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**Unmasking Gender Stereotypes in Nandi Contemporary Song Genre and Implications on Social Cohesion and Equity: A Case of Mwalimu Kendagor Limo's Songs**

By

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**Abstract**

Male literary authors portray gender dissimilarly from their female counter parts. Therefore, this study sought to unmask gender stereotypes in Nandi contemporary song genre sampling Mwalimu Kendagor Limo's songs. Three specific objectives guided the study namely: to investigate the portrayal of women in Nandi contemporary songs; to examine the depiction of men in Nandi contemporary songs, and to establish whether or not any similarities exist in the portrayal of men and women in Nandi contemporary songs in reference to Mwalimu Kendagor. The research was informed by the reader response literary theory and the feminist literary theory. The qualitative research design was used for the study whereby content analysis from You Tube and audio tapes was conducted as the main source of the song texts (primary data). Upon which the study established that since time immemorial women have been portrayed in outrageous stereotyping status as housekeepers, nurturers, mothers and sex objects. Whereas men have continued to feature as better stronger and tougher vigorous human beings, contrary to the image contemporary women bear. Nandi contemporary songs echo this mentality and perpetuate it within the contemporary society if not predict it for future generations. Among the Nandi of Kenya masculinity is likened to being resilient and strong, while femininity to being softer and weaker. The study argued that since the social environment and the roles of females have evolved through the years, the appropriate portrayal of women in songs today is debatable. Findings of this study were therefore complementary to previous social science research studies which tend to demonstrate that women are generally not depicted in powerful roles thereby limiting their perceptions. The former and the contemporary societies have not fully permitted women to project their abilities and positions of power that they hold in real life. The findings of this study have portrayed the male gender positively to a large extent and portrayed women negatively in almost every sphere of life in Mwalimu Kendagor's songs. It was recommended that contemporary songs should foster a culture where women are respected and valued, for this will go a long way in curtailing the widespread misconceptions about women in society and thus enhance gender equity.

**Key Words:** Unmasking, Gender, Stereotypes, Genre, Contemporary Songs, Nandi, Mwalimu Kendagor

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### **Introduction**

From the ancient times, songs have been part of people's culture over centuries with genesis from literature as observed by Campbell, 2011. Literature is the heritage of humankind that is delivered over generations comprising songs, short folk tales, legends, myths, proverbs and riddles. Consequently, songs are popular forms of domestic entertainment which comment on gender relations in society and on many occasions giving patriarchal emphasis. Lima (2010) alludes that songs are seen as statements of a society in which they are formulated. Songs give the perception and idea on gender construction (Fairclough, 2015). Therefore, to understand how different types of songs affect the society is very important because they become a major source of information in the contemporary society.

In history, Kenyan women have struggled against paradigms of subservience that they experience (Waswa, 2014 and Stratton, 1994). Many cultures are based on a patriarchal past where men exercise more power than women. Women universally experience suppression in the jobs, education, sexuality and reproductive areas. The womenfolk in Kenya have strived to overcome these stereotypes and are yet to gain a position of near equality in many societal constructs. They have reproductive and social rights to divorce, abortion and birth control. They can wear whatever they choose. Similarly, Ndegwa (2014) observes that laws are in place protecting the Kenyan from sexual assault and physical abuse. However, there are contemporary songs that portray clear stereotypes in women. Women are portrayed in the contemporary Nandi songs as children even when old enough and have reached marriageable age. The married Nandi women with children are still portrayed as "children". Such reference of women as "children" paints them as immature people who cannot reason without their husbands. Even though these women hold powerful jobs and play valuable roles in a variety of social constructs, the paradigm of the Kenyan traditional roles and their perceptions about women prevails.

Some Nandi contemporary songs venerate the superiority of men suppressing their women to very low levels. Among the Nandi, the boy child is held in high esteem compared to the girl child as observed by Saina (2010). This is evident in the community's customs expressed through songs. The artiste repeatedly sings: *lakwani buni koin* (this child from that home), by making such reference to a woman as child could be interpreted that the woman is immature and cannot make her own independent decisions and relies on her husband for guidance within the home where she is confined to in most cases. While giving his prudent advice to the women folk in general, Mwalimu Kendagor's stereotypic and negative attitude on women is very blatant: women do not belong to the home even after several years in marriage.

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### **Statement of the Problem**

Songs composed by artists relay certain messages that are passed through their wordings. Subsequently, this has made gender related research be of great interest with scholars focusing on inequality, power, ideology, discrimination and subordination in different contexts Koskei, (2018). Further, most of the studies have focused on Western societies and cultures. These studies notwithstanding, the African experience of African contemporary songs is not yet been fully explored. There are fewer studies in Kenya and little in relation to the Kalenjin and especially the Nandi contemporary songs (Kipngeno 2019, Simatei, 2010 and Koech, 2013). Based on this, the study strives to unmask gender stereotypes in Nandi contemporary song genre focusing on the songs of one of the Nandi artists: Mwalimu Kendagor Limo.

Within the modern way of expressions in songs that are popular, stereotype and negative musical expressions in women stand out as the appropriate ways through which artists document societal dynamics make the society have a grip with the challenges facing it. In popular songs among the Nandi, we find language expressions which complement and beautify the songs thereby making the listener more interested by the message passed by the speaker. Unfortunately, patriarchal scholars have dismissed popular songs by not analyzing their work. The patriarchal language that is used in these songs would be misinterpreted because of shared circumstantial knowledge and sexual orientation between the artist and audience.

It is from this perspective that this study focused on the portrayal of women in relation to the portrayal of men in the songs of the popular Nandi male artiste as an avenue through which patriarchy advances its sexist ideologies of male dominance and female subordination with the intention of maintaining the status quo. I therefore hope that awareness may be created on the essence of composing songs that are not chauvinistic in order to promote harmony and peaceful coexistence in society. Therefore, this study investigated the image of women and men as portrayed through contemporary Nandi songs in the contemporary song genre of the Nandi. The article sought to find whether there exists stereotypic view of women and glorification of men and how this view has been perpetuated through the songs.

### **Research Objectives**

- i. To examine the portrayal of women in selected Nandi contemporary songs by Mwalimu Kendagor.
- ii. To examine the portrayal of men in selected Nandi contemporary songs by Mwalimu Kendagor.
- iii. To establish whether there are any similarities in the portrayal of men and women in the selected Nandi songs of Mwalimu Kendagor.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The research adopted the feminist literary theory and the reader response literary theory. The reader response literary theory was useful since it is the main theory for poetry. This is because when songs are written down, they become poetry. While the feminist literary theory was useful as it advocates for women's rights on the ground of the equality of sexes. Feminist literary

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criticism is one branch of interdisciplinary enquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience. This enquiry holds two related premises about gender. One is that the inequality of the sexes is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate, but a culture construct, and therefore a proper subject of study for any humanistic discipline. The second is that the male perspective, assumed to be 'universal' has dominated fields of knowledge, shaping their paradigms and methods. Peck and Coyle (1984: 151), also define the feminist approach as the theory that demonstrates that literature is sexist in the portrayal of women with showing how texts reveal injustices of a male society where women are regarded as inferior.

Feminist Criticism is a type of literary criticism, which may study and advocate the rights of women. "Feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read." (Judith Fetterley 1938). The reader-response theory is a backlash against the proponents of New Criticism who assume that meaning existed solely in the text and can only be deciphered by competent literary critic who possesses concise analytic skills. Proponents of this theory focus on the meaning that is brought about by the reader and the text from the way the former responds to a specific text in a specific manner. Thus, insights and inferences by the reader informed by his background knowledge and experiences informs the interpretation which the reader arrives at. However, distinctions among the reader-oriented critics have been established basing on whether a text has an objective existence or not.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Scholarly Literary Criticism on Portrayal of Women**

Yo También Soy (2006) in the article: All-Female Ensembles & Gender Representation in Mariachi Music in central Mexico has done an article in order to understand how gender is represented in Mariachi music. He posits that women and men occupy different spaces because of their different socializations; men occupy the public and women occupy the private or domestic sphere (Kerber 1988). However, as Kerber (1988) notes, there are many issues with the use of this rhetorical metaphor because its proponents have failed to holistically examine the mechanisms which produce these inequalities and have limited their analysis to include only the experiences of white middle class women (Kerber 1988). This same dichotomy has often been assumed in the field of music (Post 1994).

Weitzer, Ronald; Kubrin, Charis (October 2009) in *Misogyny in rap music* have studied lyrics, videos or other aspects of rap music that support, glorify, justify, or normalize the objectification, exploitation, or victimization of women. It can range from innuendoes to stereotypical characterizations and defamations. Scholars have proposed various explanations for the presence of misogyny in rap music. Some have argued that rap artists use misogynistic lyrics and portrayals of women as a way to assert their masculinity or to demonstrate their authenticity as rappers. Others have suggested that rap music is a product of its environment, reflecting mainstream attitudes toward women, and that rap artists have internalized negative stereotypes

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about women. Still other academics have stressed economic considerations, arguing that rappers use misogyny to achieve commercial success.

### **Scholarly Literary Criticism on Portrayal of Men**

In Poland, Antoniak, J (2018), in her article, *Beyond Hegemonic Masculinity - criticism and subversion of masculinity models in American rap music: The case of the Lonely Island*, argues that the masculinity models presented in American rap music can be described as hypermasculine. In their songs, rappers often portray themselves as strong independent men rejecting or undermining the existing system of power relations represented by the state. Other elements of this hypermasculine portrait of American rappers include: heterosexuality and heteronormativity proven by a long list of sexual conquests; derogatory and objectifying treatment of women; violence and recklessness; abuse of alcohol and other substances; and excessive displays of wealth. Manase Kudzai Chiweshe and Sandra Bhatasara (2015), in their document, *Hegemonic Masculinities and Misogyny in popular Music in Zimbabwe* expound on male dominance under the topic: *Portrayal and Celebration of Hegemonic Masculinity*. He quotes Lewis (2004), who argues that culture is the vehicle by which patriarchal principles that valorize manhood are transmitted from one generation to the next; and as such, music as an arbitrator of beliefs is a transmitter of male control.

Many popular songs in Zimbabwe define, celebrate and valorize certain types of masculinity, thereby institutionalizing and coagulating hegemonic masculinities in Zimbabwe. Such a normative standard against which all other men position themselves, is based on the belief of male superiority, heterosexuality and multiple sexual partners, among other things. In Kenya, Elizabeth Wanjiru, (2015) in *Social Construction of Gender in Gikuyu Community as Portrayed in Narratives, Songs and Proverbs* discourses traditional views of men and women in the Gikuyu community. She supports her argument with Aitken's, (1987) assertion who points out that throughout history and literature the woman has been portrayed as a timewasting creature whose value is chiefly ornamental, or as one whose work consists of menial or nonessential tasks. Bernard (2014) also makes a finding that Ongidi in his songs *Portrayal of Men and Women as Professionals*. However, from one of Ongidi's songs, namely, *Mama Mulayi*, Ongidi sets out to illustrate that fathers and mothers are the cornerstone of the household who complement each other in ensuring that stability is ensured in the family.

### **Methodology**

The article adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research was appropriate in the article, since literary data is mainly non- numerical. Creswell (2014) defines qualitative research as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The study entirely relied on narration and descriptions for data analysis and presentation. The study employed purposive sampling technique to select appropriate songs from the popular Nandi artiste: Mwalimu Kendagor Limo so as to obtain actual sample cases of the portrayal of men and women. This process was facilitated by writing the song lyrics from You Tube down. This is because it is important that the songs to be written down so that the



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researcher could analyze the texts and phrases that have gender aspects. The researcher targeted songs which deal with the depiction of women and men by the artiste. Songs of the famous Nandi musician, Mwalimu Kendagor Limo which include *cheptap oret age* (the girl from another path), *tumdo nyo* (our celebration), *mother in law ak nebo werit* (mother in law and daughter in law), *chepsugulwot* (the learned girl), *aria wee Murenik* (I cheer men) and *ribwo cheptop nyu* (take care of my daughter) were analyzed in the study for they deal with themes that are gender related. The selected songs were those relevant to the objectives of the study and title of the research.

The study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling enabled the us to use cases that have the required information with respect to the objectives of the article (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999: 50). Data collection was done through close listening to all the available songs of Mwalimu Kendagor then descriptions for all of them were derived. Those that were relevant for the study were purposively selected for analysis. These are the songs whose themes dwell on how both genders are represented. The selected songs were listened to over and over again by the researcher before being transcribed and later translated from the Kinandi language to English; ready for analysis. The data collected were presented in the form of discussions, narrations and critical reviews. The personality traits of men and women as revealed in the songs were identified. The data collected were presented in form of discussions, narrations and critical reviews.

The researchers ensured that the research participants were protected; trust ensured to enhance the integrity of the research. The integrity of the research was to be protected against misconduct and impropriety reflecting negatively on the university expectations and adopt emerging issues. The researcher sought permission from the National Council for Science, Technology and Innovations (NACOSTI) and County director of Education. The researcher further bought compact discs (CDS) and Video disc of the identified Artists' songs from the appointed dealers and downloads from You Tube. The researcher assured the dealers that the study was mainly for academic purposes and not for any other application. Finally, the researcher acknowledged the works of artists by citing them appropriately in the research work to avoid plagiarism.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Portrayal of Women as Children/ Infantilization of Women**

The study found out that male artistes have a tendency of representing women negatively, even where they want to appear as if they are recognizing the place of women in the current society. Male depictions of female characters are often from a fiercely male perspective, reflecting male conceptions of female sexuality. For example, Mwalimu insinuates that the lady is capable of brewing love potion for her abusive husband:

|                                 |                                      |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Ng'o gologit boiyong'ung</i> | in case your husband becomes violent |
| <i>Matiwechi sakeywek</i>       | do not get love potion               |
| <i>Matindochi kwambisik</i>     | or any magic substance to soften him |
| <i>Makikwalileni baiyondet</i>  | do not make him docile               |

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*Tegis baiyondet ng'ung*      instead respect your husband  
*Mete kimbelebele*      avoid being on the forefront

Artists tend to overplay the sexuality of their female characters, creating the impression that women have no identity outside their traditional gender roles. These characters usually serve to enhance the images of the male protagonists who occupy the central positions in these works. Inversely, women have been socialized into accepting their inferior status in marriage. An age-old tradition asserts that 'a woman must sometimes be a fool'. We are never shown that a man must sometimes be a fool to accommodate his female counterparts. Ogundice (1994), also notes that in most African societies, gender supremacy was taken for granted and "women's work was viewed as unimportant with men wondering what makes them (women) tired at the end of the day" (34). This depicts discrimination and molestation of female gender where most of the work they do is neither recognized nor rewarded.

The study found out that the patriarchal setup in the Nandi community continues to perpetuate male dominance over women. We have also seen evidence of socially-constructed norms that for long have served to silence the Kenyan women. These are the norms that have also continued to keep most Kenyan women restricted to the 'private' (domestic/ family) sphere of life. Even though a number of Kenyan women have attempted to rise against the odds to emerge at the top of places socially reserved for Kenyan men, the patriarchal societal setting is yet to make space available for Kenyan women so that their voices can be heard. The patriarchal setting continues to be a stumbling block that hinders Kenyan women from expressing themselves freely everywhere, anywhere and anytime. Additionally, such cultural practices that perpetuate male dominance over women are very difficult to root out. Thus, the negative worldview towards the sexuality of women continues to be passed on from one generation to another.

### **Portrayal of Men in Mwalimu Kendagor's Songs**

The second research question established that discrimination of the female gender is both a linguistic and a social issue. The Nandi culture is built on patriarchy and the socialization of the children (male and female) play a critical role in the way they relate to each other. This is because from the onset, the boy child assumes his elevated status and has to uphold this dominant position. While the society portrays women as dependent, lazy and child-like in nature, the men are portrayed as independent, aggressive and domineering. Thus, positive connotations are used to refer to men while negative ones are used to refer to women. Mwalimu Kendagor in his song: *Aria wee Murenik* (I cheer men) asserts the following:

*Aria wee Murenik*      I cheer men  
*Murenik cheutatin*      men who are strong  
*Murenik chen'gulatin*      men who are tough  
*Murenik chen'gomen*      men who are clever

Men are thus represented not only as strong but as tough and clever. He thus depicts men positively stereotypically making them emerge dominant and resilient compared to their female

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counterparts. It's on this premise that the paper has investigated the portrayal of the male gender in Nandi contemporary songs, a genre of music where gender stereotypes are still rampant.

### **Similarities in Portrayal of Men and Women in Mwalimu Kendagor's Contemporary Songs**

Though there is a sharp contrast in the way Mwalimu portrays men and women, there are some similarities especially in the song *chepsugulyot* (the learned lady). In this song, the artist views educated young men and women as depicting similar characteristics. After being educated abroad, they return to the country not only full of pride but also decline to mingle with the very villagers who did a harambee to facilitate their studies overseas. Upon their return, they indulge in alcoholic sprees and are unable to give back to society. Mwalimu admonishes these two learned categories of people urging them first to coexist well with their fellow Africans, and offer support where need be as they are privileged having had an opportunity to study abroad and to land themselves well-paying jobs. In the song, Mwalimu retorts:

*Kilianjini chepsukuliondoni wee ooh? What will we do to about the learned girl?*  
*Kilianjini kipsukuliondoni wee ooh? What will we do to about the learned gentleman?*  
*Kilenjini chepsikuliondoni wee ooh? What are we going to tell the learned girl?*  
*Kilianjini kipsukuliondoni wee ooh? What will we do to about the learned gentleman?*

The songster brings out similarities of the two learned people implying that once educated the two share similar characteristics; the lady behaving just like the learned young man. He overemphasizes the value of education by urging the general public to strive to acquire higher and higher levels of education. Mwalimu seems to insinuate that despite the fact that the youngsters have acquired education, they are too proud to associate well with people in the village. This can be interpreted as negative painting because these learned young people, having been exposed to western education and modernity may have learned to mind their own businesses which the artist is uncomfortable with. Still in the song *chepsugulyot*, (the learned lady) the songster depicts the young learned man/woman as unappreciative after acquiring formal education. He laments that after landing him/her a big job, they have not assisted the family and the villagers who contributed money for them to study abroad. He presents them as materialistic, egocentric and selfish. His composition proceeds to indicate that these learned people have not helped their parents in putting up a decent house.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of this study have portrayed the male gender positively to a large extent and portrayed women negatively in almost every sphere of life. The findings of this research have revealed that the artist depicts women as children; thus, infantilizing them, and actually refers to them so. The article therefore concluded that by making such reference can be interpreted to



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imply that women are senseless, defenseless, timid, dependent and immature and that they cannot make their own decisions but have to rely on men in the community to be guided. The article also concluded that women are able to acquire formal education and compete favourably with men. However, like with all other male artistes, we sense a negative labeling of the educated woman thus tarnishing this virtuous image. The educated girl is depicted as being proud and arrogant, hateful, unappreciative, wasteful and a drunkard especially because she has learned to live her life independent from the villagers. The acquisition of education and landing herself a job has made her mind her own business; a situation which makes the artist uncomfortable and feels he has to correct the educated girl to toe the line and remain in the traditional position of women. Women are also regarded as strangers and visitors in the homes they get married to. A woman old enough to be a mother in law and a grandmother is still regarded as a 'visitor' because after all she came from a different clan years back when she got married. Men on the other hand are regarded as wholly belonging to the family and clan.

Another conclusion made was that women are portrayed as dependent fully on their husbands for they do not own property. This kind of dependence forces them to take marriage as their career.

We can clearly understand why marriage is such a vital event for a woman in the songs of Mwalimu and the Nandi community by extension where women have to marry for their livelihood's to be secure. The artist also presents the woman as a housewife and a homemaker. The role of a housewife is revealed by a woman in a household setting, performing household activities such as minding the husband and attending to visitors. The artist has also depicted the women as materialistic. They are presented as parasitic beings with an obsession for material possessions. The desire for material things forces them to get into fights over what the men in the family provide. They get into marriage with the aim of being provided for; they have no plans of generating income to the family. They are presented as parasitic for they do not provide and only rely on what the husbands bring home. In the same way, women are portrayed as home breakers; they are portrayed as idlers who keep peddling rumours and gossip in homes resulting in marriage breakups leading to separation or divorce.

The musician also presents married women as victims of various forms of violence. They are depicted as miserable victims of merciless and sadistic men who derive pleasure from hurting them, yet the artist advises the womenfolk to remain respectful to their offensive husbands! The artiste has, in addition, portrayed women as evil beings capable of brewing love potion for their abusive husbands. He proceeds to say that the ladies can get magic substances to 'soften' their husbands or make them docile. He therefore associates women with sorcery which is evil and satanic. Finally, the artist has portrayed women as objects for sale and a source of wealth. Like in most African communities, girls are regarded as a source of wealth acquired through dowry payment or bride price when they get married. Girls are literally 'sold' in exchange for cattle and other types of property. This is objectification of the woman as they are looked upon as economic assets.

On the contrary, the article concluded that men who are the aggressors are regarded highly. They are portrayed as violent aggressors, yet the artist does not put them at fault. What he emphasizes is the women remaining respectful and loyal to their abusive and indispensable

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husbands. Men are also portrayed as the main participants in functions and events. Mwalimu's songs display men as actively involved in ceremonies while women are passive. In ceremonies about women, men are the main players while women are there to be seen and never to be heard. Mwalimu has also depicted men as promiscuous. In his songs, he reveals men's promiscuity, but again, the musician does not put any effort to admonish the vice but seems to celebrate this kind of impunity. Lastly, the artist has portrayed men as the sole providers of family needs. They are depicted as the lone providers in families. Women are home makers and do not need to work as men are tasked with the responsibility of fully providing all the family needs. They are tasked with the responsibility of providing food and other material things for the family. The artiste advises them not to be lazy but go to go to work early. The comfort of their family lies on the provisions they avail to their wives and children.

Finally, the article concluded that Patriarchy remains the breeding ground of the negative worldview that women are subjected to. It remains unchallenged and un-criticized and continues to be nurtured in the name of 'our culture.' Unfortunately, the cultural practices are also increasingly manifested in taking on new or modified ways in the contemporary society, ways that find expression in extreme forms of sexual violence against women, extreme forms of social disparity and gender discrimination against them.

### **Recommendations**

This study has revealed various portrayals of each gender, gender representations and stereotypes propagated in the songs of Mwalimu Kendagor. Based on the findings and the conclusions made, the article came up with the recommendations are as follows in an effort to ensure fairness in the representation of each gender. Women should be accorded the respect they deserve in society and not regarded as children. Findings have revealed women labeled as children which should not be the case. Musicians should produce songs which depicting realistic roles of either gender. This will help improve the image of women, the gender that bears the brunt of gender discrimination in society. Contemporary musicians should consider the messages they advance through their music. Songs that appear to glorify gender violence should be avoided since domestic violence and other forms of violence are against the constitution and are a violation of human rights. Artists in the contemporary society should recognize that women no longer play the traditional gender roles of house-keeping. Despite women's involvement in a range of activities and in productive work, the songs in question have mainly portrayed them as engaging in domestic responsibilities. In Kenya today, men and women enjoy almost equal social standing. Women can own businesses, hold political office and have a full spectrum of rights. According them traditional roles, makes their role in contributing towards the economy invisible. Songs that subjugate women should be noted so as not to misinform the public into believing that objectifying women is acceptable or is worthy of celebration. We must recognize that musicians have massive followers and wield enormous influence over their fans; therefore they need to be kept on check to ensure they are spreading positive messages to their fans.

There is a need to eradicate messages depicting women as inferior, docile objects who are always performing domestic chores, instead, more characters depicting strong, authoritative and

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intellectually sound women need to be created and reinforced through contemporary songs. Fostering a culture where women are respected and valued, will go a long way in curtailing the widespread misconceptions about women in society. Contemporary artists should avoid presenting men as violent beings since domestic violence and other forms of violence are against the constitution and are a violation of human rights. Contemporary artists should also avoid depicting men as immoral and promiscuous. This results in breakup of families and to sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS. Based on the findings, conclusion and recommendations made, this article suggests future research that a similar study can be conducted investigating gender portrayal by other Nandi musicians or, on the broader sense, other Kalenjin contemporary musicians. A comparative research can be done by including contemporary songs from other communities on the way they portray men and women in their music. A similar study can be done through using songs of different genres other than Nandi contemporary songs like political, cultural, love songs, initiation songs, and circumcision songs among others.

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**Citation:** Sortum, B. J; Nabukonde, L & Achieng L. (2020). Unmasking Gender Stereotypes in Nandi Contemporary Song Genre and Implications on Social Cohesion and Equity: A Case of Mwalimu Kendagor Limo's Songs. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*. 4(9), 112 – 124.

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