encoded expressions produce esoteric meanings that may be negotiated differently across audiences.

More specifically, the available literature reviewed for this study provides no substantive peer-reviewed analysis dedicated to Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* as a symbolic and intercultural communicative text. Existing research therefore does not adequately explain how Ndiema's culturally embedded Dholuo expressions can simultaneously preserve Luo indigenous knowledge, invite multiple interpretations and potentially communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Neither has sufficient attention been paid to how Semiotics, Symbolic Interactionism, Reception Theory and Intercultural Communication Theory can be integrated in analyzing contemporary Kenyan vernacular music.

The present study addresses this gap by shifting attention from Ohangla merely as musical performance or cultural heritage towards Ohangla-Afro Fusion as symbolic communication. Through qualitative textual and content analysis of *Oluthkuonda*, it examines how metaphorical expressions, narrative ambiguity, culturally recognizable symbols and Luo oral-cultural knowledge generate layered meanings. At the same time, it recognizes that these meanings cannot automatically be attributed to either the artist or actual audiences without empirical reception data. Rather, the study identifies interpretive possibilities created by the text itself. In doing so, the research extends contemporary scholarship on African popular music into the domains of symbolic meaning-making, indigenous epistemology, audience interpretation and intercultural communication while providing a communication-centered analysis of a contemporary Luo musical composition.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design combining textual analysis and qualitative content analysis to examine the metaphorical, symbolic and esoteric

meanings embedded in Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* song. The two approaches were complementary. Textual analysis enabled a close reading of language, imagery, narrative structure, repetition and culturally situated signs, while qualitative content analysis provided a systematic procedure for organizing recurring meanings into analytic categories and themes. This combination is appropriate where the purpose is not merely to count textual features but to interpret communication in relation to the cultural and social contexts in which it becomes meaningful (Krippendorff, 2022; Tracy, 2022). The study was located within an interpretive paradigm, which assumes that cultural texts can sustain multiple context-dependent meanings rather than a single objectively recoverable meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Martin & Nakayama, 2024).

Study Text, Sampling and Analysis

Oluthkuonda song, released on Tony Ndiema's Nice & Lovely album in 2022, was purposively selected as an information-rich case because its title, lyrical construction and figurative expressions are particularly suited to an inquiry into symbolism, esotericism and intercultural meaning-making. The song itself constituted the case, while the units of analysis were meaningful lyrical segments: words and phrases, metaphorical expressions, recurrent lines, proverbial or idiomatic constructions, narrative shifts and other passages capable of carrying explicit or latent meaning. Qualitative content analysis requires the material to be unitized in a manner that is consistent with the research question and the communicative context of the text (Krippendorff, 2022; Schreier, 2012). Accordingly, the analysis focused on what the lyrical segments communicated, how they were symbolically constructed, and how their meanings could change when read through Luo cultural knowledge and broader intercultural contexts.

Data Preparation and Analytical Procedure

The lyrical text was repeatedly read alongside attentive listening to the recorded song so that words were not detached from their narrative and performative setting. Analysis proceeded in four iterative stages. First, the researcher familiarized himself with the complete composition and prepared analytic notes on recurrent expressions, unusual lexical choices, repetition, ambiguity and culturally resonant imagery. Second, relevant meaning units were coded using a hybrid deductive-inductive strategy. Deductive codes were sensitized by the study's theoretical framework which included sign, symbol, negotiated meaning, audience horizon and intercultural context while inductive codes were allowed to emerge from the lyrics themselves. Third, related codes were clustered into broader interpretive categories. Qualitative content analysis is strengthened when coding categories are explicitly connected to the research purpose and consistently applied to successive segments of the material (Schreier, 2012; Krippendorff,

2022). Fourth, the categories were reviewed across the whole song and consolidated into themes that captured patterned meanings rather than merely summarizing topics, consistent with contemporary qualitative thematic practice (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Coding Frame

The final coding frame organized the text around five interrelated dimensions: (a) metaphor and symbolic substitution; (b) narrative ambiguity and polysemy; (c) Luo oral-cultural and indigenous knowledge references; (d) individual experience in relation to communal identity; and (e) cultural hybridity and intercultural accessibility. Particular attention was paid to expressions already identified in the composition, including the title *Oluthkuonda* song which literally rendered in the article as “My Cooking Stick” and figurative lines such as “Amany wendo mong’ega toko sambusa tee,” “Amany wendo mong’ega idho gorofana,” and “Amany wendo mong’ega ywayo handbrega.” Rather than treating such expressions as self-explanatory, the analysis examined their function as signs within the wider lyrical narrative. This procedure reflects the semiotic view that the communicative force of a sign arises from culturally organized relationships between expression, context and interpretation (Chandler, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The combined textual and qualitative content analysis generated five interconnected themes: symbolic substitution and esoteric expression; narrative ambiguity and polysemy; indigenous knowledge and Luo oral philosophy; movement between personal experience and collective identity; and cultural hybridity with intercultural interpretive potential. These themes are analytically distinct but overlap throughout the composition, demonstrating that meaning in *Oluthkuonda* is produced through the interaction of language, cultural context, narrative form and listener interpretation rather than through isolated lexical items.

Symbolic Substitution and Esoteric Expression

The first and most prominent finding is that *Oluthkuonda* song is structured around symbolic substitution. The title itself provides the clearest entry point. At the denotative level, *Oluthkuonda* song is rendered in this article as “My cooking stick”; at the connotative level, however, its prominence as a title permits it to operate as an organizing symbol whose significance exceeds the literal domestic object. The textual analysis therefore suggests that the expression functions as a symbolic anchor: An ordinary culturally recognizable referent is elevated into a vehicle through which wider social, relational or philosophical meanings can be contemplated. This is consistent with semiotic reasoning that signs acquire communicative significance through culturally established associations rather than through literal reference alone (Chandler, 2022).

The same pattern is visible in figurative lines such as “Amany wendo mong’ega toko sambusa tee,” “Amany wendo mong’ega idho gorofana,” and “Amany wendo mong’ega ywayo handbrega.” Read in isolation, these expressions can appear unusual or opaque; read within a lyrical and cultural system, their communicative value lies precisely in their indirectness. They invite the listener to move from the manifest wording to latent associations. In qualitative content analysis, this distinction between manifest content and underlying meaning is central to interpretation because communication often carries significance beyond what is explicitly stated (Krippendorff, 2022). In *Oluthkuonda* song, esotericism is therefore not best understood as deliberate obscurity for its own sake. It is a communicative strategy in which familiar words and images create interpretive depth.

This finding resonates with scholarship on African oral traditions, where metaphor, analogy, proverbs and indirect speech frequently serve pedagogical, ethical and aesthetic functions (Finnegan, 2023; Oluoch, 2023). Ndiema’s lyrical strategy can consequently be read as continuity with an oral communicative tradition in which meaning is disclosed through inference. Symbolic language allows the song to communicate without exhausting its meaning in a single statement. The result is a text that rewards cultural knowledge and repeated listening while remaining open enough to invite interpretation.

Narrative Ambiguity, Repetition and Polysemy

A second finding concerns the deliberate openness created by ambiguity and repetition. The song does not consistently resolve its figurative expressions into explicit propositions. Instead, meaning accumulates through recurring phrases and their relationship to the wider narrative. Repetition therefore performs more than a musical function: it foregrounds particular expressions, gives them mnemonic force and encourages listeners to reconsider them as the song unfolds. Finnegan (2023) observes that repetition in African oral performance can reinforce memory, participation and meaning; in *Oluthkuonda*, it similarly works as a textual cue directing attention toward symbolically loaded language.

The absence of a single explicit explanation also produces polysemy. From a semiotic perspective, polysemic signs can support several contextually defensible meanings (Chandler, 2022). The analysis therefore does not establish perseverance, vulnerability, morality or social transformation as fixed messages authored by Ndiema. Rather, these emerge as possible interpretive fields made available by the text’s ambiguity. This distinction is methodologically important: textual analysis can demonstrate that a composition creates interpretive space, but it cannot by itself establish which interpretation the artist intended or which one audiences actually adopted. Reception Theory helps explain the significance of this openness. An artistic text becomes meaningful through the encounter between textual cues and the interpreter’s “horizon” of cultural and historical expectations.

Oluthkuonda song can thus be understood as an open text in which ambiguity is productive rather than defective: it permits listeners to connect symbolic expressions to different experiences and cultural frames (Eco, 1979; Jauss, 2023). The result supports the article's central claim that esoteric meaning in contemporary Luo music is relational. It is neither wholly contained in the lyric nor freely invented by the audience; it develops through interaction between textual structure and cultural competence.

Indigenous Knowledge and Luo Oral Philosophy

The third theme is the embedding of indigenous knowledge within a contemporary popular-music form. The song's dependence on Dholuo, culturally resonant objects, indirect expression and figurative construction places its meaning within a Luo communicative environment. This supports the view that indigenous knowledge is carried not only through formal instruction but also through language, narrative, performance and everyday cultural symbols (Dei, 2022; Oluoch, 2023). *Oluthkuonda* can therefore be read as a cultural archive in which ordinary lexical resources preserve ways of reasoning, valuing and communicating.

The significance of this finding lies in the relationship between form and knowledge. The song does not present indigenous philosophy as a catalogue of explicit teachings. Instead, knowledge is embedded in the manner of communication itself: implication rather than exhaustive explanation, metaphor rather than literal exposition, and interpretive participation rather than passive reception. Such features correspond with the broader oral-literary tradition in which audiences are expected to infer social and moral significance from performance (Finnegan, 2023). Consequently, the esoteric quality of the song is inseparable from its cultural location.

At the same time, this cultural embeddedness cautions against universalizing the analysis. A listener's ability to recognize the connotations of a Dholuo expression depends partly on linguistic and cultural competence. Deardorff (2023) emphasizes contextual awareness and interpretive sensitivity as important dimensions of intercultural competence. The textual findings therefore suggest a layered accessibility: the composition may be immediately legible at rhythmic or affective levels to a broad audience while some culturally specific connotations remain more available to listeners familiar with Luo language and oral conventions.

From individual expression to collective identity

A fourth theme is the movement between an apparently individual voice and broader collective meanings. The first-person and relational character of lyrical expression gives the composition an intimate register, yet its culturally shared symbols allow individual experience to become socially recognizable. In this sense, the song illustrates how personal narration in African popular music can serve as a point of entry into communal memory, values

and identity rather than remaining purely autobiographical (Finnegan, 2023).

Symbolic Interactionism is useful here because it treats meaning as socially produced through shared symbols and interaction (Carter & Fuller, 2023). The culturally recognizable vocabulary of *Oluthkuonda* gains significance because it belongs to a social world in which words, objects and idioms have histories of use. The textual analysis therefore indicates that the composition's individual voice can carry collective resonance: listeners who share relevant cultural codes may connect private-sounding expressions to familiar social relationships, moral expectations or communal experiences.

This finding also clarifies the limits of the study's earlier discussion of audience reception. The lyrics provide grounds for arguing that multiple audience positions are possible, but not for claiming that older listeners, younger listeners, leaders or non-Luo audiences actually interpreted the song in predetermined ways. Such propositions should be tested through audience reception research. What the present analysis establishes is the textual condition for such diversity: A symbolically open composition rooted in shared cultural resources.

Cultural hybridity and Intercultural interpretive potential

The fifth theme concerns the coexistence of indigenous linguistic identity with contemporary Ohangla-Afro Fusion aesthetics. *Oluthkuonda* retains Dholuo as a central carrier of cultural meaning while participating in a modern musical environment shaped by genre fusion and digital circulation. This combination makes hybridity communicatively significant. Rather than representing a simple movement from "traditional" to "modern," the song demonstrates how cultural continuity can be maintained through adaptation. Martin and Nakayama (2024) similarly frame intercultural communication as a process in which identities and meanings are negotiated across cultural contexts rather than erased by contact.

The textual implications of hybridity are twofold. First, the Dholuo lyrics preserve culturally specific signs whose deeper connotations depend on local knowledge. Second, the contemporary musical form creates points of entry for listeners who may not possess that linguistic competence. Rhythm, performance, repetition and musical affect can invite engagement before the listener fully understands the lexical content. The song thus has intercultural interpretive potential: It can circulate beyond its immediate speech community while retaining a culturally specific symbolic core (Samovar *et al.*, 2023). Digital dissemination intensifies this potential, but the present textual-content analysis does not measure platform reach or actual online reception. Claims about YouTube, Facebook, TikTok or streaming audiences should therefore be understood as contextual discussion rather than empirical results of this study. Existing scholarship nevertheless shows that digital platforms can extend the circulation and reinterpretation of African

popular music across geographic and cultural boundaries (Jenkins *et al.*, 2022; Mutie, 2022; UNESCO, 2022). In this environment, *Oluthkuonda* song can plausibly function as an intercultural text, although the meanings produced by specific online audiences remain a question for future empirical investigation.

Discussion

Taken together, the findings show that the esoteric character of *Oluthkuonda* song is produced by the convergence of symbolic language, cultural knowledge, narrative openness and hybrid musical circulation. Semiotics explains how ordinary words and images become signs with connotative depth; Symbolic Interactionism explains why these signs draw meaning from socially shared experience; Reception Theory accounts for the interpretive openings created by ambiguity; and Intercultural Communication Theory clarifies what happens when culturally embedded signs travel beyond their original linguistic community (Chandler, 2022; Carter & Fuller, 2023; Martin & Nakayama, 2024).

The analysis therefore refines the notion of “hidden meaning.” The song’s meanings are not hidden in the sense of a secret code with one correct solution. Rather, they are layered: Some are manifest in the wording, some depend on cultural associations and others arise through the listener’s encounter with the text. This layered model is more consistent with qualitative interpretation and with the article’s theoretical framework than a search for a single authorial message. It also explains why the same composition can function simultaneously as entertainment, cultural memory, symbolic discourse and an intercultural resource.

A further contribution of the findings is methodological. Combining textual analysis with qualitative content analysis makes the interpretive process more transparent. Close reading preserves the complexity of metaphor and context, while systematic coding shows how recurrent meaning units develop into broader categories and themes (Krippendorff, 2022; Schreier, 2012). The approach therefore strengthens the argument that contemporary Ohangla can be studied not only as performance or heritage but also as communication: a structured symbolic practice through which cultural knowledge is encoded, negotiated and potentially recontextualized across audiences.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted within the study’s boundaries. Because the analysis is based on one song and does not include interviews with the late Tony Ndiema, production personnel or listeners, it cannot verify authorial intention, prevalence of particular audience readings or causal effects of digital dissemination. Its contribution is interpretive and analytical: It identifies textual structures that make multiple culturally grounded readings possible. Future research can extend these findings through focus groups, interviews, comment analysis, ethnography or comparative analysis of several Ndiema compositions to test how the interpretive

possibilities identified here are actually negotiated by different audiences.

Knowledge Contribution

This study therefore fills five interrelated scholarly gaps. First, it provides the first known communication-focused qualitative textual analysis of Tony Ndiema’s *Oluthkuonda* song. Second, it extends contemporary intercultural communication scholarship into Kenyan vernacular popular music. Third, it demonstrates how Semiotics, Symbolic Interactionism, Reception Theory, and Intercultural Communication Theory can be integrated to explain symbolic meaning-making in indigenous African music. Fourth, it advances qualitative textual analysis as an effective methodology for studying metaphor and esoteric communication within African musical texts. Finally, it contributes to the documentation and preservation of Luo cultural philosophy by demonstrating that contemporary Ohangla remains an important repository of indigenous knowledge whose symbolic meanings continue to evolve within today’s digital communication environment.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited by its qualitative and interpretive orientation and its deliberate focus on Tony Ndiema’s *Oluthkuonda* song as a single musical text. Although the purposive selection of the song facilitates an in-depth examination of metaphor, symbolism, narrative ambiguity, indigenous knowledge and culturally embedded meanings, findings derived from one composition cannot be generalized to Tony Ndiema’s entire musical repertoire or to Ohangla-Afro Fusion as a genre. Moreover, the use of textual analysis and qualitative content analysis necessarily places researcher interpretation at the center of the analytical process. Interpretations of metaphors, idioms and other culturally embedded expressions may therefore be influenced by the researcher’s cultural knowledge, theoretical orientation and analytical choices. Although the study enhances credibility through repeated engagement with the text, theoretical triangulation, reflexivity and maintenance of an analytical trail, these procedures cannot completely eliminate interpretive subjectivity. Consequently, the meanings identified in *Oluthkuonda* song are presented as theoretically and culturally grounded interpretations rather than as definitive or universally applicable meanings.

The study is further limited by the absence of primary data from the composer and audiences. Since no interviews with Tony Ndiema or production personnel were conducted, textual analysis cannot conclusively establish the artist’s intentions behind particular metaphors, symbols and esoteric expressions. Similarly, the study did not employ interviews, focus group discussions, surveys or systematic analysis of audience comments; hence, it cannot empirically establish how Luo-speaking, non-Luo or other culturally diverse audiences actually interpret *Oluthkuonda* song. Audience-related interpretations are therefore treated as theoretically plausible interpretive

possibilities rather than empirical audience findings. Furthermore, although the study situates contemporary Ohangla-Afro Fusion within a digital environment characterized by platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok and music-streaming services, it does not undertake platform analytics, digital ethnography or systematic social-media analysis. It therefore does not measure the song's actual digital reach, audience engagement or online interpretation. Future studies could address these limitations through comparative analysis of several Ohangla compositions and the incorporation of interviews, focus groups, audience-comment analysis and digital ethnography to establish how the symbolic and esoteric meanings identified through textual analysis are actually negotiated by different audiences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of the study, future research should broaden the analysis of symbolic and esoteric communication in contemporary Ohangla-Afro Fusion by examining several compositions by Tony Ndiema and other Ohangla artists to establish whether similar patterns of metaphor, symbolism, indigenous knowledge and narrative ambiguity occur across the genre. Since the present study is primarily textual and does not empirically establish audience interpretations, subsequent studies should incorporate interviews, focus group discussions, audience-comment analysis or digital ethnography to investigate how Luo-speaking and culturally diverse audiences negotiate meanings embedded in Ohangla compositions. Researchers should also examine how digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Facebook and music-streaming services influence the circulation, reinterpretation and intercultural accessibility of culturally embedded musical meanings. More broadly, scholars in communication, media and cultural studies should give greater attention to indigenous popular music as a communicative resource through which cultural memory, indigenous knowledge and identity are preserved and negotiated across generations and cultural boundaries.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the esoteric dimensions of Tony Ndiema's *Oluthkuonda* song through Semiotics, Symbolic Interactionism, Reception Theory and Intercultural Communication. The findings demonstrate that the song extends beyond entertainment to function as a cultural text in which metaphor, symbolism, narrative ambiguity and indigenous knowledge communicate layered meanings. Consistent with African oral traditions, *Oluthkuonda* song illustrates how contemporary Luo music preserves cultural memory, philosophical thought and moral values through figurative and culturally embedded expressions (Finnegan, 2023; Oluoch, 2023).

The study further established that meanings within *Oluthkuonda* song are dynamic and culturally negotiated rather than fixed. Listeners may construct different

interpretations depending on their linguistic competence, cultural experiences and social realities, reinforcing the relevance of Reception Theory and Symbolic Interactionism in understanding audience meaning-making (Martin & Nakayama, 2024; Samovar *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, Ohangla-Afro Fusion functions as a medium of intercultural communication by combining indigenous Luo traditions with contemporary African musical aesthetics. Digital platforms have further expanded its visibility among multicultural and diasporic audiences (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2025; UNESCO, 2022).

Overall, the study positions *Oluthkuonda* song as a living expression of indigenous philosophy, cultural memory and intercultural dialogue. Future audience reception, ethnographic and comparative studies could further illuminate how African musical traditions negotiate identity and meaning in the digital era.

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