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Original Article

Stylistic Expressions and Gendered Representations of Femininity in Akamba Pop Music: A Feminist Intersectional Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how stylistic strategies in selected Akamba pop music represent femininity and the gendered marginalisation of women. Employing a feminist intersectional framework, it analyses the use of language, oral literary techniques, diction, and motifs in songs to reveal how women's identities are shaped, commodified, and constrained by social and cultural forces, especially colonial legacies and patriarchy. The study employs a qualitative research methodology. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting data, whereby eight songs were selected to represent Makueni, Machakos, Kitui, and Nairobi counties. The songs were sourced from the internet (YouTube). Transcription and translation were done thereafter. Using the theoretical lens of feminism and secondary texts, the data was interpreted in line with the main objective of the study. The study highlights how themes such as skin bleaching, sexual objectification, and ethnic discrimination are linguistically constructed to reflect broader gender inequalities.

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INTRODUCTION

Akamba pop music is not just entertainment; it reflects deep social realities and cultural constructions, particularly surrounding gender. This paper explores how language and stylistic choices in Akamba pop music portray femininity, often reinforcing women's marginalisation. Through oral traditions, diction, narrative perspectives, and recurring motifs, these songs create gendered discourses that mirror and sometimes contest prevailing power dynamics.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Intersectionality and Stylistic Approaches

Scholarly commentaries on feminism strive to unfold the descriptive, naming, comparative, and contrasting gender messages in literary productions. Before starting a stylistic review of the songs under study, it is essential to contextualise how feminist intersectionality guides the discussion.

The feminist thrust guides the stylistic review foregrounding gender in "New approach: The Feminist Musicology Studies of Susan McClary and Marcia. J. Citron embarked on their seminal work on music and feminism with the following remarks, "The goal of 'feminist musicology' has been to discover, analyse, discuss and promote the representation of women and the 'feminine' essence in various disciplines of music" (37). McClary and Citron's argument leans towards a positive musical composition that celebrates femininity while pursuing a latitudinal feminist essence in examining women's lives and experiences in scholarship. It argues that women's oppression is orchestrated in intersecting areas, notably gender, race, and class. The premise of intersectionality locates how stylistic strategies map out the socio-cultural constructions that marginalise women. Therefore, the paper will elaborate on how orality, language use, and context give the Akamba musicians ways to communicate the marginalisation of the female figure.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applies the qualitative research methodology. It sought to collect, analyse, and interpret the collected song data. The study investigated the literary techniques used by pop artists to portray the representations of gender. Close reading and interpretation of the primary and secondary data were made to scrutinise and reveal how the pop songs' gendered language portrays discrimination against women. This research aimed not to quantify data but to synthesise the underlying ideas, opinions, feelings, and messages communicated on gender in contemporary songs. This approach was warranted by the study topic, which called for an in-depth investigation of form and content in the songs to achieve the objectives set for the study.

ORAL TRADITION AS A SITE OF GENDERED EXPRESSION

This study identifies oral reappropriation as a strategy of aesthetic expression in Akamba pop songs. In *Orality and Literacy, the technologizing of the word*, Walter J Ong argues, "Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, never writing without orality (8). Ong argues that the element of orality is irreplaceable by any other form of document. Therefore, this study argues that the significance of the folkloric imperative validates the pop artists' composition within the Akamba oral tradition. In *Mikorogo* by Ken Wamaria, the artist employs oral narration to communicate about bleaching by modern African women, specifically Kamba women who are culturally alienated from their African roots. The narrative technique, as an offshoot of orature, is

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morphed into the song genre to flavour a gendered message regarding skin lightening. The artist uses the oral technique to describe *Mikorogo* and its significance in representing the female figure. For Ken Wa Maria, *Mikorogo* cream destroys the beauty of African women by altering their physical beauty. The song proceeds as follows;

Túīkúnā ndānsí Mãkútãnõ nínãã Mbãsù	As we staged a performance with Mbasu L1
Nõnīê ngēthè yãthándìkã yíìlyé Mùsùngú	I saw a young woman looking like a white L2
Ngàsēng'a kwãnì Mákûtānõ kō kwíthãã āsúngù	I wondered whether, in Makutano, There were whites L3
Ngãtúmā Mbãsú àchúngúsē mãúmãã nākú	I sent Mbasu to investigate L4. Mbasu told me in Makutano, there are no whites L5.
Mbāsú ãkāmbíà Mãkùtānò kûyîngwā àsûngù	Those young women have bleached their skins L6
éíwè ní ngèthē syívàkãã mííõ	Mbasu was told these are local girls who have bleached. L7
	The products are "Mikorogo," dangerous chemicals L8

Reflecting on the above excerpt, the artist narrates the story of a young woman to detail how modern trends have brainwashed Kamba women. In this song, the artist identifies bleaching as a practice that dents African womanhood by diluting skin colour. The bleaching process reduces women as subjects who try to fit into a prescribed scheme based on their skin colour, and is pushed by popular media trends that target black women. The argument is that the ideological valorisation of white as powerful in the global power structure leads Black women to use bleaching agents like *Mikorogo,* resulting in a clash of new identities.

The bleaching trend paints a troubled nationhood haunted by the trauma of colonisation. The bleaching process, as narrated by the artist, reveals the female minority at the duality of colonial and African identities. As fronted by the artist, the oral narration argues that colonialism overwrote the African idea of beauty and identity, resulting in the new identity of *Mkorogo,* meaning a mixed identity.

The *Mkorogo* practice shows the effort to mimic the white identity. *Mikorogo* is a clearing gel that scrubs the psychological dirt of "blackness" from the African female body. Using oral narration, the artist illustrates how African women are exploited by bleaching. In *Mikorogo,* we locate the commodification of beauty in the age of consumerism as mapped under an imaginary town known as "*Makutano*' which connotes the encounter of colonialism. *Mikorogo* constructs a mixture of black and white identity oscillating between the colonial past and contemporary epochs.

The bleached woman or *Mkorogo* represents an incomplete transformation from a person of colour to white, symbolising the post-colonial burden on the African woman. Therefore, bleaching acts as an institutionalised occupation of the female body to construct a pseudo-white identity in this identity struggle. In *Conscripts of Modernity:*

In *The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, David Scott elaborates that the dilemmas of colonialism are of mixed fortunes that seek to redeem, vindicate, and emancipate the colonised populace. Scott argues that the romanticisation of slavery as depicted in Black Jacobins offers a review of emancipation:

In short, in The Black Jacobins, James' Toussaint Louverture is imagined as a slave who, in an act of radical will and self-determination, transforms himself into the prefigured image of Raynal's modernist Spartacus. Admittedly, Toussaint will

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never be merely Raynal's hero, but for James, this will be the Enlightenment idiom that gives conceptual and ideological voice to his emancipationist ambitions. (101)

As an enslaved person, Spartacus led the unsuccessful revolt of gladiators against Rome. He is a symbol of resistance against oppression in the ancient Roman Empire. *Mikorogo* parallels the image of an enslaved person with the ambitious "Spartacus " frame. The artist uses oral narration to front the representation of women in the song *Mikorogo,* in that the idea of beauty in *Mkorogo* is a strategy to seek relevance in the age of consumerism. The act of *Mkorogo* is an unsuccessful bid to alter the Black identity to white to blend in with the scheme of beauty favouring light-skinned tones. However, the bleaching process is like an unsuccessful uprising, just like the story of Spartacus challenging the Roman establishment. *Mkorogo,* therefore, is a way of altering black skin to be part of the White establishment, but it ends up oppressing women even more.

In "I Like Your Colour! Skin Bleaching and Geographies of Race in Urban Ghana", Jemima Pierre argues,

> *I contend that skin bleaching practices resonate with a set of racially inflected dynamics that already exist in the local landscape in urban Ghana. Exploring the skin bleaching phenomenon as one of the many ways that particularly racialized understandings of identity and meaning are deployed in contemporary Ghana opens up a new space for us to engage postcolonial Africa in general. Similar to African diaspora societies, postcolonial African societies are also thoroughly and undeniably structured by processes of racialization. (11)*

From the above quote, we consider how the phenomenon of *Mikorogo* annotates the neo-colonial subjugation of the female body as exacerbated by harmful global acculturation. Bleaching creams like *Mkorogo* constructs a "white" identity as a scheme to advance the aspirations of Whites. The bleaching ideology falsely indoctrinates women that white is the gateway to richness, sexual appeal, and higher social status. *Wamaria* thus uses the oral technique to discuss the representation of damage done to the female body through bleaching.

The artist decries that the falsified White identity envisaged by bleaching disappoints men drawn by the superficial female attractiveness. The point is that bleaching ensnares men into falling into the trap of reincarnated "fossils" camouflaged in youthful looks. Thus, Simucrala's analogy of Jean Baulidard says, "The territory is no longer recognisable by the map" (1). The deceptive simulacrum of the bleached body evinces the dilution of African aesthetics as destroyed by dumping the neo-colonial junk of *Mikorogo.*

The bleaching practice mirrors an advertisement push that popularises a product. Women are equalled to products in a market economy, competitively seeking to position themselves as fancy. In this (de)constructed identity aligned to skin tone differences, *Mikorogo* is the low-income woman struggling to survive and resorts to bleaching to attract men in clubs, as posited by the singer.

> *"Mbasu was told these are local girls who have bleached. The products are "Mikorogo" dangerous chemicals."*

Therefore, *Mikorogo* represents the social realities of poor women in rural poor who resort to cheap and hazardous whitening creams since they are not suave and rich enough to afford sophisticated skin-lightening procedures. Moreover, bleached women represent the sexual subaltern who seeks to eroticise her body before the male gaze. In this development, she aims to renegotiate her position based on her skin tone, which sidelines her as the other. Using the whitening cream attempts to bridge the gap of social

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inequalities that binds her to oppression as a black-skinned woman.

The artist calls out women for altering their black skin to wrestle with the objectified inscription of black as unattractive. Through bleaching is a way to change the black identity, women are held captive by the capitalistic gaze, which reduces their human value to sexy and appealing products that serve the interests of the male eye. *Mikorogo* summarily exposes the fractured identities of women who strive to repair their self-imposed fragilities, often driven by the commercialised narratives of global beauty trends. Women's bleaching reveals how skin tone subtly relies on the gratification of the male gaze. The feminine appeal is commodified and fractured to suit the dictates of the male order.

Ken wa Maria's music reveals the changing face of the indigenous African woman subjected to cosmetic standards at the intersection of sexism and colourism. As the narrative takes shape, it is crucial to look at how the artist contextually uses the word "*ngethe*," which refers to a young woman, illuminating how the feminine is at the crossroads of surreal appetite of envisioning herself as light-skinned to ape fetish whiteness.

As a fable, the song calls out westernised cosmetic trends that have shattered the African cultural identity. It reveals how globalisation inculcates emerging trends of beauty among African women. The notion is that by bleaching, women aspire to look more attractive. The artist calls out the idea that "whiteness" is synonymous with attraction, beauty, and elegance, which is not always the case. In line 3, the artist sings

Nõnīê ngēthè yãthándìkā yíìlyé Mùsùngú

I saw a woman looking like a white man *Musungu*

The move fails when men doubt her authenticity and call out her peculiar looks. Okot p' Bitek captures similar observations in *Song of Lawino*, where he avers,

And she believes,

That this is beautiful,

Because it resembles the face of a white woman (37).

Comparing the quoted poem above with the song *Mikorogo*, it is undeniable that the feminine figure is a victim of the damage occasioned by Westernisation. To delineate Africa's dismemberment by foreign cultures, the study considers Ibrahim Wachira *et al*. in "Sexing time and space," note:

In *Broken Glass*, for instance, the Pampers guy and the Printer are gendered to serve as machines for capitalism. Broken by the wiles of capitalism, they lament about structural exploitation, upon which their masculinity is colonised by a local female collaborator and a French white female, Céline, respectively. The colonising female allegorises the working of the colonial gender (31).

Reconciling the above assertion, African women using bleaching chemicals to alter black identity is a gendered subjugation that reduces the bleached females as "erotic subalterns" exploited by the lures of capitalism. Their "diluted" faces only stretch the boundaries of occupation, which operate under the whims of white duplication. Therefore, the bleaching process structurally undermines the exploitation of the female body by harsh social stratification that sidelines her due to skin tone.

The bleached woman as a *Mikorogo* is a victim of indoctrination by popular culture propelled through media socialisation. *Mikorogo* is the "poster woman" for foreign bleaching multinationals who reinforce the female body's subjectivity through psychological domination through colour assimilation.

By bleaching, the *Mikorogo* woman from a subordinate class hopes to ascend to a higher social hierarchy, but the reality is the opposite. As a victim of media socialisation, the capitalists exploit her

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body and gain profits from the sale of harmful products while she is left bearing a myriad of problems, like social rejection and health deprivation.

As the singer exemplifies,

Mbāsú ãkāmbíà Mãkùtānò Those are bleached girls who *kûyîngwā àsûngù éíwè ní ngèthē* use dangerous chemicals (L7) *syívàkãã mííõ*

In "Fair and Lovely": The Concept of Skin Bleaching and Body Image Politics in Kenya, Joyce Khalibwa Okango notes that the media plays a critical role in advancing the bodily image in pop media:

Like in the case of Asia and most African countries, there have been more recent changes in the reception of dark-skinned models, actresses, and television and radio personalities in Kenya. For instance, there are fewer darkskinned models and actresses in magazines and television shows. However, as the preference for light-skinned women in the media industry continues to grow, it is important to note that the inclusion happens in opposing forces with that of dark-skinned women (37).

The idea of women bleaching thus hinges on the crossing points of the social hierarchies constructed by colour differences. In this structure, the *Mkorogo* female is placed at the bottom of the social structure, where she is a commodity whose exchange value is upgraded by altering her skin colour. Her female agency is curtailed simultaneously by commodification and sexual objectification.

Skin lightening forges the perception that a woman will upgrade her social life by attracting wealthy male lovers, unlike women with darker skin. The cosmestized beauty in *Mikorogo* foregrounds the intersecting areas where the female body is subjected to harm by the disproportionate social-economic status often discriminatory to women. Held captive by foreign acculturation and self-hate, black women are subjects of penetrative neo-colonialism now rechanneled through bleaching as a remedy to "pimp" the female body.

By "duplicating" the white skin tone on her body, the African woman is reduced to a slave of beauty commodification. The resulting intersection of their bleached skin and sexuality is intertwined with the politicised identity of black as ugly.

Commenting on the distortion of African cultural aesthetics by hegemonic cultures, Mugo Muhia and Julius Gathogo, in "The Use of Indigenous Resources in Environmental Conservation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Murogi wa Kagogo: a religiocultural perspective," note:

The other effect of modernity can be stretched to cover the distortion of Africans' understanding of themselves. One of the critical components of colonial modernity was the need to change the colonised cultures and way of life to make them useful to the colonising process. The other was the blatant disavowal of the colonised sense of history and therefore identity, institutionalised programs that slowly sought to undermine traditions, accompanied by these processes, at the forefront were religious institutions, formal educational institutions, and direct involvement of colonial administrators. This, in the end, internalised an inferiority complex that persists to this day, i.e., the colour of the skin, where black as a colour was subtly labelled inferior to white: this kind of inferiorisation is textually depicted with Tajirika's attempt to undergo a plastic surgery to change his colour to white. Human beings can be looked at as organisms inhabiting a particular ecosystem, which means that our biological make-up, including the colour of our skin, enables us to survive the conditions of the environments we find ourselves in. Does a thing like plastic surgery or body enhancement operation (as performed by Tajirika, Machokali, or Sikiokuu) then affect our proper interactions with our environment? (8).

The above quotation reveals the multiple domains under which the otherized Africans suffer in

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different marginalised locations. Central to their argumentation is that prototyping African flora and fauna disrupts the ambient ecological environment that Africans lived in for aeons. Imitating Western acculturation impinges on African authenticity, the road map to self-destruction.

In their analysis of identity erosion, we see parallels in how Wamaria discusses the case of bleaching in Kamba ladies. Wamaria's fable itemises colour disparity and sex as areas of women's discrimination.

In "Intersectionality feminism: what it means and why it matters right now," Valdecir Nascimento, a Black Brazilian human rights activist, argues that the panacea to resolving women's issues is centralising their rights. Nascimento calls upon black women to stand up to the challenge and fight for their rights. She posits, "*We should speak for ourselves, but the Black men*." Her sentiments show that colour disparity and ethnic identity is crucial when addressing women's oppression.

Black men and women both suffer from racial segregation, but are not equal. Discrimination against women is on a higher pedestal since their oppression intersects in multiple areas, including gender and race. In buttressing Nascimento's views thus:

> *Using an intersectional lens also means recognising the historical contexts surrounding an issue. Long histories of violence and systematic discrimination have created deep inequities that disadvantage some from the outset. These inequalities intersect with each other, for example, poverty, caste systems, racism, and sexism, denying people their rights and equal opportunities. The impacts extend across generations (https://medium.com/@UN_Women*).

Feminism has led to musicians raising alarms about gender and race interactions. Wamaria's *Mikorogo* ironically addresses African women as whites. He brings us to the conclusion that the Whites are no different from the Black race. Addressing the young African woman as a white helps to realise women's uniformity worldwide, even though the woman figure projected in the song is not white as perceived.

Due to the increase in the bleaching trend, Wamaria, a contemporary musician, offers a feminist solution once considered an exclusively Western-centric idea. He incorporates the Akamba oral technique to discuss the experience of colonial complications and their effect on culture and traditions. In the song, *Kavaluku,* Ken Wamaria reappropriates the Kamba oral narrative to construct patriarchal gender dichotomies. The singer categorises male and female identities using two animals commonly used in the trickster narrative genre. The song uses animal imagery as a representation of gender categories.

Kávàlúkù kēíwē nī Nzōú úyū nî ùsī múlíkú
Ndúkàtãtè kúíngā tã Nzōú
ndúkātwàwê ní kíw'ú
kâvālúkù kèìwē nzōú ndúkátātē úndíá kítāēká nyíè ngúlísē múōngō
ndìkãtwāwē ní kíw'ú (ní wìsī nōkàsãmū kàníní nāwē nzōù ní strong

Don't attempt crossing it like an elephant, you will be washed away by the waters. The hare then told the elephant Please don't leave me. L2

Let me climb on your back so that I don't get washed away (the hare is a small creature, while the elephant is strong). L3

The elephant once told the hare that this River is deep

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The song details a trickster narrative that constructs the social profiles of the hare versus the elephant as set in the Akamba orature. The artist uses the trickster narrative of two animals to represent the class and power indifference that distinctly separates them. Brought together by the fate of crossing a river, the hare and elephant binaries expose the social domains they occupy.

The elephant is a burly and strong figure who dictates the social order in the animal world. Conversely, the hare is otherized and condemned by the converging areas of limited social mobility that marginalise her as small and, thus, relatively inferior to the burly elephant. Therefore, the intersection of class and power structures marginalises the hare, which is naturally smaller than the elephant.

Wa Maria uses the trickster narrative to describe the relationship between men and women in the marriage institution. The animals' descriptive analysis (hare and elephant) locates the gender hyperbole entrenched in the song's central message. The corresponding attributes hinged on the animal-human equivalent to aid the audience in pondering the gender theme. The artist dichotomises women as the diminutive hare, while the elephant symbolises the male figure. In the song, the hare is characterised as small, weak, cunning, and sinister, while the elephant is big, strong, and foolish. The artist remaps the contemporary marriage situation where there are incidences of ungratefulness, backstabbing, and betrayal.

His imaginative analogy begins with a woman asking for assistance and is imagined through the hare's cries for help to cross a flooded river. The artist constructs the flooded river as an essential rite of passage held in high regard in the form of marriage. Crossing the river illustrates the courtship and marriage period contextualised in the Akamba setup. In the aftermath, the singer identifies women as cunning and ungrateful for their male partners' sacrifice, only to be abandoned later, as described in this line.

Kāvàlúkù kãíng'wã ní nzōú, màvíkíè ōnēsã When the elephant helped the hare, they crossed over well L6

In a veiled attack on women, the artist calls women plastic companions, vilified through the hare character. In refusing to cling to protracted power and class imbalances, the woman resolves to abandon the marriage.

lākínī úkèndā ísā ùsyōkã mbãkâ wíkālìlyê (ní wísī Nzōù nī wâ shúghûlî mbíngí)	If the hare wants to return, it will have to fend for itself. L8

The gender binaries in this trickster narrative illuminate how social positions marginalise women. In the social-cultural space, the artist constructs how imaginary boundaries of gender reinforce women's exclusion. In the pretext of helping the hare, the elephant takes advantage of the latter's low-lying stature and social status to impose his will upon her.

Similarly, in the song "*Nyamu Mbai*," meaning "Dangerous animal," Sanita has progressively organised his gender theme through an animal tale. He subtly uses animal figures to construct gender identities, thus imploring his audience to ponder over his themed message regarding animal images. Sanita employs animal imagery to describe the different vile traits associated with women.

The song categorises gender identities using the predators and prey's animal food chain. In his descriptive song, Sanita identifies women with wild and dangerous animals like the cheetah, leopard, Rhinos, and buffalo, often associated with destructive power. The song proceeds as follows;

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Nyàmú íwè tã ng'ō mbõõ ndwīkí cheetah ná mbúsyã ngúūwē nyãmú ísú syí ngãthé	Animals like leopards, rogue buffalos, cheetahs, and rhinos **Line1**
íyēndāā kúkúníwā kēlèlē syí ngúlú	Warthogs, those animals, when speared, don't like to be disturbed **L2**
Nyāmū ísú ng'ēndú syíthāã nã kyúã kíngì syìngãthê mãnyã	They are dangerous **L3**
níúküãngà úkéw'à wètwã yìthàā yínāã	Vicky's son is shocked by the boys of the day who once, upon spearing these animals, made a lot of noise **L4**

Sanita's song uses the oral trickster to show how sexual binaries of male and female are constructed using wild animals. The female world is positioned as the "wild frontier" with intersecting traits that warrant a male occupation through sexual intercourse. Sex serves as the domesticating bait that brings the chaotic life of a woman under control.

The artist contends that the "hunting" of women is a containment measure used to maintain social order.

In this awkward co-existence, the argument is that the female body is at the mercy of the phallic power as projected by the hunter's shooting in his "wild" escapades. The singer signals the sexual conquest of the female body as the gratifying symbol of male power. On the other hand, the different descriptive elements regarding women notify the symbolic domains under which women are oppressed. In these identities brought forward by the animal imagery, women are marginalised within the hierarchies of a social system that doesn't privilege them. Depicting women as a set of animals with vile attributes signifies their relegation to the bottom of the social stratum. At the bottom, women are powerless against multiple power structures suppressing their agency.

In line four of the song, we locate the male order's set of inequalities pitted against the female world. The intersecting areas of women's oppression are sex and social status. The two areas of oppression curtail women's ability to express their sexuality. By invoking sexual conquest as a controlling measure, women are discriminated against based on sex and are unable to access similar opportunities as men.

The artist constructs women as perilous beings that call for careful handling when aiming for one. He employs a series of metaphors to criticise the female demeanour by using the leopard, a ferocious animal associated with deadly attacks on its prey. Women are called leopards because their spots help the animal camouflage and are stealthy while hunting prey. The artist deconstructs males as hopeless prey represented as calves in the song. The masculine figure is toppled over by a female, symbolised by the leopard marauding the male calves, as indicated in line seven of the song.

DICTION AND THE LINGUISTIC SEXUALIZATION OF WOMEN

Diction refers to the style of writing or speaking typified by certain words and phrases depending on a certain context, situation, and audience. In *Miss Musembi,* the artist's choice of words accentuates male dominance in society. In the song, the female figure is under sexual conquest by an unwavering male who declares a "love battle" with her. Wa Maria endorses a tripartite form of subjugation based on sex, gender, and class in this piece. Miss Musembi cuts an image of a sexually exploited working female under the yoke of inequality.

Wa Maria employs diction to eroticize Miss *Musembi's* femininity. The artist's choice of "prowl" and "snatch" in his femininity references alerts us to the patriarchal subjugation directed towards *Miss Musembi*. The above words endorse women's commodification," since women's existence borders a freehold entity that should be

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occupied. The artist doesn't stomach the idea that a woman should exist without a male companion. Therefore, he pampers his female target by praising the cologne she wears to describe his sexual fantasies. In his description of the feminine figure, the artist accentuates objectification.

The song's diction manifests how men sexualize women, destroying their noble womanhood. In this song, the female corporeality is usurped by the male masculinity establishment of multiple categories of subjugation. *Miss Musembi,* as a female teacher, carries maternal responsibilities as a mother and provider of knowledge. However, she is not recognised for her professionalism. The artist's avowal to "stalk and seek pleasure" shows a coercive way to win over *Miss Musembi's* heart. The sexual rhetoric used to register feelings of affection by the artist reduces her body to an object of pleasure. In another instance of language use, Katombi says that the slay queen is a high-end girl who is expensive to maintain. Women are described as using exotic labels to represent their identities. In the song Slay Queen, the artist uses the word "*Karembo high end*" to refer to escort girls who make huge demands from men. The song proceeds as follows,

Mbēvī slay queen karembo highend kãnã slay queen nā kēnã ngālāmã
Syîndū ílã kē kwēndã nãsyõ ní highend nãkõ ní highend í kílãsì kī júú
Salon high-end mbévī west lands nā syō ngúã nì Versace na Gucci
Nà ngãli kèkwēndã ìla Mercedes sport mùndū wã nyē yā mīlīōnī ìkûmí
Símū ìlã kēkwēndã nì iphone xx ngīlī yīãnã nā mbãō
ninguuwa syindu kekwenda ni kana kamanye kana

Baby slayqueen, you are too expensive. L1. The things you want are much higher-end, and you also high-end your class is too high-end. L2
High-end salon, baby, Westlands, and the clothing brands are Versace and Gucci. L3
Salon high-end mbevi west lands na syo ngua ni Versace na Gucci. L4
The car you want is a Mercedes sports car which costs ten million shillings. L5
The phones she wants include iPhone X, which cost hundred and twenty thousand. L6

The slay queen also denotes a female gold digger, showing a flashy life. The expensive brands of Versace and Gucci represent the commercialisation of the female body. The description of women is pegged on the symbols of capitalism, while their agency and value are destroyed. Femininity is described using flashy commodities that border on female objectification.

The song, *Kwi aka na iveti,* by Nick Kisomo's proverbial title, embellishes its overall message. In the proverbial statement, "Women exist, but not all wives," the artist's proclamation seeks to address decision-making in life. Kisomo cautions that making hasty judgments can prove to be costly. The proverb uses a woman's image in two divergent ways that lean on the desirable elements of wives and the tainted traits that separate "woman" and "wife." The song proceeds as follows;

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Kúù kwí áká wákwá índí tí ívétí	There are women, not wives L1
Syíndú mbánáké yáái	Beautiful from toe to head L2
múváká mútwé	Let me explain what I mean L3
Kává küéléang'yá múnò	Marry one and suffer forever L4
òkìlá wísí	Just know the problem is to choose L5
Mányá kwí ívétí índì thìnà níwá úsákúà	You see the face and like it. There is foul play You may
Wòòná múndú súrá tí ùímwéndá	marry her and
Mbésá yú ní wáválúká	suffer L6

The artist's message resonates with the English proverb, "*All that glitters is not gold*." In an exemplary way, Kisomo advises men to choose character over "flowery looks" when settling for a wife. Thus, the wife's dilemma offers the reality of life: what glitters might be a dangerous fire. The proverb registers the biased male-dominated view that assumes all women are evil, but amongst them are good wives. In a summary dismissal of women's credibility, the music offers no refuge for women's reputation since it reconstructs the Biblical allusion that a woman occasioned the man's fall in the Garden of Eden.

Women's urge and thirst to campaign and strive for acknowledgement and liberty have been met with a lukewarm reception. In their endeavour toward self-realisation, feminists decry repudiated dominance by their male counterparts with vigorous enthusiasm. Musicians like Ken wa Maria and Katombi use prevalent language to represent women and reduce them to nondescript beings, often portraying them as sexual objects. For instance, Wa Maria, in his song *Sheila Baby*, argues that women are beings that are meant for reproductive purposes,

Sheila baby níêndá nzyáè nàkú wêsà utwàwā wònàè vísà ísú yàkwā	My desire Sheila is that I want us to make babies so that when you get married, you see my face. L5

The artist projects how utter masculine dominance is weaponised against females through sexual subjugation. Wa Maria points out immodestly that he desires to have kids with Sheila, and through his diction, it's crystal clear that reproduction helps in subduing women. The artist relegates Sheila's stature to an object men use to satisfy their sexual thirst.

First-Person Narratives and the Contestation of Female Agency

First-person narration refers to when a narrator gives a story based on their point of view. In Makindu sisters' song *"Kuma natwawa,*" the artist employs first-person narration to illuminate how women have self-induced misogyny. In her composition, the singer calls out fellow women who have tried to convince her to join the illicit trade of prostitution. The song narrates the personal lamentation of a woman lured to abandon her married life and venture into twilight life. The first-person narration thus aids in bringing out how sisterhood amongst women works against the course of women's liberation. The singer proceeds as follows,

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Kúmā nātwãwã nānyīē ndīkwēndã kūtīā mūùmē wãkwã mãthēthī mēmbīã nítīē múùmē mãkãmbōnīè wīā wã kūtã kītìmbã īlōvì *yú ãkã mēmbīā nītīè múümē mãkāmbōnīé wīã mūsēō mītãã yā ílōvî*	Since I got married and I don't want to leave my husband, Line1 Haters tell me to desert my husband so that they can recruit me into prostitution L2 Women ask me to abandon my husband, and they show me a good job in Nairobi L3 They say selling my body is a well-paying job. L4

As used by the artist, the first-person narration helps spread the enlightenment message to fellow women. In the song, a married woman confesses how her female friends have offered to pimp her out to men. In this protracted "sell-out," her femininity is subdued. The song constructs how low-income women are dependent on their spouses and are easy targets for falling into illicit trade. It's absurd that fellow women act as intermediaries of prostitution, undermining female agency. Driven by consumerist culture, they are soaked into patriarchal acculturation that normalises their exploitation.

While the woman rejects the rogue's advice, the artist calls out the role of women in advocating prostitution. Women are coerced to forfeit their agency for monetary gain by supplying their bodies to the male demand. Thus, the struggle for women's liberation suffers a heavy blow since the above statements don't inspire unity amongst fellow females. As inscribed in the song's first-person diction, women have culturally prescribed the patriarchal order of submitting to the phallic power. Therefore, the artist seeks to challenge the state of affairs and inject sense into fellow women regarding the need to stand up for their dignity as responsible members of society.

Motifs of Sexuality and Objectification in Song Lyrics

Motif refers to the recurrent pattern of images that communicates a certain theme. In this section, the study discusses motifs as running sets of sustaining images in some songs under study to represent women. The study argues that sustaining images discusses women's representation in selected Akamba music. For instance, the image of sex is used as a central definition of a woman. It has been depicted in more than one song, thus a sustaining symbol that has the power to define women as objects of male desire. For instance, in the song *Kindu ni Mwitilye*, the artist describes the female reproductive organ or the "thing" he uses the image of the vagina to reduce women to mere bodies of pleasure. Women are perceived as only available for sex. They are "things," a derogatory term that reduces them to sluts. The image of sex is used repetitively to describe how men see women. Although it is used as a language of seduction, it undermines a woman's identity by stereotyping her as a slut. As a language of love, it is (mis)used to communicate the inherent feelings of lust men have toward women. Therefore, the motif of sex isolates a woman through the erotic description, which constructs her as a sexual subaltern silenced by male desire.

In another song, *Kutomba* by Katombi, the image of sex is also a gratifying symbol of male desire. The artist sings about having several women as a way of dominance. The artist eroticizes femininity through the sexual image of the male phallus conquering the female body. Male dominance is depicted through the coitus activity, where a master lover talks about having a sex orgy with girls.

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Mbású ní kísíngá kívyú kìná mwákí úká wé wíyònéé sōlō íkúkúñwā tē íkúvévâ *Ngwété solo mwánàké ákà nò kútōmbá kísíngá níkyálílìiē*	Mbasu am the burning log of fire, come and see the master soloist who plays the guitar skilfully at night. When I have my guitar, women just whine the log of fire is burning L4 & L5

In the above quote, the images of a guitar, a burning log of fire, and a master soloist swinging his guitar are symbols of male dominance used to illustrate the sexualization of women. The artist uses phallic symbols to signify the intrusion into the female body in an aggressive way that dents womanhood. The above images portray the (mis)use of seductive power by men who desire to objectify women's representation in society. Similarly, in the set of images of objects of pleasure in *Miss Musembi*, a woman is reduced to a plaything or a sexual object through sexual overtones to express sexual fantasies about a female teacher.

In this song, *Miss Musembi* is deemed an object available for sex but not for her value as a teacher. Through objectification, Miss Musembi is silenced through the archetypal portrayal as a sexual object that gratifies the male admirer. Another instance of the image of sex is illustrated in Ken Wamaria's '*Fundamentals*,' where he addresses women as 'things.' He uses local dialects to figure out that women are just objects. He further claims the 'things' are his. An indication that women are not allowed to exercise freedom by implying women are "fundamental is sarcastic and manipulative of their dignity;

hizi ni vitu *ìthī nï syīndù ici ni indo*	These are the things These are the things These are the things

The sex motif is illustrated when the artist employs the phrase "these are the things," loosely referring to their sexual appeal. The artist repeatedly uses the phrase in a multilingual way to emphasise objectification. Referring to women as "*hizi*," "*ithi*", and "*ici*" vilifies women as objects of men. Wa Maria provides the cultural context and setting of the traditional male gaze in sexualizing women. Using code-switching to depict gender posturing illustrates the normalcy of women's oppression in the localised Kenyan society. Swahili, English, Kamba, and Kikuyu languages emphasise women's sexualized and ethnical marginalization.

Additionally, Ken wa Maria, in the song '*Mukorea*,' uses an ethnic motif in addressing tribal discrimination, where he narrates a story of a woman of biracial origin. In this song, Wamaria's piece expounds on how culture clash entrenches women's subjugation. Faced with the dilemma of "handling" a Maasai-Korean woman, the artist invokes love charms from Kitui to neutralise his lover. In the Akamba oral history, the Maasai community was revered as a formidable enemy due to the numerous battles between neighbouring communities. Thus, the artist raises his suspicion about the biracial woman's motive, who attempts to lure him into the love dragnet. The artist proceeds as follows,

nyá múkóréā nā íthē nī mùmàsãì
ēndã nìvãndē ítúmô nã āìndēmbēsyā Korea
nākwã nōtā ngùkìā Kãrãtá vújo syā kìmásãi nãmînà úvàndá ítúmò

Her mother is Korean, and her father is a Maasai L1
She wants me to strike the spear L2
I am seemingly afraid. L3

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He sings, 'She wants me to plant a spear,' which is a euphemism for 'she wants me to have sex with her.' The artist uses the sexual metaphor to foreground how cultural clashes invigorate ethnic discrimination. The biracial woman at the centre of this conflict symbolises the experiences racial minorities undergo in societal enclaves. Pursuing the song's racial theme, it is clear that its determining issues are indeed in the utopian sphere. However, the prominence of marginalised voices who have built the voices of reason, and the impact of female awakening, have changed cultural dialogues, opening up conversations that previously took place among small communities to become topics for mainstream discussions.

CONCLUSION

Language, Power, and the Marginalisation of Women in Akamba Music

This study has demonstrated how stylistic strategies in Akamba pop music articulate and perpetuate women's marginalisation through gendered language and imagery. Oral traditions, diction, and recurring motifs combine to produce a complex narrative that reflects the intersections of gender, race, and class oppression. The music preserves cultural heritage but also reveals the persistent influence of patriarchy and neo-colonial legacies on women's identities.

By engaging with these stylistic devices critically, Akamba pop music can serve as a site for feminist resistance and the decolonisation of gender narratives, ultimately contributing to the struggle for women's empowerment.

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