

Representations of Gender in Alcohol, Bhang, and Sex Referenced Kenyan Popular Music

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Abstract: This study analysed alcohol, bhang, and sex referenced Kenya popular music sang by both male and female artist to examine gender representations. This is a descriptive study relying on Fairclough's strand of critical discourse analysis, both as a theory and as a method of analysis because it provides theoretical foundation and specific methods for analysis of discursive practices. Purposive sampling was used to select 5 alcohol, bhang, and sex referenced Kenyan popular songs sung by Shuttle, Wahu, Camp Mulla, Mejja, and Jimwat that have been played in Kenyan FM stations. Data collections was done by using the internet to search for and download music lyrics (both audio and transcribed lyrics) because most Kenyan popular songs are available on the internet and they can be accessed with ease. The findings of this research indicated that alcohol, bhang, and sex reference Kenyan popular music construct different representations of men and women.

Keywords: Representations, discourse, critical, power, ideology, gender.

INTRODUCTION

There are observable trends in Kenyan popular music that refers to alcohol, bhang, and sex and bears gender representations. The music often refers to alcohol, bhang, and sex and represents men as physically and emotionally strong, wealthy and powerful, and as knowledgeable, while representing women as submissive and dependent on men, grateful to their generous men, emotionally and physically weak, and as sexual objects for men's enjoyment, admiration and appreciation.

The composition of the aforementioned songs picked up in 2000s, mainly because of the liberalization of the Kenyan airwaves and unfavourable economic conditions that resulted in unemployment and the removal of government control on prices of commodities. In addition, there was increased exposure to western music, access to cheap production technologies and a robust media [1]. There were also the rise of corporate social responsibly programmes in companies and Non Benefit Organizations (NBOs). The companies and NBOs funded music talent competitions while liberalization of the Kenyan Airwaves led to the opening of many radio and television stations that acted as a platform "where controversial issues such as sexuality, and gender roles were publicly discussed" [2]. Exposure of African America popular music to Kenyan music artist resulted in Kenyan popular music

artists borrowing from popular American musical trends [3, 4] resulting in popular music that praises alcohol, explicitly mention sex, and bears different representations of men and women.

Statement of the Problem

Though there is a link between popular music and gender representations, most studies have focused on how alcohol, drug, and sex referenced popular music lead listeners to consume alcohol and get involved in sex, often leaving out gender representations. Therefore, there is need to examine modes of representation of men and women in alcohol, bhang, and sex referenced Kenyan popular music.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Analysis of alcohol, bhang, and sex referenced Kenyan songs agrees with observations found in existing scholarly works that popular music often presents gender representations of masculinity and femininity. Dibben [5], observed that popular music represent women as submissive, childlike, and sexually available. Leonardi and Dickinson [6] observed that popular music represents women as passive, shallow, and unengaged. In addition, Calhoun said that popular music represented men as always in control, as strong physically, as having control over women, as achievers, as adventurers, and as heterosexual performers. This composition of songs that construct gender

representations is not unique only to males who dominate music industry but also to some extent to women [7, 8]. Mulvey [9] and Glanville and Campbell [10] observed that domination of the airwaves with music that bears gender ideology would mean reproducing and affirming dominance over women.

Popular music is located within popular culture. Popular culture is defined by social scientist as urban, low literate or oral, often mass-produced and disseminated through the mass media and other forms of mass entertainment [11]. However, in Africa, popular culture comes to define the production of the working class, both urban and rural as opposed to urban only [12], as this research affirms. Mass production and dissemination suggest that the music appeals to a large number of people from all social classes and gender.

Though linguistic authenticity of popular culture may determine its popularity and commercial viability [13] across a wide range of social strata, popularity and commercial viability may lie in how listeners perceive its creators as attractive, powerful, and successful. Frith [14] observed that “popular music is popular not because it reflects something or authentically articulates some sort of popular taste or experience, but because it creates our understanding of what popularity is”. Audience often comes to accept music as popular after perceiving the music’s composers as popular and successful. Though many popular songs say negative things and subordinate women, women still listen to, buy their CDs, and dance to their songs [15].

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Fairclough’s strand of Critical Discourse Analysis (distinguished from other strands in the above discussion on literature on theory), to analyse Kenyan popular music for construction of gender ideology and power relations. Fairclough theorize that discourse (form of social practice) function ideologically by constituting the social world and by being constituted by other social practices [16]. According to Fairclough [17], this construction of the world involves reproduction or change of knowledge, identities, and social relations including power relations [18].

According to Fairclough, critical discourse analysis involves analysing ways that people interact to produce social life [19]. People produce social life for example when they use language to construct different representation of men and women, to construct society and reproduce unequal relations of power between different social categories. Since the ways that people use language often portrays relations between men and women as common sense and natural, the main task of critical discourse analysis is to uncover gender

ideologies, and develop critical skills to critique and analyse discourse and social relations [20].

The term ‘critical’ in Fairclough’s strand of critical discourse analysis operates on the premise that society and social relations are socially constructed (meaning discursively produced) in a way that society and unequal relations between social categories such as gender are portrayed as commonsense and natural. This approach to discourse analysis follow from Fairclough’s understanding of discourse as doing ideological work – representing, constructing society, and reproducing unequal relations of power. Fairclough [21] observed that ‘ideologies are most effective when it workings are less visible’.

Fairclough also provides a methodology for analysing discourse. This methodology is composed of textual analysis (involving analysis of vocabulary, grammar, semantics, the sound systems, and cohesion above sentence level) [22], discourse practice (involving analysis of process of production and consumption, also described as articulation of various discourses), and social practice (involving analysis of the larger socio-cultural context) [22].

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the descriptive research design. The research used purposive sampling to sample 17 Kenyan popular songs that refers to alcohol, bhang, and sex and that have been played in Kenyan FM radio stations. Purposive sampling was used because the researcher wanted Kenyan popular songs that refers to alcohol, bhang, and sex and in the process enact gendered representations. Effort was also made to sample songs both sang by male and female artists in order to highlight the consciousness of male and female artists of masculine ideologies through their music. Though these songs are available in shops as CDs and DVDs, the songs were collected using the internet because it is cheaper and convenient.

The study explored modes of representations of men and women by analysing the contents of songs. Analysis of the contents of text (songs in this study) is part of analysis that goes on in Fairclough’s three-discourse framework (text, discourse practice, and social practice). Because of fluidity of urban/sheng words, online Urban Dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com/define) and English Sheng Dictionary (sheng.co.ke) were referred to during transcription of the urban/sheng words. Transcription was also guided by the way the urban/sheng words are used in the songs.

THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

Fairclough’s three dimensions of text analysis - namely textual analysis, discourse practice, and social practice, have analysis of the contents of text as part of

what is analysed. This is because examination of the contents of text enables a researcher or the readers of research work to be able to tell what is going [21]. Following Fairclough’s frameworks of text analysis, this study carried out content analysis of the songs to examine modes of representation of men and women.

Gender and Wealth

This study revealed that alcohol, bhang, and sex referenced songs often represent men as wealthy and women as submissive and dependent on men. Gender wealth differentiations are evident in a song by Shuttle entitled “Classic Kaplong”. In Kiswahili – English lyrical translation excerpt below, Shuttle asked her male friend how much money he has brought (line 1

and 2 of verse 1) and he tells her that he was bringing 50 000 Kenya shillings (line 3 and 4 of verse 1). Shuttle also asked her male friend about the vehicle he drives (line 3 and 4 of verse 2) who then replied that he was driving a black KBQ (line 5 of verse 2). Because of the wealth of his male friend, Shuttle becomes totally dependent and submissive to him. She tells him “Ingemi Classic Kaplong baby” (When we are at Classic-Kaplong – line 3 of verse 3), “Ingibur keikun free” (Lets stay free – line 4 of verse 3), “Classic komi korik chekeruei” (there are rooms for sleeping at Classic – line 4 of verse 4). Then the male tell Shuttle to ask whatever she wants (line 5 and 6 of verse 3) and he will pay the bill (line 7 of verse 3).

<i>Kipsigis (Kalenjin dialect)</i>	<i>English</i>
<p>Song: Classic Kaplong Artist: Shuttle</p> <p>Verse 1 (Shuttle)</p> <p>1. Keebu siling ata ooh <u>baby</u>? 2. Keebu siling ata ooh <u>baby</u>?</p> <p>(male friend)</p> <p>3. Aibu 50 000 sweeti 4. Aibu 50 000 sweeti</p> <p>Verse 2 (Shuttle)</p> <p>3. Ibutu karit ainon ooh <u>baby</u> wee? 4. Ibutu karit ainon ooh <u>baby</u> wee?</p> <p>(male friend)</p> <p>5. Abunu KBQ netui ooh sweeti</p> <p>Verse 3 (Shuttle)</p> <p>1. Unee oh Salendo Rono en Mombasa? 2. Iyomunei ani Dominic en Garisa nam kokotiet 3. Ngemi Classic Kaplong <u>baby</u> 4. Ngibur keikun <u>free</u></p> <p>(Male friend)</p> <p>5. Teb tuguk chekemach ooh sweeti 6. Teb tuguk chekemach ooh sweeti 7. Nenyun bilit iman ooh sweeti</p>	<p>Song: Classic Kaplong Artist: Shuttle</p> <p>Verse 1 (Shuttle)</p> <p>1. How much money did you bring baby? 2. How much money did you bring baby?</p> <p>(male friend)</p> <p>3. I am bringing 50 000 sweety 4. I am bringing 50 000 sweety</p> <p>Verse 2 (Shuttle)</p> <p>3. What vehicle are traveling in baby? 4. What vehicles are traveling in baby?</p> <p>(male friend)</p> <p>5. Am travelling in a black car sweety</p> <p>Verse 3 (Shuttle)</p> <p>1. How is it Salendo Rono in Mombasa? 2. How are you and Dominic at Garisa 3. Receive greetings 4. At Classic Kaplong, lets feel free Lets feel free</p> <p>(male friend)</p> <p>5. Ask whatever you want sweety 6. Ask whatever you want sweety 7. The bill is mine sweety</p>

This study also shows that apart from alcohol referenced Kenyan popular songs that portray women as sexual objects, there are also bhang referenced Kenyan popular that represent men as wealthy. An excerpt of a song entitled, “Fresh All Day”, discussed above in relations to gender and wealth, and provided below, says, “well I got money to blow, and shawty I

ain't trippin so you already know" (line 13 of verse 1), "and all she wanna see is ac ouple of more Gs". A couple of more Gs in this song mean thousands amount of money (line 12 of verse 1). This song, by Camp Mulla, also takes sexual objectification of women to another by portraying them as goods that men purchase and consume.

Song: Fresh All Day
Artist: Camp Mulla (K Cous)

Verse 1
(K'Cous)

10. and we be on that *weed* from early
11. OG smoking on that Oz
12. and all she *wanna* see is a couple more *Gs*
13. well I got money to blow, and *shawty* I *ain't trippin* so you already know

This study also reveals existence of Kenyan popular music that refers to alcohol and sex, and tends to challenge men's superior position in relation to women, but at the same time, constructs gendered ideologies that assign more power to men. Analysis of song for evidence of challenge of men's superior position or construction of gendered ideologies goes beyond lyrics to include voice inflection, beat, and rhythm [23].

Through lyrics, voice inflection, beat, and rhythm, Wahu in the the same lines of her song entitled "Sitishiki" ends up challenging men's superior position at the same time reasserting representation of men as wealthy and powerful. Though fierce and passionate vocals and lyrics, Wahu construct ideologies that represent women as self-assured, independent, and authoritative [24], the song also represents men as having a lot of money, as the ones paying the bills, while representing women as dependent on them. The Kiswahili – English lyrical translation excerpt of the song, provided below, says, "sitishiki wewe hunitishi na hizo hela zako hazinitishi" (I am not afraid, and you can't make me afraid with your money; ooh can't threaten me – line of the chorus), "sizubai hunizubaishi na hizo hela zako hazinitishi" (I am not confuse, and you can't make me confuse with your money; ooh can't threaten me – line 2 of the chorus), "Anicheki chini na juu asema I'am fine", (He looks at me from the feet upto the head and says that I am fine – line 1 of verse 2), "And sexy too so he buy me a drink or two" (*And sexy too so he buy me a drink or two – line 2 of verse 2*), "And expect me to go home with you(*And expect me to go home with you – line 3 of verse 2*), "Songa nyuma take a good look" (*Move a step backward take a good look – line 4 of verse 2*), "Songa mbele pole pole"(*Move forward slowly slowly – line 5 of verse 2*), "Chunga brother usiteleze"(*Take care brother so that you don't trip – line 6 of verse 2*), "Sikiza basi nikueleze"(*Listen then so that I explain to you – line 7 of verse 2*).

<i>Kiswahili/Sheng</i>	<i>English</i>
<p>Song: Sitishiki Artist: Wahu</p> <p>Chorus</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Sitishiki wewe hunitishi na hizo hela zako hazinitishi</i> 2. <i>Sizubai hunizubaishi na hizo hela zako hazinitishi</i> <p>Verse 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Anicheki chini na juu asema <u>I'am fine</u></i> 2. <i><u>And sexy too so he buy me a drink or two</u></i> 3. <i><u>And expect me to go home with you</u></i> 4. <i><u>Songa nyuma take a good look</u></i> 5. <i><u>Songa mbele pole pole</u></i> 6. <i><u>Chunga brother usiteleze</u></i> 7. <i><u>Sikiza basi nikueleze</u></i> 	<p>Song: Sitishiki Artist: Wahu</p> <p>Chorus</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>I am not afraid, and you can't make me afraid with your money; ooh can't threaten me</i> 2. <i>I am not confuse, and you can't make me confuse with your money; ooh can't threaten me</i> <p>Verse 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>He looks at me from the feet upto the head and says that I am fine.</i> 2. <i>And sexy too so he buy me a drink or two</i> 3. <i>And expect me to go home with you</i> 4. <i>Move a step backward take a good look</i> 5. <i>Move forward slowly slowly</i> 6. <i>Take care brother so that you don't trip</i> 7. <i>Listen then so that I explain to you</i>

Gender and Sexuality

This study reveals existence of alcohol, bhang, and Kenya popular songs that represent women as sexually available. A Kiswahili – English lyrical translation of a song entitled, "Under 18," discussed

above in relations to gender and wealth, and provided below, says, "akaniampia badala ya kumpiga makumbo (instead of - line 13 of verse 3), "twende home kwao nikampiga manyundo (I go with her to their home and I line 14 of verse 3), "nikacheka tu" (I just laugh – line

15 of verse 3), “nikaweka tu” (I just have insert – line 16 of verse 3), “Kwa kitanda hadi saa saba nikafyeka tu

(in the bed, I went on having sex upto 1 pm – line 17 of verse 3).

<i>Kiswahili/Sheng</i>	<i>English</i>
Song: Under 18 Song: Jimwat	Song: Under 18 Song: Jimwat
Verse 1 1. <u>life</u> ni <u>stressing</u> sikatai 2. lakini ni <u>blessing</u> kuwa hai 3. ndio maana kila <i>furahiday</i> yanibidi nafurahi	Verse 1 1. life is stressful I don't dispute 2. it is a blessing to be alive 3. that is why every Friday I must be happy
Verse 3 14. twende <u>home</u> kwao nikampige <i>manyundo</i> 15. nikacheka tu 16. nikaweka tu 17. kwa kitanda hadi saa saba nikafyeka tu	Verse 3 14. I should go with her to her home so that I could hammer her 15. I just laugh 16. I just laid her on bed until 17. in the bed until 1 pm I just went on slashing

Another artist known as *Mejja* in another song entitled “*Land Lord*”, also represent women as sexually available. In a Kiswahili – English lyrical translation of the song provided below, he says, “tunakula steers nanua beer” (we eat meat I buy beer – line 10 of verse 2), “kisha zikabamba anaanza kuniambia” (she became emotional and says – line 11 of verse 2) “sikujui lakini

nakutaka” (though I do not know you, I desire you nevertheless - line 12 of verse 2). Though it is not explicitly mentioned in this song, this song suggest that men are represented as powerful because they are able to control their emotions, as opposed to women who are unable to.

<i>Kiswahili/Sheng</i>	<i>English</i>
Song: Land Lord Artist: Mejja	Song: Land Lord Artist: Mejja
Verse 2 10. tunakula <u>Steers</u> nanunua beer 11. kisha zikimbamba anaanza kuniambia 12. sikujui lakini nakutaka	Verse 2 10. we ate steers and drink beer 11. then she became happy and say 12. I don't know you but I desire you nevertheless

Gender, alcohol consumption, strength, and emotion

This study found out that there are some songs that represent men has strong while representing women as emotional. Scholars have observed that the representation of men as having ability to consume large amounts of alcohol without being greatly affected “may help to demonstrate that the drinker is manly [25, 26], meaning that men are able to consume large amount of alcohol without being affected.

An excerpt of a song entitled, “Thirsty,” provided below, represents men as able to regain their strength even though they are drunk, hence the song portrays male’s drinking as an emblem of male’s power over women. Camp Mulla and Idris Jones in line 10 of verse 2 say, “get knocked down and *Imma* (meaning I am going to) make a comeback like *Jojo* (Jojo refers to a character known as Vampire in Jojo’s bizarre encyclopedia that has great strength and is capable of regenerating), “yo Cous get the bitches round, its nine

o’clock and I just got a knickers gun” (line 11 of verse 2). “*Imma* (I am going to) make a comeback means regaining strength and control. This song implies that men are strong and in control even after drinking a lot of alcohol and getting drunk.

Song: Thirsty

Artist: Camp Mulla (K Cous) and Idris Jones

Verse 2

10. get knocked down and *Imma* make a come back like Jojo
11. yo Cous get the beaches round, it's nine o'clock and I just got a knickers gun

Another song by an artist known as Jimwat, entitled “*Mpaka Che*” represents men as able to drink for a long time without losing their strength, while it represent women only as readily available for sex. Jimwat, in a Kiswahili – English lyrical translation of

the song, says that men would like to drink for the whole night (lines 15 and 16 of verse 1 and the chorus) and go to gym the following morning (line 17 of

verse1), while damsels want game (sex) for the whole night (line 18 of verse 1) and wake up in the morning with hangovers.

<i>Kiswahili/Sheng</i>	<i>English</i>
<p>Song: Mpaka Che Artist: Jimwat</p> <p>Verse 1 (Pilipili) 15. <i>maboys</i> wanataka kupewa mpaka che 16. asubuhi waamke waende <u>gym</u> tizi 17. <i>madame</i> wanataka game mpaka che 18. asubuhi waamke na <i>Jimwizzy</i></p>	<p>Song: Mpaka Che Artist: Jimwat</p> <p>Verse 1 (pilipili) 14. what do you went 15. boys went to be given till dawn 16. in the morning they wake up for the gym 17. ladies want sex till dawn 18. in the morning they wake up with hangovers</p>

CONCLUSION

Review of literature on gender representations in alcohol, bhang, and sex referenced Kenyan popular music was done, and it was found out that there were some literature that asserts that songs construct different representations of men and women. In agreement with this literature, analysis of the songs revealed that alcohol, bhang, and sex-referenced songs often construct various gender representations.

First, it was found out that the songs construct gender representation by representing men as having a lot of money, as the ones paying bills while women are represented as submissive, dependent on men, and as grateful for their men's generosity. It was also revealed that the songs construct gender ideology and power relations by representing men as strong while women are represented as weak, emotional, as sexually available, as sexual objects for men's enjoyment, and as objects to be admired and appreciated by men if men think they are beautiful.

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