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**A MISLEADING PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ORAL
LITERATURE: AN EXAMPLE FROM AKAMBA
CIRCUMCISION SONGS**

Abstract

This paper aims to study the misleading portrayal of women in Akamba male circumcision songs. The study will investigate how the woman is portrayed in the Kamba male circumcision songs and how the songs should influence the circumcised and the community as a whole to have a positive perception towards women. The study supports the proposition by Fox (1993), that what we read and listen affects our psyches and attitudes.

Key words: *Misleading; Symbolism; Songs; Circumcision; Morals; Tradition; Initiation*

1. INTRODUCTION AND STUDY BACKGROUND

Children psychologists have identified that the personality one has during adulthood, has a great influence from his or her childhood. This study believes that the negative portrayal of women in oral literature, especially in circumcision songs may contribute to the existence and perpetuation of a 'junior role' they play in the society. In essence, there is a great need to the composers of these songs to control such misleading portrayals.

These perceptions and attitudes are usually negative, and maybe misused to perpetuate a certain stereotype. In retrospect, universal portrayal represents the realities of a given society. The existence of such portrayals arise from the intentions of exaggeration and presenting the feelings of a society with the objective of making them to have an indigenous outlook, racial discrimination, gender issues among other important related aspects (Seme; 2007).

Realistic portrayals are usually evident in different sections of the society through age, tribe, and clans among other aspects. This study is primarily based on how the portrayal of women manifests itself in Akamba circumcision songs, and how it perpetuates her negative perception.

2. ORAL LITERATURE AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE SOCIETY

Oral Literature is an important branch of literature in the society, as the culture of a given society is reflected through it (Omari;

2008). Like any other community, the Akamba have their distinct traditions, which are well defined by their oral traditions.

The community tells its story and identity through different oral aspects like songs, proverbs, and folk tales among others. Among the Akamba, oral literature is taken with utmost regard, as it reveals the community's attitudes, opinions, feelings and general philosophy about the lives of the people (Ndeti; 1972).

In acting like the reminder of a peoples' character, oral literature gives a world view of a given community from their everyday's lifestyle. For instance through songs, a community gives its own view about its lifestyles (Nyaga; 1986).

Oral literature has very fundamental roles in the society, as it perpetuates and preserves its history and cultural identity. Indeed, it arises and realistically manifests itself from the continuity of our daily lives. According to Simiyu (2007), the songs of a given society continue to experience changes and modifications as a society grows.

In discussing the role of a song, Ntarangwi (1990) says that, songs are oral aspects that a society uses to address its oral aspects with the aim of preserving them for its present and future benefits. Indeed, they also help in their preservation, where they can be passed from one generation to another. Ntarangwi says that in its role, a song is expected to portray reality in a given society, as it coincides with its traditions.

Ntarangwi's views coincide with the aim of this study, which is primarily showing the negative portrayal of women in Akamba circumcision songs. Among the Akamba, circumcision songs are usually characterized by themes and philosophies of the community's perception about the roles of both men and women in the society.

Through these songs, members of the given society are able to express their thoughts and individual stand points, which they may be unable to express in normal contexts (Kavyu;1980).

3.THE PLACE OF A WOMAN IN THE AKAMBA COMMUNITY

According to Senkoro (1987), the history of a given society enlivens its art. He says that for one to understand the oral aspects of any society, it's a must to understand its history. And in exploring clan-ism relations among the Akamba, this study therefore aims at understanding their circumcision songs, and their whole view on clan-ism.

The Kambas are a patrilineal society (Kimilu; 1962). The man is the head of the family, as well as being the sole bread winner. The inheritance of property was reserved only to the men, although of late, many men have realized the importance of including their female children among the heirs of their wealth. The institutions which acted as custodians of the society's laws were also headed by men. Women had very insignificant roles (Kilauni; 2007). In

spite of all this, this trend continues to change as modernity continues to gradually penetrate to the tenets that acted as cultural embodiments of this community.

The woman was supposed to submit herself to her husband, as well as according respect to other men. In this, the woman had totally been denied her independence. If her husband wrongs her, the community's beliefs and traditions do not allow her to deal directly with him. She has to use an intermediary, who in most cases is an in-law or a male, who is her husband's age mate to 'punish her' on behalf of him, if it emerges that she was the one who wronged him.

Among the Akamba, the attributes of a good woman include, submissiveness, perseverance, patience and being respectful to her husband, as it is evident in most African communities.

Marriage leads to women being counted as part of her husband's properties. The payment of dowry indicates that the woman has been owned by the man, and she is not supposed to go back to her parents' home, despite the afflictions she would undergo under her husband. The standard dowry paid for the woman in this community is three cows and twelve goats. The dowry is also not paid at once, but gradually, according to the capability of the husband's family. In this community, the primary role of a woman upon marriage is to bear children.

The woman is expected to get children, especially boys to as to ensure the continuity of the man and his clan (Ndeti; 1992).

Women who failed to bear children were belittled by the community members, thus giving room to her husband to marry another woman, with the primary aim of getting a boy child. The woman would also be denied conjugal rights by her husband. Indeed, this was too bad, as she would not be allowed to get married again or go back to her parents.

At this state, she had to stay with her husband, in most cases playing the role of a maid or a slave (Nzioki; 1982).

In this community, women play many basic roles compared to men. Men play masculine roles such as building of homes, garden roles such as digging among others. On their part, women play roles such as thatching of houses, planting of seedlings, harvesting and preserving the harvested produce. Women also ensure that livestock are adequately fed and cows are milked.

Household chores such as cooking, bringing up of children are also reserved for them. In a wider perspective, the traditional practices of this community demean the role of women in the society. However, western education and technological advancements have greatly emancipated her from the yoke of cultural and societal discrimination. As a result of this, most Kamba women have managed to get good education and secured good jobs.

4.THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN AKAMBA CIRCUMCISION SONGS

The misleading portrayal of women in Akamba circumcision songs emerges as an echo of the community's present and past traditions. The reality of negative portrayal of women manifests itself as follows:

4.1 A woman is voiceless. She is likened to an item for sale.

Some circumcision songs among the Akamba portray women as unable to make sound decisions that suit her. Instead, important decisions that pertain to her are made by the man on her behalf.

Let's consider this song, which portrays woman as an item for sale by her father, where she has no audacity to oppose the decision.

Kamba	Translation
<i>Naamukawua naka , ukila</i>	I was being woken up by other women, wake up,
<i>Naamukawua naka , ukila</i>	I was being woken up by other women, wake up,
<i>Namukawua naka</i>	I was being woken up by other women, wake up,
<i>ngomete ii</i>	I was being woken up by other women as I slept
<i>Ngiwa nenda nithi ngwate</i>	They were advising me to go and hold their breasts.
<i>nondo</i>	When I touched them, my father warned me, don't!
<i>Na ngikwata ngitavwua ni</i>	That is my property; I will sell it whatever I want.
<i>tata we!</i>	When my father will be given cows,
<i>Isu ni mali yakwa</i>	I should also be considered, so as not to hate myself,
<i>ngathoosya kila ngwenda</i>	Aliili mwa!
<i>Tata akinewa ng'ombe</i>	
<i>Nakwa ngingewa kindu</i>	
<i>ndikemene</i>	
<i>Aliili mwa!</i>	

Before being circumcised, the youth were not allowed to practice sex. This song was then sung by the youth so as to be officially allowed to practice sex after their transition to adulthood. The song portrays the reality of belittling of women among the Akamba. They are portrayed as sex idols to please men, as it is evidenced by the fourth line 'They were advising me to go and hold their breasts'. Summarily, the song is a general portrayal of how the role of women is undermined.

In most African communities, most clan-ism factors tend to discriminate against women (Kobia 2008). Most of these songs and traditions portrayed men as role models, while demeaning the role of women. Most of the songs that were sung revealed certain themes on the community trends and their perception on the role of

women. And apart from being seen as playing the role of ‘comforting their husbands’ the woman is also compared to an item that can be sold any price.

According to the above song, sung on the eve of circumcision ceremonies, the aspect of pricing of women is evident in the sixth line: *isu ni mali yakwa ngathoosya kila ngwenda* (This is my property that I will sell when I want). The line compares the woman to a ‘thing’ that does not have any say on her rights. She is weakened by the traditional structures in place. Still, it reveals the amount of dowry that the girl’s father will get upon her marriage as shown by line seven which says ‘When my father will be given cows’. Among the Akamba, the issue of dowry has a long history, as it is a very crucial foundation of their culture that has been preserved and has been passed from one generation to the other (Kimilu 1962, Nzioki 1982, Kieti and Coughlin 1990).

According to this community, dowry payment has been a tradition that has been used to quantify the value of a woman. Due to that perception, a man compared any girl child he got with the wealth that he would receive upon her marriage (Nzioki 1982). In the Kamba community, when a woman was married, she was perceived to ‘have been bought’ (Kuthooa Kiveti). Her dowry composed of three cows, 12 goats, honey and money. The money, usually around Sh50, 000 is referred as *mbesa sya mukwa*, and is handed to the girl’s mother as a consolation for the pain she

endured during her birth, among other items (Mbiti; 1969; Kimilu; 1962; Kingei 1982).

After being married off, the woman was supposed to be submissive to her husband at all times, as well as according respect to other men in the community (Somba; 2000).

According to Somba (already mentioned), the woman was not allowed to involve herself in any scuffle with her husband. If she erred, she was supposed to be punished. Marriage made her husband's property as payment of dowry sealing any avenue that she would use to go back to her parent's home. According to (Kimilu; 1962), a man was viewed as wealthy according to the number of girls he had, due to the amount of dowry he would get during their marriages.

Discussing on the issue of dowry, Uvetie, being quoted by Gibbe (1978) says that when male chauvinism started demeaning the woman, it mostly focused on the issue of dowry.

Uvetie says that the issue of dowry simply wholly enslaved the woman, a situation that is very prevalent among the Akamba. Everything that pertain her is done by the men.

This is a poor perception that contributes to the enslavement of the woman in the marriage, where she is viewed as a "commercial commodity."

4.2 A woman has no right to own property

Among the Akamba, the man is the head of the family, and only one with the right to own property. The inheritance of land and livestock is passed on to the males through their fathers.

In the following song, the male youth are portrayed as the only ones with the right to inherit their father's property through circumcision.

Kamba

Ninitilwe mindo

Ninitilwe oyu

Mundu Ute mutile mindo ti mundu

person

Ninitilwe mindo oyu

Nithi ngasunge mbui sya nau

Muvea ute mundu mwaike ti muvea

is not a family

Translation

Can I be cut right now.

let me be cut now

anyone who is not cut is not a

person

let me be cut now

I go herd my father's goats

A family without a circumcised man

is not a family

Among the Akamba, the man would not be allowed to inherit property before being circumcised. The sixth line which says 'I go and look after my father's goats' explains this. Looking after the father's goats means inheriting the family's property. Its only men who were allowed to inherit after circumcision since they were now seen as mature men who could take care of the family's property. The Akamba tradition does not allow women to inherit property. Only the males are allowed. Waita (1997) agrees that in general, the community's culture has remained as the only

impediment leading to the males being favored on property inheritance matters.

4.3 A woman as a defender of a man

There are some songs among the Akamba that portrays the woman a whole depended on the man for her survival. This is as it is demonstrated in this song *Ekuyu mesilile mutha*:

Kamba	Translation
<i>Ekuyu mesilile Mutha</i> through Mutha	The Gikuyus passed
<i>Kiveti cha Kavyu nikyavenwa muume</i> from his wife	Kavyu has been snatched
<i>Koma na mwenyu uthele</i> you get a curse	Sleep with your mother
<i>Ekuyu mesilile Mutha</i> through Mutha	The Gikuyus passed
<i>Kiveti cha Kavyu nikyavenwa muume</i> from his wife	Kavyu has been snatched
<i>Kethiwa nininamanyie akaiya nundu wa kavyu</i> because of Kavyu	If I knew she would cry
<i>Nitha naekie kwikia uvano</i> mark	I would not have put the
<i>Muti nunanyivie Matu</i> reduced from the tree	the leaves have been
<i>Ekuyu mesilile Mutha</i> through Mutha	The Gikuyus passed

In this song, the sixth line which says ‘if I knew she would cry because of Kavyu’ (kethiwa nininamanyie akaiya nundu wa Kavyu’) *means* that, the woman would suffer after the husband neglects the family. It means that she is not able to live alone, and if she finds herself in this situation, she weeps. Weeping shows

that she is unable to provide for the family alone. This song perpetuates the notion that the woman must wholly depend on the man in all aspects of life.

4.4 A woman as a prostitute

The negative portrayal of woman as a prostitute emerges in several circumcision songs among the Akamba. The following song was sung to the initiates while they were still at seclusion stage. It is full of themes which demean the role of women among the Akamba.

Kamba

Miunda ni mali ya onthe
Vivya uimbivisya
Miunda ni mali ya andu onthe
Kii ni kiusaanisya
Miunda ni mali ya andu onthe

Translation

The farms are for everyone
 Burn mine as you burn yours
 The farms are for everyone
 This one amazes me
 The farms are for everyone

This song portrays a woman as solely owned by a man, where he uses her the way he wishes.

According to Nzioki (1982), the Akamba are patrilineal where the woman takes the second position. This representation is mostly driven by the payment of dowry, which depicts the woman as a commodity for sale. In the above song, the woman is demeaned to an extent of being likened to a 'farm' which is owned by everyone as shown in line one which says 'the farms are for everyone'.

The Kambas are a farming community, and their livelihood comes from agricultural activities. In this regard, apart from involving themselves in activities such as carvings and livestock keeping, they actively involve themselves in agriculture. The community greatly values communality in communal issues such as farming, hunting and even harvesting (Mbiti; 1969). The community members united in performing these activities, and they sang these songs to pass time.

In the above song, the 'farm' has a concealed meaning representing the woman. An unmarried woman is likened to a farm that is owned by everyone, who is free to farm on it. The second line says 'burn mine as you burn yours'. Its meaning is sleep with my wife as you sleep with yours. This is tantamount to likening the woman to a prostitute who can engage into sexual activities with different men, not because she wishes so, but because the Kamba tradition dictates so. Lines three, four and five depict her as a farm which belongs to everyone.

The Akamba were so much united that in times of war, men could leave their women to their age mates or men of their clans so that they could procreate in them (Kimilu; 1962).

The above song was thus sung to indicate that, there was no problem men leaving their wives to their clan mates to look after them and procreate with them when their husband were away. In such a scenario, a woman was not supposed to oppose.

The song below also portrays a woman as a prostitute who is hoodwinked with money such that she engages into sex with a man who can give her money in exchange with sex:

Kamba	Translation
Nzonge na ileve	I move with live
Ndindi ni kana kanini	Ndindi is a small child
Nzonge na ileve Nzoka ndathaukiawa does not play	I move with live Nzoka
Ndukue ngili ya manyanga young beautiful girl	Carry a thousand for a
Ndukue ingolo ya mutumba old woman	Carry five shillings for an

In the above song, line 5 says that a man who has a thousand shillings (*ngili*) gets a *manyanga* (beautiful young woman) while a man who carries five shillings (*ing'olo*) gets a *mtumba* (an old woman with no value)

In the above song, women are portrayed as prostitutes who will only choose a rich man.

4.5 A woman as an irrational creature

Among some of the Akamba circumcision songs, a woman was portrayed as one who is not conscious of her actions. Indeed, she is portrayed to have sex with uncircumcised boys (*ivisi*), as demonstrated in the following song:

Kamba	Translation
<i>mwanake ndaneenaa na kivetu kyeene</i> someone's wife	A boy doesn't look for
<i>Mwanake ndavoyaa kivetu kyeene</i> someone's wife	A boy does not seduce
<i>Anengawe kwa kutalilya</i> <i>Ndaneenaa na kivetu kyeene</i> wife	He is given unconditionally He does seduce someone's
<i>Mwaikwa ndaneenaa na kivetu kyeene</i> to seduce someone's wife	An initiate is not allowed
<i>Kiu ndyaa kiwua nikulye mwiasya ata?</i> enquire for more clarification?	I have not heard that, i

The above song depicts a woman as an irrational creature, who does not use her conscience. They are depicted as weak beings when it comes to sex such that they can be easily seduced by uncircumcised boys to engage in sex with them and they give in. The third line which says 'he is given unconditionally' confirms it. This song is popular during the *nzaiko nene* (big circumcision ceremony) where young initiates are given advice on how they are expected to carry on after circumcision. Among the lessons passed was to condemn sex with married women.

4.6 A woman as a source of all evil

Among the Akamba, a woman is so much loathed to an extent that most community members believe that she is the source of all evil in the society. Indeed, some of the calamities that face the community are believed to be caused by demons associated with women. Whirlwind for example are figuratively called *ngoma*

syaka (women demons). The community still believes that it is the woman who contracts AIDS to men. Women are believed to be the ones who infect men with AIDS due to her flirtatious character. According to them, the man is not flirtatious, but the woman.

In the following song, *Katulilangi* the woman is portrayed as the one spreading AIDS to men. The woman is shown as one who cannot resist sexual advances.

Kamba

Waminwa ni nzou, ndikautula muti
elephant, I will not blame you

Waminwa ni nzoka, ndikautula muti
snake, I will not blame you

Waminwa ni kitau cha muthesu, ndikautula muti
acute scald, I will not blame you

Waminwa ni kitundumo, ndikautula muti
lightning, I will not blame you

Indi waminwa ni muthelo, ngautula muti
AIDs, I will blame you

Waminwa ni Katulilangi, ngautula muti
Katulilangi, I will blame you.

Translation

If you are finished by the

If you are finished by the

If you are finished by an

If you are finished by the

But if you are finished by

If you are finished by

This song reveals that, according to most communities, the woman ought to be avoided at all times, as she is the one who spreads AIDS to men. Ceremonies and circumcision songs among the Akamba are used to warn the youth against engaging in premarital sex or hobnobbing with *Katulilangi* (*immoral women*). *Katulilangi* is a figurative name used to refer to promiscuous women. *Kutulilanga* means to jump from one place to another. The song compares the woman to a prostitute. Akamba communal

researchers believe that a woman is the one who contracts AIDS to the man as justified by the sixth line 'Waminwa ni Katulilangi ngautula muti' (if you are finished by Katulilangi I will blame you).

In this context, *Katulilangi* is a representation of the modern woman, who does not observe the traditions and norms of the Akamba. She has defied all the aspects of the community's traditions. She is demonstrated as an irrational person, who is not conscious of her actions, especially in a world full of dangers arising from sexual activities. The aim of the song is to warn both men and women against having multiple sexual partners.

4.6 A woman as an evil being

The Akamba also believe that women are evil and they have their gods who are quick to anger just like them Ndeti (1972). According to the following song, sung by men who participated in the Second World War from the Akamba community, any calamity which befell the men was blamed on women. The song was sung as follows:

Kamba

Mundu ndakusaa Ngai atanenda
die, if God does not want
Ninye noonie tukiinga Burma
were crossing Burma
Meli yaendaa ta nzeve suo su
at a very high speed

Translation

Human beings do not
I was there when we
The ship was moving

Kyalo kyu kyaumaniwe ni ngai sya aka
 cursed by the gods of women

The journey had been

This song depicts a woman as an evil being. The fourth line which says ‘the journey was cursed by the gods of women’ confirms this. If any calamity befell the community, it was attributed to the ‘women’s gods’ as line 4 shows ‘the journey had been cursed by the gods of women’.

4.6 A woman as a ‘tool’ for house chores

As pointed earlier in this study, it’s the woman who performs household chores among the Akamba. The community has set out these roles on the basis of clan-ism which are evident on different aspects of oral traditions like circumcision songs. The following song depicts a woman as the one who performs chores like cooking. The song was sung like this:

Kamba

Naendie vandu
Kiveti kinavulya mui
Kyaua ngima nyingi
Kyambia ndikasama

Translation

I went to a place
 The woman took a cooking stick
 She prepared ugali
 And told me that I would not taste

In this song, the first and second lines which says, ‘I went to a place and a woman took a cooking stick’ explains that among the Kamba, it is the duty of a woman to cook. She is also the only person who can determine who to serve her food or not as the third and fourth lines say ‘she prepared ugali and told me that I would not taste’. The picture of a woman drawn from these two lines is of

a human being who is the only one responsible for house chores like cooking and serving.

It's from that message that the initiates begin to have a mentality that it is the woman who ought to perform all the household chores like cooking and serving food. This is a negative portrayal that can only be corrected through oral literature, especially through songs.

4.7 A woman as a sex tool for the man

The Akamba community has a retrogressive perception that, the woman is a tool for fulfilling the sexual pleasures for the man without any objection. The portrayal of the woman in the song *Naamukawua naka* 'I was being woken up by women' (ref. 4.1) is a portrayal of a tool used by the man to fulfil his sexual desires. She is woken up early in the morning, where the man holds her breasts for pleasure. This is a very negative perception in the modern world where the woman has independence to make her own decisions.

4.8 A woman as a despised person

Most Akamba circumcision songs portray the woman as one who does not deserve to be accorded respect. This is demonstrated by the derogatory language used in the following song, in her reference.

In the song, *Mwasa na ngomo*, (You who is carving) the language used is spiteful against a woman.

Kamba

Mwasa na ngomo ii Wiasa ki?

Mwasa na ngomoi Wiasa ki?

*Utuku twambiliilye kwitya Ta
tukwinzia*

*Tunengwe ya mung'ele Na nda
ya kithembe*

You, who is carving what are you
carving?

Translation

You who are carving what are you
carving?

We started borrowing at night like
we are digging

So as to be given the flat one like a
drums surface

When the women are circumcised, they are cut without any caution. They are just cut at once. The word *mung'ele* (flat one) seventh line has been used to indicate to cut without caution. When circumcising the man, on the contrary, a lot of care is taken. Indeed, his circumcision is done very slowly to achieve the desired shape. The first line which says 'you who is curving' and the second line which says 'what are you curving' justify the care taken to circumcise a man. Curving takes time than just cutting.

In the seventh line *tunengwe ya mung'ele* and eighth line *ta nda ya kithembe* (so as to be given the flat one and looking like a drums surface), it emerges that the woman was circumcised without any caution being taken. A desirable shape is not even achieved, unlike the man.

Still, the woman is further demeaned in the following song '*ningukuna vilingi*' (I will blow a trumpet). A woman's private parts are likened to a hole. The song went like this:

Kamba	Translation
<i>Ningukuna vilingi</i>	I will blow a flute
<i>Niiliila yiima</i>	I miss a hole
<i>Yiima ya mundu</i>	A woman's hole

muka!

The message in these two songs is demeaning to a woman as revealed in the third line, which says *yiima ya mundu muka* (the hole of a woman). A woman's genital is equalized to just a hole. This demeaning language is able to corrupt the children's minds and other members of the community on the respect that is supposed to be accorded to a woman.

4.9 A woman has in genuine love and she is a witch

The woman among the Akamba is also portrayed as having in genuine love and a witch, according to modern circumcision songs. According to the following song, *Mbulwa* is hoodwinking her husband, with the aim of using his money in an extravagant way. Also, she is a witch, as she uses witchcraft to fool her husband. The song goes like this:

Kamba	Translation
<i>Mwana wa mwendya niki</i>	<i>Kwitu ndyinuukaa niona</i>
<i>wambikisye iko</i>	<i>tawanendeie</i>
<i>Uimbonania na Mbulwa mwiitu wi</i>	<i>Muthenya umwe nookie utuku</i>
<i>Mavenzi movungu</i>	<i>ninywite</i>
<i>Nikilya noosa musaala mwisio wa</i>	<i>Navonea kindu onakwa navatelema</i>
<i>mwai</i>	<i>Navindukie neethia Mbulwa e</i>
<i>Aimbonethya tuthi tukakunde twiili</i>	<i>muthei</i>
<i>Ovamwe na thina usu mwingi wa</i>	<i>Aithyululuka ngua syakwa ailuma</i>
<i>mbesa</i>	<i>ta simba</i>

*Nookilile nina ivula nzembete
Keka niwambonie wamwendia with
a wakiie*

My cousin's child, why did you
throw me to the fire
You threw me to *Mbulwa*, a girl
who has deceitful love
Despite the problem I am facing
because of lack of money
I usually do not go home, I think
she bewitched me

One day I came home drunk
What I saw amazed me
I woke up and saw *Mbulwa* naked
Going round my clothes, roaring
like a lion
I left the house quickly, only
covering myself with a blanket
If you would have seen me, you
could be filled by trepidation

According to this song, *Mbulwa* is a modern girl, who lives in town. Her ways are contrary to the expectations of the Akamba community. She engages in drunkenness and witchcraft. The composer says despite *Mbulwa* encouraging her husband they squander their money, she also encourages him to go on drinking sprees on end months.

The following lines second and third demonstrate this: 'When I receive my salary end month' (*Nikilya noosa musaala mviso wa mwai*) na twende tukanywe 'She urges me to go on drinking sprees with her' (*Aimbonethya tuthi tukakunde twiili*). This character, demonstrated by women such as *Mbulwa* is contrary to the expectations of the Kamba community on the characters that women should have. They are expected to stay at home, cook and take care of the family

These are the attributes of a modern woman, and according to communal researcher's leads to conflicts in the marriage. Earlier in this research paper, we identified that in the Kamba community,

the parents to the boy looked for a wife for him. They ensured that he got a good girl from a family with good moral foundation. This portrayal perpetuates a negative perception that young men cannot get morally upright girls from institutions of higher learning or in urban areas.

4.10 A woman as the key source of domestic disputes in the marriage

In this song sang in modern circumcision ceremonies, *Kasivu* is a woman who's the singer portrays as the source of domestic wrangles in his marriage. *Kasivu* is quarrelsome, and she is the reason why her husband scolds her. She is supposed to remain quiet in whenever her husband is talking to her but she cannot. This song directs every -blame in their marriage to *Kasivu*. She is depicted as being the reason for the disagreements between her and her husband.

Kamba

Inaume witu aimbite ndakumanyika
Muka Kasivu nake nimwimbu
Akomete ndeyukilya
Utuku ni kumbulukumbulu
Kasivu ni ke ke ke ndakilasya
Kisomo kya Mungelesa
nikyatuvuthisye

Our uncle is swollen
 cannot be recognized

Translation

His wife *Kasivu* is also
 swollen
 She is asleep, she cannot
 wake up
 At night, just
kumbulukumbulu,
Kasivu is ke ke ke, she
 cannot keep quiet
 The British education has
 demeaned us

According to Karanja (2008) a dispute is a disagreement between two people. Sometimes this happens where the two people abuse each other and exchange blows.

In the context of African marriages, the man was allowed by the society to use kind of derogatory language towards the woman, while the woman was not allowed to use any abusive word to the man (Watuma; 2001). According to Ndeti (1972) the woman among the early Akamba societies was supposed to submit herself to her husband and all men in general. The traditions did not allow her to question her husband in anything. She was supposed to use a tact that would have been used by her in-laws or the clan mates of the husband to reprimand her husband Nzioki (1982).

A woman among the Akamba was supposed to demonstrate submissiveness, patience and respect as line six says: *Kasivu ni ke ke ke ndakilasya* (Kasivu is so noisy). She was not allowed to question her husband.

The payment of dowry indicated that the woman had been 'bought' and she was not supposed to return to her parent's home, despite of tribulations she underwent.

Despite all these traditionalistic beliefs, contemporary modernity's such as education, Christianity, modern ways of giving birth among the women among others have been able to emancipate the woman from these archaic perceptions that greatly enslaved and demeaned her status.

In her assessment of diverse African circumcision songs, Momanyi (1998) supports this notion, when he emphasizes that the African woman was expected by the society to be disciplined in her language usage. She was expected to remain mum, even if her husband abused her.

In this song, *Kasivu* is portrayed as a very abusive woman. She is noisy and abuses her husband every time. The singer uses lines ‘ke ke ke’ to show her noisy character.

Due to her character also swollen’

Domestic wrangles in modern marriages have come to be very pertinent. The societal world view has changed, as women have lost respect to their husbands. Some have been even reported to punish them like denying them food among other basic rights.

In this song, the uncle is also swollen from the beatings of his wife as indicated by the first line “our uncle is swollen you cannot recognize him”. Among the Akamba traditions, there was no provision for the wife to be reprimanded by her husband (Nzioki; 1982). The wife was supposed to be submissive, as the dowry payment made her like a slave to the husband.

This song is sung to condemn women like *Kasivu*, who attack their men due to influences of modern education system. The men are also cajoled for being attacked by their women. The singer warns the initiates to be careful, not to marry wives like *Kasivu*.

According to Mzee Mulwa, who is the singer of the song, the woman among the Akamba is supposed to humble herself at all

times. Disciplining a woman involves being punished (Watuma; 2001). According to Mzee Mulwa, the women of the modern generation have changed. They are disrespectful to their husbands. This song is a portrayal of domestic wrangles in modern marriages. The song emphasizes a change of thematic references in circumstation songs among the Akamba.

Mwaniki (1986) says that we cannot separate songs with other aspects of life. He says that singing and playing of drums reflected the way of life of people. According to him, the song represents the way of life of people in different aspects like beliefs, worldview, religion, philosophy, morals, relationships, worries and hopes.

The message depicted by the last line of the song *kisomo cha Mungelesa nikyatuvuthisye* (the Western education is demeaning us) will be understood in the context of this song that Kasivu engages in fight with her husband because she has been psychologically emancipated and enlightened by the modern education, which aims to bring equity in the society.

The study reveals that respect is a very central issue in marriage. Both husband and wife ought to respect each other on other basis of gender. As the world changes, so should be our mindset. It's not a must for us to continue holding archaic practices, legitimizing them as our traditions. In this regard, the Akamba circumcission songs composers ought to use another approach in their

compositions, so that they can uphold the value of a woman in the society.

These songs ought to have a new approach towards marriage. In their compositions, the artists should put in mind positive subjects, who will instill a good example to the posterity. They ought to portray women in the battle to redeem themselves from the jangling discords of retrogressive traditions that denies her the right of expression.

If also the man is oppressed in marriage, the songs should also redeem him.

The researcher urges the composers of Akamba circumcision songs to compose songs that portrays a new view of the marriage. They ought to show that the community's perception has changed and gender equality has been embraced, as it is the only one that can help to streamline and eradicate all misunderstandings in the marriage.

5. Conclusion

This paper aims to investigate the negative portrayal of women among the Akamba circumcision songs. The main aim of this study is to evaluate the extent to which these songs contribute to discrimination of women in the society. This study thus concurs that such portrayal is a great impediment to the society's social

transformation, especially at this time when most women are conscious of their rights.

The research has identified that the composers of circumcision songs portray the woman as an inferior person who relies on the man, a sex vessel, the source of escalation of conflicts in the society and in the marriage and a victim of discrimination in issues of property inheritance. The study has also identified that circumcision songs among the Akamba stipulates distinct roles played by both men and women in the society.

The misleading portrayal of a woman in the Kamba society is a reflection of the philosophy that guides their daily lives. The study has identified that, like most African communities, the Akamba are a patrilineal society where these songs greatly perpetuates the inculcation of male chauvinism. In regard to such portrayal, this study is an in-depth request to the composers of Akamba circumcision songs that they must consider the modern trends in the daily life of this community when composing them. They must realize that the world is changing, where the woman is greatly emancipated from her past cultural subjugation.

The songs therefore ought to coincide with these modern trends. They ought to change the portrayal of women. The composers have to also put in mind that oral literature reflects a community's life in this changing society.

The composers must consider how the songs will impact to the lives of posterity. In doing this, they must create characters that

will have a positive influence to them. They ought to portray the women in a struggle to redeem her to repressive cultures that demeans her status, by composing emancipatory songs. The songs also sought to portray the new status of the woman, contrary to the traditional cultural discrimination. Moreover, the songs ought to portray. This request supports Ngugi (1993) proposition that changing cultures with regard to the daily changes in the society are the ones that are durable. Momanyi (2003: 3) says that any society that must transform itself must ignore the aspects demean the female folk. We must remember that circumcision songs have the ability to negatively or positively influence children therefore they must coincide with the progressive aspect of a given community. It has reached a time when the society must be enlightened about negative portrayals, especially discrimination based on gender and education. This can greatly be achieved through oral literature, especially the use of songs.

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