

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## A Critical Discourse Analysis of Gender Stereotyping in Stand-Up Comedy: A Case Study of Mc Jesse's Churchill Live Performances

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### **Abstract**

*This study focuses on the critical discourse analysis of gender stereotyping by MC Jesse in stand-up comedy. There is dearth of in depth researches on stand up comedies to explain how gendered language elicits laughter. The study will be based on the performances of Mc Jesse in the Kenyan TV show, Churchill Live Show normally aired on Nation Television-Kenya (NTV). The objectives of this study are to analyze gender stereotyping, establish the strategies used to bring out gender stereotyping and to find out the audiences' perceptions in Churchill live show. The study makes use of Critical Discourse Analysis theory by Fairclough and Wodak and the Cooperative Principle by Grice to explore the gender stereotypes and attitudes against women. The study will seek to find out whether negative gender stereotypes against women are found in Mc Jesse's jokes. The data will be derived from past 'Churchill Raw Shows' editions from the You tube from 2015 to 2017, three Focus Group Discussions with twelve participants from three secondary schools and in-depth interviews with five participants of the 'Churchill Live Show' audiences. CDA being a labour intensive approach, the data used will be limited to two years. Data analysis will involve transcription of the raw data from the original language, translation into English language and thematic content analysis to understand the theme of gender stereotyping as used in Jesse's comedy. The expected findings will benefit the policy makers and gender specialist to formulate policies which will be effective on the use of gender stereotypes positively in the Kenyan society.*

**Keywords:** Gender stereotypes, humour, stereotype, stand-up comedy, discourse, and joke

### **1. Introduction and Background to the Study**

Stand-up comedy is a comic style where a stand-up comedian either performs in front of a live audience, speaking directly to them or the performance is sometimes filmed for later release via DVD, internet, and television. Stand-up is an art form that is openly devoted to getting immediate laughs from an audience (Crowther & Hornby, 2001). It is a cultural phenomenon in need of deep understanding and thoughtful discourse because it makes use of language which is a very powerful element and most common method of communication. A notable percentage of language used in stand-up comedy is considered prejudicial or biased in use. Stand-up comedy utilizes both literary criticism and humour studies. Stand-up comedy to some degree identifies, articulates and assesses cultural meaning for popular audiences.

Particularly in Kenya, the stand-up televised comedy in the entertainment industry has pronounced itself as the centre-stage, which shapes perceptions about other groups in the society as presented in 'Churchill Live Show', thereby playing a significant role in the society. 'Churchill Live Show' is the most popular televised stand-up comedy show, aired on NTV which is one of the leading private TV channels in Kenya. The Show has two segments, presented on two different days for continuity purposes. On the one hand, there is the Churchill Show as the main segment aired on Sunday between 8 pm and 9 pm, which features the experienced comedians. On the other hand, there is the Churchill Raw aired on Thursday between 8.15 pm and 8.45 pm, which features the upcoming comedians (Ndonye 2015). Due to its popularity and uniqueness of the content, 'Churchill Live Show' has received acclaim and numerous awards as one of the best of comedy shows in Kenya, East and Central Africa. The Show has also gained momentous international interest from comedy enthusiasts in the US, the UK, India, Germany, and rest of the world. It is highly successful and has been seen as a groundbreaker in the Kenyan comedy and entertainment industry (Keniamoja.com, 2010-2014).

In early 2000 Kenyan stand-up comedy gained enormous viewership. According to consummator, "Kenyan audiences are quite hard to please this is why comedians are working hard each one trying to bring something unique

"what I have seen online I think Kenyan comedians are far better than their contemporaries in Africa". Churchill Academy provides the biggest platform for new talent with stand-up comics mushrooming all over the city. The stand-up comics are everywhere in the TV and radio stations, clubs, and theatres and at corporate events. Nearly every morning radio show hosts a comic in the house-Churchill on Classic FM, Chipukeezy on KISS 100 and Mc Jesse on Hot 96. In this study we will focus on one popular stand-up comedian Jesse Wachira who started his professional career at Churchill Live. He currently hosts Churchill Raw on NTV. This study also focuses on a style that is commonly used in most stand-up comedies in Kenya and also worldwide: gender stereotyping.

### 1.1. Gender and Gender Stereotyping

Gender is a socio-cultural phenomenon, which splits people into numerous groups such as 'male' and 'female' with each having concomitant dress, rules and stereotypes. (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary). Gender stereotypes are exaggerated and one-sided images of men and women that are deployed recurrently in everyday life. It is the practice of attributing to discrete woman or man definite qualities, characteristics (Marshall, 1998) Coulmas (ibid, 2005) articulates that gender is not a puddle of qualities possessed by an individual, but something an individual 'does'. For instance, in many communities in Kenya, some household chores like cooking are preserved for women while men do other chores like fencing the homesteads, taking care of cattle or building. Most African communities thus have some set separate duties for the female and male gender. Women are important in building stable families for a prosperous nation.

Gender roles have recognised the domination of males by institutionalizing of male supremacy over women in society (Durham & Kellner, 2006). In the western world, men are expected to be robust, and independent, while women are expected to be obedient, attractive nurturers and quiet. Culture demands compliance to the obligatory gender order. Gender stereotyping is significant due to the negative perception women have received in the past. Mueni (2014) in her study sought to explore the representations of womanhood in soap operas. Traditionally, females have been expected to wear dresses, cook and clean, raise children, maintain a beautiful and delicate body, and remain passive, moral, and pure (Griffin, 1998; Sherrow, 1996; Woolum, 1998; Zimmerman and Reavill, 1998). The comedy shows expose many stereotypes women face in the society. Deemed to be the "weaker sex"- physically, mentally, and emotionally, women have been stereotyped as being feminine (Sherrow, 1996). Stereotypes abounds in any society. One way that people in diverse societies try to tolerate differences is to make generalizations that categorize individuals into groups (Keefe, Marshall, & Robeson, 2003). Some effects of gender stereotypes is particularly critical because of gender. Gender stereotyping is currently big news in mainstream media across in Europe and the US (Durham and Kellner, 2006).

Gender stereotypes are pervasive in the media and popular culture (Saltmarsh, 2009). Movies convey particularly powerful messages about gender roles and stereotyping (Derman & Sparks, 2001). All stereotypes contribute to a culture of prejudice, which is communicated in word and action to families, communities, and even young children (Derman & Sparks, 2001). According to Kanogo (2005) in a study on African Womanhood between 1900 and 1950 she states that, Kenyan girls and women negotiate their own social, economic and sexual mobility through their own individual concepts of personhood the role of women was cooking, fetching firewood, washing, cleaning and fulfilling sexual desires of men. Her study depicts the prevailing male stereotypes of women and how women played a role in the economy by fighting alongside men in the Mau Mau war against the colonialists.

Kanogo (2005) underlines the conspiracy of colonialism and Africa patriarchy to marginalize women. The patriarchal society in Kenya looks upon women and thus deters them towards achieving gender respect, equity, parity and empowerment. Patriarchy saw gender roles as a purposeful social construction for oppressing women and therefore it is baseless (Rutere, 2010). Gender only underlines the socially constructed roles given to males and females. Despite the oppressive and retrogressive nature of patriarchy, women have high hopes in overcoming this menace and consequently restore gender empowerment, equity and partnership in society observes Rutere (2010).

King'ola (2008) in the study on *Gender Stereotyping as Portrayed in the Language of Kenyan Print and Electronic Media* has investigated the role of media in Kenya in perpetuating and reinforcing gender stereotypes in their use of English, Swahili, Sheng and English language. The study also sought to find out the level of gender prejudice, particularly on women, in Kenyan print and electronic media. Data was derived from three magazines Buzz, Pulse and the Insider. He used Critical Discourse Analysis theory to explore the negative gender stereotypes and attitudes women are exposed in the language of the Kenyan print and electronic media. He found that gender stereotypes and attitudes find their way into the language used in the Kenyan print and electronic media hence perpetuating gender stereotypes and bias. This study and its findings were relevant to the present study in that it has explored the negative effects of gender stereotypes in the Kenyan print and electronic media.

### 1.2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework and analytical approach adopted in this study relate to what is known broadly as 'Critical Discourse Analysis' which delves into the dialectical relationship between discursive and social structures, to show that discourse is not only socially constituted but socially constitutive (Fairclough, 2001 & van Dijk, 1993). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that views language as a form of social practice. Scholars working in the tradition of CDA generally argue that (non-linguistic) social practice and linguistic practice constitute one another and focus on investigating how societal power relations are established.

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according to Fairclough, (1992) language in its social context may be called discourse, which is for discourse analysis a form of 'social practice'. It is in fact through language that ideas are kept or transformed and it is the element from which social environments are shaped. There is, therefore, a reciprocal relation between discourse and society. They are dependent: discourse influences social practices as well as social practices influence discourse.

Fairclough (1992) in a study on discourse and social change describes discourse as a three dimensional concept involving text, discourse practices and social practice. As a consequence of this three dimensional model, Fairclough (1992) continues to argue that the first dimension, the text, cannot be effectively analyzed without taking in to account the other two dimensions. His aim is therefore to come up with a framework for analyzing text (a term which he uses to apply to both written and spoken instances of language use) which enables them to be treated as instances of discursive and social practices. The following model illustrates the three dimension structure.

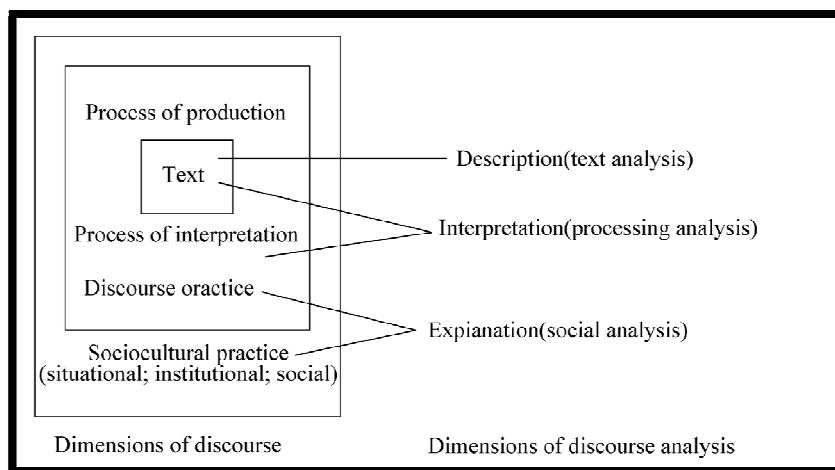


Figure 1: Dimensions of Discourse and Discourse Analysis  
Adapted from Fairclough (1995: 98)

From the above figure it can be observed that the three stages are interrelated, which indicates that when analyzing a text, critical reference has to be made to the discourse practice and socio-cultural practice.

CDA has two elements the analysis element and the critical element which are very important to this study. The study used those elements found in the CDA theory to analyze data for this research. CDA was therefore adequate for the study as it enabled the researcher to analyze the language used by the Stand-up comedians. The Cooperative principle by Grice used the concept to deal with examples in communication where what a speaker means goes beyond the meaning literally expressed by a particular utterance. The comedians observed the cooperative principle and the listeners assumed that the comedian was observing it and this allowed the possibility of implicature which was in form of stereotypes. The Cooperative principle and CDA assisted in analyzing the stereotypes the Stand-up comedians use with regard to gender, region and ethnicity.

The theory of Cooperative Principle by H.P.Grice was important to this study because need to pay attention on the utterances they make so as to avoid ethnicity, prejudice, bias and negative stereotyping.

## 2. Research Methodology

The study used the qualitative approach and utilized the descriptive design, to be precise, a case study. Descriptive survey design was appropriate when the purpose of the study was to generate explanatory information or characteristics about a specific information or phenomenon (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012). The study was based on the Kenya TV show aired on Nation Television Kenya (NTV), Churchill raw show. The specific study was on the performances of Mc Jesse on Churchill Live Show. The study selected NTV media which hosts the best and famous stand-up comedy show; Churchill Live. The programme Churchill Live, aired by the (NTV) was used because it brought a new and fresh style of comedy to the Kenyan airwaves.

The study used thirty two jokes purposively selected from Churchill Raw Show performances. The jokes were derived from Mc Jesse's performances. The twenty three jokes were from 2015 to 2017 because they consisted of gender stereotypes which were estimated to have the characteristics being measured and thus a representative of stand-up comedies, Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). The researcher picked the jokes that feature gender stereotyping. Gender stereotype was selected because they form the basis for the study. The researcher chose the comedian Jesse because he hosts Churchill Live show and has a unique style of performance

The researcher had in-depth interview with the Churchill Raw show audiences after watching episodes and the live performance. FGDs consisted of three secondary schools from Nakuru County. Twelve was ideal for the researcher because the study needs to have a manageable number of the respondents so that the researcher could observe the features being studied. In total, the study had thirty six respondents. The student aspects such as gender, ethnicity and age was not considered because the study was only interested in the audiences' reaction and perception to humour which was judged against the researcher analysis of gender stereotypes to have an objective opinion.

According to Mvumbi and Ngumbi (2015) Interviewing is collecting data through guided conversations with people. The researcher approaches certain individuals who are believed to have rich and reliable information about the research topic; and this case being "Critical Discourse Analysis on gender stereotyping from Mc Jesse's performances; the in-depth interview also allows for probes and prompts to clarify and deal with issues exhaustively. In-depth interviews are the key method to discover the views, perceptions and opinions of individuals and it will be conducted on five audience members after their watching Mc Jesse performances. The interviews will be video recorded using a mobile phone.

The purpose of focus group interview is to provide an in-depth exploration of a topic about which little is known (Mvumbi & Ngumbi, 2015) The researcher will use convenience sampling to choose three focus group discussions each with twelve participants from three secondary schools. The thirty six participants will be able to share their positions, attitudes and interpretations of the gender stereotyped jokes from 'Churchill Live shows.

Data was analyzed qualitatively using Grice's Cooperative Principle and CDA theory to show how data can demonstrate that the jokes build on the activation of contextual gender stereotypes, codes and the strategies used in Mc Jesse's show. The first step was transcription. Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn and Danao (1993) as cited by Ndambuki (2010, pg 99) define discourse transcription as the process of creating a written representation of a speech event so as to make it accessible to discourse research. The downloaded episode of Churchill Show was transcribed in the original language. The researcher listened and transcribed information from the tape recorder and linked it to the observed data. In translation the researcher used full resources and vocabulary of the target language-English. The target language was English and so all the data was translated to English language. According to Ndambuki (2010), most translational studies agree that the preservation of the original meaning is the ultimate goal for a translator. The researcher first transcribed the raw data from the original language and then provided a translation into English language, then employed thematic content, observations and analysis of the gender stereotypes used in Mc Jesse's comedy. There was interpretation of the gender stereotypes jokes from Kiswahili and other languages to English language.

### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1. Gender Stereotyping Jokes in Mc Jesse's Performances

Mc Jesse makes many jokes in his stand-up comedy performances. From the stipulated objectives in chapter one of this study where objective one was analysis of gender stereotyping from Mc Jesse's performances we have the following findings; there is a lot of gender stereotyping in Mc Jesse's jokes and in most cases women are negatively stereotyped as lovers of money, emotional and gossipers, the gender stereotyped jokes create a lot of humour among the audiences. Mc Jesse's performances are so humorous that the audiences enjoy and laugh while watching. The themes of ethnicity, gossip, marriage and courtship, social relations and social class are evident from Mc Jesse's jokes.

##### 3.1.1. Ethnicity

The jokes, which Mc Jesse gives, bring out gender stereotyping from the perspective of ethnicity due to its diverse characteristics and common social practice.

Excerpt 1: *Nilikuwa Mombasa weekend nikaenda beachi nikapata wasichana wako na bikini waja wakitaftuta kila mtu, kumbe ni akina Shiko wanaongea karibuni Mombatha na wako na accent ya Kikuyu@@@Wanaongea Kiswahili sanifu karibuni Mombasa, alafu wako na pengo nisaidie thimo (simu) nitume ashemes (sms) karibuni thana (sana) MombasaNjioni ikifika mimi naitwa Fatuma Abdala Njoki na tutaenda chakachaka na kumbuka hawana rasa @@@. (I went to Mombasa during the weekend then I went to the beach and found ladies there wearing swimming costumes. They came looking for everybody incidentally it was Shiko welcoming people to Mombasa with Kikuyu accent @@@ They talk fluent Swahili welcoming people to Mombasa with a gap in their teeth requesting for a phone to send a message. They say when evening comes she is called Fatuma Abdala Njoki and they will go to dance and remember they do not have an ass @@@).*

Mombasa is a place where the Indian Ocean is situated with many beaches where people go to swim and enjoy themselves. The place has many tourists so it is easy to find the ones who are generous and are willing to offer some money. One expects Coastal ladies to welcome you but one finds Shiko a Kikuyu lady who is business minded doing this using a Kikuyu accent saying "*Nisaidie thimu karibu thana Mombasa*" and wearing swimming costumes. The comedian relates an incident in which he comes across three ladies who are in swimming costumes speak fluent Kiswahili feigning a Coastal identity but he is able to tell from their names such as Shiko that they are Kikuyu's. He further proves their identity by their poor pronunciation of Kiswahili and English words where they mispronounce words such as *simu (thimu)*, *sms (thms)* and *sana (thana)* which creates laughter in the audience.

The ladies are masquerading as members of Coastal communities to feign innocence but are actively looking for somebody, suggesting hunting for men for commercial sex. This depicts Kikuyu women as aggressive in their quest for money and ready to seize any possible opportunity even at the expense of morals. The Kikuyu accent used makes the joke very humorous and exciting. The people from Mombasa speak using fluent Kiswahili and are hospitable and that is why Shiko chooses to welcome visitors there. The respondent suggested that the Kikuyu women wherever they are show passion for money. The respondent said that they are looking for men who have money that is why they are in the beach in their costumes. In the Kenyan society when women look for men, they are perceived to do prostitution as portrayed "*waja wakitaftuta kila mtu*".

The joke, although it sounds innocent, it is highly symbolic regarding the Kikuyu women. These jokes serve to entrench the stereotypes regarding Kikuyu women and the way they have passion for money. The Kenyan people are guilty in the formulation of ethnic stereotyping in women (Ndonye, 2015). The women of Kikuyu ethnicity are also

depicted as avaricious due to their aggressiveness in being ready to do and engage in anything that can be exploited to make money. The respondent agreed that the depictions have made people to believe in the characterizations and that the repetition of the depictions make people to believe in them and develop a gender stereotype towards Kikuyu women and other ethnic communities. There are no many incidents where you find a kikuyu lady broke and their time with men means making money according to the respondent. Most kikuyu ladies cannot rely on their pockets if a potentially generous man is near them as observed by the respondent. The Kikuyu women are business oriented and played a role in the growth of the Kenyan economy as observed by Kanogu (2005). She underlines the conspiracy of colonialism and Africa patriarchy to marginalize women. The joke depicts the positive side of kikuyu women as lovers of money because they are very hardworking when it comes to looking for money. In addition Kikuyu women are intelligent and enterprising in nature.

### 3.1.2. Gossip

Estes (1998) cited in Ndambuki (2010) defines gossip as 'a hidden aspect of the collective that it is often concealed'. The following jokes describe women as those who love gossiping or talking about others.

Excerpt 2: *The thing I love about women ni mshene, you have the best and the worst. Mkiamua kuchambua mtu mnachambua lighter na mkiamua kumtengeneza mnapaka mafuta mpaka mahali mtu yuko anasema mbona naskia nimeshine kumbe umesengenywa @@@. Madem are the only people in this world, mmoja wao anakuja wanasmile na wanaongea kitu mbaya, Ngai--- kione vile kinakaa. "Hi mambo....." @@@ (The thing I love about ladies is gossiping. They have the best and the worst form of gossip. If they decide to gossip about someone they can make someone look the best until the person says I feel am shining this is because some people are talking about her @@@. Ladies are the only people in this world who can gossip badly, about you while they are smiling, oh! my God.... look at the way she looks, then they greet her "Hi how are you...." @@@)*

The respondent describes gender stereotyping as the practice of ascribing specific attributes to an individual. He says that the joke symbolically stereotype ladies as the ones who like to gossip; ladies have the best and worst gossips in the world; they can make someone look good or bad depending on what they are talking about you "--kione vile kinakaa. "Hi mambo....." The comedian shows how women can talk about each other and when she arrives they great and smile at her hypocritically. The ladies can see you arriving and smile at you while talking something evil about you. They are sarcastic and pretenders who acclaim their friendship to you but are your enemies according to the respondent.

They also contended that in most cases when women are found together mostly in salons, markets, round table, shops or at home they must be talking about someone. According to Ndambuki (2010) Gossip functions as a form of enslavement for the women because they appear so powerfully ensnared to it that they emerge as powerless and unable to draw themselves away from it. The Kenyan society believes that when women are together their talk engage mostly in talking about others. Some gossip is majorly based on jealousy ridden hatred "Enemies carry gossip, ignorant people spread them and fools take it and accept it" as contented by Dawson (2018).

### 3.1.3. Marriage and Courtship

Excerpt 3: *When a woman sings...njoo ufanyiwe maombi...she is not happy @@@ and when she sings. Amenitendea... she is happy in her marriage. (When a woman sings "...lets go for prayers" she is not happy @@@ but when she sings, "he has done wonders for me" she is happy in her marriage.)*

Women have been stereotyped as people who can easily be read like a book when they are happy or sad. According to the respondent women has been stereotyped this is because most of them are not happy in their marriage and they show that by singing sad songs. The songs sung can easily judge the happiness and sadness in a woman. The choice of the words used in the song "*njoo ufanyiwe maombi...umenitendea*" portray the feelings of women when they have joy and when sad. If she is happy she will sing a song that praises God and when she is not happy she sings the song asking God for assistance. They also express their feelings through facial expression and as cited by Sherrow (1996) they have been stereotyped as being weak and emotional. Women are subjected to suffering and torture and that is why they express their happiness and sadness in their marriage through singing.

### 3.1.4. Social Relations

Excerpt 4: *Thank God siku hizi wasichana ndio wanatutafuta. Kuna mwenye niliambia song ya sauti sol alikubali kunifuata kanisani...Nazizi wangu the lady said I like your voice, is it yours and she knows ni ya Sauti sol @@@. (Thank God nowadays ladies look for men. There is one for whom I sang a Sauti sol song and she agreed to follow me to church. "My lover", the lady said, "I like your voice. Is it yours?" and she knows it is Sauti sol's @@@)*

In reference to the excerpt women are stereotyped as those who look for men and easily lured as depicted by the song sung by Sauti sol but she asks the boyfriend if it is his song. Sauti sol is a famous musician group whose songs attract many ladies because it consists of only men therefore ladies want to be associated with them. The lady is lured easily after the man sings the song she follows him to the church and wherever he goes. The comedian views the women as foolish such that when in love they mistake your voice and think that you are a musician like Sauti sol "*Nazizi wangu the lady said I like your voice, is it yours?*" This could be interpreted to mean; women are deemed to be the "weaker sex" - physically, mentally, and emotionally, they have been stereotyped as being feminine (Sherrow, 1996).

### 3.1.5. Social Class

Excerpt 5: *Tulikuwa Kisumu with some guys tukapata msichana wa Kisumu amechapwa na chali yake. The girl showing ona hapa nimefura (showing the face) hii ni ipad, nilichapwa na ipad, nikikufungulia mgongo yangu tu ni alama imejaa hapo ya LCD plasma screen@@@ (talking with Luo accent) then contrasts with a Kikuyu girl known as Shiko. Wacha tuulize wasichana wa Kiambu kama kina Shiko tumepata kamoja kamechapwa (talking with a girl accent) Aki a Mungu Jesse angalia hapa (on the face) hii ni stove and on the hand hii ni wheel spanner ya gari ya Ndung @@@. (We were in Kisumu with some guys and came across a girl from Kisumu that had been assaulted by her boyfriend. She showed us her swollen face, "This is an Ipad", she said. "I was hit with an Ipad and if I show you my back, it is full of LCD plasma screen marks @@@ (talking with Luo accent). He then contrasts with a Kikuyu girl known as Shiko. Let us ask girls from Kiambu, the likes of Shiko. We had just met one who had been assaulted (talking with a lady accent). "For God's sake Jesse have a look here (showing the face), this is a stove (and on the hand), this is a wheel spanner belonging to Ndung'u's motor car @@@.*

The findings from the excerpt present women from Kisumu and Kiambu are of different social class. Kisumu is a city mainly inhabited by the Luo community and Kiambu is in Central Kenya mainly inhabited by the Kikuyu community. It contrasts the Luo lady who is beaten by an Ipad and LCD plasma screen to a Kikuyu lady who is beaten by a stove and a wheel spanner. It shows the lavish lifestyle of the Luo who own and use an Ipad and LCD plasma screen to beat their wives. The joke portrays representations of the Luo community as conspicuous consumers and proud classy people. The Luo as one of the respondents agreed that he is proud of their culture and person although the comedians exaggerate this. The comedian parodies the habits of different social classes and linguistic groups in Kenya. He juxtaposes gender based violence between the Luo who are of upper class compared to the Kikuyu who are of lower class in this context. The description of the violence using an Ipad and stove evokes a lot of laughter from the audience. Gender roles have established the hegemony of males by institutionalizing of male dominance over women in society (Durham & Kellner, 2006). The women are stereotyped as objects of beating and weak people (Sherrow, 1996) who cannot defend themselves.

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