



## HOW WOMEN ARE PORTRAYED IN KAMBA PRAISE SONGS

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### Abstract

*This article helps to bring light on how women are portrayed by looking at some praise songs from the Akamba people in Kenya. To clearly highlight how the woman is perceived by the artists from the Kamba people, we shall take a look at artist to clearly understand whatever they illustrate in their songs and how they portray women in their songs. This article is based on the African Feminism. The theory helped us to investigate the qualities of an Africa woman as depicted by the artists' oat ha Akamba praise songs. The article starts with an introduction where the background of women and indulgement of women has been explained, the themes that can be drawn from the Akamba praise songs and finally there is a conclusion that gives a summary of the issues tackled in the article.*



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### 1.0 Introduction

The relationship male and female gender is an issue that raises a lot of debate in the contemporary society. The perception of the artist is majorly based on the artist creativity. Momanyi (2000), in her research explains that literature is obliged to get a new understanding of how the African women are undertaking greater roles that highlight their talents. This redemption is supported to starts from the cultural, political, economic areas and also in their minds.

There has been ongoing debate among reviewers of works of literature that raises claims that writers of different genders have different perception on female characters. This article investigated the themes that reflect the real situation of a woman in the Akamba community in the following praise songs: Mother by Bosco Mulwa, *Aka me vata* (women are of greater value) by Justus Myello, *Aka ma taoni* (Town women) by Dan Mutuku and *Nyinya wa Ndetei* (Ndetei's Mother) by Kijana Mumo.

### 2.0 Theory Leading the Article

This article is based on the African Feminism. Which handled the problems that face the African women in an effort to resolve the problems? This theory was founded by Filomena Steady (1981), who explained the state of the community and tradition that accelerates the abuse of the women in the society. Steady states that African Feminism is founded in the

direction of looking at different roles based on gender as if they are complementary. She explains that, these roles goes hand in hand with gentler and therefore brings a state of equality.

Wamitila (2002) explains that after the woman realized that they were always sidelined when it comes to decision making, political matters and economic issues they decided to take action and liberate themselves. In the beginning this struggle wa opposed greatly but that started making progress from 1800-1900 when some of their claims like right to vote and getting position in the cooperate world were finally accepted. This theory gave us a chance to investigate and understand how the organization of the society is collaborating to resolve gender issues.

African Feminism theory has tenets which uses literature as a platform of explaining the state of women in the society. A praise song which is a branch of oral literature is appropriate in investigating the state of women in the society. Secondly this theory is expected to bring gender equality in the society. It fights for a new society that respects the female gender. The following themes from the Akamba praise songs were use to investigate the real life situation of the Akamba woman.

### **3.0 Themes in the Akamba Praise Songs that Reflect the Real Life Situation of Akamba Woman**

Ndungo (1985), states that literature is the true nature of life. According to him, an artist like any other member of the society write or tells a story from experience gained in the society he or she lives. This article supports Ndungo's opinion as he states that many literature works are based on the themes that involve society and a specific time.

In support, Ngugi (1993) states that literature does not come from a vacuum. He says that literature gets its form and importance from the society. He states that, the issues that give literature direction include: politics, economy, education, tradition, marriage among many other factors that emerge from different fields in the society.

Njogu and Chimera (1999) state that there is a great relation between art and events in the society; therefore the themes push the artist during the time he or she has. The Akamba community has witnessed these periodic changes. These changes has been caused by technological advancements, western education, growth of industries and cities, advancement in different economic fields, religion among many other factors

### 3.1 Education

After the colonial master came, the Kamba community like any other community in Africa was intrigued by the western education which included classroom reading. The issue of western education is sensitive in today's society because it is associated with economic wealth (Kauai, 2008). From this belief some of the Akamba praise songs bring to light the importance of the education in the society.

As identified by the founders of Feminism theory, education is a key element in fight towards the liberation of women. Many women have the ability to progress in education if they had a chance to do so. Steady (1981) supports the above opinion when she states that an African woman can engage herself in the developments of the society if given chance.

Education is key in everybody's life since it eliminates stupidity. When a woman gets educated the whole society benefits. Lyatuu (2011) reacting on what was said by Mbilinyi (1991) suggested that education is the liberator of the woman.

Justus Myello, an artist recognizes the woman as somebody with ability in education. He explains that a woman is born with mental ability to do great things. This artist supports women education. A woman translation of her behavior is mostly given based on how society views her. Sometimes is how men view her or explained through different sectors in the society. The artist illustrates the above through the following stanza:

*Yuyu nooka nasye aka ithyi twikwo na* Now i praise the women saying that,  
*Tunengetwe utonyi ni mumbi witu,* They have been given the ability by God,  
*Akili na kisomo tutuie nasyo,* Mental awareness and the also posses  
*Ona maovisi manene tutua namo.* education.

Lack of proper education among many women has made them not to fully comprehend their objectives as women. Education ia a major weapon in the life of every human being. When a woman is given chance to pursue education, she has the ability to many great things. The artist states that women need to be respected since they are a major player in building the family.

In Kamba community there are women with remarkable positions, for example Charity Kaluki Ngilu the current Kitui Governor, Wavinya Ndeti, former Kathiani MP from 2007-2012, Dorcas Mwilu, the curreny deputy Chief Justice, Dr. Monica Juma, current minister for foreign affairs just to name a few. Not only in Kenya but also across the world. There are

some women with leadership abilities for example; Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister for England in the 90's led the country well and gained recognition for it. Theresa May, current Prime Minister for England, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former Liberian President from 2006-2018. She was the first woman to be elected as a president in Africa.

With the help of African Feminism theory women are raising and pushing for more education. Women have to a certain extent changed and become intellectuals. This has made them trust their abilities and become leaders in different fields.

### 3.2 Marriage

The Akamba people like any other community in Africa recognize marriage as an institution that continues the family line. In Akamba community, when a man attains marriage age, he was given advice by elders to choose the right marriage partner. After getting a suitable partner, he would inform his parents and elders. There was a courtship period to observe the girl's behavior and mannerism which was known as "kuowa" if the girl was accepted by the society, plan for marriage would take place (Watuma, 2011). Things have changed nowadays because of changes in technological advancement, education, religion among many other factors. Marriage can take place without informing parents or elders.

Marriage is one of the institutions that followers of Feminism are fighting against. They claim that marriage is among the many societal organization that are used to discriminate women. They claim that when a woman gets married and dowry is paid, the woman is seen as man's property. According to the feminists this puts woman in a place to be molested.

Mbiti (1991) explains that, the issue of marriage is an important aspect recognized all over the world and it affects the growth and development of the society. A woman in the Akamba community is not expected to show bravery or any form of refusal to her husband. She should only be humble, patient, perseverance and obedience to all men (King'ei, 1982; Nzioki, 1982). An African woman should have knowledge about her and should be given freedom to give her views and opinions in her marriage. There are some women who have built their families in absence of their husbands and sometimes do better than homesteads where the husband exists.

The artist of the song *Nyinya wa Ndetei* (Ndetei's Mother) depicts the woman divorcing the husband and returning to her matrimonial home with her children. She cuts off all communication with her husband. This shows that women have started breaking free of the

customs that stated that the woman was man's property. Ndetei's mother showed her role as an able parent when she decided to take away her children. Even though she went away, her husband is seen to feel emptiness in his marriage. This is explained in following verse:

*Nyinya wa Ndetei, nyinya wa Nthiwa* , Ndetei's mother, Nthiwa's mother,  
*Mami wa Koreta, kyeva cha ngoo na kimako* mother to Koreta, Am grieved in my heart of  
*nikyambingiviie,* you had any pity,  
*Ketha wi tei na ukambona yu wamba kuia,* You could have pitied me because am sickly  
*Kethiwa wi tei ukambona yu ninamosie* and getting thin.

The husband to Ndeti's mother is seen to be full of thought. This shows that a woman plays an important role in the well being of the family as illustrated in the stanza above. Marriage has encouraged male chauvinism to take root in the society in that the man is the head of the family. When a woman gets married she finds herself under the rule of her husband and every decision she makes should be approved by her husband.

### 3.3 Economy

Virginia Woolf in her book, *A Room of One's Own* (1928), she emphasizes the issue of economy in liberating women. According to Woolf, women cannot be truly liberated without having financial freedom. Feminists emphasize that women should look for avenues that facilitates them to have financial freedom. Some recommended means include joining women Saccos and self help groups. Women should stand and condemn oppression economic wise. Millet (1969:157) explains that economic change can be achieved when women are empowered financially.

#### 3.3.1 Akamba Woman in Business

Justus Myello in his song *Aka* (women), he empowers the women financially when he explains that women undertake small business. Many women in Kamba community meet their needs and their family's needs through their small business. This is explained in the following verse:

*Aingi matatite maundu tuviasala* , Many women starts small business like green  
*Vai kindu kivinya Ukamba ta kuea syana na* groceries,  
*Kuta maluu na manga, mavokoto,* It is not easy task in the Kambaland to raise  
*Mekiite vitii nongi kulungya ukya musyi,* children by selling Irish potatoes and cassava,  
 avocado,

Working harder to fight poverty in their families.

This verse depicts a woman as a hand working person. A woman has the ability to look for her daily bread so that she can fight against poverty in her family and her society as a whole. Even though the business might not have a big profit, it enables her to meet her needs without depending on a man. The artist shows that a woman can do great without depending on men. Economic systems since colonial period made Africans not to be able to meet their basic needs (Masinde, 2003). This is the reason why some women resorted to prostitution to earn their living. Due to lifestyle changes love was shifted to be dependent on money. In his song *Aka ma taoni* (Town women) women are seen to be more attracted to loving money than actual love from men. This is illustrated in the following verse:

<i>Mo masyaa ila ndia imbiie nikuka ingi ,</i>	They say that the fool promised to come
<i>Vata wakwa ni mbesa</i>	back, My only priority is money
<i>Yavika ningumwnya</i>	When it gets back, I am going to show him.

In this stanza, women are seen as gold diggers. The woman is victimized in that the male counterparts are the one paying for the act they did together. This shows that the woman is being used as sexual object for the pleasure of the men. Prostitution is not acceptable in today's society as seen in Christianity and Islamic religion. The Islamic religion has a severe punishment for prostitution. The book of Mathew state that:

Therefore I tell you, whoever leaves his wife for any other reason  
expect fornication and adultery and marries another wife has sinned.

### **3.4 Liberating Women from Cultural practices**

Makoti (2005) quoting Mbiti (1969) states that culture is being strongly fought by religion both Christianity and Islamic to ensure that it vanishes. Makoti then emphasizes us to stay true to our culture. This article strongly supports Makoti's opinion to uphold our culture and stay true to it.

Ndungo (1999) explains that culture and upbringing plays an important role in shaping how the society perceives women. In many cultures women are expected to be submissive, quiet, humble and obedient (Somba, 2000). Nowadays due to changes in lifestyle and western culture influence, women can liberate themselves from oppressive cultural practices. Women

in the Kamba community have liberated themselves by refusing to remain silent on oppressing cultures. This has enabled them to have the ability to decide what to do without depending on the man.

In the song *Nyinya wa Ndetei* (Ndetei's mother) the woman is seen liberating herself from marriage and going back to her matrimonial home. The artist illustrates that through this verse:

<i>Nyinya wa Ndetei, nyinya wa Nthiwa mami</i> <i>wa Koreta, nyinya wa syana ni ivityo yau yu</i> <i>nekie, Kuma wathi ona kavalua ndunandikia,</i> <i>Nakwikie ata mama, ko ve nai itaekawa</i>	Ndetei's mother, Nthiwa's mother, mother to Koreta, mother of my children what mistake did I commit, Since the day you left, you never wrote a letter, What did I do to you? There is no sin that cannot be forgiven.
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The woman divorced her husband and went with the children. The husband is now asking the mistake he committed. He wants her wife back to him but Ndetei's mother has decided to liberate her to abusive cultural practices. Many women in African communities are not allowed to inherit property. When they get married they become party of their husband's property. This situation comes about because of the payment of dowry. Even after husband's death the woman was expected to remain in her husband's family. Inheritance went to the male children.

Nowadays things have changed because women can now inherit their parents' property. According to the Kenyan constitution 2010, chapter two, article twenty seven women and men have equal right in every aspect from political, economic and cultural and can inherit property. The culture in which the woman grows in is the one that undermines and oppresses her. Women should be in forefront in the fight against such oppressive traditions. Therefore the African Feminism Theory is obliged to fully indulge itself in traditions, nature and customs of the community to fully comprehend the woman place to work alongside her counterpart, the men.

### **3.5 Leadership**

Male chauvinism has dominated in political parties and the society in general. Highlighting the woman as being without any leadership abilities like their male counterpart. There are women with ability to give views and being listened to and their opinions taken to

consideration. Several organizations are campaigning for women empowerment and wants women to rise to the occasion and take leadership positions.

Women have a major say in political arena because of their number when it comes to voting. Kenya is taking the right direction in women leadership though slowly. In 2017 election, the posts of women who were elected increased significantly as compared to previous elections. Three women were elected as governors; these are the late Joyce Laboso, Governor Bomet; Ann Waiguru, Governor Kirinyaga and Kaluki Ngilu, Governor Kitui. Three women were also elected as senators, these are: Margaret Kamar, Senator Uasin Gishu, Dullo Fatuma, Senator Isiolo and Susan Kihika, Senator Nakuru.

The women who were elected as Members of Parliament increased significantly compared to 2013. It is the woman's responsibility to put her in the political arena instead of waiting for men to have favor on them. Justus Myello in his song *Aka* (women) explains that women have remarkable positions and they were born leaders since they are given that ability by God. He states that in the following verse:

*Yuyu nooka nine nasye aka ithi twi kw'o,* Now i praise the women saying that,  
*Na tunenetwe utonyi ni mumbi witu,* They have been given the ability by God,  
*Akili na kisomo tutuite nasyo,* Mental awareness and the also posses  
*Ona maovisi manene tutua kw'o* education.

Women need to believe in themselves so that they can be able to acquire leadership positions in Kenya and all over the world. This artist says that women have been given empowerment from God. Women should use the ability endowed on them to gain political positions.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

In general the artists of these Akamba praise songs have tackled the issue of women being sidelined by the society. These songs have highlighted how women from nowadays have evolved and changed compared to those in the past. This means that, women are human being that adapts to change in time, history, politics, economy and society. They have analyzed woman from several aspects such as economically, politically, societal issues and culturally. Women should be given a chance that she deserves in the society.

According to the African Feminism Theory, women play a major role in the development of the African countries and the whole world. The Kamba people have changed their thinking and recognize the woman as equal to men. This article has realized that the existence of

uniform education system, new means of wealth acquisition, religion and issue involving economy among many others has affected the themes in Kamba praise songs. This is because the artist is guided by events and history to develop themes.

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