

FEMALE CHARACTERS CONTESTING MAASAI TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES AND MATERIALISM IN H.R. OLE KULET'S *BLOSSOMS OF THE SAVANNAH AND DAUGHTER OF MAA*

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines how the Kenyan writer H.R. Ole Kulet portrays female characters vis-à-vis Maasai traditional practices in Blossoms of the Savannah and Daughter of Maa. It proceeds from the premise that characterization plays a pivotal role in depicting the place and role of particular characters in a work of art. For instance, the roles assigned to certain characters in the work of art reflect on their cultural position in the society. It is in this way, the paper examines female characters in the two texts aiming to show how the author portrays cultural conflicts in regard to their positions and roles in the society. From a close reading of the text, it is evident that these characters help to bring out cultural conflicts in the Maasai community. Some of them are either rebelling against traditional cultural practices as they embrace modernity while others are defending the traditional cultural practices as they oppose modernity. This paper contributes useful data on the role of literature in inspiring social consciousness on gender and development issues.*

KEYWORDS: Portrayal, Female Characters, Maasai Traditional Cultural Practices, H.R. Ole Kulet, Blossoms, Savannah, Daughter, Maa

INTRODUCTION

Traditional practices encompass beliefs, values and customs held by a community. Traditional practices among the Maasai are very important because they give people a sense of belonging and identity. Moreover, the traditional Maasai practices help the people to fit in the society. Cultural practices encompass beliefs, customs and values that are held by a community. The Maasai people practice various cultural practices. Among the cultural practices are female circumcision, early marriages, polygamy and engagement. The mentioned cultural practices make the characters who embrace modernity to go through painful encounters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Henry Ole Kulet has made an enormous contribution to Kenyan literature and there are some critical commentaries on his writing. Many critics of Kenyan literature have lauded the author, including Peter Mbugua (2004), Evan Mwangi (1999, 2001), Francis Imbuga (1993) and David

Dorsey (1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1992d). This section undertakes a review of related literature based on the objectives of the study.

Evan Mwangi, in an article *Whose House has it Become* (1999) makes insights into the Maasai social transformation process in *Bandits of Kibi*. Despite focusing on the *Bandits of Kibi*, the article provided pertinent comments on the broad “Kuletian” canon. In the article, Mwangi notes: “Exile and social uncertainty in the turbulence of history are major themes of Kulet’s fiction” (p. 13). In addition, regarding *Moran no More*, Mwangi mourns the loss of the pre-colonial tranquillity and the emergence of corrupt modernity while celebrating the world of new values to which the narrator has to adjust in order to forge a new identity” (Mwangi, 1999, p. 15). All the characters in the novel, except Romian’s (the narrator’s) grandfather, are unapologetic about the loss of Maasai cultural heritage. This study focused on Maasai characters in Ole Kulet’s *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Daughter of Maa*.

In *I to I in the Narrative Mirror: Fictional Autobiography and the Problem of Maasai identity in Henry Ole Kulet’s writing*, Mwangi (2001) sheds light on the problem of Maasai identity, another major concern in postcolonial discourse. The critic has discussed at length the consequences of formal education, which is “foreign” to the traditional Maasai way of life. Mwangi brings out its alienating and emasculating features. This study examined education as portrayed in Ole Kulet’s *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Daughter of Maa*.

Mbugua (2004) observes that Ole Kulet’s writings are inspired by contemporary issues in his community. Therefore, as a writer who reflects on a postcolonial Kenya, Ole Kulet is most likely to address post-independence issues arising from his society (Mbugua, 2004, p. 37). Ole Kulet has addressed the uncertainty in which his community finds itself in an attempt to embrace modernity while at the same time trying to uphold its traditions leading to a double identity. In the course of this study, we looked into the question of materialism through a critical analysis of characters in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Daughter of Maa* who embrace modernity and at the same time desire to uphold their culture.

Mbugua (2004) further states that traditional Maasai customs privilege men and in the process suppress women (p. 37). According to Mbugua, Maasai women are rendered voiceless and inconsequential in the face of their traditional culture. This is in agreement with Spivak (1996) who observes that:

Women in many societies have been relegated to the position of the ‘Other’; marginalised and in a metaphorical sense, ‘colonised’, forced to pursue guerrilla warfare against imperial domination from positions deeply embedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from, that imperialism (p. 1).

In using the above observation, Mbugua (2004) sought to demonstrate how the modern woman strives to liberate herself from victimisation by the society that is governed by oppressive patriarchal ideologies. In this regard, and basing on Mbugua’s illumination, the study paid special attention to Kulet’s portrayal of Maasai girl characters who try to liberate themselves from the male-dominated Maasai culture after acquiring formal education.

Statement of the Problem

The Maasai are widely viewed as a community that resists foreign infiltrations to their traditional cultural practices. They are considered to show very little positive response to the processes of modernity and social transformation, and that whatever changes that occur among

the Maasai is peculiar to a community that strictly upholds its traditional heritage while at the same time trying to embrace aspects of modernity. Therefore, using *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Daughter of Maa*, the study sought to examine Ole Kulet's treatment of uncertainties, tensions and conflicts that arise from the interaction between traditional Maasai culture and other forces of modernity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was qualitative in nature whereby the researcher undertook a critical analysis of Ole Kulet's two selected novels. For purposes of the study, the researcher sampled two of Ole Kulet's texts, namely *Blossoms of the Savannah* (2008) and *Daughter of Maa* (1990). The two were selected from among Ole Kulet's latest works on the basis that they reflect challenges and conflicts that arise from modern and urban influences. Data was collected through a close reading of these texts. The study engaged descriptions, analysis and relevant literary arguments in order to present the data. The analyses of research texts was done with the intention of coming up with material information for the study. The tenets of the postcolonial literary theory were engaged as we examined the data in line with the objectives that guided this study. In the presentation of findings, for easy reference, the two texts are indicated using the abbreviations BOS for *Blossoms of the Savannah* and DOM for *Daughter of Maa*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Brief Description of Female Characters in *Blossoms of the Savannah*

Female characters in *Blossoms of the Savannah* are Taiyo, Resian, Minik ene Nkoitoi and Nabaru. Taiyo is Ole Kaelo's eldest daughter and the elder sister to Resian. Taiyo is twenty years old. She is brought up in a town setting. Therefore, she does not value the Maasai traditional practices. Taiyo is also portrayed as an ambitious person since she is committed to her mission in life. Additionally, she has just completed secondary education and she is looking forward to join University.

Resian is Ole Kaelo's youngest daughter and Taiyo's sister. Just like Taiyo, she has also grown up in a town setting. When we are introduced to her in the novel, Resian has also completed secondary education and she is looking forward to join a University. Resian gets protection from her sister Taiyo who acts as her mentor. She is also ambitious and does not want to adhere to the traditional Maasai practices.

Mama Milanoi is Ole Kaelo's wife and a mother to Taiyo and Resian. She is in her early thirties. Mama Milanoi has gone through the Maasai cultural practice of female circumcision. While in Nakuru, Mama Milanoi does not adhere to the traditional practice of female circumcision but later when she relocates to Nasila, Mama Milanoi is forced by the Nasila culture to have her two daughters circumcised and thereafter married off.

Nabaru is a nurse. Her work is majorly to nurse the girls who are circumcised. When Resian is attacked by Olarinkoi, it is Nabaru who is called upon to nurse her so that she can get well in order to be circumcised. Nabaru has undergone circumcision but she does not see its need in

the modern times. No wonder she assists Resian to run away from the planned move by Olarinkoi's mother of having her circumcised.

Minik is a village crusader who is against the Maa cultural practices namely: female circumcision and early marriages. Minik has undergone the traditional rite of female circumcision though she is against the practice. Minik is an enlightened woman who has studied veterinary medicine in Makerere University. The experience that she had passed through makes her to start a firm of rescuing girls who are forced to be circumcised and be married off.

Anna Nalangu is Ole Rana's daughter. She is an educated woman who has completed her studies and is currently educating women in the village educating women. Nalangu is a woman who is enlightened and does not adhere to the logic that the Maa men hold that a woman should not be respected. She is out to prove men wrong because women are also human beings who need to be respected.

Seleina Mugie is Ole Mugie's daughter. Seleina represents women who are not enlightened and must adhere to Maasai cultural practices. When the novel unfolds, we see Seleina getting engaged to Joseph Malon. She is forced to go through ups and downs as she tries to stick to Maasai traditions.

Portrayal Maasai traditional cultural practices

Portrayal of Female Circumcision

In many African cultures, circumcision is regarded as the sacrament which converts a child into an adult. Therefore, undergoing the ritual implies that one is ready for adulthood. Circumcision is required for both males and females since it prepares them to the adult life. Female circumcision is the removal of the prepuce or the hood of the clitoris. Among the Maasai, female circumcision is a very important rite since it facilitates their marriage. The circumcision ritual for girls is not very elaborate and it takes place indoors.

Some of the female characters in *Blossoms of the Savannah* have staged a rebellion against female circumcision. Taiyo is one of the female characters who is torn between obeying the Maasai cultural practices or follow her own wishes in life. The community demands that all girls be initiated into womanhood through the traditional rite of passage – circumcision after which the initiates graduate to join the institution of womanhood. Taiyo finds herself at the crossroads as she contemplates the possibility of being circumcised and in the process abandon her education. Eventually, she decides to rebel by skipping the rite in order to proceed with education.

The urge to pursue education makes Taiyo overwhelmed. During a discussion with Resian on uncircumcised women, Taiyo comments that her body belongs to her (Taiyo). Resian is equally assertive by declaring that she will not allow anybody to force her to undergo female circumcision. For instance, Resian finds herself in the same predicament as Taiyo. Resian is more deeply attached to school and town life than to the Nasila's lifestyle that entails female circumcision. Resian joins Taiyo in deserting the rite by denouncing it. By doing so, Resian is inspired by Minik's character of being firm and courageous. Furthermore, she opposes the rite without caring whether in doing so she will rub the men who practice the culture the wrong way. On the other hand, Resian is against many Nasila women who would not dare go against the Nasila oppressive cultural practices. Thus, both Resian and Taiyo want to join Minik soon

so that: “Nasila can have the Kaelo’s daughters to reckon with” (BOS, p. 200). In addition, Taiyo and Resian are in agreement that the fire Minik was spearheading would inevitably eradicate all the oppressive edicts and still leave the Nasila culture intact. According to Taiyo and Resian, they are determined to skip the rite even if the clansmen can force their father to embrace it. Their decision not to follow the dictates of the community does not augur well especially with the senior community members who view the decision as a betrayal of their traditional cultural practices.

The decision by the two girls not to undergo circumcision makes Taiyo’s mother to be inconsolable. Ole Kaelo is equally perturbed when he learns that his two daughters have refused to be circumcised as demanded by the Nasila culture. The Nasila culture demands that a woman is circumcised in time and if a woman is not circumcised then the act must be done to her despite the age. Therefore, both Ole Kaelo and his wife have to embrace tradition and reality by having their daughters circumcised. Both parents fear how the community will take the decision of their daughters not to be circumcised and at the same time, they fear how they will be viewed in the community.

The fear that both parents have is confirmed when Olarinkoi’s mother challenges Resian’s womanliness. Olarinkoi’s mother is aware that Ole Kaelo did not circumcise Resian in time as the tradition demands. Therefore, Olarinkoi’s mother reprimands Resian thus: “What were you guarding so tenaciously and valiantly when I am told you are not yet a woman?” (BOS, p. 227). This reproach illustrates Olarinkoi’s mother’s perception of Resian: “Resian is not a Maasai woman because she is not circumcised” (BOS, p. 227). Furthermore, she goes ahead to refer to her as a child, implying that she fails to qualify as a Maasai because she is not circumcised. Olarinkoi’s mother, therefore, insists that Resian should be circumcised.

Resian is conscious that female circumcision should be done away with. She asks: “But suppose all the women said no to the delectable culture? What would men do? Nothing! I am proud to be among the uncircumcised and I would not trade my position for anything” (p. 283). Worse still, Taiyo considers female circumcision as a bad ritual and for her it will take long before her conscience reconciles with what happened to her physically, for the damage that was done to her mind was indelibly printed on her memory.

Paradoxically, Nabaru the nurse finds fault with the women of Nasila. Olarinkoi’s mother’s hope of having Resian get circumcised and be later married off to her son is dashed when Nabaru accepts to assist Resian to run away. Such an action would mean Nabaru’s estrangement from the Maasai community. According to Nabaru, women are to be blamed because they are the perpetrators of the obnoxious and repugnant tradition of female circumcision. She therefore advocates that women must be enlightened in order to stop the traditional act.

Minik’s fight against female circumcision and early marriages can be attributed to the foreign formal education that she has been exposed to. Even though Minik went through the rite of female circumcision, she does not want other female characters to undergo the same rite. Nabaru’s perspective towards female circumcision is the same as Minik’s. Minik says: “Circumcision does not add any value to the lives of its young victims” (BOS, p. 268). Hence, the two, Minik and Nabaru, conclude that female circumcision traumatises girls and it is hazardous to their health.

Polygamy and Arranged Marriages

Polygamy is a situation where a man marries more than one wife. One of the leading contributions to polygamy among the Maasai is arranged marriages. Among the Maasai, a man is allowed to marry as many wives as possible provided one is rich. Furthermore, the Maasai believe that children are a source of wealth and the only way to get many children is by practicing polygamy.

In the two selected texts, there are instances of polygamy and arranged marriages. For instance, in *Blossoms of the Savannah*, Ole Kaelo and his wife make plans so that Resian can get married to Oloisudori as an additional wife. Contrary to their expectations, Resian goes against their wish by refusing the offer of getting married. The formal education that Resian has acquired makes her to go against the treasured Maasai cultural practice. This is attested by her contempt towards Oloisudori. She says: “What an ill-mannered devil this man is!” (BOS, p. 94). Thus, this is unlike her mother, Mama Milanoi who warns her daughter against using abusive language that may annoy her father. Moreover, Mama Milanoi is hurt by Resian’s remarks because she does not respect Oloisudori. Resian’s behaviour would not only entail her loss of identity, which is based on Maasai culture and kinships, but an uprootment from the society.

Ole Kaelo has no option but to give out Resian to Oloisudori. Ole Kaelo insists on giving out Resian in order to safeguard the business and the house as part of the agreement. On the contrary, the idea angers Ole Kaelo to the point that he is disturbed to think that circumstances can force him to hand any of his daughters to a man who is not of their choice.

Worse still, there is a moment of disagreement by Mama Milanoi who feels offended; for she was also forced to get married to Ole Kaelo. This implies that their marriage was not out of love. Hence, Mama Milanoi wonders how a person of her age can be her son-in-law. According to her, the culture has become moribund, useless and impotent. Mama Milanoi goes ahead to challenge the Nasila practices. She says:

Nasila River has been there as far back as Nasila people can remember. It has sustained the life of man and beast from time immemorial. But Nasila water is no longer the water Mama Milanoi and her friends scooped up with their hands and drank happily to quench their thirst after a long hot day in the fields (BOS, p. 118). Mama Milanoi’s perspective towards the Nasila cultural practices is a show of her disapproval to them for she equates the cherished tradition of planned marriages and forced marriages to pollution. It is evident that Resian is enlightened. When Ole Kaelo informs Resian that she should remain home and serve Oloisudori, she declines. Instead she blames her father for the tension that continues to grip their home ever since they relocated to Nasila. Resian does not understand the reason of remaining at home alone in the name of serving visitors.

Throughout the second half of the novel, both Taiyo and Resian have decided to liberate themselves from a male-dominated culture that privileges men and in the process, suppresses women. The two girls want to show Oloisudori that they are young modern women who have their pride, self-respect and self-esteem: “They want Oloisudori to know that they are not rudderless objects drifting in the sea without direction” (BOS, p. 200). Both Taiyo and Resian have their aims and projections that could only be enhanced by the lofty ideas they hold and the desire for higher learning at the University and career development.

The two protagonists – Resian and Taiyo – are a clear embodiment of the encroachment of foreign cultures among the Maasai. They are firmly against the Maasai traditions, and their identity is purely ‘foreign’. Therefore, to them, it is an insult to their intelligence, dignity and integrity to think that mere material things such as gifts that Oloisudori gave them would sway them from the goals they had already set for themselves. Thus, the two girls represent educated and enlightened women who cannot be used as objects.

Resian becomes furious when it dawns on her that she has been sold off. She is shocked when she learns that she was going to be literally Oloisudori’s slave. As Resian gets more enticed by obtaining the University education, her affiliation towards marriage weakens while her allegiance to school strengthens. This could be explained when Resian becomes defiant and abusive. Her feelings are articulated thus: “I’d rather die than get married to a monster, who is an Ol-ushuushi like Oloisudori” (BOS, p. 214). Resian’s quest to save herself is an indication of abandoning a cherished Nasila culture of polygamy and early planned marriage.

Taiyo is equally against the Nasila culture of polygamy and planned marriages. Her fight can be attributed to the foreign formal education that she has been exposed to. The fact that Taiyo does not want to embrace the Nasila culture indicates her displacement from her ancestral roots. Her dislocation from the Maasai community is magnified when she compares Nasila culture to three blind mice who she thinks do not seem to know that the world is changing. The three blind mice in this regard allude to

The witches (enkasakutoni) who threaten to curse women who are not circumcised ‘intoiye- nemengalana’ and ensure they did not get husbands nor children; the mid wife (enkaitoyoni) who threatens to spy on the young women as they give status altered there and then; and the dreaded circumciser (Enkamuratani), who will never tire of wielding her razor-sharp blade menacingly (BOS, p. 156).

In *Daughter of Maa*, men are also driven by material gains. For instance, the men who want to marry Nalangu are doing so because they are rich. Ole Mugie wants to marry Nalangu because he is rich and nothing can stop him from getting Nalangu.

Daughter of Maa and *Blossoms of the Savannah* are Ole Kulet’s novels that portray change in the Maasai cultural practices as we applaud the emerging status of women. The issues handled in the novels under study are generic: polygamy, arranged marriages between two families rather than two individuals, and the expanding roles for women in employment and family decision-making.

The Maasai community practices arranged marriages and polygamy. This is seen at the beginning of the novel *Daughter of Maa* when villagers of Maa gather in Ole Mugie’s homestead to witness the engagement between Joseph Malon and Seleina Mugie. The elders of Maa make a bond that should stay. Therefore, when Malon comes up with the suggestion of marrying a girl of his choice, the elders object terming, the act as an abomination. Furthermore, during the same occasion, the Maa people come in droves in specific dresses. This is evident: “When old men come draped in their best new blankets” (DOA, p. 1), their appearance is also unique. This is seen: “When visitors come with their heads clean shaved and fly whisks flipping from shoulder to shoulder” (DOA, p. 1). Maa women are, therefore, perturbed because they think Maa men are putting on blankets to woo Nalangu.

In *Daughter of Maa*, polygamy is prominent. To some extent a man is allowed to marry when he grows old so that a man can get a woman to take care of him. Secondly, men marry additional wives when their girls are married off, and, therefore, they have enough wealth. For instance, Ole Mugie wants to go for the second wife. Ole Mugie feels that he is the right person to marry Anna Nalangu because of his wealth. This is evident when he says: “The whole of Maa village will then know that Ole Mugie is the original one who once astonished the entire Maa when he married Nalotuesha. Hence, Mugie wants to prove his might by going for Nalangu, a woman who is admired by many men.

Anna Nalangu is an example of an enlightened woman who does not want to entertain the Maa men. The Maa culture permits a man to have as many wives as possible. Anna Nalangu is therefore seen by Maa women as a threat to their husbands. Apart from being enlightened, Nalangu is also a custodian of the traditions. This is evident when she goes to the bush with Ododalu to be shown a tree that flowers to indicate the coming rain; after the visit, Ngasharr is jealous for he thinks Ododalu has won the heart of Nalangu. From Ngasharr’s behaviour, it’s evident that he wants to add another wife.

The elders of Maa usually safeguard their tradition. This is evident when Malon suggests breaking the son-in-law engagement and marrying a girl of his choice. The elders had to come in very fast and save the situation. Thus, they advised Malon to marry Seleina and take her away to his father’s home and hurry to marry Nalangu and stay with her at his government resident.

Nalotuesha is equally perturbed when she learns that Malon is no longer in love with her daughter. She is therefore determined to save the marriage between her daughter and Malon. She goes to Olodalu’s wife to persuade her to accept Nalangu as a co-wife so that Seleina can have an easy time to get married to Malon. Nevertheless, Nalotuesha is determined to safeguard the son-in-law engagement. This is evident when she further goes to Nariku-Nkera’s home to persuade her husband to marry Nalangu. Nariku-Nkera objects and Nalotuesha’s response proves that polygamy is evident thus, “Since when did women protest when their husbands wanted to marry” (DOA, p. 72). Nalotuesha’s character shows her as a determined character that is out to safeguard her daughters’ marriage.

Even though Ole Mugie is a Maasai elder who is esteemed for his wealth, he is willing to marry Nalangu. He goes to Ole Rana’s home to ask for permission to marry Nalangu. Ole Rana is a clear representation of modern parents who give their daughters a chance to choose their partners. He represents a liberal parent. Thus, he gives Malon and Mugie a chance to talk and agree with Nalangu. Ole Rana goes against the tradition by allowing her daughter to choose a marriage partner.

Anna Nalangu represents women who are not only educated but also enlightened. Hence, when she learns that she had been mistaken both by the Maa women and men; she decides to go to Nalotuesha’s home to ask why she was misunderstood. To her surprise, Nalotuesha becomes furious. This is evident when she remembers the day her husband abused her after she had commented on him wanting to marry Nalangu. Nalotuesha’s nostalgia clearly indicates that women do not have a say in a male dominated Nasila culture.

In order to liberate herself from a male dominated culture, Nalangu fights back. In anger and desperation, Nalangu reaches for the bucket full of water and empties the contents over the head of Malon. Paradoxically, when she was attacking Malon, her supposed father-in-law was

watching. The act of Nalangu fighting a man is against the Maa customs. Thus, she represents the girls who are enlightened and brave.

The protagonist's action of disowning Joseph Malon is a clear indication that women are supposed to be dignified. Women who do not trust Nalangu ought to know that she is a faithful educated woman who is not interested in their husbands. While reacting to Lanto and Malon, Nalangu says, "you both stand aside and view all women with a mocking detachment that shows they are ornaments to be admired, desired and possessed" (DOA, p. 142). According to Nalangu, these are some of the prejudiced attitudes that Maasai men hold towards women. Thus, the protagonist wants to enlighten other women to fight for their rights.

In order to abide by the Maa culture, women undergo torture. Seleina is not an exemption for she had to persevere in order to get married to Malon. Seleina is equally perturbed. She feels lonely and discouraged simply because Malon is thinking of Anna Nalangu. Seleina represents women who are not enlightened and have to depend fully on men to decide their destinies.

Contesting Materialism in the Maasai Culture

Those who champion the fight against female circumcision argue that materialism is the driving force in the society. For instance, Ole Kaelo's plan to have Resian get married to Olosudori is because of material gain. The only way Ole Kaelo can be sure of the safety of his business and house is to give out Resian.

Resian and Taiyo represent the girls who are enlightened. Thus, they are against the Nasila oppressive culture. When Oloisudori comes with expensive gifts during his visit to Ole Kaelo's home, his aim is to lure Resian to accept the offer of getting married to him. But both Resian and Taiyo are against the logic that gifts can sway them from the goals they have already set for themselves.

Oloisudori's offer to take around Ole Kaelo and his wife to Milimani residence, where he was constructing a story building for Resian was indicated to show Ole Kaelo and his wife that their daughter was going to be in safe hands. However, both Ole Kaelo and Mama Milanoi become disturbed simply because their previous stay in town made them to feel guilty to hand their daughter to a man who is not of her choice. In addition, Ole Mugie thinks that he can easily marry Nalangu simply because he is rich. He says: "The whole of Maa village will then know that Ole Mugie is the original one who once astonished the entire Maa when he married Nalotuesha" (DOA, p. 25). This reproach reflects Ole Mugie as a powerful man but to the contrary, Ole Rana does not respect his wealth and mighty but instead advises him to go and speak to Nalangu so that they can agree.

Worse still, when Taiyo and Resian are having a party, Oloisudori comes when he is well-armed. He shows his pride by abusing Minik. According to him, Minik is a woman who has no control over Resian. The fact that Minik outsmarts Oloisudori and his men is a clear indication that women are enlightened. However, not all Maasai practices are bad. For instance, the Maa culture admits and welcomes those who have been away for long. Parsime, Ole Kaelo and his family are welcomed in the 'Imolelian' (community). The communal aspect is evident when Nasila people come together to "offer blessings for his family's well-being" (DOA, p. 51). Welcoming visitors is a way of appreciating those who have been away for long and induct them into Nasila community.

Despite staying in town, Ole Kaelo appreciates Maasai traditional practices. Ole Kaelo tells his wife to teach her daughters their roles as the Nasila tradition demands. He says: “Start counselling the girls to understand their roles” (DOA, p. 62). This is a clear indication that Ole Kaelo has both the traditional traits and the “foreign” traits thus bringing fourth hybrid. Moreover, in *Daughter of Maa*, we see men and women gathering in Ole Mugie’s home to witness the engagement of his daughter. Moreover, when love between Malon and Seleina strains, the villagers come in ready to assist.

Traditional naming creates a sense of belonging for every Maasai child. While the names ascribed are engendered with a responsibility of perpetuating the family’s identity to posterity, Taiyo, Resian and Minik names are anchored in the ancestral roots. The names given to characters in the two selected novels echo the value that the Maa people place on the names. However, baptism which is its European counterpart is meant to mark out the individual’s acquisition of a Christian identity, which is a “foreign” phenomenon. Therefore, Anna Nalangu and Seleina Mugie have names that point out to their European heritage and their African ancestry. Their names indicate their hybrid identity.

CONCLUSION

The endeavoured to discuss cultural conflicts as portrayed in Ole Kulet’s works focusing on his two selected novels: *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Daughter of Maa*. The point of departure of the study was the need to highlight the various perspectives from which the world has perceived the Maasai. It emerged that the Maasai have, on the one hand, been perceived as a glorious people, who embody the authentic image of Kenyans. On the other hand, they have been perceived as “backward” because of their allegiance to their traditions. However, our prime concern was in examining cultural conflicts after the interaction between the indigenous Maasai culture and Western culture.

Ole Kulet grapples with the issue of female circumcision as one of the cultural practice among Maasai community. As one of the objectives of our study, we depicted that various characters have different perceptions towards female circumcision. It is clear from the study that an enlightened character such as Resian who has not undergone female circumcision as is required by the Maasai culture. Resian risks being isolated and chances of finding Maasai spouses are reduced to almost nil while their status in the society is always that of a child. We are informed that Taiyo and Resian face opposition and rejection in the process of embracing modernity and education. Besides rebelling against circumcision, Taiyo and Resian also rebel against polygamy and arranged marriages. Resian objects to her arranged marriage to Oloisudori and rejects the presents that she was given by him.

The women characters are not only on the verge of womanhood but also torn between their personal ambitions and the humiliating duty to the Maasai tradition. In pursuit of their delicate and elusive social-economic and cultural empowerment, the male characters send female characters into a flat-spin labyrinth from which they have to struggle to wriggle out. The women characters undergo excruciatingly painful steps to victory.

The study explored tensions and cultural conflicts among the Maasai as portrayed in Ole Kulet’s fictional works with a particular focus on *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Daughter of Maa*. We recommend that another study be done focusing on cultural aspects in Ole Kulet’s

other fictional works that have not be examined in this study to establish his treatment of the same themes in his other works. We limited the current study on the tensions, uncertainties and cultural conflicts among the Maasai that result from contact with other cultures. We explored how education and foreign cultures have affected the Maasai way of life. We recommend that a similar study be carried out focusing on the works of other Kenyan writers from different communities.

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