

Sexual Objectification of Women in Selected Kipsigis Popular Songs of Kenya

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Abstract— Songs perform key roles in the society such as entertainment and education but can project certain ideologies and stereotypes. This study examined the objectification of women in selected Kipsigis popular songs. The researcher purposively picked 15 songs from speakers of Kipsigis popular artists, 30 respondents and five composers. An interview schedule was used to obtain the relevant information from the respondents and composers of the songs. The study was guided by Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1978). The results of the study indicated that artists objectify women as instruments, female sex organ as food and a place while sexual intercourse is portrayed as a journey, war and work to mitigate their offensiveness. It is believed that the findings of this study would be of great significance in information dissemination to the media, schools and churches in censuring and sensitization of songs that objectify women. Also, the results of this study is expected to be instrumental in mitigating offensive expressions that cause harm and shame to the listeners of Kipsigis popular songs through proper interpretation of words and phrases that objectify women.

Index Terms— Kipsigis, popular songs, objectify, sex, patriarchal, intercourse.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women have been objectified in the entertainment industry for a long time. Songs, films and music videos have portrayed and given women images of appealing sex objects. Sexual objectification is a phenomenon of gender that involves women as victims and men as perpetrators that damages the appearance and woman's body. According to Gill (2007), the entertainment industry depicts men as dominant and strong, while women are seen as weak vessels, objectified as victims of circumstances. Sexuality in songs is a frequent and common platform where women face persistent offensive images. Men see women as sex objects in which they separate physical attractiveness and sexual attributes from the rest of the woman's existence and personality reducing them to instruments of pleasure (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

With the development and expansion of music in the digital age, sexuality and objectification of women in popular music have intensified. According to Vivian (2002), popular songs are a potent means through which human beings express their emotions, thus artists have utilized this in conveying beliefs over their verbal and lyrical statements. Because of this, many popular songs portray women as objects of sex and convey the misogynistic construction of women. Fredrickson

and Roberts (1997) agree that sexual objectification occurs in daily social interactions and is highly likely to be focused on women than men with negative consequences. Popular songs objectify sexual acts and sexual organs as bodies that occur for the use and as pleasure for men.

The lyrics of selected Kipsigis popular songs highlight the traditional sex stereotypes in which the bodies of women and their beauty are captured in the songs. Sexual acts have been objectified as food and work while the female sex organ is seen as an instrument and something edible that can satisfy the desires of the male gender, hence are objects of male fantasies. Women consistently view and hear that it is normal and natural for them to be treated as sex objects by men. Also, women know that their bodies are of value to men and should dress seductively to please men. Consequently, these women can engage in risky behaviours to garner men's attention thus impact on their mentality (Odhiambo, 2015).

The Kipsigis are a speech community that constitutes a dialect of the larger Kalenjin language spoken in the central and south Rift Valley of the former Rift Valley province of Kenya. They belong to the Highland Nilotes who mainly inhabit the high-altitude regions of Kenya. The Kipsigis are bordered by fellow Nilotes; the Luos who are speakers of Dholuo language (lake or river Nilotes) to the west, the Nandi speakers to the north (highland Nilotes) and the Maasai, speakers of the Maa language (plain Nilotes). This paper is organized as follows; section 2 provides literature review, 3 provides the data and analysis, section four the results and discussion, then finally section five provides concluding remarks.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The objectification of women in the modern world music has attracted many studies using both quantitative and qualitative methods. For instance, a study by Apuke and Jigem (2019) suggests that music has a prominent sexual objectification that portrays a controlling image of men over women in strict appearance standards. Similarly, women in western cultures are objectified greatly as compared to men, where women's bodies are sexualized, evaluated and looked at with great frequency (Wiederman, 2000). Correspondingly, Nwagbara (2005) notes that women are depicted and given images of career incompetence, enthusiasts in fashion beauty and alluring sex objects. These images send sticking impressions leading to arousal and exhibition of impulses.

A study done by Onanuga (2017) on the portrayal of women in Nigeria music among male artists, shows the promotion of violence against women, devalued females and gender oppression. Findings in this study suggest the presentation of women as sex objects for satisfying phallogocentric and

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patriarchal lust among men in the society and condemnatory constructs among females who are willing partakers in the performances. Nyirenda (2015) agrees that gender representations in music include demeaning of women, promotion of hyper-masculinity and stereotyping and objectification of women. Furthermore, one way in which music shows sexual dominance among men is its masculine nature where male artists reinforce and celebrate the sexual objectification of women. According to Chiweshe and Bhatasara (2013), male artists in Zimbabwean popular songs valorize hegemonic masculinities in which women are commoditized, objectified and feminized. They recreate connotations about women's bodies and positions which gives a justification to heterosexuality and patriarchal practices.

Additionally, it has become a norm to hear lewd and obscene remarks about the objectification of women in music. Dwivedi (2017) posits that women are objectified as ointment, bombs and instruments, which indicates that women are not considered as respectable and worthy persons and are depicted negatively. Balraj and Jan (2012) analyzed Malaysian music videos and found out that women are called girl, baby girl and baby which shows that they are immature and require protection. It was also observed that women are objectified in terms of sexual organs such as buttocks, breasts and vagina.

Lastly, Odhiambo (2017) in his study of women's objectification among selected Benga popular songs among the Luo community, found out that a woman is an object of admiration among men and thus should be beautiful while the unattractive ones are shamed. An attractive woman is objectified as a Nile perch, a delicacy among the Luo people. Also, Luo popular songs emphasize traditional sex stereotypes that depict beautiful eyes, buttocks and physical beauty. In the songs, a woman with big buttocks is sexually desirable hence evokes explicit images that create mental pictures among the listeners. Mboya (2011) agrees that Luo love songs construct the body of a woman as an object in which the sexual desires of the male folk are gratified.

This paper's objective is to extend the understanding of objectification of women in Kipsigis popular songs especially on sexual acts and organs and how to achieve politeness through the use of these objects to avoid offensive language and pass their message to the audience.

III. DATA AND ANALYSIS

Data from interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The songs were transcribed in the original Kipsigis dialect and were translated into English. The required information was extracted and studied critically to identify the words and phrases that have objectified sexual acts and organs in women.

The primary texts for data and analysis were Kipsigis popular songs. The lyrics were taken verbatim, and the translation was done by the researcher who is proficient in Kipsigis dialect. The researcher did analysis of the lyrics with the assistance of respondents to study the various ways in which

the artists used objects in portraying women, sexual intercourse, and female sexual organ in their songs.

In the song *Kiptingiat*, for instance, the artist uses words and phrases such as:

siabeten bokoiniki (to cut trees)
kotesetaa kasit komie (work went on well)
eye otilisie (I cut trees)
kiteitos ketik (the trees made a lot of noise)

These words and phrases are used metaphorically to compare sexual intercourse to violent work such as cutting of trees using a saw mill. Through this language, the beauty of a woman is cheaply reduced to fragments and her beauty is diminished to be object-like. The artist has rendered women as mere objects to be used by men to fulfill their sexual desires, and by so doing, reduces the offensiveness of taboo words as he passes his message to the audience.

In the song *miwat* by Superior Warriors, the artist used words and phrases such as:

Kiiam miwandenyun (you ate my sugarcane)
menyoru onyinyindo en miwat (the sugarcane was not sweet).

The woman in the song is sexually dissatisfied due to sexual coercion by a man and shows how women have a low capacity to reject sexual approaches. In this instance, a woman has been reduced to someone who eats what is brought home by the man and if the food is not sufficient, she runs away. Moreover, the society we live in today is patriarchal, hence certain attributes have been assigned to women such as dependency and physical weakness. This is realized where women depend on men to perform roles such as siring babies as seen in the following:

Kobit kasit (there is work)
Kosor kokwetab kapkorors (save Kapkoros village)
Kobokokur robta (bring rain)

The roles outlined in the above are only done by men and the women play her role as an object and a platform for a man performs his roles. Women are dependent on of men and would not make any progress without a man who has full control over her. In this case, the woman becomes an object who willingly suspends her voice, opinions and individuality so as to be with the male gender as in the following:

chomege gaa emosto kityo (all is good I just miss you)

Furthermore, the behaviour assigned to males are risk taking, competitive achievement as well as intellectual and physical aggression and the Kipsigis popular songs gives them the notion of subject. A woman is seen as someone who is seduced and her main role is to submit to the desires of the man by giving up herself completely to the man's pleasure as seen in the following:

Yetachin obot Bilet (when a woman welcomes you).

Lastly, Kipsigis popular songs have used materialistic metaphors profoundly to compare women to objects. The songs sung by male Kipsigis popular songs artists portray

women as easy to impress and sees them as an object who submits to the desires of the self who in this case is the man.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section is going to discuss the various ways in which women have been objectified in the Kipsigis popular songs. For instance, women as instruments, sex intercourse as food, war, journey and work will be put into perspective.

Women as Instruments

The terms used by Kipsigis popular songs artists portray women and activities involving them as objects of cutting trees and machines. The artists compared women to instruments used by men in forming words and phrases that objectify women. Such terms include:

Mashinit (machine)

Takiget tipait choechen (I feel like driving a tipper)

Takiget transis choechen (I feel like driving a transit lorry)

Inaget probox oterteri (I overpower a probox during driving)

Otinye experience neyamat ageten tipait (I have enough experience to drive a tipper)

These words and phrases downgrade the status of a woman to instruments controlled by men, enslaves, dehumanizes, and portray women as devoid of skills, understanding and reasoning. Artists used these terms to match women with instruments which undermines their ability to choose and promote what is valuable which leads to the relegation of a woman's status to things that can be violated and abused by others.

In Kipsigis popular songs, women are seen as instruments based on their looks, usability for pleasure and the quality of gaze hence are eroticized as part of sex by men. They exist to the end of male pleasure hence are viewed as tools for the gratification of sexual desires and purpose by men, which harm the identity of women. For instance, women are seen as less human and turned into commodities or things that are sold and bought like cars, engines and machines. They become depersonalized and discriminated harming their humanity.

Furthermore, Kipsigis popular song artists view women as willing givers of consent to be used as objects for men's sexual purposes because they lack options in a male dominated society. For instance, data shows that women allow men to drive their cars, ignite engines, and change gears while driving. This shows that women have laid low and have given consent to be used sexually by the men hence objectification of women is exhibited and demanded by men in the society. Women are used as objects by men because they want and men need women as objects and demand them to be object-like. For example,

Kogul mwanik – to siphon fuel

Anakin mwanik – give someone paraffin.

Inakan beek – give me water

The above data shows that women give consent to men to willingly use their bodies to gratify their desires. Women

have given themselves the position of objects and men are supposed to play their role in these objects well. Through the use of objects in their songs, Kipsigis popular song artists are able to achieve politeness through the use of objects that are crucial in lessening the bluntness of taboo words because one domain of experience is understood in terms of another.

Furthermore, women have been portrayed as sex objects because of the sexual content that are passed across by Kipsigis popular songs. Despite music being a tool for passing educational information, societal and spiritual values, it has also served as an informal tool for the conveyance of behaviours specific to gender hence expose messages that focus on objectification of women. In the sampled songs, it was found out that women have been objectified by the lead artists, mostly males. In songs where there is a collaboration of either gender, women view themselves as objects and instruments and have internalized this to a varied degree, therefore, they begin to self-objectify and treat themselves as objects of admiration and evaluation based on their appearance.

Objectification of sexual intercourse.

Sexual intercourse in Kipsigis is referred to using words and expressions that hedge explicitness to avoid being considered obscene. Kipsigis popular songs artists have coined expressions that involve food, journey and work to connote sexual intercourse where women are on the receiving end.

Sexual intercourse has been objectified as food. Given the primary and basic importance of food, humans have symbolically created consumption metaphors as a vehicle for shaping and conveying concepts of gender and sexual identity. In the traditional Kipsigis society, women are associated with cooking and nourishment hence artists have used appetite for food in masking the language of sexual desire. Hunger for food is equated to sexual desire hence appetizing food connote sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is objectified in food eating since it involves a tool used for eating and what is eaten. This objectification perceives women as lacking key human attributes such as mindedness, personhood, moral status and mental capacity. Furthermore, sexual intercourse as food is used with terms such as meal, hunger and appetite and share sexual referents such as sexual arousal and desire because food is an avenue for sex connotations in that lovemaking and eating go together.

Sexual intercourse is also metaphorised as war. Sexual objectification is out of control among men, hence the avoidance of negative outcomes is impossible. Women experience sexual objectification most often, which makes them internalize other people's perspectives of themselves, therefore, they are at risk for physical and sexual harm as they are objects to be used, evaluated and gazed upon by others.

Male artists refer to sexual intercourse as war because it requires physical strength and men generally get engaged in activities that exhibit phallic power over women. In the sampled songs, male Kipsigis popular artists objectified sexual intercourse as war with the male sexual organ being the weapon to kill, maim, or attack the enemy in a battle. For instance:

Kiotile ketik (I was cutting trees)
 Suset (biting)
 Kikasuk rokoret (bit the pipe)

All these phrases depict sex as war where men are the perpetrators of the violence against women. They emphasize the message that sex involves a collision between two people of the opposite sex and requires physical strength for the man to regulate and control women as well as to instill discipline on the female sex organ which is seen as deviant and insatiable.

Also, objectification of sexual intercourse as war shows violence, hostility and dominance against women as seen in the phrases:

kiteitos ketik (the trees made a lot of noise)
Korii mashinit (machine spitting fire)

These words and phrases add to the customary view of the man as a hunter, sex activity initiator and the one with sex drive. These terms degrade women as humans who deserve less moral treatment by others, have less capacity for decisions or thoughts as men and shows aggressive mistreatment of women sexually. Sex as war promotes the pleasure principle advanced by the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective and the desire to maintain authority over females. The male Kipsigis popular artists have used terms that perceive them as beings incapable of inflicting pain and sexual aggression on others since they are passive in the act. Moreover, objectifying sex as war hinders the man from having authentic relationships and feelings with the opposite sex which makes the man overlook the willingness of the partner in such context because he is out to satisfy his ego and sexual desire.

Sex intercourse as work is devoid of the violent connotations seen in sexual intercourse as war and are relevant due to the effort used. Sexual intercourse conception as work holds the relation of women as part the male economy. This reduces sexual intercourse to an encounter that lacks affection but an act performed by 'tools' such as the penis. Sexual intercourse as work shows images where the man spends his energy on the task at hand as shown in the terms:

Ketindetab tinget' (tractor driver)
Tutet (to harvest).
 Otinye experience neyamat ageten tipait (I am experience in driving a tipper)
 Takiget transis choechen (I want to drive a heavy transit)

These expressions show the man as the one who undertakes the work with skill and perfection while the woman is the recipient.

Male Kipsigis popular song artists also portray sex as an act of inspection where the man samples the woman to know her state and value. In the traditional world today, women are expected to be virgins before getting married. Women should keep themselves pure until the day of marriage. This shows sexual intercourse as work done with an effort to achieve discipline and control while the woman receives the action.

Sexual intercourse is also objectified as a journey with a starting and ending point. Among the Kikuyu people, for instance, they believe that sex as a journey begins with an erection and ends with an orgasm (Njoroge, 2015). The conception of sex as a journey is talked about in terms such as to migrate, finish the journey and depart because sexual activity corresponds to the act of leaving and a destination while the partners are the travellers. In Kipsigis popular songs, these expressions objectify sexual intercourse as a journey where one heeds a call and embarks on a journey. For instance,

Sinamach owo Kisumu for wan hawa (If I want to go to Kisumu for one hour)
Ketetab tipait (drive a tipper)
Omoche nenomii tulwet owendi mosmos (Whenever I am on a hill, I drive well)
Ndokelun iwe rutoi (If you are on a journey)

The above phrases give an account of a person or two people on an expedition or transit to achieve sexual pleasure. The journey involves two people, therefore, the woman welcomes the man and the two are supposed to complete the journey.

In the traditional African world, women are perceived as welcoming and accommodative people as they offer food, shelter and accommodation. For example, in the song *rutoi Belgut*, whenever a man visits a place as *iwe rutoi* and a woman welcomes you as *ndewendi kotkotachin obot Bilet*, or whenever you meet a willing woman as *inyoru cheragan*, sexual intercourse takes place. Additionally, men are supposed to prepare for the journey as depicted in the phrase *chobogen boten panda* (be ready you are part of the journey) as observed in the song *Kapkoros*. Whenever a human being gets a job in any place, one must travel to the place to start the work. In this notion, sex is objectified as a journey because the man has to travel to the place when a contract is available hence *kokobit kondract* (there is a contract) and *kokobit kasit* (there is work).

Objectification of Sexual Organ; Vagina

Female sexual organs have been symbolized and stripped of their personality by comparing them to objects such as instruments, food and animals. The vagina and the penis are discussed using different terms. For instance, the terms used to refer to the penis shows its legitimacy and social power while the vagina is discussed in expressions that portray it as a passive and abused part of the body which devalues it (Javaid, 2018).

Artists have objectified the vagina as an instrument. The symbols used in this category interprets the vagina as a tool or instrument that receives an action performed by the male sex organ. Kipsigis popular song artists have used terms that portray the vagina as hollow and used to store liquids or some things are put inside. Their role is to be entered and portrays the submissive role of women in sex, therefore, propagates male dominance. Such terms include:

Teret (pot)
Tait (lamp)
Tangit (tank).

These instruments enclose hollow spaces where an action takes place and depicts women as passive during the sexual process.

These terms also underpin the vagina as a conduit where a man can insert the penis because they have phallic objects such as pipes used to either deposit or withdraw liquids to quench a man's sexual thirst. This agrees with Anudo (2012) who posits that a vagina acts as a tool used by men to remove sexual heat from the penis because when aroused, the penis becomes erect and the body temperature becomes high. While the main role of the female sex organ is to perform natural duties such as urination, the vagina is the central constituent in procreation because it receives the penis and sperm which swims to the fallopian tube for fertilization, therefore, the terms above which are hollow and receive fluids for them to perform their functions optimally.

Additionally, vagina has been objectified as food. Food performs important functions in the human body such as boosting the immune system, healthy development, source of energy, minerals, nutrients and vitamins. The objectification of the vagina as food is because it is a source of nourishment to the penis in the same way food nourishes the body. For instance, the vagina is something to be eaten by a man hence:

panyek (meat)

After eating the meat, the man feels satisfied. This is because sex makes people full of life and energized subject to adequate preparation before sex and knowledge of the woman's erotic zones.

In as much as the vagina is seen as food to be eaten, organs such as the mouth are known to chew and gulp any delicious food. It has teeth that assist in breaking food particles into small pieces that make it easy to swallow. The vagina, in this sense, has been objectified as *kutit* (mouth) that breaks down the food. Whenever the mouth is excited, it releases saliva that softens and digests food the same way the vagina releases mucus that lubricates it for ease of penetration during sex. The term *kokoyam kutit* (my mouth is dry) indicates that the vagina is an object that needs food for it to work normally.

Vagina is also seen as a place. In the Kipsigis community, the word for vagina is considered a taboo word talked about as a place with no specific name to palliate its offensiveness while others portray it as a forest, kitchen, or a valley. For instance, the vagina has been referred as:

Uyan (somewhere)
Oloton (that place)
Koronotet (that place).

These terms do not give the specific name or the location of a place and are polite but portray the vagina as a location without a name, yet it is an important organ that brings life.

Forests and valleys have vegetation the same way the vagina has pubic hair that covers it and prevents heat loss and the effect of the organs rubbing each other. The vagina has been objectified as:
Olebotembwet (a valley)

Olemipukonok (a bushy place)
Yepitat (grassy area)

These terms show how men chronically survey the body of a woman and frequently think about the appearance of women's bodies as objects. Also, a forest is a source of firewood used for cooking in the kitchen. A fireplace accommodates firewood the same way the vagina warms the penis during sexual intercourse hence the phrases:

Burget koronotet (that place is warm)
Yosumaat chiget (the kitchen is warm)

The vagina is a hollow organ and has space where sperm is deposited after ejaculation and allows the sperm to swim to the fallopian tube where fertilization takes hence the term:

Orit (inside).

V. CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it is evident that artists of Kipsigis popular songs used sexual connotations in their songs to objectify women through the use of metaphors which shows how women are inferior to men reducing their status to weak beings in the society. Furthermore, women are portrayed as objects used by men to advance their dominance and power.

We live in a patriarchal society where men use the physical appearance of women to set apart or single out the body components to gratify their desires and depict women as objects for the male gaze. This leads to the evaluation and judgement of women based on their appearance instead of attributes based on their competencies.

Women are seen as objects such as food, cars, journey and instruments operated by men to show power over them, which is contrary to our cultural norms and the requirements of etiquette despite such words lessening the use of taboo words in public. The status of women and their sexual organs have been degraded by comparing them to places and sexual intercourse as work.

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