

# The Development Process of *Karioki* Entertainment

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Place of fieldwork: Uganda

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- Research background

In Kampala, the capital of Uganda, *karioki* performances take place on the stages of restaurants and bars in the evenings. *Karioki* is performed to popular music by one person or by a small group of people. It is primarily composed of three entertainment forms. The first is “mime,” which involves singing without actual vocalization, using body movements and lip-synching for expression. Songs performed in mime are most often Ugandan, with lyrics in the local language. “Dance” is the second form. It is usually performed to American songs that have a quick tempo. The third performance form is “comedy.” Although comedy resembles mime, it tends to rely more on playful body movements and humorous antics than on expression through singing.

The term ‘*karioki*’ is originated from *karaoke*. Since the introduction of *karaoke* to Kampala, some people have become performers in order to attract patrons and then they have succeeded to become musicians. So sometimes the people of Kampala say that Ugandan musician used to perform *karioki*. Unlike *karaoke* performers, however, the *karioki* performers I came across in the course of my research do not actually sing. This leads to the consideration of other unique elements in the development process of this performance art.

- Research purpose

My research purpose is to demonstrate how *karioki* has developed.

The majority of *karioki* performers that I encountered were in their mid-teens to mid-twenties. They had various backgrounds and were of various ethnicities. They formed groups of approximately ten men and ten women. Group membership changed frequently. In this paper, I examine how these characteristics have affected the development process of *karioki*.

My main research methods included interviewing people who were involved in the initial formation of *karioki* groups, collecting relevant articles from local print media (newspapers) published between 1998 and 2008, and conducting thorough analysis.

- Fieldwork results

The first group, which is said to have founded *karioki*, was organized in 1999 by graduates from the same school. In the beginning, they focused on performing dances to Western songs (mainly American songs) and imitating the original musicians; they were called “dancers.” The group won popularity by performing at social functions in university halls. In 2000, *karioki* appeared for the first time on the stages of restaurants and bars. One bar organized a dance competition. And the bar motivated a group of talented youth to start a *karioki* group. After the group had been organized, members asked their friends to join and the number of members thus increased. The

initial group members were not only individuals from the Ganda, who comprise half the population of Kampala, but also people from the Congo, Rwanda, and Arab countries. In addition to dances to Western songs, this group performed the traditional dances of the various ethnic groups of Uganda and its neighboring countries. In 2001, an NGO with the goal of enlightening youth began an initiative to pursue educational activities around schools. As part of these activities, the NGO organized a group to entertain people by performing plays in which the songs were lip-synched. Two years later, a young performer who had performed Western dance at restaurants and bars joined this group and he had started to take it to an amusement center. At the same time, they began to do mime to local music, something that the young performers had previously had no interest in. This influenced other groups that had been concentrating solely on dancing to American songs and they started to include local song mime and dramatic performance.

- Implications for future research

As part of my research, I examined how young people who were interested in Western music and dance came together with people of different backgrounds and how the fluidity of group membership affected the development process of karioki, which has now advanced from mere entertainment to real business.

During the course of this research, I observed that young people often shifted from karioki into other performing arts such as theatre, music, and traditional dance. In the future, I would like to re-examine their experience in the development process of karioki, taking the attributes of the youth and the social conditions in Kampala into account. Moreover, I plan to observe how youth who had experience of karioki manage social relationships and develop their skills when they move into other performing arts. I will then attempt to comment on the characteristics of youth through observing the process of participating in and moving out from karioki.