



# A feminist analysis of 'Dhako en ...' (A woman is ...) proverbs among the Luo community of Kenya

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Postcolonial feminism conceptualises the female body as volatile to theorise the inherent vibrant activities of (re)identification of the self from the social masculine inscriptions. In addition to that, the female body is also understood as a subject of conquest in a political struggle to emancipate the self from the instigators of its suppression. Given this, the female body is highly political and attempts to emancipate itself from oppressive patriarchal hegemony. In spite of these efforts by feminist scholars to proclaim the inevitable transfiguration of the female body, and to elucidate a transformation towards autonomy of self, discourse in emerging oral tradition and emerging genres of oral literature in contemporary African societies derail the quest for recreation of an 'envisioned woman'. In this study I analyse 'Dhako en' (a woman is) proverbs among the Luo community of Kenya, and investigate their dominant role in the objectification of the female body in contemporary society. These proverbs were collected from Facebook, and then analysed through a deconstructionist approach and postcolonial feminist theory of sexualised objectification. At the superficial level, 'Dhako en' proverbs are supposed to entertain by creating comic relief. I argue that the signified is a woman relegated to a mere object of misappropriation, and that the signifiers embody sexual connotations in the pretext of artful use of words verbally. I conclude that these proverbs become existential threats to the 'transfiguration' process of the female body and continue to 'other' the image of the woman, complicating the overall feminist struggle. **Keywords:** *Dhako en*, objectification, female body, social degradation, social other.


## Introduction

The body is a critical subject for postcolonial studies. In particular, postcolonial feminist studies engage with representation and (re)creation and (re)identification of the female body from the hegemonic masculine inscriptions, which have played a critical role in 'othering' the woman in society. Elizabeth Grosz, a postcolonial feminist scholar, describes the female body as highly "volatile" to explicate and conceptualise the inherent activities of resistance against demeaning patriarchal inscriptions, in what then becomes the larger process of re-identifying the self (14). Another notable scholar, Ketu Katrak, argues that the female body should be viewed as a subject of conquest, and is thus often experiencing "internal exile" as resistance against demeaning and marginalising social identities within masculine space (2). Given these arguments, it is apparent that the female subject grapples with the continuous challenge to (re)create an identity which she can be proud of. Nevertheless, society makes this aspiration complex and complicated in representation of the female body in various oral performances. That is to say that societies place further obstacles against the feminist struggle, and this is visible in the language of composition and transmission of 'Dhako en' (a woman is) proverbs among the Luo community in Kenya. As I argue in this paper, 'Dhako en' proverbs are anchored in objectification of the female body, and this is reflective of the society's marginal positioning of female subjects.

Oral tradition and performances, which embody a community's way of life, are some of the avenues in which social degradation of the female body is exacerbated, particularly among the Luo community of Kenya in contemporary times. Oral tradition is conceptualised for the purpose of this study as the transmission of messages orally from one generation to the next. These messages are passed through normal conversations and may also

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find themselves embedded in oral arts such as songs, narratives, and poetry of the people that use them. Since oral tradition relies on language, it becomes susceptible and vulnerable to a hijacking that reinforces the perceived status quo such as patriarchal norms within the society.

Linguist Robert Lakoff argues that “Language uses us as much as we use language” (45), and theorizes on what is “women’s language” by asserting that: “It will be found that the overall effect of ‘women’s language’—meaning both language restricted in use to women and language descriptive of women alone—submerges a woman’s personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly, on the one hand, and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in the subject-matter and uncertainty about it” (48).

From Lakoff’s argument, it is notable that language has a role in constructing and reinforcing certain identities. Besides, its role as a political tool that highlights the contradiction between genders in the community is explicit in most cultures. Another critic, Kuber Bathla, argues that patriarchy, like all social systems, is constructed by people and is reinforced and cemented when it seeps into language. The idea is that language, which is the medium of communication in oral tradition and performances, is a breeding ground for gendering that occurs in societies, and particularly the social marginalisation of women in the society. Language usage thus portrays a community’s values, beliefs, and social relations.

Given the above, in this article I posit that the Luo community, which is at the centre of this study, have proverbs within its oral tradition which highlight the othering and marginalisation of women, and this could be suggestive of how a part of this society perceives women and womanhood. Lakoff avers that there are specific linguistic expressions that allow the woman to be discussed and treated as an object, sexual or otherwise (48), and this is conspicuous in the deconstructed ‘*Dhako en*’ (a woman is) proverbs among the Luo community in Kenya.

The primary texts used in this article were collected online through Facebook as a dominant social media platform. First, I searched for similar posts on Facebook with the keyword ‘*Dhako*’ to locate the primary texts. Posts and comments with ‘*Dhako en*’ proverbs were then collected for analysis. In addition to that, on 7 January 2020, through my Facebook account, I created a post requesting for ‘*Dhako en*’ proverbs, and users responded to this in the comment section by sharing proverbs that they were aware of or had heard being used in their communities. Importantly, these proverbs naturally occur orally but were collected in written form based on the method of data collection. Their ‘orality’ in the text is further reinforced by Peter Amuka who argues that readers are ever engaged in an oral exercise when interacting with a written text. The data collected was then thematically analysed, where emphasis was placed on those that ‘objectify’ female bodies. Critical engagement with the texts was augmented by the poststructuralist theory of Deconstruction and postcolonial feminist reflections on objectification.

The humorous use of words among the Luo community intended to render communication artistic and enjoyable, and as Ruth Finnegan (219) argues, to make commentaries on social life. ‘*Dhako en*’, which is translated into English as “a woman is”, is a phrase commonly used in proverbs that describe women. “Woman” is the English equivalent of ‘*Dhako*’. Generally, these proverbs describe women by comparing them to an object, often traditional or contemporary, but within the community’s social realities. In the first part of the proverb, the woman is described by comparing or linking her to the object. For instance, ‘A woman is x’, where x is a descriptive statement or an object. In most cases, x as an object is a metaphor that needs to be qualified in the second part of the proverb. In other words, the second part is the signified, and can take the form of a caution or advice, or even be humorous. Thus, it is the second part of the proverb that contains the meaning.

At face value, these proverbs are supposed to be humorous and entertaining among those who use them, but deeper interpretations of them highlight the prevailing social degradation of the female body through systemic sexual objectification using language. Notably, these proverbs exist in day-to-day conversations, and may be used by both men and women. However, the rate of their usage among men exceeds that of women, who can be argued to be conscious and uncomfortable with their sexual connotations, and how they are objectified. Aside from that, these proverbs are also prevalent in the lyrics of Luo traditional and popular music genres such as *Nyatiti*, *Benga*, and *Ohangla*, where the artists use them to entertain their listeners and to pass critical messages. Jayne Otwick Odhiambo, for instance, has analysed how the Luo Benga music, with emphasis on Okatch Biggy’s songs, reinforces sex stereotypes within the Luo tradition (47).

Importantly, in the verbal performance of the proverbs, the auxiliary verb ‘*en*’ (is) is dropped for simplicity purposes. For example, *dhako ndiga. Ka ijienge marach to ng’ato okwale* (notice the absence of ‘*en*’). It is translated as “A woman is a bicycle. It will be stolen if you do not keep it well”. At the superficial level, this message is supposed

to be a caution to men to take good care of 'their women'. In addition to that, it offers dark humour, where it will likely trigger a mixture of laughter and discomfort in the audience.

Regardless of the humour, such proverbs and their usage in society are problematic as the undertone is a situation where the woman is objectified. The given example implies that a woman is like a physical object that can be taken or stolen at will. Her human attributes are taken away, and she is given mostly inanimate features. Most of them, as will be explained, sexually objectify a woman and her body when deconstructed.

According to Martin Hohendorf and Alessandra Pucci Daniele, Derrida's deconstruction helps in disclosing the gender oppressions expressed through language (41). In Derrida's view, there is a connection between the signifier and the signified, where the signifiers can have alternative and non-fixed meanings. According to Guillemette and Cossette, "Deconstruction criticism subscribes to the poststructuralist vision of language, wherein the signifier (the form of sign) does not refer to a definite signified (the content of a sign) but produces other signifiers instead". Thus, through deconstruction, one can depart from the obvious and superficial meanings of '*Dhako en*' and delve into how they portray the Luo woman with sexual undertones. As a result, the danger is that these proverbs intensify the oppression of the woman, and because they are delivered with supposed dark humour, they therefore remain normalised and invisible. Along with other postcolonial feminist arguments on objectification, deconstruction is a critical analytical tool in unmasking such objectifications to enable criticism against them and continue the struggle of (re)creating positive identities of the female body in society.

### **Representations of objectification in '*Dhako en* ...' proverbs**

"The act of 'objectifying' means making into an object or treating something that is traditionally not an object as an object, which then becomes susceptible to manipulation and control through the physical properties that it possesses" (Calogero 574). When a human being is objectified, the perpetrator of the objectification no longer sees the victim as a human being and perceives the subject as an 'it'. In this case, the 'it' disqualifies the human attributes as the individual is identified with properties of the object that it has been linked to, or is perceived to be.

Notably, objectification theory was originally developed by Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts but has been widely used in feminist studies. According to these scholars, objectification theory attempts to elucidate the extreme and pervasive tendency to equate women with their bodies, which can have negative consequences for women's body image and beyond (Calogero 574). When a woman's body is sexually objectified, it is put on public display in and its identities and images become subject to misappropriations. It is problematic because sexual objectification has traditionally fragmented the woman into a collection of sexual parts and/or sexual functions. The danger is that this strips the woman's unique personality and positive identity. Jayne Odhiambo supports this by arguing that the consistent naturalisation and normalisation for men to treat women as mere sexual objects, and for women to be told that their bodies function only as things of value to men, present lasting effects on the mentality of women (48).

Sexual objectification of women in '*Dhako en*' proverbs is a construct of the social realities of the society in which they are performed. Feminist scholar Rosalind Gill aids in understanding the existing social problem in her argument that "all women's bodies are available to be coded sexually" (150). In addition, the essentiality and meaning of the female body predominantly rests on the socially generated codes in communities. Amuka supports this claim and says that the human body is "a language unto itself; the body is imbued with the power to create stories, culture and history". Amuka's conclusion is derived from his study and analysis of Okoth Okombo's *Masira Ki Ndaki*.

Like most African communities, the Luo of Kenya are patriarchal, and this influences the society's perception and imaging of women as objects. According to a sociological study of Luo gender relations carried out by April Gordon, "the Luo represent more than retrograde patriarchal dominance over women" (886). In such a society, the woman is perceived as inferior in a retrogressive way, and this always paves the way for misappropriation of her body. The social implication of such cultures is that the male becomes dominant, and the woman is defined by the man, especially in terms of her identity. Besides, it offers the impression that the woman is owned by the man, and therefore the man can do to her whatever pleases him. Given these realities, the patriarchal orientation of the Luo society becomes a breeding ground for the objectification of women which is reinforced from one generation to the next.

Feminist studies have also engaged with the sexism of Luo oral performances. Aside from sexism, humour is a dominant feature of the Dholuo language as noted in most oral performances such as *Pakruok* (praise for oneself), *Ngero* (proverbs or sayings), or '*Dhako en*' proverbs. In her study of *Pakruok*, Beatrice Atieno Owiti observes that humour derived therein is culturally bound, and the level of appreciation for the humour will vary from one culture to the next ("Humour in *Pakruok* Among the Luo of Kenya: Do Current Theories of Humour Effectively Explain *Pakruok*?" 31). Owiti identifies power relations in the Dholuo language oral performances, and how women are represented as less equal to men.

The uniqueness of the Dholuo language is also observed in popular culture's treatment and appreciation of the human body as figurative codes for various modes of thoughts, feelings, and features that do not coincide with English idioms (Odhoji 2). Amuka has also argued that the human body is a narrative text, especially among the Luo people, where it "enjoys a very special place as a literal object in Luo oral art". Thus, it is not by coincidence but by socio-cultural design that '*Dhako en*' proverbs among the Luo community figuratively treats female bodies with socio-culturally generated signifiers that target socio-culturally acknowledged meanings. Amuka further posits that the body, with the female in mind, inspires songs, dances, and feasts, among other forms of oral art. According to him, the preoccupation of a woman's body in '*Dhako en*' proverbs is socio-culturally pegged and understood.

A proverb like "*Dhako jek, ting'o gari size moro amora*" (a woman is a hydraulic jack, she can carry a vehicle of any size) tends to instigate laughter in the audience and elicit admiration for the perceived power of a woman. The metaphorical usage of a hydraulic jack represents the function and power of a woman. The most arrived at meaning of the proverb is that, like a hydraulic jack is capable of lifting vehicles of any weight despite its small size, so is the suggested power of a woman. When deconstructed, the proverb portrays the woman's capability to withstand the weight of any man during sex. Therefore, the strength of a woman is equated to her sex life and capabilities.

"*Dhako Turkana tur gi chuore makata opek*" (a woman is Turkana, she struggles with her husband however heavy she is) highlights a similar meaning as above. Importantly, the humour and meaning in this proverb rests in the vocabulary of the Dholuo language. Turkana is a geographic space, whose first three letters "*tur*" form an independent root word in Dholuo that means 'to struggle'. Given this clarification, the proverb uses Turkana within the local context of conversationalists to image a woman who struggles with the weight and burdens of her husband. The social problem with objectification is explained by Jayne Odhiambo in her analysis of the Luo Benga music, where she argues that:

Many problems arise when stereotypes are seen as ideal behavior, for instance when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male desire: she is then judged and evaluated on the basis of her appearance and not on her competence based attributes. (56)

In addition, the overall problem underpinned by this proverb is sexual objectification, which according to Sarah Gervais *et al.* is a given type of appearance focused on sexual body parts (743). These scholars further explicate this is based on objectification theory that manifests in two ways. First, whenever one objectifies a woman, he or she always separates a woman's sexual functions or body parts, and then reduces the body parts to just instruments (743). Secondly, it entails regarding the sexual body parts of the individuals as capable of representing their entire persons (743). Overall, a woman's body is perceived in her sexual functions and not by her personhood and essence of being a human.

Reflecting on Gervais *et al.* and Jayne Odhiambo's argument, it is noted that the above proverbs are exemplifications of the Dholuo language's capability to foster sexism and objectification of women. First, the woman is compared to an object, the hydraulic jack. Secondly, the signifier (the hydraulic jack) has several aspects of the signified, where one of them is the strength of a woman while the other is strength in her sex life. The proverb symbolises a woman's ability to sustain the weight of any man during intercourse. By in so doing, the proverb furthers sexism, which is the "set of expectations of women's (or males, however, in a misogynist society, females are the focus of prejudice) appearance, actions, skills, emotions, proper place in society" (Wilson 45). It continues to marginalise women and their bodies become objects of sexual perversion, where it represents the woman as a body designed for sex and sustaining the weight of every man's body during intercourse.

There are instances where some '*Dhako en*' proverbs encourage not only sexual objectification but loss of autonomy of the female body. As argued by Miruka Philip, Nathan Joshua, and Jack Obongo, Luo culture is

patrilineal and this implies that it is a society where “male ownership” is predominant (240). Within such a society, the female body is identified through her relationship to a particular male (father or husband), and this encourages the assumption that a woman can be owned or used by the man. The audience for this proverb is undefined, and this is attributed to the contemporary vehicles within which they are performed and transmitted. Importantly, sexual overtones manifest in most Luo oral performances. For example, in his study of *Ohangla* music among the Luo, Fred Atoh emphasises the sexual overtones in lyrical composition and dance moves as an integral part of the performance (49). Thus, it speaks volumes of why most of these proverbs are overtly used in *Ohangla* music. In addition to that, it can be seen that the proverbs are transmitted verbally through several channels, and this demonstrates their increasing popularity among contemporary Dholuo language users.

Several proverbs assume the meaning expounded above. For example, “*Dhako puodho, ng’ama ni gi kweye to choro mana keyo*” (a woman is a garden. Whoever has his hoe/*jembe* gets to plant in it). Herein, a woman is compared to land as a physical object, which then implies that she is rendered usable and own(able) by men. In addition to that, this proverb has a sexual connotation as it portrays the woman as a conquest of a man’s sexual desires. It reinforces the marginalisation of the role of women in society to merely a man’s form of sexual satisfaction. A proverb with a similar meaning is “*Dhako gas, ng’ama ojase ema tiyo kode*” (A woman is a gas cylinder, any man that refills it gets to use it). Notably, Gayle Rubin presents an apt explanation of this through the theory of sex/gender systems. She argues that this is the “set of arrangements by which society transforms the biological into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied sexuality” (159). The above proverb demonstrates how language becomes a tool to transform the woman’s body into a product that can be owned and is therefore capable of satisfying the sexual needs and wishes of the capitalist and masculine hegemonic society.

“*Dhakonam, ok de ipong’eng’ato achiel*” (A woman is a lake, you cannot fill it alone) also highlights the appropriation of a woman’s body and autonomy, and denotes her useability by men. Furthermore, it depicts a consumerist image of a woman, disregarding her voice and self-determination as she becomes a subject of conquest by anyone. By implying that anyone can fill water in a lake, the suggestion is a precursor and reinforce(r) for degradation of the woman in its representation of a female body capable of being used by any other man. Rubin further argues that: “There is an economics and a politics to sex/gender systems which is obscured by the concept of ‘exchange of women.’ For instance, a system in which women are exchangeable only for another has a different effect on women than one in which there is a commodity in equivalent for women” (205)

The proverb explicitly reveals that a woman is seen merely as an object owned by a man that can be used by anyone who fulfils her demands. Critics would argue that it robs the woman of her dignity and autonomy of self and relegates her to a social space of vulnerability through misappropriation of the body. It normalises the objectification of the female body, and the fact that such proverbs are popular offers clues on how contemporary society furthers the degradation of the woman from what is typified with the traditional society’s treatment of the woman.

Social degradation of a female body is also notable in the proverb “*Dhako chuodho, ng’ama oruako gambut ema yore*” (A woman is a muddy ground, whoever puts on gumboots gets to cross over it). This could imply that a woman shares similar properties and attributes as mud, and is thus relegated to a social “other”. She becomes that which people must wear protective gear in engagement with for she is described as having unclean properties. Indeed, several studies have been conducted on how societies perceive women as unclean, socially exclude them, and treat them negatively, especially during menstruation (McHugh 410; Mengi and Rajput 401).

Another proverb is: “*Dhako mit makata omuonyo chloroquine*” (A woman is sweet even if she has taken quinine medication). Chloroquine/quinine is an anti-malarial drug that is characterised by its bitter taste and itchy skin sensation as side effects. The proverb employs the drug’s irritating side effect and creates an assumption that a woman is sweet even if she takes the drug, where ‘sweetness’ is contrasted with the taste and side-effects of the drug. In this case, sweetness is deconstructed as a sexual metaphor. Also related to this proverb is “*Dhako milimili karatuon*” (A woman is as tasty as a food additive) which equally uses taste and food to signify the sweetness of a woman’s body. By linking a woman to ‘sweetness’ she is relegated to an object that can be consumed or eaten by a man, and she becomes an object that is supposed to satisfy a man’s desire for sweetness, pleasures, and other sensations. Indeed, Josephine Shui-Kei Chin, a feminist scholar, includes “sweet in taste” as one of the obscene and indecent metaphors that are used to describe women in Hong Kong magazine (28). While her study is based on the language of print media, the phrase “sweet in taste” is used in verbal messages as demonstrated by the above ‘*Dhako en*’ proverb.

The tendency to see the female's body as an object that is consumable or 'eatable' by a man is observed in an analysis of 'Dhako en' proverbs that use food images in representing women. In her analysis of the relationship between food and the woman's body, Naomi Graetz argues that "[w]omen are often thought of as either food, or in relationship to food. This might be related to the fact that a woman's body is traditionally conceived as deficient, as an imperfect male, and even a subhuman" (1). Tisha Dejmanee's analysis of women in food blogs helps in further understanding this relationship by explaining it as "food porn" (433). In other words, women are portrayed as tasty and edible foods with the most attractive descriptions by using erotic language to trigger interest in buying.

Take, for instance, this example: "*Dhako packed lunch*" (A woman is a packed lunch) which implies the readiness and the available nature for eating or consumption with which her body is imaged. Another proverb, "*Dhako matumbo, ichame ka oliet*" (A woman is cooked intestines, it is eaten when hot), also employs the food trope in describing a woman. *Matumbo* (tripe) is a local delicacy in Kenya made from cooked intestines and other stomach organs from slaughtered cows, goats, or sheep. Characteristically, *matumbo* has a lot of fats, and when cooked, these fats will melt but then solidify very fast. Therefore, the meal has to be served and eaten quickly when it is still hot to avoid the unpleasant solidifying fats. The above proverb likens a woman to "*matumbo*" (an object) where the signified is sex. It means that a man should have sex with a woman when the woman's body is still 'hot'.

"*Dhako ok mur mor mor pile*" (A woman is not warmed for her body is always warm) is also accompanied by food imagery, and it particularly denotes the 'warmness' of a woman's body with emphasis on the sexual and intimate relationship that a man has with a woman. Arguably, food's palatability is enhanced by warming. However, this proverb advises that a woman's body should not be warmed for it is already warm, and ready for consumption. It can then be concluded that the symbolic reference of a female's body with food in composition and usage of this proverb suggests the hyper-sexuality of the community. Dejmanee elaborates further that "in a hypersexual context in which the exploitation, regulation and objectification of women's bodies is predictably commonplace, 'food porn' plays with ideas of the pornification of the female body" (445).

The most apparent element in these proverbs is the sexual objectification of the female body. Notably, the 'sacredness' of the institution of sex is contested in these proverbs, where the performer says what is hitherto considered taboo or sacred. The cultural views of the institution of sex are challenged, and this could be explained by two theories. First, it could be linked to the increased liberalism wave that is sweeping through society worldwide (Sindima 190)—this is also relevant for understanding the cultural crisis of Luo society. Alternatively, the trend demonstrates deviance and is in a way a kind of power contest between the norm and what is not normal. In the theory of "The Everyday Forms of Resistance", James C. Scott posits that "Most 'everyday resisters' are rather like opponents of the law who estimate that it is more convenient to evade it or bribe their way around it rather than to change it" (57). These proverbs can be put into the context of everyday resistance against the social conventions of conversation, where the everyday resisters employ the proverbs to defy and challenge the norms in their aspirations of freedom of speech. As such, there is an inherent battle to be free of refrains in conversation, which manifests as the undertones of the proverbs in the mainstream.

Upon analysing the words (signifiers) used in 'Dhako en' proverbs, a critical concern is the question about the level of obscenity of the language used. In the above examples, the words (signifiers) are derived from local objects and actions, which when used in normal conversations, would not be accused of vulgarity. Nevertheless, it is upon deconstructing these words, and their contextual elements, that obscenity is unmasked in the form of the signified (meanings). 'Dhako en' proverbs use simple and sexually explicit language and euphemisms to speak about what is regarded as social and cultural taboos. Ideally, such proverbs are used by adults among adults, and they come as euphemisms. Nevertheless, their proliferation on social media platforms and in popular music, which are unguarded vehicles for their performance, implies that they are available to all audiences. It explains why the performers make use of imagery and euphemisms as resorts of covering the hidden meanings. Owiti explains that unravelling the concealed meanings demands social and cultural competence "whereby the conversationalists can produce and interpret both verbal and social contexts using sociocultural rules and rules of discourse" ("Pragmatics of Dholuo Panegyrics" 134). Another scholar, Ogone Odhiambo, underlines the importance of audience in Luo oral performance by stating that the audience possesses a repository of the virtual text, where they consult memory (45). Therefore, while the signifiers, on the surface, are ordinary and 'innocent' words, the signified 'Dhako en' underlying sexual connotations are only derivable by those who are conversant with the 'playbook'.

Users of 'Dhako en' proverbs must be reminded that objectification through these verbal messages elicit psychological harm to the woman in the long term. Peter Koval, Elise Holland, and Michelle Stratemeyer argue that sexual objectification of the woman leads the woman to objectify her body, which harms her emotional wellbeing. These critics further comment that the danger of such socially degenerating proverbs is the ability to generate a cycle of objectification, where the woman becomes preoccupied with her physical appearance and the sexual values that she offers others. In other words, 'self-objectification' succeeds the objectification that is explained in 'Dhako en' proverbs. According to Koval, Holland, and Stratemeyer, self-objectification results in women experiencing unpleasant feelings such as shame and anxiety. Therefore, 'Dhako en' proverbs could be used innocently in the Luo community among users who may not mean harm for the woman (arguably) but the reality is psychologically detrimental to the female body which may take long to correct.

## Conclusion

I have argued in this article that 'Dhako en' proverbs among the Luo community of Kenya establishes grounds on which the objectification and social degradation of women are performed. As a form of oral tradition, 'Dhako en' proverbs are verbally passed from one generation to the next through day-to-day conversations, on social media platforms, and in the lyrics of Dholuo music genres such as *Ohangla*, *Nyatiti*, and *Onanda*. At face value, these proverbs are humorous, and thus entertaining to the users (audience). On the other hand, when deconstructed and subjected to poststructuralist feminist theories, 'Dhako en' proverbs bear undertones of marginalisation and objectification of the female body in contemporary society as a socially constructed 'other'.

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