



Gender Dynamics in Selected Babukusu Popular Songs in Western Kenya

***Kasili George Wanjala**

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0632-3241>

Department of Language and Lit. Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

Email: georgekasili@gmail.com

Omuteche Jairus, PhD

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6643-1987>

Department of Language and Lit. Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

Email: jairus.omuteche@gmil.com

Wasike Chrispinus, PhD

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5643-222X>

Department of Language and Lit. Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

Email: wasikech@yahoo.co.uk

***Corresponding Author:** georgekasili@gmail.com

Copyright resides with the author(s) in terms of the Creative Commons Attribution CC BY-NC 4.0.

The users may copy, distribute, transmit and adapt the work, but must recognize the author(s) and the

East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences

Abstract: This study explored how selected Babukusu popular songs encoded gender dynamics and how they shaped different forms of identity. The study employed the qualitative approach, informed by discourse and stylistic analysis. Through the purposive sampling, the study selected both oral texts and musicians for analysis. Purpose sampling was also employed in selecting key informants among the enthusiasts of the Babukusu popular music. The study employed textual analysis, which focuses on meaning and representation. The study deployed play-stop-play technique in order to facilitate both transcription and translation to allow dissection of gender dynamics through textual exegesis and self-interpellation. The findings highlight that gender dynamics exist in the Babukusu popular songs. The popular songs consider wives as cunning, intelligent, caring and apple of the husband's eye. On the other hand, men appear to be idlers, rumor mongers, traitorous, irresponsible, immoral, inhuman, malicious, social, generous but also inconsiderate. Furthermore, women are engendered as materialistic, immoral, pretentious, nagging but also sensitive, caring and secretive especially in times of war. Whereas the Babukusu are a patriarchal society, the females have acquired different identities that do not relegate them to the periphery. This therefore is a call to order for the community to revise its understanding of the female gender. This calls for further research within the community's music to unravel emerging trends in the relationship between the two genders.

Keywords: Gender dynamics; Babukusu; men; wives; women.

How to cite: Wanjala, K. G., Jairus, O. and Chrispinus, W. (2025). Gender Dynamics in Selected Babukusu Popular Songs in Western Kenya. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 6(1), 1-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46606/eajess2025v06i01.0418>.

Introduction

This study engages with different gender dynamics in the negotiation of identity for both males and females as dramatized in select music. Kennedy (2023) argues that gender dynamics refers to people treating men and women differently in ways that affect their power, status and authority. In this light,

gender dynamics refer to relationships and interactions between and among people based on gender. The paper reads how popular music dramatize the concepts of woman, wife and man as gendered identities. The argument of the paper is that the artists have rendered gender differently in their songs in their description of wives, men and women to dramatize different gender dynamics that

are inherent in the Bukusu community. It is from these performative areas that the paper dissects the different gender dynamics within the Bukusu society that the songs lay bare. As McClintock (1995) notes, gender is much an issue of masculinity as it is of femininity, hence the paper's attempt at decoding both genders in the songs. The researchers made an initial effort at demonstrating how each artist has handled each gender category in order to show the community understands of the gender dynamics over time.

Theoretical Framework

This study relied on the Butler's (1988) gender performance and performativity notion that gender is not something one is, but something one does, a series of acts and behaviors that are performed repeatedly within a social context. The notion was complemented by Kennedy's (2023) standpoint that gender dynamics refers to people treating men and women differently in ways that affect their power, status and authority. Specifically, this study benefits from different tenets from the Butler's performativity theory that gender is an identity that keeps on constituting itself. This approach is further backed by Butler's (1999) declaration that gender does not stay the same over time and that gender is formed through a set of acts. This paper sought to read both the deeds and words of some characters captured in popular music as 'sets of acts' that bring out their gendered sides of life. This notion is further bolstered by Butler's notion that gender is real only to the extent that it is performed. This tenet was of great help especially in fleshing out issues of gender dynamics; the performative acts of the characters in the way they relate as men and women reveal how the Babukusu conceive of both males and females.

Literature Review

Different scholars have discussed gender and popular music. According to Taylor (2012), music is a dynamic mode of gender. It is a transient discourse about gender. Treitler (2011) argues that music is an essentially gendered discourse, a marker of identity within a context of gender, race and ethnicity. The author, therefore, demonstrates that music assigns identities that are contextually conditioned by gender among other contexts. On the other hand, McClary (1991) noted that music is fraught with gender related anxieties and the history of musical form and structure described as a heavily gendered legacy is bound up with issues of gender. McClary advances the idea that within the lyrics of music,

gender issues are encoded. While previous studies sought to link music with gender, this paper sought to establish how variant gender dynamics are deployed in negotiating the gendered identity within the Babukusu popular songs. By Babukusu, popular music we refer to music with a wide appeal among the Babukusu based on its distribution to large audiences through the music industry.

Different scholars have enunciated on the concept of gender among the Babukusu. Wabende (2014) quoting Wanyonyi Manguliechi, a Bukusu genealogist, states that the word 'omukhasi' (woman) is associated with 'asi' (down), which has served as justification why the woman has to be below or under men. However, Kasili (2016) reported that the title *Mayi* (mother) has a lot of respect; a woman is not the same as mother in the nation; a woman therefore is any mature female person who can become a mother after giving birth. Some interviewed elders on 10 Aug 2023, revealed that when conducting a head count, the Babukusu do not consider women as noteworthy, so that in case one is called upon to state the number of passers-by and people in their company, rather than saying there is one mature male, a child and a mature female, the answer will be one person, a woman and a child. Ironically, whenever something happens accidentally and which may portend danger, both Babukusu men and women call out for their mother's intervention through the phrase *Mayi wee!* meaning, 'Oh mother!' At this point, both Babukusu men and women identify with their mothers. In response, this paper sought to establish how different gender dynamics within select popular songs serve to enhance the construction of different markers of women, men and wives. In affirming masculine pride and bold manhood, the Babukusu use different discursive strategies. Wasike (2013) relates that biographical details of the oral poet can be a demonstration of the extent to which personal life and character determine and shape an individual's status as a symbol of Bukusu masculinity. The scholarly intent of this paper was to make an initial attempt to decode variant gender dynamics within songs.

Wechuli et al (2022) examined the images associated with women in the music of Ali Akeo and Wilbert Wanyama through Ethnopoetics and feminist literary criticisms. The study established that women in the music are depicted as nurturers, leaders, adulterous, reliable, evil and destructive. The gallery captures both positive and negative

attributes of the female gender. While studying gender presentation among the Abakhayo, Anyango (2014) notes that men are looked at as sons, brothers, husbands, fathers and providers while women are constructed as daughters, wives, mothers, sisters and providers in Ongidi's music. On the contrary, this paper does not limit itself to one gender but it adopts a broader spectrum in order to establish the identity statuses of both men and women by delving into the performativity of these genders thereby elucidating different gender dynamics within the songs.

Methodology

The study employed the qualitative approach, informed by discourse and stylistic analysis as advocated by Mugenda and Mugenda's (1999).

Population and sampling

The study used the purposive sampling in the selection of both oral texts and musicians for analysis. The study managed to access twenty-one Babukusu popular musicians. The artists were purposively sampled generationally based on their age grades: Wasike wa Musungu is a first generation Babukusu popular music artist whose songs have served as trendsetters in the community. Simiyu Makhanu is a second-generation artist who is adept at ordering his instruments while Steve Kay represents the current generation of the Babukusu popular musicians. Purposive sampling was also relied upon in selecting the songs for analysis since not all the pieces of popular music created by the artists deal with issues of gender. Purpose sampling was also employed in selecting key informants among the enthusiasts of the Babukusu popular music. This was done by organizing the enthusiasts into first, second and present Babukusu popular music generations through the age set system

Treatment of Data

The study employed textual analysis, which focuses on meaning and representation. The study deployed play-stop-play technic in order to facilitate both transcription and translation to allow dissection of gender dynamics through textual exegesis and self-interpellation. Every piece of the music was exposed to content analysis, complemented by discussions among different informants.

Ethical considerations

Informants were assured that the research was purely for academic purposes and were free to opt in and out of it. Having explained the purpose of the

study and assuring the informants about their confidentiality, they gave an informed consent about their participation. The study sought permission from both the national and county governments after approval by the host university.

Analysis and Discussion

The findings appear in three categories: wives, men and women. Within these broad categories are finer illustrations of how each gender is encoded within the music.

Babukusu Wives within Music

Artists have captured Babukusu wives differently: cunning/clever, intelligent, caring, submissive, assertive and the apple of the husband's eye. A wife among the Babukusu is called *Omukhasi* (a wife) though the term can also refer to a woman. Occasionally, a husband can refer to the wife as *Omuloosi* or *Omukhaye* (an old woman and the beloved wife respectively). Within the Babukusu community, there were four types of known wives: *Nabulobe*, *Nabukelema*, *Nafwofwoyo* and *omukhaye*. All the four had well defined and elaborate qualities/marks. *Omukelema* is the beloved wife, *Nabulobe* is the detested wife, *Nafwofwoyo* is the all jack wife, always taking time to execute a given task and most commonly in the wrong way. On the other hand, *Omukhaye* is the ever-welcoming wife (Interview with Two Elders).

The nomenclature about wives falls in step with the notion of gender as a performative act (Butler, 1999) and might explain that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body; this is formed through a set of acts that are culturally and socially conditioned in the form of norms and also enunciated in discourses. According to Butler (1999), gender is always a doing and the identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results. Wa Musungu, in the song *Omukhasi Omukesi* (a wife is clever/cunning), sings his heart out through the persona, a husband, who opens up and confirms that wives among the Babukusu are both clever and cunning; when she sees you come home with greens (sukuma), she looks at you with her mouth twisted like that of a rat (jeering) - an indicator of disappointment. On another occasion, when you come home with a piece of meat, she jumps from her sitting position like a wild animal and welcomes you soothingly for the long day at work but the soothing is not meant

for you; it is because of the meat. Wa Musungu therefore concludes that wives are clever/cunning in their body language.

Kumoyo khakubole bana befwe omukhasi omukesi, akhubona wama enje yaya wicha khu luyia, okula sukuma weikina mbilile omukhasi aluyia, onyola omukhasi wafumbile kumunwa bukhikha nga embeba, oli akhubona wicha ne khakilo khe enyama khubolele, wafumbukha asi yaya nga esang'i mubunyasi, wapa pole,webasia pole ye lukendo khane enyama.

Trans: Let my heart call out my comrades a wife is clever, she sees you coming towards the yard, you acquire greens hoping to take them to the wife, you find the wife with a twisted mouth like that of a rat, when she sees you come with a kilo of meat, I tell you, she springs to her feet like a wild animal in the grass, she soothes you, then you think the sooth is due to the travel home, but then it is for the meat.

The wife therefore in her cunning state displays the drama of welcome and dis-welcome. It is for the husband to dissect this drama. What the artist is constructing is that wives as owners of the hearth culturally, appreciate their husbands' input in making sure the hearth is working but at the same time are quick to revolt when the husband does not bring home what they consider as palatable. Whereas it is the wife's responsibility to prepare the meal, she is selective and plays on the masculine ego of the man in order to keep her domestic space active. Butler's (1999) standpoint of gender as a doing is reflective of the contrastive actions of the wife with respect to welcoming the husband back home or not depending on what he brings home, hence qualifying her as being cunning/intelligent. In fact, as Butler (1990) argues, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition, a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of the body, understood in part by as a culturally sustained temporal duration. To confirm that the cunning nature of the wife is not happenstance but a repeat overtime, the artist reports that they have come to learn this trend as part of the behavior pattern of the wife: "Kamakhuwa ke bakhasi lelo khwakamanyile alamala kakhubona wicha ne sikekhe siri, wasangala wakhila ta!" **Trans:** "Issues to do with wives we have

known them these days, once she spots you coming with something little, she will be quite happy."

In capturing situations where the husband stands out as the provider while the wife as the receiver and cook, artist Wa Musungu seems to take us back to what Schipper (2007) referred to as hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity. To Schipper, hegemonic femininity entails characteristics defined as womanly which establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity, thus enhancing the dominant position of men and subordination of women. The wife, therefore, in her cunning nature may imagine having control over her husband through her drama of welcome and dis-welcome but in essence confirms and consolidates her husband's position within the family and community that he is superior to her. This is because as Schipper further notes, Hegemonic masculinity allows compliance with and subordination through accommodating the interests and desires of patriarchy. Such ideologies, as Mueni and Omollo (2015) note, are constructed to serve the interests of the dominant gender at the expense of the weaker gender thus individuals are expected to conform to the prescribed gender status quo; men are seen as heads of homes, leaders and breadwinners while women are relegated to the domestic sphere and their roles revolve around childbirth, care of children, the man and the home.

Despite the cunning nature of the wife, Wasike wa Musungu in the song *Nakhamela* (even if I get drunk), demonstrates that husbands are able to appreciate the role played by wives in preparing meals. In appreciating this role, the artist pegs his argument on the fact that human life is indeterminate, hence a wife who helps in food preparation and serving of the husband contributes a lot to the sustenance of human life: "Omukhasi okhufukile owooo wase, omwene oyu niye obuyila."

Trans: "A wife who prepares ugali for you is yours; she is the one you brag about."

A similar argument is enunciated thus: "Omukhasi owowo kakhaba omumalimali mala nakhuwa biakhulia nolia omwene oyo niye ofumia, niye wakhulinda!" **Trans:** "Even if your wife is untidy but she gives you food to eat, that is the one you praise, she is the one who takes care of you!"

Although the song seems to relegate the wife to the hearth, the wives are solely the nurturers and caretakers of the husbands; in their absence then,

the husbands would suffer on a culinary platform. Masasabi (2011) corroborates the foregoing argument when arguing that a woman has specified duties among the Babukusu: cooking for the family, fetching water from the river, fetching firewood, cultivating, planting and harvesting, grinding grains and taking care of her husband and children. The kitchen and therefore the cooking space and all the responsibilities tied to it is a specialty of wives, mothers and daughters while men, boys and husbands were not given any space in the kitchen. Whereas the wife would cook, the husband was to provide and thereafter be served, thus creating an atmosphere of complementarity between the couples.

While discoursing on the nature of popular music, McClary (1991) argues that music is fraught with gender related anxieties. At the same time Kanyi (2015) argues that songs are honest confessions of what usually remains concealed in the self and about the other.

In the song *khalingjola* (you will fit me), artist Kay captures a close and intimate relationship between the husband and the wife. More importantly, the wife is constructed as the center of the husband's life in that she has special responsibilities to execute, including the death rites upon the demise of the husband: "Ewee, niwe busa oli mumoyo kwange. ewewe niwe busa omusale wange, mayi we babana base. Ewe niwe okhambone chisi nengonile, Kumoyo kwange usutile, sesi kumoyo kwowo khusutile, omwana mukhana wang'ona!" **Trans:** "It is just you who is in my heart, it is just you who is my friend, mother to my children, it is you who will ward off flies when am dead, carry for me my heart as I carry your heart too, the girl child you are beautiful!"

What the band is vouching for is that as the apple of her husband's eye, she is irreplaceable even in his death. The bosom nature of the relationship is captured in the way the artist encodes it in terms of carrying each other's heart; the human heart is universally accepted as a symbol for love. It is through such imagery that Kay captures their infinite love. To crown it all, the artist extols the beauty of the wife and confers on her the responsibility of bearing his children. The artist deploys a confessional tone in relating his feelings towards the wife and it is from such confessions that the paper argues in agreement with Frith (1996) that music is an integral part of daily

activities that constitute individual subjectivity, thereby defining space without boundaries. Apart from the confessions the artist makes, he also reflects on their present economic status and assures the wife that it will not be the same all through. He is optimistic that with time, their status will improve through both working hard and being prayerful. With such optimism, he exudes hope that despite the lack of food presently, with time they will afford chicken and Ugali, staple food among the Babukusu. He captures a state where all their property is jointly shared and foreshadows a situation where he would have enough money till spending will not be an issue. To crown her beauty, he advances a promissory narrative of taking her to a saloon for hair therapy and thereafter acquire a pair of shoes for her. As a show that she is the apple of his eye, he confirms that they will spend his money jointly but more importantly use it on the education of their children. He therefore envisions a peaceful and successful family together.

Tunalala njaa Leo, engokho khulalia, bususma khulalia! Muchuli mayi khulalia, Tuishi fukara, kwa bidii na maombi, chochote change ni chako, nitatumia pesa inizoe, Khuche musaluni bakhung'one, ewe mayi! Biraro biosi khukulile, chisendi change khusipende! Babana befwe khubalinde, khubayile esikuli basome.

Trans: We sleep hungry now, we shall eat chicken, we shall eat Ugali, tomorrow mum we shall eat, we live in poverty, with hard work and prayer, anything of mine is yours, i will use money until it gets used to me, we go to a saloon to make your hair, you mum, I also buy shoes for you, we spend my money.

Such reflections on their family through music allow us to read this script as Roseman (1991) argues that music validates social institutions and ritual practices. Through the music, Kay is able to justify marriage as a social institution, take note of the challenges that come with it and offer hope that despite the challenges, there is room for the couple to overcome them. More importantly is the desire to have not only a peaceful family but also a successful one. Husbands therefore come through as providers for the wives who are the apple of their eyes.

On his part, the artist Simiyu Makhunu in the song *Khapwondi wa Nambalu* (*Khapwondi child of*

Nambalu) constructs a wife as a concerned and caring individual. Berliner (2008) argues that music is integrated into the process of community living, in peoples' lives and in social organizations; Khapwondi's wife portrays her concern over the husband's security to the effect that she is aware of a rumor circulating that the husband's life was in danger and therefore takes her time to advise the husband. The behavior of the wife in taking a proactive role of advising the husband is in agreement with Butler (1988), who notes that gender is real only to the extent that is performed. The song records: "Omukhasi amubolela, abolela Khapwondi, ali ne nonywa kamalwa, balikho bakhukuta, nyoa ne olota mungo, Khapwondi saulila!" **Trans:** "The wife told him, she told Khapwondi, that when you take beer, I have heard gossip about you, come home early, Khapwondi could not heed!"

Commenting on the role of music in society, Hawkins (2002) and Lull (1992) agree that music provides frameworks for our identity construction and evaluation of others; the advice given is disregarded by the husband who goes ahead to join other revelers despite the warning, therefore bringing him out as unheeding, as the song reveals, Khapwondi was found dead by the wife just at the junction to their home. From the narrative in the song, the death was clinically executed by five people who shared a drink with Khapwondi but deliberately split into two groups in order to have the death accomplished. The wife was led to the scene of murder by a file of brown ants; Khapwondi had his neck twisted five times as the text encodes. The music therefore brings out the husband's identity as unheeding as the wife comes through as a caring and concerned individual not only in life but also in death for it is she who wakes up quite early to establish the whereabouts of the husband. The wife stands out therefore as a responsible female in ensuring stability in the home through ensuring proactively that the husband is safe.

The Portrayal of Men in Music

Among the Babukusu, the status of being a man is called *Omusecha* or *Omundu we sisecha* (a man or a person of male gender). The artists have discoursed over different types of men in their music. While discoursing on the nature of popular music, Treitler (2011) argues that music is a gendered discourse and therefore a marker of identity. In this regard, within song *Munju balomananga* (there are spousal fall outs within marriage) Wa Musungu delves into

the friction between spouses and accounts for such moments through what he refers to as non-salaried teachers (*babalimu batamba kumushahara*); rumor mongers/idlers; men are therefore portrayed as idlers and rumour mongers. He argues that there is *Bukulo* within households between husband and wife. *Bukulo* is part of ritual drama among the Babukusu; there are clans in the community that engage in trading of insults on different occasions, they are also known as joking relatives. This arena is deployed to capture the times when husbands and wives differ in their houses but again make peace. One reason given to account for the frictional moments between couples is the rumor that some men (close friends to the husbands) feed wives of their friends on. The band acknowledges that in any given marriage, it is normal for couples to differ but there are occasions when there is external interference: "Bukulo buli munju, mukhasi ne omusecha balomananga, sisionakanga chinju ango,balio babalimu batamba kumushahara nibo babonakanga chingo chefwe!" **Trans:** "There is Bukulo in households, wife and husband differ, what messes ours homes is..... there are non-salaried teachers that mess up our homes!"

Were and Derek (1968) observed that the sort of country that people live in affects the way they live and develop. Further, they note that artists are shaped by their societies and the music they come up with is in a way a reflection of that society. Additionally, Butler (1988) argues that gender is a conscious and deliberate act done first, hence performance. The artist therefore captures the gossiper/idler man in the Babukusu community who gives very disparaging reports about the husband(s) in question, to the effect that he has not only absconded eating meals prepared by the wife but also irresponsibly buys huge amounts of meat to eat with friends at the market. He worsens the whole report when he reminds the wife that she would have had a chance to eat the already consumed meat. Due to such reports, on arrival, husbands find wives who are unwilling to engage them in any talk. The silence taken on by the wives is a protest statement against both eating away from home by the husband and irresponsible spending of family funds. Within Babukusu parlance, refusal to eat a wife's meal is a silent but salient way of telling her that she is unwelcome in the home and therefore a silent rejection. This can be explained in the way the Babukusu construe getting married as *khutekha* (cooking) and this could explain why the wives of

the persona in the song refuse to talk back as a show that what the husband is engaging in is unpalatable within marriage. The silence therefore, as Price-Mitchel (2013) argues, is a metaphor that acts as a tool for self-reflection. The wives to the affected husbands use the silence to reflect over their positions in the marriage as well as their relationships with their husbands. Husbands therefore have a moral duty to eat the meals prepared by their wives in the community; in fact Babukusu refer to getting married with regard to females as *khutekha* (cooking). Therefore, men are captured as idlers and malicious rumour mongers at market centres who are bent on causing uncalled for filial friction in marriages. In this discourse, there is return to the power of gossip and the eventual husband-wife/spousal friction. The text entertains the issues of unchanging rural realities of the prevalence of gossip. Ogude and Nyairo (2003) would agree in their argument that in the song 'Jamriambo' by Nairobi City, Ensemble touches on polygamy and the (destructive) power of gossip and some of the unchanging realities of rural existence. Marriage is then marked by both moments of peace and its lack; frictional moments, as the song advances, inform the ritual drama that accompanies marriage. In the eyes of the wives as captured in their reaction, men are portrayed as irresponsible in their spending of family income. But as the artist encodes, men are social, outgoing and generous in sharing what they buy at market centres with other fellow men who, however, turn out as their traitors.

The Babukusu community values morality and as such there are certain personality traits that are unwelcome. Althusser (1971) observes that every text bears a stamp of its time in expressing its cultures, values of the time or resisting them. Kay through the song *Wambumuli* captures not only the immorality but also the recklessness that comes with certain men probably not only within his Babukusu community but also within the Kenyan nation. Further the song has what Frith (1988) refers to as lyrical realism in its construction of an immoral man; it constructs a direct relationship between a lyric and the social (immorality) and emotional (consequences) condition they describe and represent. In the song *Wambumuli*, the persona, a man, whose wives have been snatched by *Wambumuli* rants out a lament. The different actions of *Wambumuli* are in line with Butler's (1990) assertion that 'performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which

achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.' *Wambumuli* morphs into different gender spaces as the song unfolds. *Wambumuli* is constructed as an immoral and reckless man who is said to have taken off with not only the first wife but also the second wife and finally with the daughter of the persona. Within the lament, the persona lays claim that the second wife was his beloved one but the lamentation gets worse when *Wambumuli* takes off with the daughter possibly a child of one of the wives: "Wambumuli! Omukhasi wange, omukhasi wange wa Kwanza, Wambumuli kelukha naye, Wambumuli! Omukhasi wange, omukhasi namba mbili, Wambumuli kacha ne naye, Wambumuli! Omwana wange, omwana we sikuli, Wambumuli kacha ne naye!" **Trans:** "Wambumuli, my wife, my first wife, Wambumuli took off with her, Wambumuli, my wife, my second wife, Wambumuli went away with her, Wambumuli, my child, my school age child, Wambumuli went with her!"

Additionally, the text reckons that school girls are getting pregnant and upon investigation, it is revealed that the individual responsible is *Wambumuli*; this situation is worsened when the artist reveals that university students are getting infected by HIV/AIDS and all these are linked to *Wambumuli*. The artist as a social commentator in the community takes on *Wambumuli* and advises him to keep off peoples' wives lest he meets his death. All the actions point out men as immoral, reckless and inconsiderate. The actions by *Wambumuli* which qualify him as both immoral and irresponsible can be well explained in the words of Butler (1988) who notes that nobody is a given gender prior to doing gendered acts as demonstrated in the above excerpt. Therefore, *Wambumuli* comes through as a mature male individual who is not only immoral but also very reckless in the way he has love escapades with nearly every woman he comes across: mothers and their daughters, school going girls and university students. It is immoral for a man among the Babukusu to have sexual relations with both mother and daughter since gender relations are bound by strict cultural laws. Therefore, there is need for mutual respect in sexual relations for they define and give identities to people.

Simiyu Makhanu, in the song *Khapwondi wa Nambalu*, conceives and constructs men as inhuman, inconsiderate and malicious. He perceives

them as so in the way they plan and execute a murder of a fellow patron at a local drinking joint. This could be best explained through Butler (1988), who reports that nobody is a given gender prior to doing gendered acts. It is on record in the music that men broke into laughter upon seeing the victim arrive at the venue to which he ironically responded by joining in. It emerges that there is malice in the way the men disappear from the drink point: three go in advance and leave behind two to keep watch on their victim whom they had discussed in advance. When Khapwondi decides to retire to his home, he is monitored and stalked by one team ahead of him and the other from behind till he is inhumanly killed through strangulation; his neck is twisted five times. From the turn of events, Khapwondi had been discussed in a secret meeting since the artist confirms through a lubukusu idiom *khulia kumuemo* that means holding a secret meeting about a person who is absent with malicious intentions:

Bataru banyoa ebweni, basikala babili bachunga, bamanye achila khulina, nga soleli arura, babili bamulonda munyuma, khane enyuma bamutekanie, akenda omutekanie, Khapwondi wa Nambalu, oli kembiya asikalukha, embi ango wee, enyuma bamulanga, ebweni bakhobeche, bali ali nekhebukha, bebweni bamutila, bali kekhebukha benyuma, basoleli barekana nenaye, bamuyusisa likosi, bamuyusia kharano!

Trans: Three went ahead, two remained behind to keep watch, to note the route he would take, when he left, two followed him, but from behind he was being stalked, he walked while stalked, Khapwondi wa Nambalu, when he neared the turning point, near his home, they called him from behind, those ahead were coming; when he looked behind, those ahead got hold of him, when he checked those behind, the men wrestled him to the ground, they twisted his neck, it was twisted five times!

The music therefore reveals that beer taking sessions could be sites of malice not only among the Babukusu but among also other Kenyan communities and it is through such communication that Anderson (1994) would rope in the argument that music is a viable site for imagining the nation.

The fact that men planned to execute the death of a fellow man in the absence of any female in their secret meeting (*khulia kumuemo*) is a testimony that they had little space for the female gender in what they considered as issues specifically affecting them in this case the planned death of Khapwondi. Men, therefore, are secretive and discriminatory while handling what they regard as a masculine deal as witnessed in their malicious plan to kill a fellow patron at a social forum.

The Portrayal of Women in Music

Women are on the other hand encoded quite differently. This paper's reading about men discoursed over *Wambumuli*, a mature male person, who is immoral and reckless sexually. Within the Babukusu community, a woman only becomes a wife after marriage; therefore being a woman is not synonymous with being a wife. Artist Kay constructs a female equivalent to *Wambumuli* in the song *Nambumuli*. On her part, she has sexual relations with any man that she comes across. From the choice of the names, the artist reasons in agreement with Sharpely-Whiting (2003), who argues that artists formulate lexis that distinguish and mark gender. Before the song ventures into the different actions by *Nambumuli*, it highlights some of her attributes that are typical of the period of composition of the song: painted finger nails, lipstick, eye goggles, mini-skirt, long trousers, the iPad and a very active member on face book. Face book, therefore, becomes a site for hooking up and identity formation. With regard to circumstances of its composition as argued by Ruksana (2014), the artist demonstrates *Nambumuli's* penchant for immorality through noting that within a record of three months, she had caused a lot of marital disharmony; she had had sexual relations with school boys, the persona's brother-in-law on a visitation and the persona's new herd's boy among others: "Kimiesi kitaru kiongene! Babana be bikuli, Nambumuli kacha nenabo! Mukhwasi wange! Nambumuli kacha ne naye! Omwayi wange, Nambumuli kacha ne naye!" **Trans:** "Only three months! School age children, Nambumuli had sex with them, my brother-in-law! Nambumuli had sex with him, my herds' boy! Nambumuli had sex with him!"

From these casual sexual relations, it is encoded that the pupils are infected; thus leaving the community at crossroads because the girls in the community have nowhere to get married to. Just like in the case of *Wambumuli*, *Nambumuli* is

advised to keep off other people's marriages, lest she is killed. Both characters, therefore, come through as destructive elements in society through widespread infection of HIV/AIDS to unsuspecting victims.

In the process of disentangling the nature of popular music, Hawkins (2002) observes that popular music is shaped and shapes social, political and cultural concerns; the song (*Nambumuli*) satirically exposes the process that ladies go through before they end up miserable without husbands; hence acquiring the *Nambumuli* identity. From the song, *Nambumuli* is among the educated women in the community who in the initial stages prefer men who own expensive vehicles such as Prado, Mark 2, Range rover and those who have lots of money. While these happen, they (women) have little regard for men who own probox and motorcycles. As encoded in the song, the lady will drift into some kind of poverty (lack of a husband) and that is when she acquires the *Nambumuli* status. It is this *Nambumuli* state that she will start having casual sex with any man she meets including school boys. This happens possibly after she discovers that she is infected; she is therefore seen in and out of different hotels as she spreads the infection. As Butler (1988) notes, gender is a conscious and deliberate act done first, hence performance, but when these acts are repeated ritually and unconsciously, they become performative; further in Butler's (1999) standpoint, she observes that gender is always a doing and that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results; *Nambumuli* acquired her identity after going through different stages:

Bakoko befwe basomilekho bekholanga
bali benya basecha bali nende epurado,
mark two, range rover nende be
kamapesa.... bali nende oli nende eprobox
nende chi pikipiki amurebakhoo asakula
busa..... oli kimiaka kiesenda ne aba
nende mumutambo busa kwo omusecha
ne nekekela Nambumuli..... akalukha
enyuma acha ne bibiana bititi!

Trans: Our sisters, who have acquired some learning reach a point and look for men who own Prado, Mark two, Range rovers and those with money; when one who has a probox or a motorbike shows interest, she shrugsthen she drifts into the poverty of lack of a husband, then she

becomes Nambumuli...Then she comes back and starts having sexual affairs with small children!

Therefore comes through as a well-educated female who failed to get married due to her materialistic nature in chasing after lavish things in place of marital bliss. Due to her materialistic nature, she has been infected by a terminal illness, which she now spreads through casual sex with any man she meets. The artist, therefore, as a social commentator delves into heterosexual relations and unearths reasons behind immorality through sexual recklessness as witnessed in *Wambumuli* and *Nambumuli* respectively. While contending on identity, sociologist Anthony (1991) argued that a person's identity can be found in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going; indeed *Wambumuli* and *Nambumuli* have kept their narratives going through the different actions they engage in. From the actions of the two, the paper is reminded by Wanjala and Kebaya (2016) that there are two kinds of youth identity: foisted identity and referential identity. They argue that foisted identity refers to an identity imposed on the youth such as the criminal identity while referential identity on the other hand involves the intrinsic and reflexive identity for the youth as dramatized through the hustler identity. The identity of both *Wambumuli* and *Nambumuli* could pass for referential identity as the two are driven by their humanly desires that seem untamable hence intrinsic and reflective.

Wa Musungu engages with a different identity of women; he depicts them as pretentious and nagging through the song *Machuma*. As Anthony (1991) has argued, a person's identity can be found in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going but more importantly as Butler (1999) argues, gender proves to be performative and is always a doing though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed; Machuma's pretentious and nagging nature is demonstrated thus:

Nanyola Machuma mu busa mathare,mu
busa, nanyola Machuma mu busa... khwola
ebungoma khwema mustage, khucha
mubusa khwacha mandizini khunywa
ekimbo ya busa,namuwa kumkimbo kwa
busa, omukhasi wakhaya ali Wasike nyena
guinness,naye asaba Guinness arie?

Trans: I met Machuma in a busa den in mathare, I met machuma in a busa den, when we reached Bungoma, we stopped

at the bus stage to a busa den, we went to Mandizini to take one kilogram tin of busa, the woman refused saying Wasike I need Guinness, how does she ask for Guinness?

Whereas the artist meets and courts her in a busa den, upon arrival in Bungoma, the lady declines an offer of the same brew on the grounds that she needs Guinness. Initially, she had refused a lunch offer at Nakuru, claiming she only wanted ball gum. The identity of the lady had already transformed from one who takes an illicit brew to one who consumes legalized and bottled beer. Such turn of events in the identity can be accounted for in the words of Butler (1999) that advances the argument that gender does not remain the same overtime and varies with race, class and region. Apart from rejection of Busaa, Machuma 'falls' sick while in the rural home of the artist. The sickness comes upon her after she noticed her co-wife going to the farm to gather greens meant for the midday meal while the artist had gone out to drink Busaa. Being the urbanite, she is, possibly Machuma does not envision herself eating the greens (*Murere*-slimy Pottage among the Babukusu) hence silently but saliently devising a mechanism to get herself out of the rural. When the artists takes her to Dr. Marumbu's Hospital in Bungoma town, she is diagnosed to be suffering from 'hunger'; the way she ate the food meant for a patient was testimony that she was not ill at all hence discharged. The artist captures this ravenous appetite by likening Machuma's way of eating the meal to the feeding habits of a rat: "Wayila muwodi namba tatu, ali yuno we enjala, kabolela basisista ali muwekho kamanda khumukhake.....khulia khwo mulamu khukabukhana nende omulwale. Wakanyanyila khungaki nga embeba!" **Trans:** "She was taken to ward three, she was one suffering from hunger,....he instructed the nurses to try her with some githeri, the eating style of a healthy person is different from that of a patient. She ate it haphazardly like a rat!"

The haphazard manner of eating was a testament that Machuma was not suffering from any attack by pathogens; she was dead hungry but could not eat the food prepared in the home village of the artist. She needed relocation in space to town possibly to have chance to eat a decent meal. From Machuma's behavior, the artist concludes that he had brought home a mosquito. To show that Machuma was indeed nagging, the artist notes that this 'Mosquito' can bite even in the cracks of a cracked heel of a

human leg: "Kuluma ne mumakia!" **Trans:** "It bites even in the cracks of a heel."

Machuma's actions would still be explained by Butler (1988), who notes, gender is a conscious and deliberate act done first, hence performance, but when these acts are repeated ritually and unconsciously they become performative. Furthermore, in Butler's, (1999) standpoint, she observes that gender is always a doing and that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results hence our conclusion that *Machuma* as a woman is both pretentious and nagging.

Simiyu Makhanu captures women as sensitive, caring, secretive and protective in times of adversity. The performative act as Butler (1988) notes in reference to gender as a conscious and deliberate act done first hence performance enables us read women as couched above during the historic Babukusu attack on the *Barwa banyamulinge* (sabaots). This is captured in the song *Wachonge*. According to Bhabha (1994), while theorizing nation is primarily concerned with stories, as they shape nations and people, nations are their own particular narratives, which he considers in two ways: pedagogical nation and performative nation; among the Babukusu consultations were always with the community's prophets before any attack on neighboring communities and as indicated in the song, the Babukusu had sought advice on the possible routes to use for attacking and also assess possibilities of a successful raid from one seer *Manyi* of the *Bakhurarwa* clan. But because the other seers as depicted in the song (*Wachiye wa Naumbwa, Mutonyi wa Bukelembe, Maina wa Nalukale*) had prophesied to no avail, the Babukusu soldiers conspired and set a trap for *Manyi* who was out of his fort on other errands. The trap entailed having *Manyi* explain what had happened to a heifer that the Babukusu soldiers had forcibly made to drink six gallons of *busaa* and was then drunk and was 'talking'. If he failed to unravel it, he was to be speared to death. The woman factor comes in when while this trap was being set, one woman was in the hearing and it is she who ran out when she heard the arrival of *Manyi's* entourage in the name of fetching firewood then stepped on *Manyi's* smallest toe and whispered the trap. This single act by the woman is what Butler(1988) speaks of performative in the sense that as gendered act is conscious and deliberate and it is from her explanation that upon being asked, *Manyi* gave an exact account till the

Babukusu soldiers reveled in the fact that he was the right seer they had been waiting for. However, as it were, this was a second hand prophesy with the aid of the old woman hence the Babukusu lost the war miserably till they had to retreat. Through the savior motif, Makhanu constructs women as concerned, secretive and protective of human life as in the case of Manyi. Other accounts may exist in explaining the loss of the war by the Babukusu.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study findings highlighted that gender dynamics exist in the selected Babukusu popular songs in Western Kenya. The popular songs consider wives as cunning, intelligent, caring and apple of the husband's eye. On the other hand, men appear to be idlers, rumor mongers, traitorous, irresponsible, immoral, inhuman, malicious, social, generous but also inconsiderate. Furthermore, women are engendered as materialistic, immoral, pretentious, nagging but also sensitive, caring and secretive especially in times of war. The identified gender dynamics reveal that patriarchy is opening up as cultural thread in the community vistas for the female gender to negotiate new identities, hence occasioning a departure from the traditional understanding of the female.

Whereas the Babukusu are a patriarchal society, the female self (women and wives) have acquired different identities that do not relegate them to the periphery. This therefore is a call to order for the community to revise its understanding of the female gender. This calls for further research within the community's music to unravel emerging trends in the relationship between the two genders.

References

- Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. In L. Althusser (Ed.), *Lenin one Philosophy and Other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Anderson, W. D. (1994). *Music and Musicians in Ancient Greece*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London.
- Anthony, G. (1991). *Modernity and Self-identity*. Stanford University Press. Stanford.
- Anyango, B.F. (2014). *Gender Presentation among the Abakhayo in Ongidi's Songs*, MA Thesis, University of Nairobi.
- Berliner, P. (2008). 'The Sound of Mbira: Music and Traditions of Shona People of Zimbabwe.' Chicago University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge. Print.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. NY: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performance Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal* 40(4).
- Butler, J. (1990). *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. NY: Routledge.
- Frith, S. (1996). Music and Identity. In Hall, S. & du Gay, P. (Eds.) *Questions of cultural Identity*, 108-117. Sage.
- Frith, S. (1988). *Performing rites: On the value of popular music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hawkins, S. (2002). *Settling the pop score: Pop texts and identity politics*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Kanyi, T. (2015). Portrayal of Women in Selected songs of Kenyan Male Artistes. *Pathways to African Feminism and Development-journal of African women's studies center, University of Nairobi*, Vol.1, 3.
- Kasili, G. (2016). *Gender Dynamics and Images of Motherhood in Selected Bukusu Work, Ritual and Initiation Songs*, MA Thesis, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology.
- Kennedy, J. A. (2023). *Gender Dynamics in the work place*. Vanderbilt University, Owen Graduate School of Management.
- Lull, J. (1992). Popular music and communication: An introduction. In J..Lull (Ed.), *popular music and communication*. Sage.
- Masasabi, A. (2011). 'Verbal-Text as a Process of Compositional and Improvisational Elaboration in Bukusu Litungu Music' Unpublished PHD Thesis University of South Africa.
- McClary, S. (1991). *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

- McClintock, A. (1995). *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Routledge.
- Mueni, J. and Omollo, L. (2015). *Our Pregnancy, My Choice: A Feminist Critique of Nerea*.
- Mugenda, O.M. and Mugenda, A.G (1999): *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Nairobi: Acts Press.
- Ogude, J. and Nyairo, J. (2003). 'Specificities. Popular Music and the Negotiation of Contemporary Kenyan Identity: the Example of Nairobi City Ensemble.' *Social Identities*, 9(3).
- Price-Mitchel, M. (2013). *The Importance of Silence in a Noisy World*. Macmilan.
- Roseman, M. (1991). *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest: Temiar Music and Medicine*. Berkely, University of California Press.
- Ruksana, S. (2014). 'New Historicism: An Intensive Analysis and Appraisal,' In *Indian Review of World Literature in English*, 10(2).
- Schipper, S. (2007). *Recovering the feminine other: masculinity, feminity and gender hegemony*. Theory and Society.
- Sharpely-Whiting, T. (2003). *Pimp up Hos Down: Hip Hop and Gender: Young Black Women*. Boston: Boston Press.
- Taylor, J. (2012). Taking it in the ear: on musico-sexual synergies and the (queer) possibility that music is sex. *Continuum* 26,603-614.
- Treitler, L. (2011). *Reflections on Musical Meaning and its Representations*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Wabende, K. (2014). *From the Babukusu Fireside To The Stage: The Performance of the Oral Narrative In The Shifting Spaces*, PhD Thesis, University of Nairobi.
- Wanjala, H. and Kebaya, C. (2016). 'Popular music and identity formation among Kenyan youth,' *Muziki*, 13:2, 20-35. Print.
- Wasike, C. (2013): *Textualizing Masculinity: Discourses of Power and Gender Relations in Manguliechi's Babukusu After Burial Oratory Performance (Khuswala Kumuse)* PHD Thesis, University of Witwatersrand, Johansberg.
- Wechuli, C. et al. (2022). Images of Women in Selected Luhya Popular Music. *African Journal of Education, Science and Technology*, 7(2).
- Were, G. and Derek, W. (1968). *East Africa through a Thousand Years*. London. Evans Brothers Ltd.