

5 The dynamics of humour in coital imagery

Reflections on Bukusu *Embalu* and select East African popular music

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Beyond procreation and continuity of the human race, sex and sexuality are a long-lasting creative force in literary art, whether oral or written, and beyond. Indeed, there are an unlimited number of artists whose claim to fame and immortality is their treatment of sex and sexuality in their creations. From traditional to contemporary oral art forms, references to physical sex, enunciation of the feelings and emotions underlying sex, and the accompanying innuendos are practically a social fact that is, however, seldom acknowledged. Also rarely acknowledged is the propensity of artistic sexual references to occasion excitement and amusement among hearers. Artists of all ages are wont to deploy sexual images as inspired by their unique contexts and diverse artistic ends, desires, and aspirations. Indeed, the desire to amuse and move to mirth and laughter, even as salient messages are delivered, may be one of the fundamental motivations. In the present chapter, we look at how coital imagery is deployed by artists in two different sexual humour cycles (old and contemporary, respectively) to arouse aesthetic response of amusement and mirth and, in the process, bring to surface any issues of profound social import. We specifically explore the making of sexual humour in traditional *Embalu* ritual among the Babukusu of western Kenya, on the one hand, and selected contemporary East African popular music, on the other, with the aim of establishing how the two genres relate in both content and form relative to their idiosyncratic contexts.

One enduring characteristic of sexual humour is a licentious tendency that persistently seeks to violate taboo and mainstream social norms. It may, however, be important to establish if strategies employed in the aforementioned cycles of sexual humour are the same or not, how and to what aesthetic value. Simiyu (2019) posits that even within the stringent traditional order, traditional ceremonies such as *Embalu* give participants and members of the community, at large, a momentary licence to escape the rigorous social restrictions to experience occasional bliss, though not without specific sociological purposes. Similarly, Orina (2014) contends that contemporary popular music is created in modern times when, especially among younger generations, individual liberties and economic considerations lie above ethical and social order considerations. It may then mean the circumstances that permitted

the performance of sexual humour are no longer necessary or are often contravened. It, nonetheless, matters to establish whether the creation of sexual humour depends on the context and characteristics of the target audience, and if it does, to what extent and by what means. The central questions the present chapter seeks to answer, therefore, include: First, in what ways are coital images in both *Embalu* and selected popular songs from East Africa used to create sexual humour? Second, in what ways does the deployment of coital imagery in the two sexual humour traditions vary or conform to any particular pattern? Third, how does the social setting help to establish the social impact/relevance of the two genres?

Contexts and performance in *Embalu* and East Africa's popular music

Given that the present chapter focuses on the link between diverse sources of sexual humour and the characteristics of resulting sexual humour genres, an elucidation of the underlying social orders should be a befitting starting point. As already indicated above, our interest is in two unique relevant contexts, which are central to appreciating instances and the nature of sexual humour under consideration in the present study: A typical traditional context contrasted with a modern/popular subculture. The elaborate *Embalu* ritual is basically a likeness of the indigenous Babukusu's consideration of what a complete life entailed; a product of a system whose single most important reason for being, as Orina (44) has put it, is to guarantee social order and harmony in a consistent and predictable manner. Onwuegbuna posits that the traditional social order was mainly characterised by "homogeneous ethnic settings" (1). Indeed, as will be demonstrated below, the performances seek to inculcate in the new initiates the values that the community holds dear and also spell out to them what the society expects of them as they transit from boyhood to adulthood (Simiyu 7).

Babukusu are a sub-tribe of the expansive Bantu community, Luyha, who occupy the western part of Kenya. The traditional Babukusu had an ostentatious repertoire of core values and cultural practices that were expected to guide the operations of each belonging member of the community from the start of their lives to the end. Despite an onslaught from shifting social realities driven by urbanisation and globalisation, Babukusu have posted relative success in maintaining a substantial proportion of their age-old circumcision rites (*Embalu*) that are best known for elaborate visual and oral enactments that complement them. The ceremonies last the entire night and are accompanied by various songs and dramatised actions which mark out the various stages of the ritual, each with relevant import. The songs are laden with meaning and evoke humour and excitement which hits crescendo when the initiate is finally circumcised in the early morning of the following day. The present study seeks to explore the extent to which coital images abounding in the songs serve as a constant trigger of heightened excitement among participants.

Unlike *Embalu*, contemporary East African popular music is an outgrowth of a contemporary postcolonial subculture epitomised by an urban lifestyle which authenticates the contact between western/modern and indigenous value systems. The result is either a quiescent conflict or, to a certain extent, a hybrid fusion of both. The western social and artistic modes may be termed a subculture because, clearly, nascent popular culture did not necessarily happen in a cultural lacuna, but rather exists alongside an enduring traditional mainstream culture. Onwuegbuna (1) refers to Nigerian popular music to as “a neo-folk form,” which is “an acculturative product of the African folk music” and borrows immensely from and modifies the genre it seeks to become heir to. Like the name suggests, popular culture (also “pop culture”) commands a huge following, especially among the younger generations, perhaps because of the liberties it promises and a tendency to appeal to the sensual part of life and all with a lesser level of seriousness. It is an epitome of mass culture that stands in opposition to social boundaries/authority apportioned by the conservative traditional order. Therefore, popular music in East Africa, just as elsewhere across the globe, is markedly dogged with controversy and even consternation. Indeed, most of the popular music items sampled for the present study have either been banned or, at least, been subject of a possible ban.

Review of related literature

Research in verbal art is abound with studies that have focused on formal, historic, and sociological/cultural derivatives of both traditional and modern musical compositions. In an influential paper on the propensity of ritual aesthetics in African dramaturgy, Nwanaju (3) concurs with Tambia, Turner, Grotowski, and Schechner, whose definition of ritual emphasises communicative and performative perspectives, thus:

A culturally constructed system of symbolic communication ... constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy(rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition). (Nwanaju 3)

This definition of ritual points to the formal attributes of ritual that may be subjected to productive stylistic analysis. Similarly, Rosenberg decries a tendency by cultural and literary researchers to eclipse “songs created in emergent forms, employing Western instruments and technologies and, oftentimes, incorporating compositional elements from throughout Africa and the globe” (40). In an attempt to reverse this trend, Rosenberg examines the narrative techniques employed within works of verbal expression by Tanzanian artists in order to reveal the extent to which novels and songs can and often do exploit similar compositional and aesthetic techniques. Rosenberg has no qualms as to

whether musical compositions should be considered and “consumed alongside (other) literary models” (42). The position here is that the literariness or poetics of African oral compositions, music included, should not be in doubt, a point that the present study further demonstrates by examining the nature and function of sexual humour in two related cycles of musical compositions.

In yet another socio-formalistic study, Suriano reports, in a study on the impact of this music and urban slang on media and politics, that *Bongo Flewa* artists adopt street language and new slang terms, and “Swanglish” words (a mix of Swahili and English), to deliver social and political messages to the crowd more effectively (212). Suriano then concludes:

Songs are a means of expressing social, economic, and political issues, felt at a local level, such as unemployment, poverty, life in the *geto*, HIV/AIDS, corruption (in slang *chai*, literally “tea”), as well as love interests, such as infidelity, arguments between married couples, and youth expectations about marriage and family life – most of the time depicted from a male point of view. (Suriano 215)

Indeed, one central argument we seek to pursue in the present paper is that humour in musical compositions that are the subject of the present study could indeed further reveal the functional nature of music as a genre of oral literature. In a study on the link between urbanisation and African popular music, Onwuegbuna emphasises the social role of popular music in Africa, thus:

The utilitarian position occupied by pop music in the religious, social, economic, and political life of Africa defines the level of functionality of African pop music. The music is functional to the point that it is a vital, inseparable part of the whole, without which the purpose of the activity may never be successfully achieved. The various genres and sub-genres of pop music, like *gospel*, *highlife*, *reggae*, *disco*, *calypso*, *hip hop*, *rock*, and *Afrobeat*, all have religious, social, economic, and political activities where they are concomitant participators. (Onwuegbuna 169)

Clearly, there always exists a link between the choice of artistic strategy and the envisaged impact on the audience within specific time and space. It then becomes apparent that strategy/performance and context go hand in hand. Ntaragwi, in his contextualised analysis of popular musical performance among the Swahili of Mombasa, Kenya, also notes the significance of context in both the production and manner of consuming Taarab. He opines:

At each performance, a song’s meaning expands or changes depending on the images it expresses or the inferences the audience members may make from it. Given the use of metaphor and other symbolic tropes in song texts, a single taarab song may elicit numerous meanings and interpretations. (Ntaragwi 2)

In his study, Ntaragwi critically conjoins context, style, and meaning. His approach sets a good model for the present study as we too seek to examine the dynamics of sexual humour in two different cycles of sexual musical compositions with the intention of establishing whether there is any interface between them. Specifically, we look at the relationship between past and present uses of coital imagery in sexual humour and whether the relationship is a dialogue of cycles or simply epitomised by disparities, inconsistencies, and discontinuities. Many more studies exist that touch on how linguistic elements in African musical compositions bear on both the aesthetics and the social concerns that come to life in the genre. One such work is by Samwel (121–130) who points out that the history of Tanzanian popular music (Bongo Flewa) is marked with difficult patches of rejection as it was perceived as immoral and misleading. He adds that the music was associated with immorality because of the artist's hooliganism in both modes of dressing and choice of words. The artists were also associated with drug abuse and alcoholism.

Similarly, while examining gender humour, Abedinifard is of the opinion “that ridicule, as occurring in mainstream gender humour, plays a panoptical role in enforcing inequitable gender relations” (1). He adds: “[A]s a pervasive disciplinary tool, gendered ridicule causes self-regulation in social agents who then wish to consent to the cultural ascendancy of certain modes of gender performance and the subordination of certain other forms of performing gender” (1). Although gender is not the centre of the present study, and our focus is still to identify instances of humour in the two cycles of sexual humour and what they represent, Abedinifard's analysis of the negative effects of gender humour is important because it supports our argument that humour is not only a critical literary technique in verbal humour but also one that draws from both the prevailing social order and the artist's intentions.

In a similar appraisal of humour and gender, Bing looks at “liberated” sexual jokes that women share with each other both in all-female groups and by e-mail to discount arguments that sexual humour is not common among women. Besides identifying the various types of jokes women create and share: Sexual jokes, role reversal jokes, and stereotyping, Bing makes a distinction between “mainstream” sexual jokes and liberated sexual jokes, thus: “Traditional sexual jokes, such as the Neil Armstrong joke, are funny partly because they violate taboos against talking in public about sex. ‘Liberated sexual jokes’ are funny because they violate taboos against talking about sexism” (338). The gist of Bing's interest in liberated women's jokes, however, lies in their structure, their use of stereotypes, and their subversive potential. Much as sexual humour and feminism are outside the scope of the present study, we still find Bing's general deductions on humour quite enlightening. He says:

To see the way wit functions for all of us—men and women alike—is to see a map of our culture: to focus on things we've seen but not necessarily processed or analyzed; explaining what we've sensed but not yet bothered

to define. Humor may have been ignored or challenged, but it has always been a secretly potent, delightfully dangerous, wonderfully seductive and, most importantly, powerful way to make a statement, to tell our stories, to make sure everyone's voice is heard. (Bing 359)

All of Bing's views help to emphasise the main point unto which the present study seeks to further draw attention, which is that sexual humour not only has a vibrant existence in, in Bing's words, "the fictional universe where anything is possible" but bears rich aesthetics that may be examined in terms of both form and their sociology. The foregoing literature is crucial in arriving at two important deductions: First, that an examination of aesthetic strategies in verbal art such as musical compositions is a viable and potentially resourceful venture. Second, that there is indeed a link between the aesthetic dimensions an artist chooses and the overall impact on the audience.

Theory and method

This analysis of sexual humour is pegged on one main theoretical construct: Critical Humour Studies (CHS). CHS is an outgrowth of Humour Theory, which is almost an entirely "humour-for-own-sake" approach that focuses more on the pleasantness of humour and much less on its social relevance or basis. According to Abedinifard (2015), Humour Theory has a tendency to portray "raising serious questions of humour's political force (to at best) appear as unnecessary if not irrelevant" (6). Accordingly, therefore, the emergence of CHS is a good thing because it puts in place a more critical examination of humour. In making clear this evolution, Abedinifard says thus:

Challenging the notion of humour as an absolute good means that humour cannot be taken as a form of discourse or performance that is isolated from other discourses or from wider configurations of sociality and social relations. Humour may at times provide distraction or diversion from the serious sides of life or from entrenched social problems, but it is not separate or separable from the broad spectrum of communicative forms and processes or from the manifold issues surrounding social encounter and interaction in a multicultural society. Sexism, racism, homophobia, and other kinds of prejudice and bigotry are not exonerated by their appearance in comic discourse; indeed, they may be more effectively communicated, disseminated, and reinforced by being articulated under the wraps of humour and comedy.

It may then suffice to note, basing on the foregoing, that Critical Humour Studies, by virtue that it merges the critical questions of "how" and "why" of humour, does little to encourage the decimation of Humour Theory and the appreciation of humour for the sake of it, but a lot more to ensure the contexts that determine the various ways humour is perceived are given

adequate and full consideration. Abedinifard further underscores the critical role Michael Billig's book *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* plays in de-familiarising "humour by controversially suggesting that humour's universality is due not to any of its benign features but to the social functionality of the very aspect of humour which humour scholars often deem as unfortunately negative, i.e., *ridicule*" (Abedinifard 8). It is indeed purposed in the present project to as much as possible reveal the funny side of what may otherwise be considered offensive, ridiculous, harsh, and even horrid in other contexts.

Since this study targeted musical compositions with sexual humour, all the items we subject to analysis are purposively sampled. For *Embalu*, two of the surviving and most popular songs are critically appraised after being collected and recorded through participant observation and interviewing of participants. The popular music that is the subject of this study was also deliberately sampled. For practicality – especially owing to space and time constraints – and representative adequacy, a total of four popular songs sharing the following features were selected: Overt and concealed references to sex, composed after the year 2000 and deemed widely popular with younger generations, and controversial and/or under consideration or considered for the ban on ethical/moral grounds.

All the selected items are then transcribed and translated before being subjected to close reading and analysis. Analysis of the items then proceeds within their broad "performative discourse": "in context and setting, in gesture, in tone, in body language, in expression, in pauses, in performed skills and movements" (Wasamba 2015, 155). Equally, the views of the interviewees and respondents form a vital part of the analytical framework.

Sexual humour in the Embalu ritual

Under this section, our attention is on coital images in the performance of *Embalu* that induce mirth and laughter. In talking about humour, we espouse Attardo's definition of humour as "whatever a social group defines as such" (Dore 2018, 3). In that regard, therefore, the reactions of the target (also participant sometimes) audience were important in deciding what is to be considered generally funny and amusing. Our analysis starts with the song entitled "*Maweyo Omwana*":

Fanani: *Maweyomwanakulaebwembe*

Wote: *Bufumboburarabufumbobwekhusinyiburekatietie*

Fanani: *Nochakhusokokulebwembwe*

Wote: *Bufumbobusarabufumbobwekhusinyiburekatietie*

Fanani: *Nakopasabeinakhupaepicha*

Wote: *Bufumboburarabufumbobwekhusinyiburekatietie*

Fanani: *Bwaleapopobukhilaenda*

Wote: *BufumboburarabufumbobwekhusinyiBurekatietie*

Translation

Soloist: Buy a razor, mother of the initiate

Response: Hair on his private parts can entrap a bird

Soloist: Remember to purchase a razor from the market

Response: Hair on his private parts can entrap a bird

Soloist: I imitated an engineer to be able to take a photo

Response: Hair on his private parts can entrap a bird

Soloist: Even underwear can't contain them

Response: Hair on his private parts can entrap a bird

The song of “*Maweyo Omwana*” is sang shortly before the initiate faces the circumciser’s knife. Participants excitedly announce the initiation and the coming of age of yet another man. The man will shortly require a sexual partner with whom he can start a new family, so both he and society need to get ready for that inevitable eventuality. The prospects of one getting a life partner is, of course, a good thing that calls for both celebration and the deployment of accompanying light-hearted coital imagery. The song humorously refers to “pubic hair that is long enough to trap a bird” and which need to be trimmed and tidied up lest it came between the couple’s pleasure. The soloist announces that it was not easy for him to discover how untidy the boy was as he had to engage in a self-deprecating act going on his back in order to have a “worm’s eye view” of the initiate’s private area: “I imitated an engineer to be able to take a photo.” The soloist further relies on exaggeration to indicate that time had come for both the boy and his future wife to get ready for the task that awaits them: “Even underwear can’t contain them.” Therefore, through repetition, exaggeration, and a level of self-deprecation, an otherwise bizarre and solemn situation is turned into one that people can laugh about in a relaxed manner. This is because joke performance is used to relieve anxiety and fear, breach inhibitions, and act as a “safety valve” for difficult subjects and feelings. Therefore, *Embalu*, being an example of an initiation rite, is used to explain the metamorphosis of children into adults – the change from an asexual to a sexual role or, more accurately, the transition from a world in which sexually oriented activities may occur but are not perceived as such (or, although quite explicit, are not threatening) to the adult world. Humour is exploited as an important part of the dialogue between the soloist and audience to frame their experiences in a comic way, thus communicating sensitive personal information with ease. This is amplified by Teela who says “humour signals friendship, approval, disdain, fear and insecurity.” The “*Song of Matero*” bears similar features, as may be seen below.

Song of Matero

Fanani: *Matero matero*

Wote: *Aaaa*

Fanani: *Matero kafwabalialio*

Wote: *Aaaa Matero kafwabalialioaah*

Fanani: *Matere matere*

Wote: *Aaaah*

Fanani: *Matere kamwenyenekhumoka*

Wote: *Aaah materekafwabaliaoah*

Fanani: *Matere matere*

Wote: *Aaah*

Fanani: *Materebachamutauni*

Wote: *Aaah Matere kafwabaliaoah*

Fanani: *Wandene wandene*

Wote: *Aaah*

Fanani: *Wendene kabira mu wamunie*

Wote: *Aaah wandene kabira mu wamuniechimbilo*

Translation

Soloist: Matere Matere

Response: Aaa

Soloist: Matere died yet they insist he's still alive.

Response: Aaa Matere died yet they insist he's still alive.

Soloist: Matere Matere

Response: Aaah

Soloist: Matere those who have been to the city

Response: Aaa Matere died yet they insist he's still alive.

Soloist: Penis penis

Response: Ahaa

Soloist: Penis entered the vagina

Response: Ahaa Penis entered the vagina fast

In “*Song of Matere*,” an ordinary event is twisted into a sexual metaphor that hilariously targets and warns adults who may be secretly engaging in forbidden sexual escapades that their days are numbered. Matere, the subject of the song, had been confirmed dead only to come back to life the day his remains were to be interred. Surprisingly, those who had been a while ago expressing their pain by wailing uncontrollably take to their heels immediately he rises. The implication is that, often time, there is a discrepancy between what people publicly say they want and what they truly desire. This is compared to sexual liaisons that are engaged in and enjoyed under the cover of darkness but whose results the partners hardly want to be associated with. Caution is then advised since such illegitimate liaisons can lead to unnecessary conflicts, especially when committed by underage partners. The soloist, through unconcealed sex jokes, affirms that any kind of immorality is not tolerable among Ababukusu where immoral people are treated with disdain and often ostracised. Given these rules, people try to abide by the norms and rules of the society, lest they became the targets of deprecating jokes. However, this does not imply that moral rules are not broken. For instance, instead of using euphemisms that conceal the sexual organ, the song uses the words “penis” and “vagina” to expose the undesirable behaviour in society. Situma (2013) confirms when he says:

Jokes are used to convey messages on a light note. During communication, the speaker has to inform the audience of something and has to make the informative intention clear. Politicians use jokes to tone down an otherwise tense situation and help to pass messages, which otherwise would imply impoliteness.

In yet another “*Song of Euno*,” married partners who get caught up in illegitimate sexual relationships are indirectly lampooned as their foolishness is made the subject of hilarious ridicule.

Song of Euno

Lubukusu Translation

Soloist: <i>Yabirireheeeuno</i>	Soloist: WE ANNOUNCE THE INITIATES'PASS OUT
Response: <i>Euno!</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Ambatiang'Iheeeuno</i>	Soloist: The announcement for a ritual
Response: <i>Euno</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Ambamwalieheeeuno</i>	Soloist: The announcement from Bamwalie clan
Response: <i>Euno</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Omundualiano</i>	Soloist: There is a man here
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Bali nienanu</i>	Soloist: What is his name?
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Bali niye Kundu</i>	Soloist: His name is Kundu
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>NaunyilemukhaWekesa</i>	Soloist: When he sees Wekesa's wife
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Saboachatinya</i>	Soloist: he loses his calm
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Nyowayukhililamumatore</i>	Soloist: He runs around banana plantations
Response: <i>Haya</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Nyowauna</i>	Soloist: Then he was erect
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Nyokabala</i>	Soloist: Then he went that way and that way
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Umukhasiwalila</i>	Soloist: The woman mourned with pleasure
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Ali ewe wamanyakhukhwala</i>	Soloist: That you know how to do it
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Ali wanjakalamulusiba</i>	Soloist: You stir me to the end
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Umusajayuno</i>	Soloist: That man
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Alingamurimba</i>	Soloist: Is like <i>murimba</i>

Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Alingalisondo</i>	Soloist: is like forgotten skin
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Alingaembulu</i>	Soloist: Is like a Hyena
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Alingawasio</i>	Soloist: Is like <i>wasio</i>
Response: <i>Haa</i>	Response: Haa
Soloist: <i>Alingawasio we maye</i>	Soloist: Is like <i>wasio</i> eehemaye
Response: <i>Hooo</i>	Response: Hooo
Soloist: <i>Eehe</i>	Soloist: Eehe
Response: <i>Hahootiang'i x3</i>	Response: Such need cleansing×3

Performed for initiates during their pass out, the song is meant to inculcate morals in the initiates. The illicit acts of the two lovebirds are lampooned but the audience ends up laughing more at the crazed acts than the two persons. It is as if the two lovebirds are under a spell and the soloist paints this in a manner that arouses laughter. When Kundu sees his fellow clansman's wife, he hardly can remain calm. The soloist says, "he runs around banana plantations." He acts like all manners of bad things: *Marimba* (hawk), *Embulu* (chimpanzee), and *Wasio* (vulture). The three creatures are used figuratively to lay bare the displeasure of the soloist on Kundu's character. As alluded to by Teela (3), "this coded joking and private jests are essential tools to manage negative emotions. This form of emotion work has the specific intention of avoiding the negative consequences of sex work to mental health and emotional well-being." The woman, on the other hand, is over herself with excitement and can't control what comes out of her mouth. The soloist's exaggeration portrays the two lovers' actions as ridiculous and laughable. The sex jokes in this song are used to explain how human sexuality is feared because of the strength of our erotic urges compared to the fragility of the social structures we have erected to order our lives as humans. The illegitimate sexual partners are reminded that submitting to their erotic urges will definitely destruct the reality of society that has been created over time. Therefore, these erotic pleasures must be brought under control.

Sexual humour in contemporary popular music

Sturges (2017), in a treatise on her fondness for the popular music group AC/DC, ends up baring important and near-universal features of contemporary popular music, thus:

They are preposterously smutty, hopelessly unsophisticated, and pretty much every one of their songs sounds the same. As well as big riffs, they are defined by casual sexism and oafish double entendres. When not extolling the delights of fighting, gambling, drinking and fast cars, their songs are about getting laid or hoping to get laid. Their songs are populated by strippers, prostitutes and young men with apparently unvanquishable erections. (Sturges 1)

The impropriety of the genre notwithstanding, Sturges considers it sufficiently artful. She avers: “Lyrically, AC/DC may be puerile, but their pithiness is second to none. In employing minimal words to capture the overwhelming madness of teenage lust, there’s artfulness to their innuendo.” Indeed, it is this artfulness that is responsible for the amusement those who like the genre experience. It is on the basis of such assertions as Sturges’ that the present study seeks a better appreciation of humour in both traditional and contemporary musical compositions with explicit sexual references. For purposes of the present study, four representative contemporary/popular compositions have been sampled, namely “*Kolo*,” by Aslay; “*Tarimbo*,” by Ethic Entertainment; “*Kwangwaru*,” by Harmonize and Diamond Platinumz; and “*Utawezana*,” by Femi One.

In “*Kolo*” by Aslay, a frustrated man directs a tirade of insults and ridicule at his former lover. Though minimalistic and calculated to put the woman down, it is not lost on the audience that the man is bitter about losing the woman and just venting his wrath. Hyperbole and irony are, therefore, the main contributors to the comic effect that results from the performance of the song. The audience cannot help but respond with amusement to the trumped up accusations the man levels against his former lover; he goes:

Kiswahili

Kolo

Kiunokizitokama engine yafuso

Haunalolotekitandaniyanipoupou

Unashindwahatakufuavichupivyako

Unanukajashomakwapanikamachoo cha soko

Yani!!

Nikikutazamawalasikumalizi

Unavyojuakupostpichanakuekapozi

Yani!!

Kwenyemitandaoumekakiwiziwizi

Kazikuchambuawenziousiyokosakaziwewe

Tenasijutiikukuacha

NaonakamanimechaNyoka.

Chumbakilikuwakamakichakaunajistiri

Kazitukutukanamastarwakipost

Pichazaostaumenitiaabuebutafadhali

Hajuikupika

Nikipikamimiunapostwewepicha

Translation

Wheel

Waist as heavy as mechanical engine

You offer nothing in bed, you’re just there

You can’t even wash your underwear

Your sweaty armpits smell like a market toilet

That is

I looked at you but couldn’t finish

But you know how to post pictures and pose for them

That is!!

On the networks, you like a thief

You’re ever busy undermining your friends

Again I don’t regret leaving you

I feel like I escaped from a snake

The room was like a bush toilet

When superstars post their pictures you follow with

Insults, you embarrass me please

You don’t know how to cook

When I cook you post on social media

Unaniaibishampakachooniunajisnapisha	You can hardly use the toilet properly
Nimekuvumiliakwakwelinimechokachumba	I have endured and lost interest in my home
Kama jalalahatamachizinashindwangwa kuwaleta	I can't even host friends in my house
Mwanamkeganikolo, kolokololoo	What a woman, like a bicycle
Unanuka Kama ngurungurungururu	You stink like a swine

The man is in instantiable rage and almost blinded by the desire to revenge. In his desperation, he hurls anything he lay his hands on at his victim. He accuses her of being lazy and ponderous in bed, filthy (can't even wash her underwear and sweaty armpits that smell like a market toilet), vindictive, and a poor cook. This is almost everything wrong that one can be accused of, but the one question that lingers in the audience's mind all this while is how the man got himself in this situation. Where was he looking when he first fell in love? Now like in sour grapes, he can only lament at what seems to have already slipped through his fingers. The repetition of insults only adds to the amusement of audience who may now be convinced that the insults are just a face-saving gimmick calculated to convince the jilted lover that he has not lost much, protect him from the shame that engulfs him, and perhaps humble the woman who comes through as strong and unapologetic. Nonetheless, it is ironic that the man should be mourning (given the tone of his singing) instead of celebrating his "lucky escape."

In a similar song, "Tarimbo" by Ethic Entertainment, the artists use images that conjure up excitement among listeners, especially young adults. "Tarimbo" was released in January 2019 and like most songs of its ilk, sex, alcohol, drugs, money, and violence are predominantly part of the subject. Although the song was roundly condemned for condoning rape and being misogynist, a lot more Kenyans welcomed the song. In fact, by June 2019, the song was trending at number two on YouTube in Kenya with many positive comments and views. In the song, a man is heard taking pride in his ability to subdue a woman that is adamant to his advances. He promises to use his stick/cannon (oversized manhood) to get even with the woman by making it a really painful experience for her during intercourse. The images of "beating up" and "stepping on it" taken as used in chest are sufficiently humorous. The song goes:

Kiswahili

Bas basjokamaanamaringo
Bas basjokamaanamaringo
Mihupendachapanatarimbo
Mihuchapachapanakanyaga

Translation

Relax, relax if she's playing hard to get
 Relax, relax if she's playing hard to get
 I love to beat it up using the stick
 I seriously beat it and step on it

Nevertheless, as the song progresses, the man introduces more methods he could use to subdue his object of aggression and they all turn out to crude and

uncivil. Much as it is welcome for a man to promise a woman an epic sexual experience, it is totally unacceptable for any man to promise to force himself onto any woman. The persona says:

Kiswahili	Translation
<i>Namwagabilaata permission</i>	I then empty even without permission
<i>Mmmh</i>	Mmmh
<i>Mmmh</i>	Mmmh
<i>Bilahatappermission</i>	Even without permission
<i>Mmmh</i>	Mmmh
<i>Mmmh</i>	Mmmh
<i>Bilahatappermission</i>	Even without permission
<i>Mihuchapachapananakanyaga</i>	I seriously beat it and step on it
<i>Namwagabilahata permission</i>	Even without permission

Promising to force himself onto the woman and pursue his own selfish pleasure portrays the man as a clueless potential partner that is basically a laughable embarrassment to the men fraternity. As if to confirm his clueless nature, the persona admits that he nearly loses his mind each time he comes the woman he covets:

Kiswahili	Translation
<i>Kanapendakuziwashakakunakeroma</i>	She likes spicing them up as if they carry delicacies
<i>Venyekamebe bathuthakananikoroga</i>	My head spins when I see that mountain of buttocks she carries
<i>Venyekamebe bathuthakananikoroga</i>	My head spins when I see the mountain of buttocks she carries
<i>Pastor Ng'ang'azasadaka</i>	Pastor Ng'ang'a with everything he received as offering
<i>Atapelekakwake</i>	Would easily surrender to her

The persona's actions are laughable because he has clearly allowed his fantasies to crowd his judgement. His threat to use force then comes through as empty. His sense of helplessness, now that his style cannot match that of the woman he targets is humorous. What is more, it also seems he is conscious of his own deficiencies and shortcomings. He has a ready answer if "cannon" malfunctions and fails to rise to the occasion; he says:

Kiswahili	Translation
<i>Toa mzingaunatakadungia Sara</i>	Take out the cannon you want to inject Sara with
<i>Kama mzingaunakataaende adawa</i>	If the cannon refuses to go for medicine
<i>Tunatumi adawa</i>	We use medication
<i>Tutatumi adawa</i>	We will use medication

A man who relies on sex-enhancing drugs to save face and talks openly about it is admitting to a struggle with anxiety and insecurity, which is by any standards laughable in the backdrop of his earlier bravado. It is ironic and laughable such a man could come around to threatening anybody, leave alone a woman of the stature he describes.

“*Kwangwaru*” by Harmonize and Diamond Platnumz is another song that derives its essence from ridicule. In a typical case of sexual fantasy, a man mocks his former lover by singing praises to his current lover whom he paints willing to do anything to satisfy his lust. The song goes:

Kiswahili

*I wish ningekuwanamavumba,
Mkwanjamanotinikuhongevyathamani*

Ama, niwe fundi wakuigizaka' Kanumba

MasanjaJotiusiwembaliname Masanja

Mhhmy darling, I need you love

Uwename hakiyaMungunakupenda

Nobody can show you love, oh×2

Usiwaaminiukishawapawanakwenda

Oh, basijilegezenikubebemgongoni (iyelewi)

Dekanikudekezenikutunzekamamboni (iyelewi)

Wakijawapotezejifanyekamahuaoni (iyelewi)

Kishauniongezeulivyo funzwaunyangoni (iyelewi)

Translation

I wish I had a lot of money
Money to spoil you with
valuables

Or I could be a good actor
like Kanumba,

Or Joti, so you won't be far
from me

Oh my darling I need your
love ooh ×2

Be with me, I swear to God
I love you

Nobody can show you love
ooh ×2

Don't trust them, they'll
leave the moment you
give it to them

Oh then easen so I can carry
you on my back

Indulge in me, let me cosset
you like thepupils of my
eyes

If they come misdirect them,
pretend you've not seen
them

Then give me more of what
they taught you at the
initiation ceremony

Descriptions such as these could excite anybody. The man is completely hypnotised and his speech involuntary. He proceeds:

Kiswahili

Oh, baby Asadansinikuone (kwangwaru)

Translation

Ooh, baby, dance for me
(Kwangwaru)

<i>Oh, baby, Basichezanimimi (kwangwaru)</i>	Ooh come and dance with me (kwangwaru) My love (kwangwaru)
<i>Oh, baby, Asadansinikuone (kwangwaru)</i>	Ooh baby, dance for me (kwangwaru)
<i>Nipatievyakitandani, nipempakakwenyekiti</i>	Give me of the bed, give them to me even on the couch
<i>Ili asiniingieshetani, nawenikajakukucheat</i>	So that the devil does not lead me into cheating on you too
<i>Oh, basijilegezeNikubebemgongoni</i>	So Loosen yourself up so I can carry you on my back
<i>KitandaninikolezeKwamiunoyakingoni</i>	Arouse me in bed with your Ngonitwerks
<i>Kishanibembeze, nirudisheutotoni</i>	Then soothe me, take me back to my childhood
<i>Weka mate niteleze,kamanyokapangoni</i>	Smear saliva on it, so I can slide like a snake into its cave

Vivid images and hyperbole are the main sources of humour in the song. Much as the women in the song are objectified, it is the man who, just as is the case in the preceding song, and as Sturges would put it, “come over as passive and hopeless, awestruck in the presence of sexual partners more experienced and adept than them.” This is of course at the least laughable.

Lastly, a controversial song, “*Utawezana*” (Will you really manage?) by an upcoming Kenyan lady musician, Femi One, has all the features to qualify as an answer to her male counterparts’ portrayal of women. Negative sentiments towards the song were numerous and came from as high up as Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) chief executive officer, Ezekiel Mutua, who even threatened to have the song banned after a short video surfaced online in which a child said a few lines of the song’s explicit lyrics. The song’s catch line is a question perceived to come from a lady and addressed to a man: “*nikikupea utawezana?*” which translates as “can you do it well if I give it to you?” Coming from a woman, this is a disarming blood-cuddling question to any man. It simply means the man is being sized up as a potential sex partner and the lady already doubts his prowess in bed. The female voice then goes ahead to troll the man’s physique:

<i>Okonkwonakitambiutawezana (Nitawezana)</i>	Okonkwo with a big belly, you can? (I can)
<i>Nikikupeautawezana? (Nitawezana)</i>	When I give you, will you make it? (Yes I will)
<i>Manze Femi One nikikupata</i>	Femi One when I get it
<i>Nitakupendaka vile napenda tumbler</i>	I will love you as much as I love tumbler ×2

The woman is brazen, straight talking, and knows exactly what she wants. It is she who approaches the man (Mejja) first (it is also evident she had confided

her interest in the man to her friend) and when the man tries a few sweet words she puts him off by saying it is good sex she wants and not flattery:

Swahili

Femi, ndouleMejja, ndouleMejja
Si ulikuwaunadaikuchapiananaye
Ishiaishiaishia

Okonkwo pole nimekujaghafla (Usijali)
Ni vile we hukuwaumenibamba
[Mejja]
Aah Femi One piakwangu we nimsoo
Kwanza vile ulituoshakwaile verse ya "LigiSoo" eeh

Nakupendamanze we hukuwamhumble (Asante)
Legend, kwangu we ni icon
[Mejja]
Aahstoriza icon kwanza wekambali
Femi One mi hukuwanimekutamani

Eeh, Okonkwoumeanzakunichocha (Ah zii)
Nishowniwapiuliniona
[Mejja]
Aah Femi One (Eeh) we unibamba
KwaInstagramnikichekiizomapaja

Femi, see Mejja, see Mejja
You wanted to talk to him
Go, Go, Go

Okonkwo sorry I came suddenly (Don't worry)
It's because you make me feel happy
Aah Femi One also to me you are 100
First when you washed us in the verse of "LigiSoo" eeh

I love you, you are so humble (Thank you)
Legend, to me you're an icon
Ah icon story, first forget them
Femi One I always admire you

Yep, Okonkwo you have started to tease me (Ah No)
Tell me where you saw me
Aah Femi One (Eeh) you amaze me
On Instagram when I check those thighs

It now seems the man has been put on the defence, warned to choose his words carefully and clearly explain his abilities and qualification, as it were. This is not what the audience is used to and it is laughable. The lady is clearly in charge and she wants to be impressed:

Swahili

Okonkwonakitambiutawezana (Nitawezana)
Nikikupeautawezana? (Nitawezana)
Manze Femi One nikikupata
Nitakupendaka vile napenda tumbler

Napendamachaliwakona swagger (Okay)
Nikicheki fashion yakohapana
[Mejja]
Femi One haomachalilookulooku
Ni lookutulakinihawanakakitu

Ah! Natakakurombosahadichini
[Mejja]
Ah! Natakakuikotahukochini
[Femi One]
Ah! Napendakupakuanikiwajuu
[Mejja]
Ah! Siteti, napendahiyo view

Fungua bonnet (Okay) toa screw (Aha)
Mbonaunanidainausiniambieuongo
[Mejja]
Ah! Nakudaijuuumetoka ghetto
Na we nimanzi hardcore manzimathongo

Okonkwonakitambiutawezana (Nitawezana)
Nikikupeautawezana? (Nitawezana)
Manze Femi One nikikupata
Nitakupendaka vile napenda tumbler

Translation

Okonkwo with a big belly, will you manage? (I can)
When I give you, will you manage? (Yes I will)
Please, Femi One when I get it
I will love you as much as I love tumbler

I love men with swagger (Okay)
When I look at your fashion, no

Femi One those good looking men
They're just well dressed but they don't have money

Ah! I want to bubble it till down
Ah! I want to pull it down
Ah! I would like to download when I'm on top
Ah! I can't complain, I like that view

Open bonnet (Okay) release screw (Aha)
Why do you want me and don't tell me a lie
Ah! I want you because you are from the ghetto
And are a hardcore chic, who speaks English

Okonkwo with a big belly, you can? (I can)
When I give you, will you make it? (Yes I will)
Manze Femi One when I get it
I will love you as much as I love tumbler

The lady's exaggerated confidence and persistence (especially through repetition) are the main source of humour in the text. Ingenious imagery such as "Open bonnet (Okay) release screw (Aha)" also add to the humour.

Summary of findings and conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, a few facts may be adduced concerning the nature and function of sexual humour in both old and contemporary musical compositions. First and foremost, it may have been clear that the sexual images contained in the musical compositions are majorly aimed more at entertaining and making light of situations. It may, however, be added that sexual humour in traditional musical compositions sought to go beyond mere entertainment and make some lasting impressions on the audience's mind on society's values and expectations.

Second, it may be observed that a number of stylistic devices come in handy in the artists' expression of sexual humour, some of these include exaggeration, repetition, vivid imagery, and figurative language as well as irony. It may also be pointed out that, compared to traditional compositions, contemporary music relies more on target self-deprecating humour. Indeed, humour in the latter category may be defined by a lack of sophistication and a casual approach to sex amid a relaxed liberal and hypnotic approach while the old is demarcated by a strict pragmatic demeanour.

It may then be concluded that sexual images can indeed be humorous as demonstrated in the discussion above and that old and contemporary contexts have not only their own unique standards for sexual humour but also apply similar literary techniques to achieve diverse aesthetic effects. It may also be concluded that context is key in the appreciation of sexual humour. As already indicated above, different situations and contexts have given rise to not only

different compositions of sexual humour but different standards of judging such humour. In other words, therefore, sexual humour may not be effectively appreciated away from its own context.

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