

# IMAGES OF LOVE IN THE SWAHILI TAARAB LYRIC: LOCAL ASPECTS AND GLOBAL INFLUENCE\*

SAID A. M. KHAMIS

*University of Bayreuth, Germany*

## ABSTRACT

Taarab is a music complex that demonstrates the fusion of local elements and those from Arabia, Europe, India, the USA, and Afro-Cuban. Until recently, the taarab lyric has been normally composed following prosodic rules found in Arabic poetry and written to portray mainly 'romanticized love'. In a taarab sub-category called *mipasho* conceived in the 1990s, the form, shape and function of the taarab lyric have changed radically. The lyric is now often composed in blank and free verse styles, about anything that opiates and expresses wishful thinking based on consumerism and rivalry between individuals and groups. This essay sets out to show the type of images the Swahili poets use to construct many facets of love in the taarab lyric in its traditional and modern form. Initially, this essay was presented as a paper in a colloquium jointly organised by the Department of Islamic Studies and the Professorship of the African Literatures in African languages of the Bayreuth University (Universität Bayreuth) in May 2003, in one of international meetings organized to provide discussion of various interdisciplinary topics under the umbrella project "Local Action in the Context of Global Influences" sponsored by the Humanities Collaborative Research Centre (Kulturwissenschaftliches Forschungskolleg – SFB/FK560).

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*Another way of looking at it (i.e. love) is that of the poets. 'Tis not hereafter, sing the drunken old men in Twelfth Night: present mirth hath present laughter. It is a prick, it is a sting, suggests George Peele: it is a pretty pretty thing; it is a fire, it is a coal. And how many other things too, pretty or stinging. A red red rose, an ever-fixed mark, a sickness full of woes; it is of God and passes human wit, but it has pitched its mansion in the place of excrement. It is begotten by despair upon impossibility. And so on and so on: the poets never tire of this senior-junior giant dwarf Dan Cupid...*

*(Love and Marriage: Literature and its Social Context by Laurence, Lerner (1979: ix).)*

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## INTRODUCTION

Through out this essay, Cuddon's view of 'images' (1991: 442–443) as ...[c]overing the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind and sensory or extra-sensory experience is adopted. As such, images may be literal or figurative and appear as single or overlapping complex wholes created from sorting out, organising, analogising and framing the artist's physical, ideological, psychological and socio-cultural world(s). In this essay however, the range of images does not refer only to the 'system of nomenclature' of a given culture, but also to incoming flows of images increasingly mediated through modern mass communication channels; national or transnational. In our view, four possible scenarios constraining a creator of images are identifiable.

The first, is about what can be exploited from 'physical environment(s)' as both discrete entities or as processes that define our world the way it is – as a conglomeration of oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, forests, bushes, animals, deserts, mountains, hills, valleys, sky, heavenly bodies, waves, volcanoes, tempests, floods, droughts and floods. In fact, this means all actions and phenomena emanating thereof.

The second is related to the first and is about what is derived in a relativistic sense, from artist's material and ideological culture, offering countless choices of items and concepts for the formation of images through observation, isolation<sup>1</sup>, and analogy. The emphasis here is that, images are considered varying from culture to culture. That is, an object or concept may be found in one culture, but not in another. Perhaps the object or concept is present in both cultures but the logical bases behind the creation of the same image may vastly differ from culture to culture. For example, the item *mwezi* (the moon) or *qamar* (Arabic) as often appears in taarab, should be a universal object since the concept 'moon' is every language. However, its comparison with an unreachable lady as expressed in the Swahili taarab lyric *Mwezi (The Moon)*, may be inconceivable in another culture. This is to say that items, phenomena, processes and concepts may be culturally specific or non-specific depending upon whether they are locally or transculturally acquired, and images may be accepted or rejected on the basis of whether or not they conform to the existing cultural 'matrix' of a society.

For example, when I heard for the first time a woman being romantically compared to *nyama choma* (roasted meat) in a song from Kenya, I considered the analogy to be quite incongruent and aesthetically unacceptable. Not until I

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<sup>1</sup> This is very important – for a certain item may be present in two different cultures, but only in a certain significance and poignancy in one and not in the other, hence its utilisation as a metaphorical subject in one and not in the other culture. For example, *Kunguru* is used as a metaphor in reference to a cunning woman in a taarab song in Zanzibar, but has never appeared elsewhere in East Africa, though *kunguru* are at large in other regions of East Africa and the world.

got to know the ‘taste’ of *nyama choma* and the sexual nuances attached to it. The same is probably true when an image *tasi* (sea-water fish) from a taarab song in Zanzibar, referring to the beauty and sexual appeal to a lady, may appear incongruent and unacceptable to the cultural milieu of an audience in mainland Kenya and Tanzania.

The third scenario has to do with the creative skills that vary from one artist to another depending upon the power of observation and the ability to present sharpness in the images s/he creates to distinguish his or her style from those of other artists. We therefore talk of appealing and less appealing images or images that are stylistically and semantically effective as opposed to those which are dull and uninteresting.

The fourth scenario is about whether certain material and ideas (e.g. objects, commodities, signs, icons, images, symbols, tropes, ideologues) from outside cultures have been brought relatively closer to the world of an artist (e.g. taarab poet) through printed media, phonograph record, sound film, radio, audio cassettes, video cassettes, transnational television channels and currently electronic mail and Internet. The dissemination over time, through mass media, of various images from other parts of Africa, Arabia, India, Europe, Latin America and USA<sup>2</sup>, has extended the range of choice of global images by taarab poets – a phenomenon that has helped to make some images in the taarab lyric assume universal presence and global character.

## 1. LOVE INTRICACIES

Referring to Shelly’s categorisation of love, Kitzberger (1977: 1) puts love as ... [a] trinity comprising three aspects: ‘love between the sexes’, ‘love from mankind’ and ‘love from nature’. In this essay, we will focus on the images of love between the sexes and love for ‘things’ or ‘material’, featuring abundantly in *mipasho*, a sub-genre of modern taarab. In so doing, we keep in mind the fact that the concept of love, even in its narrowest sense, is highly incorporating and semantically elastic, appearing as attribute, process, narrative, interrogative lament and expressing yearning, tenderness, sadness, wonder, eroticism, peace, affection, rejection, possession, dispossession, faithfulness, betrayal, beauty, loneliness, intimacy, sensuality, friendship and rivalry.

In addition to this, love itself, is referred to in many ways in Swahili lyrical poetry as ‘adulterated love’, ‘promiscuous love’, ‘unquenched love’, ‘unfortunate love’, ‘love rivalry’. Not to mention its derivatives and composites as *mapenzi/pendo/hiba*<sub>(Ar)</sub><sup>3</sup> *huba*<sub>(Ar)</sub>/*mahaba*<sub>(Ar)</sub> (love), *mpenzi*<sub>(Ar)</sub>/*habibi*<sub>(Ar)</sub>

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of taarab songs – this goes back to at least 1920s if not prior to that, since it may be possible that some of the tropes and images were introduced in the Swahili literature already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Fumo Liongo’s love songs and some might be derived from Swahili classical poetry.

<sup>3</sup> (Ar) is a symbol for Arabism.

(lover), *bingwa wa mapenzi* (love-adept), *mwanagenzi wa mapenzi/mchanga wa mapenzi* (love-child), *mshibaji wa mapenzi* (love-devotee), *ndoto za mapenzi* (love-dreams), *mwasha moto wa mapenzi* (love-enkindled), *ushehenezi wa mapenzi* (love-laden), *maombolezo ya mapenzi* (love-lament), *ugonjwa wa mapenzi* (love-sick), *zinduko la mapenzi* (love-awakening), *mkosefu wa mapenzi* (loveless), *-a kupendeza* (lovely), *uzuri*, (loveliness) etc.

## 2. AIM

If we consider taarab's long tradition<sup>4</sup> and the bulk of its lyric<sup>5</sup>, it is alarming to discover that the lyric remains relatively unexplored in Swahili literature. The reason behind this perhaps is that, whereas few Swahili poets, who compose the taarab lyric, do so mainly to express love between the sexes, the majority of modern Swahili poets and critics are preoccupied with 'serious' issues (i.e. moralistic political and social ones) as shown in poetry and other forms of Swahili literature in general. However, 'love', in its many and varied facets, is so important a human attribute that it can not be turned down like that in any literature or literary criticism. It is from this conviction that this article is written. Precisely to show that love poetry exists in Swahili literature as it exists in many other literatures of the world, and such, it carefully selects from local and global repertoires objects, concepts and processes to create complex images as a way of speaking or expressing 'love' and its protean nature.

In addressing love images in the Swahili taarab lyric however, the description of 'global images' is particularly very daunting. This is because these are so intricately embedded in the Swahili nomenclature that it is hardly possible to distinguish them from local ones. Any attempt to set a clear demarcation line to separate them from the local ones is often futile. The way out of this predicament is perhaps to trace every suspected global image not from one possible parameter, but several: from for example, historical allusions, religious references, Indian Ocean connection, the Bible and Kor'an and other books, from radio, audio and video cassettes and films; including old Indian, Arabic and Western films of the 1960s to 1970s. This is to be followed by a systematic comparison and contrast before any decision on boundaries or inclusion and exclusion is made.

This rigour is notwithstanding, tracing each and every single 'images of love' in all taarab lyrics is hugely meticulous and practically not amenable. We will therefore concentrate on recurring images captured in the following sub-

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<sup>4</sup> In taarab songs, this goes back to at least to the 1920s if not prior to that since some of the tropes and images were already introduced in the Swahili literature in the Liyongo's love songs.

<sup>5</sup> A distinction is to be made between 'musical lyric' (or sung lyric) from 'epic' (recited/chanted lyric) and 'drama' (spoken lyric). Nonetheless, the poem written to be sung remains the one kind to which no critic can deny the label 'lyric' ... (Lindley 1985: 2).

headings: ‘Love is Praise and Lure of Beauty’, ‘Love is More than Lure of Beauty’, ‘Love is a Pleasure’, ‘Love is a Token’, ‘Love is Something to be Shared between Man and Woman’, ‘Love is a Choice’, ‘Love is a Secret’, ‘Love is a Possession’, ‘Love is a Delicate Thing’, ‘Love is a Paradox’, ‘Love is Betrayal’, ‘Love is Torture’, ‘Love is a Sexual Act’, ‘Love is an Improbable Romantic Adventure’ and ‘Love of Material Things’.

### 3. LOVE IS PRAISE AND LURE OF BEAUTY

If as Lerner (1979: ix) puts it ... [a] theory of intersexual attraction and love which holds that love is an affectionate response to one who is instrumental in the gratification of individual’s need – then we should expect lovers, lured by beauty of their loved ones, to shower them with praises. Very often in poetry dealing with this theme, poets reach for hyperboles, figures of speech and colourful images so as to capture the eulogies.

Hence the Swahili taarab lyric is full of love praises and gratifying expressions about perfect beauty. Images that crop up together with these praises and gratification normally appear as allied metaphors, geared at constructing meaningful wholes. Several objects, concepts, processes and narratives are used in such allied imagery: flowers (e.g.; *waridi*<sub>(Ar)</sub> [rose], *asumini*<sub>(Ar)</sub> [jasmine], *afu*<sub>(Ar)</sub> [wild jasmine]), fruit(s) (e.g. *tunda la heba*<sub>(Ar)</sub> [fruit of love], *tunda la thamani*<sub>(Ar)</sub> [valuable fruit], *tufaha*<sub>(Ar)</sub> [apple], *komamanga*<sup>6</sup> [pomegranate], *nanasi*<sub>(Per<sup>7</sup>)</sub> [pineapple], *mung’unye* [a kind of guard used for vegetable], *ratabu*<sub>(Ar)</sub> [dates], *balungi*<sub>(Per)</sub> [shaddock], *kitamli* [a coconut fruit of kitamli whose juice is preserved for drinking purposes only]), birds (e.g. *ndege wangu* [my bird], *twuyuri*<sub>(Ar)</sub>, [bird], *tausu*<sub>(Ar)</sub> [peacock], *njiwa* [dove], *kunguru mjanja* [a cunning crow]) and other animals (e.g. *kipaka Luluwa* [the little kitten *Luluwa*], *tasi* [a kind of seawater fish], and *ghazali*<sub>(Ar)</sub>, [gazelle], *chesi* [a deer]. Other items and concepts range from heavenly bodies like *mwezi* or *qamari / ya qamari*<sub>(Ar)</sub>, [the moon], *nyota* [star] to *nakshi* [design/pattern], *sega langu la asali* [my beehive], *bibi wa mabibi* [the lady of ladies], *mabanati wa peponi* [the maidens of paradise] and parts of the body like *macho yake* [her eyes].

Let us now take some stanzas to illustrate the complex combination of these images. First two of the four stanzas of the song *Waridi Lisilo Miba* (A Rose without Thorns) showing an interplay of the mundane and heavenly images all geared at creating the necessary overstatements in describing a lady whose beauty is almost ‘mystical’. Though Knappert (1972: xii) tends to exaggerate his statement, there is some truth in saying that ... [I]n Swahili Islamic culture, every poet’s work is soaked in the implicit assumptions of Islamic imagery, among other things.

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<sup>6</sup> Literally meaning ‘the dwarf palm of Oman’ that is *mkoma wa Manga*; *Manga* being a Swahili name for Oman.

<sup>7</sup> (Per) is a symbol for Persian.

### **Waridi Lisilo Miba**

Ewe kiumbe wa shani	nalipenda umbo lako
Mzuri uso kifani	kakuumba Mola wako
Katu humu duniani	hapana mfano wako
Ewe ua la peponi <sup>8</sup>	waridi lisilo miba

Kwenu kakutoa nani	kwenye masikani yako
Bilisi <sub>(Ar)</sub> au Ruhani <sub>(Ar)</sub>	kakuiba kwa wenzako
Mabanati wa peponi <sub>(Ar)</sub>	hao ndio fani yako
Ewe ua la peponi	waridi lisilo miba

### **The Rose without Thorn**

You, a miraculous being, I love that figure of yours  
You're unequalled in beauty, the Lord has perfected you  
There is none in this world, to compare with you  
You the flower of paradise, the rose without thorns

Who has driven you out of your dwelling?  
Did the Devil or Spirit, stole you from your kind?  
It's the maidens of paradise that are your equal  
You the flower of paradise, the rose without thorns

Another song is *Mwezi* (The Moon) which works not only on the mystical or luminous beauty of the moon, but on the concept of distance, alienation and implied kinaesthetic effect. It is a poem of wishful thinking in which the poet craves for almost the impossible – though, at the same time, the audience realises that what the poet wants is not beyond his reach – after all, he is, by implication, talking not of a spatial separation, but a psychological one, between himself and a lady he loves who seems, for now, unreachable.

### **Mwezi**

Unapochomoza	na uzuri wako
Unanipumbaza	kwa kicheko chako
Kuwa n' naweza	ningekuja kwako

Chorus:	Ewe mwezi ewe azizi	nipe mbawa nirukie <sub>(Ar)</sub>
	Ewe mwezi ewe mpenzi	nipe ngazi nipandie

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<sup>8</sup> The word 'pepo' is a Bantu word, but the concept, *ua la peponi* (the flower of Paradise) is an Arab/Islamic concept.

	Nikiona sura yako Lakini mbali uliko Nataka ridhaa yako	akili zinaniruka lini huko nitafika kama nawe wanitaka
Chorus:	Ewe mwezi ewe azizi Ewe mwezi ewe mpenzi	nipe mbawa nirukie nipe ngazi nipandie
	Unapoangaza Unazikimbiza Unazifukuza	kubwa nuru <sub>(Ar)</sub> yako nyota chini yako popote zilipo
Chorus:	Ewe mwezi ewe azizi Ewe mwezi ewe mpenzi	nipe mbawa nirukie nipe ngazi nipandie

### **The Moon**

	When you appear with all your grandeur You beguile me with your smile Were it possible, I would've come to you	
Chorus:	Oh, the moon, Oh the precious one, give me wings to fly to you Oh, the moon, Oh my love, give me a ladder to climb to you	
	When I see your face, I really lose control Far over there where you live, when will I reach you? Would you (at least) give me your word, that you also love me?	
Chorus:	Oh, the moon, Oh the precious one, give me wings to fly to you Oh, the moon, Oh my love, give me a ladder to climb to you	
	In your luminous composure, your light is overwhelming You expel all the stars under you You drive them away wherever they are	
Chorus:	Oh, the moon, Oh the precious one, give me wings to fly to you Oh, the moon, Oh my love, give me a ladder to climb to you	

One of the best examples of the taarab lyrics that uses integrated images for the praise and lure of love is *Shada Langu la Maua* (My Cluster of Flowers). The word 'shada' (cluster) itself, stands for the idea of 'bringing together' variety of items in 'symmetry' and 'harmony'. The word 'langu' signifies 'possession' and 'maua' (flowers – in plural), a beloved lady with many different positive qualities. Thus, in this lyric we observe the lavish use of items of beauty – especially flowers or parts of flowering plants, implying also the lavish tropes and attributes directed towards the beloved one.

### **Shada Langu la Maua**

Jema shada la mauwa	laua kwa rangi yake
Limepangwa kwa muruwa	sioni kifani chake
Na asumini kutiwa	hakika mahala pake
Shada hili limekuwa	la pepo <sup>(Ar)</sup> na watu wake
Rehani na mawaridi	hizo ndizo shanga zake
Tena halafu mkadi	'mefungiwa yasitoke
Harufu yake baridi	shada hili sifa yake
Shada hili zuri hadi	Ni stadi fundi wake
Pachori na pompiya <sup>(Oc)</sup> <sup>9</sup>	utasema zumaridi
Jinsi linavyonukiya	kwa uzuri limezidi
Hadi limepindukiya	shada hili ni shadidi
Na 'mi nalitunikiya	sifa yake maridadi
Shada kiweka shingoni	hupendeza sawasawa
Hutulia kwa makini	kama sahani na kawa
Huvutia mashetani	na majini wenye mbawa
Malaika na ruhani	wote wanalitambua

### **My Cluster of Flowers**

Beautiful is my cluster of flowers, I'm dying for its colours  
It is elegantly arranged, the like of it, I cannot find  
To be inserted with jasmines, that is what it deserves  
This flower has been, the flower of paradise for her people

Sweet basil and roses, these are its beads  
Then flowers of a screw pine are tied to secure them  
Its cool scent, is among the qualities of this cluster  
How beautiful this cluster is, skilful is its maker

Pachori<sup>10</sup> and pompia<sup>11</sup> you would think an emerald  
The way it smell makes it even more beautiful  
It excels in beauty and scent, and its qualities are emphatic  
I have but to reward it with all these praises

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<sup>9</sup> (Oc) stands for Occidentalism.

<sup>10</sup> A kind of plant with sweet-smelling foliage and florets.

<sup>11</sup> Derived from a perfume brand; perhaps from France.

When placed on the neck, it appears extremely gorgeous  
It rests in gentleness, like a food plate and its cover  
It attracts the Satan and genies with wings  
The angels and spirits, they're all beguiled by it  
And they finally all recognise it.

#### 4. LOVE IS MORE THAN LURE OF BEAUTY

There are many examples in taarab lyrics showing love is not necessarily caused by the lure of beauty, but also by other qualities and behaviours. The Swahili believe that whereas beauty lures, character counts more. In Swahili marriage tradition, before anyone marries s/he is advised to make sure that the proposed partner has all the qualities of a good wife or husband. There are so many songs in taarab that are reproachful to those who are lured by beauty at the expense of character. Here is the song *Wasia* (Advice), which is specifically written to insist on the importance of good character:

##### **Wasia**

	Ichukue hii siri	iwe kwako ni wasiya
	Huwi katika wazuri	ila kwa njema tabiya
	Uwe mwenye kusubiri	siivamie duniya
Chorus:	Tabia kitu azizi	kiumbe akiwa nayo
	Si hoja sura nzuri	na watu kukusifiya
	Au umbo la fakhari	mwenyewe kujivuniya
	Huwi na nyingi jeuri	hayo yakasaidiya
Chorus:	Tabia kitu azizi	kiumbe akiwa nayo

##### **Advice**

Take this secret, so that you be heeded  
You won't be among good people, except for good character  
You should be patient, don't pounce upon the world

Chorus: Good character is precious when one has it

What counts is not the beauty and praises of people  
Or a glorious figure to be proud of  
To be too proud will not help you

Chorus: Good character is precious when one has it

It is also important to keep promise of ever loving your partner and of cherishing the love, an act that is also regarded as a good behaviour as the poet in *Miadi Kitu Azizi* (A Promise is a Precious Thing) claims. Actually, this song is a lament in which the poet blames his partner for not keeping his/her promise of loving and cherishing their love:

**Miadi<sub>(Ar)</sub> Kitu Azizi**

Miadi kitu azizi	akiweka muungwana
Si kitu cha upuuzi	Miadi kitu cha maana
Kuipuuza huwezi	Miadi mkipeana

**A Promise is a Precious Thing**

A promise is a precious thing, when a lady/gentleman keeps it  
It is not a trivial thing, a promise is a great thing  
You shouldn't ignore it, when a promise is given

## 5. LOVE IS A PLEASURE

Here, the Swahili poet expresses cheerfulness and joy in order to show the brighter side of love. After all, love is going on smoothly with both sides reciprocating positively as they nourish and cherish it – hence there is every reason to celebrate the success. To show love is a joyous thing, various types of hyperboles and dense images are employed to create the desired effect. In the lyric *La Waridi* (The Rose) for example, the poet expresses his joy and satisfaction for having the ‘rose’ as the ultimate choice:

**La Waridi**

Nanipate narijisi <sub>(Ar)</sub>	asimini <sub>(Ar)</sub> na kiluwa
Hamu yangu hainisi	wala moyo sitotuwa
Lawaridi kwangu basi	lashinda yote mauwa

**The Rose**

Even if I get the narcissus, jasmine and kiluwa<sup>12</sup>  
My thirst will not be quenched and my heart will find no peace  
The Rose is the ultimate flower, it excels all other flowers to me

In *Ndege Wangu*<sup>13</sup> (My Bird), the poet celebrates his success in having the bird whose beauty the poet describes in ‘divine’ and ‘mystical’ images:

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<sup>12</sup> Sweet-smelling flower and foliage from local plant called Mkiluwa.

<sup>13</sup> The word ‘wangu’ suggest possession.

### **Ndege Wangu**

Ndege wangu kaumbika	mzuri aso kifani
Utadhani malaika <sup>(Ar)</sup>	anapendeza machoni
Katulia hana shaka	yumo mwangu mikononi

### **My Bird**

My bird is perfectly created, her beauty has no resemblance  
She is like an angel, so amazingly beautiful to look at  
She's quite relaxed (and) not worried, (for) she is in my hands

Sometimes the adventures and dangers of love are also celebrated as struggles that end up in victory when love is finally secured as shown in the lyric *Nacheka ni Furahani* (I'm Laughing in Great Joy):

### **Nacheka ni Furahani**

Sijali kulaumiwa	kwa kukupenda fulani
Lolote litalokuwa	'mekuchagua moyoni
Maovu nimetupiwa	siyajali asilani
Chorus: Si hasara asilani	nyuki kufa asalini
Nacheka nifurahani	ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha

### **I'm Laughing in Great Joy**

I don't care being blamed for loving you  
Whatever happens, you are the choice of my heart  
I'm branded with evil accusations, but I don't care about them

Chorus: It's not a loss for a bee to die for honey  
I'm laughing and rejoicing, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha

## **6. LOVE IS A TOKEN**

Love needs to be reinforced, maintained and perpetuated. At least love fervour needs to be kept constantly alive. This can be done not only through exchange of gifts, but most importantly, through verbal exchange and eulogies. Examples of reinforcing love through material and verbal exchange abound in the taarab lyric. One example is shown in the lyric, *Pete Mevaa Kidoleni* (I've Put the Ring on My Finger) – an act that perhaps, springs from the Western rites.

**Pete Mevaa Kidoleni**

Zawadi ‘menitunukiya	pete ya dhahabu ya shani
‘Mepata kwako metuliya	‘mejivalia kidoleni
Moyo ‘mejifurahiya	‘mepata pete ya fulani
Pete kaa kwangu kidoleni	meumbiwa ajili yangu

**I’ve Put the Ring on My Finger**

A gift is given to me, a wonderful golden ring  
That I got it from you I’m comforted, I’ll put in on my finger  
My heart is overjoyed, I got a ring from so and so  
Stay on my finger the ring, you have been made for me

In this case, a token is a letter and/or a photo as shown in the lyric *Zawadi na Baruwa* (A Gift and a Letter). Though the gift is not specified in the title, we learn from the lyric that it is a photo – also an act that represents the Western way of courting:

**Zawadi na Baruwa**

Baruwaye na zawadi	imefika mikononi
‘Meketi sitaradadi	aloandika ni nani
Mara ipige raadi	njiwa kakaa usoni
Picha yake ‘mechukuwa	nzuri mno yakini
Hanena yeye kapowa	yuko pahala fulani
Hapo mbio kajitowa	hamkabili machoni

**A Gift and a Letter**

A letter and a gift got into my hands  
I sat in wonder who might have written it?  
Soon a thunder stroke and a dove stood before me

The dove carried her photo, indeed a very beautiful photo  
She told me (in the letter) that she was calmly waiting for me  
some where  
I rushed out, and went to stand before her

In the lyric *Mazoea Yana Taabu* (The Longing Troubles Me), the verbal exchange clearly indicates something secretive that may be interpreted as the sharing of the ‘flesh’:

**Mazoea Yana Taabu**

Nyama zetu za ulimi	ambazo tukipeana
Na mengineyo sisemi	tuliyo 'kifanyiana
Ni makubwa kwangu mimi	sijapata kuyaona

**The Longing Troubles me**

How I long of the sweet words we used to exchange  
Other deeds I can't mention which we used to share  
Great was the impact, never did I experience it before

**7. LOVE IS SOMETHING TO BE SHARED BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN**

The axiom: 'It takes two to tango' – is well revealed in Swahili love lyrics asserting that it is 'natural' that man and women should fall in love. It is almost impossible to find a Swahili lyric dealing with love between the same sex, except when it is about one's parents or God and prophets. Nor is any kind of Platonic love allowed, for that would be like an act of keeping petrol and matchbox in close proximity as warning goes in *Kibiriti na Petroli* (Matchbox and Patrol), which is about sexuality obscured in the images of fuel, fire and explosives (Khamis 2002: 200):

**Kibiriti na Petroli**

Kibiriti na petroli	iwapo utaviweka
Hivi ni vitu viwili	visije kukutanika
Kusalimika muhali	lazima vitaripuka
Bora uvitenge mbali	hapo utasalimika

Chorus:	Pamoja ukiviweka	hiyo ni hiari yako
	Muhali kusalimika	patazuka mripuko

**Matchbox and Petrol**

A matchbox and petrol, if you ever keep them  
These are two things, that never should meet  
Never, for, that affinity will cause an explosion  
Better to keep them apart, to avoid an imminent danger

Chorus:	If you keep them together, it's your choice The danger is unavoidable, an explosion will occur
---------	---

The philosophy behind the danger of Platonic love here, is definitely derived from Islamic tenets, where the purity of love of man and women culminates in marriage. Love without marriage is a sin, always equated with that of our ancestors, Adam and Eve, who because they disobeyed God, were severely punished. In the following lyric the apple is a sex symbol; a fruit not permitted to be eaten illegally. Here is the lyric; *Adam na Hawa* (Adam and Eve):

### **Adam na Hawa**

Wa kwanza walioumbwa	wazee hao wawili
Sura zao zilikuwa	mfano wa ukamili
Wakalila hilo tunda	kuikhalifu amri
Maafa yakawafika	Duniani wakajiri

### **Adam and Eve**

The first people to be created are those two ancestors  
Their appearances were an example of perfection  
They ate the forbidden fruit as they did not obey the order  
Calamities befell them, as they were driven to the earth

It is God who gives us everything – including partners of opposite sex. If we are to live satisfactorily, we have to follow His orders as the lyric *Mungu Kanipa Hidaya* (God Gave Me a Token) explicitly emphasises:

### **Mungu Kanipa Hidaya**

Furaha nyingi moyoni	Rabi kanijaaliya
Vipi nikuelezeni	ili yapate weleya
Ndoto yangu ya zamani	leo imekamiliya
Siku zote peke yangu	nikiranda na duniya
‘Napowaona wenzangu	husuda nawaoneya
Moyo kiona uchungu	fanaka kunifikiya
Umenitoka upweke	yangu yamekamiliya
Rabi amenipa mke	mzuri alotimiya
Karimu ni roho yake	imani yake tabiya
Mola kwa imani yake	yeye kanifikiriya
Tena kwa khiyari yake	mwenyewe kaniumbiya
Kisha kwa fadhila zake	miye kanitunukiya

### **God Gave Me a Token**

My heart is full of happiness, filled in by God  
How can I explain this joy so that you can understand  
My long-standing dream, is today fulfilled

I was all these days alone, roaming in the world  
When I saw my friends (with partners), I became envious  
My heart became bitter asking why success didn't come to me?

You've delivered me from solitude, my things are now perfect  
You've given me a wife God, a beautiful perfect lady  
She's generous in her heart, her compassion to me is a habit

God the giver has shown pity to me as He has thought of me  
And in His own will, He has created this one for me  
And with His grace, he has rewarded me this lady

## **8. LOVE IS A CHOICE**

A choice of love partners may, at a quick glance, seem to contradict with *Mungu Kanipa Hidaya* (God Gave me a Token). The notion of choice seems to give 'love' a sense of freedom which is not there when one takes God's providence as the source of love and partnership. But to Swahili poets this is not contradictory at all, for it seems, God's providence does include freedom of choice in the sense that it is God who induces the choice after all. Here is *Mpenzi Wangu* (My Darling) emphasising the importance of freedom of choice in the proverbial sense of Love is blind:

### **Mpenzi Wangu**

Kwa mtu nimpendaye	mbaya huwa mzuri
Yeyote nimtakaye	na mwenyewe akakiri
Katu sitokani naye	japo awe na athari

### **My Love**

To the person I love an ugly one becomes beautiful  
Anyone I want, provided s/he consents,  
Never will I depart with her, though s/he might have a defect

But sometimes a choice may be difficult as exemplified in the lyric *Ua Lipi la Kuchuma?* (Which Flower to Pick Up?).

### **Uwa Lipi la Kuchuma?**

Mambo yamenikanganya                      katu sina la kusema  
Mauwa hujitawanya                         kwenye bustani njema  
Na ‘mi sina la kufanya                       silijui la kuchuma

Chorus:                      Uwa lipi la kuchuma                      hili ndilo au lile?

### **Which Flower to Pick up?**

I’m totally confused, I’m almost speechless  
The flowers are abundantly showing off in this beautiful garden  
And I don’t know what to do, I don’t know which one to pick up

Chorus:                      Which flower to pick up, this or that one?

But one can choose or pick up a wrong flower (person), in the sense that the chosen one is not willing to reciprocate love and therefore what one gets is only a reproach: *Pendo Kitu cha Hiari* (Love is a Free Choice):

### **Pendo Kitu cha Hiari**

Pendo kitu cha hiari                              vipi wanilazimisha?  
Kama mimi sijakiri                              huwezi kunipendesha  
Ingawa wewe mzuri                              sio kujirakhisisha

Chorus:                      Wengi walokuja kwangu                      na wote nimewakhini  
   Ghali sana pendo langu                      ovyo halipatikani

### **Love: A Free Willing**

Love is something of a free choice, how dare you force it to me?  
If I have not accepted it, you cannot make me love you  
Though you are handsome, I’m not ready to make myself cheap

Chorus:                      Many who approach me, I reject them all  
   My love is too expensive, it is not so easily acquired

## **9. LOVE IS A SECRET**

There are several reasons why love is supposed to be a secret in Swahili culture. From Islamic point of view, open expression of love to anyone who is not one’s husband or wife is a sin. It follows then that there is a social inhibition towards free and open love to an extent that anyone in love must approach the subject in a covert manner. As a result of this one who is in love is never so sure of how

the loved one may respond if s/he approaches her/him or announces his/her love openly to her or him. This act may even infuriate one who is approached for 'love' proposal. We thus have lyrics such as *Mapenzi Yapo Moyoni* (Love is in my Heart), *Nampenda na Kumwambia Siwezi* (I Love Her/Him, but Can't Tell Her/Him), *Ishara Zanisumbua* (Signs Trouble Me) and *Moyo Nisitiri* (My Heart, Save Me from Shame). The best example of love as a secret is demonstrated in the lyric, *N'napenda kwa Ishara* (I Love By Showing Her/Him Signs):

### **N'napenda kwa Ishara**

Kama kupenda ni dhara	mwenzenu nimeshadhurika
N'napenda kwa ishara	naogopa kutamka
N'nachelea izara	na kuja kufedheheka

Chorus:	Mwenzenu nishadhurika	Wala sina manusura
	Naogopa kutamka	Naichelea izara

### **I Love by Showing Her/Him Signs**

If loving is harmful, I've already been harmed  
I love only by showing signs, I dare not utter a word  
For I fear disgrace, and to be so ashamed

Chorus:	I tell you my friends I'm already harmed, hence nothing can save me I fear disgrace, and to be so ashamed
---------	--

But love can be so pressing sometimes that one cannot suppress his/her feelings and hence is bent at confessing to someone he/she loves whatever happens. In a situation like this, there is no hesitation but to speak out. We thus, have such lyrics as *Leo N'natowa Siri* (To-day I Break the Silence), *Mapenzi Yamenisibu* (Love Has Afflicted Me), *Kukupenda Sitchoka* (I Can't Tire Loving You), *Kusubiri Sitoweza* (I Can't Wait), *Pendo Halizuiliki* (Love is Unstoppable) and perhaps the more pervasive is *Niibe* (Steal Me):

### **Niibe**

Niko radhi kuibiwa	madhali mwizi ni wewe
Kwenye khatari kutiwa	nimekubali mwenyewe
Niibe nipate tuwa	kinipunguwe kiwewe

Chorus:	Ni wewe pweke ni wewe	niibe 'sinidhulumu
	Nakuruhusu mwenyewe	nitachukua jukumu

### **Steal Me**

I'm willing to be stolen, only if the thief is you  
To be put into dangers, I have accepted whole-heartedly  
Steal me so that I can rest, and my worries be reduced

Chorus: It is you, only you, steal me so as I shouldn't be tormented  
I give you my permission, I'll take all the responsibility

## **10. LOVE IS A POSSESSION**

Love and egoism are inseparable – they always go together. S/he who ever loves wants to monopolise 'love' and the loved one. Swahili love lyrics of this type are full of possessives '-angu' as *uwa langu* (my flower), *mali yangu* (my property), *mpenzi wangu* (my darling), *kibaya changu* (my bad thing). In this category, there are those lyrics that insist on rightful possession, those that remind others not to interfere with his/her possession and those that warn others to stop their moves to interfere with their love affair. *Kibaya Changu* is the lyric that insists on the rightful possession and reminds others of such possession:

### **Kibaya Changu**

Naona ajabu	Umeshughulika
Wajipa adhabu	na mengi mashaka
Dunia aibu	mwisho takufika

Chorus:	Nambiye kizuri	alokupa Mungu
	Sitokibadili	kwa kibaya changu

Wewe una chako	kisichokutoka
Chako mali yako	huna mshirika
Cha halali yako	kakupupa Rabuka

Chorus:	Nambiye kizuri	alo kupa Mungu
	Sitokibadili	kwa kibaya changu

### **My Bad Thing**

I'm surprised, that you are so busy (looking for what is mine)  
You actually punish and put yourself in distress  
A disgraceful situation that's what you'll end up in

Chorus: Give me the best that God has offered you  
I won't exchange it for my bad thing

You have yours, that cannot part with you  
That is your property, you have none to share it with  
It legally belongs to you, it is given to you by God

Chorus: Give me the best God has offered you,  
I won't exchange it for my bad thing.

*Bure Mnajisumbuwa* (You Just Put Yourself in Distress) is a lyric that warns others against any approach to the poet's lover:

### **Bure Mwajisumbuwa**

Mwanieonea choyo	ati miye nimepewa
Japo mkisonga nyoyo	Mola hatonipotowa
Bure mnaona hayo	miye nimekusudiwa

### **You Just Put Yourself in Distress**

You are envious of what I have been given  
Though you suffer pain in your heart, God will not dispossess me  
(of her)  
It is in vain that you feel that way, it is to me that gift is intended

## **11. LOVE IS A DELICATE THING**

Here a 'delicate means love can last and survive 'only' if lovers take meticulous care to nourish and protect it. One way of expressing this in the lyric is to show how much lovers care about love and about their loved ones, for if they do not love will fall apart. This is done by praising the loved one or by showing that the loved one is the only person the lover cares for. The following lyrics *Macho Yake* (Her Eyes) selects in the metonymy *macho* (eyes) as the most attractive part of the beloved's body that beguiles the lover:

### **Macho Yake**

Wasfu wake ni jamali	siwezi kuudharau
Umbo lake ni kamili	tangu chini hata juu
Kumuona ni awali	ni siku ya sikukuu

Chorus: Si umbo wala si yeye                      ila macho peke yake

Yapo mengi siyajali	ila macho yake huyu
Lisitokee suali	mpenzi <i>I love you</i>
Mengineyo sikubali	ila macho yake tu

Chorus: Si umbo wala si yeye                      ila macho peke yake

### **Her Eyes**

Her countenance is beautiful, I can't degrade it  
Her body is perfect, from below to the top

It's my first time to see her, this is a day of perfection to me

Chorus: Her figure and countenance notwithstanding, I love her eyes the most

She has plenty to be admired, but I love only her eyes  
There should be no question, I love you my darling  
I wouldn't mark anything else, but her eyes only

Chorus: Her figure and countenance notwithstanding, I love her eyes the most

Another way of showing love is a delicate thing, where the love and the loved one are literally fragile. The song *Yai* (An Egg) in which the poet shows that both love and the loved one should be handled with care, is a good example:

### **Yai**

Rafiki yangu mpenzi	mpenzi u mahabubu
Mwenzangu n'nakuenzi	sipendi upate tabu
'Menifanya mpuuzi	hunijibu kama bubu

Chorus: Yai ukilichezeya mwisho hukuvunjikia

Yai ni kitu laini	halichukui sulubu
Ujuwe lina thamani	kulipata lina tabu
Meneno haya amini	usidhani nakusubu

Chorus: Yai ukilichezeya mwisho hukuvunjikiya

Yai unapolipata	lichukue taratibu
Wende kwa mwendo wa tata	kwani lataka sababu
Watahamaki ladata	Iwe kwako ni adhabu

Chorus: Yai ukilichezeya mwisho hukuvunjikiya

### **An Egg**

My friend, my darling, the beloved partner  
I do value you a lot, that's why I avoid to cause any  
discomfort to you  
But you make me look like a fool, for you treat me like a dumb



Chorus: I dare not return, on the piercing thorns  
I'm not used to torture, I reject it, that's the end of it all

In *Kisebusebu* the poet shows the fickle nature of love as revealed by the indecision of the loved one:

### **Kisebusebu**

Wajidai hunitaki	wenzio kuwasifiya
Kunisengeya huchoki	maovu kunizuliya
Kumbe unataharuki	na mate kunimezeya

Chorus: Wafanya kisebusebu na kiroho kiko papo

### **The Fickle Nature of Love**

You pretend you don't want me, you speak highly of yourself to your friends  
You never tire of backbiting me and never stop speak badly of me  
But you care so much about me, and you water your mouth when you see me

Chorus: You pretend you don't love me, but I know I am in your heart

And '*Sinikadhibishe* is about confronting the loved one who is spreading lies against his/her lover.

### **'Sinikadhibishe**

Bure 'sinikadhibishe	kunitia uwongoni
Wala sijibabaishe	mimi nimekuoneni
Bure sijikurupushe	'mekukuta mikononi

Chorus: Ni bure hiyana yako hiyo ulonifanyiya  
Nimempata mwenzako mwenye sifa ya tabiya

### **Don't Call Me a Liar**

Don't call me a liar and don't lie to me  
Don't try to confuse me, I caught you red-handed  
Don't dodge the issue, I saw you in his/her hands

Chorus:           Your disloyalty is in vain and all that you have done to me  
                      I got a better man/lady, a man/lady reputed for her fine behaviour

### 13. LOVE IS BETRAYAL

Love can be as fickle and treacherous as lovers themselves. Why do lovers lose direction and become disloyal is a topic in psychology, but disloyalty in love affair is a common misdemeanour and is substantially dealt with in the Swahili taarab lyric. *Naitafuta Mizani* (I'm Looking for a Love Measure) is a song of lament in which a lover is appealing to the audience that his or her loved one should be brought to a love court where their love would be measured on a scale so as to know whose love is a true one.

#### **Naitafuta Mizani**

Naitafuta mizani	ya kupimia mapenzi
Tuyatie kipimoni	tulinganie azizi
Yako hayaonekani	yangu wayaona wazi

Chorus:           Mapenzi yetu yapimwe                           yajulikane yakini

#### **I'm Looking for a love Measure**

I'm looking for a love measure to weigh our love  
Let's put your love and mine into it to weigh and compare  
Your love will not be seen, mine will be seen clearly

Chorus:           Our love should be measured to be known which weighs more

In *Sasa Njiwa Kakutoka* (Now the Dove has Left You) the betrayal is more obvious. A third person is celebrating a victory after he has won the love of a woman who is loved by another man. The dove, so to say, has found another keeper. In fact the captive bird is a common archetype as Belcher (1987: 69) observes ... [T]he captive bird has traditionally touched the sensibility of poets, either as a bird in a cage or as a bird in the fowler's nets ... In *Sasa Njiwa Kakutoka*, the dove is as a captive bird who has just exchanged keepers, which seems to indicate that the fate of being kept in a cage follows her wherever she goes.

#### **Sasa Njiwa Kakutoka**

Njiwa alikuwa wako	nyumbani alituliya
Ukavifanya vituko	ndipo akakukimbiya
Sasa keshatoka kwako	naapa hatorejeya

### **Now the Bird has Abandon You**

The dove was yours, she was living peacefully in your house  
But after mistreating her, she has abandoned you  
Now she is not in your house, she wont return to you

## **14. LOVE IS TORTURE**

The mere fact that love is not reciprocated is the cause for brooding and lament as the titles of these songs indicate: *Wanikutisha Hilaki* (You are Torturing Me), *Mpenzi Nifikirie* (Darling Be Thoughtful ), *Nachelea Pendo* (I'm Scared of this Love), *Mapenzi ni Kitu Ghali* (Love is an Expensive Thing), *Namtafuta Mpenzi* (I'm Looking for My Darling), *Napenda Kitu si Changu* (I Love Something that is not Mine), *Pendo Lipi ni la Kweli* (Which Love is True), *Fikira na Mazoea* (Thoughts and Being Used to You), *Hanijali* (She Doesn't Care about Me) etc. The culmination of love torture is 'tears' as in *Machizi Yananimwaika* (Tears are Pouring from My Eyes):

### **Machizi Yananimwaika**

	Msidharau mapenzi	pendo lina miujiza
	Katu kula huwezi	mambo yakikushangaza
	Kazi kufanya huwezi	mapenzi yanaanguza
Chorus:	Machizi yananimwaika	Sina wa kuninyamaza
	Nalianalia ninasikitika	mapenzi yaniumiza

### **Tears are Pouring from My Eyes**

Don't belittle love, love is a miracle  
Never can you eat, when things overwhelm you  
You can't do any work, when love burns you so much

Chorus: Tears are pouring from my eyes, I have none to comfort me  
I'm sobbing and sobbing, for love tortures me

## **15. LOVE IS A SEXUAL ACT**

In response to the question what is love, Lerner (1979: 212) puts 'love' in relation to 'sexuality' and 'marriage' as ... [t]he epiphenomenon of sexual appetite and marriage as an institution for the regulation of sexual behaviour. In the Swahili taarab lyric both terms 'love' and 'sexuality' have in the past been used with maximum reticence, but nowadays, poets write about love with explicitness. For example, in the past, the shape and appearance of a female

sexual organ was described in the symbolism of the flesh of a duck which represents the female sexual organ and eating it is an act of copulation.

### **Nyama ya Bata**

Bata ni mtamu sana	ukijua siri yake
Ni laini kutafuna	kama sufu nyama yake
Bata mle kwa kunona	na masala umpake

The flesh of a duck is so delicious if you know  
the secret of its taste  
It's soft to the bite, like wool is the flesh  
You eat it when it is juicy and you put heavy gravy on it

## **16. LOVE IS AN IMPROBABLE ROMANTIC ADVENTURE**

Lovers plunge into adventures for a number of reasons. They may love without being loved and think persistence is the only way to secure the denied love. They may suffer inferiority complex by thinking that they may not be accepted. They may just be affected by a degree of uncertainty that hinders them from venturing into love proposal. They may have to fight their way towards winning love of someone who already loves somebody else. They may indulge themselves in stealing other people's lovers etc. The poets in this case will paint the predicament and augment it as a nerve-breaking phenomenon. In *Lulu* (Pearl) the poet undertakes a journey of picking up a pearl at the bottom of the sea, as he ventures through strong waves and undercurrents in an ocean full of sharks and octopuses. The poem becomes a narrative, relating a story of adventure:

### **Lulu**

Nilipiga mbizi	kati ya bahari
'lisema siwezi	mawimbi makali
Kunisha pumzi	mimi sikujali
Si papa si pweza	wanyama khatari
Niliwashangaza	kwa moyo jabari
Sikuvichokoza	sikutaka shari
Roho nimeuza	kwa kitu fakhari
Ni lulu si chaza	il'oniathiri
Il'onipumbaza	ni yake jamali
Na kumbe siwezi	kuvunja safari



**Mimi wa Karne ya Ishirini na Moja**

- Chorus (1): Haiya, haiya, haiya namlambe, namlambe  
Haiya, haiya, haiya New Millenium imeingiya  
Tizameni wa karne nimeingiya  
Mimi ni top teni nimeingiya  
Tizameni wa karne nimeingiya  
Mimi ni top teni nimeingiya  
Nafanya mentanens kwa soft-weya  
Nafanya mentanens kwa had-weya  
Nafanya mentanens kwa softiweya  
Nafanya mentanes kwa hadiweya  
Microsoft staili naichezeya  
Microsoft staili naichezeya  
Microsoft staili naichezeya  
Microsoft staili naichezeya  
Haiya, haiya, haiya, namlambe namlambe
- Solo: Ndiye miye mwanamke wa karne hii mpya  
Niliyeumbika kike nd'o miye nimetokeya  
Ndiye miye mwanamke wa karne hii mpya  
Niliyeumbika kike nd'o miye nimetokeya
- Nyote namkusanyike shamba na mjini piya  
Bure msihangaika Mi' hamtonifikiya  
Nyote namkusanyike shamba na mjini piya  
Bure msihangaika Mi' hamtonifikiya
- Mkitaka msitake wakati wangu miye  
Niacheni nitambike Ilobakia mliye  
Mkitaka msitake wakati wangu miye  
Niacheni nitambike Ilobakia mliye
- Chorus (2): Mimi ndiye topu wenu karne ishirini na moja eee  
Zimekwisha ndaro zenu hamna chenu kimoja  
Mimi ndiye topu wenu karne ishirini na moja  
Zimekwisha ndaro zenu hamna chenu kimoja
- Nimepoa sina presha nakula nakshinakshi  
Nyieye yenu yamekwisha mimi hamnishughulishi
- Ndipo najifaraguwa ni nafasi yangu miye  
Kwa mambo n'noyajuwa kiboko yenu ni miye  
Ndipo najifaraguwa ni nafasi yangu miye  
Kwa mambo n'noyajuwa kiboko yenu ni miye

Solo: Na hili bodi ni saizi yeyote namvutiya  
Tazama yangu mavazi mwilini najitambiya  
Na hili bodi ni saizi yeyote namvutiya  
Tazama yangu mavazi mwilini najitambiya  
Nguo za hadhi na ujuzi kwa dola nagharamiya  
Si tetroni kudarizi mitaani kutanuwa  
Nguo za hadhi na ujuzi kwa dola nagharamiya  
Si tetroni kudarizi mitaani kutanuwa  
Hiyo ndiyo yangu hadhi watapitapi wajuwe  
Ndiyo yangu matunuzi kazi iko kwenu nyiye  
Hiyo ndiyo yangu hadhi watapitapi wajuwe

Chorus (3): (Repeat as above chorus 2)

Solo: Kwenye barahi ya huba bingwa ninaogeleya  
Matamu yangu mahaba ya kisaikolojiya  
Kwenye bahari ya huba bingwa ninaogeleya  
Matamu yangu mahaba ya kisaikolojiya  
Nawaliza majibaba hakika yanavutiya  
Zaidi hatosiriba nina teknolojijiya  
Nawaliza majibaba hakika yanavutiya  
Zaidi hatosiriba nina teknolojijiya  
  
Nayajuliya si haba nawatiya kiwewe  
Kwa hizo zangu huba hamniwezi kwa nyiye  
Nayajuliya si haba nawatiya kiwewe  
Kwa hizo zangu huba hamniwezi kwa nyiye

Chorus (4): (Repeat as above chorus 2)

Solo: Kwenye mpya same chaji natesa ‘mepanda chati  
Nitazameni hodari alaivu kwa setelaiti  
Kwenye mpya same chaji natesa ‘mepanda chati  
Nitazameni hodari alaivu kwa setelaiti  
Kwa sayansi ni mahiri ninaruka kwa roketi  
Utabaki na ushari umepitwa na wakati  
Kwa sayansi ni mahiri ninaruka kwa roketi  
Utabaki na ushari umepitwa na wakati  
  
Mimi kwenu natesa mutambuwe wezangu  
Teknolojiya ya kisasa hiyo ndiyo fani yangu  
Mimi kwenu natesa mutambuwe wezangu  
Teknolojiya ya kisasa hiyo ndiyo fani yangu

Chorus (5): (Repeat as above chorus 2)

Solo: Mkija kwa juu nawadaka nyiye nyiye hamnitatizi 2  
Mkija kwa chini nawachota nyiye nyiye hamna ujuzi  
Mkija kwa mbele nawakamata nyiye nyiye hamniwezi  
Mkija kwa nyuma nawasukuma nyiye nyiye nawapa dozi  
Mkija kwa juu nawadaka nyiye nyiye hamnitatizi  
Mkija kwa chini nawachota nyiye nyiye hamna ujuzi  
Mkija kwa mbele nawakamata nyiye nyiye hamniwezi  
Mkija kwa nyuma nawasukuma nyiye nyiye hamna ujuzi

Narusha roho muumiye	narusharoho mpagawe nyiye
Narusha roho muuguwe	narusharoho muuguwe nyiye
Narusha roho muumiye	narusha roho mpagawe nyiye
Narusha roho muuguwe	narusha roho muuguwe nyiye

Kitikiti natikisika	nimebobeya siigizi miye
Na hekaheka hainisumbuwi	nimebobeya n'na cheti
Kitikiti natikisika	nimebobeya siigizi miye
Na hekaheka hainisumbuwi	nimebobeya n'na cheti

### **I'm a Lady of the Twentieth Century**

Chorus: Haya, haya, haya, you say whatever you want to say  
Haya, haya, haya, a New Millennium has arrived  
Look at me! The lady of the New Millennium has arrived  
I'm among the top ten to arrive  
Look at me! The lady of the New Millennium has arrived  
I'm among the top ten to arrive  
I do the maintenance with software  
I do the maintenance with hardware  
I do the maintenance with software  
I do the maintenance with hardware  
Microsoft style I've mastered it all  
Haya, haya, haya, let you say whatever you want to say

Solo: I'm a lady of this new century  
A perfect lady I'm, one destined to emerge  
I'm a lady of this new century  
A perfect lady I'm, one destined to emerge

*Images of Love in The Swahili Taarab Lyric*

Let all of you group up, from villages to the city  
Do not trouble your selves, you wont reach my level  
Let all of you group up, from villages to the city  
Do not trouble your selves, you wont reach my level

Whether you want it or not, this is my time  
Let me strut and swagger and you just cry  
Whether you want it or not, this is my time  
Let me strut and swagger and you just cry

Chorus (2): I'm the top among you, I'm of the twentieth century  
Your intrigues have finished you have nothing else to offer  
I'm the top among you, I'm of the twentieth century  
Your intrigues have finished you have nothing else to offer

I'm at ease, I'm without any pressure I'm eating my things with style  
Your intrigues have finished, you don't worry me at all

That is why I strut and swagger, it is my chance, it's really mine  
For what I know, I'm the best among you, I am  
That is why I strut and swagger, it is my chance, it's really mine  
For what I know, I'm the best among you, I am

Solo: And my body is of perfect size, it attracts anyone  
Look the way I dress, my body looks just fine  
And my body is of perfect size, it attracts anyone  
Look the way I dress, my body looks just fine  
Elegant dresses that I know to choose and buy them with US dollars  
It's not tetron that I wear and expose myself in the streets  
Elegant dresses that I know to choose and buy them with US dollar  
It's not tetron that I wear and expose myself in the street  
That is my status, the meek should know  
That is my buying, the ball is at your court now  
That is my status, the meek should know  
That is my buying, the ball is at your court now

Chorus (3): (Repeat as above, chorus 3)

Solo: In the ocean of love, I, the expert, am swimming  
Sweet is my love, it's full of psychology  
In the ocean of love, I, the expert, am swimming  
Sweet is my love, it's full of psychology

I make rascals cry, (even) those who are so attractive  
He wont change me as a result of this, I have a new technology  
of love to change him  
I make rascals cry, (even) those who are also attractive  
He wont change me as a result of this, I have a new technology  
of love to change him

I know how to give it to them, I do make them crazy  
For that love of mine, you can't compete with me  
I know how to give it to them, I do make them crazy  
For that love of mine, you can't compete with me

Chorus (4): (Repeat as above, chorus 2)

Solo: With new same charge, I put you all in distress  
Look how skilful I'm, alive in the satellite  
With new same charge, I put you all in distress  
Look how skilful I'm, alive in the satellite  
As for science I am so knowledgeable, I fly in a rocket  
You will remain quarrelsome, you are outdated  
As for science I am so knowledgeable, I fly in a rocket  
You will remain quarrelsome, you are outdated

I put you in distress, you should know that  
The modern technology is my line  
I put you in distress, you should know that  
The modern technology is my line

Chorus (5): (Repeat as above, chorus 2)

Solo: When you drop from above, I'll catch you, you don't startle me  
If you emerge from the bottom, I just pick you up, you don't  
have the know how  
If you come from the front, I just capture you, you can't defeat  
me  
If you come from behind, I just push you aside and make you go  
crazy

When you drop from above, I'll catch you, you don't startle me  
If you emerge from the bottom, I just pick you up, you do not  
have the know how  
If you come from the front, I just capture you, you can't defeat  
me  
If you come from behind, I just push you aside and make you go  
crazy

I am mocking you so that you become inflicted with pain,  
I am mocking you so that you go crazy  
I am mocking you so that you fall sick  
I am mocking you so that you fall sick  
I am mocking you so that you become inflicted with pain,  
I am mocking you so that you go crazy  
I am mocking you so that you fall sick  
I am mocking you so that you fall sick

I am carried over on a throne as I swing about,  
I am an expert I imitate no one  
Bad times never bother me, I'm used to it, I've a certificate  
I am carried over on a throne as I swing about,  
I am an expert I imitate no one  
Bad times never bother me, I'm used to it, I've a certificate

The change from the traditional *taarab* lyric to *mipasho* lyric is not only a shift from images of romanticized love to those of love of material things, but a shift from strict prosody to blank and sometimes free verse style or a mixture of these. It is also a shift from some dynamics of textuality to dynamic of orality with more repetitive, antiphonal and choral effects. This makes the lyrics appear too long and monotonous from a chirographic point of view, though the emphasis here is not the value of words of the lyric, but the percussive effect that provide the dance mode.

## CONCLUSION

In describing love images in the taarab lyric, we have tried to demonstrate how the Swahili taarab poet reaches for objects, concepts, figures of speech, tropes, symbols and icons to create the appropriate images for different facets of love, love processes and love situations. Most of the images like *kunguru* (a crow), *tasi* (a kind of sea water fish), *lulu* (pearl), *nanasi* (a pineapple), *zambarau* (a damson fruit), *mung'unye/mumunye* (a gourd resembling a vegetable marrow) etc are derived locally. Others are derived from cultural exchange through the intercontinental trade between the peoples of the Arab world, of Persia, India, and China, and also eastern and central Africa (Mazrui & Shariff 1994: 3). The scope of image acquisition however, goes beyond the cultural exchange through intercontinental trade. It includes an exchange of ideological culture encapsulated in concepts, icons, metaphors, words, phrase and images like *mwezi* or *qamary* (the moon), *waridi* (a rose), *nyota* (a star), *ghazali* (a gazelle), *mabanati wa peponi* or *hurul-l-eyn* (ladies of paradise), *ratabu* (dates), *komamanga* (a pomegranate) and *asumini* (a jasmine) that are of Arabian origin

– passed over to Swahili culture perhaps from Arabic taarab via mass media such as print media, phonograph record, sound film and radio.

However, images like *kibiriti* (a match box), *petroli* (petrol), *pete* (a ring), *asali* (honey), *simu ya mkono* (a mobile telephone), *buzi* (a boozer), *dala* (US dollar), *pajero*, (a Pajero) *masidi* (a Mercedes), *vazi* (dress), *softweya* (software), *hadiweya* (hard ware), *intaneti* (internet), *roketi* (rocket) and *bingwa* (expert) may have originated from Europe through the same media channels or perhaps, very recently, from transnational television channels.

A separate category however, can be delineated – especially the one referring to images of women such as those derived from heavenly bodies (e.g. *mwezi* & *nyota*), flowers (e.g. *waridi*, *asumini* & *afu*), fruit (e.g. *embe dodo*, *nanasi*, *tini*, *balungi* & *tufaha*), birds (e.g. *tausi*, *njiwa*, *chiriku*, *kunguru*, *kuku*, *bata*, *ninga* & *mnana*), other animals (e.g. *ghazali*, *chezi* & *nyoka*), sacred places (e.g. *peponi* & *firdausi*). Some of these images are derived locally and others transculturally, but all show that taarab, both from a point of view of local practices and global influences, is indeed impregnated with interesting gender issues and sexuality.

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