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'One people, one destiny': integrated selves and 'Kinships' of nations in the East African Community's and founding member states' anthems

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ABSTRACT

Despite the unification of East African states to form the East African Community, the member states also aspire to grow as integrated selves within the unification. This article draws on African philosophy's Ubuntu and Benedict Anderson's (2016) ideas of imagined communities to investigate whether the East African Community's anthem and those of its three member states enmesh the concepts of individual nations' self-integration and communal aspirations with the community's insistence on 'oneness'. A close reading of Uganda's, Tanzania's, and Kenya's anthems reveals that they symbolically represent individual member states as integrated selves and aspire to fortify communal relations with neighbouring states, thereby signalling that individual states will flourish amongst others—the very things addressed in the EAC's anthem. Anthems' fictitious worlds metaphorically shed light on the materialisation of a healthy East African Community and the growth of individual member states, grounded in the principles of self- and communal integration. The paper argues that the EAC's anthems embody the philosophy of unity and, at the same time, convey the idea of unification among the member states.

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1. Introduction

Perhaps the best way a nation or community embodies its philosophy is through its national or community anthem. Through anthems, people of a nation express their identity, sing about their dreams and achievements, promise to keep them, pray for themselves and others, warn enemies, and even invite others, among other things. Anthems, thus, are cultural productions through which certain philosophies concerning states and communal integration, such as those of the East African Community (EAC), can be discerned.

Textually, the EAC's slogan 'One people, one destiny', signals that the East African people are looking forward to becoming one, perhaps by sharing their cultural productions, lifestyles, expectations, philosophies, hopes, wishes, and realities of existence. This article investigates the EAC's anthem and the anthems of its three founding member states (Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) to ascertain the coexistence of aspirations for the communal existence of the EAC's people, their 'oneness', as well as the founding member states' desires for integrated selves.

Although the current EAC comprises seven countries (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo), and each has its own anthem, the anthems analysed here are rich in modes and techniques of representations, which best capture the idea of intra and international cohesion. In addition, the EAC's anthem was composed by merging the work of three songwriters from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda (Samwel, 2022). Supposedly, the merged songs carried the EAC as envisioned by the composers' national identities and aspirations, as the composers likely

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infused their respective countries' experiences into the EAC's anthem. We also chose the EAC's anthem for its text, which emphasises the communion of EAC member states.

As founding members of the EAC, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda share many commonalities, and their integration can be traced back to the pre-colonial era (Reith & Moritz, 2011). Additionally, their geographic proximity allows them to share some common socio-cultural and historical experiences. Even with the introduction of colonial borders under British rule, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania shared a similar colonial experience, as they were part of the customs union founded in 1919 and members of the 1948 East African High Commission (ibid). As postcolonial states, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania formed their union via the so-called East African Common Service Organisation (EACSO) and attempted to set up a central bank, which was founded in 1965, thereby translating their efforts to materialise the dream of living as a community, the idea enmeshed following the establishment of the 1967 EAC (ibid).

After the collapse of the 1967 EAC in 1977, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania heads of state engineered the reunion, which entered into force on 7th July 2000 after signing 'the Treaty for the Establishment of the current East African Community in November 1999'.¹ Rwanda and Burundi joined the community in 2007, while the Republic of South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo joined in 2016 and 2022, respectively (ibid). This growth brings the community's total to seven members.

Being colonised by the British, their membership in the former EAC, and their geographical proximity have created cultural and historical commonalities among the three founding members of the EAC. Given this history, these independent states envision a shared destiny, as lauded in the EAC's slogan, 'One people, one destiny'. Notably, cultural and literary creations from these member states, such as national anthems, are informed by this complex socio-political milieu. As Breitingger (cited in Tengy, 2016, p. 22) opines, 'African writers don't write fiction; they write faction; that is, fiction based on facts'. Thus, art reinterprets the socio-political and cultural reality of its people and internalises specific social values.

As Marx and Engels claim, 'the production of ideas, concepts, and consciousness is first of all directly interwoven with the material intercourse of man' (1845, p. 6). Then, the EAC's anthem and the anthems of EAC member states are thus cultural and or literary products that artistically embed the community's and member states' socio-cultural milieu. These anthems, therefore, serve as a repository of ideas and the founding states' aspirations for the flourishing of EAC. Generally, singing songs is part of the lives of East African people. Music is 'the art of the continent' and has a direct impact on African political and cultural life (Allen, 2004, p. 1). For example, the role of popular music in Tanzania's 2015 and Kenya's 2022 electoral campaigns is enormous. East African people sing in churches, mosques, farms, and even during rituals. Nonetheless, singing songs provides relaxation and motivates workers. Also, songs accompany religious and national celebrations, burials, and weddings. Songs and anthem singing are often part of the pre-class routine. It is also a practice when a nation is represented in international tournaments.

Songs/music thus unify and differentiate people. Regarding this point, we see how popular and classic music define new and old generations, respectively. Additionally, songs and music have political value. Anthems, for example, are national symbols and 'every' nation has an anthem. Even a newly born nation, like South Sudan, has one². Anthems enable nations to affirm their identity, construct, or rather appreciate, their ethnicity, and bargain for the 'rulership' of the people. Given this, schools and even colleges have their own anthems. National anthems thus function as 'on behalf of the people of a certain country'. When the melody of Tanzania's national anthem is played at an international event, it signifies that Tanzania is being represented there. For reasons such as these, Cerulo (1993) says that national 'anthems and flags provide...the strongest, clearest statement of national identity' and that anthems are also symbols treated with the esteemed respect that uniquely identifies a nation, society, or a community (p. 244). They have nearly the same significance across nations (Cerulo, 1993, pp. 243–244). Notably, regional integrations, too, have anthems. For example, the African Union, the European Union, and the East African Community have their own anthems.

2. Review of related studies

Scholars have explored a wide range of aspects of national anthems and symbols. For example, Shtan'ko et al studied the origin of 'specific aspects of forming [...] national symbols...and the anthem of Japan' (2016, p. 1). This study informs that 'Sustainable national shared philosophy and national identity are

generated due to symbolic synthesis'. The study concludes that the Japanese flag and anthem are the products 'linked to the history and cultural traditions of the country' and 'symbols' that 'express the nature of society and the development level of the nation' and are handy icons in the 'understanding of their culture and sources of its political power' (p. 3). The study thus emphasises the iconic relationship between anthems and the nations they represent.

Also, Souza (2006, p. 543) examined and ascertained 'attitudinal resources the anthems' authors utilise to construe and negotiate feelings with their audiences'. The study revealed that anthem authors invoke 'effectual values' in composing anthems. Therefore, through anthems, authors share their feelings of 'love for the nation through the use of family metaphors'(Ibid., 543); hence, the family becomes a metaphor for the nation, and, as a family needs love and protection, so does the nation (Ibid., p. 543). Building on Souza's work, the current study examines how anthems reveal the kinship considerations of the communal and individualised interests of states comprising the EAC. We examine how the anthems of each member state advance the agenda of considering others and their well-being. We read the songs in comparison to the EAC anthem.

Mustafa's (2015) study explored 'nationalism as expressed in English and Egyptian national anthems' (p. 63). It concluded that national anthems praise rulers and insist on citizens' affection for a given state, urging them to hope, guard, and reinstate their liberty and faithfulness. Entailed here is that anthems shape people to go as per the state's expectations and aspirations, which they reflect on their physical experience, including 'principles governing people extremely according to the anthem; sacrifice, love, unity, or even glorifying the ruler as God's representative' (ibid., p. 66). The current study builds on Mustafa's by considering a range of individual states' anthems and their alignment with the EAC anthem to discuss the aspirations of individual states and the EAC's forged kinship integration.

Also, Okal et al. (2016) researched South Sudan's national anthem and reported the paradoxes inherent in the national anthem of the Republic of South Sudan; it 'talks of many achievable wishes notably unity in peace and harmony... freedom, justice, liberty and prosperity ... and protection of the nation' yet, in South Sudan, there is no tranquillity; there is tribalism, inter-tribal misunderstandings and leaders do not respect integrity and dignity (pp. 77–78). Regarding this inquiry, we aim to determine whether the anthems we study embody virtues necessary for the flourishing of the EAC and its founding member states.

Similarly, Dze-Ngwa (2014) researched the nature and composition of Cameroonian national anthems and concluded that in the country, two anthems coexist that are unfamiliar to the majority of Cameroonians. The anthems, the study says, are the legacy of colonialism and hence have no national character and contradict the Cameroonian constitution, which acknowledges the togetherness of the nation (ibid: 99). In other words, Dze-Ngwa's finding reveals that there are times when national symbols may misrepresent their people's philosophy and aspirations. That is because, according to Dze-ngwa, the national anthems of Cameroonians create disharmony rather than accord among the torn-apart Cameroonians.

Curtis's (2010) thesis examined the Mozambican national anthem, with a focus on memory and nation-building. It revealed that the country adopted an anthem meaningful to it and that national anthems serve as an educational and political ritual during their performance (p. 1). The study further revealed that there is a close relationship between Mozambican national symbols (anthems) and its ideological memory—socialism—and that the Mozambican anthem contains nationalist elements that emphasise nation-building and may not necessarily function as a nationalistic anthem. In other words, the study indirectly suggested that the song's content does not guarantee citizens' practice.

Also, Samwel (2022) examined whether the national anthems of Kenya and Tanzania, on the one hand, and the East African anthem, on the other, effectively convey the social identity of the respective nations and the East African Community. He argues that the three anthems of Tanzania and Kenya, and the EAC anthem, fall short of identifying the two countries and the East African people. These weaknesses, he ruled out, stemmed from legal issues, the procedures followed during the composition of the anthems, and the diction used. We aim to extend Samwel's exploration by arguing that the national anthems of the three countries speak to the integrated selves of their countries and to the sense of communal belonging marshalled by the EAC as a regional integration, as well as by its anthem.

Despite the growing interest in researching national symbols and anthems in particular, most of the studies have concentrated on individual nations, measuring the discrepancies between anthems against their respective nations' reality, their evolution, nationalism and aspects other than how an individual national anthem address the nation an integrated self and whether such concern also establishes individual anthems speak of kinship or togetherness of nations concerning anthems of regional integrations. This article examines the coexistence of nations' sense of an integrated self and their communal/kinship aspirations, as represented in the EAC anthem and the anthems of its three co-founding states, to address the lacuna.

3. Method and theory

To unearth the issue at hand, this article conducted close readings of the anthems of Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and the EAC to ascertain how their techniques of representation, such as diction and themes, embed the communal and individual identities of each member state. The focus is on how the literariness of the anthems work together to bring to light the sense of individualised self-integration aspired to by each member state, and whether individual anthems hint at the oneness insisted on by the EAC anthem—the philosophy of 'One People, One Destiny'.

In analysing how the studied songs symbolically represent nations as integrated selves and 'kinships' of nations, we invoke Tutu's (2009) view on Ubuntu, an African philosophy of communitarianism which posits the African conception of life where one's humanity is caught up, is undistinguishably tied up in others' as he says:

.... belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'A person is a person through other people.' It is not 'I think therefore I am'. It says rather: 'I am human because I belong'. I participate, I share. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has the proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole, and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are (p. 35).

At the core of these words is the view that an individual flourishes in his relationship with others and is thus responsible for others' well-being and communal growth. That is, life is all about relating to others. Banda clarifies this assertion when he regards Ubuntu as a relationality (2020, p. 208). According to him, 'Ubuntu ... is also understood in communitarian terms of human solidarity, interdependence, commonality and communality that can be summarised as relationality' (ibid., p. 210). This conception resonates with Ekeh's idea that African ontology emphasises values such as truth, honesty, collaboration, and the sanctity of human life (2020, p. 88). These virtues enhance individual flourishing, unity, and peace.

Even so, there criticism levelled against Ubuntu. Magezi (2017), cited in Banda (2020), stated that 'Ubuntu's definition of community narrowly refers to people bound geographically and relationally' (p. 114). However, our deployment of this notion seems relevant given the view that the people of the studied nations, as we have said earlier, share a geographically and historically based 'umbilical cord'. Moreover, we utilise the notion of Ubuntu, as it provides an explanation of 'interdependence, mutual communal relationships, and is heavily anti-individualism, anti-alloofness and seeks to promote commonality, relationality and communal cooperation and integration' (Banda, 2020: 209), the very things the EAC seeks for its people. However, we utilise these virtues to explore the relationality of intra- and inter-national relations.

Additionally, critics (including Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013) opine that 'Ubuntu as an ideology is not well rooted in the ethical experiences of modern people qua moral beings' because Ubuntu, as a 'Conceived ethical solution, lacks both the capacity and context to be an ethical inspiration or code of ethics in the present context' (198). For instance, Ubuntu has proven to be a theory and not a practice since the African nation where Ubuntu is rooted, several governments 'have been dogged with narratives of corruption, violence, vote rigging...' (Manyonganise, 2023, p. 26). The view implied here is that Ubuntu, developed in traditional communal settings, can no longer address the problems facing a world that is increasingly individualistic and less communal. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013, 203) state that Ubuntu 'can only be fully realised in a naturalistic and traditionalistic context of those people' in a communitarian

society. However, we align with scholars (including Metz, 2014; Koenane & Olatunji, 2017; Molefe & Muade, 2025) who rebuke the claim that Ubuntu's value has diminished in contemporary times. Like them, we hold a different view, arguing that Ubuntu has relevant political applications and is vital to building dignity through governance that prioritises people's needs and interrelations, as the analysis reveals.

Furthermore, our analysis draws on Anderson's (2006) notion of 'Imagined Communities'. Anderson states that 'In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the 'Other', and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love'. He adds that 'Something of the nature of this political love can be deciphered' from how 'languages describe its object: either in the vocabulary of kinship' or of idioms, denoting 'something to which one is naturally tied' (pp. 141–142). For Anderson, we can discern such inspirations in 'The cultural products of nationalism—poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts,' because these 'show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles' (ibid., p. 141). In a way, Anderson infers that a nation, as a community, forges unity through love, as it is in the Ubuntu philosophy. From Anderson's assertion, we infer that the love within a country can extend to the neighbouring community, especially when a language can forge kinship among states.

Notably, Anderson's (2006, p. 9) concept of imagined community primarily concerns the nation-state. His idea, though productive for analysing the supranationality of states like the EAC, reflects on the proposition that singing together cultivates identity convergence even for people with different backgrounds. As Phelan's (2017) asserts, research suggests that singing contributes to our sense of self-identity, social integration, and belonging, especially when it is contextualised in an event (or ritual) that promotes these values (192); a point relevant in the EAC's context. Hence, performing shared symbols repeatedly creates a sense of togetherness. In singing the EAC anthem, for example, singers become a 'we' that transcends individual interests or national borders. We thus remain cognisant of Bachmann's (2013) notion of 'geopolitical imaginary' which insists cooperations beyond a simple love for one's nation, to argue that the singing of EAC by nationals of member states connotes the forging of a unified East African community that is a consciously built regional identity, one that is reenacted through a cultural ritual, anthem-singing.

In the next section, we examine whether these songs foster communal and individual aspirations among member states for the betterment of the EAC and of independent member states. Firstly, we analyse the manner in which the EAC anthem embeds the language of kinship among its member states. Then, explore how individual states' anthems, focusing on whether they embed the concept of an integrated self and on how these selves are open to communicating with other nations.

4. Analysis and discussion

4.1. *The East African Community's anthem and kinships of its member states*

The East African Community's anthem (EACA) has three stanzas and one chorus. The first stanza is the prayer performed by the plural persona/speaker 'we', thereby marking a plurality of voices. The prayer is a unison voice asking God to protect, or rather preserve, the EAC so that its members—the 'us'—live harmoniously and reach their destiny. According to Kanu and Ndubisi (2021), African prayers in songs and proverbs refer to God because, within their belief system, God is the creator of the universe. The first stanza of EACA is followed by the chorus, which is repeated after each stanza and is also sung from a 'we' perspective, connoting that the 'we' should protect the community, be responsible, and prosper through unity so that the EAC can last longer. Following the chorus is the second stanza in which the persona 'we' addresses that oneness and patriotism should be EAC's community unity pillars. The second stanza calls for members to protect freedom, peace, traditions, and customs. Finally, the last stanza orders the EAC members to work harder and cooperatively to attain their destiny: 'a better community'.

A recurring device in these lyrics is the EAC anthem's use of the 'we' narrative perspective, as it manifests in these lines: 'We should protect/guard our community//We should be committed to be strong...' and 'We should work together//We should work hard//We should build a better Community'. The 'we'

narrative perspective in deployment is performative. For the singers, it serves as a call that summons community members into being one each time they sing it.

Indeed, Askew (2002, p. 7) asserts that the performance of anthems helps citizens develop a sense of national identity. As Phelan (2017, p. 185, 188) noted, when an anthem (for example, the EAC anthem) is performed collectively and repeatedly, this ritual singing creates a 'space of belonging' physically and emotionally, 'even to traditions with which we are not familiar' (p. 185, 188). Similarly, when East Africans sing the anthem, through their 'we' perspective, they inscribe the idea of a regional community onto themselves. As a performative act, it is crucial for transforming the EAC from a mere political and economic entity into a lived, affective experience. It also erases the fractionalism created by nationalism among EAC member states. As Grosby (2005) states, 'Nations are comprised of a community of kinship, where individuals recognise themselves to be continuously related to others.' Nationals of a given nation refer to themselves as 'us', contrasting themselves with those who are not, the 'other'. Thus, as Gandhi (1999, p. 108) claims, nationalism is a divisive force separating one nation from another. If we read the 'we' narrative perspective as envisioning the ubuntu oneness of EAC member states, it is because ubuntu is the ethics of caring for strangers, not kinship care. Metz (2014, p. 96) states that ubuntu is 'not a function of intimate relationships, but is instead a matter of being hospitable to strangers'—that is, foreigners.

Furthermore, one literary fact advanced by the language of the EAC's anthem is its insistence on the oneness of EAC member states. This fact echoes the communal language, given the use of the plural persona 'we' and the communal imagining of these member states through plural deictic expressions. In the anthem, for example, one feels the unison of personas representing member states singing the EAC world communally:

Our unity is our pillar
 Long live our community
 Patriotism and togetherness
 Be the pillars of our unity
 May we guard our freedom and peace
 Our culture and traditions

In singing the above verses, the people of member states communally reiterate the sense of the EAC's objective: 'creating one single ... territory' that could serve as 'a vehicle for bringing about faster economic development.'³ The said objective translates to EAC being a family, with its members working communally for its prosperity. This oneness is also felt in the song's diction. The use of the first person plural point of view, 'we', and the possessive pronoun 'our' symbolically stand for the EAC member states' communal desires to have unity, peace, culture, traditions, and development, especially when we consider that these states are susceptible to wars resulting from religious rivalries, tribalism, and regionalism, among other things.

Symbols, as Bangura (2011) says, can endorse 'social integration' and confer 'legitimacy,' 'loyalty,' and 'hope' (p. 1). Indeed, the EAC's anthem's deployment of the first-person point of view has implications for communicating its philosophy of oneness. Usually, the author's use of one narrative technique over the other is influenced by 'the purpose and feelings of the writer to [the] audience' (Sisakht, 2014, p. 181). Likewise, Asidiky (2009) asserts that 'lyric writers' use language that may awaken listeners to 'create a similar contact because they are referring to themselves as if they are telling people about their own lives and experiences' (p. 56). Regarding Asidiky's observation, we understand that the use of the possessive pronoun 'our' signals the unity of nationals of EAC member states who claim to be one people through a shared community, freedom, and unity, and so on.

In addition to the use of the first-person plural subject, which is maintained throughout the three stanzas and the chorus of the song, the diction reveals that all three stanzas and the chorus aim to achieve semantic and structural cohesiveness, which this paper considers a metaphor for the philosophy of oneness. For example, across the three stanzas, semantic cohesion conveys the idea of solidarity, unity, pulling together, and interconnectedness through the subjectification of the EAC members as 'we'. To further illustrate, the structural divisions of the anthem employ word repetition—synonyms and patterns with closely related meanings—which exemplify structural cohesion in the EAC anthem. Table 1 below clarifies this view.

Table 1. Repeated words-synonyms/patterns stanza's lyrics:

Stanza one	Chorus	Stanza two	Stanza three
Repeated words/patterns	Repeated words/patterns	Repeated words/patterns	Repeated words/patterns
Jumuiya (community)	Jumuiya (community),	Mshikamano (togetherness),	Jumuiya (community), sote
Tu/Twa (we)	sote (all)	unity umoja	(together/all of us)
Yetu (our)	Tu (we)	Tu (we)	Tu (we)
	Yetu/wetu (our)	Wetu/zetu (our)	

These repeated words not only show the poetic cohesiveness of the anthem but also signal a sense of imagined interrelation among member states, a relationship the EAC vows to cement, thereby advancing modern communitarian rationality, which is also the core of Ubuntu virtues, against the 'sense of self' which is 'taught in rationalist/modernist cultures' (p. 99). Such a claim prompts us to consider two observations about the data in the table above. First, the chorus, stanzas 1 and 3, are unified by the repetition of the word 'community', which expresses nearly the same idea carried by the words 'Mshikamano (togetherness)' and 'Umoja (unity)' as they appear in stanza 2. Through repetition, the song calls for the communal living of EAC member states. Banda (2020) states that 'Ubuntu as relationality provides a good ground for human flourishing because of interdependence, communal support, communal networking, and communal security that is needed for other people to thrive' (p. 210). To Banda, Ubuntu invokes African sayings such as 'hands wash each other' and 'no log of fire can glow alone' to argue that Africans affirm the view that 'one needs other people to flourish as a human being' (ibid).

Repetition brings structural and thematic cohesion. In unison, the synonyms (together and unity) suggest the theme of unification. Secondly, the repeated use of the pronoun 'we', which signals the first person plural point of view, and the possessive 'our' (in all stanzas and the chorus), echoes the togetherness and collective ownership of responsibilities of individual EAC member states in the creation of the EAC. Collectively, the 'we' in the anthem's stanzas, 'pray' to God so that He 'preserve[s]... 'The East African Community'; 'fulfil our [the EAC's] objectives;' and 'protect/guard our [their EAC] Community'. The 'we' pray so that they '...should be committed to be[ing] strong,' 'Patriotic' and united,' guard our [their EAC] freedom and peace,' 'culture and traditions' and 'should work together' and hard to 'build a better Community'.

The responsibility that the 'we' subject pleads to God that they have to fulfil is the very plea that Ubuntu put forth for the betterment of any community. These include collective good, humanness, and respect for their community' (Magezi 2017, p. 112, cited in Banda 2019). Indeed, at the core of the EAC anthem is the collectivity of member states who insist on working together for their (communally implied) survival.

4.2. Uganda and friends: Integrated self as neighbours keeper in Ugandan national anthem (UNA)

According to Namagero (2020), the UNA, 'Oh Uganda, Land of Beauty', was composed by Professor George Wilberforce Kakoma to mark his celebration of Uganda's independence in 1962 (p. 21). The song is a prayer to God to keep Uganda's and Ugandans' freedom united, with love and friendly relations with Uganda's neighbours. It also praises Uganda as a productive and lovely land.

The UNA's lyrics celebrate Uganda's unity, freedom, and shared destiny. The anthem also speaks of oneness, or rather, the philosophy of collective humanity and mutual care. As Ugandans sing this song, they remind themselves of values such as 'Together we'll always stand' and 'In peace and friendship, we'll live'. Moreover, the anthem emphasises that Ugandans live in solidarity, cooperation, and coexistence. The values define the relationships among Ugandan citizens or between Ugandan citizens and their neighbours. In the lyrics, Uganda is portrayed as a nurturing land, where love, labour, and divine providence sustain all. Singing UNA thus invokes God to guide and highlight communal responsibility toward the country, framed as 'land that feeds us'. In a way, the song instils in its singers the spirit of oneness, autonomy, and a sense of humanity, as expressed in *Ubuntu* and African communal ethics.

The UNA has many features that align with the EAC anthem, but it also has its own peculiarities. The anthem's peculiarity lies in its address of issues specific to Uganda, including praise for Uganda's beauty and its insistence on Uganda's freedom from captivity and slavery—liberty. The UNA imagines the

Ugandans to remain 'United, and free,' and 'For liberty//we'll always stand' together. Singers of UNA also imaginatively thank Uganda for being dear and fertile. They say it is 'The land that Feeds us [Ugandans].

Moreover, these verses collectively portray the people of Uganda as trusting, appreciative, and loving their fertile land, which is the source of life. However, the song has what this paper terms the 'diction of relationality,' which unites it with the diction of the EAC anthem's pervasive communal responsibility. For example, verses 9–12 of Uganda's national anthem call for partnerships and friendship with neighbouring countries, including those in the EAC. Some of the verses read:

Our love and labour we give,
And with neighbours' all,
At our Country's call,
In peace and friendship, we'll live.

These verses have a rhyming pattern of 'abbc' where the tenth and eleventh verses ending with - ɔ:l are preceded and followed by the lines ending with a 'v' sound. This patterning of line ends lauds the theme of interconnectedness and emphasises the themes of intra- and intensification; Uganda as a nation has to live with its neighbours in a friendly manner and 'all' as one. As Gichure (2015, cited in Banda 2019) states, the 'significant element of Ubuntu culture is that it lends itself to a communal and traditional lifestyle in which every person is their *neighbour's keeper*' (p. 127) (emphasis added). Indeed, the UNA's diction (which calls on Ugandans to live united and friendly with their neighbours) implies that Uganda's independence depends on its perfect sync with its neighbouring states.

Arguably, the Ugandan national anthem's meaning and diction present the country as a self-entitled entity whose citizens should pray for and whose flourishing depends on a cordial relationship with 'neighbours,' presumably members of the EAC. The anthem implores Ugandans to forge 'friendship with' these neighbours. Such is what the EAC anthem insists, the creation of a 'community,' bounded by 'unity' and 'togetherness'.

4.3. Oh God of all creation: Kenyans' cohesion in national anthem (KNA) and the question of neighbours

The Kenyan National Anthem (KNA): 'Ee Mungu Nguvu Yetu' (Oh God of All Creation), adopted in 1963, was composed by local musicians,' a five-member commission, headed by the then Kenya Music Adviser, Mr Graham Hyslop, Mr G. W. Senoga-Zake, and Mr Thomas Kalume. KNA has official English lyrics/versions, but this paper prefers to use both versions to address the alleged loss of literary value that sometimes occurs in translation. We are convinced that much of this literariness has been lost or transformed during the translation of the anthem. The KNA has three stanzas. Stanza one calls upon 'God of all creation' to bless Kenya and ensure that the nation has 'justice,' and that its people live in 'unity' and 'peace' in their lovely land. In stanza two, the persona awakens all people, referred to as 'ndugu' (relatives or siblings), as a family to build and protect the lovely Kenya. Lastly, the third stanza appears to complement the second stanza. It insists that building Kenya is the sole responsibility of all Kenyans and that, through unified efforts, Kenya will be respected.

Anderson (2006) writes that 'The nation is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (p. 9). Anderson's words are echoed in the writing of the KNA. As from the teamwork of the KNA's composition,'[i]t was expected that the [its] lyrics would express the deepest convictions and the highest aspirations of the [Kenyan] people as a whole' and more interestingly, the composing team were aware 'that words can either unite or divide,' and so 'great care had to be taken to ensure that the Anthem was an indisputable unifying factor in the life of the nation'⁴

By singing the KNA, Kenyan nationals express a sense of profound unity and patriotism. Its lyrics also express the nation's devotion to divine guidance. These values align closely with the Ubuntu philosophy. Like UNA, KNA also invokes the supreme figure's—God's—blessing and justice. By doing so, it envisions Kenya as a nation where peace, liberty, and mutual care should prevail. The lyrics call Kenyans to 'arise' and serve faithfully. It also emphasises their collective responsibility while also calling for moral strength. Its diction, for example, 'Let all with one accord//Build this our nation together,' frames the anthem as an utterance that celebrates solidarity among Kenyans, their shared labour, and even gratitude. Essentially,

it speaks to the spirit of oneness and interdependence and calls for a community built on the principles of justice and peace. It is also a call for humanity and cooperation to ensure Kenya's prosperity and harmony within its borders.

Notably, KNA's diction suggests that Kenyans' initial aspiration was to envision their internal unity. Such is the purpose it was designed to serve, building Kenya as one. For example, some lyrics from the anthem's stanza one read: 'Haki iwe ngao na mlinzi/Natukae na udugu/Amani na uhuru', meaning that 'Justice be our shield and defender/May we dwell in unity/Peace and liberty'. The diction in these lines signals a call for a community where all Kenyans live harmoniously and united, despite their differences, including ethnicity, social inequality, and political stratification, which are realities among Kenyans (Oino & Kioli, 2014). The song, thus recalling Anderson's (2006) prior words, is the imagination of a community free of socio-political discord (p. 9).

At the national level, the KNA's diction solicits what, in the vision of Ubuntu, could be conceived as a community tolerant of various forms of diversity. This view reveals, via its use of words/phrases which, when sung in unison, say, for example, 'taifa letu' (our land/nation), 'tuungane mikono/pamoja kazini' (let us join hands/build our nation together), and 'Nchi Yetu ya Kenya' (our homeland Kenya), to mention a few, that whoever sings KNA envisions the sense of communal life. The deployment of the first-person plural persona 'tu', i.e. 'we', and the possessive pronoun 'our' is repeatedly, across stanzas, metaphorically framed to visualise the aspired Kenyans' internal cohesion and a unified sense of ownership of their land, Kenya.

By singing the KNA, Kenyan nationals imagine their country is not just a geographical space but a socio-cultural and psychological 'interconnectedness of human society, with the [the political] implication that people should treat others as part of their shared extended human family' (Eliastam, 2015, p. 2). The diction in the lines captures the view:

Natukae na udugu (We should dwell in affinity/brotherhood⁵)
Amani na uhuru (Peaceful and liberty)

As Tutu (2009) writes, a community that practices Ubuntu has people who are 'generous, hospitable, friendly, caring, and compassionate' (p. 34). As Tutu sees it, Ubuntu involves fellowship, hospitality, harmony, and communal solidarity with others. While many of the Ubuntu virtues insisted on by KNA imply the Kenyan nation's self-integration, it is crucial to note that they indirectly point to a principle that may nurture the EAC's flourishing. For example, the anthem's deployment of the words: 'udugu' and 'ndugu' (brotherhood/affinity and relatives) as they appear in the first and the second stanza hint at Kenyan's internal relations, yet they are the very thing that will make Kenyans imagine themselves as people with Ubuntu, welcoming and considerate of others. If the people of Kenya will practice 'udugu', as per the envisioning of their national anthem, they, in the same manner, imagine people from EAC's state as their 'ndugu' (relatives) and so as per Gichure (2015 cited in Banda 2019) Ubuntu is the basis for practising 'traditional lifestyle in which every person is their neighbour's keeper' (p. 127). Practising these virtues, Kenyans will join hands with others in times of happiness and discord, which is the very thing their song and Ubuntu philosophy insist on.

4.4. 'Mungu ibariki afrika': the intra and inter communing of nationals in tanzanian national anthem (TNA)

Tanzania's national anthem (TNA) is popularly known as 'Mungu Ibariki Afrika' (God Bless Africa). The anthem was adopted in 1964 to replace the British colonial anthem 'God Save the Queen' as Tanganyika's national anthem, following the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar (Taylor, 1963, p. 217). Later on, the anthem, a hymn requesting God to bless the country severally, as ordered by the commissioner of education, was to be sung daily in Tanzanian schools, a practice the authors of this article have reiterated, having gone through the Tanzanian education system. TNA has two stanzas and two refrains. According to the anthem's wording, the first stanza is a prayer for God to bless the African continent as a whole and its leaders, while the second stanza is a plea for God to bless Tanzania as a country, its people, and its leaders. The first and second refrains are the prayers in which the singers beseech God to bless the children; Africa(ns) and Tanzania(ns), respectively.

Notably, the organisation of TNA's first verse, 'God bless Africa//Bless its leaders//Wabariki viongozi wake//Wisdom, unity and peace//These are our shields//Africa and its people,' provides a basis for imagining intra- and inter-communal relations. The first stanza is a prayer that beseeches 'God bless Africa' and 'its people'. The verse is sung along with the first refrain, in which the Tanzanians identify themselves as Africans. A verse from the refrain read, 'Bless us, the children of Africa'. Such a stanza, which comes first, is paralleled with the line in stanza two, which serves as a prayer that beseeches 'God [to] bless//Tanzania and its people'. The ordering and wording of these prayer verses are purposeful, for they emphasise the kind of nationalism that transcends national interest (that is, safety and blessing) to that of fellow Africans. The order of the stanzas thus profiles the mother community (Africa) that Tanzania first identifies with, before it can think of itself as a country, as Tanzanians. Hence, one sees how Tanzanians prioritise communal interests before their individualised national interests.

The said identification further enmeshes when Tanzanians imagine themselves as part of Africa, and this is very noticeable in the possessive pronoun [our] in the prayer they say, asking God to bless Africa with 'Wisdom, unity and peace,' which '... are our [their] shields'. More so, the sense of a nation as an integrated self-community on the one hand, and one which seeks communion with other countries, including those forming EAC, on the other hand, appears in how the two stanzas beseech God to grant 'umoya' (unity) to Africans and Tanzania as the word repeats in the first and second stanzas. The unity of the two stanzas metaphorically represents the coexistence of two worlds: Tanzania and Africa.

Notably, the TNA's community imagination extends beyond national borders to encompass the entire African continent, suggesting that integrating Africans into a single community is essential for an independent Tanzania. Given the prayer's rhetoric of 'unity and peace' in the first stanza, the song implies that only when the African community possesses these virtues will an independent country like Tanzania flourish. Such a move counters a pervasive sense of individualism in modern societies and the political fragmentation that may result from a strong sense of national identity. It proposes what this paper designates as *the communion of (inter) nations*. Okoro (2015) writes of how modern man is prone to hatred and social stratification, a situation from which Africa cannot escape; he argues that:

The modern man of all the races without exception seems to be condemned to the capriciousness of such modern phenomenon, without knowing where else to turn for salvation. We are confused and seem to be doomed as selfishness; individualism, competition etc. have taken over our corporate and personal values, resulting to [in] crisis, conflicts, hatred, genocide, racial cleansing and wars at their varying degrees (p. 2).

Indeed, all the anthems analysed in this article appear to imply that they deter this situation, as their wording promotes unity, love, and socio-political cohesion among their respective nationals. Such virtues, we say, are the pro-Ubuntu spirit and open a window for communal or filial attachments. Tanzanians sing their national anthems; they also reiterate the virtues of Ubuntu and cement the communion of (inter) nations, as lauded through the TNA's deployment of the metaphors of 'mother Africa' and 'mother Tanzania' in the first and second refrains, respectively. In the first refrain, Tanzanians declare their kinship with fellow Africans, indicating that Tanzanians and other African communities are naturally tied. In singing the first refrain, '[God] Bless Africa, Bless Africa//Bless us, the children of Africa,' Tanzanians identify with the African community, demonstrating that they still hold hope for the African continent.

According to Okoro (2015), 'Ubuntu reflects the deep spiritual truth that humanity[humans] share one indivisible essence—one spiritual essence, one planetary life system, one human race and one dependent human community' (p. 1). As the wording of TNA indicates, when Tanzanians sing their anthem, the plural first-person subject marker 'tu' in 'Tubariki watoto wa Africa//Bless us, the children of Africa' grants them agency to imagine their fellow Africans and themselves as children who descend from one mother. So they are obliged to pray for the well-being of these fellow Africans with whom they share descent. Generally speaking, the wording of TNA not only ties the two stanzas but also connects the song ideas to those of the EACA, UNA, KNA, and TNA, thereby communicating the philosophy of oneness. Stanzas one and two of TNA share words—unity and people—whose meanings evoke a sense of unity.

TNA thus implies that Tanzania's prosperity is unattainable if Africa is disunited. As such, Tanzanian signals her readiness for EAC oneness in the way the first stanza calls for the unification of Africa, where EAC can be interpreted as an attempt towards 'the global-African unification'. The meanings of the words 'unity' and 'Africa' echo those of 'community' and 'unity' (in EACA and KNA), as well as 'friendship' and

'unity' (in UNA). They all bring a sense of people living in unison. They, therefore, connote a genetic relation of Ubuntuism to the theme of oneness that is addressed in all these anthems.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Our study conducted a close reading of the anthems of the East African Community (EAC) and its member states, Uganda (UNA), Kenya (KNA), and Tanzania (TNA). It aimed to establish whether these anthems promote the philosophy of oneness. Using Anderson's notion of imagined communities and the notion of ubuntu, the analysis asserted that the authors of all the studied anthems employ diction and literary features that enable them to express their national self-integration and the aspired international kinship, or the 'communion of inter-nations'.

The study made a unique contribution to the existing scholarship on the topic through its dual focus, comparatively examining national anthems at both national and supranational levels. It has uniquely interpreted its findings by invoking the African philosophy of Ubuntu. The move is unlike the previous scholarship, which has often examined individual anthems in isolation, as well as those that analysed them against a nation's socio-political reality. Against this background, we have demonstrated that the set of the studied national anthems (UNA, KNA, TNA) as well as the regional anthem (EACA) are thematically and philosophically in dialogue. The approach has consequently revealed that these anthems share symbolic elements that speak for individual states' dreams and those that transcend individual state boundaries.

Furthermore, invoking the Ubuntu framework, especially its emphasis on values such as relationality and interdependence, given its conception that 'a person is a person through other people,' suggests that national anthems have a deeper, culturally grounded call for national and intranational unity. Notably, all anthems pervasively deploy the first-person plural 'we' and the possessive 'our,' as well as themes of communal labour and shared destiny. These devices serve beyond rhetorical devices. They bear performative enactments of Ubuntu virtues. The lens has therefore been helpful in our interpretation of the EAC's slogan, 'One People, One Destiny'. Against this backdrop, the slogan is neither a far-fetched nor a purely political import. It sounds more like an extension of an indigenous African worldview, through which the conception of EAC prioritised interstate communal flourishing. Notably, although these anthems harness Ubuntu virtues that envision the EAC's future, this vision coexists with the socio-political realities and tensions of individualism and self-interest. These are attributed to the collapse of the former EAC. They thus speak against Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013), who assert that Ubuntu lacks contemporary relevance. Ubuntu virtues in the anthems, therefore, can be read not necessarily as descriptions of reality, but as aspirational and pedagogical tools, attempting to call into being the very communal spirit they describe, against the tide of countervailing modern forces'.

Moreover, as the songs analysed reflect the historical context of the 1960s, a period marked by post-independence optimism, our analysis has shown that, amidst contemporary social, cultural, and socio-economic realities whose individualism is the call of the day, the Ubuntu virtues, as elaborated in these anthems, still provide a resilient cultural and philosophical foundation for the survival of intercommunal relations. The Ubuntu values in the song serve as a blueprint for reconciling individual member states' development with the communal interests advanced by EAC. Performing these anthems, therefore, is beyond entertainment. They serve as a persistent, daily reminder that there is an inextricable link between a nation's self-interest and the well-being of its neighbours.

We thus recommend that governments and states forming the EAC recognise and practice the Ubuntu philosophy as embedded in these anthems, for they are not mere ornaments. While these anthems are not necessarily literal descriptions of reality, they can serve as aspirational and pedagogical tools. They can be taken as a call for a communal spirit of humanness against the individualism of nation-states. They are a vital resource that can be harnessed to foster deeper regional integration and national survival. Even so, we further recommend that additional studies be conducted to examine other themes in these anthems or to determine whether the philosophy of oneness is sustained or challenged by other EAC members. Such research is especially relevant, considering that the EAC has welcomed—and will perhaps continue to welcome—new member states with diverse historical and cultural backgrounds.

Notes

1. East African Community. History of the EAC. <https://www.eac.int/eac-history>.
2. <https://nationalanthems.info/ss.htm>.
3. The objective is stipulated on www.eac.int/sectors/customs/objectives.
4. Retrieved from <http://www.kenyabrussels.com/>.
5. Udugu, is gender neutral in Kiswahili, it entails a quasi-kinship or affinity.

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The authors declared no potential conflict of interest. Grammarly was deployed for language editing because the authors are not native English speakers.

Author contributions

CRedit: **Spemba Elias Spemba**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Elijah Sibonike Mwaifuge**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Data availability statement

Materials used in this study are publicly available on public domains and official government websites of the East African member states.

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