



Materialities of Oral Cultures in East Africa: An Online Workshop

Uppsala University, Sweden

MARCH 12, 2026; 11:00-16:30 (CET); 13:00-18:30 (EAT)

Online: Zoom: <https://uu-se.zoom.us/j/3968999462>

This workshop explores how oral cultures in East Africa are shaped by the material conditions through which they are performed, transmitted, and preserved. Focusing on traditions expressed in languages across East Africa such as Swahili, Lulogooli, Gikuyu, Mijikenda and Luganda, the workshop examines how voice, rhythm, gesture, musical instruments, performance spaces, and communal participation function as material foundations of oral expression. These embodied and environmental elements anchor oral genres including praise poetry, folktales, chants, proverbs, wise sayings, riddles, storytelling and ritual performance as dynamic cultural archives that convey memory, worldview, and social critique. The workshop also highlights how multilingualism influences the material life of oral traditions. Key oral forms both gain and lose nuance as they move across linguistic and media environments, raising questions about translation, transcription, and cross-cultural interpretation. Participants will examine how these shifts are shaped not only by language but by the materials including fabric, sound recordings and digital interfaces that hold or reformat oral knowledge. In addition, the workshop considers emerging efforts to document oral cultures through digital tools, datasets, community archives, and the digitization of khanga's majina. These initiatives expand accessibility while prompting reflection on ethics, representation, and cultural stewardship. Overall, the workshop foregrounds materiality as central to understanding the creativity, resilience, and evolving forms of East Africa's oral cultures.

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Time: 11:00-16:30 (Sweden, Belgium, Netherlands); 13:00-18:30 (EAT)

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11:00-11:20 (Ashleigh Harris, Gloria Makokha & Ursula Oberst (ASCL): Introductory Remarks

11:20-11:35 Muneeb Kaderdina (Director at Kaderdina Hajee Essak Limited & Mali ya Abdulla, Mombasa): The Process of *Majina* Formation, A Case of Mali ya Abdulla in Mombasa, Kenya

11:40-11:55 Mbũgua wa Mũngai (Kenyatta University): “The dog that auctioned Kenya on the way to heaven”: Revitalizing Language Through ‘Nonsense’ in Kamande wa Kioi’s Gikuyu Pop Music

Lunch 12:00 – 13:00

13:00-13:15 Maurice Simbili Mwichuli (Kenyatta University): Globalizing Lulogooli: Challenges and Triumphs in Collection and Translation of Lulogooli Lexicon of Literary Terms

13:20- 13:35 Mark Obure Morang’a (University of Nairobi/Ghent University): From the Kaya to the Reef: Environmental Materialities in Digo Oral Performances

13:40-13:55 A. S. Bukenya (Literary Scholar & Author, Uganda): What things “Say”: Symbolism and Signification in Non-Verbal Sounds

Short break 14:00-14:20

14:20-14:35 Phyllis Ressler (EMU in Virginia, USA): Ascribing Value: Reflections on the *Kanga*, An Ethnographic Approach

14:40-14:55 Mshai Mwangola (Performance Scholar & Oraturist): *Lesò* as Orature: Transcending Boundaries in the Making of Meaning

15:00-16:00 **Discussion and Q&A**

16:00-16:30 **Closing Remarks**

This workshop is hosted by the African Literary Metadata Project at Uppsala University, Sweden