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LEXICAL INDICES OF PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY IN YORUBA POPULAR MUSIC

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Abstract

The representation of women in Yoruba popular discourse reflects entrenched patriarchal values that sustain unequal gender hierarchies. Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà's Àpàlà music, though widely celebrated as entertainment, also operates as a discursive site where dominant perceptions of gender are constructed and legitimised. While previous scholarship has examined Yoruba music in terms of performance, aesthetics, and social commentary, little attention has been given to the ideological power of lexical choices in shaping gender identities. This study investigates how women are discursively represented in selected Àpàlà lyrics of Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà, with focus on the lexical indices through which patriarchal ideology is encoded. Using Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis, three songs that explicitly foreground women were purposively selected. The selected songs are: Agídí ò sé ló'lé ọkọ, Ìsé Ilé and 25x40. The analysis examined lexicalisation strategies such as naming, adjectives, and metaphors, as well as transitivity structures that define agency and passivity. Findings reveal recurrent patterns of derogatory lexicalisation in which women are portrayed as stereotyped threat to morality and marriage, disruptors, objectified and dehumanised beings, and passive recipients of men's authority; while men are consistently constructed as providers, disciplinarians, and custodians of order. Women's agency is largely limited to negative actions, whereas men's roles are framed as positive and corrective. Metaphors of disease, danger, and animality further dehumanise women, positioning them as destabilising forces within households and society. The study concludes that Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà's Àpàlà is not merely artistic expression but a vehicle of ideology that sustains patriarchal dominance and normalises women's subordination. By highlighting the ideological force of lexical choices, the research underscores the role of Yoruba music in perpetuating gender inequality.

Keywords: Lexical indices, Patriarchal ideology Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà, Àpàlà, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

The representation of women in cultural productions has long engaged scholars, since cultural texts function as powerful channels for constructing, transmitting, and legitimising gender ideologies. In the African context, particularly within Yoruba society, music transcends the realm of entertainment to serve as a discursive platform where social values, collective beliefs, and ideological assumptions are articulated and reinforced. As a communicative form, Yoruba popular music reflects, negotiates, and frequently naturalises dominant gender norms. Scholarship recognises its role as a storehouse of cultural knowledge, a medium of critique, and a tool for political mobilisation (Barber, 1991; Ajayi, 2004; Omojola, 2006; Akinwale, 2012). Within this tradition, Àpàlà music, popularised by Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà, stands out for its use of proverbs, satire, and moral commentary, functioning as a form of oral journalism and cultural critique (Ajayi, 2004; Omojola, 2006).

While language serves as a veritable tool that encodes power relations and cultural values (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998), music deploys language in expressing collective experiences and

framing social transformation (Barber, 1991; Waterman, 1990), and African oral and popular traditions demonstrate how language and music intersect in constructing identity and ideology. Together, they create a space where gender identities are continually produced and contested.

In Yoruba musical discourse, women are often valorised as mothers and wives, but are equally stereotyped as promiscuous, indolent, or socially disruptive (Afolabi, 2019; Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997). These portrayals reproduce patriarchal assumptions and inscribe restrictive notions of womanhood within the cultural imagination. Since identity is discursively constituted (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), the lexical strategies employed in such music become central tools in the ideological construction of gender.

Lexical choice, in particular, plays a critical role. Words are ideologically loaded: they encode attitudes, perspectives, and relations of power (Fairclough, 1995). In Yoruba popular music, lexical items used for women often convey evaluative stances that reproduce patriarchal ideology. Negative lexicalisation stigmatises and marginalises women, while positive lexicalisation confines them to narrow identities such as wives, mothers, or objects of beauty. Thus, in Àpàlà and similar genres, lexical items function not merely as stylistic devices but as ideological instruments through which gender identities are constructed, reinforced, and occasionally contested. Examining these choices illuminates how patriarchal discourse sustains gender hierarchies while leaving room for potential resistance.

Gendered identities, understood as roles and meanings socially ascribed to individuals on the basis of gender, are not inherent but discursively produced through language and cultural practice (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Butler, 1990). Within Yoruba music, women may be portrayed simultaneously as “mothers of the nation” and as “sources of moral decay,” depending on lyrical framing. Such representations are deeply ideological, reflecting ambivalent societal attitudes toward femininity. Ideology itself refers to systems of belief embedded in language and presented as natural (van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 1995). In Yoruba music, patriarchal ideology manifests in depictions of women as dependent, morally weak, or subordinate. Yet certain lyrics gesture toward resistance by affirming women’s strength and indispensability. Ideology here is therefore both a means of domination and a potential site for renegotiation.

While Yoruba music has been studied extensively for its aesthetic and sociopolitical significance (Adegbite, 1991; Barber, 1991), less attention has been paid to the specific lexical strategies that shape representations of women. Most scholarship has focused on performance practices, sexuality, or audience dynamics (Waterman, 1990; Oikelome, 2013), with little sustained analysis of the lexical items through which women are ideologically constructed. This gap is significant because language is never neutral but a resource for legitimising social hierarchies (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). By examining lexical strategies in Yoruba popular music, this study investigates how women are represented and how such representations reinforce patriarchal ideologies in selected lyrics of Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà’s Àpàlà.

Text Synopsis

In Agídí ò sẹ́ é lo ilé ọkọ (“stubbornness is not good for matrimony”), Àyínlá satirically condemns women as naturally headstrong, wasteful, and lacking humility, framing them as pleasure-seekers dependent on their husbands. The song prescribes meekness and submission as the only virtues capable of sustaining marriage and securing a husband’s enduring love, thereby reinforcing patriarchal expectations of female docility and domestic discipline.

In Ẹ̀sẹ̀ Ilé (“domestic attitude”), Ọmọwùrà reinforces negative stereotypes of women as stubborn and discourteous, extending domestic defiance into public shame. Though rooted in personal

experience, the song ridicules and subjugates women within a polygamous setting, while simultaneously presenting Ọmọwùrà as an unapologetic polygamist who openly boasts of multiple wives and concubines.

25x40 is another song in which the extravagant nature of women is condemned. It brings to fore the height of disgust the artiste has for luxurious women who wants nothing but pleasures. In this song, Àyínlá compares being involved with certain women to a terrifying experience. In Egba philosophy, the male's sense of superiority allows him to speak disparagingly about his in-laws, specifically his mother-in-law.

Review of relevant studies

Music is widely recognised as more than an artistic form; it operates as a discursive arena where culture, ideology, and social values are encoded and circulated. African popular music, particularly Yoruba genres such as Àpàlà, has been shown to function as a repository of communal knowledge, moral commentary, and political critique (Barber, 1991; Waterman, 1990; Omojola, 2006). Àpàlà, popularised by Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà, exemplifies this role through its use of satire and proverbs to interrogate individual and collective behaviour, earning its description as a form of oral journalism (Ajayi, 2004; Omojola, 2006). Within such genres, language is central to meaning-making: lyrics are interpreted as cultural texts where word choices, metaphors, and naming strategies reproduce or challenge societal norms, including gender relations (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) foregrounds how ideology and power are embedded in language (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998), while Critical Stylistics extends this by examining the linguistic tools through which dominance, identity, and resistance are constructed (Jeffries, 2010). Scholars of African literature and oral traditions likewise argue that musical texts encode cultural hierarchies and moral frameworks (Barber, 1987, 1991; Adegbite, 1991). Linguistic studies further demonstrate how naming, lexicalisation, and descriptive strategies shape gendered representations, often reducing women to social or moral categories that reinforce patriarchal ideologies (Cameron, 1992; Mills, 2008).

Research on Yoruba music reflects this dynamic. Women are sometimes valorised as mothers and caregivers but more frequently stereotyped as extravagant, promiscuous, or disruptive (Afolabi, 2019; Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997). Studies confirm that Yoruba musical traditions tend to reproduce patriarchal gender roles, even when acknowledging women's social importance (Waterman, 1990; Olorunyomi, 2005). However, much of the scholarship has prioritised performance practices, sociocultural functions, or sexuality, while offering limited analysis of the linguistic mechanisms, especially lexical strategies, that underpin these portrayals. Though proverbs, metaphors, and satire have been examined (Ajayi, 2004; Omojola, 2006), systematic attention to lexical choice as an ideological tool remains underexplored.

Recent interdisciplinary approaches increasingly treat popular music as a site where linguistic strategies articulate cultural values and identities. Studies employing methods from Systemic Functional Grammar, stylistics, and CDA demonstrate that lexicalisation and transitivity expose agency and evaluative stance in lyrics, while metaphor, presupposition, and speech acts reveal the ideological framing of social identities. Building on this, closer attention to Yoruba popular music can illuminate how lexical strategies specifically construct and sustain gendered ideologies.

Afolayan (2004) emphasises that lyrical patterns in Yoruba popular music are not incidental but culturally embedded representations that mirror and perpetuate patriarchal values. Applying Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Afolayan identifies how transitivity choices in Ọmọwùrà's Àpàlà songs assign active roles to men while limiting women to passive or objectified grammatical

positions, thereby linguistically enacting gender inequality. He argues that the subordination of women in Yoruba music is ideologically motivated, reflecting social norms that privilege male dominance.

Oloruntoba-Oju (2007) has applied discourse theories to explorations of gender in Nigerian music applying CDA to interrogate gender identity in Yoruba popular music by analysing the “discursive construction of female identity” in Yoruba popular music. He finds that lyrics often encode hegemonic masculinity and institutionalise female subjugation through metaphor, appellation, and ridicule. His study uncovers how male artistes often construct femininity in restrictive, stereotypical terms, portraying women as subordinate, seductive, or immoral. He argues that such constructions are not simply reflective but also constitutive of the patriarchal order in Yoruba society. This perspective resonates strongly in the music of Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà, where linguistic expressions reinforce male superiority and feminine objectification.

In analysing contemporary Nigerian hip-hop and Afrobeat, Aboh (2015) applies Systemic Functional Linguistics to assess how artistes such as Wizkid and Davido use language to position gender identities. Aboh identifies that while male artistes often use assertive and agentive clauses to describe themselves, female references tend to be either possessive (“my girl”) or objectified through metaphor and euphemism. The relevance of this approach is evident in the study of Ọmọwùrà’s and Òbésèrè’s lyrics, where similar transitivity structures encode dominant male perspectives.

Fadipe (2016) adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to interrogate the ethical and ideological undertones in Ayinla Ọmọwùrà’s corpus. His study shows how proverbs, satire, and moral injunctions are discursively deployed to police women’s behaviour while affirming male authority. Through lexicalisation and evaluative strategies, Ọmọwùrà constructs women as sources of disruption who require regulation, thus reinforcing Yoruba patriarchal structures. Fadipe concludes that the ideological weight of Ọmọwùrà’s discourse lies not only in entertainment but in its capacity to sustain gender hierarchies.

Bakene and Ogundeyi (2023), drawing on discourse-oriented ethnolinguistics, analyse the socio-cultural dimensions of Ayinla Ọmọwùrà’s music, particularly its ideological representations of women. They demonstrate how lexical items and proverbs serve as ideological markers, situating women within frames of moral judgment and domestic responsibility. Their analysis shows that Ọmọwùrà’s use of satirical naming practices aligns with broader Yoruba oral traditions where women are discursively disciplined through proverbial wisdom. This work underscores the role of linguistic choices in embedding and naturalising gender ideologies within cultural texts.

Oladunmoye (2025) explores the ideological representation of women in the lyrics of Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà’s Àpàlà and Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè’s Fuji using critical stylistics, Halliday’s transitivity system, and identity theory. The study identifies four dominant discourse issues: patriarchal hegemony, objectification, sexuality, and stereotyping, through which women are represented as disruptors, subordinates, conceited figures, sex objects, and stereotyped caregivers. These forms of representation are underpinned by ideologies of patriarchy, conservatism, liberalism, and feminism. The findings reveal that Yoruba musical discourse not only mirrors but also sustains gender ideologies, while also allowing traces of liberal feminist perspectives that contest patriarchal dominance. The study underscores how language in Yoruba popular music functions as a powerful site for the construction, reinforcement, and occasional negotiation of gender ideology across different musical eras.

These studies by applying linguistic approaches such as SFL, CDA, sociolinguistics, and stylistics to Yoruba popular music show that Ọmọwúra employs naming, description, and transitivity to construct women's identities in ways that mirror wider socio-cultural ideologies. His Àpàlà frequently portrays women as moral disruptors requiring control, reflecting entrenched patriarchal assumptions while also signalling shifts in gender politics across generations. Although scholarship has examined Ọmọwúra's cultural, satirical, and sexualised style, little attention has been given to the linguistic strategies that encode these representations. This study therefore focuses on the role of lexical choices in framing women in Àpàlà lyrics, analysing how such patterns reinforce gender stereotypes and sustain patriarchal ideology within Yoruba music.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its framework. Van Dijk (1993, 2008) views discourse as a social practice that both reflects and constructs power relations. His model emphasises the interaction between discourse structures, social cognition, and ideology, making it well suited to analysing how Yoruba music lyrics encode and transmit gender ideologies. In this view, lexical choices are not stylistic ornaments but ideological tools that shape representation, reinforce stereotypes, and legitimise social hierarchies.

Compared with other CDA models, van Dijk's framework provides specific advantages. Fairclough's dialectical-relational model highlights institutional discourse such as media and policy, while Wodak's discourse-historical approach relies heavily on extensive socio-historical triangulation. Both are less adaptable to oral and musical texts. By contrast, the socio-cognitive model directly connects micro-level linguistic analysis, such as lexicalisation, naming, and description, with macro-level ideological systems.

Accordingly, this framework enables the study to demonstrate how Àyínlá Ọmọwúra's Àpàlà lyrics construct gendered identities and sustain patriarchal ideologies within Yoruba cultural discourse.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with emphasis on lexicalisation as a key discursive strategy (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). Three Àpàlà songs by Àyínlá Ọmọwúra, *Agídí ò sé ló'lé ọkọ*, *Ìsé Ilé*, and *25x40*, were purposively selected for their thematic relevance to gender. The songs were sourced from CDs and YouTube, transcribed from Yoruba and translated into English with attention to cultural nuance, ensuring that proverbs and gendered terms retained their ideological force. Analysis focused on lexical items that construct women's identities and encode patriarchal ideology, guided by CDA's concern with links between textual choices and broader structures of power. By examining how word choice frames women within Yoruba popular music, the study demonstrates how lexical strategies contribute to the reproduction of gender ideologies. Its scope is limited to the selected songs, excluding the artiste's full repertoire or performance contexts.

Data Analysis

Nominals used to represent women as stereotyped threats to morality and marriage

In patriarchal contexts, naming and evaluative language often confine women to restrictive identities shaped by male-centered views. The analysis examines the lexical choices that construct women as stereotyped figures.

Excerpt 1

Agídí ò sẹ́ é lolé ọkọ	Stubbornness cannot sustain a marriage
Iwà ìrèlẹ̀ ló n yókò nínú	Its humility that pacifies husband.
Igídá, èyónú obìnrin	Careless and troublesome woman
Adójú ọkọ rósọ	Who dresses provocatively before husband,
Wọ̀n kíì gbọhun tokọ bá n wí	such women do not heed their husband's counsel
Oṣẹ̀ tó bá jì ná lẹ̀ n wá kiri,	It is only food that is already prepared that you
Oṣẹ̀ akótílẹ̀ tà obìnrin,	desire, <u>Lazy and wasteful woman,</u>
Ẹ wá wò ìyàwó òḍàrán	come and see <u>the criminal wife,</u>
Ò ta pètéesì fowó rodán	who sold a storey-building to buy a mere Odan Tree.
Ìyàwó kẹ̀buyẹ	<u>Extravagant wife</u>

AGÍDÍ Ò SẸ́ É LO ILÉ ỌKỌ

In this excerpt, the use of **nominal groups**, both derogatory titles and kinship titles, functions as a key lexical strategy in reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes. According to Van Dijk's (1998) **socio-cognitive model of CDA**, such choices are not neutral but reflect the mental models and ideologies of the dominant group (men), shaping how women are perceived and treated within society.

In “**ìyàwó òḍàrán**” (**criminal wife**) and “**ìyàwó kẹ̀buyẹ**” (**extravagant wife**), these kinship titles (**ìyàwó** – wife) combined with derogatory epithets (**òḍàrán** – criminal, **kẹ̀buyẹ** – extravagant) reduce women to their marital status while attributing moral and economic failings to them. The wife is constructed not as a partner but as a deviant disrupting household stability, while the husband is exempted from blame (“**ọkọ rẹ̀ ò dàrán**” – *your husband is not guilty*). In “**Èyónú obìnrin**” (**careless and troublesome woman**) and “**òṣẹ̀ akótílẹ̀ tà obìnrin**” (**lazy and wasteful woman**), these epithets portray women as inherently irresponsible and morally weak. By framing the **obìnrin** (woman) in terms of disorder and waste, the texts construct female identity around deviance, legitimizing men's authority as the corrective force. Through labels like **ìyàwó** (wife) and implicit references to kinship, women are stereotyped primarily in relation to men and family roles. Their value is judged by obedience, humility, and economic prudence. Failure in these domains earns them derogatory epithets, reinforcing the patriarchal assumption that women's identity is tied to men's honour and household survival. The repeated negative **lexicalisation of wives/women** reflects **Van Dijk's CDA principle** that ideologies are reproduced through discourse structures. By naming women as *criminal*, *extravagant*, *lazy*, or *troublesome*, the lyrics construct women as threats to social and marital harmony while men emerge as innocent, patient, or corrective figures. This asymmetry naturalises patriarchal dominance by legitimizing male authority and depicting women as perpetual subjects of moral regulation.

Excerpt 2

Ìsẹ̀ ilé nì ó rù wón dẹ́ta	Your lack of home training will bring you to public
Ìyàwó òsì	disgrace,
Èlẹ́jọ wẹ̀wẹ̀.	<u>Useless wife, careless</u>
ISẸ́ ILÉ	

In this excerpt, the nominal groups “**ìyàwó òsì**” (**useless wife**) and “**Èlẹ́jọ wẹ̀wẹ̀**” (**careless talkative**) function as derogatory epithets that project patriarchal stereotypes of women. The kinship title **ìyàwó** (wife) is negatively qualified with **òsì** (useless), reducing the woman's identity to failure in her marital role, while **èlẹ́jọ wẹ̀wẹ̀** portrays her as irresponsible and verbally disruptive,

reinforcing the stereotype of women as lacking discretion. These lexical choices foreground patriarchal ideology by positioning women as morally deficient and socially disruptive, thereby legitimizing male authority as the corrective force and reinforcing the expectation of silence, submission, and domestic responsibility as markers of the “ideal woman.”

Excerpt 3

À ní wí

Ẹ lé.ò gbọ nílẹ orin,

Wọ́n ní sẹlẹyà wọ́n nínú ilé,

Ìyàwó dé,

We keep giving the warning,

yet you refuse to listen in the midst of music,

you persist in your foolishness at home.

The wife is here,

25x40

In this excerpt, the nominal group “**ìyàwó dé**” (the wife is here) is used as a kinship title that carries a derogatory undertone within the context. Rather than denoting respect, *ìyàwó* (wife) is framed as a source of stubbornness and disobedience, someone who disregards warnings and persists in folly. This representation reduces the woman’s identity to her marital role while casting her as a disruptive presence in the home. From Van Dijk’s CDA perspective, such lexicalisation foregrounds patriarchal ideology by constructing the wife as the problematic “other” whose failure to conform legitimises male authority and social correction, reinforcing expectations of obedience and submissiveness as ideal female traits.

Adjectives used to represent the woman as disruptors of social order

In patriarchal discourse, adjectives and descriptors serve as tools for reinforcing gender ideology. Negative qualifiers in song texts portray women as disruptors of harmony and morality, while positioning men as guardians of social order.

Excerpt 4

Ilé onísẹ̀gùn ló ní run’wó sí,

Ìyàwó ọ̀sì, ìyàwó,

Bó o gbóògùn wọlé

Yóó domi.

You waste your money at the herbalist’s place,

Useless wife, useless wife

If you bring charm

into my house

It will be rendered powerless.

Oní bǎn bási,

Kò bára síwájú

Pompous woman,

get away from here.

25x40

Excerpt 5

Kì í sẹ̀wọ̀ nìkan

Ìyàwó aláragbígbóná

Mo tún máa fẹ̀lòmíń o

sínú ilé mi

You are not the only wife,

jealous wife.

I will still take another wife,

into my household,

In the excerpt, women are repeatedly named with **adjectives and nouns** such as *ìyàwó ọ̀sì* (“useless wife”), *oní bǎnbási* (“pompous woman”). These descriptors collectively project women as morally deficient, arrogant, and socially disruptive. By framing the woman as *useless*, and *pompous*, the songs emphasise her incapacity to sustain marriage or contribute positively to the household. Terms like *useless wife* and *pompous woman* extend the negative identity beyond the wife to the mother, suggesting that deviance is intergenerational and natural to women. Such lexicalisation encodes

patriarchal ideology, presenting women as perpetual disruptors of harmony whose value lies in obedience and humility, while men remain absolved as morally sound and authoritative

Ojòwú obinrin

Tó bá tí sù ẹ kó o mí a lẹ

Oṃọ oní wókowòko,

Awọn màrà è.ló kó.ọ nísẹ.owú.

Jealous woman,

If you are tired, you may leave.

Lousy wife

her mothers trained her the craft of jealousy.

ISÉ ILÉ

In this excerpt, adjectives and nouns such as **“jealous wife,” “unfortunate child,” “jealous woman,”** and **“lousy wife”** are used as derogatory epithets that portray women as disruptors of marital peace and social order. These lexical indices foreground patriarchal ideology by reducing women to negative emotional and moral attributes, particularly jealousy, wastefulness, and disobedience. Terms like *jealous wife* and *unfortunate child* extend the negative identity beyond the wife to the daughter and mother, suggesting that deviance is intergenerational and natural to women. Such lexicalisation encodes **patriarchal ideology**, presenting women as perpetual disruptors of harmony whose value lies in obedience and humility, while men remain absolved as morally sound and authoritative. Through Van Dijk’s CDA, such language reflects how patriarchy legitimises male authority, normalises polygamy as a corrective measure against women’s perceived flaws, and extends blame to women’s upbringing, thereby naturalizing their subordination and reinforcing the idea that women are inherently flawed and in need of male control.

Excerpt 6

Ọbẹ.tó bá jì ná lẹ.ń wá kiri,

Ọlẹ akótilẹ tà obinrin,

Ẹ wá wò iyàwó ọḍaràn

Ò ta pètẹ̀ẹ̀sì fowó rọ́dán

It is only food that is already prepared that you

desire, Lazy and wasteful woman,

come and see the criminal wife,

who sold a storey-building to buy a mere OdanTree.

AGÍDÍ Ò SẸ É LO ILÉ OḲO

The choice of adjectives and nouns in the excerpt **“lazy and wasteful woman”** and **“criminal wife”**, is deliberate and ideologically loaded. The adjectives *lazy* and *wasteful* are moral judgments that go beyond mere description, casting the woman as deficient in virtues expected of wives within patriarchal culture, such as industriousness, thrift, and responsibility. The noun *woman* becomes negatively qualified, reducing her identity to deviance from domestic duties. Similarly, the phrase *criminal wife* combines a kinship role (*wife*) with a derogatory epithet (*criminal*), transforming what should be a socially respected position into a marker of disgrace. This lexical strategy not only stigmatises the woman but also frames her as a moral and social threat. Within Van Dijk’s CDA perspective, such lexicalisation reveals the ideological process whereby patriarchy reproduces itself: women are discursively constructed as disorderly when they challenge or fail to embody submissive, disciplined roles, while men are implicitly positioned as moral judges and custodians of order. Thus, the adjectives and nouns function as powerful indices of patriarchal ideology, using language to delegitimise female agency and reassert male dominance.

Metaphors used to objectify and dehumanise women (commodities, animals and danger)

Metaphors are a powerful tool in patriarchal discourse, often used to objectify and dehumanise women by comparing them to commodities, animals, or sources of danger. Such figurative language

strips women of individuality and humanity, reducing them to negative symbols that reinforce male authority and social control.

Excerpt 7

Jejeṛẹ̀ ìyàwó mí a gbó,
Kí í bóḳọ́ dámòràn

cancerous wife, listen,
she doesn't counsel her husband rightly

Ìyàwó omọ́ Ajá,
Ẹ̀ni tó tó_ẹ̀ ló sọ́ fún mí

The wife, the daughter of a bitch,
the one who trained you exposed you to me,

AGÍDÍ Ò SẸ́ É LO ILÉ OKỌ

In the excerpt, the metaphor **“cancerous wife”** frames the woman not as a partner but as a deadly disease, a destructive force that corrodes marriage from within. This dehumanises her by equating her presence to a pathological condition, implying that she is not only useless but also harmful and in need of correction or eradication. Similarly, **“the wife, the daughter of a bitch”** draws on an animal metaphor that associates her lineage with impurity, promiscuity, and worthlessness. By invoking the dog image, the woman is degraded to an animalistic identity that denies her dignity and justifies her subordination. These metaphors foreground patriarchal ideology by presenting women as threats, burdens, or degraded beings whose failure to conform to submissive roles warrants ridicule and control. From Van Dijk's CDA perspective, the choice of such metaphors is not neutral but ideologically charged, legitimising men's dominance by portraying women as inherently flawed and dangerous. In this way, metaphor functions as a lexical index of patriarchy, encoding cultural stereotypes that naturalise women's inferiority and men's authority in both the domestic and social sphere.

Excerpt 8

Ìyàwó dé,

The wife is here,

Omọ́ onígbèsè tó fé.
jẹ́lé run Ẹ̀ní wọ́lé e
wón wọ́lé orò,
Ìvá tó bí í ló ío

the child of the ruinous debtor
whoever marries into such a family walk into trouble, she is
indeed a replica of her mother.

In this excerpt 8, the metaphor **“the child of the ruinous debtor”** objectifies and dehumanises the woman by reducing her identity to inherited debt and ruin. Rather than being viewed as an individual, she is cast as a commodity burdened with liability, implying that marrying her is equivalent to acquiring debt or misfortune. This frames her as economic “danger,” a source of inevitable downfall to any man who takes her as wife. Likewise, the metaphor that she is **“a replica of her mother”** erases individuality by presenting her as a mere reproduction of an already tainted lineage, suggesting that immorality or ruin is hereditary for women. These metaphors foreground patriarchal ideology by shifting blame for social or economic instability onto women and their families, portraying them as corrupt stock that contaminates men's success. Through Van Dijk's CDA lens, such figurative language functions as a lexical index of patriarchy, legitimising male authority by naturalising the belief that women are dangerous inheritances, economic liabilities, and perpetuators of disorder, rather than autonomous human beings. By encoding women as debt and ruin, the discourse devalues them and reinforces their subordination within a patriarchal worldview.

Excerpt 9

Tó bá tí rí ẹlòmíin,
Jagunlabí á fàrigá

Once she sees another woman
'Jagunlabí' will flare up in anger,

ISÉ ILÉ

In this excerpt, the metaphor “**Jagunlabí**” (literally, “born of war” or “child of battle”) constructs the woman as a figure of uncontrollable aggression and danger, aligning her with conflict and chaos rather than peace or domestic stability. Referring to Akinsola as “**Jagunlabí**” (line 27) carries a derogatory connotation. In Yoruba, “**Jagun**” means to fight a war and “**Jagunlabí**” is usually an honorific reserved for warriors and people of admirable character. However, Ayinlá humorously labels any woman who cannot be controlled as “**Jagunlabí**” connoting a “*rascal*.” By equating her jealousy and rivalry with warfare, the metaphor dehumanises her, reducing her identity to a disruptive force that threatens social harmony. This portrayal reinforces patriarchal ideology by suggesting that women are inherently quarrelsome and unstable, thereby justifying male authority as necessary to contain or regulate such tendencies. The metaphor functions as a lexical index that foregrounds gendered stereotypes, naturalising the notion that women embody danger and discord, while men are positioned as the rational stabilisers of order.

Transitivity and Agency representing women as passive recipients of men’s authority

Transitivity and Agency in Critical Discourse Analysis are crucial in exposing how power and ideology are embedded in language. In patriarchal contexts, women are often represented as passive recipients of men’s authority, positioned as subordinates whose identities are tied to their compliance with male dominance. Through Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model, such discourse is seen as a strategy to reproduce patriarchal ideology by naturalizing the subordination of women and legitimizing male dominance.

Excerpt 10

Mò ní wí tó,
Kí ẹ gbóràn sókọ yín lẹnu
Ìyàwó àwùgbó yín yẹn ní pòjù
Sẹ bawọn bàbá a yín láya nílẹ

I am persistent in my warning,
be submissive to your husband,
Wives, your defiance is becoming unbearable,
I suppose your fathers have wives at home

Ohun tí bàbá sọ nǵóṣí
Ìyàwó tó o ló ò gbà
Òhun lẹkọ sẹ ní lù é lójojúmó.
Oṣọ tó sẹyá tó sẹ bàbá,
Tó ní gbó, b̀̀kátà,
Ó sá yẹ ká pón-on lé

What your father once instructed,
Wife, that you completely rejected,
That is why your husband hit you daily.
The husband that plays the mother’s and father’s role,
And who provides for your needs, truly
should be respected.

ISÉ ILÉ

In this excerpt, transitivity patterns clearly position **men as Actors** and **women as Goals**, reinforcing the asymmetrical power relation between genders. The directive “*be submissive to your husband*” frames women as passive recipients of male authority, while the clause “*your husband hit you daily*” assigns the man agency as the doer of action and the woman as the object of punishment. Similarly, metaphors such as the husband “*playing the mother’s and father’s role...*” elevate men as all-

encompassing providers and disciplinarians, while women are reduced to dependents whose existence is defined by compliance or defiance. These representations show how patriarchal ideology is foregrounded in the lexical and grammatical choices: men embody authority, rationality, and provision, while women are constructed as subordinate, passive, and in need of control. Such discourse naturalises male dominance as both moral and social responsibility, while legitimising female subordination as the “norm” within the cultural context.

Excerpt 11

Igídá, èyónú obīnrin

Adójú kọkọ rọsọ

Wọn kǐi gbohun tokọ bá ń wí

Careless and troublesome woman

Who dresses provocatively before husband,

such women do not heed their husband's counsel

Má sọ mí dolóṣì,

Jé.ń rójú gbó.ṭẹbí

Jé.ń rójú gbó.ṭ'orogún ń rẹ o.

Don't turn me into a destitute man

Allow me to care for my family.

Allow me also to provide for your co-wives.

AGÍDÍ Ò SẸ É LO ILÉ OḲO

In the excerpt, the metaphors “careless and troublesome woman” and “a woman who dresses provocatively before her husband) depict women’s agency negatively, portraying them as careless, provocative, and resistant. The line “such women do not heed their husband’s counsel” further casts them as irrational and disobedient. By contrast, the husband in “don’t turn me into a destitute man” and “allow me to care for my family and co-wives” is represented as the rightful Actor of positive processes, provider, protector, authority. Thus, women are shown only as Actors of negative actions while men embody order and responsibility. These choices foreground patriarchal ideology, naturalizing male dominance and female subordination.

Excerpt 12

Iwà yí tí dì bárákú,

Mì ò rọhun tó té,wọn lórùn

nílẹ ayé e wọn.

This behaviour has become an incurable habit,

I have never seen them satisfied

in their life,

Bó o fé,wọn sílé

Won máa jáde,

Mo sorry fún irú wọn,

If you marry them into your home,

they will eventually leave your home.

I pity their kind,

25x40

In the excerpt, the metaphors “this behaviour has become an incurable habit” and “they only destroy households across the world) foreground women’s agency only in destructive, negative terms. Their actions are pathologised as a disease-like habit, positioning them as irredeemably troublesome. Similarly, “if you marry them into your home, they will eventually leave” reduces women to unstable, disloyal figures whose presence threatens household stability. By contrast, the male speaker’s role emerges as rational and evaluative, one who pities their kind but upholds the authority to judge their behaviour. These transitivity choices construct women as Actors of chaos while relegating them to passive subordinates in need of male regulation. The lexical indices here, emphasizing women’s destructive habits and instability, foreground patriarchal ideology, legitimizing male dominance and reinforcing the belief that women’s agency is inherently disruptive unless contained.

Conclusion

The study reveals that Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà's Apàlà music encodes deep-seated patriarchal ideologies through strategic lexical choices that consistently position women as subordinate or disruptive. Women are represented through derogatory names that portray them as threat to morality and marriage, negative adjectives that represents them as disruptors of social order, and metaphors that objectify, dehumanise, or pathologise them, while transitivity patterns restrict their agency to negative actions such as stubbornness, promiscuity, and household destruction. By contrast, men are discursively constructed as providers, disciplinarians, and custodians of order, with agency foregrounded in positive processes of provision, protection, and authority. These linguistic strategies function as lexical indices that sustain and naturalise patriarchal ideology, making male dominance appear normal and legitimate. The study therefore concludes that Yoruba popular music is not merely entertainment but a powerful cultural site where gender ideologies are reproduced, legitimised, and transmitted, reinforcing unequal gender hierarchies within society.

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Discography

- 1) Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà and his Àpàlà group, volume 14:1 *Agídí ò ẹ́ é lo'lé ọkọ*
- 2) Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà and his Àpàlà group, volume 13:2 *Ìsẹ́ Ilé*
- 3) Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà and his Àpàlà group, volume 20:1 *25x40*