

# **Patriarchal Symbolic Order: The Syllables of Power as Accentuated in Waswahili Poetry**

by

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## **Abstract**

*This article briefly outlines the literary tradition of the Waswahili in east Africa as a community, and thus underscores their contributions with discussion on the socio-cultural, ideological and political influences that have contributed to the literary landscape. And furthermore, the article delves into the issue of masculinity as depicted in the genre of poetry and how it has been used to perpetuate male-constructed stereotypes that discriminate women via an analysis of select poems wherein the manifestations of masculinity can be observed.*

## **Introduction**

For a long time gender relations have continued to draw both national and international debates because they involve social relationships between men and women. Hence, patriarchy has continued to offer us gender subject positions that are socially constructed that direct our thoughts and actions, and clearly portraying our femininity or masculinity. In this article, I will discuss how masculinity is depicted in works of poetry from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And as a consequence, masculinity is socially constructed and is usually created through a historical process that sustains gender practices controlled by a hegemonic symbolic order sanctioned by male ideologies.

For the purposes herein, the Waswahili will be taken to mean a particular East African coastal community that comprises of different groups of people who share a common culture (Prins 1967; Salim 1973). Thus, the community uses Kiswahili as its first language that belongs to the Bantu linguistic family and is spoken widely in East Africa, and also the national language of the republics of Kenya and Tanzania. Hence, Kiswahili has 15 or so dialects and is more varied compared to other local languages spoken in the region.

While discussing the identity of the Waswahili as a community, Mazrui and Shariff (1994:53) states that group identities are not determined by who we are genetically but through 'dynamic perceptions of the collective self constructed in history. Likewise, the Waswahili as a community also comprise of Muslim and non-Muslim, thus the poetry discussed here was written by members of the Muslim community which enables us to distinguish between the poetry of the Muslim Swahili and those written by other East Africans in the region, using the Kiswahili language.

Therefore, I have used poetry to elucidate the patriarchy structures and cultural aesthetics, and through this use of poetry review how patriarchal ideologies of a given society are perpetuated, and how hegemonic forms of masculinities can be critically analyzed within historical periods. Accordingly, in a society like the Waswahili, there exist ideologies that justify men's supremacy on the basis of cultural traditions, religious ideologies and sexual differences, as evident through analysis of literary genres like poetry.

From time immemorial, men in this community have been the cultural managers of the existing patriarchal symbolic order where language, for example, is used to define sexuality as a binary opposition that registers differences between men and women wherein these differences have been manipulated socially and culturally by a patriarchal system that involves male-constructed stereotypes of sexual difference.

On the other hand, women have been playing the role of custodians of male ideologies they have internalized and interesting enough it has become a part of their daily lives. And not unlike other communities, this community has for a long time used literary art forms to advocate masculinity to maintain the status quo. Hence it is within this understanding that I critically analyze some of the poetical compositions in this community as vehicles of transmitting, preserving and perpetuating masculinity in specific historical periods via the selection of specific poems to expound the various manifestations of masculinity existing in the community discussed.

Three poems have been discussed at length although a few examples from other poetical materials have been used only to augment discussion. First, the poem of *Al-Inkishafi* written by Sayyid Abdalla bin Ali bin Nassir (1720-1820) is a soliloquy based on 'mortal defection' (Hichens 1972). Written immediately after the fall of the sultanate of Pate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the poem is highly didactic. According to Hichens (1972:8), copies of this poem have continued to be treasured by many Swahili households, and have often been quoted in theological discussions among the Muslim Swahili, and early researchers and scholars like Rev. W.E. Taylor and C.H. Stigand viewed the poem as the greatest religious classic of the race (Hichens 1972:9).

Several literary scholars and researchers have studied and analyzed *Al-Inkishafi*, and have indicated that it is the most widely read poem from this community, which include Gibbe (1995), Momanyi (1991), Mlamali (1980) and Mulokozi (1971), among others. I have chosen this poem because not only does it depict an outstanding historical period in the history of the Waswahili, but it also underlines a male oriented feudal system, a highly stratified socially ruled by feudal lords who controlled the cultural, economic, political and literary life of the community that introduced a patriarchal ideology designed and maintained to set specific gender roles while entrenching the principles of masculinity. Thus, societal organization, the segregated lifestyle of the patriarchs and the subordinate feminine roles are clearly elaborated in the poem.

Second, the poem of *Mwanakupona* (1790-1860) has elicited scholarly arguments and explanations from literary researchers and critics, among them Momanyi (1998), Njozi (1990), Senkoro (1988), Khatib (1989) and Mulokozi (1982). Some scholars have viewed the poem as a disgrace to humanity and to women in particular because it encourages submissiveness and subordination of women. Khatib (1985), for example, says it is a poisonous poem that encourages women enslavement. However, others have observed that the poem should be analyzed within the historical and cultural contexts it was composed, because while others lacked Islamic sources to competently analyze it, others had no ideological knowledge to base their arguments, and therefore ended up analyzing the poem using contemporary situations and ignoring the time it was composed.

Nonetheless, in observing its cultural and historical contexts it will enable us to understand the patriarchal ideologies at play, and the hegemonic masculinity that controlled the life of people at the time. According to Njozi (1990:63), the continued popularity of the poem among the Muslim Swahili is due to its proven effectiveness in promoting and maintaining peace and harmony in marital life. This peace, of course, was subject to strict adherence to the patriarchal symbolic order, and I believe the poem is not in total disregard for women in the Waswahili community because *Mwanakupona* lived in a period when male ideologies were not questioned, and conversely the patriarchal order had to be maintained and thus women had to conform to it through obedience which is also a religious virtue.

The last poem that I have analyzed in relation to male ideology and existing masculinity is written by a contemporary poet and a prolific Kiswahili literary writer, Said Ahmed Mohammed in relationship to the period after independence in East Africa (after 1960s) that saw the emergence of literary works written by the African elite in which most of the works challenged colonial inheritance, and also seen the depiction of societal problems as a result of the establishments of cities and flow of cash economy wherein rural-urban migrations resulted in high rates of unemployment leading to the emergence of commercial sex workers in most of the major towns. In this context, Said Ahmed Mohammed (1983) wrote an anthology of poems entitled, '*Sikate Tamaa*' where he discusses contemporary socio-economic and political issues facing Africa after independence, and discusses male ideologies and their impact on women, especially in relation to the effects of urbanization and cash economy.

In this anthology, I only discussed one poem entitled, '*Wananambia Mchafu*' which literally means 'They tell me I am dirty' because of the masculinity it depicted and the hostilities directed to femininity due to nonconformity set by societal norms. Meanwhile, the author has written a number of other literary works including novels, plays and poetry that have been researched by Kiswahili scholars like Muindi (1990), Sirucha (1986), and Mlacha (1984) and others. Thus I examine how poetic language is used in the poem as a way of interpreting the feminine image that question the patriarchal social structure where masculinity and male ego tend to dominate.

## **The Waswahili and Literary Tradition**

The Waswahili is a community that occupies the East African coastal strip from the southern coast of Somalia in the north to the north coast of Mozambique, including the adjacent islands. The Swahili as a distinct group have evolved as a distinct culture after many centuries of economic and social interactions. According to Middleton (1992), the Waswahili have lived along the East coast of Africa for more than two thousand years.

Historically, due to flourishing maritime trade, there was the emergence of city-states, including Pate, Lamu, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Sofala and Kilwa, among others. These city-states were ruled by patriarchs known as sultans drawn from the ruling upper class. Thus it is believed that the period from 1100 to 1500 is the golden age of the Waswahili civilization where patriarchal states controlled trade, politics, culture and literature. And by the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, families ruled the city-states and it is precisely during this time that great works of literature were written wherein the realities of important historical epochs were depicted by well known classical poets like Sayyid bin Abdalla bin Ali bin Nassir (1720-1820) who wrote the poem of *Al-Inkishafi* (Hichens 1972:86), Mwanakupona binti Mshamu (1790-1860) who wrote the poem *Utendi wa Mwanakupona* (Nabhany and Abubakar 1972), and Muyaka bin Hajji (1776-1849) who wrote popular poems in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Abdulaziz 1979), among many others.

It can therefore be argued that Kiswahili language has the longest literary history in comparison to other African languages in the region. And like in many other patriarchal societies, the age old patriarchal system of the Waswahili produced literary works loaded with male ideologies that perpetuated masculinities through time.

Correspondingly, the Kiswahili language has been used extensively to preserve the beauty of literary compositions and to depict their history and social life. Indeed, literature recreates our social, historical, economic and psychological realities and can also be a channel for patriarchal attitudes, ideologies and stereotypes of both men and women.

For the Waswahili, poetry is a way of life, a communicative tool that expresses their aspirations and their vision; and history attest that before foreigners from across the Indian Ocean (Arabs, Persians, Chinese, Indians) came to the east coast of Africa, the Waswahili were a matriarchal society. Jahadhmy (1997:42), for example states, "...men generally went to live with the clan of the women they married." In other African patriarchal societies, it is the women who would go to live with the relatives of the husband. But with the introduction of other forms of societal organization including clan lineages from the settlers, new forms of ideologies and masculinities were introduced. And with the coming of patriarchal religions like Islam and Christianity, patriarchy was entrenched among the Waswahili, probably because the religions are mostly controlled by men and thus new forms of social ordering were introduced within social institutions as reflected in works of art, like poetry.

Hence, the basic micro-political unit became the patrilineal clan, and being a patriarchal community, the poetry of the Waswahili of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was in the possession of men from the ruling class who perpetuated male power through a patriarchal symbolic order.

Furthermore, Islam as a way of life also has contributed immensely to beautify this poetry composed to fulfill a liturgical, instructive and didactic mission, and also express and maintain man's position in society. Islam as a religion is a significant aspect of the Waswahili culture, and thus many Islamic concepts are found in their literature, especially those based on law and doctrine. Yet this does not mean that the originality of this genre can be challenged, it simply means that Islamic influence plays a significant role in shaping the lives of this community. And it should also be realized that some aspects of African culture and practice are found in this poetry, and as much as the Waswahili have been influenced by many races, they also have their own distinct literature emanating from their various life experiences.

According to Knappert (1979: xiv), there are four main functions of this poetry in with a large number of the poems are didactic juxtaposing narratives where epics have been composed of great men and their deeds in history. Perhaps a most vivid example is the epic of Fumo Liongo composed by Mohammed Kijumwa during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fumo Liongo is a well known popular poet and warrior who believed to have lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Among the Waswahili, he is a legendary figure remembered in their oral traditions and whose praises are sung in ceremonial occasions.

And in addition, other forms include topical compositions and songs, many rich in images and a high degree of figurative language gendered where male dominance has for a long time given meaning to life in this community. However, the female voice has not been totally absent in the poetic arena as women have been composing songs and poems through history to perpetuate masculinity where patriarchy is the supreme order in a social, economic, political and cultural way of life. Yet, this does not mean that there has not been any reactionary poetry from women challenging the status quo, and indeed, there are a few examples of women who have composed poems questioning their subordinate role and daring to enter the public space reserved for men (e.g. poem of Fatma binti Athman and songs of Siti binti Saad). And in many instances, women have been used as custodians and perpetrators of the various masculinities as a result of social conditioning; as poetesses and singers have depicted this role through their own literary creations.

### **Masculinity as Accentuated in Poetry**

According to Cornwall (1994:20), hegemonic masculinity is connected with the institutionalization of men's dominance over women, thus the association between men and women is seen by the society as a natural phenomenon. However, it should also be noted that in this power structure, it does not necessarily follow that men are the ones who dominate women. What it means is that at any given time in a particular culture, both men and women will support a hegemonic masculinity, and consequently the dominant group in power will ensure that subordinate groups accept the way things are and live by the rules prescribed to them by the high and mighty in society.

Conversely, Foucault (1981:92), for example reports that power is the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere they operate that constitute their own organization, whereas Weedon (1991:113) defines power as a relation, a dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects. Hence in this situation, patriarchy gives man the power to control discourse, and uses it to perpetuate unquestioned masculinity.

In looking at the historical landscape of the Waswahili of Kenya, one cannot fail to notice the dominant forms of masculinity perpetuated by the social and political systems established in different historical periods. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century, for example, imported Islamic patriarchal ideologies coupled with the existing local traditional and cultural ideologies had amalgamated to bring forth a stratified and distinct socio-cultural way of life that recognized the power of man in society. Thus hegemonic masculinity was demonstrated not so much through physical strength but through economic power and independence enjoyed by the ruling class via the authority of men over women, and interest in sexual conquest to prove manhood. And obviously, these masculine traits do feature in the poetry of this community as society supported masculinity within established social institutions and literary genres like poetry with groups of men from the ruling class taking positions of power and wealth that legitimized and reproduced social relations that generated their dominance.

According to Scott (1990) also, relations of power are characterized by official transcripts that articulates and legitimizes the position of the superiors, and reinforces the mechanisms to control subordinates, thus both men and women can be connected to this official transcript of masculinity where men legitimize their control of women. The Swahili feudal class of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries which has also been depicted widely in various works of poetry is proof of this phenomenon; hence the status quo so established has been perpetuated to this date through established social institutions like marriage.

## **Sex-role Theory**

Continuing, the Waswahili community, just like many other world communities, can be discussed under what is known as the sex-role theory where people learn from the established social institutions to behave in ways that are socially acceptable and appropriate to their sex. This social theory recognizes the dichotomy between men and women wherein men are known to be: aggressive, rational, dominant and objective; and therefore thought to value power, competency and achievement. On the other hand, women are known to be passive, submissive, narcissistic, emotional, and subjective. However, different schools of thought have questioned this theory as it does not address the obvious fact that masculine traits are valued more than those thought to be feminine, and assumes that gender forms the core of one's identity. On the other hand, feminist theories advanced by feminists like Firestone (1972), Millett (1977), Kristeva (1986; 1984), Showalter (1977), Chodorow (1978), Ogunjipe-Leslie (1984), Steady (1981) have challenged the patriarchal symbolic order controlled by men. For example, they have challenged the sex-role theories and the Freudian approach (Oedipus complex) where masculinity is taken as the norm against which differences between men and women are measured. Feminists have objected this approach where the phallus is the signifier of sexual difference symbolic of power in a society where men are dominant and control social institutions (Weedon 1991:49).

While expounding on theory advanced by Jacques Lacan, Weedon (1991:52) states that the patriarchal symbolic order is also the 'social and cultural order we live as conscious, gendered subjects'. Besides, it is this symbolic order that structures language and gender rules that also govern our speech behavior. Language plays an important role in maintaining this social and cultural order because it is an expression of the position of the speaker. Hence, meanings of femininity and masculinity vary from one culture to another or even between discourses within a particular language (Weedon 1991:22). All these variations are also subject to historical change, like different historical epochs manifest variations of masculinities. And for many generations, the Waswahili literature has been used to maintain the patriarchal symbolic order and strengthen manifestations of masculinities in areas like class and sexual orientations.

Cornwall (1994:12) also adds that there is no single universalized masculinity. The term has multiple and ambiguous meanings that alter according to context and time. Hence, an analysis of the Waswahili poetry can show this trend where masculinity has had multiple meanings that have evolved through time. Also language is the raw material used to depict situations in poetry, and as a set of syllables and signifiers, language is also metaphorical. For example, the word 'male' has been naturalized through many generations of social conditioning to mean authority, while the word 'manhood' has been linked to the male sexual organ. Similarly, the word 'man' symbolizes possession and control in many cultures, whereas the word 'woman' in some social contexts can send messages that are linked to weakness. This is why in many African societies one can hear such utterances like 'don't cry like a woman' or 'fight like a man'. Because men are linked to power structures, there is a tendency to associate them with images or instruments of power. For example, in Kiswahili language we have a saying that says, '*Bunduki bila risasi itaua namna gani?*' meaning, 'How can a gun without a bullet kill?' The gun is a tool of power and has often been associated with men because mostly it is them who handle them, anyway. Elsewhere, studies that have been done by sociolinguists like Coates (1986, 2003), Johnson and Meinhof (1997), Holmes (1995), and Halliday (1978), for example, show that men have a way of employing strategies to perpetually retain the control of language and discourse.

Masculine identities may also be located in possessions that can either be acquired or lost. In Kiswahili there is a saying: '*Mume bila kazi si mume*' meaning 'A man without a job is no man at all.' Sometimes the saying also includes, '*Mume ni kazi*' which simply means, 'A man is his job.' Among the Waswahili, like in many societies, a man is the bread winner and provider for his family. But if he does not have a job or an income generating activity, then he will not be able to fulfill this gender role, and his credibility as a man is therefore questioned. On the other hand, the women in their own spaces have material culture that is exclusively used by them. For example, certain areas of the home, like the kitchen, have been the preserve of women for generations in African societies and elsewhere.

And in most African traditions, men are not allowed to hang around the kitchen because they do not usually cook. And subsequently objects like 'Mwiko' (wooden spoon or cooking stick), 'Kinu na mchi' (mortar and pestle) or even 'Ufagio' (broom), are usually not handled by men. Therefore, by enforcing the femininity of these objects, women and men define their spaces.

Hence, the construction of masculinities through exclusion of men in specific areas usually enforces gender spheres and helps to perpetuate the male ideology of dominance. Thus, gender identities for a long time have been produced through exclusion processes are taught to young boys and girls so that as they grow up, they become gendered subjects and internalize gender differences that assign gender roles. Chodorow (1978), for example, explains that in order for a boy to attain a model of masculinity embodied in the father, he must stop identifying himself with his mother and reject the feminine aspects associated with her. While describing personality traits also, Doyle (1989) elaborates the traits that define men's behavior as aggressiveness, forceful, individualism, competitiveness, self-reliance, ambition and dominance, among others. Moreover, these traits permeate in the symbolic order where language plays a major role, and are centered on power, the phallogocentric power, hence a symbolic construction which corresponds with the hegemonic definition of masculinity where, as Connell (1995) indicates, is the ideal and dominant form within the given society. This desired form which all must conform, and thus standard yardstick against which all other masculinities are evaluated. And it is also worth noting that in the Waswahili community, like in many other world communities, the above is the case when patriarchy has been able to perpetuate itself through women, the very group that it oppresses. Thus women in patriarchal societies have internalized gendered identities and locations, and have become the real custodians of this symbolic order as evident when we critically analyze the poetry of this community.

Instructively, one vivid example is the 19<sup>th</sup> century poetess of Lamu, Mwanakupona binti Mshamu (1790-1860) who hailed from the northern coast of Kenya from a feudal ruling class, and the wife of Bwana Mataka, the ruler of Siyu in the northern coast of Kenya. She composed *Utendi wa Mwanakupona*, a poem of 102 verses addressed to her young daughter who was called Mwana Hashima binti Sheikh. Using one of the Kiswahili dialects, the Ki-amu dialect of the northern Kenyan coast, she composed the poem two years before her death and regarded it as a will to her daughter. The poem details the wifely duties which she wanted the girl to adhere to once married.

In this classical work, she teaches her daughter and all the girls of the time, the politics of survival in an Islamic patriarchal society where a wife is supposed to serve her husband dutifully and with humility. The following verse clearly underscores this:

*Mama haya yasikize tafadhali  
Sinipuze utaona nafuuze za  
Akhera na duniya*

My child, hearken to these words I  
pray, you do not ignore me you will  
behold the advantage of them for  
the life to come and this

While humility is a religious virtue, the woman is also warned that unless she serves her husband with humility, which also means conformity to the laid down social norms, she will suffer the consequences here on earth and even in afterlife. The poem also teaches her appropriate speech behavior and the art of keeping a husband satisfied. The encouragement to use proper language (refined language according to her class) is meant to conform to this social symbolic order as the following verses indicate:

*Uonapo uso wake funua meno uteke  
Akwambialo lishike illa kuasi  
Jaliya*

When you look upon his face reveal  
your teeth in a smile, that which  
he tells you hold to it except to  
Rebel against the Highest

*Mama sinoe ulimi nioleze wako  
Umi naliowa nyaka kumi  
Tusitete siku moyo*

My child, be not sharp-tongued, be  
like me, your mother I was married  
ten years yet we did not quarrel  
one single day  
(Translation by Jahadhmy 1997)

Hence, appropriate speech behavior was required of her to be accepted in the community and in her social class, the feudal ruling class. Proper language here also means the kind of language that is appropriate to her gender. In becoming linguistically competent, the girl learns to be a female member of her speech community, and the linguistic behavior appropriate to her sex is, in fact, geared to perpetuate the social symbolic order which creates gender dimensions in conformity to existing masculinity. The symbolic order thus demanded that women serve their men with a show of happiness even when this is not genuine wherein they had to put up a show to impress their husbands who had power over their lives, and likewise, women are taught how to soothe charm and amuse her husband in order to survive in a man's world. The poem clearly defines the socially constructed differences between men and women which according to this symbolic order are regarded as natural, and differences are legitimized as women have been for generations socially conditioned to believe it was natural. Conversely, in this poem the poetess is, therefore, a custodian of the male ideology.

According to Mulokozi (1982), the image of woman as given by Mwanakupona is that of submissiveness, and a tool for the satisfaction of male desires. In fact, he states that its popularity among the Waswahili is a clear indication of how masculinity has infused in the lives of women, especially those in the upper class. Yet, this poem should also be analyzed within the historical, cultural and social environments it was composed. Njozi (1990), for example, analyzed this poem, drawing from Islamic sources and grounding it on the teachings of Islam. Thus Mwanakupona was teaching her daughter how to survive in an environment that considered women as the sources of male comfort and pleasure wherein she had to abide by the established feminine and masculine norms; and contrary to this, she would suffer on earth and in the after life as these verses of Mwanakupona drawn from Jahadhmy (1997:32) clearly shows:

*Na siku ufufuwayo nadhari nda  
Mumeyo taulizwa atakayo ndilo  
Takalotendewa.*

And on the day of resurrection the  
award is with your husband, he will  
be asked what he shall wish, and  
as he wishes it will be done.

According to this verse, man as husband has been given divine powers to determine his wife's fate after death in front of God.

*Kipenda wende peponi utapekwa  
dalihini, kinena wende motoni  
huna budi utatiwa.*

If he wish that you go to Paradise  
you will forthwith be brought there  
if he says that you go to the fire  
without escape you will be put there.  
(Translation by Jahadhmy 1997)

From these lines, it is clear that male ideology was infused in religion and given credibility. This is because there is nowhere in the Islamic Holy Book- the Koran, which categorically state that men have powers in heaven to decide whether their wives will go to hell or heaven. This popular fallacy has also been disputed by some Muslim scholars like Njozi (1993) who states that the Koran does not bestow in man such divine powers. Expounding on this delusive belief, Sembene (1972:14-15) says that sexism has been institutionalized to the extent that Muslim women are indoctrinated to believe that their obedience and subservience would earn them a place in Paradise. That is why among the Waswahili, the poem of Mwanakupona is quite edifying. However, we should not rule out the religious implications of some of the stanzas in this poem where the woman are advised to observe cleanliness, and correspondingly, Islam teaches its followers to be obedient and to observe cleanliness.

Similarly, the community is also polygamous; hence polygamy is understood to bring forth uncertainties, jealousies and rivalries especially among co-wives. Thus, in order to catch the husband's eye, and be able to acquire a place in Paradise, co-wives enter into cut-throat competitions to gain favour from the head of the family who is the man. Due to this then, it is understandable why Mwanakupona was preparing her daughter to face this reality. And additionally, Mwanakupona herself was married into a polygamous family, so she knew what she was talking about. Femininity is hereby constructed around adaptation of male power where its central feature is women's attractiveness to men, which also include physical appearance, so this is clearly underlined in Mwanakupona's poem:

*Nawe ipambe libasi ukae kama  
harusi, maguu tia kugesu na  
Mikononi makowa*

Do you adorn yourself with finery that  
you remain like a bride, put anklets  
upon your ankles and bracelets  
upon your arms.

(Translation by Jahadhmy 1997)

In this feudal Islamic society, men occupied the public sphere while women were in the private sphere. It was, and has been, the duty of the husband to provide food and clothing for his wife while the latter took care of the home. And errant women who could not adhere to this social duty were punished not by flogging but by denying them necessities like clothes. That is why the Waswahili have a saying which says, '*Mke hapigwi kwa gongo, hupigwa kwa nguo*' meaning, 'a wife is never beaten with a cane, but with a piece of cloth'. Likewise, the 19<sup>th</sup> century popular Swahili poet, Muyaka bin Hajji (1779-1840), vividly elaborates this in his satirical poem, '*Kitambi changu*' meaning 'My cloth'. In this poem, he demands his unfaithful mistress to return the cloth he gave her because she wore it and went out with other men, an act that cannot be tolerated in a male dominated society as it is against the norm (Abdulaziz 1979:175).

Continuing, when serving the man, the woman is taught to suppress emotions that demonstrate power or even anger, because power is masculine, and so it is something that a woman must avoid. The feminist psychoanalytic theory defines language as an expression of the subjectivity of the speaker. Yet this subjectivity can be the product of a false consciousness, which can also be as a result of patriarchal ideologies. In this case, the symbolic order represses the feminine libido and in its place an imaginary 'self' of the woman is exhibited.

Therefore instead of her expressing her inner self through her speech and actions, she is taught to exhibit only those traits that conform to the hegemonic masculinity in place. That is why Mwanakupona tells her daughter to pretend to laugh when she sees the feudal lords and not to arouse her husband when he sleeps:

*Kivikia simwondowe wala sinene*  
*Kwa yowe keti papo siinuwe*  
*Chamka kakuzengeya.*

When he sleeps do not arouse him and  
don't speak with a loud voice  
stay there, rise not from your place  
So that if he wakes he has to search  
for you.

(Translation by Jahadhmy 1997)

In the above verse, the relationship between husband and wife is shown to dictate the desired principles of femininity and the unquestioned masculinity. The woman is depicted in ways that satisfy male interests and is a necessary device for the perpetration of masculinity. During Mwanakupona's time, the relationship between husband and wife may look like that of a slave and her master, but as has been stated in the foregoing, women were the custodians of the hegemonic masculinity and had to do so for their own survival.

Another didactic poem composed by Sayyid Abdalla bin Ali Bin Nassir in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is *Al-Inkishafi*. The poem is believed to have been written around 1810-20 (Jahadhmy 1997:62). It is believed that the poem, which is in a Kiswahili dialect called Ki-pate, was written soon after the downfall of the kingdom of Pate in the northern coast of Kenya. The word *Inkishafi* is a derivative of the Arabic verbal stem '*kashaf*', which according to Hichens (1972:24) literally means 'he revealed himself to himself'. Allen (1977:14) on the other hand, says the word means 'to examine' or 'to reveal'; while Jahadhmy (1975:62) says it simply means 'to uncover' or 'to examine'. The poem is one of the many classical great works of the Waswahili, and has greatly influenced the thoughts and life of the Muslim Swahili for decades. Thus a didactic and homiletic poem which draws vivid images of the fall of Pate to signify the temporary nature of man's life, composed by a Pate citizen from the ruling elite who was also a renowned poet; hence the poem also depicts the social position held by men compared to that of women who performed subordinate roles dutifully as the society demanded which involved making men comfortable and entertained:

*Pindi walalapo kwa masindizi  
wali na wakandi na wapepezi  
na wake wapambe watumbuizi  
wakitumbuiza wasinyamaye.*

And while they lay down for rest  
they had masseurs and fanners  
and gayrobed women, the  
minstrels singing melodies  
ceaselessly  
(Trans. By Hichens 1972:72-73).

In context, subservience and humility of women were the feminine virtues most treasured by the patriarchal symbolic order, which also shaped by their milieu. As Figs (1978:23) clearly states, men continue to perpetuate the idea that women are intellectually inferior so as to boost their own feeling of superiority. Between the lines of this verse, one cannot fail to see how masculinity commands and subjects women into a state of pleasure giving objects, and the symbolic order prepares and molds the male character to occupy the 'right' subject position that also constitutes masculinity. Thus, in many African patriarchal societies, women were not supposed to express their inner feelings of wanting to be loved, let alone initiating lovemaking. They were supposed to inhibit their feelings, but at the same time become sexually available. Yet, they were prohibited from being sexually assertive but were required by society to give in to the husband's sexual demands. Hence, the one who should derive sexual pleasures and satisfaction is the man, and women were taught to believe in fate as this Swahili proverb clearly states, '*Hafuti mwana Adamu, jambo akikutubiwa*' meaning, 'a human being cannot delete what has been written down.'

The following verses also depict the hegemonic masculinity of the time where men of honor controlled society and its riches:

*Uwene wangapi watu wakwasi  
walo wakiwaa kama shamsi  
wa muluku zana za adharusi  
dhahabu na fedha wakhiziniye*

How many rich men have you seen  
who shone like the sun who had  
control of the weapons of war  
and stored up silver and gold

*Malimwengu yote yawatiile na  
dunia yao iwaokele, wachenda  
zitwa zao zilele, mato  
mafumbuji wayafumbiye*

All the world paid them homage and  
world was straight and ahead  
For them they walked with heads  
held disdainfully and eyes closed  
in scorn.

(Translation by Jahadhmy 1975:68)

The above verses clearly depict man's power and earthly possessions wherein men controlled armaments of warfare, and the instruments of power via noble men who established a niche for themselves as political, literary, religious and cultural standard-bearers and the patriarchs who perpetuated the masculine image through established social and cultural norms.

Juxtaposing the wider patriarchal ideology, the woman's image is also divided into two; the nurturing, humble and submissive creature that conforms to the symbolic order, and the so called 'eve' image who is a trickster, and a temptress who can disorder a man's world. These two images have also been embraced by hegemonic masculinities through history and have been authenticated by patriarchal religions in the world. Hence, among the Waswahili, these images are depicted in poetry and continue to perpetuate masculinity in social institutions. The following proverb, for example, originates from such a belief. It says, '*Ukichoka kuungua, utafanya mwiko*' (When you are tired of burning your hand, you will make a cooking spoon). 'To make a cooking spoon' is a metaphor, that means to divorce and probably marry again. Such an action would be as a result of a wife not conforming to the social norms laid down by society. Thus, women signify wooden spoons because of their traditional roles where the 'spoon' is used as a symbol of femininity.

In a historical construct, when money economy was introduced in East Africa, the traditional division of labor changed whereby men were not the only breadwinners as women attempted to venture into the cash economy, although masculinity was deeply entrenched and revolved around economic gains. Thus, when the colonial era was established in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the social institutions of most African societies were reorganized as a result of the new political and economic order, hence during this period, many African men received education and ended up doing white-collar jobs, and in contrast, the colonialists did not encourage female education and so women felt short changed, therefore, colonial patriarchal tendencies subordinated African women further, again strengthening masculinity. Subsequently, because of the high rates of industrialization and urbanization, some women ventured into towns to look for employment. This was frowned upon because they entered into the public sphere, the man's world, and thus dreadful suspicion arose in the man's public sphere especially when he knew now he was not the only breadwinner. This would render him redundant, resulting in the collapse of the whole patriarchal system (Figs 1978:172). Among the Waswahili, just like in other societies in the region, some of those women who ventured into the male sphere were ridiculed, especially those that ended up in brothels for lack of legitimate employment. And in short, the move by the women was a challenge to the symbolic order that sought to maintain women in their limited space of the home.

Shaaban Robert (1968), a renowned novelist and poet among the Waswahili, and who is regarded as the 'Shakespeare' of Kiswahili literature among Kiswahili scholars, captured some of these trends in his works. However, another poet, Said Ahmed Mohammed (1983:7) looked at the position of women in relation to the forces that surrounded and shaped the lives of womwn. In his poem, '*Wananambia mchafu*' (They tell me I am dirty), the poet insists that people are usually quick to blame female sex workers instead of investigating the root cause of their behavior. He depicts the hard life experienced by these women to show the gendered life in the urban centers, where even in these public spheres, women were still the providers of services in the phallogocentric world. The poet says in this stanza:

*Wananambia, naharibu utu wangu*  
*Wananambia, nalizika jina langu*  
*Wananambia, na kutaja siri zangu*  
Bali wanashindwa kuchunguza kisa changu.

They tell me, I destroy my humaneness  
They tell me, I bury my name  
They tell me, and make known my secrets  
Yet they are unable to investigate my story.  
(My translation)

In these lines, the poet who is representing the female voice is challenging masculinity and the patriarchal symbolic order. He is also representing the more often unheard female voice challenging male ideologies in existence. In Zanzibar, for example, a popular female singer, Siti binti Saad, faced a myriad of problems when she started singing in public. In his book '*Siti binti Saad*', Shaaban Robert (1967) eulogizes her as a determined and courageous woman who fought against socio-cultural barriers in her community and the hegemonic masculinity, to have a breakthrough in the public sphere. The manifestations of masculinity in the society are evident through speech acts like cursing, abusing and attacking women who deviate from the norm.

In unity, commercial sex workers were often regarded as social misfits and outcasts that should not be honored even in death as these verses from Mohammed (1983:7) elaborates:

<i>Wananisubu, machafu matendo yangu</i>	They abuse me, that my actions are dirty
<i>Wananisubu, najivua nguo zangu</i>	They abuse me that I undress myself
<i>Wananisubu, siujali uke wangu</i>	They abuse me that I ignore my womanhood
<i>Bali wanashindwa kuchunguza kisa changu</i>	Yet they are unable to investigate my story

<i>Wananilani, baba hata mama yangu</i>	They curse me, my father and my mother
<i>Wananilani, wasema sihofu Mungu</i>	They curse me, and say I don't fear God
<i>Wananilani, hawaji mazishi yangu</i>	They curse me, that they will not come to my
<i>Bali wanashindwa kuchunguza kisa changu</i>	funeral
	Yet they are unable to investigate my story
	(My translation)

Even in this age, commercial sex in the East African region, and supposedly everywhere in Africa, is not tolerated by various societies. What is not understood by many critics of such an activity is that those women go to prostitute with men, yet the latter do not carry the brunt of the blame. Traditionally, commercial sex challenges the established boundaries and women's sphere of operation. The dominant mythic and symbolic structure shared by members of the Waswahili community, and other patriarchal communities, leads them to believe that their social order is legitimate and natural. Hence, it should not be challenged through nonconformity to the established social norms. The above poem that was composed in the second half of the twentieth century was a reflection of the feminist wave that had been sweeping across the African continent, where writers and scholars engaged in gender discourse. This gender debate is still being perpetuated in literary genres especially the position of woman and her role in society, thus various theoretical models on feminism were being advocated to deal with masculinity through questioning the social structures that perpetuated it. It therefore goes without saying that African literary writers would lend a voice in the contemporary issues of the time.

Kiswahili literature has undergone major transformation, thanks to the gender sensitization programs that were being initiated to deal with gender equality worldwide. Kiswahili literary writers have now started to challenge masculinity and to offer new images that reflect experiences of both men and women. Hence, they have begun to question our traditional practices and the establishments of masculinities and femininities, including the specific roles that they play in our societies.

Such writers include C. Momanyi (2006), K.W. Wamitila (1999), Kithaka wa Mberia (1997), Katini Mwachofi (1987), Ali Mazrui (1981), Penina Muhando (1975) and Shaaban Robert (1967), among others. And in most of these works, both male and female writers challenge the various manifestations of masculinities and patriarchal structures and institutions through the literary characters.

The Waswahili, like any other African community, have songs that are sung in various occasions like weddings and circumcision ceremonies. There are also special songs and dances that are performed exclusively by women and young girls, when the latter are being initiated into womanhood and marriage. Through special institutions like '*Unyago*', a seclusion stage where lessons are taught to young girls as they pass through vigorous dances aimed at pleasing the husbands to be. In fact, by engaging in such satirical songs, the female audience supports and authenticates masculinity as the male ideology permeates through their songs. Such institutions perpetuate masculinity because the ultimate outcome is to please the man. The songs are either performed inside a house or in an enclosure because of the lovemaking messages they portray. In here, they exhibit their skills in hip movement as well as acting out motions of coition (Campbell 1983:225). However, such institutions have not been favored by religion like Islam as the practices go against their teachings.

I should also state here that symbolic orders have not been static. Different historical epochs have not only changed the literary landscape of Kiswahili literature but have also changed the conditions of the existing hegemonic masculinities where men have been calling the shots in different changing ways. This has also been happening elsewhere in Africa, for example in Southern Africa where long period of colonization produced violent patriarchal versions (Morrell 1998). It is also possible that with new communication networks being formed coupled with new economic corporations and the reorganization of state structures, new masculinities will continue to be formed (Connell 2000). This also applies to the Waswahili community that has continued to experience different manifestations of masculinities through time.

## **Conclusion**

The poetic discourses of the Waswahili have continued to be governed by historical events that shape their socio-cultural, economic, and political worlds. Thus, through poetry, we are able to capture the different historical periods and masculinities that controlled social structures and their effects on women. Hence in this discussion we have seen that at least seven themes have materialized to inform us that: poetry is often subservience to the patriarchal symbolic order, written and expressed by women that perpetuate hegemonic masculinities that were and continue to be dominant; the forces of change brought about by modernization and different world views have continued to alter

the perceptions of men and women in terms of gender and subject positions within established social structures; literature works as the reproduction of male imagination, is being challenged by emerging views concerning gender constructions and the place of man vis-à-vis woman in the patriarchal societies; the voice of assertiveness by some of the Waswahili female artists and musicians challenge masculinity has differentiated men and women socially; our social, economic, political and cultural relations are based on a masculine worldview that we have internalized through socialization processes we have continued to inherit through history; different theoretical paradigms have been discussed in relationship to how they have been used to address patriarchy and its manifestations with a particular focus on the feminist psychoanalytic theory to elucidate that we acquire subject positions within the symbolic order through false consciousness, and last, language, especially poetic language, can be used to favor the interests of a particular social group via the realm of language differences that acquire meaning, yet it can also be a transparent medium to challenge patriarchy and address the distorted qualities of female sexuality.

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