IMAGES OF WOMEN IN
AFRICAN ORAL LITERATURE:
A CASE OF GIKUYU AND SWAHILI PROVERBS.

BY

CATHERINE MWIHAKI NDUNGO

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
AT KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

DECEMBER 1998.
DECLARATION

This thesis is my own original work. It has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

CANDIDATE:  

CATHERINE MWIHAKI NDUNGO

Date: 21/12/98

This thesis has been submitted with our approval as University Supervisors.

SUPERVISORS

Prof. KITULA KING'EI  

Date 21 December, 1998

Prof. IRERI MBAABU  

Date 21 December, 1998
DEDICATION

FOR

MY DAUGHTER

BESSIE ANGELA KABURA

AND

ALL THE WOMEN

WHO HAVE SUFFERED

UNDER THE YOKE

OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFINITION OF TERMS</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIKUYU GLOSSARY</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWAHILI GLOSSARY</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Area of study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The Gikuyu People</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 The Swahili people</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Statement of the problem</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Justification of the study</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Scope and limitations</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Aims and objectives</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Hypotheses</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Literature Review</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11 Methodology</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12 Conclusion</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 2: THE ROLE OF PROVERBS AMONG THE SWAHILI AND THE GIKUYU

2.1. Introduction 66
2.2. The Role of Proverbs in Gikuyu and Swahili Communities 77
2.3. Classification of Proverbs 91
2.4. Conclusion 98

CHAPTER 3: GIKUYU PROVERBS AND THE IMAGES OF WOMEN

3.1. Introduction 99
3.2. The image of a Woman as a Wife 105
3.3. The image of a Woman as a Mother 107
3.4. The Image of a Woman as an Economic Asset 125
3.5. The Image of a Woman as Stubborn, Destructive and Dangerous 139
3.6. The Image of Woman as Unreliable and Unpredictable 148
3.7. The Image of a Woman as Inferior and Weaker sex 155
3.8. Conclusion 170
CHAPTER 4: IMAGES OF WOMEN IN SWAHILI PROVERBS

4.1. Introduction 173
4.2. The Woman as an Economic Dependant 184
4.3. The Image of a Woman as a Wife 189
4.4. The Image of a Woman as a Mother 202
4.5. Conclusion 216

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary 228
5.2 Conclusions 244
5.3 Findings and Contributions of the Study 247
5.4. Recommendations 248

REFERENCES 250

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - List of Gikuyu Proverbs 278
APPENDIX B - List of Swahili Proverbs 396
APPENDIX C - Map showing Provinces of Kenya 310
APPENDIX D - Map of Central Province 311
APPENDIX E - Map of Coast Province 312
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has enjoyed immense contributions from many people who assisted me in one way or another during its various stages. It is impossible to name all of them.

First and foremost I wish to convey my special gratitude and appreciation to my supervisors Prof. Ireri Mbaabu and Prof. Kitula King'ei who tirelessly read my work and made valuable suggestions which have been instrumental to the final version of this work.

I note with appreciation the assistance from Sheikh Nabhany, Mohamed Karama, Asla Omar, Githinji Wainaina, Grace Wanjiru Kamau and Beatrice Njeri Mwangi who gave insightful suggestions during the collection and interpretation of the Swahili and Gikuyu proverbs.

I wish also to acknowledge the support of many colleagues and friends from the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University and Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) whose support and input shaped my ideas on the subject of the study.

I cannot forget to thank my parents who sent me to school and have continuously urged me to pursue my academic aspirations to the uttermost level.

My thanks also go to the Organisation of Social Science Research for Eastern Africa (OSSREA) and AAWORD whose research grants enhanced my interest in Oral Literature research. Similarly, I wish to extend my deep
appreciation to DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) whose financial support enabled me to collect data for this work.

I very much sincerely thank my husband Gikonyo Ndungo, my children Ndungo, Githinji, and Kabura whose moral support and encouragement have kept me inspired to complete this work.

I also wish to thank Mercy Murage and John Mulwa who keyed in this work with a lot of patience and dedication.

Above all, I thank God Almighty for I have been able to do everything through Him for He has been and remains my strength.
DEFINITION OF TERMS

Culture: This refers to social behaviour patterns, beliefs, arts, institutions and ways of doing things which are characteristic of a particular group of people.

Feminism: This refers to social movements that seek to change the traditional role and image of women to end sexism and attain for women equal rights with men.

Feminist: This refers to a person who identifies with principles and aims of broad feminist movement which works for women to have equal rights with men.

Gender: This is a set of qualities and behaviours expected from a female or a male by their society.

Gender oppression: This means the undervaluing of what is seen as feminine.

Gender subordination: This is a social system in which people are socialised to accepting sets of beliefs which hold that women are inferior to men. The power relations attached to these ideas give men more power than women in society.

Myth: Old traditional study concerning supernatural beliefs giving expression to early beliefs, aspirations and perceptions of people (Waita 1996).

Oppression: A historical and structurally institutionalised system of rights where one group benefit at the expense of another.

Oral Literature: All the creative works of Human kind which uses the spoken word as their mode of communication.
Patriarchy:
This is a social system which is based on beliefs of men's superiority and which gives men a major decision making power.

Proverbs:
Metaphorical statements that summarise a cultural context, event, happening or experience and is accepted as truth.

Sexual division of labour:
This means the way work is allocated and valued according to whether it is performed by women or men.

Socialisation:
This means that people are taught to accept and perform the roles and functions that the society gives to them. Men and women are socialised into accepting different gender roles from birth.

Stereotypes:
Stereotyping refers to prejudices and fears about certain social groupings usually seen as inferior to the dominant group. Individuals are judged according to their group identity.

Subordination:
Subordination means being placed below or ranked in an inferior position to something else or being subject to the control or authority of another.

Subordination of women:
Women are placed in a position in society which is consistently inferior to the position of men. This is justified by theories of biological difference.

Women's oppression:
Women's oppression is the experience women have of gender oppression as a system of domination.
GIKUYU GLOSSARY

Ahamaki: Rulers.
Gachohi ga guckia muiritu kwa ithe: Beer to return a newly married woman to her parents.
Gaka: A small (insignificant) woman.
Gicokio: Divorced woman (reject).
Gitiiro: Group dance for women and men where one group challenges the other to get up and dance.
Kenda muyuiru: 'nine' full literary means ten.
Mbari: Clan.
Mbimbi cia mburi: Goats droppings.
Mwene Nyaga: God.
Nyumba: Household.
Thaata: Barren person.
Thimo: Proverbs.
The following are the Swahili words most frequently used in this thesis.

Akili: Intelligence.
Buibui: Outer black robe worn by Muslim women which covers from head to foot.
Chuo (pl Vyuo): School.
Ilimu (Elimu): Education.
Kadhi (pl makadhi): Muslim judge of personal law.
Kungwi (pl makungwi): Woman who initiates young girls at puberty; the title of the middle rank among makungwi.
Madarasa: More advanced religious class for students who have completed basic koranic school.
Mahari: Bridewealth.
Methali: Proverbs.
Mji (pl miji): town, tribe.
Mwalimu (pl Walimu): Teacher.
Muungwana (pl waungwana): A person of free birth without slave decent in the patriliny, well bred person.
Mwanaharamu (pl wanaharamu): Illegitimate child.
Nyumba: House hold.
Unyago: Puberty initiation institution.
Ukoo: Clan.
Sharia: Statutory law.
Talaka tatu: Literary means three divorces. According to Islamic law, for divorce to be ratified it must be pronounced three times.
ABSTRACT

This study was to examine critically the portrayal of women in selected Gikuyu and Swahili Proverbs. The aim was to describe the images of women that emanate from the selected proverbs. The research concern arose out of the realisation that gender relations and attitudes are important in understanding society. The findings of the study have shed light on the societal attitudes towards women.

A content analysis of one hundred and fifty three Gikuyu proverbs and one hundred and twenty seven Swahili proverbs collected from published and oral sources in the Kenyan Coast and Central provinces reveal that women have diverse and ambivalent images. The images were derived from both literal and underlying levels of meaning of the proverbs.

The study shows that women as mothers in both Gikuyu and Swahili societies are portrayed positively in their roles as rearers, teachers and role models of their children. The image of a mother borders on idolisation.

However women in general and wives in particular, are portrayed negatively in both Gikuyu and Swahili societies especially with regard to their personalities. Women are generally depicted as treacherous, unreliable, unintelligent, dependent and lacking in vision and wisdom.

According to the feminist literary theory which was
used as a guide in the analysis of the data in this study, the images emanating from the proverbs are a reflection of the societal attitudes towards women in the two communities as literature is a vehicle of cultural philosophy. The study concludes that, for the two communities to portray women positively as mothers and generally negatively, there must be a good reason. It could be an indication that women as a category threaten the male domain. It needs to be established why women are perceived negatively and how the negative image translates in real life situations.
CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives an introduction to the study; in particular, background information on the Gikuyu and Swahili communities. It also offers comments on the aims and objectives of the study and the rationale as well as the method used in data collection and analysis. The problems encountered by the researcher in the course of the study are also discussed.

It is widely accepted fact that works of art including literature reflect the social structures of the societies from which they emanate. Gender issues and relations have been focused on throughout history. Gallagher (1981) for example, notes that the issue of woman’s position in society has preoccupied philosopher’s social commentators and creative writers throughout history. This may be illustrated by a number of studies carried out to establish the root of gender disparities, such as Lakoff (1973), Ngugi (1975), Mugo (1975), Chesaina (1994) and Kabira (1994). From these and other studies, several factors have been cited as having played a leading role in giving women the stereotype images they have in many societies in the world. Factors like education, (Riria 1984) cultural attitudes, (Mugo 1975) and patriarchy, (Engels 1844) have
been highlighted as having contributed to the formulation of negative images of women that many societies have.

This study attempted to carry out a comparative study of the images of women in Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs. Both Swahili and Gikuyu are Bantu language groups. The word Bantu was first used by Bleek (1862) to refer to languages, which had a common historical origin. This word was used to classify languages which had several similarities in terms of their phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and Lexis.

Like in other communities literature is a crucial tool in shaping social life among the Swahili and the Agikuyu. Society is a manifestation of culture which encompasses all agents of socialisation such as folklore, religion, rites of passage and all other institutions used to achieve societal goals. One of the principal aims of society is the achievement of harmony among the various members of the community. The most crucial of these relationships are related to gender.

In many societies, it has been observed that women occupy lower status as compared to their male counterparts Millet (1969), Emecheta (1977), Figes (1986), Beavior (1949). These, it is argued, have been perpetuated through oral art forms. The cultural images associated with women reflect and promote the social ideologies and beliefs from society. Polemics against women are common in many
societies. These include being accursed from the time of Eve; seen as crooked because she was made from a man’s rib, and bestial, greedy and crafty by nature, Badawi (1991).

Proverbs cannot be studied and analysed meaningfully outside the cultural forces of the society that created them. This is because like other forms of oral literature such as narratives, riddles, songs, and tongue twisters, proverbs serve as carriers of a people’s culture and history.

1.1 AREA OF STUDY

The research was carried out in the central and coast provinces of Kenya. Gikuyu people occupy Central province and parts of Rift Valley. They are commonly referred to as Kikuyu.

In the preface to *Facing Mount Kenya*, Kenyatta (1938) explains the spelling of the name "Kikuyu." He says,

"the usual European way of spelling this word is Kikuyu, which is incorrect; it should be Gikuyu, or in the strict phonetic spelling Gekoyo. This form only refers to the country itself. A Gikuyu person is a Mu-Gikuyu; plural, A-Gikuyu." (Kenyatta 1938: XV).

Central Province is divided into seven administrative districts, namely, Nyeri, Murang’a, Kiambu, Nyandarua, Kirinyaga and the newly created Thika and Maragwa,
Kirinyaga, Thika and Maragwa are new districts created as follows: Kirinyaga was carved from Embu district; Thika from Kiambu and Maragwa from Murang’a district respectively. It is noteworthy that Nyandarua district was created immediately after Kenya’s independence in 1963. This study has only confined itself to the original districts of the Gikuyu people namely, Nyeri, Murang’a and Kiambu since the rest are new and most of the people occupying them originated from the three original ones.

Recent statistics on the population of the Agikuyu are not available though they numbered over three million people during the 1989 census (source; Central Bureau of Statistics Government of Kenya). They make up the largest group of the North Eastern Bantu who include Gikuyu, Embu, Mbeere, Kamba, among others. It is estimated that there are about five to six million people living in Central Province. Not all Gikuyu people live in Central Province. They inhabit other provinces as well especially the Rift Valley Province where majority of them have settled in Nakuru and Laikipia Districts. The total Gikuyu population to-date could be about six and a half million (Wanjohi 1997:19).

The other geographical region constituting the area of study is Coast Province, which is occupied mainly by Miji Kenda the Swahili people being among them. The Province is made up of the following districts: Tana River, Kwale,
Kilifi, Malindi, Lamu, Taita-Taveta and Mombasa. However, the districts which make up the land of the Swahili people are Lamu, Malindi and Mombasa and hence this study has been confined to data collected from those particular districts.

1.2 THE GIKUYU PEOPLE

1.2.1 PHYSICAL SETTING

In order to understand and appreciate the economic, cultural and political forces which have influenced the Gikuyu way of life, it is important to understand their physical or natural environment.

According to Muriuki (1978:1) Gikuyu area in Central province is approximately 160 kilometres from North to South and about 50 kilometres West to East. It lies at an altitude that ranges from about 1200 metres to over 2,500 metres above sea level, and has many natural landmarks. To the north, the area is dominated by Kirinyaga (Mount Kenya) which rises to 5,250 metres. Muriuki (1978: 1-2), notes that:

"To the West of the border of the Kikuyu area follows the escarpment of the Rift Valley and includes the Nyandarua or Aberdare Mountains; to the East and South the country can be said to end roughly at the mountains the Kikuyu call Kianjahi (Ol Donyo Sabuk) and Kiambiruiru, the Ngong' Hills".
The Gikuyu people border the Maasai to the North and West; to the North East, they are neighbours of the Meru; to the East lie the Mbeere and Embu and to the South East the Kamba.

Like in the rest of the country, there are two rainy seasons because of the effects of the South East and North East trade winds blowing from the Indian Ocean towards the Equator. The long rains fall between March and May and the short rains between October and December. In addition to the two rainy seasons, there are two other seasons; the cold season running from June to August; the dry and hot period from January to March during which the short rain crops such as beans and potatoes are harvested. The long rain crops such as maize are harvested in August and September.

Generally, since Gikuyuland is on high altitude, it receives higher rainfall than the lowlands of Kenya. The Gikuyu, who are deeply attached to their land, are chiefly agriculturists as their land is endowed with adequate rainfall and moderate temperatures. Its deep red volcanic soil is very productive. The main traditional food crops include bananas, sweet potatoes, yams, millet, sorghum and cowpeas. Maize, which constitutes the staple food, was introduced towards the end of the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries Muriuki (Ibid: 33). The Gikuyu also keep livestock such as sheep, goats and cattle.
ORIGIN OF THE GIKUYU

The Gikuyu people have not lived in Central Province for a long time. Like other non-literate communities the Gikuyu did not have documented history as noted by Muriuki (1974:2) who states that:

"faced with scarcity of written sources or even their non existence, historians have primarily relied on oral traditions for the reconstruction of African History."

This approach of reconstructing a people's history has its own drawbacks. As Njoroge (1971) observes, the weakness of oral history is that it leaves out important pieces of information. As a result it has been argued that history can only arrive at probabilities but never at certainties (Muriuki 1974:3).

It is in view of the above that the beginnings of the Gikuyu are discussed. Their origin and history is given in two different accounts: one scientific (linguistic, historical, oral) and the other mythical. The following is a summarised account of these origins.

A study of Gikuyu language shows that it is akin to a group of related languages found around and near Mount Kenya. These are classified under the name Thagicu which includes the Mbeere, Embu, Chuka, Mwimbi, Igoji, Tharaka, Igembe, Tigania, Meru, Kamba and Gikuyu. Bennet (1967: 127-59) argues that Thagicu is a group of dialects or very
closely related languages that are spoken to the East and South of Mount Kenya. He sub-divides the group into two: Northern and Southern Thagicu.

The northern Thagicu includes the Tharaka and Meru cluster while the southern one covers the rest of the dialects. On the basis of linguistic data, scholars such as Ehret (1972) have noted that the name Thagicu was derived from the people called Thagicu who occupied the North East, the East and South sides of Mount Kenya. Today only remnants of Thagicu are left specifically in Tharaka and Mbeere areas. It is noteworthy that Mavuria location of Mbeere is traditionally known as Thagicu, (Muriuki 1974: 52). Going by linguistic data, one can deduce that Gikuyu being descendants of Thagicu probably came from Tharaka/Mbeere area (Wanjohi 1997:24).

However, according to oral traditions, the Gikuyu have a prior origin in the Igembe and Tigania areas of Meru District from where they migrated south to Thagicu or Tharaka area (Muriuki 1974; and Njoroge 1971). It is approximated that the migration took place in the middle of the fifteenth century (Bennet 1967; Muriuki 1974:55).

It has been observed that, the harsh climatic conditions of Tharaka, which still exist today, must have compelled the Gikuyu people to migrate. Historians have noted that the migration continued and led the Gikuyu people to other places such as the famous Mukurwe wa
The linguistic and historical contributions regarding the origin of the Gikuyu people are further supported by oral traditions.

According to Muriuki (1974) the ancestors of the Gikuyu came from either Meru, Igembe, Chuka; Mbeere or especially from Ithanga. It is also reported that some Gikuyu sub-tribes claim that their ancestors came from either Kambaland, Mbeere or Thagicu. These claims are supported by Dundas (1908:137) which shows that the Aceera clans of the Gikuyu descended from the Kamba.

Available linguistic and the oral evidence reinforce the fact that the Gikuyu are fairly recent migrants to Central Province having descended from people who lived in the North, East and South of Mount Kenya. These are today termed the 'Proto-Gikuyu' who have been referred to as Thagicu.

An attempt to explain the past scientifically is difficult since one is forced to rely on scattered evidence derived from linguistic, archaeological and oral information (Kimambo 1968:195). This approach however, has limitations and leaves the mind still posing many questions. It leaves room for and justifies other types of explanations even if in a very weak sense of that term. It is in this light that one explores what the myths have to say about the origins of the Gikuyu.
Generally, myths explain the origins of natural phenomena including that of people. They are an embodiment of dogma and are accepted on faith. The major functions of myths is to offer explanation, descriptions, as well as justifying aspects of human social and physical existence.

Kenyatta (1938), provides one of the most popular myths about the origin of Gikuyu. He states that Gikuyu, the first man and his wife Mumbi, were creations of Mwene Nyaga, (God). God also created a big mountain called Kirinyaga, currently known as Mount Kenya.

Mwene Nyaga is said to have taken Gikuyu to the top of the mountain and, indicating all the lands in view, he gave them to Gikuyu and his children forever and ever. With his wife Mumbi, Gikuyu was told that he should reproduce and through children and grandchildren make for himself an immortal lineage.

Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi are said to have made their home at Mukurwe wa Gathanga. While there, Gikuyu and Mumbi got "nine" children, all daughters: Waithira Wanjiku, Njeri, Wanjiru, Wairimu, Wangui, Wambui, Wangari, Wamuyu and Nyambura.

As Muriuki (1974) admits:

"these myths are clearly unhelpful and only two points are worth noting: first, there is the implication that the Kikuyu might have migrated from beyond Mbeere and that they may be related to their neighbours. Secondly, the possibility
that the area around Mukurwe wa Gathanga was a significant one in the evolution of Kikuyu. While Mukurwe region retains significance, it can no longer be regarded as the cradle for there is evidence to show that some of the Mbari (clan) came from as far as Meru, Mbeere, Chuka and Ndia. Igembe, Tharaka, Ithanga and Thagicu are places that are frequently mentioned.

The myths on the origin of the Gikuyu seem to have been formulated after the advent of colonialism. Muriuki (1974) notes that the ethnic history of the Gikuyu is much intertwined with rights to land. It was therefore taboo for any Gikuyu to discuss the past frankly particularly if this seemed remotely to contradict or undermine their claim to ownership of land prior to the dawn of the colonial era.

The myth associated with the origin of the Gikuyu can only be understood in the light that, it is closely related to the ideology of Gikuyu ownership of land. Myths' main function is to give historical intention a justification. Therefore Gikuyu may have stuck to this myth of their origin so as to justify their land rights. As Mpesha (1979:123) rightly states:

"The Gikuyu myth of origin gives them confidence and sense of belonging".
Although there is a myth about Gikuyu having been matriarchal, the practice and performance indicate that the society was and still is patriarchal. There is however, a legend that claims that, at one time, the Gikuyu society was matriarchal and that the menfolk staged a coup d'etat which ended female rule. The story goes that the women in their position of power became very tyrannical and overbearing and acted ruthlessly towards the men. They subjected men to all sorts of unjust and cruel treatment. The men came to a point when they would not tolerate it any longer. They therefore revolted against the women and they overthrew the women's tyrannical rule. It is alleged that they did this by getting all the female leaders and many of their women followers pregnant thus rendering them ineffective in battle. Six months after the women had conceived, men were able to execute their plan of "defeating" the daughters of Mumbi and threw off their rule. When most women were heavy with a child, the men took over the Government (Kariuki 1963:3). After the coup d'etat, the men changed the structure of the society; abolished polyandry which was commonly practised during the matriarchal rule and instead established polygyny (Kenyatta 1938:9). From then, Gikuyu ancestry is traced through the male line i.e. the father's home. Men therefore became the
heads of households and also the rulers in society. This shows a reversal in power relations which is still practised today.

The Gikuyu family (nyumba) of those who are related by blood such as has always consisted of a man, his wife or wives and their children and their grand and great grand children. Kenyatta (1938), Mugo (1982). This family unit constitutes the core of the Gikuyu society. The father was the head of the family and in his absence or death, the eldest son of the senior wife became the figurehead. The head of the family was supreme in all family affairs (Kenyatta 1938:9). Therefore, in the family group "the father was the most important person, and his position in the community depended on the way in which he was able to organise his family. Hence it was very important that when a man got married, he should have male children. Firstly, the male children were expected to carry on the line and to increase the number of people in the family, for if a man died without a male child, his family came to an end and this broke the continuity between the living, the dead and the unborn (Muriuki 1978: 5).

Secondly, male children were preferred to female ones because the males would remain in their homes for the rest of their lives mostly helping the family. The females, on the other hand, would sooner or later get married and hence abandon their homes. This often led to
the fear that if a man died without a male child to perpetuate his lineage, it would very likely bring an end to his family since all his daughters would get married, (Mugo 1982: 6). It was also expected that since male children became warriors, they would protect the society from attacks from its enemies. This preference of male children among the Gikuyu still persists to today. This is evident in the proverb:—

"Mwanake ni kienyu kia Ngai"

(The young man is God's generous gift to mankind)

At a level higher than the family, the Gikuyu society was and to-date is still sub-divided into Mbari (sub-clan or kinship groups). The sub-clans were the focus of social and political interaction. For example, the settling of quarrels and the regulation of local affairs was carried out on a clan basis. A clan might inhabit a whole village depending upon its size. "Each Mbari (clan) traced its origin to one of the "nine" Kikuyu clans and hence regarded itself a direct descendant of the mythical ancestors of the Kikuyu people (Muriuki 1974: 113). In view of this, it can be deduced that to some degree the present Gikuyu social structure is still based on popular myths and legends.
1.2.4 EDUCATION IN THE GIKUYU COMMUNITY.

In order to appreciate the images of when projected through Gikuyu proverbs, it is important to have an insight into the kind of socialisation that the member of the society went through. One agent of socialisation was education. Education among the Gikuyu, like in all societies, was and is still a life-long process. From an early age, children were informally taught the community traditions through tales, riddles and proverbs. These forms of oral literature also formed an important source of entertainment and amusement for the young as they sat round the fire in the evening waiting for the meal to cook.

Initiation ceremonies for males and females served as one of the main educational channels. (Muriuki, 1974: 119) observes that:-

"This education was both practical and theoretical and covered such fields as tribal traditions, religion, folklore, mode of behaviour and the duties of adults, taboos and sex".

Circumcision, one of the major initiation ceremonies, served as a vehicle for the transmission and perpetuation of cultural norms and values. Circumcision ceremonies have ceased to take place as social phenomena with the advent of formal education systems, transformation of families into nuclear units and other changes brought about by the
social/ economic pressures of modern life. These are some of social changes which have changed the social structures and organisations.

Gikuyu children were first educated within the family circle and secondly within the local community, largely by parents and members of the extended family. The focus of learning was family and clan traditions.

Learning is a life long process which starts from birth. As soon as children learned basic skills of sitting, walking and talking, their learning is intensified and are exposed too much oral learning. They were taught the correct manners of speech, the history and traditions of the maternal and paternal family lineage, names of mother, father and their age groups and manners and correct behaviour. Most of this training was carried out through the medium of oral literature. Its chief purpose is to transmit knowledge and therefore each genre of oral literature teaches about a specific aspect of Gikuyu life. Riddles, for example, teach characteristics of natural things like plants and animals and proverbs contain the wisdom of the people and express the morals and ethics of the society. Narratives on the other hand are used to record and perpetuate the community's beliefs, customs and traditions.
1.2.5 GENDER ROLES IN THE GIKUYU SOCIETY

The Gikuyu society had well defined roles for both men and women. From early childhood, learning was geared towards formal and gender oriented training. Boys for example were made to learn practical agriculture and the location of family, clan and community lands. The primary duty of men was to defend the community against attacks from other communities. They were also entrusted with more difficult tasks which were regarded as men’s jobs.

"...such duties included the clearing of virgin land, cutting poles for building houses, cattle kraals. They also planted specific crops such as yams, bananas and sugar cane." (Kenyatta: 1938:12)

The young men who had just been circumcised were occupied in the general work of the community. They would help their parents in clearing and digging newly acquired fields in addition to their normal activities of hunting and military training for the defence of the community. Most of the time they would do a lot of physical exercises to keep fit and ready to execute their security roles (Mugo 1982:21). However, the major role of young uncircumcised boys was to herd the cows, sheep and goats. When warriors graduated from battle, they served in various councils of elders which were vested with legislative, executive and judicial matters.
Girls on the other hand were taught domestic duties of a wife and a mother. This included household chores such as cooking, looking after children, fetching water, firewood and weeding. Today, the traditional roles of men and boys have changed tremendously. Men are no longer required to defend the community, as Gikuyu people are part of a unified Kenyan nation with a centralised defence system. Boys are no longer expected to spend most of the day herding livestock as the demands of formal education have taken up most of their time. However, women and girls are still expected to perform their traditional roles in addition to other activities which include schooling for girls and paid employment for women.

1.3 THE SWAHILI PEOPLE

1.3.1 PHYSICAL SETTING

The Swahili whose proverbs are compared with the Gikuyu proverbs in this study are the occupants of the coastal strip. The term, "Swahili" which referred to the coastal people and their language was first used in the fourteenth century by an Arab historian, Ibn Batuta (Whiteley 1969:35, and Hurreiz 1985:106). It is generally
accepted that the term is derived from the Arabic word 'Sawahel' plural of 'Sahel' which means coast. Mbaabu (1996:28) observes that:

"the name 'Kiswahili' comes from an Arabic root 'Sahel' meaning coast and the Bantu prefix Ki denoting the language".

This etymology was first advanced by Krapf (1882) in his publication of Swahili grammar. However other alternative etymologies have been proposed for the names 'Kiswahili': the language and 'Waswahili': the people.

The first one is kiziwa-hili and Waziwa-hili meaning the language of this ocean and the people of this ocean respectively. Mbaabu (1985:5) argues that:

"this could be possible because the Kiswahili word bahari - ocean is of Arabic origin and many Bantus use cognates of ziwa to mean big pool, lake, sea or ocean."

In a later publication Mbaabu (1996:28) points out that there could be another etymology of 'Kisiwa-hili' and 'Wasiwa-hili' language and people of this continent.

In view of the fact that the Waswahili have occupied the coastal islands such as Lamu, Pemba, Mombasa and Zanzibar, the first etymology looks more plausible. It is worthy noting that the Waswahili themselves have rejected the theories about their origin and their language for they insist that original Waswahili were called Wangozi and
Apart from the terms as explained above, the question of who are the Waswahili (singular: Mswahili) has drawn discussions within and without academic circles (Shariff 1973:61, and Salim 1978:1) for example state that:

"the Swahili speaking people are not easy to identify as a group the way we can identify say a Kikuyu or Luo or Somali."

Many authorities have given varying versions of the origin of this language. This ranges from Johnson (1939) who argues that the language developed as a result of the Arabian immigrants to East Africa who married Bantu women and thereby adopted a number of Bantu words in their language to Krumm (1953) who believes that immigrants from South Arabia and the Persian Gulf adopted the language of the ethnic population on the East African Coast and enriched it with a number of new words and sentences (Heine 1970:81-82).

Johnson (1939) and Broomfied (1930) have argued that the Swahili people were offsprings of Afro Arab intermarriages and their language was nothing but a mixture
of Arabic and several Bantu languages. Johnson (1939) argues that Arabs married Bantu women. These women learnt some Arabic from their husbands. The husbands in turn learnt a bit of Bantu language from the women. The children from such intermarriages then learnt the Bantu language from their mothers and Arabic from their fathers. This then led to the emergence of a mixture in the languages the same way their blood got mixed (Mbaabu 1978). There is no dispute that there were long associations between Africans and Arabs at the Coast and that this association manifested itself not only in their language but also in other aspects of their life such as religion, trade and even politics. As a result of this interaction, the Kiswahili language borrowed many words from Arabic especially those associated with religion of Islam which was the religion of the Arabs.

Though Johnson's views of the Kiswahili being a hybrid language have been advanced by various scholars such as Gray (1962:11), Steere (1870), and Coupland (1938:11), research by later day scholars such as Greenberg (1966), Guthrie (1949) and Mbaabu (1978, 1985, 1996) have provided indisputable arguments to the effect that Kiswahili is indeed a Bantu language. It possesses many linguistic features, like other Bantu languages such as Kikuyu, Kinyamwezi and Kiganda. Such features include grammatical patterns of agreement and prefixes in their structures.
The basic vocabulary is Bantu. On the basis of its regular phoneme and morpheme equivalents, the language may be said to be purely a Bantu language (Heine 1970:82).

The Swahili language consists of several dialects spoken between Comoro islands in the South and Kismayu in the North. Among its dialects are Kiamu, the dialect of Lamu, Kimvita, the dialect of Mombasa, Kisiu, the dialect of Siyu Island and Kiunguja, the dialect of Zanzibar. It is the Kiunguja, the Zanzibar dialect which was used as the basis of standard Swahili.

Each of the listed dialects is spoken by a specific group of people. For example Kimvita is the spoken by Wamvita who occupy Mombasa island while Kipemba is spoken by Wapemba who occupy Pemba islands. However, the term Swahili has come to be accepted as referring to the language of the people of the coast who speak any of these dialects. What unites the Swahili people is their common ancestry, the coastal strip, their language Kiswahili and their common culture which is reflected in many parameters such as customs, beliefs, dress, personal names and architecture (Hurreiz 1985:120). It was noted Swahili people are predominantly Moslems.

Hence, for the purpose of our study, Waswahili will be taken as the people who occupy the East African seaboard stretching from Mogadishu in the north to Grand Comoros in the south. Kiswahili as a language is said to have
originated somewhere between Malindi and Lamu, traditionally known as Uswahilini. Classical Swahili literature originated and flourished on the Northern islands of the Lamu Archipelago. However, it is important to note that Kiswahili is now accepted as the language of inter-ethnic communication in Kenya.

Kiswahili is now an international language. In both Kenya and Tanzania, it has both national status while in Uganda and Zaire, it is among the recognised and official language. It is extensively used in Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Mozambique, Somalia and Seychelles. It is also a language of broadcast in major stations in the world such as the British Broadcasting Co-operation (BBC), Voice of America (V.O.A) Radio Cologne and Radio Moscow. Kiswahili is also taught as a subject of study and as a language in many universities in Africa, America, Europe and Asia.

1.3.3 THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE SWAHILI SOCIETY.

The Swahili unlike the Kikuyu do not form one tribe which claim one ancestor, Salim (1978:3). The Swahili people consist of smaller groups. Each group to some extent is different from others because it is developed and lived in one area of the Coast and its members acquired certain features in terms of their living, economic
occupation and speak their own dialect. Some of the main groups are the Bajun, the Amu, the Vumba and the Wamivita. The Swahili have a long history of living in towns (Miji) and hence the family life has been affected by urban conditions. The Miji is line home of the Kinship groups. The smallest unit is the household called nyumba (literary house) which consist of a man, his wife and his children. A man who had more than one wife which is allowed by the Islamic religion had more than one household. Families, which are related by blood, constitute an ukoo which means kinship, Salim (1978:11). Many ukoos constitute a mji.

The members of a ukoo trace their descent to a common ancestor, three or four generations back who in earlier times lived in a nyumba. Membership of a ukoo is normally traced through father, (ukoo wa kulia) but children could trace descent through their mothers’ maternal ancestors and such a grouping was referred to as tumbo (womb or ukoo wa ujomba), Abdulazizi (1979:29).

A person could however belong to a unit called a mlango (literary "door") which comprises of relatives from both the mother’s and father’s relatives. According to the social hierarchy, the father is the head of the family (nyumba). The household in this context refers to the family unit which includes brothers of the same father and their offsprings. Together, the brothers would make policy decisions in home such as matters pertaining to the
education of the members of the family, marriage, legal matters and so on. The oldest brother in the family would have the decisive role. The unmarried people were referred to as watoto, children. This social structure is still prevalent in many Swahili families.

1.3.4 EDUCATION IN THE SWAHILI COMMUNITY

Like in many other communities, Swahili people start educating their children right from birth, Harris (ed) (1965:153). As they grow up, children are taught to behave and to have good manners. Politeness and other aspects of good manners are emphasised such as greetings. Children are taught to greet older people, to give them way, to offer them seats and to eat after the adults have eaten. In general, they are taught how to approach adults with respect and good manners, Harris (1965), Salim (1978). Like in other African communities, there is age and sex distinction among the Swahili. Old people are more respected than the young are.

They are given preference in many ways. For example old people are served before young people and if the seat are not enough in a gathering, the old people are given first priority, Mbaabu (1985:30). These virtues and mannerisms are reinforced by sayings of prophet Mohamed
which make them to acquire a religious importance. Kiswahili is full of proverbs emphasising good manners and virtues. The following are examples:

1) **Heshima kitu cha bure**
   
   (Respect is a free thing)

2) **Mtu hakatai mwito, hukataa aitiwalo**

   (One does not object to a call, he/she objects to what she/he is called for)

Apart from social education and ethics, Swahili people who are predominantly Moslems insist on giving their children basic Islamic education. Mbaabu (1985:16) observes that, this is done as soon as the children start talking. From the age of three or four years, both boys and girls learn to recite the Holy Koran. They are taught about the life of Prophet Mohamed and how to recognise Arab letters.

After making sufficient progress in their studies of the Koran, the Swahili children are sent to Koranic schools otherwise known as **Madarasa** or **Vyuo** plural of Chuo which means school. Since before the advent of secular formal education, Swahili children have attended Chuo, the Koranic school, Porter (1990:9). Historically, children in Koranic schools were offered complete education which included religious and secular education. They were taught to read the Koran, how to perform prayers and how to behave towards
their parents and in general to acquire religious and moral instructions, Salim (1978:12). Apart from religious education, the children were also taught history, geography, maths and other subjects, Porter (1990:9). Koranic teachers were respected people. They are the leaders of all community affairs. The pupils of Koranic schools were young but a few continue to study Ilimu under the guardianship of sheikh, (religious leader).

After completing Chuo, the boys are circumcised and this initiates them to adulthood. As young adults, the men are taught trade such as fishing, carpentry, jewellery, and goldsmith among others. Porter (1990:9) observes that, fewer girls than boys used to complete madarasa education. After reaching puberty, the girls were taken to confidants otherwise known as Kungwi who instructed them in matters pertaining to their sexuality and skills which are perceived as essential in their future roles as wives and mothers.

The formal education for most Swahili children used to end at the Madarasa school. However, since the advent of secular education and demands of modern living, Madarasa schools have been converted to nursery schools. In the past the parent used to fear the secular schools which were mostly run by Christian missionaries. They feared that their children would be converted to Christians, Mbaabu (1985:18). Nowadays, not all children are being taken to
traditional Koranic schools because they have the formal nursery and primary schools to attend. Porter (1990:19) observes that some Madarasa schools and mosques which were traditionally used for Islamic education are now being used to provide extra tuition to Swahili children in their secular school subjects.

1.3.5 GENDER ROLES IN THE SWAHILI COMMUNITY

In the Swahili community, like in many Kenyan traditional communities, gender roles were and are still clearly defined (Kenyatta 1938). From early childhood, the learning was geared towards formal and gender oriented training.

The Swahili men being the heads of the families are charged with the responsibility of meeting the material needs of their wives and children. They are the breadwinners and their occupations range from farming, fishing to sailing. They also play the role of policy makers.

The women’s role is tied with their reproductive roles and domestic chores. The women’s place is usually in the home, be it in a small village or in a town. Women hardly go beyond the house except to visit or buy something to do with the housekeeping from the nearest shop (Salim
Women occupy themselves by sweeping their compounds, cooking, washing dishes and clothes, pondering grain, grinding, plaiting mats and making lace. Mbaabu (1985:17), observes that compared with many African women, the Swahili women are less burdened with production of food for the family. Their main work is to cook and do other household chores.

The Swahili children, like other children in the Kenya communities are largely occupied by schooling. However, after school, young girls spend their time playing with girls of their age and helping their mothers with housework. They are taught how to cook meals when they are about ten years of age. All this is considered as appropriate training for them in preparation of their future roles as wives. After the age of puberty, girls do not mix with boys except those of their household and near relatives especially when they are not in school environment. When going out they are accompanied by their mothers and female relatives who act as chaperons. When out of doors, they wear black all covering garments called 'Buiru'.

For young boys apart from, schooling, they also help in household work. They most assist their fathers in activities like fishing, sailing, carpentry, cultivating or harvesting. Men and boys command more respect than women and girls.
1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Several studies of the oral literature of specific groups (e.g. Schipper 1992, Kabira 1994, Chesaina 1994, Davies and Graves 1986, Taiwo 1984) include some discussion of women as creator/performer and as subject. The oral forms studied such as narratives, proverbs and songs reveal that women are depicted negatively. There is however, paucity of studies specifically focussing the use of the proverbs as a medium of gender socialisation and its impact on gender relations (Madumulla 1994). The present study was therefore necessitated by the need to fill this gap by finding out to which extent proverbs have been used by society to maintain the male/female status quo if at all. The study furthermore, attempts to identify and analyse the images of women as portrayed in the Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs. For the purpose of this study, a proverb is conceptualised as:-

"a saying more or less fixed form, marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of truth tersely expressed in it." (Finnegan 1970: 393)

It is widely agreed that proverbs act as important vehicles through which the attitudes and beliefs of people are expressed, (Seitel (1972), Miruka (1994) and Schipper (1992)). The images created by proverbs can therefore be
used to reveal a great deal about the attitudes of a society. It is in the light of this crucial role played by proverbs that the study set to determine the way proverbs have been used to depict the image of women in Gikuyu and Swahili societies and how the images created have served the purpose of relegating women to subordinate positions in the two societies. In other words, the study focuses on how proverbs have been used to portray women.

The study therefore seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are women depicted in Gikuyu and Kiswahili proverbs?

2. How does the portrayal of Women in Gikuyu and Kiswahili proverbs reflect the socio-cultural ideologies relating to gender in the communities in question?

3. How does the image of a woman as exemplified in Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs affect gender roles and attitudes of the two communities?
1.5 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

As noted in the introduction, there is currently a global emphasis on studies focusing on gender with special reference to women. Though women have been part and parcel of society since the beginning of mankind, their role and contribution have largely been taken for granted if not ignored altogether. However, most societies, as Bennars (1995) observes, have discovered that they cannot afford to ignore women’s contribution to the entire realm of human development. Studies have been carried out to trace the core of women’s marginalization, Riria (1984). The role of oral literature as a vehicle of cultural transmission has occupied a central position in these discussions. Kabira, Masinjila and Obote (1997), hence a study of oral literature as detailed in this work (specifically proverbs) provides additional insight on the root and nature of female subordination.

There are numerous publications on the oral literature of many African communities but very few have gone beyond the stage of recording the artforms. (Okombo 1992: 11). This study therefore goes beyond mere recording of proverbs and contribute towards the analysis of the artforms as well as more insights towards gender studies and oral literature in general.

From the existing studies on the images of women such
as, Lakoff (1973), Ngugi (1975), Mugo (1975) Chesaina (1994), Kabira (1994) there is evidence that women have been accorded negative images. They are depicted as idlers, gossipers, cowards, fools, to name just a few. The study sheds further light on these so far identified images by looking at some of the underlying factors that have contributed to the subserviation of women by society.

1.6 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The study has focused on the images of women as portrayed in Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs. Proverbs cover many aspects of societal life: social, economic and politics. This study, therefore focuses on how women are depicted in these aspects of life as portrayed in the proverbs of both the Gikuyu and Swahili communities. However, since the material was collected in the source language, that is, in Gikuyu and in Kiswahili, the translation of the data was functional. Due to differences between the source languages and the target language (English), a great deal was lost in attempt to communicate meaning, rhyme and culturally bound concepts especially those which are expressed non-verbally through facial expressions and gestures. Some metaphors are untranslatable from one language to the other without the accompanying
cultural perspective. In order to try and overcome this problem, the material has been presented in both the source and the target languages although a free translation has been attempted to try and give the meaning intended in the original text.

After collecting proverbs, one encounters the problem of interpreting them. There are two levels of a proverb: what it says and what it means. The literal meaning of words tend to be easily translatable while the deep meaning tends to be difficult to interpret.

The distinction between proverbs and sayings is not usually clear cut. Speakers of any language would argue over the classification of a number of them as sayings other than proverbs and vice-versa. Proverbs begin as sayings just to be considered as proverbs with age. However, whether they are sayings or they are proverbs is not the issue in this study. The most important point was to see the kind of "wisdom" in their philosophical aspect.

Another problem encountered involved that of differentiating between sayings and proverbs. It is noteworthy that proverbs start as sayings but after sometime they become proverbs. An example is the proverb:-

*Kungu maitu na hunyu wake*

(Hail mother despite her roughness)
Although this proverb does not sound like a proverb in terms of the general structure and meaning, it is actually a proverb. Both proverbs and sayings have been used to understand the images of women in both Gikuyu and Swahili societies. As Parker (1974:8) states:

"The proverb, inspite of its surface form, must be viewed as a social phenomenon in any consideration which attempts to approach an understanding of the proverb as a channel for meaning."

She goes on to add that, data necessary for the fullest understanding of the proverbs comes from more than the text. In view of the above, it is appreciated that the proverb quoted above is unique in the sense that, it does not ascribe to structure of the proverbs but it is considered a proverb since it stresses the importance attached to motherhood irrespective of the physical and behavioural attributes of a mother (Barra, 1939:42). Furthermore, as Fergurson (1983:v) observes:

"Some proverbs are simple folk saying (an apple a day keeps the doctor away); these have only their literal meaning. Some, broader and more philosophical, aspire to deal with the great mysteries and paradoxes of life (opportunity seldom knocks twice). Others, metaphorical; while apparently belonging to the first class they really belong to the second."
1.7 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of this study are two fold:

1. To evaluate and analyse the depiction of women in African oral literature using Kiswahili and Gikuyu as case studies.

2. To find out the socio-cultural and economic factors which contribute to the manner in which women are portrayed in the oral artforms (specifically the proverbs) among the Swahili and Gikuyu communities.

1.8 HYPOTHESES

This study was guided by the following assumptions:

1. Women are depicted negatively in both Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs.

2. African oral literature portrays women negatively because society is male-dominated and because it reflects the ideological perspective of the society in which women are seen as inferior.

3. Factors such as socio-cultural, economic,
patriarchy and religion contribute to the negative portrayal of women in African Oral literature.

1.9 LITERATURE REVIEW

Literary studies carried out on the images of women can be divided into two categories:-

(1) Those which have focused on oral literature.

(2) Those which have focused on language.

Among the studies on oral literature is Chesaina (1994) in a paper entitled "The Images of Women in African Oral Literature with Maasai and Kalenjin Narratives as Case Studies."

In this paper, it is observed that the Kalenjins regard women as children who need to be guided and protected. Chesaina observes that both Kalenjin men and women hold this view and according to the latter, any woman who does not live up to that expectation is regarded as has become westernised.

This same view is held by Maasai men and women. The Maasai argue that:-
"Infancy of women was natural law since jobs done by women were not as demanding as those of men". (Chesaina 1994:86)

However this view has been sharply argued against by Kipury (1983: 8) who observes that:

"In Maasai society women do most of the work in the home. The numerous chores for which they are responsible include building houses, fetching water and firewood, milking and distributing food, cleaning milk utensils, sweeping the cattle, calf, sheep, goat enclosures as well as bearing and caring for children. Although the duty of grazing and watering stock is normally a man's job, it is not infrequent for women to be called upon to give assistance when the need arises."

From her survey, Chesaina (1994) concludes that portrayal of women in Kalenjin and Maasai Oral Literature is very negative. Her study is crucial to this research for it has helped to consolidate the view that women are depicted negatively in African Oral Literature. However Chesaina only dealt with Oral narratives of the Maasai and Kalenjin. Hence her work differs from this study for in this study, attention is focussed on proverbs of Gikuyu and the Swahili people. The main differences between this study and Chesaina's (1994) are the genres of oral literature used in the analysis and the communities under investigation. Chesaina (1994) deals with Nilotic communities while this study deals with Bantu communities. She also confines herself to oral narratives while this
study deals with proverbs.

Kabira (1994)'s study is based on "Gender and Politics of control and an overview of images of women in Gikuyu oral narratives". Kabira identifies several images of women such as: unreliable, disobedient, irresponsible, disloyal, adulterous, cunning, senseless, easily cheated, forgetful, evil tricksters and lazy among others. She reckons that there is hardly any story among the Gikuyu that describes women especially wives positively.

Like Chesaina (1994) Kabira differs from this study in the sense that she confined herself to the oral narratives of the Gikuyu while this study deals with fixed forms specifically proverbs of the Gikuyu and Swahili people.

Barra (1960), Taylor (1891), and Njururi (1983) have studied on Gikuyu proverbs. However, their analyses are limited to collecting, recording and translating the proverbs into English. These works are therefore mostly useful as sources of some of the data.

Munene (1995), Ng'ang'a (1996) and Wanjohi (1997), have also collected and explicated the philosophy in Gikuyu proverbs. These works have been very useful to this study for they have contributed to the understanding and analysis of Gikuyu proverbs.

Similar works on Swahili proverbs have been undertaken by Taylor, (1891), Hollingsworth and Alawi (1968), Farsi (1958), Abudu (1974), Abudu and Baruwa (1981a, 1981b),
Knappert (1975), Msuya (1977), Ngole and Honero (eds) (1982), Karama and Said, (1983) and Ndalu and King’ei (1989). These scholars have provided invaluable data to this study for they have not only collected and compiled proverbs of the Waswahili but have also explained their meaning and usage. The collections by these scholars remain a mine of information not only on oral traditions of the Swahili but also on their manners, customs, beliefs and Folklore (Knappert, 1975: 117). An exception to the above is Parker’s (1974) explication of the Swahili proverbs which specifically highlights the nature of messages found in Swahili proverbs. She reckons that the message could be literal, coded or cultural. Her study has contributed to this study in regard to analysis of the image of women as portrayed in the Swahili proverbs. Parker proposes a sound methodology for investigating the Methali (Proverbs) and also advances a theory for interpreting their messages at both literal and coded level. Her study has therefore been fruitful to this study in the analysis of the content of the proverb texts.

Matteru (1982) also surveys the image of women in Tanzania oral literature. From her survey she points out that women are portrayed as mothers, men’s pleasure objects or as men’s owned property. Her sources of data were mostly songs and tales though other genres have also been alluded to. Her study shed light on the images of women in
oral literature though this study will confine itself to images of women as exemplified in Swahili and Gikuyu proverbs. Mekacha (1993) in his paper entitled "Mwanamke ni Ibilisi?" (Is a woman a devil?), also surveys the images of women in contemporary songs of the Swahili. He identifies four images of women. These are:

1. **Mchapakazi**
   (Hard worker)

2. **Mwenye busara na mshauri wa mumewe**
   (Wise and adviser of the husband)

3. **Mnyonge na mwenyewe kutegemea mumewe kupata mradi wake**
   (A weakling who depends on the husband for her needs)

4. **Chombo cha anasa cha kuburudisha mwanamume** (a pleasure object for the husband)

Mekacha goes on to conclude that, a woman has insatiable desires, is jealous, weak and is the source of all evils in society. She is portrayed as evil, immoral and demonic. This work is very crucial to the present study as it reinforce some of the images of women emerging from the Swahili and Gikuyu proverbs. A point of contrast however occurs in the sense that Mekacha has concentrated on the portrayal of women in the contemporary songs. This study however focuses on proverbs.
Other studies carried out on the images of women have concentrated on language and how it is used to perpetuate the negative images of women. Among these studies is Lakoff (1973) who uses linguistic evidence like colour words and tag questions to show that the marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in both the way women are expected to speak and the ways in which they are spoken of. Lakoff shows that in women’s appropriate speech, strong expressions of feelings are avoided and expressions of uncertainty are favoured. She further argues that what is said about women shows them as objects whose social roles are derivative and dependent on their relation to men. For this reason language works against the treatment of women as serious persons with individual views. Lakoff’s study data does not include any texts drawn from African Oral Literature sources.

This view is also propounded by Ngugi (1975) who argues that language has been used to perpetuate the myth of female inferiority. He recommends that it is necessary to examine social economic structures of the societies in order to place and define women more meaningfully. Ngugi further observes that those who control the means of production in society also control, to a large extent, positions and dominant images of women. He succeeds in showing that language has served as a crucial tool in shaping the image of the women in society. Unlike Ngugi’s
work, this study looks at proverbs and discusses the images of women portrayed through them while also attempting to derive the attitudes of the target societies towards women from the images projected.

Mugo (1975) shows the importance of language in depicting the images of women in society. As she states: -

"the biggest enemy to be reckoned with in the battle for the liberation of the abused female image is first and foremost language, its concepts, implications and the whole emotive stimuli behind the actual utterances." (Ibid: 210)

However, Mugo's emphasis is on general cultural attitudes and hardly deals with any genre of oral literature or any particular community. In this study, however the focus is on such cultural attitudes towards women as expressed through one genre of oral literature, namely proverbs.

Oduol (1990) gives some linguistic evidence on the sexist ideology carried in Dholuo, a language spoken mainly around Lake Victoria. Her work is an attempt to "provide a case study of the relationship between language and gender in Dholuo by providing linguistic evidence of sexism reflected in the vocabulary and expressions associated with women which have biased gender concepts. It, in particular, aimed at demonstrating the role that language plays in the social categorisation and cultural evaluation of Luo women. She aims at showing the extent to which
patterns and cultural values of inequality and oppression in Luo linguistic practices tend to sustain the existing gender arrangements. Her study is relevant to this research for it contributes to the researcher's knowledge of sexist languages. However, Oduol's area of focus differs from the present study in that here the area of emphasis is proverbs, one of the genres of oral literature in both Gikuyu and Swahili while her's deals with fixed forms in Dholuo.

1.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the views expressed within the feminist literary criticism. The term feminism was coined by a French Socialist, Charles Fourier in the early 19th century. At that time, it was used to refer to the new woman who was agitating to transform herself and society.

Today, the term 'feminism' is regarded as a loose term for a variety of conceptions of the relations between men and women in society, their origins and how they might be changed for the better, (Mitchel and Oakley 1986).

Feminism comprises of various social theories which explain the relations between sexes in society and the difference between women and men's experiences. Among the social theories of feminism are:
(i) Liberal feminism
(ii) Radical feminism
(iii) Marxist feminism
(iv) African feminism
(v) Feminist literary theory.

In order to better understand the feminist literary theory and its application, it is important to give a brief explanation of the above social theories and their common characteristics since the feminist literary theory derived its tenets from the other feminist social theories.

According to Ramazanoglu (1989:8-9), various versions of feminist theory share certain characteristics:-

(i) All versions of feminism assert that, the existing relations between the sexes in which women are subordinated to men are unsatisfactory and ought to be changed.

(ii) Feminism challenges much that is taken for granted as natural, normal and desirable in our various societies.

(iii) Feminism consists of ideas which raise fundamental problems of explanation. The whole history and future course of human history is
brought into question.

(iv) Feminism is not simply ideas. Its point is to change the world to transform the relations between men and women so that all people can have more chances to fulfil their whole human potential.

(v) Feminism comprises very varied political practices but all of them are aimed at changing the relations between the sexes by giving women control over their own lives. They may vary from consciousness raising groups through the struggle for separation from men to organised demands to civil liberties and economic and political powers; feminism is then by definition provocative.

(vi) Feminism proposals for change always encounter resistance though the nature and strength of the resistance is variable.
1.10.1 LIBERAL FEMINISM

Feminism is a conscious effort to view things differently from the male perspective. It is the conscious and deliberate effort to change the angle of perception of men versus women.

Liberal feminism developed in the context of liberal philosophy of the 16th and 17th century. This theory holds that women and men are identical in their essential nature but women are deprived of the opportunities to realise their potentials on account of their gender. The liberal feminists believe that there is no such thing as male/female nature but human nature. They envision a society inhabited by human beings who will be the same in their essential.

The major weakness of this theory is that it has inherent contradictions. It is not committed to liberty and equality for all including women but for women in the bourgeoisie class who in turn are in the forefront of advancing the main tenets of the theory.

1.10.2 RADICAL FEMINISM

Radical feminism is a fairly recent theory generated by women’s movement of the 1960’s. It was sparked off by
a small group of white middle class college educated American women in the late 1960's. The women were initially members of other organisations which advocated peace, justice and the end of oppressive institutions. However, the women were shocked to discover that women's subordination was in-built in all societal organisations. They split away to form their own organisation whose goal was to get rid of all the oppressive structures and practices which were deemed oppressive and against women.

Radical feminists believe that the oppression of women is at the root of all other systems of oppression dating from the historical establishment of patriarchy. Radical feminism focuses directly on women's relation to men as politically problematic. They focus on patriarchal oppression in every area of women's lives from the most private to the most public. They stress the need to re-value the creative and nurturing aspects of femininity which have become devalued and distorted in patriarchal society (Daly 1978). Liberal feminism questions the legitimacy of any social order which creates and maintains the oppression of women by men. Radical feminism defines women as universally oppressed, as sisters in oppression in a world owned, controlled and physically dominated by men (Ramazanoglu 1989:13). Radical feminists see gender as a way men and women are differentiated which leads to their being subordinated to men. To redress this situation, they
advocate for separation and polarisation of sexes. The major flaw in this theory is that it has ambivalent approaches to the future of human beings. This is the only theory which is overtly anti-marriage and family as they exist today.

1.10.3 MARXIST FEMINISM

The Marxist feminism theory as denoted by the name is derived from Marxist political theory which was formulated by Karl Marx in the mid 19th century as a reaction to the excesses of the industrial revolution and the bourgeois political economy. This theory questions the adequacy of Marxist Theory and Politics since Socialism although it could improve material conditions for women, it could not lead to women's liberation from men.

Like radical feminism, Marxist feminism focuses on power differences between women and men. Since Marxism offers little in gender relations, Marxist feminists draw from radical feminism notions of patriarchy (the generalised power of men over women) and notions of sexual politics.

All the versions of feminism have strengths and weaknesses but they all concur that most societies are male dominated. Dominant values, beliefs and practices have a
male bias. The male perspective, overrides one's sex roles. It is this state of affairs that led to the rise of feminism (Freeman (ed) 1975).

1.10.4 FEMINIST LITERARY THEORY

Feminist literary criticism as expounded by Kolodny (1986) states that there is need to pay close attention to the ways in which certain power relations (usually those in which males wield various forms of influence over females) are represented in texts of literature (oral or written). It is the contention of this study that the power relations as expressed in art forms reflect those same power relations in the culture of a given community. They reflect the value systems of the societies in question both dialectically and ideologically. Therefore the feminist literary criticism theory is an "act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction". (Kolodny, Ibid: 501).

The feminist literary criticism as observed by Kolodny has three tenets.

1) New literary forms result from some kind of ongoing, internal, dialect within pre-existing styles,
traditions or if by contrast the ideology declares literary change as independent from societal development and therefore determined by upheavals in the socio-economic organisation of the culture at large.

This tenet holds that there is need to utilise the past in order to understand the present. Like all historical social theories, the feminist literary theory recognises the past as a storehouse, as a resource for remodelling literary history, past, present and future. As a result, it states that evaluation of current literature have the effect of either solidifying or of reshaping the community's sense of the past.

2) Appropriation of meaning from a text is dependent on the reader, that is, according to critical assumptions and predisposition brought to the text by the reader, listener or observer. Accordingly, different meanings can be appropriated from the same text according to changed assumptions, circumstances and requirements. Literature (oral or written) is a social institution and is used as an agent of socialisation. In order for one to understand any literary text one needs to be familiar with language codes, code of customs of society and of conceptions of the community in question.

3) Feminist literary theory seeks to discover
how aesthetic value is assigned, that is, in the text or in the reader, listener or observer and most important what validity by aesthetic judgements. The question being raised is what ends does the judgements serve and what conceptions of the world or ideological stances do they help to perpetuate?

The feminist literary theory aims at a transformation of the structures of traditional male power which now order the society. The feminist literary critic demands that there is need to understand the ways in which societal structures have been and continue to be reinforced by our literature and our literary criticism. The feminist seeks to liberate new and perhaps different points or significance from the same texts and at the same time argues for the right to choose which features of texts need to be taken as relevant since different questions are being raised.

As Steady (1986) argues, feminism in relation to African literature has to examine the socio-economic factors which contribute to the African woman's oppression. By using the feminist theory the researcher has been able to relate the conditions of women in the Gikuyu and Swahili Communities as portrayed through proverbs with the socio-economic realities of culture and development. Feminist theory was appropriate for this study for it is been able to identify gender and to recognise women's position
internationally as one of second class citizens and to seek to correct that state.

As Frank (1984:35) observes, feminist literary criticism is a theory whose interest is women oriented issues in literature. Through this theory, critics are able to examine sexist images of women perpetuated by literary artists and, by extension, the society. The fundamental question, which arises, is the effects of such images on the target audience and the society in question.

The feminist literary criticism has to be implicitly contextual. It is mainly concerned with the gender of the artist and the artist’s attitude towards women.

Based on this theory, it has been shown that the images of women in Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs are deeply rooted in their historical and sociological issues. The images of women portrayed through the proverbs are a reflection of women’s private family lives, their experiences of courtship, marriage and childbearing. It is through this theory that one understands what it means to be a woman in the Swahili and Gikuyu communities. The theory has also enabled the researcher to be both descriptive and evaluative of the role and place of women in the target societies. The theory has served as a lens through which it has been possible to see the historical, cultural and environmental forces that have produced and encouraged women; and have even frustrated their efforts to
get out of their negative images. The theory has provided parameters through which one is able to understand how the images of women are shaped to reflect the world which has engendered them.

The pivotal role played by this theory is one of helping the researcher to reconstruct, analyse and account for and judge literary works (Frank 1984:47). It is on this account that it is chosen as a basis for the analysis of this study data on the images of women as exemplified in the Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs.

1.1. METHODOLOGY

The data of this theory was collected between January 1993 and May 1998.

The study was conducted in two stages:

(a) Preliminary

(1) Archival/Library Research:

The archival research entailed visiting libraries and documentation centres such as Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi, Kenya Institute of Education, Kenya National Archives, Fort Jesus Resource Centre, Institute of Kiswahili Research, Dar-es-Salaam, Women Research Documentation Project in Dar-es-Salaam among others.
This enabled the researcher to take stock of what has been done in the field of oral literature and women studies in general. The archival research enabled the researcher to focus more on the theory of feminist literary criticism on which the study is based. This research also supplemented the field research for it was used to collect proverbs that are documented in books.

For the purpose of this study, the archival research did not provide adequate information for understanding either the meaning or function of many proverbs for any particular cultures corpus of proverbs. Hence an in-depth field research was necessary to achieve this goal. The archival search served as a link between the primary and secondary data.

2) Field Research:
The field research was done in two stages:-

(a) Preliminary Pilot Survey.

This stage was undertaken to enable the researcher to familiarise herself with the respondents and the areas of study. The pilot survey enabled the researcher to estimate the number of relevant proverbs she was likely to collect. From this information, it was possible to sample the respondents to use in the main research programme. Thus the pilot survey was used to improve on the methodology.
which was used during the main fieldwork. During the pilot survey, it was established that if men and women were mixed together in a focus group discussion, the men would dominate the discussion and women would be overshadowed. The researcher therefore modified the group compositions during the main research to ensure that a group was composed of either men or women but not mixed.

The pilot survey also enabled the researcher to choose appropriate time for the focus group discussions. Women were more available during the lunch break while men were more available in the evenings. Interview schedule items were also modified. During the pilot survey, it was noted that when respondents were told to give examples of proverbs which contained gender based information, it was not easy for them to produce them. However, when asked to give examples of all types of proverbs, more proverbs were produced including the targeted ones. It was also noted that there were proverbs whose message was not gender based but were useful in shedding light to gender relations.

Among the questions asked were:-

1) Give examples of proverbs which you know that talk about men and women and their relationships.

2) What do they mean?
3) In which contexts are they used and for what purpose?

4) Are there other proverbs which have a similar message?

5) What in your opinion is the relevance of this proverb to the society?

(b) Field Work:

This was conducted using the following methods:

1. Interview and Observations.
2. Focus Group Discussions.
3. Key Informant Interviews.

The fieldwork was undertaken in three districts of Kenya's Central Province namely: Murang'a Kiambu and Nyeri, for the Gikuyu data and Mombasa, Lamu and Malindi in Coast Province for the Swahili data. Gikuyu proverbs were collected from Kigumo, and Kiriajni in Murang'a District, Karatina, Nyeri town and Mweiga in Nyeri District. In Kiambu, the research was conducted at Kwa Maiko, Lioki and Limuru. In Coast Province, the data was collected at Mombasa Old Town, Fort Jesus, Community Centre, Malindi Town and Lamu Town. These locations were chosen because the residents were considered to be representatives of their communities and the use of
proverbs is still very prevalent among the communities. Furthermore, these areas were seen as areas where the people are very much connected to their cultures unlike in urban areas where influence from other culture has taken root. The districts were sub-divided into divisions and from each district one division was selected at random to represent the other divisions in that district. It was felt that since proverbs are based on the lives and experiences of a people, there would be no significance difference between proverbs from different divisions of a single district. The major differences between proverbs if any could only be between those obtained from different districts perhaps due to environmental, cultural and or dialectal variations.

For example the proverb:-

*Kwa Muhoror gwakuire ngaguro*  
(Muoro’s home was destroyed because of a token meal)

This proverb is well known in Nyeri because it was coined out of a historical event that took place in Nyeri. Also the proverb:-

*Wimbo mui hauongelewi mwana*  
(A bad song is not sung to a child)
Dua mbaya haiombolezwi mwana

(A bad prayer is not used to hush a child)

From each division, the researcher limited herself to ten men and ten women who were selected randomly from two locations that did not border each other, based on the following criteria:

(1) age
(2) gender
(3) education

In total a hundred respondents consisting of 50 males and 50 females were interviewed.

The researcher chose respondents who were fifty years and above since proverbs are mostly used by elderly people in society. The respondents were also chosen on the basis of their educational background in order to obtain a balanced view. For example based on the level of education, the researcher sampled both men and women who had no formal schooling, those who had had basic education and those who had secondary and tertiary levels of education. There were twenty women who had no formal
schooling and six men in the same category. The rest of the respondents had either basic or secondary levels of education. The researcher wanted to find out whether there were differences in perceptions pertaining to the content and images of women as evident from the proverbs. From each informant, the researcher collected as many proverbs as the respondent could provide without selecting any particular type. The sorting out of the proverbs was done later after acquiring a representative sample of the proverbs.

As observed by Milroy (1987: 84) an exploratory research is best carried out as an in-depth investigation of a small group of people. For this reason the interviews undertaken were limited to a small sample of respondents who were sampled based on the three variables; age, sex and education.

The researcher approached the members of the community directly and informally. This enhanced a greater degree of rapport between the researcher and the respondents from local people as research assistants was enlisted.
1.11.1 TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

The main methods of data collection were:

1) Tape recording:

Proverbs were tape recorded from informants mostly in cases where research assistants were sent to the field. This helped in not only saving time but also in getting the proverbs verbatim from the informants' versions without any alterations.

2) Observer participant Approach:

The researcher also collected proverbs during such formal ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and Board of Governors meetings in secondary schools. The settings were ideal for they provided forums where proverbs as a language discourse could be observed. Furthermore, they provided vital proof that the use and application of proverbs is still very much practised and therefore there are relevance in perpetuating societal ideologies is still very significant.

The researcher and her assistants were keen on examining the artists' behaviour and attitudes towards their presentations. This also served to fill the gaps in the
verbal presentations. Field observation had the advantage of allowing the researcher to view the proverbs in vital settings such as churches, weddings and formal meetings such as parents days in schools and also Board of Governors meetings as well as normal and ordinary conversations where they were repeatedly observed under varying kinds of uses and where there were numerous informants with varying degrees of sophistication in their use of the proverbs.

3) Writing the proverbs as performance took place. Due to financial constraints the researcher used four tape recorders among five research assistants and hence one research assistant was compelled to collect some of the proverbs by listening and writing down what the informants said.

4) Informal interviews: Interviews have been suggested as one of the optimal means of gathering data on proverbs (Seitel, 1972). These were used to seek clarifications or further explanations in order to find out the views and attitudes of the respondents. This method was also used to seek information concerning the meaning of the proverbs, the occasions and situations in which they are used, the potential users, the purpose they serve and their effect. This information was effectively gathered in focus group discussions. Many
proverbs were collected from various parts of Central and Coast provinces. As many varieties of each proverb as possible were collected within the study areas. By processes of elimination, the proverbs with gender based information were selected for content analysis. Many proverbs collected were disqualified because they did not contain gender-based information. After sorting the selected data, the researcher was left with one hundred and fifty three Gikuyu proverbs and one hundred and twenty seven Swahili proverbs which were further analysed and have been used as the basis of this study.

1.11.2 DATA ANALYSIS

The first step consisted of the transcription of the recorded materials from the tapes. In the second stage, the literal translations of the proverbs to the target language (English) was carried out since the material was collected in the source languages (Gikuyu and Swahili). The cultural aspect of a proverb makes its translation rather difficult. However, from the literal translation an actual translation was undertaken. After this, the proverbs were divided into categories according to the themes and images exemplified through them. These included images of women as mothers, gossips, untrustworthy beings
and teachers among others. An analysis was carried out to find out the images of the woman in the proverbs.

Analysis was carried out as follows:

1) Thematic analysis - This consisted of an exposition of issues or ideologies about women raised in the proverbs.

2) Literary analysis - This dwelt on analysing the language and symbols used in creating the various images of woman. The images were derived from both the literal and metaphorical levels of the proverbs.

3) A detailed theoretical discussion was then done on the various images and their implications on the woman's position in the Gikuyu and Swahili Societies. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the discussions on the images.
1.12. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to give background information to the study topic, the communities under investigation as well as to explain the problem of the study. A justification of the study has also been given, as well as a literature review and the methods which were used in data collection, analysis and Interpretation. This was aimed at putting the topic in perspective. The theoretical framework used in the data analysis and interpretation is also explained.
CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THE ROLE OF PROVERBS AMONG THE SWAHILI AND THE
GIKUYU OF KENYA.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the role of proverbs among the Gikuyu and the Swahili of Kenya. In order to achieve this goal, the following issues have been addressed:

(i) definition of oral literature
(ii) role of oral literature and proverbs in particular
(iii) classification of proverbs.

From the discussion of the above issues conclusions have been drawn.

Before embarking on analysing the images of women in Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs, it is necessary to start by defining oral literature since proverbs are just one genre of oral literature. It is also important to understand the role of oral literature in general, and that of proverbs in particular, in society. Therefore, this chapter attempts to define oral literature and proverbs and describe their functions in the Gikuyu and Swahili Societies.
The term "Oral Literature" has of late been a topic of discussion in many literary circles. It may be claimed that once a piece of oral literature is written down, it ceases to be oral and becomes written literature. It is therefore important to explore some of the views expressed before coming up with a working definition of the term oral literature. Some scholars have argued that the term itself is a contradiction in its self for oral means spoken while literature means written (Mulokozi 1982: 10).

Oral in the literal sense means that which is transmitted by word of mouth. Oral literature therefore refers to that form of literature whose medium of transmission is the spoken word. The question which arises is: is everything that is orally transmitted oral literature? Taban Lo Liyong (1972: 11) responded to this question thus:-

"Oral literature. What is that?... The cultural information and values transmitted by the spoken word and received by the ear and responded to by the whole organism in societies where writing was and (is still) not yet the order of the day. Folktales, legends, beliefs, songs, poems, proverbs, tales..."

What emerges from Taban Lo Liyong’s definition of oral literature is closely related to the contents of such oral
artforms. He reckons that oral literature contains cultural information and cultural values of the society in question. Another salient feature of oral literature brought out in Taban Lo Liyong's definition of oral literature is the fact that it is responded to by the whole organism. This implies that when one listens to or watches a performance of oral literature, it appeals not only to his/her sense of sight and hearing but other senses. In this view, it may be argued that oral literature appeals to the physical, emotional, spiritual or even the mental faculties of the audience.

Akivaga and Odaga (1982:1) contribute to the debate in the definition of oral literature by observing that:

"Oral literature is a spoken acted (performed) art whose media like that of written literature is words."

In order to differentiate between oral and written literature, Nandwa and Bukenya (1983:1) state that:-

"Oral literature may be defined as those utterances, whether spoken, recited, or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic characteristics of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression."
They continue to elaborate that narratives, songs, proverbs, and other forms of 'literature' are referred to as oral because they are composed and performed through word of mouth which is the meaning of oral. They further argue that this form of art is literature because it uses language as its medium of communication and employs artistic devices which enable it to appeal to the feelings and understanding of the audience.

Having looked at these definitions, it is obvious that, the above definitions have merits and demerits. There is hardly consensus among scholars as to what constitutes adequate definition of oral literature. There have been attempts by scholars to get alternative concepts for oral literature. Among the concepts suggested are "orature", "Verbal arts", and "oracy", (Bukenya and Zirimu 1977).

However, for the purpose of this study, oral literature will be taken to mean all artistic expressions of humankind which use language as their medium of communication. Among these artistic expressions and performances which are commonly referred to as genres of oral literature are narratives, songs, riddles, poetry, proverbs, myths and legends.

Having looked at the term oral literature, the next thing to be addressed is the role of oral literature in
society and its relevance in relation to gender studies and more specifically woman.

In order to understand a community, it is important to have an idea of its literature, whether oral or written. Literature reflects and shapes the lives and ideas of people. It reflects the philosophy and value systems of the society in question.

As Mbele (1987) observes, most of the literature of many African communities, such as the Yoruba, Obiechina (1975), Kabira and Mutahi (1988) including the Gikuyu and Swahili, Knappert (1979), Maasai Kipury (1983), is still in its oral form. Hence it is of paramount importance that in order to understand gender issues in Gikuyu and Swahili communities, an understanding of their oral literature is vital. Oral literature serves as a vehicle or a medium through which the basic societal morals, concepts, beliefs, values, attitudes or their total philosophy is transmitted. Therefore, in order to appreciate the people's feelings, hopes, fears, aspirations, philosophy and aesthetics, and, in brief the totality of the people's way of life, it is vital to study their oral literature which serves as a reservoir of their cultural heritage. It is especially crucial to study oral literature with a view to the appreciating the fact both the Gikuyu and the Swahili people like many African communities, largely transmit
their history, values, aspirations and attitudes using the oral mode of communication.

From these premises, it is obvious that it is impossible for societal philosophy to survive without the support of the oral artist. Oral literature serves as a vehicle through which cultural heritage is recorded and transmitted. Additionally, oral literature provides society the means with which to evaluate and re-assess itself. Hence, through the study of oral literature, people can correct the false images and distortions of their past. This can provide a platform for the people to create and recreate more positive images of themselves and their culture. Through the same medium, people can create faith and self-confidence and respect in themselves and can become better human beings.

Oral literature is a channel through which peoples' traditions are perpetuated. These include all those habitual deeds and customs from the most religious rites to the conventional way of saluting a foreigner. Oral traditions imply what can be deduced from interactions in which their transmission is carried out by word of mouth through direct contact between individuals. Such transmission depends largely on memory and habits of thought, action and speech of the cultural community. This definition of "culture" agrees with the exposition given in
"Culture in its broadest sense is a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their art, their science, all their social, institutions including their system of beliefs and rituals. In the course of their creative struggle and progress through history there evolves a body of material and spiritual values that endow that society with unique ethos. Such values are often expressed through the people’s songs, dances, folklore, drawings, sculpture, rites and ceremonies."

Oral art forms of a given community are relatively homogeneous since being drawn from oral traditions they depend on face to face contact and ensures common customs, beliefs, techniques, sentiments and general outlook. Individuals tend to share moral attitudes and concepts of good life and of the rights and obligations of individuals to the community and vice versa.

Even after the adoption of printing, oral literature in Africa has not been wiped out. Oral and written literature continues to co-exist and to enrich each other. Creative writers have continued to appropriate oral literary traditions by way of borrowing the themes, the plots and other elements of literary traditions in the process of producing their own works, (Mbele 1982:6). In
this way oral literature has been an invaluable source of
data and inspiration for written literary traditions.
Thus, observes Mbele (1982:7):

"contrary to the common belief, the spread of
literary tradition has not resulted in the
obsolescence or displacement of the oral literary
tradition. Oral literature has persisted as the
predominant literature of man, even in societies
where literacy is general and universal".

Elders in the community still continue to transmit to the
youth the customs, beliefs and expectations of their
people.

In Africa as elsewhere, oral traditions reflect
people's way of life. Oral literature results from the
conscious efforts of people in the society. It is a
product of people's intellectual and creative activity. It
embodies, in words and images, the tensions, conflicts and
contradictions at the heart of the community's being. It
throws light on the aesthetics and imaginative place of the
community's efforts to come to terms with its environment
in producing its basic requirements such as clothing,
shelter and, in the process, creating and recreating itself
in history (Ngugi 1981).

Oral literature is a powerful instrument in evolving
the cultural ethos of a people. It has been used as a tool
for socialising and indeed anchoring a deep realisation of
people's image of themselves. Therefore by studying oral literature of any community, it is possible to understand and appreciate the cultural values of the target community. This could lead to unravelling of the ideologies that hinder women's full participation in economic ventures which in turn retards growth and development of the community in question. Study of oral literature can enhance the awareness of cultural values and literary structures that persist as part and parcel of the understanding of the past and the contemporary social situation of the community under scrutiny.

Oral literature is a conscious craft that bears aesthetic and artistic expression. It is stimulated by a physical and socio-economic environment, that is, the collective preferences of the people as well as their talents and creativity. Oral literature is dynamic for it has a history, and it changes with the social, economic and political structures of the community.

Hence, when discussing any aspect of culture like gender relations, one area of focus is, most probably, the activities which are derived from peoples beliefs and attitudes. Such beliefs and attitudes could change with the passage of time. Proverbs, however, do not change as fast and could be seen in an achronic perspective. However, as Chesaina (1991: 26) notes:-
"most of the values enshrined in
the proverbs are as relevant to our
contemporary cultures as they were
to our ancestors' cultures".

Notwithstanding, it is notable that no living culture
is ever static. It changes in the physical, social,
political and economic environment following the changes in
the modes of life of the society in which it occurs which
in turn changes the thoughts and lives of the people.
Culture is an instrument which unites people in common
beliefs, actions and values.

It is culture which identifies a people. It is the
mark of uniqueness of a peoples' life. It embraces their
total mentality as expressed in their oral literature,
language and philosophy. It's outward manifestations are
realised in various forms of performances and creative arts
such as dances, sports, music, painting, textiles, carvings
and other art forms.

In this study, culture is treated as a dynamic force
that shapes the destiny of the people in their quest for
freedom peace and development. Oral literature was and is
still utilised as a tool for instruction and transmission
of knowledge. Such knowledge transmitted emanates from
oral art forms used during initiation rites, marriages,
deaths and religious rituals or public fora for behavioural
appraisal, criticism and control. Dances, mimes, story
telling and heroic reactions are an essential part of one’s upbringing.

Oral Literature tends to be used to outline the social responsibilities with respect to the roles, the relationships and the responsibilities of societal members. It is used as a tool to make members of a society accept certain common values. It therefore contributes to the control and integration of an individual’s feelings and beliefs. Furthermore, oral literature, plays a decisive role in instructing members of the community the values and the socially sanctioned attitudes. It is the medium through which the Gikuyu and Swahili impart historical and religious beliefs as well as social attitudes from one generation to the next.

In recent years, quite a number of researchers in the field of Oral literature in Kenya such as Kabira and Karega (1988), Kabira (1983) Mwangi (1970), Nandwa and Bukenya (1983), Chesaina (1988), Kieti and Coughlin (1990) Kipury (1983), Lusweti (1984), Ndalu and King’ei (1989) and Abudu and Baruwa (1981) have concentrated on the collection of oral literature genres. These studies however, hardly go on to relate oral literature to society not to mention the portrayal of women and society at large. In this study however, one of the main aims has been to find out how women are depicted in Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs. This is
in view of the fact that literature as a cultural force does not simply reflect but subtly and indirectly helps to shape social reality as highlighted by sociological and psychological theories of socialisation. These two models of analysis essentially propose that social attitudes and behaviour of imitation and comparison with the attitudes and behaviours presented by significant individuals and groups and by cultural forces.

Hence in view of the fact that literature is an agent of socialisation and reinforces traditional values and beliefs, this study looks at the portrayal of women in Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs in order to gain an insight into the societal attitudes and beliefs about women in the two communities.

In the following section of this chapter we focus on proverbs as one genre of oral literature and the role they play in society especially in regard to the portrayal of women.

2.2 THE ROLE OF PROVERBS IN GIKUYU AND SWAHILI COMMUNITIES

This section focuses on the meaning of proverbs and the role they play in the societies studied.
2.2.1 DEFINITION OF PROVERBS

There are as many definitions of proverbs as there are scholars in this field. However, this researcher has looked at some of the definitions that have been cited, their strengths and weaknesses and then came up with a working definition which will serve as a guideline for the present study.

Some of the views put forward are:

1. A Proverb is "a terse, compact pithy statement of popular wisdom accepted as an expression of truth" (Sunkuli and Miruka 1990).

2. A proverb is a "short familiar sentence" expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson, a bye word; a saying that requires explanation (Chambers 20th century dictionary).

3. "A proverb is "a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness sense and salt and distinguished by popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it" (Finnegan 1970: 393).

4. "A proverb is seen as, "constituting the unwritten
commandments and the invisible granary of guiding wisdom accumulated over many generations. . . .
proverbs are tools with which worthy speakers manage to chide, apologise, give hints of things to come, praise and pull out of difficult situations without embarrassment or loss of face" Wescott (1981)

5. A proverb is seen as "succinct and memorable statement that contain advice, a warning or production, or an analytical observation. Its form is usually terse, figurative, rich in metaphor and most often poetic." Fergusson (1983)

The diversity in the views expressed in the meaning of proverbs makes it necessary to outline the salient features in the definition of a proverb. From the above definitions, it is clear that they are based on three characteristics of proverbs:- These are:-

(a) structure
(b) content
(c) function

The main characteristics of proverbs emerging from the definitions are:-
• a short verse or brief.
• indirect, obscure or gnomic.
• relatively invariable statements
• full of wisdom, truth or meaning.

From the above-mentioned features of a proverb mentioned, the basic elements include its structure and its content. With regard to content, it is generally accepted that the message conveyed through proverbs is accepted by the society as an expression of truth and wisdom (Miruka 1994:45). Therefore, one of the main aims of this study is to find out the truth gathered about women in the Gikuyu/Swahili proverbs. Other elements of the proverbs emphasised are their brevity and compactness. These characteristics make proverbs easy to remember. It has been noted for example that in most societies, proverbs appear in fixed patterns and there is little room for improvisation or creativity on the part of the performers. This feature, observes Bukenya (1983:99) puts proverbs in the category of formulas or formulae.

The above discussion concurs with Nandwa and Bukenya (1983: 100-101) when they reckon that:

"A proverb is a terse statement containing folk wisdom."
In an attempt to clarify their definition, they further state that:-

"A proverb is terse in the sense that it uses the fewest words possible in context."

This explanation tallies with an earlier view that proverbs are compact statements for they do not waste words, Sunkuli and Miruka (1990). Proverbs go straight to the point intended to be made. This verbal economy of proverbs is therefore one single factor which makes them popular, Nandwa and Bukenya (1983). For example, proverbs are usually very handy for they give a summary assessment of the situation. In this regard, therefore, proverbs have been labelled as conversational shorthand. In short, skilled artists use appropriate proverbs to explain a point and leave the audience the task of working out their meaning and application. However, this kind of usage can also be counter-productive because if an artist uses a proverb which the audience is not familiar with, communication could be inhibited. This is especially so because most proverbs are allusive. They refer indirectly to history, stories, institutions and beliefs which are well known in particular traditions. If the audience is not familiar with such traditions and a proverb is drawn from them, it will be at a loss to comprehend the message.
Due to their shortness and invariability, proverbs are the most memorable of all the genres of oral literature. Probably, this is why they have been used by many oral artists as a backbone to the whole body of oral literature. Narrators, singers and poets constantly borrow heavily from this genre so as to enrich their performances. In some traditions, it is not unusual to find that a song is nothing less than a string of proverbs put together. This trend is even more so in the Gikuyu traditional oral songs. Examples of these include, for example the songs sung by popular musicians such as Joseph Kamaru, Kihara Simon, Queen Jane and other notable Gikuyu artists.

Theatrical pieces in the Gikuyu language have been presented in various entertainment venues in Nairobi have proved quite popular recently to a variety of audiences. The titles of these plays have tended to be drawn from popular proverbs. Examples of such titles are:-

**Utakanyuiriiire**, derived from the Gikuyu proverb:-

**Utakanyuiriiire ndamenyaga kari rita** (Gikuyu)

(He who has not drunk from it does not know its measure.)

This means that it is only the wearer of the shoe who knows where it pinches. Another example is the play entitled "Cia Mukari" (what belongs to a mean person). This is
also derived from the Gikuyu proverb:–

Cia Mukari Iriagwo na Mambura (Gikuyu)

(What belongs to a mean person is eaten during festivals)

A variant of this proverb is:–

Muka mukari ariagirwo na mambura (Gikuyu)

(What belongs to a mean woman is eaten during festivals.)

There are also narratives whose main message can be summarised using proverbs. For example there are many Swahili and Gikuyu narratives whose main teaching can be summarised in proverbs such as:–

Asiyefunzwa na mamaye hufunzwa na ulimwengu (Swahili)

(One who is not taught by the mother is taught by the world.)

Murega akirwo ndaregaga akihetwo (Gikuyu)

(If you refuse to be advised, you cannot refuse the consequences.)

The above examples emphasise the fact that proverbs form one genre of oral literature which is widely acknowledged in many traditions as the most serious and mature form of expression. They therefore form one genre
of oral literature which is commonly and most widely used unlike other genres.

Another characteristic of proverbs, which is focused on in this study, is the fact that they are considered to be the mark of adult wisdom and experience (Akivaga and Odaga 1982). Important issues and pieces of advice are stored in and transmitted through proverbs. It is a fact that settling disputes and judicial decisions in traditional societies were carried out using proverbs (Nyambezi 1954, and Barra 1960). It is therefore not unusual to find even casual speech marked by heavy occurrence of proverbs. It is therefore very essential that there is a proper understanding of proverbs for one to appreciate not only African literature but also African beliefs, values, attitudes and views.

Perhaps the most crucial feature in the definition of the proverb in regard to this study is the fact that they are considered as an expression of folk wisdom. They are, for example, believed to be very intelligent and mature forms of expression. There is a tendency to refer to them as "wise sayings" or "sayings of the wise". This view of the proverbs has two aspects to it:

- Collective or common ownership
- Practical application.

The message or wisdom of the proverb is the collective
property of the society from which it comes. In oral traditions, it is not easy to associate a particular proverb with a particular artist. The originators of proverbs, unlike other art forms are usually anonymous. However, it must be stated that not everybody creates the proverbs. Certain genius individuals create these literary pieces as others take them up and pass them on.

It is likely that a proverb starts as a general saying but due to its power to fire the imagination of the people, in this case referred to as "the folk", they slowly accept it until it becomes a common saying of the folk in the community. In this case the composition of proverbs may be regarded and accepted as a communal activity. It is the general agreement of members of a given community that establishes the validity of a proverb. Nyembezi (1954) for example observes that proverbs were first uttered by famous men or by bards or jesters before the king or at beer drinking parties. These were then taken up and popularised by others.

'Folk wisdom' was also characterised by practical application in the sense that they make sense only when they are directly applied to specific situations or problems. The value of a proverb lies in its applicability to a concrete situation, that is, how it assesses the
situation and the suggestions it offers to solve the problems in that particular situation. Hence a proverb has to be interpreted within its own context. Nonetheless, it is important to note that proverbs can be applied to different situations and their interpretation in such cases depends on the context. It is even very common, depending on the situation, to come across proverbs that contradict each other as illustrated in the following examples from the Swahili community:

1. Mtoto wa nyoka ni nyoka (Swahili)
   (The child of a snake is a snake)

2. Mtoto wa simba ni simba (Swahili)
   (The child of a lion is a lion)

Similarly from the Gikuyu community, the following examples suffice:

1. Kori kaiyaga ta nyina
   (A kid steals like the mother.)

2. Kana ka ngari gakunyaga ta nyina
   (A cub of a leopard scratches like the mother.)
The preceding examples indicate that offsprings often resemble their parents in their behaviour. However in both Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs, there are examples which give contrary views. The following proverbs reveal contradictions to the view that offsprings resemble the parents.

**Nda yumaga muici na murogi (Gikuyu)**
(The womb begets a thief and a witch)

A parent can give birth to a thief and a witch. This implies that the offsprings are of different characteristics.

**Moto hauzai moto (Swahili)**
(Fire does not breed fire)

In the above Swahili proverb, the implication is that there is no resemblance between the parent and the offspring.

What emerges from the above characteristics of proverbs is that they are metaphorical statements that summarise a cultural context, event, happening or experience. It is therefore important to understand that they cannot be understood outside the specific setting within which they emerge.
2.2.2 THE FUNCTIONS OF PROVERBS

Proverbs have multiple roles depending on context, user, audience and purpose. Kabira and Karega (1983:38) for example, observe that some of the roles of proverbs include warning, informing, advising, and educating. On top of this Lusweti, (1984:46) lists other functions of proverbs as disposing justice, criticising, resolving conflicts, oratory and entertainment. In elaboration, she observes that people use proverbs for oratory purposes especially when trying to make points clear. Proverbs are also used by adults to comment on the behaviour of others especially those who are perceived as deviants from the accepted patterns of behaviour. Proverbs are also used as pieces of advise by parents when counselling children or by adults when advising the youth.

In some communities proverbs are used by elders for the purpose of dispensing justice. Among the Agikuyu the following proverb is used to encourage people to be impartial when making decisions which touch on two parties.

Gutiri wa nda na wa mugongo (Gikuyu.)

(No one has the monopoly of the mother's bosom or back.)
People use proverbs to enrich their speeches. Miruka (1994) notes that, most scholars tend to concentrate on the normative function of the proverbs. In this role, the importance of proverbs cannot be downplayed: Proverbs are largely didactic and tend to be used to perpetuate and facilitate the achievement of societal ideals. In this role, they are used to warn, caution, advise, encourage or castigate elements of societal norms.

Proverbs also have aesthetic functions. When used in this role, they add flavour to entice and to captivate the audience to listen to the speaker. They help the speaker to make his point more forcefully as it is believed to leave an indelible mark on the mind of the listener(s). It is therefore not surprising that people who have knowledge of many proverbs are more eloquent and formidable communicators.

Proverbs are also used for reflective purposes. They can be used to summarise a people's philosophy of life, developed over a long period of time. Through proverbs, members of a society can reflect on their own experiences. Furthermore proverbs can also be used as mirrors through which societal attitude and thought processes can be inferred. This is in view of the fact that, they play a speculative function as statements of the past and their application to the contemporary situations.
Proverbs also have summative functions. In view of the fact that they are short and to the point, they contain veiled meanings for they are considered as condensations of larger issues. In this aspect proverbs need decoding and elaborate explanations to enable a stranger to understand. This explains why many stories or discussions are summed up using proverbs.

Though proverbs are used in casual speech, they are mostly used for discussing serious issues such as discussions on matters like land; marriage contracts; legal proceedings among others. When used in such contexts or occasions, nobody bothers to interpret them. They are used to refer to the peoples' philosophy and they cover a whole range of human experience. In proverbs, principles of the society are expressed in graphic and concise form and the wider implications of specific situations brought to mind. It has been suggested that proverbs can be regarded as "tribal law" (Barra 1960). This is because in traditional societies proverbs were used by elders, especially the rulers to display their intelligence and sober mindedness. In such circumstances, proverbs were used to add flavour to speech. As Achebe (1958:5) points out:

"Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten."
They served as a tool for oratory and enhancement of one's public image. The educational and moral value of proverbs continues to this day to cover the whole spectrum of life of the community.

2.3. CLASSIFICATION OF PROVERBS

There are various ways in which proverbs have been classified. The factors which have been considered in the various forms of classification have ranged from the functions of the proverbs to their structure.

2.3.1 FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Notable scholars of oral literature such as Kipury (1983) and Chesaina (1991) just to name a few, classify proverbs according to their functions. Chesaina for example groups proverbs under sub-titles such as "proverbs of fate", cautionary "proverbs", proverbs on Greed and selfishness, Proverbs on the importance of being humane, and so on. Miruka (1994) notes that this classification operates from the theoretical framework that oral literature's major purpose is sociological, specifically
educating. This approach in classification is in line with the treatment of oral literature as a utilitarian art and hence proverbs are grouped in accordance with their role.

The roles of proverbs are diverse. These include warning, advising, castigating negative social behaviour, consoling victims of negative social misfortunes and encouraging among other functions. However, like the content classification (cf 2.3.3 ff), this approach suffers from the fact that a proverb may change its functions depending on when it is used, in which context and by whom. In order to understand the function of a proverb, knowledge of the situation in which it is cited is essential.

Finnegan (1970:416) states, for example, that one proverb can be used in several contexts to suggest a variety of different truths and different facets of the same truth or even opposites. She further argues that to confine an African proverb to a single role is to mess the flexibility and situational aspect that is so striking of African proverbs. This is in view of the fact that the same proverb can be used in a whole range of situations with different applications and meanings. Furthermore, there are many proverbs which are contradictory. Chesaina (1991:26) for example, admits that not all proverbs can be categorised functionally. This is because there are some which cannot be pinned down to any of the categories she
has identified. That notwithstanding, functional classification approach is very important in view of the fact that oral literature is a product of culture. Hence, it reflects a peoples' philosophy, beliefs, attitudes, and values.

2.3.2 ALPHABETICAL CLASSIFICATION

In this method as has been used by various oral literature scholars, (e.g. Barra (1960), Njururi (1983), Ndalu and King'ei (1989), Abudu and Baruwa (1981) and Mbaabu (1978), proverbs are classified following the alphabetic order of the first letter in the original language. This means that all the proverbs beginning with "A" are classified before those which begin with "B".

Miruka (1994:48) points out that this system of classification has the advantage of catering for all possible proverbs and is easy to execute. It has, however, the problem of putting proverbs of diverse structures, styles and themes together. It is difficult to differentiate them at that level. Further more, once the proverbs are translated, they cannot retain their alphabetic order.
2.3.3. SUBJECT CONTENT OR THEMATIC CLASSIFICATION

Under this method, proverbs are grouped according to what they talk about. Those that dwell on religious matters are grouped together; those that hinge on politics are also put together. Similarly, those that deal with social matters such as marriage are also categorized into a group.

The major drawback to this method, as also observed for the functional classification approach is that groups are likely to overlap. This is because some proverbs apply across many subjects as may be shown in the following Kiswahili proverb:

Asiyesikia la mkuu huvunjika guu (Swahili.)

(One who does not heed an elder breaks his leg)

This proverb could be used in the domestic context by a parent who wants to warn or caution a deviant child. It can also be used by a husband to caution wife against opposing him. The same proverb can also be used in a political situation in which a politician is warning his juniors or followers that unless they heed his advice, their positions may be jeopardized.
2.3.4. STYLISTIC - STRUCTURAL CLASSIFICATION

Proverbs have also been classified according to their stylistic or structural features. In regard to their form, proverbs are generally short and appear in more or less fixed forms whose pattern are acceptable to society. Proverbs are also marked by some kind of poetic quality in style and of sense. This is noted by Finnegan (1970:399) who observes, proverbs are mainly expressed by literal statements, similes, metaphors, hyperbole and paradox.

Based on these stylistic elements, proverbs have been classified thus: directives, epigrams, and allusions. This kind of classification is referred to as literary classification, an entirely new approach which classifies proverbs entirely on the account of their stylistic and structural dimensions (Miruka, 1994)

Within the category of directives are proverbs that comment on situations, sum up or cover some designated message to the target audiences (Miruka 1994; 46). Furthermore, proverbs in this category occur as terse authoritative statements whose truth is expressly unchangeable as illustrated in the following examples:-
1. Asiyefunzwa na mamaye hufunzwa na ulimwengu (Swahili).

(He who is not taught by the mother is taught by the world).

2. Karega nyina nigukua gakuaga (Gikuyu).

(He who refuses to heed the mother is bound to die).

These two proverbs show that one who does not heed the mother's advice does not expect any good in life.

The second sub-category under stylistic-structural proverbs, is Epigrams. These are proverbs which are structurally longer, are amusing and express some clever thought. The major feature of an epigram is that it draws analogies between phenomena. An epigram comprises of two parts both of which may be stated or one of which may only be implied. Examples of such types of include:-

1. Maji yakijaa hupwa (Swahili)

(When the tide is high it ebbs)

2. Mpanda ngazi hushuka (Swahili)

(He who climbs the ladder comes down)

The third category of proverbs under the stylistic classification are the allusions. An allusion is an
indirect reference to some familiar person, event, object or place. The familiarity of the concept makes the meaning of the proverb clear and actually places it in a context.

Proverbs being products of a peoples' history are bound with allusions, some historical, which emanate from historical events of the society in question.

They could also refer to stories and institutional beliefs which are well known to the society as shown in the following Gikuyu proverb:

Kwa muhoro gwakuire ngaguro (Gikuyu)

(Muhoro’s home was destroyed because of lack of a token meal).

The above proverb refers to a man by the name ‘Muhoro’ who was very mean. One time there were people who planned to go and steal his cattle, goats and sheep. Somebody was sent to warn him but when this messenger was denied a token meal, he refused to give Muhoro the information on the planned raid. As a result, Muhoro was caught unawares and his home was destroyed because of his meanness. Through this proverb, members of community are warned to treat any visitor kindly for they do not know who such visitors may be or what news they may be bringing.

In view of the various functions of proverbs as
discussed in the preceding paragraphs this study explore the images of women in Swahili and Gikuyu proverbs. All categories of proverbs have considered as long as their subject matter, content or theme touches on the images of women in the two communities.

2.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to define Oral Literature in general and proverbs in particular. It has been shown, for example, that it is not easy to define or classify proverbs as they have as many definitions as there are scholars who have defined them. The functions of proverbs have also been discussed in order to throw some light to the importance of the emerging images of women in Gikuyu and Swahili respectively. It is argued in this chapter that proverbs are a reflection of some of the societal attitudes and beliefs about women.
CHAPTER THREE

3.0 GIKUYU PROVERBS AND THE IMAGE OF WOMEN

This chapter examines the concept of proverb in the Gikuyu community, their functions and the image of women emanating from them. It goes on to make conclusions based on the emerging images of women, societal attitudes towards women and their implications in gender relations.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are widely used in the Gikuyu community. Gecaga (1994:117) for example, observes that they are especially used to bring out the finer shades of meaning and to drive home a point of difference or agreement. Hence the Proverb:

Ciunagwo rukomo Kimenyi akamenya ikiunwo
(We speak in proverbs, he/she who is intelligent will understand).

As Madumulla (1995:24) rightly notes, what constitutes a proverb varies from one society to the other. In the Agikuyu society, the term used to denote proverb is "Thimo". This is a noun derived from the verb guthima
which means to measure or gauge (Mpesha 1979:135). With regard to the term 'proverb', it refers to words seldom quoted in full, or sometimes just single words. Munene (1995:) defines Gikuyu proverbs:-

"Thimo ni ndundiro cia ihooto na ngarango nyingi thiini wa cio na itari irathimurwo ndungihota kumenya ndeto cia cio".

(Gikuyu proverbs are sausages whose fillings are truths and unless they are unravelled you cannot understand their meaning).

Nganga (1996) too defines Gikuyu proverbs as:-

"Thimo ni ciugo ciaragia uhoro na njira hithe, na ii uugi muingi na munene muno na ihinya kuiguo na kumenyeka ni mundu utoi thimo. Ihuthagirwo na kwaria, na kuheana uhoro uria utekwendo umenyeke ni andu othe aria mathikiriirie na uhoro ukwendwo kuhithwo mundu uria utoi thimo"

(Proverbs are words, which discuss an issue in a hidden manner with a lot of wisdom, and they are difficult to be understood by somebody who does not know them. They are used in speech and in the discussion of issues which are not supposed to be known by everybody listening and especially those who are not familiar with proverbs). (Our translation)

Munene (1995) explains that proverbs are used to pacify or to give people food for thought. In the Gikuyu society proverbs are very important for they are used to inculcate the Gikuyu philosophy, cultural values and attitudes or the whole spectrum of Gikuyu social life. Like other genres of oral literature, Gikuyu proverbs are as old as the people
are. Thus states Munene (1995):

"Agikuyu maturaga na ndundiyo ciao cia ihooto (thimo) kuma kimerera kiao.

(Gikuyu people have had their proverbs since their origin).

This view is also held by Njururi (1983) who notes that Gikuyu proverbs are as old as the language itself.

Among the Agikuyu, the handing down of proverbs from one generation to another through word of mouth is a custom closely associated with the education of the young. Gikuyu proverbs are based on the day to day affairs of the people and hence bear a close relationship to life.

Proverbs are used in many spheres of Gikuyu social life. They are used often to build or to destroy arguments in whatever matter is being discussed. They are used to start off discussions; explanations and elaborations follow later. They are also used as granaries of advice or stores of knowledge that the Agikuyu have accumulated over the years. They are accepted by the Agikuyu community as denoting wisdom. They signify truthfulness. Though some people use proverbs in ordinary speech or casual conversation, they are not meant for use in such a manner but to be used mostly in important gatherings such as in settling disputes. Therefore, leaders (athamaki) know more
proverbs than the ordinary people for they use them in
their day to day duties of administration in the community.
They discuss people’s lives in proverbs so as to conceal
the contents of the discussions. They also use proverbs to
display their intelligence and sober-mindedness. They use
the proverbs to add flavour to their speech in order to
influence decision-making. Hence in such circumstances,
proverbs are used as a tool for oratory and enhancement of
one’s public image. Children from the ruling families have
opportunities of learning more proverbs than children of
ordinary folk. The proverbs are valued for the wisdom
carried in them which would help people to mould themselves
into responsible citizens, as illustrated in the following
example:-

Ngarari ni kamena

(Discord breeds scorn).

Such kinds of proverbs are used to "help" women avoid
unnecessary disagreements especially with their husbands.
They were further warned that:-

Kirema arume ni kigariure

(That which defeats men is thoroughly tested
over). That is, men are not easily defeated.
This proverb was used to discourage women from arguing with men because they would face the consequences of men's wrath if they ever dared to oppose them. This is in view of the fact that men do not give up easily. Even when they are faced with a difficult task, they fight to the bitter end. Women are therefore supposed to be cautious when dealing with them on account of this characteristic.

Proverbs are regarded as spears which pierce people's hearts and whoever is pierced, it is believed, cannot sleep until he/she understands the message contained in it. As observed earlier, proverbs are a difficult form of speech and people normally struggle to understand the message contained in them. This is because some of the proverbs contain words which are no longer in use while others are expressed in archaic forms. However, some proverbs are relatively new for they contain words which refer to events which took place after the establishment of colonial rule. All the same the whole repertoire of Gikuyu proverbs is derived from the community's conditions of life and are based on experiences of the people.

They are based on experiences and observations of people's characteristics as they interact with their environment and on the social institutions of the Gikuyu community. The messages expressed in the proverbs give an insight into the people's attitudes to life. Proverbs are
therefore considered as expressions of wisdom, justice, judgement, and equity. They are viewed as small windows into the soul of the a people's philosophy about life.

Ng'ang'a (1996) notes that Gikuyu proverbs can be divided into three categories:

Firstly there are proverbs which are clear and their message is obvious. An example is:

Wahira ihu wi kironda niwe ukagura
(If you impregnate one with a wound, you will marry her).

This message clearly states that if a man impregnates a girl with a wound (disability) he will be obliged to marry her. The proverb has however been extended to mean that one should be careful in making choices especially those which may oblige him to take certain measures.

Secondly, are proverbs whose meaning is concealed and are difficult to interpret. An example of such proverbs is:

Ciunagwo rukombo/rukomo kimenyi akamenya ikiunwo
(we speak by proverbs, he who is intelligent will understand.)

Thirdly are proverbs which consist of one, two or
three words but talk about a comprehensive situation or a summary of a situation. An example of this type of proverb is:

Uugi uugi gu

(wisdom, wisdom, no wisdom).

This proverb means that, the secret has been revealed. The proverb is used to warn people who use cunningness to trick others that their tricks will sooner or later be known and they will be exposed for what they are.

This chapter focuses on all the three categories of proverbs with special focus on the way women are portrayed either literally or metaphorically.

3.2 THE IMAGE OF A WOMAN AS A WIFE

In the traditional Gikuyu society, both men and women were encouraged to get married. Women in these relationships played the role of a man’s companion. They were expected to be good and responsible wives to their husbands. A good wife was supposed to take care of first and foremost, her husband, attending to all his needs and desires and then the rest of the household roles. As a good wife, she was also expected to obey the husband,
sharing his likes and dislikes and respecting his relatives. The importance of the position held by women in the society is best captured in the proverb:-

Nyoni ya njamba ndiri gitara

(A male bird has no nest)

This proverb shows that as far as the society is concerned, the home belongs to the woman. Various attitudes towards women seem to have stemmed from the numerous roles assigned to them by society. Through the process of social conditioning or socialisation, women came to accept the social attitudes towards them. For example, they also came to accept that they were inferior to men and should occupy an inferior position in society. They came to believe that since men are biologically strong, then it implied they were superior. They came to believe that since they were not endowed with the same strength as men to enable them perform similar activities, men’s roles were more important than theirs. The society endorsed these beliefs by all means possible. These means included the oral literature forms such as proverbs, songs and narratives. The distorted images of women became part of the social attitudes and beliefs of society.
3.3 THE IMAGE OF A WOMAN AS A MOTHER

Among the Agikuyu, as in other societies, the woman's primary role is that of motherhood. In regard to the status of women in many African traditional societies, Steady (1981:29) observes that:

"The most important factor with regard to the woman in traditional society is her role as a mother and the centrality of this role as a whole. Even in strictly patriarchal societies, women are important as wives and mothers since their reproductive capacity is crucial to the maintenance of the husband's lineage and it is because of women that men can have lineage at all."

The central role of a woman as mother is further articulated by Davies (1986:243) who notes:

"In many African societies, motherhood defines womanhood. Motherhood is crucial to a woman's status in African society. To marry and mother a child (a son preferably) entitles a woman to more respect from her husband's kinsmen as she can now be addressed as mother of ..."

A woman is brought up right from childhood knowing and realising the importance of that role and cherishing it. Lippert (1972) notes that, this is the only role that gives her status. Hence her training right from childhood includes this important aspect and it is emphasised
thereafter.

The Gikuyu society considers a woman as its mother. She is, as a result, seen as the cornerstone of the family. She forms the foundation of the homestead and without her the homestead is broken. As she is the homemaker, without her there is no home in the sense of Gikuyu social life. This role of the mother is well-documented in Gikuyu proverbs. As a mother, a woman is supposed to cook for children as well as her husband, hence, as illustrated through the following examples:-

Mundu utathiaga oigaga no nyina urugaga wega.

(The person who does travel thinks that his/her mother is the best cook).

Though this proverb refers to people with limited experience who assume that their position or view is the best, the message is derived through the image of a woman as a cook for her family.

Another proverb which brings out similar sentiments is:-

Muria ngime ni ari mukimiri.

(The one who asks for mashed food has someone to mash it for him.)
This proverb means that anyone who chooses to eat mashed food has someone to mash it for her or him. However, according to gender roles in the Gikuyu society, the work of cooking is the woman's and hence the proverb cannot be treated as gender neutral.

The role of women as mothers: the cornerstone of the home though positive has been used by society to deny women a chance to participate in the economic development of society. Women have been constantly reminded that their place is in the kitchen and hence they have no business participating in other areas of social life. Yet there is ample evidence to show women's role in various aspects of the economy.

In Gikuyu society, as in most parts of Africa, the whole of a girl's life is one long preparation for the useful role she is supposed to play. The role pertains mainly to marriage and child bearing. Women are seen as procreators and perhaps the mother image stems from this role. As wives and mothers, women provide their husbands and the society at large with the most important assets: children. Until he was married, a young man remained a dependant who owed total obedience and economic service to his father's household. The latter was the head and patriarch in the home.

After marriage, a man was expected to start his own
homestead, till his own land and acquire his own property including livestock. Marriage was the beginning of a man’s economic emancipation. Once married, a man could control the labour and output of his wife and eventually exchange his daughters in marriage for new wives if the need arose.

For women, marriage imposed on them new roles and expectations. They were expected to bear children: a sacred duty of a woman since children are regarded as the future of a society and without them there was no future. This perspective prevails today in Gikuyu so it is the children who link one generation to another and one clan to another through marriage. It is children who bring pride and honour to family and the whole society. So in her role as a procreator in collaboration with the man, the woman was and is almost worshipped, even acquires a new identity as a mother of so and so (Kenyatta 1978). After all, doesn’t the survival of the whole society lie in her hands? So the woman has to be kept satisfied with her role as procreator. This role is so crucial and central to her life that if she fails to fulfil it, though giving and rearing children was a social duty for both men and women, she is considered incomplete.

In Gikuyu society, a woman who has not produced children is embarrassingly referred to as "thaata" which means barren woman. In traditional society and even today
women were blamed for childlessness in marriage. When a woman turned out to be barren, the husband had the right to divorce her and if necessary, marry another woman or other women. As Taiwo (1984) notes, childless marriages had no place in African traditional life. However, the society did everything to help a woman to fulfil her role as a procreator. For example, if she did not procreate with her husband, the husband would allow her to have sexual intercourse with other men of his age. If that failed, she would be taken to a medicineman who would try to investigate the cause of her barrenness. It is only after all avenues had been exhausted that the woman would be identified as barren, and in most cases, be divorced because of this.

The examples discussed below bring out the image of a woman as a procreator and the joys and sorrows associated with this role.

*Mutumia angikura atari mwana ndangiona mutahiri mai* 
(The woman that gets old without bearing a child will have nobody to draw water for her, that is, she will have nobody to help her).

The above example literally highlights the society's attitude towards motherhood. This aspect is a blessing since it brings forth children who will take care of their
parents in old age. As far as society was and is concerned, a woman without a child for her husband is a failure for children are perceived as belonging to a man, clan and society at large. Children are also used to enhance a man's social status. Hence a woman who is unable to get children of her own is seen as a liability to the family. She is not a contributor to the general welfare of the clan. This implies that the woman's biological function of procreation was overplayed by society.

It is important to note that only those women who were identified as barren, suffered the consequences of childless marriages, not sterile men. This is because society blames barrenness on the woman and never on the man. Consequently, the worth of the woman in the Gikuyu society is still measured in terms of her ability to give birth to children. In fact women who have mothered but lost their children are treated with more sympathy than the barren ones as brought out in this proverb:

\[ \text{Mukuithia ari itigi kuri muthati} \]

(One whose child has died is more worthy than a barren one).

If a woman lives up to the social expectations of motherhood, then her worth is celebrated in various ways as in:-
Kungu maitu na hunyu wake
(Behold my mother despite her shortcomings).

This proverb emphasises the importance of a mother and the central place she occupies in the hearts of the members of her family. Despite her shortcomings, a mother is very important in the lives of the whole family. She is seen as the cornerstone of the family and is regarded with a lot of warmth as the above-cited proverb shows. Gikuyu men, especially when drunk, sing boasting that they belong to their mothers.

As mothers of children, it is the women who feel the pain when children are in distress. They also bear burden of the children when such children misbehave. This is expounded in proverbs like:-

Mwana mukigu/mwaganu aturagia nyina ✓
na maithori/kieha

A naughty/foolish child brings grief to the mother.

A child who does not live to the expectations of society either due to lack of intellect or because he does not conform to the societal code of behaviour, is a disgrace to the mother. In dealing with such children, the mother is reminded to be extra vigilant for:-
Mureri kirimu ndaigaga muthigi thi

(One who rears a foolish child does not keep the rod down).

This is similar to the English proverb which says:-

Spare the rod and spoil the child.

In the Gikuyu society, it is the woman who is rebuked for the children's failure. A woman has even more problems to deal with if she happens to have male children. This is brought out in the proverb:-

Haaro ni ya muka uri ihii

(Quarrels are part of life of a woman who has sons).

Apart from revealing that the mother is the one who takes the blame and the responsibility when children quarrel, this proverb also reveals the attitude of society towards males.

Although this proverb could mean that, sons are troublesome but it must be born in mind that, male children are socialised to be more aggressive than female ones. Female children are expected to be docile and timid and therefore, compared to their male siblings, they give their parents less trouble. Due to this expectation, when the
female child matures into a woman, she is expected, and
tends to be docile and timid since society does not expect
her to behave roughly or aggressively. Any girl child who
behaves contrary to this expectation is called:-

Wanja kihii

(Wanja the boy. Equivalent to the English
'tomboy')

The above expression is used to describe a girl of
unfeminine behaviour. It implies that even though she is
a girl, she behaves like a boy and this is a negative mark
on her personality as a woman who shows aggressiveness is
frowned upon. When children misbehave or fail to live up
to the expectations of society, the mother takes the blame
as exemplified in the following proverbs:-

1) Mwana wa ngari akunyaga ta nyina

(The cub of a leopard scratches like the mother)

2) Kori kaiyaga ta nyina

(A kid steals like the mother)

Among the Agikuyu, a woman is charged with the
responsibility of bringing up children. This is because as
a mother, she spends most of her time tending to the needs
of the children: moulding their character to ensure that her offsprings conform to societal norms. As a result, if the child fails, it is the mother who is considered to have failed. To fulfil this duty the mother tried very hard to ensure that the children did not only grow physically but also emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. She made sure that she brought them up strictly in accordance with the customs of her people and that the children were properly introduced to the societal beliefs, values, attitudes and customs. This is because the safety and proper upbringing of children was and still remains the mother's main concern.

A mother used riddles, proverbs, songs and nuptial chants to inculcate morals in the children. Examples of such proverbs are:-

Cia haramu ititugaga

(Material goods amassed corruptly bring no profit)

Gutiri muici na mucuthiriria

(There is no difference between a thief and his accomplice)

These proverbs also show that a child learns its habits from the mother since it spends most of the time with her. This gives another image of the woman as a
teacher.

The education of children especially at their tender age (the formative stage) is the responsibility of the mother. The above-cited proverb emphasises this central role of a mother in the development of a child as she acts as a role model for the child. There are conventional and cautionary riddles, proverbs and folktale, to make women accept those roles. Conformity to societal expectations is an important aspect of traditional life. Any person who tries to upset the societal values does so at their own peril. Hence women did everything possible to train the children to meet the societal standards; if they failed they faced the wrath of the community.

However it is important to note that Gikuyu society has proverbs which portrayed the difficulties encountered in child rearing. Such proverbs include:-

Guciara kunaga irigu ngingo

(Giving birth breaks the neck of the banana plant. i.e. The woman who gives birth is like the banana tree that breaks under the weight of its fruit.)

This proverb shows that maternity means pain to the mother. This attitude is captured in the following proverb:-
Guciara ti kumia
(To give birth is not to defecate).

This implies that to have a family brings with it certain responsibilities. It also means that giving birth is not a useless task for it brings benefits of providing the parents with children who are expected to look after them in old age. However, the above proverb show that the task of rearing and training of children is demanding and therefore women have to be adequately prepared and committed in order to accomplish it.

It is interesting to note that though the society blames the mothers for the ills of their children, the same society has proverbs which show that it is not any parent’s wish to bring forth children who are not well behaved. Such proverbs include:-

1) Guciara uru ti kwenda kwa mwene
(No one wills to have evil offspring).

2) Kuri guciara uru ta kihia gigiciara na mutwe
(There is giving birth badly like a sorghum which breeds through the head).

There are women who give birth to bad children just
like the sorghum that bears its fruit on the head unlike most Gikuyu crops.

However, according to the Gikuyu society, since the mother was responsible for the early education of the children, what the children practised was what they learned from her. This is implied in the proverb:-

Ngari ndioi gukunya nikuonio yonirio
(The leopard was ignorant of scratching but it was taught).

The above proverb means that any knowledge displayed by a person must have been acquired through some form of training. In regard to children it is assumed that the behaviour they have must have been learnt from the mother who is their role model and trainer. Hence, the habits of children are normally attributed to their mothers. This means that whatever behaviour a child manifests, it must have learned it from some source, and whatever the source, the mother is to blame for she is charged with the responsibility of moulding the behaviour of children.

As a result of this ideology, the Gikuyu lump mothers and children together and the actions of one of them automatically affects the others. They are expected to share sorrows and joys. Hence proverbs such as:-

119
Kugunirwo mwana no ta kugunirwo nyina
(To aid the child, is to aid the mother).

Another proverb which shows the close relationship between the mother and the children is:-

Ndundu ya nyina na mwana ndiingagirirwo
(The assembly of the mother and the child is never interfered with).

Due to this bond, between mother and child, people who interfere with the children’s happiness know that they are attacking the mother. Hence it is common to hear people making taunts such as:-

Ngukuringa nyukwa aimbe nyondo
(I will hit you till your mother’s breasts swell).

This is because anything to do with children has a direct effect on the mother. No wonder there is a proverb which mourns the death of this relationship.

"Mbeca itiri mwana na nyina"
(Money does not take into account the relationship between mother and child).

This proverb seems to have entered the Gikuyu society
after money as a medium of exchange had come to replace barter trade. The relationship between mother and child is a very special one as already revealed above. However the coming of the money business seems to have destroyed even the most sacred of relationships. As the saying goes, money is root of all evil, so when it comes to money matters, this special relationship is often forgotten so that a child can quarrel with the mother because of money. Another proverb which brings out the mother image is:

Kirimu kiongaga nyina ari mukuu
(A fool sucks the mother when she is dead).

This proverb emphasises the central role of a mother in the life of a family. A foolish person tries to derive benefits where they do not exist. Such a person will not distinguish between situations that are beneficial and others which are not. This is because they have limited intelligence and hence have no wisdom to discern situations. In order to pass this message the image of a mother is used to imply that though a mother is expected to nourish the children with her breast milk, she cannot fulfil that role once she is dead. The mother’s biological and social tie with her children is so deep that the death of a mother occasions untold suffering to the children
especially if they are still dependent and hence the proverb quoted above.

Even in natural characteristics like beauty, the mother still takes the blame if something does not go right. This view is well captured in proverbs like:-

\textit{Muiritu njong'i akiuhwo nyina athekaga na kammwena} 

(When an ugly girl is being wooed the mother rejoices secretly).

It is shown that the mother will suffer the consequences of giving birth to an ugly daughter. Hence, when a suitor appears to woo such a daughter, the mother rejoices because she would be the one to blame in case the daughter does not get a husband. Even if she gets a beautiful daughter, she will still have some problems. This sentiment is expressed in the following proverbs:-

1. \textit{Nyina wa thaka ndari matu} 
   (The mother of a beautiful girl has no ears).

2. \textit{Mwari mweru ni magambo} 
   (A light skinned (beautiful) girl is a problem).

These two proverbs indicate that the mother of beautiful girls has no ears in the sense that she has to
plug her ears so as to avoid hearing what people have to say about her daughters. Beautiful girls were the targets of every suitor and jealous women. Men sought for beauty as one of the characteristics for their future wives and hence anybody who met the beauty test was bound to have very many prospective suitors and those who could not get the girls admiration were likely to talk evil about them. Furthermore, the same girls were likely to experience rivalry among other girls in their age set because of jealousy. Many Gikuyu narratives focus on problems faced by beautiful girls as they overcome the treachery and betrayal of their jealous age-mates or cruel step-mothers. (Njururi 1966:86-9), Finnegan (1970: 358). In such circumstances the mother had to avoid listening to what people said about her beautiful daughter whether positive or negative. As minders of children, mothers were not expected to desert their homes for the sake of their children. This is clearly stipulated in the proverb below:

**Muka uri mwana ndoraga**

(A woman who has a child does not desert her home).

The above proverb emphasises the self-sacrifice
expected of a woman as a mother. Despite all the problems a woman may face in her home, she has to stay for the sake of her children so as to bring them up and ensure their welfare for a mother is expected to have unwavering devotion towards her children.

The mother is also seen as a bridge between the father and the children and other members of the community. This is expressed in the following proverb:

Ndugu ya mwana imatagio ni nyina
(The friendship of the child is strengthened by the mother).

The relationship between the father and the children is determined by the relationships between the mother and the other members of the community. This is even more so with regard to the relationship between husband and wife. If the relationship between mother and father is good, so will be the relationship between the father and the children and vice versa. Hence the mother image is very central in the Gikuyu social life. This view is best summed up in the proverb:

Mwana amenyagwo ni nyina
(A child is known by the mother)
Women in the Gikuyu society are also depicted as economic assets.

3.4 THE WOMAN AS AN ECONOMIC ASSET

Apart from their domestic roles, women were also looked upon as economic assets. A woman was an economic asset for her father because the father would be paid dowry when she got married. Bride price in many African societies was regarded as a major source of family income. It was a token payment paid by the prospective husband and his family to the bride's parents which symbolized a union between the two families and connected and cemented their relationship.

The two major criteria used to determine a good wife were her character which included behaviour and industriousness as well as her physical appearance. Beautiful girls were a target for every man looking for a wife. Gechaga (1983:5) notes that, when men went on errands to look for future wives, they would target beautiful ones first and later consider the less beautiful ones. The more beautiful a woman was, the more valuable she was to her parents. An example of a proverb which celebrates the beauty of a woman is:-
Mwari mwega ahitukagira thome wa ngia

(A good (beautiful) woman passes by the gate of a poor man.)

A variant of this proverb is:-

Nyanja njega ihitukagira thome wa ngia

(A good gourd (beer container) by passes the gate of a poor man.)

Beer and cows were some of the commodities used in paying bride price and it is no wonder that women are normally equated with them.

From the above proverbs it is implied that a poor man cannot afford a beautiful woman because she is bound to be betrothed to the richest suitor. Propertied men would end up with the most beautiful women since they were able to pay higher dowries. This is exemplified in the proverb:-

Mwanake wi indo ndoihanaga

(The youth who has enough to pay for his bride need not beseech her).

It is no wonder that poor men would marry when they were older because their economic circumstances forced them to longer bachelorhood. Girls were therefore seen as a form of investment for the parents and the parents did their best to get their daughters beauty adornments such as
bangles, necklaces; and ochre which they used to smear on the hair and face. A parent would go to any length to ensure that the daughter looked beautiful. If something was found that seemed to endanger the girl's beauty and welfare, the parents would even visit a medicineman. The following proverb illustrates that the parents of a beautiful girl did not have to bother with visits to a medicineman because their daughter was sure to get a husband.

*Mwari mweru ndaraguragirwo*

(A beautiful girl is never treated by a medicineman.)

However, in their choice of husbands, women were discouraged from looking for handsome men. Most fathers constantly reminded their daughters that:-

1) *Uthaka nduriagwo*  
   (Beauty is not eaten)

2) *Mundurume ti magego*  
   (Manhood is not determined by the teeth).

These statements were used to encourage girls not to
consider the physical appearance in their choice of husbands. No matter how ugly a man was, as long as he was wealthy he could be a target for many women who wanted to get married. Hence the proverb:

- "Mwanake wi indo ndoihanaga"

(The youth who has enough to pay for his girl need not beseech her).

The proverb implies that a youth who is well to do economically does not need to go out of his way to woe a woman for many of them would be after him on account of his economic status. Men did not necessarily have to be handsome in order to get wives. As far as physical appearance is concerned, it was not considered as a criterion to judge the worth of a man. This is captured in the proverb below:

- Hunyu ni umwe na arume

(Roughness is synonymous with men.)

Such proverbs were used to justify men's rough appearance. In fact when people want to criticize women whose skin is not smooth, they compare her to an uncircumcised boy.
Ahunyukite ta kihii
(She is as rough as an uncircumcised boy).

The essence of the above discussion is to emphasize that beauty which is natural and beyond any woman’s control was used either to lower her social status or to elevate her to a higher social status depending on the man she married. A beautiful woman had better chances of marrying a rich man than an ugly one.

It is not only the beauty of a girl that makes her dear, but other aspects of her character were also considered. Girls had to be industrious and well behaved to be able to get wealthy husbands. For example, as in many African societies, Gikuyu strongly forbid their young boys and girls from engaging in pre-marital sexual relationships. As a matter of fact, virginity was highly rated as a virtue. Therefore, if a girl happened to get a child before marriage, (which was a very rare occurrence) she could only be married by an old man as a second wife or to an old man whose wife had passed away because no young man, especially from a well to do family, would marry her. A woman’s chastity was therefore very important because a virgin was more valued then one who was not as illustrated by the following verse from a popular Kikuyu folk song:-
In this verse, the brother advises his sister Wanjiru to be careful and make sure that she guards her chastity properly so that the brother can get a higher dowry once she is married. In Gikuyu society brothers also benefited from the wealth obtained from their sisters dowries because some of this wealth would be used to pay dowries for their own wives. This is why the brother in the verse cited is concerned that Wanjiru should maintain her chastity so that she can fetch a higher bride price. This implies that a woman is a commodity or object whose price is negotiable depending on her state at the time of marriage. (Ng’ang’a, 1996:61) reckons that, after getting married and staying with her husband for about a week, the newly wed had to go back to her parents with a gourd of beer,

Gachohi ga gucokia muiritu gwa ithe.
(A gourd of beer to return the girl to her father.)

During that time her chastity/morality was exposed.
If at the time she was married she was found to be a virgin, the beer in the gourd was mixed with goats droppings (mbimbi cia mburi) indicating that she was a virgin worthy being married and her father had a right to claim more dowry because his daughter was chaste and honourable. However if she was not a virgin, charcoal was put in her beer to show that she was already spent/utilised and therefore was not chaste and her father had no business to ask for more dowry. The newly wed would be accompanied by a young girl carrying a small basket full of bananas (babies food in the Kikuyu society) which indicated that the bride should have gotten a baby for she was a woman and not a girl. Women who lost their virginity before marriage were therefore considered a disgrace to their agemates, parents, and the whole society. In the Gikuyu society girls were not expected to indulge in premarital sex. If they indulged in such unacceptable social behaviour, their value diminished greatly and their character was even more ridiculed as the proverb below shows:-

**Muka mucangacangi ndagaga mwana ✓**

(A woman who roams about never misses a child.)

This proverb means that if a woman is the type that does not guard her chastity, she will eventually find
herself mothering a child. This woman, as noted earlier, would never expect to get married to a bachelor as a first wife. She could only be married by a man who had another wife/wives or a widower. She was derogatorily referred to as a "gicokio" which means a reject or one who has been defiled. The term was used to refer to divorcees. Wachege (1994: 94) reckons that fathers whose daughters got children out of wedlock, would be heard lamenting "njohi yakwa ni yaitikire" meaning "my beer spilt." This was because they did not expect much from such daughters for their worth was diminished. He further indicates that, a man who married a "gicokio" (reject) was bribed or compensated, for he married a girl who was already depreciated. He was given a goat which was referred to as "mburi ya gutira nyondo" "a goat to support or stiffen the breasts." However, it is important to note that, while the woman suffered this social ridicule, her partner, the man was not equally punished. The kind of punishment a man faced such as being ostracised by his agemates was not as harsh as that which the woman faced. A man who was himself responsible for violating the girl's chastity would even insist on marrying a virgin himself.

Another sense in which women are depicted as economic assets is through the institution of polygyny or the marriage of several women to one man at the same time.
Polygyny was usually taken as evidence of a man's wealth. As noted before, Gikuyu wives were acquired through the payment of dowry or bride price which was usually measured in terms of livestock such as cows, goats and even beer. In this sense a woman was basically regarded as a thing to be traded in. In this sense, a woman was objectified. As an object, a woman had very few rights as an individual in Gikuyu society. It was either her family (parents) or the family into which she married that controlled her productive and reproductive outputs. The exchange of women for bride price between one family and another is to be understood as part of the total exchange system involving economic transactions. The alliance contracted between the two families is asymmetrical and matches the whole fabric of the Gikuyu society which is founded on a basic premises of inequality, differentiation, super-ordination and subordination. For example the society was stratified according to one's economic power. There are the rich and the poor. This is clearly stated in the proverbs:

1. **Itonga ikiaria, ngia ndingimira**
   (When rich people are talking, a poor person cannot blow his/her nose.)

2. **Uthuri wa gitonga ndunungaga**
   (A rich man's fart does not smell)
In the first proverb, it is clear that poor people were not given a chance to express their views especially before rich people. In the second proverb, it is eminent that the habits of the rich, no matter how unbecoming they were, were not scrutinised because their positions and status gave them licences to do whatever they wanted. The stratification of the society was extended to gender relations in the society.

By paying bride price, a man acquired full rights over his wife/wives as well as the children. In that light, bride price is seen as an indemnity paid to the girl’s father for the loss of a member. This is clearly captured in the proverb:

*Igitunywo mwana ni iikagirio mungu*

(When a child from a monkey is taken away, is given a young gourd).

This proverb means that in order to retrieve a baby from a monkey which often snatched babies who were kept under shades while their mothers worked on the farm, one had to give it a young gourd for it to relinquish the baby. This shows that you should be careful when people offer you a "bribe" for they may want something precious from you. It also shows that once a price has been offered, liberty is compromised. This proverb is frequently used during
marriage negotiations among the Gikuyu people. The future bride's kinsmen insist that in order for them to relinquish the girl and her rights, they require to be compensated adequately. A marriageable woman was regarded as a liquid asset. It was therefore common to offer Gikuyu girls for marriage to the highest bidder. Mugo (1982:6) reckons that:

"the females were treated with great respect and caution. They were the means by which a certain family would have expected a little bit of more income, in the form of a dowry. Sometimes the parents would be tempted to sell their daughters to the highest bidder."

In some other cases a woman was equated to cows, they were given an equal economic status and one was seen as an equivalent of the other. For example, if one incurred a debt whose value was equivalent to that of a cow, if the debtor had a marriageable daughter, he could offer her hand in marriage to the creditor as a form of compensation. In other cases, a father would be given material support and would promise to offer his daughter as a form of paying off. The relationship between two families based on marriage contract is a reflection of the commercial exploitation of women. Women were looked upon as articles of trade whose value was determined by other parties. Generally, it was a reflection of gender stratification where women are looked upon as inferior. The commercial
element in the dowry is clearly captured in the proverb:-

Cia uthoni ciambaga nguhi

(Goods to be used in payment of dowry starts from small quantities.)

The settling of a dowry is done gradually.

Though the above proverb could mean the building of strong relationships starts slowly, it could also show that the bride price was not likely to be settled fast and would take a long time and therefore in the payment one was expected to do so gradually. This shows that a girl was an investment whose returns would be accessed for a long time. In fact, families preferred those who paid the dowry in instalments rather than ones who paid in lump sum payment. This is revealed in the proverb:-

Muracia umwe utatira

(One who pays dowry daily without missing)

This proverb show that the social bond developed between two families through marriage was never to be terminated. However it could also show that once a woman was married, her family would be assured of economic benefits from the family she married into and their
relationship was continuous.

The exchange between women and material possession were seen as equal and one with many daughters could see the number of cows or goats he could expect from their prospective husbands. Conversely one who had cattle could see the number of wives he could anticipate to marry. One had to forego the cows in order to acquire wives. Hence the proverb:

*Aka na ng’ombe matiri ndugu*

*Women and cows are not friends).*

The same virtue which sees women as goods of trade also encourage men to work hard to acquire wealth to get wives. Lazy people were castigated since they could not be expected to get wealth to marry many wives. This is clearly stipulated in the proverb:

*Ng’ombe ndionagwo ni ithayo*

*A cow is never acquired by an indolent person).*

As noted earlier, poor men could not expect to acquire wives since, as far as the Gikuyu people are concerned:

*Mwana ndaheanagwo*
In his attempt to explain this proverb, Barra (1960:74) says:—

"The proverb is used especially by a father to the young man wanting to marry his daughter. It must be born in mind that the Kikuyu girl is not given to her husband but she is bought by him.

It may be argued that Bara's views are a reflection of colonial mentality and ignorance of the significance of bride price. Bride price served many purposes such as establishing relationship between the two families and also acted as a sign of commitment on the part of the husband to the girl he intended to marry. The child was valued and could not be given away just like that.

That not withstanding, it is obvious that women in polygyny were treated as marks of wealth and prestige and economic assets for the man. Thus observes Gacanja (1997:209):—

"According to Kenyatta, polygamy was both an economic institution in the sense that only the rich men were able to attract more than one wife and a political institution on that Gikuyu believed that if a man could effectively control and manage affairs of a large family (many wives and children) he could lead and look after the interest of an entire community".

One can therefore conclude that women as economic
assets also enhanced a man’s status in society not only economically and socially but also politically.

3.5 THE IMAGE OF A WOMAN AS STUBBORN, DESTRUCTIVE AND DANGEROUS

In Gikuyu society, a woman is generally portrayed as a person who can be very destructive, dangerous and unreasonable. There are several proverbs in the language that point to this attitude. This image of a woman as a dangerous element is seen in the proverb:-

Aka eri ni nyungu igiri cia urogi
(Two wives/women are two pots of poison.)

This proverb could be interpreted that two women especially co-wives will always quarrel for they are competitors for one husband. This rivalry arises from a competitive situation.

The wisdom expressed in African culture is that polygyny has social and economic advantages. It is also portrayed as an institution which is accepted by both men and women. Kenyatta (1938) reckons that women in Gikuyu society would labour to get cows and money to be used as
dowry by their husbands to acquire more wives. It is expected that a woman who would go to the pains of assisting the husband in acquisition of new wives would live in harmony with them. Hence the picture created is that women would calmly agree to share their husbands and would show no feelings of jealousy. However, this rosy image of polygyny is negated by the proverb quoted above. There were many reasons why the Gikuyu people practised polygamy. Among them are:

1. To increase labour force - It has been noted already that the more a man prospered in terms of land and livestock, the more he acquired new wives to be used to look after the animals and to farm on the land. Kabetu (1961: 14) reckons that, in marrying new wives, men looked for farmers and especially hard working ones.

2. To subsidise each other sexually. According to the Gikuyu culture and beliefs, a woman was not expected to have any sexual relationship with her husband while she was pregnant or lactating. In such cases a man was expected to meet his sexual needs with the other wives who were not in a similar state. Once a woman got pregnant, she could not have sexual relationship with the husband until the child was born, weaned and old enough to deliver food to the father. Also after reaching menopause, women were not expected to continue with sexual relationships with the
husband unless it was for ritual purposes like cleansing. This is clearly stipulated in the proverb:—

Muka mukuru acokagirirwo na gikuu
(One goes back to an old wife during bereavement).

Hence men married young wives to satisfy their sexual needs after retiring the old ones.

(3) Polygyny also served to increase the number of children in the family. Children were a mark of wealth and prestige and hence each man strived to have as many children as possible. These could only be acquired through polygyny (c.f. Kabetu: 1982).

(4) Another reason why polygyny was practised was to fill the gaps in the gender of children. For example, if one wife had only girls, the man would marry another wife to beget sons. Also if a man married a barren woman, he could marry another wife to beget children with her.

Despite these reasons for polygyny, the above quoted proverb emphasises that, in a household where there were more than one wife/woman, trouble was always expected. Women are portrayed as people who cannot deal with each other sensibly and will therefore, brew trouble all the time. The imagery used here of two pots of poison brings out the idea that women can be very dangerous, almost
lethal in their rivalry. The evil nature of the women’s character is often emphasised in Gikuyu proverbs and other genres of oral literature. Hence it is stressed that the more wives there are in a household, the more trouble is expected. Despite this state of affairs, the Gikuyu have a proverb which stresses the disadvantages of a monogamous marriage.

Mutumia umwe ni rigu wa gatema.
(One wife is the last morsel of food you take when you have dysentery).

These proverb shows that, despite the problems associated with polygyny, the society valued it compared to monogamy. Monogamy was seen as portending more ills than polygyny. The above proverb shows that a man with one wife was like a person who took his last piece of food when in diarrhoea which implies that death was eminent after that. Probably this attitude was propagated because society looked at many wives as a sign of wealth since poor men had no chance of acquiring many wives. Hence polygyny was sanctioned through the use of proverbs such as:-

Gutiri njamba ya mwera umwe
(There is no cock which belongs to one hen).
Certain practices within the Gikuyu culture also portrays women as people who are unreasonable. This view is perpetuated through the proverb:

_Haro ni ya muka uri thiiri_

(Quarrels are part of a woman who is in debt, or, a woman in debt is a quarrelsome woman).

The proverb shows that a woman is a less responsible person because she hides behind her bad moods in order to escape her creditors. Unlike men, women are seen as bad debtors and the warning being sounded here is that one should never trust a woman to honour her debt because she is not only unreliable but she is also unreasonable. According to Gikuyu culture, when one incurs a debt, one is expected to pay.

_Kuria thiiri ni kuriha_

(The way of settling a debt is paying it off).

Hence it is irresponsible for women not to honour their debt for that is an indication of irresponsible behaviour. This attitude denied women credit facilities for they could never be trusted to repay their debts.

Another proverb that emphasises the image of a woman as destructive, dangerous and unreasonable is the one that
Giathi githaragio ni gaka kamwe
(An assembly can be spoilt by one small woman).

A variant of this proverb is:

Gaka karia kahunyuku niko gatharithagia giathi
(The small rough woman is the one who causes the destruction of an assembly)

This proverb points out that a single woman is enough to disrupt an orderly gathering by creating chaos and destruction. The use of a diminutive form "gaka" small woman stresses the fact that a woman may be insignificant in terms of size and appearance but she can be very dangerous and destructive. She may be insignificant as far as the society is concerned, but the effects of her cunning and scheming nature, can be disastrous. That a woman creates chaos and misrule in man's orderly life is also illustrated by the proverb:

Njamba ya mundurume irundagwo ni aka
(A warrior's downfall is caused by women).

Although this proverb could be interpreted that men
are weak and women are strong, it could still be seen as suggesting that women are cunning and dangerous. The proverb reminds us of the story of Delilah and Samson in the Bible. Samson was a powerful and successful warrior but his downfall and destruction was arranged by a woman, Delilah.

Apart from being destructive, women are portrayed as stubborn. This aspect of their personality is brought out in the proverb:

**Kiringiri gia aka ni rwenji rukirega**

(To force a woman to do something she doesn’t like is like forcing a blunt razor to shave.)

The above proverb shows that women cannot be convinced to do something that they are against irrespective of whether it is good or bad. They are portrayed as being as stubborn as mules. This implies that, once women form an opinion it would take a lot of persuasion to change their mind or to make them think otherwise. Sentiments have been expressed that the above proverb depicts women positively for they emerge as people who are principled, strong willed and full of determination. (Njoroge 1992: 6) This view solidifies the fact that proverbs can be interpreted variously. Though this may mean that women are strong willed which is
positive their inflexibility is negative. This stubborn, dangerous and destructive nature of women is further stressed in the proverb:-

\textbf{Marakara ma arume matituraga ta ma aka}

(Men’s anger does not last as long as women’s.)

It is commonly believed that when men are angry, they act immediately and their anger is let off and forgotten. This indicates that men settle their disputes fast. This is revealed in the proverb:-

\textbf{Mwaki wa arume ndutogaga keri}

(Men’s fire does not smoke twice)

This proverb shows that men sought their issues fast without brooding or delaying unlike women who tend to keep their anger boiling inside them for a long time and as a result they become quarrelsome and vengeful. This fact as emphasised in the proverb is used to stress the negative nature of women that they are potentially dangerous, destructive and vengeful because they nurse and harbour their anger longer than men. This attitude is also brought out in another proverb.
Mbaara ya aka ndiri horohio

(Women's quarrels are endless.)

This proverb also stresses the unforgiving nature of women. Since women can keep their anger inside them for long periods, it makes them engage in endless fights and quarrels. As a result their fights and quarrels are not taken seriously. This is brought out in the proverb:-

Mbaara ya aka ndiri ng'ondu

(Women's quarrel has no sheep. (sheep were used in payment of fines.)

Since women's quarrels are incessant, nobody pays much attention to them. They are seen as part of women's nature and therefore Gikuyu society never set fines for such fights. However, if men quarrelled or fought, there were specific fines to be paid in terms of sheep or cows because this was regarded as a serious matter. It was believed that men did not quarrel unless there was a serious reason unlike women for whom quarrels were considered the order of the day. This points out to the fact that women are emotionally weaker since they cannot subdue their anger or other emotions and therefore they look for outlets to vent their emotions. However, men are displayed as people who have higher capacity of handling their emotions without
letting them spill over.

3.6 IMAGE OF A WOMAN AS UNRELIABLE AND UNPREDICTABLE

Another negative image that emerges from Gikuyu proverbs is that of a woman as unreliable and unpredictable in her actions and behaviour. This image can be illustrated using the proverbs below:

*Aka matiri cia ndiro no cia nyiniko*  
(Women have no upright words, only crooked ones. Women conceal all they know not.)

This proverb is used to state that women never keep secrets and they seldom tell the truth. The attitude about women expressed in this proverb was used by the society to keep important matters of society from women. Since women cannot keep secrets or tell the truth, they are not to be trusted. This is captured in the proverb:

*Aka matigagwo ndundu*  
(Women are never confided to.)
The rationale is that, women cannot be equalled with men especially where important matters are concerned for they cannot keep secrets.

This proverb can be compared to the one below:

Cia mucii ti como

(Home affairs are not divulged.)

A variant of this proverb is:

Kagutwi ka mucii gatihakagwo ageni

(Domestic issues are not to be divulged to visitors.)

Gikuyu people have the ideology that domestic issues should never be discussed in public circles. This is clearly stated in the proverb:

Cia mucii itiumagirio magiri-ini

(Family affairs should never be taken outside the boundary of the homestead.)

Women were seen as people capable of divulging even the innermost secrets of the home, thus jeopardising this principle. They are therefore unreliable and untrustworthy
unlike men as shown in the proverb.

\[\text{Cia athuri ni thure} \]
\[
(\text{Elders activities are well thought out.})
\]

Men knew what to discuss in what forum but women could not be trusted to do the same.

Another proverb that emphasises the unpredictability and unreliability of women is:-

\[\text{Gitiiro kia muka wene gitikagio athii} \]
\[
(\text{One does not respond to the dance of a strange woman until she has left.})
\]

"Gitiiro" is a group dance for women where one group challenges the other to get up and dance. When the challenging group finishes its part of singing and dancing, the other group responds to the challenge and this can go on for some time. The proverb therefore means that one does not respond to the challenge of a stranger, more so if the stranger is a woman because you do not know her intentions. Similar sentiments are expressed in the proverb:-

\[\text{Aka a kwene ni irima iriku} \]
\[
(\text{Strange women are a deep hole.})
\]
The above proverb reveals the suspicion with which strangers or outsiders were treated, especially if they were women, for they were bound to pose a danger or threat to the welfare of the community. Therefore, strangers especially women, were not to be trusted because one would never be sure of their real intentions. Strange women were to be distrusted even more because they could be used by the enemy to lure men and subdue them. That women are not to be trusted is also expressed in the following proverb:

**Muici na mundu muka atigaga kieha akua.**

(He who steals with a woman will live in fear until she dies.)

The proverb highlights the Gikuyu belief that a woman can never be trusted and if she knows your secret, you will live in fear for the whole of your life. This is because she could let the secret out any time. The proverb portrays women as untrustworthy and unreliable, and it implies that a man is more reliable and trustworthy. This aspect is captured in the following proverbs:

1. **Uhii ni umagwo no uka ndumagwo**

(One outlives boyhood, but one never stops being a woman.)
These two proverbs dwell on the negative aspects of a woman. A woman will always be a woman, untrustworthy and unpredictable. However, a boy graduates into a man and a man is trustworthy and reliable. It is interesting to note that both girls and boys underwent circumcision as initiation from childhood to adulthood. However circumcision only seemed to change the boys to become mature and responsible adults. Other proverbs which show the unchanging nature of women are:

1. **Mureri kihii ni mwirereri mundurume**
   (He who rears a lad rears a man for himself.)

2. **Muruithia arume ari kihii**
   (The circumciser of men was himself uncircumcised.)

3. **Kiguta kia mundurume ni kigutukaga, no kia mundu muka gitigutukaga**
   (A lazy man ceases to be lazy but a lazy woman never ceases to be lazy.)

These proverbs show that as a boy grows up he will mature
and become a man just as the circumciser was once uncircumcised but get circumcised to become a man. However, women never change even if they become circumcised and hence they have no age group as indicated in the following proverb:-

**Atumia matiri rika**

(Women have no age group.)

This could mean that women have natural traits while men have cultural traits which can change. A lazy man can also change to become active but a lazy woman would always remain lazy. This attitude explains the reason why men were very particular on marrying hard working women because if they married a lazy one they would be doomed for the rest of their lives for the belief was that the women would never change.

The unreliable nature of the woman is also revealed in the proverb:-

**Mundu muka na iguru matimenyagirwo**

(A woman and the sky/weather are unpredictable.)

The woman's behaviour is as erratic as that of the weather. Like the weather which can change anytime to bring out
sunshine, rain or wind, the woman can also change any time. The proverb emphasises the idea that a woman is unreliable because one can never predict her behaviour. She changes like the weather without any warning. In order to curb this erratic behaviour that stems from the fact that she cannot be trusted, the society has proverbs like:

Nyamacucu, kanua ni koinagirwo ithigi.
(Woman, remember that the mouth is sometimes covered with a twig.)

The proverb warns the woman that she should learn to keep some secrets. The Gikuyu believe that since a woman cannot be trusted to keep secrets, her words cannot be taken seriously until they stand the test of time. The following proverb illustrates this:

Kia mundu muka gitikagio kiarara.
(A woman's word is not believed until the following day.)

As a result of this view about women, society tends to ignore women completely. They are neither consulted nor trusted even with issues which concern them, such as the control of their fertility and the number of children in the family. Women are expected to be passive consumers of
male policies and decisions. This is expounded in the following proverb:

Watuirwo thingira nduregagwo nyumba

(Whatever is decided in the hut (men’s house) is never objected in the house (women’s residences.)

A variant of this proverb is:

Ciaririo thingira itiregagwo nyumba

(Whatever is discussed in the hut is not rejected in the house.)

However, it is important to point out that women were not totally excluded from making decisions though in most cases men did not expect opposition from women on any decision they made.

3.7 IMAGE OF A WOMAN AS THE INFERIOR AND WEAKER SEX

Among the Gikuyu, as in many other African societies, the division of labour was gender based. Each member of the family knew his/her role and responsibility in the economic production and distribution of family resources so
as to ensure the material prosperity of the group (Kenyatta 1938:53). The "light" duties such as cutting grass, thatching and plastering the walls was the work of women. The men did the heavy work of clearing the fields and breaking the virgin ground for cultivation of crops. Division of labour had symbolism attached to people. There are certain symbolism attached to gender roles beyond the biological disposition. The division of labour among the Gikuyu was carried out on the premise that women were the "weaker" sex and men were the "stronger" sex. Kabetu (1961:35) noted that women are God’s creatures who are not endowed with strength. Their talent is reproduction and rearing of children and other domestic duties. This ideology has resulted in social attitudes such as that males are supreme and females subordinate which have led to the coinage of a number of proverbs that emphasise the difference between men and women. The following proverb points to the weakness and inferiority of women:-

_Mutumia na kionje ni undu umwe_

(A woman and an invalid are the same.)

The comparison here to an invalid refers to a woman’s physical and mental state. For example, in war nobody would be expected to fight women for that was not heroic.
Similarly, no man was expected to argue with women for men were expected to lead in policy decisions especially those pertaining to community such as entering into war or settling of legal disputes.

Views have been expressed that equation of women to invalids was meant to protect them, especially during wars. Gikuyu and Maasai communities used to fight especially over cattle and during such fights women and children were protected and they were always seen as weaklings who should not be involved in wars. Hence there are proverbs such as:-

**Mundu muka ndoragagwo**

(A woman must never be killed.)

This proverb was used to show that a woman is weak and helpless creature and therefore must be protected, as she is incapable of defending herself. The woman must also be protected because she is the procreator and if she is killed the process of procreation will be endangered. She was the lifetime of the community. This is because the society looks upon the woman as the symbol of fertility and vitality. This is the same reason why female animals are usually not slaughtered for meat until that time when they are too old to give birth. This view is best captured in
the proverb:

Mundu utathiaga athinjaga mwati
(A person who does not travel slaughters a virgin ewe.)

This can only be done by someone whose knowledge is limited and hence acts out of ignorance. Society's position in regard to women, is that, the woman is weak and vulnerable though she has the central part to play in ensuring the continuation of the human species. For this reason, during war, women would be taken away while men were killed. For the same reason women in Gikuyu society were never allowed to go to the battlefield.

Atumia matithiaga ita
(Women never go to war.)

Women and children had to be protected at all costs. On the same line of argument, women were not sent to places where trouble was likely to occur. For example, women would not be sent to collect debts as the following proverb shows:

Mundu muka ndatumagwo thiri-ini
(A woman is not sent to collect a debt.)
Another reason why a woman could not be sent to collect a debt was probably because she could not be trusted as some Gikuyu proverbs allege. An example of such proverb is:

**Aka matigagwo ndundu**

(Women are not confided in.)

Probably, a woman could not be wise enough to know how to go about asking the debtors to pay up.

In contrast to this weak image of a woman, men are portrayed as strong, brave and aggressive. This image is well-exemplified in proverbs such as:

**Mureranirwo na ihii ndahomokaga/ndabuaga**

(A girl who is brought up among boys does not improve in health.)

This proverb hints that since boys are aggressive and fast in their activities, they eat faster and hence eat more and, therefore, a girl brought up among them becomes weak for she will be under-nourished. This is because her weakness will send her away and therefore she will not grow up healthy. The view that men are strong is also brought out in the proverb:
Mumbia arume omburagwo na njuguma

(One who refuses something offered by men gets beaten with clubs).

This proverb shows that when women are dealing with men, they are expected to be agreeable for if they do not, they are likely to get hurt for men do not accommodate any nonsense, least of all from women. The fact that men are strong when compared to women is also highlighted in the proverbs:

1. Mwana ndahuragwo ithe ari ho

(The child is not beaten when the father is present).

2. Mwana wi na ithe ndanyuaga muma

(The child who has a father takes no oath (for the father defends him and if necessary takes the oath himself instead of the son.)

The above proverbs emphasise the fact that the man, being strong, is capable of defending his children whenever the need arises unlike a woman who cannot do so on account of her weakness.

In view of the above, the society took advantage of the biological differences between men and women to place women in a disadvantaged position. The roles performed by women were therefore looked down upon as inferior. The roles played by men became the most important and superior ones. This discrimination against the roles played by
women and exaltation of those ones of men is illustrated in the following proverb:-

Mutumia ndaturaga mutwe na ndaikagia ndahi ndua

(A woman does not split the head (of the slaughtered goat) nor does she dip the cup into the beer-pot (because both are men's jobs.)

This proverb means that there are duties that are assigned to men while others are assigned to women. As this proverb shows the duty of splitting the heads of slaughtered animals, especially cows and goats, was specifically done by men, so was that of checking whether the brew was ready. This could imply that, women's sense of judgement could not be relied upon where important matters were concerned. For instance, widows had to rely on their brothers- in-law to perform such tasks for them because the society would never allow a woman to get involved in such activities. It is also important to note that those who performed such tasks in their homes were perceived as the heads of their homesteads and women were never considered as heads of households even when they were widowed.

The society used these kinds of proverbs to deny women any participation in important matters concerning the society. Such proverbs were also used to deny women meat from some parts of animals and reserved such meat for the
males. These meats included ribs, legs and African sausages (*mitura*). Women/girls were mostly given meat from the stomach and intestines while the boys were given the neck. In the same way, women were denied beer except in rare occasions and specific ages when men felt women could now handle beer as "men". It is only women who were past menopause and whose sons were circumcised or married who were allowed to drink since they were through with their reproductive roles.

Other proverbs that emphasise the inferiority of women in society include:-

**Gutiri ii kahii itakarugwo mutwe**

(There is no household with a male child where a head will not be cooked.)

The implication in this proverb is that, a household with a male offspring no matter what problems they go through, there is hope.

The preoccupation in Gikuyu and many African societies on the continuity of the family line means not just a desire for children, but a preference for sons. A high premium was put on male children in Gikuyu society as shown by the following proverbs:-
Mwana wa kahii ni igiri ria mucii
(A boy child is the hedge of the home).

Mwanake ni kienyu/githendu kia Ngai
(A young man is a chip of God)

These proverbs show that male children are more celebrated. Boys were seen as part of the divine plan of God. The proverb originates from the fact that young circumcised men in the Gikuyu community were greatly respected. The Gikuyu people considered male children more important than female children because they would not leave their homesteads as girls did when they got married. They remained at home and married to perpetuate the family lineage, unlike women who were seen as sojourners destined to join other families.

Mundu muka ni munoria/mutuga kwene
(A woman benefits others.)

Men are seen as insiders who will remain in the households/homesteads. To the Agikuyu, life begins at immortality and ends in immortality. A man who begets daughters only, feels he has no continuity. Girls are seen as people who go to build other men's immortality rather
than their own fathers'. It is no wonder then that a woman's main role to her husband lies in her ability to ensure his immortality by bearing him male offspring to ensure the continuity of his line and hence a boy child is seen as the security of his father's homestead.

The boy child is seen as the symbol of protection, security and permanency. He is also seen as the provider of the family. This is because in the traditional Gikuyu society, one of the jobs of men was to provide the family with meat. This was done mainly through keeping of livestock which was mainly men's duty. A boy was, therefore, considered as a future provider of the family. A family without one was regarded as lacking in a future provider since girls could not undertake such roles of protecting, providing and continuing the fathers' family line. Boys were therefore preferred to girls as far as the family welfare was concerned. Hence Kenyatta (1978:13) statement:

"If a man died without a male child, his family group comes to an end."

Another saying which diminishes the worth of women as compared to that of men is:-
Gwethera gitahi muka
(To get the belly a wife/woman.)

This saying implies that there is parallelism between getting a man a wife and getting something to eat. Just as food satisfies the belly, the woman satisfies the needs of a man. Such needs include social, material and sexual satisfaction. A woman is seen as an object to satisfy the needs of a man just like food satisfies the belly whenever one is hungry. This expression brings out another aspect of a woman as a man’s object who should be ready to meet all his needs. This is also brought out in the following proverb:

Muka wa mwathi ahingaga na kuguru etereire kigurumuki oke
(The hunter’s wife, awaiting her husband’s return, close the door only with her foot; leaves the door unbolted so that her husband may enter quickly with his prey.)

The above proverb shows that a wife has to bear with the responsibilities of her husband since they also fall squarely on her shoulders. She has to bear his absence and be ready for his return at any time and that is why she is expected to close the door with her leg awaiting her
husband's return. This means that if the husband is away, a wife cannot sleep soundly lest the husband comes and he has no one to open for him. Hence she needs to be alert so as to provide the necessary service to the husband in his hour of need. A woman is not just inferior to a man, she is also part of his property. This view is well stipulated in the following proverb:—

**Aka na ng'ombe matiri ndugu**

(Wives/women and cows have no friendship.)

According to the ideology expressed in the above proverb, there are things that friends can share freely, but a wife and cattle are not some of them. This indicates that wives and cattle are some of the most precious properties for a man and it is no wonder that a man's wealth was measured in terms of the number of cows and wives he owned. Hence women and cows were seen as commodities whose value was at par. For a Gikuyu man, there can be no ground for friendship with one who seeks to deprive you, your land, cattle or women. The image brought out here is that of a woman as man's valuable asset.

That a woman is seen as a sexual object for the man is also captured in the following proverb:-
Muka mukuru acokagirirwo na gikuu

(A man goes back to an old wife when death occurs.)

When a wife was past childbearing age, the husband rarely went to her hut for sexual satisfaction. This gratification would be provided by the younger wives. However, when death occurred in the family, the husband had to engage in ritual sex with his old wife to protect the family from further loss and to cleanse the homestead. The proverb, therefore, emphasises the fact that it was only in special circumstances such as when death occurred in the family that a man would visit his old wife for sexual purposes. What is implied is that an old woman/wife was no longer useful as a sexual partner of the husband, but when tradition required it, she could be used to fulfil the social duty of cleansing the homestead from evil spirits especially spirits of death. The image of women as weaker and inferior sex is best summarised in the proverb:

Arume ti aka

(Men are not women.)

This proverb stresses the fact that men and women are different and their differences should be respected. However, the proverb covers differences beyond the
biological level. It also covers differences expected between the two sexes in the social sphere. This is apparent when we consider that the proverb is never used the other way round.

Aka ti arume

(Women are not men.)

The proverb therefore emphasises the negative characteristics of women and cautions that these are absent in men. Such characteristics traditionally associated with women include cowardice, unpredictability and stupidity. The proverbs discussed above have brought out these characteristics thus revealing the attitude of the Gikuyu society towards women. When one uses the above proverb, one is saying that men unlike women do not possess the negative characteristics associated with women. Gikuyu is not the only language or culture which has this tendency. Cameron (1985) states that many commentators have noted that there are more words to abuse or insult women than men and most taboo words refer to women’s body parts. Hence we note that when one is told that he is behaving "ta mundurume" like a man, even when used for women is regarded as a compliment while its converse "ta mundu muka" like a woman, is considered a great insult especially when used
The contempt with which weakness of women is treated is demonstrated in the proverb:

*Igukura'iriagwo iguku ni aka*

(Once old, its hump is eaten by women.)

This proverb means that the hump of an old bull is eaten by women. According to Barra (1960: 22) the hump is a choice morsel for young men when the bull is young. However, if it is old, women eat it. He continues to give an English equivalent of this proverb which is:

*Rubbish is women’s portion.*

According to the Gikuyu culture, the meat of a bull or ox hump is a delicacy especially for young men, whom as pointed earlier, are regarded with awe and reverence for they are part of divinity as implied in the proverb:

*Mwanake ni kienyu kia Ngai*

(A young man is a chip of God.)

However, the bull is a very fierce animal and can only be handled by strong young men. The proverb therefore
brings out the fact that when a bull gets old, it becomes so harmless that even women, who are traditionally believed to be weak, can tackle it. This is because the fury of the bull abates with age, rendering it weak and therefore incapable of resisting those society considers weak. Hence this proverb also perpetuates the ideology of the woman as the weaker sex.

3.8 CONCLUSION

The images created through the Gikuyu proverbs as discussed so far, are clear in depicting women as inferior to men especially in their physical and intellectual capacity.

From the study of the proverbs, it is obvious that society has given men power to control the social, economical and political structures of the community. This power has been used in the image formation among the community's members. Women's images seem to emanate from the social roles and their position in society. In the agricultural sector, they are treated as the asset for cheap labour. The more land, goats, cows, sheep a man acquires, the more wives a man marries so as to increase his labour force. (Kenyatta 1938:176) notes that the wealth
accrued through the woman's sweat was used by the husband to pay dowry for new wives'. It is even clear from the proverbs that women and cattle were symbols of prestige and comprised the most valuable assets a man treasured. Hence men used the wives who were seen as symbols of social status as ladders in advancing themselves economically, socially and politically. A man who could not run his house effectively could never be given a public office.

From the proverbs studied, the only positive image of a woman is that of a mother. However, even this one leaves a lot to be desired. The mother figure is treated as sacred, an idol which is almost worshipped.

However, through the images in the proverbs, the mother has a lot of problems which emanate from her role as a mother. The society blames her for the mistakes that are committed by her children. She is even supposed to persevere even if the husband mistreats her because she is a mother and a mother cannot desert her children. This shows that no matter what happens in her home, the woman is not expected to leave her home on account of her children.

From the analysis of the images of women in Gikuyu proverbs, it is clear that women are depicted positively only as mothers otherwise they are seen as incapable of keeping secrets, dangerous, stubborn, unreliable to name just a few of the negative attributes associated with their
personality. As Kabira (1993:104) rightly states:

"For a society to depict a category of its people in this manner, there must be a good reason. Wives are seen as great threat to male dominance and therefore there is need to keep them down."

Proverbs therefore emerge as an ideological tool which the society uses to regulate roles and behaviour of its members and they are used to make gender inequalities look natural and acceptable to all the members and also unchangeable.
CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 THE IMAGES OF WOMEN IN SWAHILI PROVERBS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the depiction of women in Swahili proverbs. The aspects covered in this chapter include the factors that have influenced the image of women in Swahili culture. The image of women such as women, wives, teachers, nurses and economic dependants as portrayed in the Swahili proverbs have also been discussed. From the images emanating from the proverbs discussed, observations have been drawn.

Knappert (1975:117) notes that many proverbs are 'heavy' or loaded with implications which only someone who is familiar with the people and their language can understand. They require cultural and religious information.

It is important to note that among the main factors that have been instrumental in the formation of the images of women in Swahili literature, both oral and written, have been the Islamic religion and the feudal system of production.

Mulokozi (1982:4) observes that:-
"In the feudal culture a woman was a thing and an object of gratification of the male’s lust. Feudal decadency and indolence were reflected also in the sex relations of the nobility ...".

According to feudal mentality, a woman is portrayed as sensuous: having titillating physical curves and voluptuous symmetry, endowed with softness of body and voice. She has form without content. The preoccupation is with the woman’s physical and superficial appearance and not with her intellect and abilities other than those which are purely sexual.

The feudal way of life and Islamic religion are the two sides of the coin introduced to the Swahili people by the foreigners, especially from the orient.

The advent of Easterners and Islam had a marked influence on Swahili people, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This influence was many faceted: economical, political and cultural. The Swahili people embraced Islamic religion, and as a result according to Ismail (1968:8), they have the religious identity of Islam. Even the question of whom they may marry or not marry is affected by this extra-tribal concern of religion. Mbaabu (1985:6) observes that a Muslim woman is expected to marry another Muslim but a man can marry anybody. It is argued that males may convert their wives to be Muslims but the same cannot be expected of females.
To the Swahili, Islam is not only a religion, it is also a creed. Its holy book is the Koran; and it draws wholly from the prophet's sayings and Islamic Sharia. They not only govern social life, but also form the source and key factors of personal statute laws such as those governing marriage, divorce and inheritance (Strobel 1979; Salim 1978). In stressing this fact Mawadudi (1980) asserts that Islam is not merely a body of metaphysical doctrines nor a bundle of rituals, nor merely a set of rules of individual conduct. It is a way of life; whose basis lies rooted in Divine revelation. It is a way of life which is permeated by God. He further observes that a Moslem is committed to follow this way of life. As far as Moslems are concerned, God's commandments constitute the law of Islam.

According to Islamic Ideology, men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given them more strength than women and because they support women from their means. Badawi (1991:23) observes that,

"Man in Islam is fully responsible for the maintenance of his wife, his children and in some cases of his needy relatives especially the females."

Hence it is important to point out that male dominance and female subordination in Swahili society cannot be understood outside the context of Islam (Strobel 1979 :55).
In religion practice, verses in the Koran which dwell on the weakness of women are stressed.

Commenting on the Holy Koran, verse 4:38 Al Amin bin Aly Mazrui (1955:1) writes:

"God made us, male and female and in His wretchedness, He filled women with weakness in thought. In His bounty, He filled men with goodness in strength, great intelligence and good thoughts and for this reason He ordained men to be the ones to oversee women. And the prophet said; A man is the caretaker of his wife and it is he who will be questioned about his care in the after world....women of course have no fault for what they do, for they know nothing but all the fault is on men who indeed know good and bad and what is worthy doing and what is not."

From the above ideology, women are seen as inferior not only in power and position but in nature as well. Morally, they are seen as evil (descendants of Eve); intellectually, they are seen as limited and incapable of reasoning.

This Islamic doctrine towards women has been used to support and ensure limited liberty for women. According to the philosophy expressed in the religion, ideal and proper women are expected to be religious, chaste and obedient.

In reference to the above quoted verse, 13th century Islamic scholar-jurist, al Baydhwi as quoted by Strobel (1979), identifies ways in which men are superior to women. He notes:
"Allah preferred one over the other in matters of mental ability and good council and their powers of duty and for carrying out divine commands. Hence to men has been confined prophesy, religious leadership, pilgrimage rites, the giving of evidence in law courts, duties of holy war, worship on Fridays etc. They also have the privilege of electing chiefs, have a larger share of inheritance and discretion in matters of divorce."

In the eyes of Moslem law, a man's word is accepted as being truthful, final and binding but a woman's words do not have the same status or legitimacy. As a result of such ideologies, Swahili women who are predominantly Moslem, have been excluded from authoritative, political and religious roles within the community. Among the various reasons is that of Purdah and the belief that men must "oversee women". There are two schools of thought in regard to the role played by Islam in the formation of the images of women.

One school of thought holds that Islam sustains rather than undermines the status of women. According to the proponents of this view, the Koran and the prophet's original teachings may today be seen to subjugate women. However, when looked at in the context of family, life during the prophet's lifetime was loose; polygyny was predominant and easy divorce and remarriage were an obsession (Kader 1984:114). In order to arrest the
situation, the prophet taught against female infanticide; limited the number of wives a man could marry at the same time to four and imposed adequate provision by the husband for his wife or wives and children within marriage and even after divorce (Saleh 1977). It is possible that from this state of affairs the Swahili coined the proverb:

Kosa moja haliachi mke
(One fault does not warrant the divorce of a wife.)

The proverb's literal statement carries the message that one mistake should not necessarily precipitate a divorce. It is used to discourage men from divorcing their wives on flimsy or trivial grounds.

In order to discourage divorce, Islam demands that a man should give his wife three chances - talaka tatu. It has been pointed out that one may divorce his wife out of anger but this anger may subside after some time. There is provision for this because a divorce cannot be ratified at this stage. Hence it is stressed that divorce can only be enacted after three witnesses collaborate the evidence of the complainant. It is also mandatory that divorce cannot be legalised until three months and ten days are over to ensure that the woman is not pregnant during that divorce. This is because child's up-keep still remains the
responsibility of the husband. To God, divorce, according to Islam, is the most loathsome of all permissible acts of man. Moslems believe that marriage is arranged in heaven, hence the proverb:

_**Ndoa hufungwa mbinguni**_

(Marriage is solemnised in heaven).

It can be deduced from this proverb that divorce is never encouraged.

The second school of thought holds that, in essence, the Koran offers no real ethical codes or moral values regarding men-women relations. Supporters of this school of thought argue that the enjoyment of physical pleasure, especially for men, is acceptable and provided for. Women, on the other hand, are primarily sexual objects to be protected from their own immorality, Rahman (1982). Women are seen as intellectually inferior to men and have greater carnal susceptibility. As Shaikh (1996:89) rightly states,

"Women are viewed as possessing a fatal attraction which men are incapable of resisting. Women’s innate capacity for sexual allurement is considered to be incredibly dangerous, particularly because it distracts and beguiles men away from their religious devotion..... Accordingly, women’s power is viewed as twofold; first due to the power of sexuality and second due to their innate capacity to deceive and defeat men not by force, but by cunning and intrigue."
What emerges from this quote is that women's whereabouts, irresistible sexuality and sensuousness threatens and could lead to the disintegration of a healthy ordered society into an unbridled chaos and sexual anarchy. Men are portrayed as beings whose passions are quickly stirred and once they get to that state, the rational and moral faculties become purely instinctual beings. It therefore means that the veil is meant to make it impossible for men to become sexually aware of women by seeing them. This tallies well with the belief that what the eye does not see, the heart does not desire.

If women leave their homes and demand a voice in public, they are likely to upset God's plan and the result would be destruction of order, reason and justice. Men utilise Islam to claim their control and superiority over women. Islam defines woman's status as daughter, wife and mother (Mikhail 1969:5). Often this knowledge of female obedience is a lesson learned in female puberty rites, otherwise known as unyago (puberty initiation rites of passage) practised by the Swahili Arabs and the twelve tribes, Strobel (1979:201). This is an educational institution among the Swahili which is used to educate girls about their sexuality and also to prepare them for their future roles as wives in the Swahili community. The ideology of female subordination may be overtly stated or
Women's subordinate status is depicted in Islamic literature in several ways. Knappert (1975:130) observes that:

"When studying Swahili literature, oral or written, verse and prose (largely written by men of course) one cannot help being struck by many references to weakness of women and their inclination towards slander."

In contrast to this view, men are perceived as being endowed with great intelligence and skill of judgement (akili) and hence are expected to make decisions that women must obey since they are considered weak, easily trickable. Being more subject to earthly desires, women must be protected from themselves while men must be aware of these lascivious temptresses. Hence the proverb: -

**Penye urembo ndipo penye ulimbo.**

(Where there is finery, there is a snare).

Men are warned to be wary of women, especially beautiful ones. The latter are often depicted as diabolic, whose striking physical beauty usually covers evil which is likely to ensnare them. This is exemplified in the proverb: -
Mke mzuri hakosi kilema

(A good wife does not miss a defect)

In his attempt to explain the meaning of this proverb, Sheikh Ahmad Nabhany, a prominent Kiswahili scholar (personal interview 1996) notes that a woman may be a good cook but ill behaved; she could also be well behaved but have a scathing tongue which will constantly nag the husband. These observations about female nature have been used to condemn women who do not live to the expectations of society. The ideology of female vulnerability and the need to protect women's respectability provide the rationale for 'purdah': the veiling and seclusion of women.

With the insistence on feminine passivity and the prevalent attitude that women should remain indoors, individual women are effectively isolated from one another, thereby forcing their dependency on their husbands. As a result husbands become the intellectual and emotional mainstays of their wives. This further increases their domestication and their dependence on their husbands. This view is best expressed in the sayings:

1. Mume ni kazi

(A husband's worth is his job.)
2. Mpuuzi hana kazi

(A fool has no work)

The above sayings indicate that a man's worth is measured by his ability to work so as to generate an income. A man who does not measure up to this expectation is regarded as a fool and, therefore, is despised by society as useless. Hence the popular saying:-

Akiwa hana kazi (mume) hajaliwi

(If a man has no job he is not valued.)

This proverbs indicates that for a man, respectability is related in large part to his income. But for a woman, respectability has everything to do with her being proper as is evident on the following example:-

Mume ni kazi, mke ni tabia

(A husband is work, a wife is character)

It is notable, in the given example, that a man's worth among the Swahili people is measured by his ability to generate income and provide for his family. For a woman, her worth is pegged on her behaviour and character.
4.2 THE WOMAN AS AN ECONOMIC DEPENDANT

At the turn of the century, slave trade was rampant at the Coast. Central to ideological system that buttressed the society, the principle of social stratification located slaves and women below freeborn men. Strobel (1979:43) observes that, though there were women who owned slaves, still women and slaves occupy parallel positions of subordination, legally and ideologically. A revealing proverb focuses on this subordination:

**Hakuna mkika mungwana**

(There is no well bred/freeborn woman)

Slave trade has since been abolished but the status of women is still low compared to that of men and especially in economic terms. Through the above proverb it shows that women like slaves could not be "waungwana," who were seen as civilised, sophisticated and well bred. Women, married or single, are not required by Islamic sharia to earn their family an income. This is considered a man's responsibility. Women thus, are seen as an economic dependants. In the Swahili community, Women are catered for, patronised and nurtured as indicated in the following example:-
Mke ni ngu, mgomba ni kupalilia
(The woman is a garment, a banana plant is weeding)

In her attempt to explain this proverb, Matteru (1987:43) says:-

"In order for a garment to serve its purpose better, there's need to take great care of it. This goes for the banana plant. It will be more productive and exploitable if carefully hedged, protected from animals and if manured and well watered. In the same way the belief is that women the labour source and reproducers of society need to be carefully tended for, controlled, tamed and fed."

Sexual division of labour delegates to women the sole responsibility for household tasks. This is a critical factor in the continuing subordination of women. Their predominant role within the household and their absence from the wider political arena go hand in hand with attitudes that perceive them as inferior and subservient.

It is noteworthy that, while these attitudes are perpetrated by males, they are internalised by women who acquiesce to their own subordination. This view is best expanded by Machel (1973) when he acknowledges that:-

"the centuries' old subjugation of women has to a great extent reduced them to a passive state which prevents them from understanding their condition."
As a result of their socialization, Swahili women always look up to men for guidance and the right answers. The life-long experience of subordination and lack of confidence in their capabilities leave most women reluctant to take any steps to liberate themselves. They perceive themselves as appendages of men who expect them to be veiled and unheard. They stay at home to look after their children and to put up with the excesses of their husbands. For doing this, they are guaranteed economic security as the following proverb indicates:

**Uso wa kuhifadhiwa u chini**

(A face that is patronised is bowed)

It is evident from this example that dependent women must be submissive. As Mies (1981:11) notes, under capitalist conditions all women are socially defined as housewives (all men as breadwinners) and motherhood has become part and parcel of this housewife syndrome. The man is seen as the provider of food and protector of women and children, who, in turn, are seen as weaker than men and dependent on them.

Domestication of women, their transformation into housewives dependent on the income of the husbands is the model of sexual division of labour under capitalist,
Islamic religion and Swahili culture. As Badawi (1980:3) points out, Islam regards the women's role in society as a mother and a wife as the most essential one. As a result of this ideology, Swahili women are domesticated housewives. They lead a solitary life, performing the roles of wife and mother in an individual house. They are confined to kitchen and nursery chores and may be seen as relegated to home and family servitude. It has been observed that Swahili women rarely leave their homes except when going to weddings and funerals (Salim 1973). Even then, they have to be veiled.

Mernissi (1975:XVI) argues that literature does not see women as inferior but rather as dangerous because of their sexuality which constantly distracts men from their love for Allah. In order to arrest this situation, women are isolated through veiling and seclusion: a practice that confines women from the age of puberty and above to the company of their own sex. On the other hand, veiling is the wearing of a head and face cover by women that conceals their hair and lower part of the face. Seclusion and veiling must be understood in the light of chastity as explained by Muslims.

Among the Swahili, girls are expected to be virgins during their first marriage and also to observe fidelity in marriage. In Islam, women are supposed and are encouraged
to stay at home, and should they go out, they are required to be veiled, 'Purdah.' Within this Islamic doctrine, women are portrayed as very sexual creatures who, if not restrained, will distract men from the proper and loftier pursuits of religion. As a measure to control their sexuality, proof of a girl's virginity upon marriage is required and its absence is an affront to family honour. Chastity of women is particularly respected and protected at all times. Mawdudi (1980) points out that a Muslim men cannot physically abuse a woman under any circumstances. Like women, men are also expected to be chaste but as Mernissi (1975:94) notes, it is harder to find evidence of male sexual misadventures. It is no wonder that such sayings about chastity, as illustrated below revolve around women:-

Ndege hulindwa, mke halindwi

(A bird can be guarded, a wife cannot)

This saying implies that once married women are expected to respect their marriage vows of remaining faithful to their husbands. A variant of the above proverb is:-

Mlinzi hulinda ndege, mke mzuri halindwi.

(A guard guards birds, a good wife is not guarded)
The given examples stress that, it is a paramount duty for a woman to observe her honour and that translates to being faithful and chaste. Failure to observe chastity and faithfulness could lead to divorce and since men in Islam are fully responsible for maintenance and upkeep of their wives and children, this could lead to untold suffering in the part of the women who are expected to be economic dependants of men.

4.3 THE IMAGE OF A WOMAN AS A WIFE

In most cultures, marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. Among the Swahili, as among other African societies, spinisterhood for women and bachelorhood for men are not encouraged. Hence the proverb:-

Mwenye dada hakosi shemeji.
(One who has a sister does not miss an in-law.)

If a female is to attain the whole dignity of a woman as well as respect, she must be legally married either in accordance with Islamic religious rites or traditional customs. An unwed or single mother is an offence to public
decency and if motherhood occurs out of wedlock, the child becomes a severe handicap for her in life. The child born out of wedlock is referred to as Mwanaharamu "(illegitimate child)". Abudul and Baruwa (1981:6) observe that:-

"Kwa mila za Kiswahili, ni tusi kubwa na aibu mwanamke kuzaa bila kuwa na mume. Mtoto aliyezaliwa hivyo huitwa "mwanaharamu" na kwa hivyo anapofanya lolote la ukosefu wa adabu au la aibu watu wanamkumbusha kuwa yeye ni mwanaharamu."

(According to Swahili customs, it is a great shame for a woman to get a child out of wedlock. The child born in such circumstances is called an illegitimate child and whenever that child does something wrong or shameful he or she is always reminded that he or she is an illegitimate child).

Hence the proverb:-

Fumba la klo jicho mwanaharamu apite

(Close your eye so that the illegitimate child may pass.)

A variant of this proverb is:-

Funika kaa mwanaharamu apite

(Cover the plate for the illegitimate child to pass.)

Swahili people believe that reproduction should be within the confines of marriage where two people will co-operate in bringing up the children born within it. This view is
best expounded in the proverb:-

Mkono mmoja haulei mwana
(One hand cannot rear a child.)

This proverb means that a child belongs to the community whose expectations are that children should be born within the confines of marriage. As far as Swahili society is concerned, the sexual act outside marriage, especially for women, is a fault, a fall, a weakness and a defeat which haunts her throughout her life. Women are therefore expected to defend their honour, virtue, and if they fail and yield elsewhere, they are scorned upon.

It is noteworthy that marriage is one of the means of support open to women. In marriage, a wife gives herself to a husband who in turn becomes responsible for her. Therefore, as a wife, the image of the woman is that of an economic dependant. If in a marriage relationship, a man does not support a woman, according to the Islamic law, she can be granted divorce. Hence the saying:-

Ikiwa hana kazi mume hajaliwi.
(If he has no work, he is not valued).

This saying shows that a man who cannot generate an income
to support his family is considered a failure. It is no wonder that Swahili women are expected to be married by men who have high economic status, Strobel (1979).

Right from birth, a girl is socialised to be a good wife and mother. She is taught good manners, how to wash dishes, she is not allowed to go out alone especially during the day. At night she may be allowed to make visits to friends and, or relatives but in the company of a female attendant or an elderly woman. If she deviates from this expected code of behaviour, she is severely punished, for this implies that she may diminish her chances of getting a husband. If visitors, male or female visit their home, she is expected to hide in another room and is warned never to converse with them. This gives the image of a woman as a prison inmate in this community.

However as Strobel (1979) states, from 1950s it was becoming clear that Muslim girls could benefit at least from primary education without being spoilt.

When ten years old, Swahili girls are handed over to confidential elderly female advisors otherwise known as "Makungwi" (plural) or Kungwi (singular). Strobel (1979:xi) defines a kungwi as a woman who initiates young girls at puberty. Once a girl attains the age of puberty, she is handed over to the kungwi who places her in restricted environment and instructs her on how to look
after herself properly, cook and plait mats. She is also taught how she is to live with her husband once married.

The form of education imparted by the kungwi is called unyago whose sole objective and curriculum is to produce a good wife and mother in accordance with Swahili culture.

Among the courses she learns are how to cook and serve a husband, how to wash and keep the house clean, how to make a bed, how to massage the husband, how to anoint his feet with oil and how to rub him gently until he falls asleep. This teaching is best captured by Mwana Kupona (1860) who instructs her daughter thus:-

"Keti naye kwa adabu
usimtie ghadhabu
akinena simjibu
itahidi kunyamaa

Kilala siikuse
mwegeme umpapase
na upepo usikose
mtu wa kumpepea
chamka siimuhuli
mwandikie maakuli
na kumtunda mwili
kumsinga na kumwoa"

(Live with him (husband) befittingly
Do not provoke him to anger
If he rebukes you, do not answer back
Try to control your tongue

When he rests do not betake yourself off
draw near to him, caress him
and for cooling air let him not lack
someone to fan him
When he awakes, delay not
prepare a meal for him
and take care of his body
perfuming him and bathing him.)

Salim (1978:12) in response to Mwana Kupona’s teachings reckons that:-

"All this is good training for her as an up-coming housewife."

After the age of puberty, the girls are not expected to mix with boys except those of her household or near relatives, Porter (1990). From then on, she is confined to the house and if she goes out visiting her mother or another female relative will act as her chaperone. This practice of confining women to their own company as noted earlier is called seclusion. When out of doors, she wears the black all-covering garment called buibui or hijab. This involves the wearing of a head and face cover that conceals the hair and lower parts of the face. Veiling is symbolic seclusion of women. Swahili people believe that:-

Uzuri wa Mwanamke si wa kila mpita njia
(The beauty of a woman is not for every passerby.)

Women’s purity is an expression of family honour and control by their male relatives who in turn are supposed to be responsible for them economically.
Hence at puberty girls are usually married off. This is because women are believed to be sexually powerful and potent to an extent that, unless controlled, female sexuality could cause havoc and social disruption (Saadawi 1980). Women are also believed to lack great powers of reasoning and discipline, Strobel (1979). Men are therefore charged with the duty of protecting them and society from the consequences of unbridled female sexuality. As observed earlier, there are proverbs which caution men to be wary of beautiful women for such women can trap them. Female vulnerability and the need to protect women's respectability provides the rationale for Purdah - veiling and seclusion, the twin manifestation of Purdah. Physical seclusion and separation from men are the major tenets of Purdah. According to Strobel (1979:76),

"Since Purdah and need for female mediators with the outside world constituted key ingredients in the Swahili ideology of sexual asymmetry and male dominance, women were absent from all public positions of authority."

Cultural values and social attitudes relegate women to seclusion and restricted mobility are major indicators of cultural subordination of women. This further manifests itself in the way most of the homes are built. Special entrances and special sections of the home are provided
for, exclusively for women. This kind of social isolation has confined the Swahili women to a private world which has its own traditions, rituals and norms which differ totally from that found in a man's world. The social isolation also has various negative social and economic consequences for women.

Women are not expected to participate in activities outside the house. The role of women as housekeepers among Moslems is perceived as being very important. Badawi (1980:22) observes that:

"Neither maids nor babysitters can possibly take the mothers place as the educator of upright, complex free and carefully reared children. Such a noble and vital role which largely shapes the future nations, cannot be regarded as 'idleness.'"

From this view, Swahili people like other Muslim communities largely view women's role as that of caring for their families and making the home a place worth living in. Hence the proverb:

Mke ni nguzo ya nyumba

(A woman is the cornerstone of the house).
A variant of this proverb is:

Mke ni figa la nyumba

(A woman is stone (cooking) of the house)

The ideology of veiling i.e. 'Purdah' dictates that a woman can only expose her face and hands, although it is noteworthy that veiling is essentially a product of social life rather than that of the teaching of Islam. According to Nelson (1972),

"It was Prophet Mohammed who first veiled his women in order to symbolize their special status as his wives. His purpose in veiling them was to distinguish them from other women of the community and to preserve their respect as being of special status. The spread of the practice of veiling and seclusion among the converts of Islam took the form of emulation of the prophet and was more of urban than rural phenomena.....Though at first a private and personal matter which some people adhered to while others ignored, it became widespread custom as the numbers of slaves and concubines increased."

According to Levy (1957), it was approximately one hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet that:

"the system of seclusion of women was fully established in which
among the richer classes, the women were shut off from the rest of the household under the charge of eunuchs.

Muslim marriage is based on the premise that social order can only be maintained if the women's dangerous potential for causing chaos is protected and restrained. Women are, therefore, held as a prized piece of property and not as persons.

A woman's highest value is placed upon her proper conduct before marriage and upon her marital fidelity. The codes of female modesty, veiling and seclusion are therefore seen as solutions to the need to protect society from possible consequences of female sexuality. Seclusion of wives ensures that they are extremely subservient to their husbands. As a result of this type of confinement, the home becomes the women's domain and her worth is measured on how well she has managed to live to the society's expectation in this sphere. As a result, she is reminded that she is the cornerstone of the home and without her role in this sphere the family is likely to collapse, Akilimali (1982:33).

The woman is seen as the axis of the family; custodian of the home, the children, the traditions, the language and the culture. The English saying, "a home without a woman is a sea without fish", summarises the vital function and
the relationship of a woman to a home.

A good wife is declared above all else the best reward life on earth can offer in the Swahili community. The socialisation and education of women aims at sharpening their awareness of domestic duties towards husbands and the family, which implies the woman’s total submission to their wishes. The model traditional wife shows great devotion to her husband; is expected to be always polite never giving any offence. She is expected to be very understanding and submissive and to be a strong upholder of societal values. The model wife according to Swahili and Islamic doctrine is a quiet, submissive and innocent female who looks after the children and the house; cooks and puts her family’s interest before hers. Hence the saying:-

Ushaifu si heshima ya mwanamke.
(Pride is not a woman’s virtue.)

Women are socialised to be content with performing narrow dimensional traditional roles of wife and mother while men are encouraged to expand and exercise their abilities to the fullest. Society’s division of gender roles limits women’s human capacity for the pursuit of self-realisation, thus destroying any attempts of her fulfilment outside the family. The ideal image of a good
woman is one who is loving, hardworking and one who stays at home to wait for her bread-winning husband. Through various channels of socialisation, women are made to believe that the meaning of a woman’s life is to serve her husband well, bring up his children with all her strength and intelligence. She is expected to render total, unquestioning devotion to the husband. This is an enormous task and, in order to accomplish it, she is warned of the dire consequences which can befall her in case she fails to fulfil her rightful role as an ideal wife. This is clear from the proverb:–

Mume ni jaha si raha
(A husband is pain not joy.)

This proverb shows that in order for one to maintain a husband securely, one has to deny herself in order to please him.

Mume ni shoga tu
(A husband is just a friend.)

A ‘friend’ in this context means that one is here today but tomorrow he is gone. The implication here is that the relationship between a husband and a wife is based on
mutual friendship and understanding and it is to be cultivated in order for it to last. The wife has a role to play in order to sustain this relationship. The husband too has a package of responsibilities to meet in order for the relationship to thrive. This is expected in any agreement or relationship.

Women are often reminded of their obligations to their men and are always warned that divorce is a possibility of which they should always be aware.

Proof of adultery on either man or woman may lead to dissolution of marriage. The marital bond can be dissolved by the husband through a unilateral declaration of his desire to do so. Traditionally, a declaration of divorce by the husband is made verbally.

On the other hand, the wife does not have the privilege to terminate her marriage by such a unilateral declaration. She has to seek for divorce on grounds which she must substantiate. Badawi (1980:19) observes that, due to the emotional nature of women, a good reason for asking for divorce should be brought before the judge. However, there are legal grounds on which the wife can acquire this privilege. Among such grounds is economical deprivation (Mikhail 1979).

As dealt with in a preceding paragraph, a significant aspect of a husband’s relationship with his wife in Islamic
society is in the matter of divorce. Although it is possible under Islamic law for a wife to divorce a husband, it is extremely difficult and rare to do so. Strobel (1979) notes that lack of maintenance is one of the few grounds on which a woman can be granted divorce.

However, it is very easy for a man to divorce his wife and men do so frequently. It is not uncommon for example, for a man to have had five to six wives, each at a different time, in his life time and for each of these wives to have had as many husbands.

4.4 THE IMAGE OF A WOMAN AS A MOTHER

As a man’s sexual companion, a woman is also expected to procreate. Women are expected to undertake this role of childbearing as soon as they are of age; this is at the onset of puberty. Hence, Swahili girls are married off as soon as they start showing signs that they have reached maturity. This is illustrated in the following proverbs:-

1. Mstahi mke umbu hazai

   (One who respects a wife as a sister does not give birth.)
2. **Mficha uke/uchi hazai**

(One who hides private parts does not give birth.)

3. **Mkataa uzazi ni mchawi**

(One who opposes procreation is a witch.)

The given examples stress the importance and the necessity of procreation which, as observed earlier, gives women status in society.

From childhood, a woman is socialised to know the importance of that role. In order to underscore this, oral literature genres such as proverbs, riddles and songs have been effectively used as tools of socialisation to achieve this. Motherhood is shown as a blessing. This message is expounded in proverbs such as:-

**Furaha ya mama ni mtoto**

(The mother's happiness is her child)

To instil into women that, for their happiness to be complete in marriage, they need to have children. According to Taiwo (1984:2), childless marriages have no place in African traditional life. This is succinctly captured in the following examples:-
1. **Ucheshi wa mtoto ni anga la nyumba**

(The laughter of a child is the light of the house)

2. **Raha ya dunia ni watoto**

(Happiness in the world is children)

In this perspective, children create a sense of fulfilment among women. It is emphasised that no happiness can be achieved for a woman unless she bears children. Households or marriages without children are considered incomplete and in darkness. Children’s activities are crucial to the well-being of the family. For this sole reason, women are encouraged to procreate in order for their marriages to be complete and their joy to be full. Women who fail to give birth are seen as valueless.

In the Islam religion, the society is not hostile to a barren woman. Among the Swahili people therefore, there is a belief that God is the provider of everything and if He has chosen not to give you children, it is not your fault. This belief in God as the provider is best exemplified in the proverb:-

*Aliyekupa wewe kiti ndiye aliyenipa mimi kumbi*

(He who gave you a throne is the one who gave me a coconut husk).
This religious ideology exonerates barren women from blame unlike in Gikuyu and other African societies where women who are barren are despised and scorned upon. Palmer (1983:40) observes that:

"A woman without a child is a failed woman."

In most cases the feeling and suffering experienced by such women in such societies are not considered. Women are looked upon as mere tools of procreation and their individual worth is pegged against this biological function. However, as noted earlier among the Swahili due to their ardent belief in God as the provider, barren women are not ill-treated. In fact relatives of such women give them children to rear so that they too can experience the joy of such an important task. In this case women are able to compensate for their bareness by fostering children. It is therefore not unusual in the Swahili community to hear children referring to a mother as:

Mama wa kulea
(The mother who brought me up).

Societal expectation is that every woman should behave like a mother. However, the society is not blind to the
fact that a biological mother and a foster mother are different and behave differently to children depending on whether they are their biological or foster mothers. The category of mothers who are despised are stepmothers. The practice of polygyny explains the presence of a step-mother image in their proverbs. How do Swahili people view stepmothers?

**Mama wa kambo si mama**

(A stepmother is no mother)

This proverb implies that, somebody else’s mother is a bitter cucumber. The notion here being expressed is that mothers are only kind and good to their own biological children.

Women generally hate their co-wives as indicated in the following proverb:-

**Uke wenza una karaha**

(Co-wifely is a problem)

Motherhood has certain responsibilities and these are well-documented in Swahili proverbs. These include; the mother as a nurse and as a teacher.
4.4.1. THE MOTHER AS A NURSE

Biologically, it is women who nurture the children in their bodies. They also produce milk which is a crucial food for the babies especially at their normative stages. This role is well stipulated in the proverb:

Akosaye la mama hata la mbwa huamwa
(He who misses the mother’s (breast) he can access a dog’s).

A variant of this proverb is:

Titi la mama litamu hata likiwa la mbwa
(Mother’s breast is sweet even if it’s a dog’s.)

These proverbs show that it is the women’s role to breastfeed or feed her children and children who are denied this crucial service have no alternative but to look for it elsewhere. It is, therefore, emphasised that it is imperative for those who give birth to suckle or provide food for their young ones. Women as producers of children and of milk, are the first providers of daily food to the child. The proverb’s usage is extended to other spheres of life to mean that if you miss one opportunity, then you can look for the next best alternative.
Apart from feeding them, the mother is also charged with the responsibility of minding the cleanliness of her children. This is expressed in the proverb:

*Mtoto akinyea, kinyeo hakikatwi.*

(If a child defecates, the anus is not cut).

The mother has to nurse her children with tenderness and care. She is also indoctrinated that child rearing is her duty for,

*Jogoo halei Mwana.*

(A cock does not rear a child).

This proverb is used to instil into the woman, the belief that the role of rearing children is entirely hers for it is not man’s. A father’s role is to provide materially for the family but the rearing, cooking, cleaning and even educating of the children is the mother’s duty. The mother in the Swahili community is portrayed as the nurturer of future generations. The society has proverbs which show that if the mother is affected, the children are likely to suffer. This is stipulated in the following proverb:

*Kuku mwenye watoto halengwi jiwe.*

(A stone is not aimed at a hen with chicks.)
It is evident from the above example that the society has a lot of respect for women's reproductive roles and hence it is important to nurture and treat them well. Any maltreatment of women is bound to affect the welfare of the children. This is in view of the fact that children depend on parents for their material welfare and if the parents are affected, the children are likely to suffer for they will have no protection and will lack somebody to depend on. This is captured through the following proverb:

*Mti mkuu u~igwa, wana wa nyoni huyumba*  
(If the big tree falls, the nestlings fret.)

However the society is not blind to the difficult role assigned to women. There are several proverbs which show the difficulties that are likely to be experienced in the process of rearing children. Such proverbs are:

1. **Uchungu wa mwana aujuaye mzazi.**  
   (The labour of childbirth is known by the parent (Mother).

2. **Kulea mimba si kazi, kazi kulea mwana.**  
   (It is not hard to nurse a pregnancy what is hard is to bring up a child.)

A variant of this proverb is:
Kuzaa si kazi, kazi kubwa kulea

(To give birth is not work, work is to bring up a child.)

These proverbs show that the task of bringing up children is enormous and this role has generally been delegated to women despite the fact that the society considers them both mentally and physically weak. It is interesting to note that whether the woman gives birth or not, she has to face the consequences of either. This is exemplified in the proverb:-

Uzazi ni vita na ugumba ni vita

(Giving birth is war and barrenness is war.)

Accordingly, whether you get children or remain barren you are likely to experience the consequences of either option. This implies that in life, you have to experience ups and downs. Men are never seen as being barren - though the terms are neutral they refer to a woman more than a man, just as 'mzee' is generic but is treated as masculine.

4.4.2 THE MOTHER AS A TEACHER

Apart from looking after children's physical welfare,
mothers are also expected to look after the children's intellectual and spiritual welfare. Much attention is paid to the bringing up of girls so that they may be well brought up to transmit the cultural norms of the society to their children. Women have the primary role and responsibility of bringing up children in accordance with the societal expectations. This is in view of the fact that the mother has the children under her prolonged and detailed care. She is charged with the responsibility of moulding the character of her children and ensuring that they adhere to acceptable behaviour in accordance with societal customs. Such behaviour includes how to eat, dress, talk and laugh decently; and to have respect for elders, courtesy to visitors to name just a few. If a child deviates from this expected code of societal behaviour, it is the mother who is considered to have failed and is therefore to be blamed. There are several proverbs which show that whatever behaviour a child adapts is learned from the parents and especially the mother. This is stipulated in the following proverbs:-

1. Mtoto akibebwa hutazama kisogo cha mamake

(When a baby is carried on it's mother's back, it looks at the nape of the mother's neck, that is, cannot help following its mother.)
2. Mtoto umleavyo ndivyo akuavyo
   (As you bring up a child, so he/she will be.)

3. Mtoto wa nyoka ni nyoka
   (A snake’s offspring is a snake.)

4. Mbwa wa msasi mkali ni mkali pia
   (The dog of a fierce hunter is also fierce.)

The above proverbs indicate that parents and especially the mothers being the ones charged with the upbringing of children are role models of their children. This means that their effectiveness in child rearing will be judged by the outcome of the citizens they bring up. If children behave irresponsibly it implies that the parents and more so the mothers are the failures. They are warned that whatever the children become will be directly attributed to the kind of upbringing they have received from their parents. This is exemplified in the following proverbs:

1. Wimbo mui hauongolewi mwana
   (A bad song is not sung to a child)

2. Dua mbaya haiombolezwi mwana
   (A bad prayer is not used to hush a child).
They are further threatened that the full wrath of the community will be on them and they will suffer dire consequences for failure to play their role well. This message is clearly stated in the proverb:

**Mchelea mwana kulia hulia mwenyewe**

(One who fears a child crying, will cry himself/herself.)

This proverb implies that whatever fate a child encounters due to poor training and socialisation the parents and especially the mothers will share also. Hence the mother has to do her best to train the children to become acceptable citizens because failure to do so, the children will learn what they would have learned from the mother but the alternative form of learning will be very painful. This is clear from the proverb:

**Asiyefunzwa na mamaye hufunzwa na ulimwengu**

(He who was not taught by the mother will be taught by the world, that is, spare the rod and spoil the child.)

Proverbs are also used to urge the women to use all the tools at their disposal to ensure that they instil the right kind of education in their children. Whatever measures she uses, she is reminded that they cannot be
harmful to the child as shown in the following examples:-

1. **Teke la kuku halimuumizi mwanawe**
   (A hen’s kick does not hurt her chick.)

2. **Kuku havunji yayile**
   (A hen does not break its egg.)

3. **Simba hamli mwanawe**
   (A lion does not eat its cub.)

Women are encouraged to use caution in upbringing their children as is also evident in the following example:-

**Mtoto ukimnyang’anya kisu mpe banzi achezee**
   (If you deprive a child of a knife, give him/her a stick to play with.)

Due to the close contact between women and children, a very close relationship develops between them. Taiwo (1967:112) notes that:-

"An African mother shows particular concern for her children because they are the expression, proof and pride of her womanhood."

As a result of this, the woman works to bring her children
up to be useful members of the society. Children’s exemplary behaviour is an aspect which creates a lot of joy and pride in women. The children are also reared to realise the influence their mothers have on them. Hence the proverb:

Mwana mtukana nyina kuzimu enda kiona
(A child who abuses the mother will go to see hell.)

Due to their close link and association between mother and child, the mother’s relationship with the children is stronger than that with the father. The following proverb supports this view.

Mama kwa mwanawe, mtoto kwa mamaye
(Mother to child, child to the mother.)

The proverb implies that, the fate of women and their children is intertwined. Despite a father’s authority over and responsibility for children, the ultimate sanction a mother can apply against her child’s behaviour, before God is stronger than the father’s before God.

In fact the relationship between a child and a father is determined by the relationship between the mother and
the father. Hence the proverb:

Aliyoea mamako ndiye babako
(He who married your mother is your father.)

A variant of this proverb is:

Mume wa mama ni baba
(A husband of a mother is a father.)

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the images of women as portrayed in Swahili proverbs. The image of women in the Swahili proverbs dwell on their social and biological roles and functions. It has been noted that the major factors which have influenced the formation of the images of women in Swahili proverbs are feudalism, patriarchy and the Islamic religion.

The image of women that emanates from the Swahili proverbs considered in the chapter are a reflection of the values and beliefs the Swahili people have regarding women. It is argued here that oral literature and proverbs in particular spring from and express the culture of a people
including their values, and beliefs.

In summary, the emerging image of woman in the Swahili community as seen through the proverbs can broadly be categorised as follows:-

A woman:

(i) As a wife

(ii) As a mother

As a wife, a woman is supposed to be beautiful, good looking and attractive. The definition of beauty varies from culture to culture. Over time, persons seen as beautiful have generally inspired adoration. Among the Waswahili, women are expected to be beautiful in order to appeal to husbands sexually. In the proverbs, it has been shown that women are adornments and men have the duty to bedeck them appropriately. This is further evident in the following examples:-

1. **Mke ni ngo, mgomba ni kupalilia.**
   
   (A women is clothes, banana plant is tending.)

2. **Uzuri wa mke ni ngo, wa ng’ombe ni kulimiwa.**
A woman’s beauty is clothes, a cow’s is nurturing.

(To bedeck a wife is man’s pride.)

The attractive wife who is the pride of her husband must be good looking, beautiful and preferably young. Hence the proverb:-

Mke ni dada mdogo
(A wife is a young sister.)

Beauty alone may be enough to attract a suitor who can raise a woman’s status. Beauty therefore becomes an avenue to power. It should be noted however, that the standards of beauty are usually not decided upon by women. The image of a woman as a pleasure object is detrimental to women’s liberation especially when accepted by the women themselves. Instead of engaging in meaningful productive labour, Swahili women, especially in urban centres, spend a lot of their time beautifying themselves in order to attract their men.

Apart from physical beauty, Swahili women are also expected to be beautiful in character. This is exemplified in this proverb:-
Ushaufu si heshima ya mwanamke.

(Pride is not a woman’s honour.)

Character-wise, an ideal Swahili wife is portrayed as chaste, humble, docile, obedient and submissive. If a woman lives up to the above description, she is then assured of a husband’s moral and financial support. This, therefore, leads to the image of a wife as an economic dependant. In that role, she is reduced to a cook, a waiter, a cleaner and a sexual object. King’ei (1992:72) notes that:

"Woman is treated as a child who needs full parental (male) guidance and direction. Her lot is to obey and follow man’s decision unquestionably and failure to do so means risking the wrath of her husband and relatives."

The proverbs strongly stress the duty of income generation as the man’s. A woman has no business in the economic sector for she is supposed to remain in the domestic realm. Her material, spiritual and even social benefits are to be derived from her husband. A man who fails to meet these requirements is bound to face social ridicule.

In return, the woman offers herself to the man for all his social and sexual gratification and strictly observes fidelity rules. She also has the responsibility of
maintaining the house accounts (Mwana Kupona, 1860).

Her domain is her kitchen and she becomes the cornerstone of the husband’s home. If she fails to meet these requirements, she is warned that her material benefits can be withdrawn an event which would plunge her into hardship. As observed earlier, divorce is very rampant among the Swahili and as Knappert (1979) observes, broken marriages are blamed on women who are seen as having failed to attract their husbands with their charms. Women are normally accused of infidelity and are portrayed in the proverbs as incorrigible adulterers. Hence the proverbs:

1. *Ndege hulindwa, mke halindwi*  
   (A bird is caged, a woman is not.)

2. *Hapendezi mwanamke, ila ndani dafu yake*  
   (A woman does not please unless in her home.)

3. *Maji ya dafu hayapendezi ila dafuni mwake*  
   (Coconut water does not please unless in its own nut.)

The image of women as wives can therefore be seen in two perspectives. The first one is that of an ideal wife who is physically and characteristically attractive. She embodies all the nutritive and supportive virtues
associated with a good woman. These include pity, sympathy, purity, love, charity, and motherhood. Women with such virtues are chaste and faithful and are often loved and supported by their husbands due to their submissiveness and obedience. Such women are well kept and well clothed which leads to their happiness. The image of an ideal woman is characterized by her behaviour of humility. Such a wife is not demanding, greedy or aggressive. She gets satisfied with what the husband offers so, as not to make demands on him which he may not be able to meet which would embarrass him. Such a wife is considered wise and patient and even more important, she knows how to control her tongue. Such a wife supports her husband in his trials and tribulations and is subservient.

However, there is another image of women which portrays them as adulterous by nature. For example:

Chelewa, chelewa, utakuta mwana si wako

(Be late, be late, you will find the child is not yours.)

The variant of this proverb is:-

Saburi, saburi, mwana si wako.

(Patience, patience, the child is not yours.)
In these examples, men are warned that, unless they fulfil their conjugal duties, they will end up with children who are sired for them by other men. The proverb could also mean that, the husbands might end up loosing their loved ones. This shows that women are easily swayed, adulterous and insatiable. It is partly on the basis of this ideology that women are veiled and secluded. Though these proverbs imply that you must do something during the appropriate time, the message is conveyed using the image of a woman as one who cannot be trusted especially where fidelity is concerned. The evil wife/woman is associated with dangerous qualities like greed, insatiable sexuality and deceit. This is captured through the proverb:

**Uwongo uliua wasichana wazuri.**

(Deceit destroyed good girls.)

As Mbughuni (1982:22) rightly observes:

"The two basic images of women which emerge from the literature discussed can be regarded as two sides of the same coin meant to legitimize male domination......These contrasting images also reflect a male ambivalence towards the female. Basically she is a dangerous creature of a different nature who must be approached with caution. Once tamed, however, she can become the object of adoring fantasy."

In companionships with the men, women are expected to propagate the human race. There are several proverbs which urge the duo to ensure that they fulfil this vital function. These include:-

Msitukane wakunga na uzazi ungalipo.
(Do not abuse midwives while procreation continues.)

Children are the most important possessions to parent. In regard to women, Knappert (1979:6) observes that:

"Children are a woman’s dearest wish and the fulfilment of her life. Women feel that their existence is empty unless they have children. The children give women’s existence purpose or meaning. This is because a woman is predestined for motherhood. It is believed that, God created a woman with the intention that she should bear children and continue the existence of man. In His infinite wisdom, God created man with the desire to worship Him but woman He shaped with a desire to be fertilised and to give birth. Men represent the spiritual aspirations of the human race, the devotion to adoration of External light to study and reflection. Women represent the earthly wishes of people, the desires for lust and for the enjoyment of children."
The ideology that women are not complete without children is very prevalent in Swahili proverbs. Knappert further observes that to divorce a fertile wife is strongly disapproved of in Islamic society because children are expected to care for their parents when they are old.

Motherhood goes with certain responsibilities and these are largely stipulated in the proverbs. These include, rearing, nursing and teaching the children so that they grow up to be responsible citizens of the society. There are several proverbs which stress the fact that it is the women's duty to rear the children. While rearing and nursing children, women are also portrayed as teachers and therefore moulders of children. They are urged that, since it is their duty to bring up children, the society will judge them harshly because the failure on the part of the children will be a reflection of the failure of the mother in particular and the parents in general. Despite this view, society is aware that there are certain traits that a child may exhibit which were not necessarily acquired from the mother. This is implied in the proverbs such as:--

1. **Mizungu ya kula hafundishwi mwana**

   (The art of eating is not taught to a child.)
2. Mtoto wa kuku hafundishwi kuchakura

(A chick is not taught to peck.)

Paradoxically, despite the fact that women are urged to devote themselves fully to their husbands and children in particular, the society has proverbs which show that anyone who gets pre-occupied with one particular thing is likely to be naive and narrow minded. This is brought out in the proverb:

Umekuwa bata akili kwa watoto?

(Are you a duck that your mind is with your children?)

In view of the above, it can be deduced that women in the Swahili society are treated with a lot of sentimentalism which often borders on idolisation while submitting them to male authority. The subordination of females to males depends very much on the psychosexual relationship. Man is vested with the power to make a woman his plaything, an object for the gratification of his desires.

The proverbs emerge as channels used to call upon women to be humble, obedient and submissive to their husbands. As far as Islamic philosophy which has been internalised by women is concerned, male authority goes
beyond earthly life and may determine their destiny thereafter. This view is best expressed by Mwana Kupona (1960:2) when she instructs her daughter thus:

"Siku ufululwao
nadhari ni ya mumeo
taulizwa atakao
ndilo utakalotendewa

Kipenda wende peponi
utakwenda dalhini
kunena wende motoni
huna budi utatiwa".

(And on the day of resurrection
the award is with your husband
he shall be asked what he shall wish
and as he wishes it shall be done.

If he wishes you go to paradise
you will forthwith be brought there
If he says that you go to the fire
without escape you will be put there.)

No wonder then that as far as Swahili women are concerned, the only way to maintain their marital intimacy, emotional and material support and their future destiny is to resign themselves totally to male dominance. This status quo is emphasised in the following examples:

1. **Mume ni moshi wa koko ukitowaka hufuka**

   (A husband is like coconut fire, if it does not light, it smokes.)
2. Mume ni mume hata akiwa ni gume gume
   (A man is a man despite his disability.)

3. Mume hana sifa
   (A man has no character.)

4. Uzuri wa mke ni tabia
   (The beauty of a woman is behaviour.)

Though the wife/mother image is the most desirable life for a woman, it should not constitute the parameters to complete her as a human being.
In both Gikuyu and Swahili languages, proverbs are generally standards with variations of expressions in terms of wording occurring only in widely separated regions. The variations in proverbs were more pronounced in the Swahili language which consists of several dialects. For example, in Mombasa we have the proverb:-

**Uzazi ni vita na ugumba ni vita.**

(Giving birth is war and so is bareness.)

This proverb manifests itself in Lamu as:

**Uzazi ni kondo na ugumba ni kondo.**

(Giving birth is war and so is bareness.)

These two proverbs have a similar meaning but due to dialectal differences, they have different wording.

Proverbs are not easily formulated and often take an archaic mode of expression of beliefs. There are no known authors of this creative work of art. Proverbs often come in balanced couplets with an antithesis, that is with
enunciations and deductions. They touch on many themes including the philosophy of the people concerned. There are different functions of proverbs, among them are, to ridicule, advise and rebuke those who are considered to be deviating from the generally acceptable norms. Proverbs are used in an effort to persuade people into compliance. Irony and sarcasm are often used as instruments of constraint. Hence proverbs can be used for getting people "into line" through the use of such persuasive means without direct infringement upon their rights. Proverbs are also a good way of communicating in various ways in order to achieve the desired results. They are the source of the people’s philosophy and way of life by which their mentality and behaviour patterns can be studied and appreciated. It is in the basis of these functions that the images of women as portrayed in the proverbs have to be understood.

The images of women in both Gikuyu and Swahili societies bear testimony of the values and beliefs of these communities about women since proverbs spring from and express the culture of the people which includes their values and beliefs. Since the images are entrenched in people’s minds, they manifest themselves in their beliefs and verbalised compositions. The dominant image of women in both Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs is that of a mother together with the roles associated with motherhood. The traditional role of women in Swahili and Gikuyu societies, like that of women of other parts of Africa is closely tied to the concept of women as rearers of
The life cycle of a woman through birth, to puberty, to marriage, to life in marriage and old age are directly related to this view of her primary role of procreation. This is the reason why women are prized in many societies. They are viewed as homemakers and pillars of the family. This ideology is revealed in the proverbs exemplified below:

1. Mke ni figa la nyumba (Swahili)
   (A wife is a cornerstone of the house.)

2. Nyoni ya nja ndiri gitara (Gikuyu)
   (A male bird has no nest.)

Homes are associated with women and without them, there is no concept of a home in the Gikuyu and Swahili communities. Hence marriage for women in both communities is over emphasised. This is revealed in the following proverbs:

1. Gutiri mutumia wenjagirwo mbui kwa nyina. (Gikuyu)
   (No woman will have her grey hair shaven in her maiden home.)

2. Mwenye dada hakosi shemeji (Swahili)
   (One who has a sister cannot miss an in-law.)

These proverbs show that in both Swahili and Gikuyu societies women and men are urged and encouraged to be
married. One’s life is considered as incomplete unless one has a family and a family is only sanctioned in marriage for illegitimate children have no place in both cultures. Individual’s social status is acquired through the institution of marriage.

However, though marriage is seen as the norm for every man and woman in both Gikuyu and Swahili societies, the institution is seen as being more oppressive to women than to men. It emerges as an oppressive snare that imprisons women and enslaves them, sucks their vitality and humanity. This is apparent from the following proverbs:-

1. Mume ni jaha si raha (Swahili)
   (A husband is stress, not joy.)

2. Mume ni shoga tu (Swahili)
   (A husband is only a friend.)

3. Mumbia arume omburagwo na njuguma (Gikuyu)
   (One who refuses something offered by men gets beaten by clubs.)

4. Murugiri arume ndagaga ngiha (Gikuyu)
   (One who cooks for men does not lack big veins.)

The image of a wife captured through the above proverbs shows that she has to be careful when dealing with men who are portrayed as violent and demanding. If she fails to follow the instructions, she expects to face the full wrath. In
order to ensure that all women get husbands, both Gikuyu and Swahili communities encourage and sanction polygyny either through culture or religion.

This can be shown through the following proverb.

1. **Gutiri njamba ya mwera umwe** (Gikuyu)
   
   (No cock belongs to one hen.)

2. **Ndoa hufungwa mbinguni**. (Swahili)
   
   (Marriage is solemnised in heaven.)

The emphasis of polygyny and fatalism as shown in the Swahili proverb greatly affects the roles and the rights of women. For example, among the Agikuyu, a person who had only one wife was viewed as low in social and economic status. As observed earlier, his subsequent success and standing were largely measured by the number of women he managed to acquire as wives. To obtain wives, one had to have wealth and hence, polygyny on a large scale was a sign of affluence. However women in polygynous institution are portrayed as dangerous, quarrelsome and unreasonable. This is explained in the proverb:-

**Aka eri ni nyungu igiri cia urogi** (Gikuyu)

(Two wives are two pots of poison.)

The environment in a polygynous marriage puts women on a
coalition path despite the Gikuyu philosophy that people who are put together cannot avoid quarrels. This is revealed in the following proverb:-

Mathanwo me kiondo kimwe matiagaga gukong'orania. (Gikuyu)

(Axes in one bag cannot help scratching each other.)

For the Swahili polygyny is sanctioned through the Islamic religion and culture. One is allowed to marry up to a maximum of four wives on condition that he is able to support them materially and treat them equally.

Upon marriage women in both societies were prized particularly to bear children and their status in most cases, was dependent upon the satisfaction of this function. Motherhood is regarded with veneration. Women generally gained their identity and some freedom of action through marriage and by becoming mothers. Lippert (1972:166) observes that:-

"Motherhood is the highest goal of traditional African woman. Attainment of this goal is identity, status and satisfaction."

Motherhood is therefore seen as women's identity and without it her life has no meaning. It is evident that in many African societies, Gikuyu and Swahili societies inclusive, motherhood defines womanhood. To marry and mother a child (preferably a son) entitles a woman to more respect
from her husband and kinsmen as she is able to be addressed as mother of so and so. This preoccupation with motherhood is widely propagated through the portrayal of women as mothers. Women struggle to get children for fear of being divorced or co-wives being brought in. Motherhood is crucial to the happiness of the woman and to her ability to control her life. Motherhood is associated with femininity and nurturing as opposed to fatherhood which is associated with masculinity and aggression as exemplified in the proverbs below:

1. **Tha cia arumi itiri iria.** (Gikuyu)
   (Men's pity has no milk.)

2. **Jogoo halei mwana** (Swahili)
   (A cock does not rear a child.)

The above views notwithstanding, masculinity is treasured in both Gikuyu and Swahili societies. As mothers, women in both Gikuyu and Swahili societies are portrayed as teachers to their children. As a consequence of their roles in societies, African women have always been upholders of traditions on the communities studied. It is the primary duty of women to pass down mores and values to the future generations. The importance of this role of women cannot be over emphasised. Through the use of proverbs and other genres of oral literature, women are portrayed as custodians of oral traditions and conveyors of the same to the younger
generations. A failure on the part of a child to grasp and adhere to cultural norms is generally considered as a failure on the part of his/her mother. There are many proverbs in both Gikuyu and Swahili language, which stress the idea that children's behaviour has a direct bearing to the behaviours of the parents especially the mothers. The following proverbs are just but a few examples:

1. **Kori kaiyaga ta nyina (Gikuyu)**
   
   (A lamb steals like the mother.)

2. **Mwana wa ngari akunyaga ta nyina (Gikuyu)**
   
   (A leopard's cub scratches like the mother.)

3. **Mtoto akibebwa hutazama kisogo cha mamaye (Swahili)**
   
   (When a child is carried on the mother's back he/she looks at the mother's nape.)

4. **Asiyefunzwa na mamaye, hufunzwa na ulimwengu (Swahili)**
   
   (He/she who is not taught by the mother will be taught by the world.)

   The above proverbs show that, in both Gikuyu and Swahili communities, the mothers are seen as the foundation of the child's moral behaviour. They are portrayed as the role models of the children as the habits and behaviours displayed by the children can only be attributed to the instructions they have received from their parents, especially their mothers. For this reason the communities studied castigate
women for the negative behaviours exemplified by children. As far as the two societies are concerned, children learn the first rules of social life, manners and good behaviour from the parents and more so from the mothers. Hence it is mother’s duty to strive and bring up a child in a manner that is acceptable to the society.

Women are therefore portrayed as nurtures and educators of future generations. It is therefore not surprising that the image of a woman as a mother is held in high esteem and as Kabira (1994) reckons, it is the only positive image of a woman in Gikuyu narratives and even in the proverbs. As mothers, women are devoted above all to their children and are prepared to tolerate all kinds of mistreatment such as beatings, unfaithfulness and even being deprived in order to stay and look after their children. This is stipulated in the following proverb:

Muka wi ciana ndoraga. (Gikuyu)

(A Woman with children does not run away.)

Women are expected to put with all male excesses and put all their energies, hopes and dreams to their children with the aim of enabling them to receive a better life. The devotion and commitments of women to their children has to be seen in the light that women are blamed for all the faults of their children.

Another broad category of images of women from the
Swahili and Gikuyu proverbs emanates from what is perceived as their personality. While most of the Gikuyu proverbs dwell on the negative attributes associated with a woman’s personality, the Swahili proverbs stress on what should constitute a good woman, as a girl, wife and mother.

The Gikuyu proverbs which dwell on the woman’s personality depict her as a destructive, dangerous, stubborn, unreliable and unpredictable. There are several proverbs which capture the undesirable behaviours associated with a woman’s personality. These include:-

1. Giathi gitaragio ni gaka kamwe. (Gikuyu)
   (A gathering can be dispersed by one small woman.)

2. Aka matiri cia ndiro no cia nyiniko. (Gikuyu)
   (Women have no upright words, only crooked ones.)

3. Kia mundu muka gitikagio kiarara (Gikuyu)
   (A woman’s word is believed after the test of time.)

The negative portrayal of the woman’s personality that emerges from the Gikuyu proverbs can only be understood from the patriarchal point of view. Spender (1980:1) reckons that, a patriarchal society is based on the belief that the male is the supreme sex and many of the social institution and much social practice is then organised to reflect this belief. As shown in the proverbs, women in Gikuyu are considered inferior to men. In a society where women are devalued, it is
inevitable that the images associated with them are negative or have negative connotations. However, images associated with males have positive attributes. These include:

1. *Mwaki wa arume ndutogaga keri* (Gikuyu)  
   (Men’s fire never smokes twice.)

2. *Cia athuri ni thure* (Gikuyu)  
   (Elders (men) issues are well sought out.)

3. *Maitho ma arume ti ma irang’a* (Gikuyu)  
   (Men’s eyes are never completely closed.)

4. *Thutha wa arume nduoyagwo ruoya* (Gikuyu)  
   (Where men have passed there is not a single feather to be picked.)

5. *Ugi wa arume utemaga ta hiu* (Gikuyu)  
   (Men’s skills cut like knives.)

The proverbs imply that, men are always very alert and it is very difficult to cheat them contrary to women who are portrayed as always prone to falling prey to tricksters. From these examples, it is clear that double standards have evolved because the fundamental classification of males and females seems to have been developed largely by males to ensure that no matter what females do, it is negative and whatever males do is positive. Furthermore, as Ngugi (1975) rightly notes, those who control the means of production also control language. One can further observe that women are assigned
images and qualities that men find distressing or disturbing. Since men are the dominant sex, their dominance is reflected and reinforced in language use.

While the Gikuyu proverbs which dwell in the women's personality portray her negatively and as inferior to man, the Swahili proverbs which dwell on women's personality dwell on what behaviour a woman should be wary of. She is expected to be of good behaviour. This is expressed in the following proverb:

Mke ni tabia (Swahili)
(A woman is behaviour.)

A variant of this proverb is:

Uzuri wa mke ni tabia si sura (Swahili)
(A woman's beauty is in character not in physical appearance.)

She is also urged to avoid behaviours which can depict her in negative light or plunge her into chaos. This is shown in the proverbs below:

Ushaufu si heshima ya mwanamke (Swahili)
(Pride is not a woman's virtue.)

The above proverbs show that a woman has to avoid negative behaviours which could tarnish her personality. It
is worthy noting that, while Gikuyu proverbs depict men with negative attributes as exceptions rather than the norm, women’s negative attributes are applied across the board as reflections of all women. This can be inferred from the following proverbs:-

1. **Kuri arume na maiuria dua.** (Gikuyu)
   (There are men and those who fill the gourds.)

2. **Kuri arume na turuma ndoro.** (Gikuyu)
   (There are men and those who eat mud.)

Among the Swahili, the belief is that a man is a man despite his draw backs. This is exemplified in the proverb below:-

**Mume ni mume, hata akiwa ni gume gume** (Swahili)
(A husband is a man even if he is disabled)

While women’s negative personality attributes are over-emphasised in both Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs, their positive attributes are down played. For example feminine beauty which is seen as positive in both societies, there are also proverbs which warn members that they should be careful when dealing with beautiful women for they are likely to ensnare them with their beauty. This is captured through the following proverbs:-
1. **Mwari mweru ni magambo (Gikuyu)**

   (A fair skinned (beautiful) girl is a problem.)

2. **Penye urembo ndipo penye ulimbo (Swahili)**

   (Where there is finery, there lies the snare.)

3. **Mwanamke mzuri hakosi kilema (Swahili)**

   (A good woman does not miss a defect)

In regard to their economic status, women in Swahili and Gikuyu cultures are depicted differently. Among the Gikuyu, the woman is described as an economic asset for both her parents and her husband. The parents benefit economically when the woman gets married for they expect dowry from her suitor. This is illustrated in many proverbs such as the ones below:

1. **Mwana ndaheanagwo (Gikuyu)**

   (A child is not given away.)

2. **Aka na ng’ombe matiri ndugu (Gikuyu)**

   (Women and cows are not friendly.)

3. **Mwari mwega ahitukagira thome wa ngia (Gikuyu)**

   (A beautiful girl passes by the gate of a poor man.)

Once married she is also expected to benefit her in-laws. This is clear from the following proverb:-
Mundu muka ni mutuga/munoria kwene (Gikuyu)
(A woman benefits others.)

Contrary to this portrayal of women as economic assets to the Gikuyu community, Swahili women are portrayed as economic liabilities to their husbands. This has to be understood in the light of Islamic teachings which many Swahili people prescribe to. The customs, traditions and the Islamic religion which govern the lives of the Swahili people explicitly say that women are dependants and as a result, the bride price which is paid on their account becomes an indicator of their gender family relations where the man becomes superior while the woman is seen as inferior. As far as the Islamic religion is concerned, the task of income generation is the man’s, (Strobel 1979, Mikhail 1979).

This is clearly stipulated in the following proverbs:-

1. **Mume ni kazi, mke ni tabia (Swahili)**
   (A husband is work, a wife is behaviour.)

2. **Ikiwa hana kazi (mume) hajaliwi (Swahili)**
   (If he has no work (husband) he does not matter.)

In fact one of the few grounds allowed for a woman to divorce her husband under Islamic sharia is if a man fails to meet her economic needs or neglects her. Nyerere (1968) looks upon Muslim women as "invaluable resource". The economic...
dependence of women is crucial in understanding gender relations in the Swahili culture. According to the Swahili philosophy, dependence breeds weakness and subjugation. This is illustrated in the following proverbs:

1. **Uso wa kuhifadhiwa u chini (Swahili)**
   
   (The face of one under obligation is cast down.)

2. **Omba omba huleta unyonge (Swahili)**
   
   (Begging breeds weakness.)

As Wachege (1992:119) rightly states:

"economic dependence is a major tool for oppression and exploitation. Women should therefore emancipate themselves from such oppressive dependence."

It can be argued that discouraging women from actively pursuing public lives for themselves is a way of ensuring their subordination, a means of dictating their passivity, thus their assured dominance by men.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that in both Gikuyu and Swahili societies, women were treated as appendages of the men. They were used as the agents of reproduction and production. Their power only manifests itself in the domestic sphere where it is the power of subordinate agent upon which the subordinate becomes dependent. Women only made decisions which were directly related to the domestic spheres. In other
spheres of societal life, women were depicted as lacking in self-control.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

From the images of women emanating from Swahili and Gikuyu proverbs, the conclusion that can be drawn is that women have been marginalized and relegated to subsidiary roles and inferior positions in the society. They have been marginalized in all spheres of social, political and economic life. The society has given men the power to mould the women into a form most suited to them. The socialisation process and the assimilation of cultural and religious values and attitudes ensure the negative images of women and the ambivalent attitude towards women is accepted by females as well as males. The researcher was shocked to learn that most women interviewed concurred with the negative attributes associated with them as perpetuated in the proverbs. Such traits include unreliability, untrustworthiness, irresponsibility and dependency.

As seen in the proverbs discussed, Gikuyu and Swahili cultures were geared towards producing women who were subservient. They encouraged a passive attitude among the women and reverent awe for the achievements of men. Among the tools used to achieve the passive attitude among the women is oral literature and more specifically the proverbs. It is
also clear that the proverbs have been used to modify conscience and influence belief. They have been effectively used to relegate women to their lower status in the society where they are perceived as passive consumers of male ideologies. The persuasive effect of the art form, proverbs being part of it, is maximised when the audience (in this regard the target group of women) responds to its values or is socialised and compelled to accept the feelings, ideas and character aspects portrayed. The work of art tends to influence the audience to internalize these variations and experiences conveyed which in turn modify conscious and existing attitudes, Harrap (1949).

From the foregoing discussion, one can conclude that women in both Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs are largely portrayed negatively save for the mothers who are portrayed in positive light. The problem of negative female portrayal has to be addressed to enable them to recognise their true self. In the same manner, men have to be empowered to be confident by understanding and accepting the true female images as opposed to the stereotypical ones portrayed in the proverbs and other art forms. As King’ei (1992:176) notes, women have not only accepted their debasement by men folk, they seem to have sanctioned it. The burden is on the women to emancipate themselves from the negative images. Proverbs are part and parcel of ideological vehicles that contribute to the maintenance of the status of quo. Women should therefore refuse to subscribe to images which are geared towards...
demeaning and dehumanising them. Women’s negative portrayal in the proverbs is a strategy used to justify their exclusion from the decision making process and benefits. They are depicted as less intelligent and incapable of offering positive opinion. As Ortega (1990) observes:—

"If we are committed to working for a better humanity for all we have to be aware that this is not possible as long as we are limited by language and images we use unconsciously or by choice"

Language can play an important role in creating positive images of women. Redressing the negative images of women inherent in the proverbs have to be addressed from the language which is the carrier of those images. This is in view of the fact that the structures of social systems are shaped through communication and language which shapes thoughts, believes and attitudes. This manifests themselves through social channels and communication such as proverbs. It is evident from the images emanating from Gikuyu and Swahili proverbs that, language cannot be treated as gender neutral as it is closely linked to the gender issues of communities studied. When women are depicted as unchanging despite the social, political and economic conditions prevailing in their surroundings then it means that they never grow up. This implies that they never mature and will never do so. This is vividly stipulated in the following proverbs:—
1. Uhii ni umagwo no uka ndumagwo (Gikuyu)
   (A boy can get out of a boyhood but a woman remains a woman.)

2. Kiguta kia mundurume nikigutukaga no kia mundu muka gitigutukaga (Gikuyu)
   (A lazy man ceases to be lazy but a lazy woman remains lazy.)

3. Mke ni dada mdogo (Swahili)
   (A wife is small sister.)

From the above views associated with the personality, character and behaviour of women, they are usually ignored and their opinion is rarely sought or considered.

5.3 FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

From the foregoing discussions, it is clear that there are many prejudices against women in Gikuyu and Swahili societies. Some of these prejudices have clearly manifested themselves through the proverbs which emerge as one of the vehicles of transmitting traditions and values of the societies.

This study has examined some of the positive and negative images of women portrayed through the proverbs. It has been shown that women as mothers are positively depicted but as wives and women in general, they
are negatively depicted.

As a result, the study shows that there is need to do a selective application of proverbs. Those proverbs which have positive contribution need to be preserved and perpetuated but those which have negative impact on gender relations can justifiably be rejected for they have outlived their usefulness. Those proverbs could have been useful at a given point in time but their continued usage may be irrelevant to this present time in history. This is so especially in reference to proverbs which demean and abuse some members of the community, in this case the women.

Now and in the future, the proverbs which are biased should be discarded and new ones formulated which can enhance the positive gender relations if they have to be useful in society. This is so especially in view of the fact that proverbs are said to express the collective wisdom of the people which implies that they are a reflection of their philosophy, modes of thinking, values and aspirations as they serve the role of safeguarding their identity (Madumulla, 1995:xii).

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to address the marginalization of women, there is need to develop positive images and discard those which portray them negatively. This is not an easy task as Saadawi
"Whereas political and economic change can take place rapidly, social and cultural progress tends to lag behind because it is linked to deeper inner emotive and psychic process of human mind and heart."

According to the feminist literary theory, the portrayal of woman as emanating from the Swahili and Gikuyu proverbs must be radically questioned. There is need to find out how this negative portrayal of women has emerged over the years, how it has been sustained and how it impacts on their self perception and how that translates in their operation in real life. There is also need for conscious concerted efforts to be undertaken to ensure that proverbs which depict women negatively are replaced with proverbs which portray both men and women on an equal footing regardless of their gender.
REFERENCES


Amuka, P. (1976) "The Study of Proverbial Love"
Institute of African Studies (IAS) University of Nairobi, Nairobi.


Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. Nairobi

Foreigners Guidance Centre, Buraydah.


Broomfield, G.W. (1930) "The Development of Swahili Language" in *Africa* 3, 516-522

——— (1931) "The Re-Bantuization of the Swahili Language" in *Africa* 4, 1, 77-85.


_________ (1966) The Languages of Africa. Indiana University, Bloomington.


258


   Trubner & Co., London.

Krumm, B. (1953) "How the Kiswahili Language came into Existence." in Tanganyika Notes and Records. No. 34.


Mabala, R.S. (undated) "Gender in Tanzania Kiswahili Fiction". Unpublished paper.


271


_________ (1977), "How to be/treat a Lady in Swahili Culture. An Expression of Ideal". *Ba Shiru*.


Reusch, L. (1953) "How the Swahili People and the Language came into Existence" Tanganyika Notes and Records. 34 20-27


_________ (1978) People of the Coast. Evans Brothers (Kenya) LTD, London.


273


APPENDIX A

LIST OF GIKUYU PROVERBS

1. Aka a kwene ni irima iriku.
   (Strange women are a deep hole.)

   (Two wives/women are two pots full of poison.)

3. Aka matigagwo ndundu
   (Women are not confided in)

4. Aka matiri cia ndiiro no cia nyiniko.
   (Women have no upright words, only crooked ones.)

5. Aka matiri rika
   (Women have no age group)

6. Aka na iguru matimenyagirwo.
   (Women are as unpredictable as the weather.)

7. Aka na ng’ombe matiri ndugu.
   (Wives and cattle have no friendship.)

8. Arume mari rwamba.
   (Men have spikes.)
   (Men are not women.)

10. Arume ti ihii
    (Men are not uncircumcised boys)

11. Atumia matitihaga ita.
    (Women do not go to the battle field.)

12. Cia athuri ni thure.
    (Elders affairs are well sought out.)

13. Cia haramu ititugaga
    (Material goods amassed corruptly bring no benefit)

14. Cia kionje itigayagwo kiri muoyo
    (That which belongs to a cripple cannot be inherited in his/her life time)

15. Cia mucii itiumagirio magiri-ini.
    (Family issues should not be discussed outside the boundaries of the homestead.)

16. Cia mucii ti como.
    (Home affairs are not divulged.)

17. Ciakorire Wacu mugunda.
    (They found Wacu in the field.)
18. Cia uthoni ciambaga nguhi.
   (Goods to be used in bride-price starts with small quantities.)

   (Whatever is decided in the hut is not rejected in the house.)

20. Cionje ikumi ikiritwo ni umwe mugima.
   (Ten disabled people are worse of than one healthy person.)

21. Cira muingi ni wa uthoni ugikua.
   (Long legal discussions are only necessary when sorting out divorce proceedings.)

22. Ciunagwo rukomo kimenyi akamenya ikiunwo.
   (We speak in proverbs, he/she who is intelligent will understand.)

23. Gaka karia kahunyuku niko gatharithagia giathi
   (The small rough woman is the one who causes the destruction of an assembly)

   (One should never reveal the secrets of his heart.)

25. Giathi githaragio ni gaka kamwe.
   (An assembly is dispersed by a single woman.)
   (One does not respond to the dance of a strange
   woman until she has left.)

27. Guciara kuunaga irigu ngingo.
   (Bearing bends the neck of a banana tree.)

28. Guciara ti kumia.
   (To give birth is not the same as to defecate.)

29. Gutiri muici na mucuthiriria
   (There is no thief and a spectator)

30. Guciara uru/nai ti kwenda kwa mwene.
   (No one wills to have evil offsprings.)

   (No married woman will have her grey hair
   shaved at her mother’s house.)

32. Gutiri ii kahii itakarugwo mutwe.
   (There is no household with a male child where
   a head will not be cooked.)

33. Gutiri mutumia ugaga ni akenjerwo mbui gwake.
   (No married woman has ever said she will have
   her grey hair shaved at her home.)

34. Gutiri njamba ya mwera umwe.
   (No cock belongs to one hen.)
35. Gutiri njiara muthenya ihithaga thigira.
(That which gives birth during the day cannot hide the placenta.)

36. Gutiri wa nda na wa mugongo.
(No one has the monopoly of the mother’s bosom or back.)

37. Gutiri witemaga agitemera ithe kana nyina.
(No one injures himself/herself when cutting for the mother or father.)

38. Gwethera Gitahi muka.
(To get the belly a woman/wife.)

39. Haro ni ya muka uri ihii.
(Quarrels are part of a woman who has male children.)

40. Haro ni ya muka uri thiiri.
(Quarrels are part of a woman in debt.)

41. Hunyu ni umwe na arume.
(Roughness is synonymous with men.)

42. Ingiugirwo mbu ni aka ndingihona
(If women scream at it (antelop) it cannot survive)

43. Indo cia ndaho itituraga
(Looted property does not prosper)
44. Igitunywo mwana ni iikagirio mungu.
(When a child is taken away from a monkey, it is given a young gourd in its place.)

45. Iri gukura iriagwo iguku ni aka.
(The hump of an old bull is eaten by women.)

46. Itonga ikiaria ngia ndingimira.
(When rich people are talking, a poor person cannot blow his/her nose.)

47. Itunyagwo mbui ni guciara kwayo.
(A plant looses its blossom as soon as it bears fruits.)

(Domestic affairs are not divulged to visitors.)

49. Kana ka ngari gakunyaga ta nyina.
(A leopard’s cub scratches like the mother.)

50. Kia mundu muka gitikagio kiarara.
(The word of a woman is not believed until the following day.)

51. Kiguta kia mundurume ni kigutukaga no kia mundu muka gitigutukaga.
(A lazy man ceases to be lazy but a lazy woman never ceases to be lazy.)

52. Kionje kirumaga muhiuhia.
(A disabled person abuses the nurse.)
53. **Kirema arume ni kigariure.**

(That which defeats men is thoroughly turned over.)

54. **Kirimu kiongaga nyina ari mukuu.**

(A fool sucks the mother when she is dead.)

55. **Kiringiri kia aka ni rwenji rukirega.**

(A woman’s dislike/refusal of something is a blunt shaving knife.)

56. **Kori kaiyaga ta nyina.**

(A kid steals like the mother.)

57. **Kugunirwa mwana no ta kugunirwo nyina.**

(To make the child happy is to make the mother happy.)

58. **Kungu maitu na hunyu wake.**

(Behold my mother despite her roughness.)

59. **Kuri arume na maiyuria ndua.**

(There are men and those who fill the gourds.)

60. **Kuri arume na turuma ndoro.**

(There are men and those who eat mud.)

61. **Kuri guciara uru ta kihia gigiciara na mutwe.**

(There is breeding badly like sorghum which breeds through the head.)
62. **Kuria thiiri ni kuriha.**

   (The way of eating a debt is paying it off.)

63. **Kwa Muhorow gwakuire ngaguro.**

   (Muho ro's home was destroyed because of lack of a token meal.)

64. **Kwenda ng'ombe ni kwenda mukwa.**

   (To love a cow is to love its rope.)

65. **Marakara ma arume matituuraga ta ma aka.**

   (Men's anger does not last as long as women's.)

66. **Mathanwa me kiondo kimwe matiagaga gukong'orania**

   (Axes in one basket never fail to knock each other.)

67. **Matumbi ma njamba matiturikanagia**

   (cock eggs do not hatch each other)

68. **Mbaara ya ka ndiri horohio.**

   (Women's quarrels are endless.)

69. **Mbaara ya aka ndiri ng'ondu.**

   (Women's quarrels have no sheep.)

70. **Mbeca itiri mwana na nyina.**

   (Money does not differentiate between mother and child.)
71. Mucirirwo ni arume ndegitaga.

(One whose case is decided by men has no defence.)

72. Muhiki atemaga mweru.

(A bride injures a new com'er.)

73. Muici na mundu muka akenaga akua, no muici na kihi akenaga kiarua.

(One who steals with a woman lives in fear until she dies, but one who steals with a boy lives in fear until the boy is circumcised.)

74. Muici na mundu muka atigaga kieha akua.

(He who steals in the company of a woman will live in fear until she dies.)

75. Muiru ndatuaga ungi.

(A co-wife does not name her co-wife.)

76. Muiritu njong'i riria ekuhwo, nyina athekaga na kamwena.

(When an ugly girl is being wooed, the mother rejoices secretly.)

77. Muka mucangacangi ndagaga mwana.

(A woman who roams about never misses a child.)

78. Muka mukari ariagwo na mambura.

(One gets a chance to enjoy the hospitality of a mean woman only during celebrations.)
79. Muka mukuru acokagirirwo na gikuu.
   (One goes back to an old wife during bereavement.)

80. Muka uri kironda ainagira gitiro rwere.
   (A woman with a sore wound dances on the outskirts.)

81. Muka uri mwana ndoraga.
   (A woman who has a child does not run away.)

82. Muka wa mwathi ahingaga na kuguru etereire kigurumuki oke.
   (The hunter’s wife awaiting her husband’s return closes the door with her foot so that the husband may enter quickly with his prey.)

83. Mukuithia ari itigi kuri muthati.
   (A woman whose child has died is more worthy than a barren one.)

84. Mumbani ombanaga ona ari thingira.
   (An attractive person is able to attract even when he is in the hut.)

85. Mumbia arume omburagwo na njuguma.
   (One who refuses something offered by men is beaten with a club.)

86. Mundu wi na mutino atemagwo ni mwengu wa muka.
   (Unlucky person is hurt by his wife’s loin cloth.)
87. Mundu muka na iguru itimenyagirwo.
   (A woman and the sky/weather are unpredictable.)

88. Mundu muka ndoragagwo.
   (A woman is never killed.)

89. Mundu muka ndatumagwo thiri-ini.
   (A woman is not sent to collect debts.)

90. Mundu muka ni mutuga/munoria kwene.
   (A woman benefits other people.)

91. Mundu utathiaga oigaga no nyina urugaga wega.
   (A person who never travels thinks his/her mother
   is the best cook.)

92. Mundu utathiaga athinjaga mwati
   (One who does not travel slaughters a virgin ewe)

93. Mundurume ti magego.
   (A man is not teeth.)

94. Murega akirwo ndaregaga akihetwo.
   (One who refuses advice does not refuse the
   consequences.)

95. Mureranirwo na ihii ndahomokaga/ndabuaga.
   (A girl who is brought up among boys does not
   improve in health.)
96. Mureri kirimu ndaigaga muthigi thi.
   (One who rears a fool does not keep the rod down.)

97. Muria mburi imwe weru wa nyina no rukungu.
   (A person who slaughters his/her mother’s only goat leaves only dust in her house.)

98. Muria ngime ni ari mukimiri.
   (One who eats mashed food has someone to mash for him.)

99. Muruithia arume ari o kihii
   (The circumciser of men was himself uncircumcised)

100. Muti utunyagwo mbui ni guciara.
    (A tree is deprived off its blossom by reproduction.)

101. Mutumia angikura atari mwana ndangiona mutahiri mai.
    (A woman who gets old before getting a child will have nobody to draw water for her.)

102. Mutumia na kionje ni undu umwe.
    (A woman and a disabled man are the same.)

103. Mutumia ndaturaga mutwe na ndaikagia ndahi ndua.
    (A woman does not split the head (of a slaughtered animal) nor does she dip the cup in the beer pot.)
104. Mutumia ndonagwo igego ria gituri.
   (A woman does not laugh until her last tooth is visible.)

105. Mutumia umwe ni rigu wa gatema.
   (One wife is like the last morsel one takes when in diarrhoea.)

106. Mutumia muugi niwe wakaga mucii no uria mukigu ni gutharia atharagia.
   (A wise woman builds her home but a foolish one destroys it.)

107. Mwaki wa arume ndutogaga keri.
   (Men’s fire does not smoke twice.)

108. Mwana amenyagwo ni nyina.
   (A child is known by the mother.)

   (An already born child is not thrown away.)

110. Mwana mukigu aturagia nyina na maithori.
   (A foolish child is a source of sorrow to the mother.)

111. Mwana ndaheanagwo.
   (A child is not given away.)

112. Mwana ndahuragwo ithe ari ho.
   (A child is not beaten when the father is present.)
113. Mwana muugi aturagia ithe na gikeno nake mwana mukigu aturagia nyina na kieha.

(A clever child is a source of joy for the father but a foolish one brings sorrow to the mother.)

114. Mwana wa Kahii ni igiri ria mucii.

(A boy child is the hedge of the home.)

115. Mwana wa ngari akunyaga ta nyina.

(A leopard's cub learns to scratch like the mother.)

116. Mwana wa ithe ndanyuaga muma.

(A child who has a father does not take an oath.)

117. Mwanake ni kienyu/githendu kia Ngai.

(A young man is a chip of God.)

118. Mwanake wi indo ndoihanaga.

(A youth who has property does not beseech his bride.)

119. Mwaniki wa mwatu ambaga kwiyanika.

(One who sets the beehive positions oneself first.)

120. Mwari mwega ahitukagira thome wa ngia.

(A beautiful girl passes by a poor man's gate.)

121. Mwari mweru ni magambo.

(Fair skinned/beautiful girl is a problem.)
122. **Mwari mweru ndaraguragirwo.**

(A beautiful girl is never treated by a medicineman.)

123. **Mwihi ti na mwana ni utamuri.**

(One who swears with a child does not have one.)

124. **Mwirereri kihii ni mwirereri mundurume.**

(One who brings up a boy, brings up a man.)

125. **Nda imwe yumaga muici na murogi.**

(One womb begets a thief and a witch.)

126. **Ndugu ya mwana imatagio ni nyina.**

(Friendship of a child is strengthened by the mother.)

127. **Ndundu ya nyina na mwana ndiringagiririo.**

(Do not attempt to penetrate the relationship between a mother and a child.)

128. **Ngarari ni kamena.**

(Discord breeds scorn.)

129. **Ngari ndioi gukunya ni kuonio yonirio.**

(The leopard did not know how to scratch, it was shown.)

130. **Ngatha niyo ituaga.**

(A hardworking wife makes herself stand out.)
131. **Ng’ombe ndionagwo ni ithayo.**

(A cow is not acquired by indolent people.)

132. **Niiguaga itari nyonge.**

(They can fall (breasts) before they are sucked.)

133. **Njamba ya mundurume irundagwo ni aka.**

(A warrior’s downfall is caused by women.)

134. **Njuku ni cia atumia.**

(Gossip is for women.)

135. **Nyamacucu kanua ni koinagirwo ithigi.**

(Woman, the mouth is covered with a twig.)

136. **Nyanja njega ihitukagira thome wa ngia.**

(A good gourd by passes the gate of a poor person.)

137. **Nyina wa thaka ndari matu.**

(The mother of a beautiful one has no ears.)

138. **Nyoni ya mundurume ndiri gitara.**

(A male bird does not have a nest.)

139. **Tha cia arume itiri iria.**

(Men’s pity has no milk.)
140. Thangari ya mucii ininagwo ni mundurume.
(The malignant grass in the homestead is eliminated by a man.)

141. Thome wa anake nduri thogora no tharo.
(The youth’s gate has no value, nothing to offer.)

142. Ugi wa arume utemaga ta hiu
(Men’s skills cut like knives)

143. Uhii ni umagwo no uka ndumagwo.
(A boy can stop being a boy but a woman will always be a woman.)

144. Utakanyuiriire ndamenyaga kari rita.
(He/she who has not drunk from it does not know its measure.)

145. Uthaka nduriagwo.
(Beauty is not eaten.)

146. Uthuri wa gitonga ndunungaga
(A rich man’s fart is oduorless.)

147. Wahira ihu wi kironda niwe ukagura
(If you impregnate one with a wound you will marry her.)

148. Wa mwangi ndutogaga keri
(The fire of the Mwangi ruling generation does not smoke twice)
149. Wathi wa kura wongagirirwo ungi.
   (When aiming power is diminished, it has to be replenished.)

150. Watuirwo thingira nduregagwo nyumba.
   (What is decided in the hut is not rejected in the house.)

151. Wega wariire karigu.
   (Pleasure destroyed uncircumcised girl.)

152. Weru wa arume ndwagaga kununga/mucingu
   (There is always some aroma (from roast meat) from where men are)

153. Yonwo ni aka ndiricaga
   (If it is seen by women (antelop) it cannot defend itself)
APPENDIX B

List of Swahili Proverbs

1. Akiwa hana kazi (mwanamume) hajaliwi cf. mwanamume ni kazi.
   (If he has no job he is not valued.)

2. Akosaye la mama hata la mbwa huamwa.
   (He who misses a mother’s breast even a dog’s he can suck.)

3. Aliyekupa wewe kiti ndiye aliyenipa mimi kumbi.
   (The one who gave you a chair is the one who gave me a coconut husk.)

4. Aliyemwoa mamako ndiye babako.
   (He who married your mother is your father.)

5. Asiyefunzwa na mamaye hufunzwa na ulimwengu.
   (He/she who is not taught by his/her mother will be taught by the world.)

6. Asiyesikia la mkuu huvunjika guu.
   (One who does not listen to the elders breaks his leg.)

7. Baba wa kambo si baba.
   (A step father is not a father.)
8. Bata mtaga mayai usimchinje kwa tamaa ya wengi.
   (A duck which lays eggs should not be slaughtered due to greed.)

   (Bitter herb is medicine for a pregnant woman.)

10. Chakupewa si chako.
    (What is given to you is not yours.)

11. Chelewa chelewa utakuta mtoto si wako.
    (Be late be late, you will find the child is not yours.)

12. Dua mbaya haiombolezwi mwana.
    (A bad prayer is not used to hush a child.)

    (Close your eyes for the illegitimate child to pass.)

14. Funika kaa mwanaharamu apite.
    (Cover the plate (food) for the illegitimate child to pass.)

15. Furaha ya mama ni mtoto.
    (The joy of a woman is a child.)

    (There is no well bred/freeborn woman.)
17. Hakuna mume wa waume.
   (There is no husband for men.)

18. Ikiwa hana kazi hajaliwi.
   (If he has no work (a man) he does not matter.)

19. Heshima kitu cha bure
   (Respect is a free thing)

20. Heshima ya mwanamke ni kuolewa
   (A woman's honour is to get married)

   (A cock cannot bring up a child.)

22. Kanga hazai ugenini.
   (A guinea fowl does not breed in strange surroundings.)

23. Kiatu cha mtoto hakimponyi mama mbigiri.
   (A child's shoe cannot heal the mother.)

24. Kosa moja haliachi mke.
   (One fault does not warrant the divorce of a wife.)

   (A hen does not break its egg.)
   (A stone is not aimed at a hen with chicken.)

27. Kulea mimba si kazi, kazi kulea mwana.
   (It is not hard to nurse a pregnancy, what is hard is to bring up a child.)

   (Cultivation and resting, a child rearer does not rest.)

29. Kupambda mke ndiyo sifa ya mume.
   (To bedeck a wife is a man’s pride.)

30. Kuzasa si kazi, kazi kubwa kulea.
   (Giving birth is not work, what is work is to bring up the child.)

31. Kwamba uzuri waliwa, kapike ule mwenyewe.
   (If beauty is eaten, go and cook and eat alone.)

32. Maji ya dafu hayapendezi ila dafuni mwake.
   (Coconut water does not please unless in its own nut.)

33. Maji yakijaa hupwa.
   (When water overflows, it ebbs.)

34. Mama kwa mwanawe, mtoto kwa mamaye.
   (Mother to child, child to the mother.)
35. Mama wa kambo si mama.
   (A step mother is not a mother.)

36. Maskini na mwanaye, tajiri na mali yake.
   (A poor man and his child, a rich man and his wealth.)

37. Mbwa wa msasi mkali ni mkali pia.
   (A dog of a fierce hunter is fierce too.)

38. Mchelea mwana kulia hulia mwenyewe.
   (He/she who fears the crying of a child will cry himself/herself.)

   (One who hides their private parts cannot give birth.)

40. Mgomba haushindwi na mkunguwe.
   (A banana tree is not unable to hold its fruits.)

41. Mizungu ya kula hafundishwi mwana.
   (The art of eating is not taught to a child.)

42. Mja hana hiari.
   (A needy person has no choice.)

43. Mjukuu si mwana, akilia mpeleke kwao.
   (A grandchild is not a child, if he/she cries take him/her to his/her home.)
44. Mkata hapendi mwana.
   (A poor person does not love a child.)

45. Mkataa uzazi mchawi.
   (One who refuses to give birth is a witch.)

46. Mke ni dada mdogo.
   (A wife is a young sister.)

47. Mke ni nguzo ya nyumba.
   (A wife is the pillar of a home.)

48. Mke mzuri hakosi kilema.
   (A good wife does not miss a defect.)

49. Mke ni figa la nyumba.
   (A wife is stone (cooking) of the house.)

50. Mke ni nguo, mgomba ni kupalilia.
   (A wife is clothes, a banana tree is weeding.)

51. Mkono mmoja haulei mwana.
   (One hand cannot rear a child.)

52. Mia halasa hamziki mamaye.
   (One who eats ill-gotten wealth cannot bury his mother.)

53. Mlinzi hulinda ndege, mke mzuri halindwi.
   (A guard, guards birds; a good wife is not guarded.)
54. Moto hauzai moto.
(Fire does not breed fire.)

55. Mpanda ngazi hushuka.
(One who climbs the ladder, comes down.)

56. Mpuuzi hana kazi.
(A fool has no work.)

57. Msitukane wakunga na uzazi ungalipo.
(Don't abuse midwives when child bearing continues.)

58. Mstahi mke umbu hazai naye.
(If you respect a wife like a sister you cannot procreate with her.)

59. Mtawi (mchawi) mpe mwana alee.
(Give a witch a child to bring up.)

60. Mti mkuu ukigwa wana wa nyoni huyumba
(When a big tree falls, nestlings fret)

61. Mtoto akibebwa hutazama kisogo cha mamaye.
(When a baby is carried on the mother's back, it looks at the nape of her neck.)

62. Mtoto akinyea, kinyeo hakikatwi.
(When the child defecates, the anus is not cut.)
63. Mtoto akililia wembe mpe.
   (If a child cries for a razor, give it to him/her.)

64. Mtoto ukimnyang’anya kisu, mpe banzi achezee.
   (If you take a knife from a child, give him/her sticks to play with.)

65. Mtoto umleavyo ndivyo akuavyo.
   (As you bring up a child, so he/she will be.)

66. Mtoto wa kuku hafundishwi kuchakura.
   (A chick is not taught how to scratch the ground for food.)

67. Mtoto wa mhunga asiposana hufukuta.
   (If the son of a blacksmith fails in forging, he works the bellows.)

68. Mtoto wa nyoka ni nyoka.
   (A snake’s child is a snake.)

69. Mtoto wa simba ni simba.
   (A child of a lion is a lion.)

70. Mtu hakatai mwito hukataa aitiwalo
   (One does not refuse to heed a call, he refuses what he is called for)

71. Mtu halindi bahari ipitayo kila chombo.
   (One does not guard a sea where every vessel passes.)
72. Mume ni jaha, si raha.
   (A husband is pain, not joy.)

73. Mume ni kazi.
   (A husband’s worth is his job.)

74. Mume ni kazi, mke ni tabia.
   (A husband is work, a wife is character.)

75. Mume wa mama ni baba.
   (A husband of mother is a father.)

76. Mume ni moto wa koko usipowaka hufuka.
   (A husband is coconut fire, if it does not light, it smokes.)

77. Mume ni mume hata akiwa ni gume gume.
   (A husband is a man even if he is disabled.)

78. Mume ni shoga tu.
   (A husband is only a friend.)

79. Mwana akinyea, kinyeo hakikatwi.
   (If a child defecates, the anus is not cut.)

80. Mwana kidonda, mjukuu kovu
   (A child is a wound, a grand child is a scar.)

81. Mwana mkua nave ni mwenzio.
   (A child who is brought up with you is your peer.)
82. Mwana mkaidi hafaidi mpaka siku ya Idi.
(A naughty child does not benefit until the day of Idi.)

83. Mwana mtukana nyina kuzimu enda kiona.
(A child who abuses the mother will go to see hell.)

84. Mwana mui dawa ya mlango.
(A bad child is medicine for the gate.)

85. Mwana wa kuku hafunzwi kuchakura.
(A chick is not shown how to scratch up the ground for food.)

86. Mwana wa ndugu Kiruga, mjukuu ni mtu mbali.
(A brother's child is a child, a grand child is a distant person.)

87. Mwana wa simba ni simba.
(A lion's child is a lion.)

88. Mwanamke mzuri hakosi kilema.
(A beautiful woman cannot miss a defect.)

89. Mwanamume ni kazi, mke ni tabia.
(A husband is work, a wife is character.)

90. Mwanamume ni mbono, hualikia kule.
(A man is a creeper he stretches far away.)
91. Mwenye dada hakosi shemeji.
   (He/she who has a sister cannot miss an in-law.)

92. Mwenye ishiki kalewa.
   (Someone in love is drunk.)

93. Mwenye kubebwa hujikaza.
   (One who is carried on the back must cling on.)

94. Mwenye kupenda ni jura.
   (A lover is a fool.)

95. Mwenye nguvu mpishe.
   (Let a strong person pass.)

96. Mwenye tumbo na tumbole, angafunga mkaja.
   (She who is pregnant is pregnant, even if she ties a cloth.)

97. Mzazi haachi ujusi.
   (One who gives birth cannot avoid defilement.)

98. Ndege hulindwa, mke halindwi.
   (A bird is caged, a wife is not.)

   (Marriage is sanctioned in heaven.)

100. Ngome ya mke ni mume.
    (The fort for a wife is a husband.)
101. Nguzo ya nyumba ni mke.
   The cornertone of a house is a wife.)

102. Omba omba huleta unyonge.
   (Begging breeds weakness.)

103. Pendo za mwana zi matakoni mwa nyina.
   (The love of a child is on the mother’s lap).

104. Penye urembo ndipo penye ulimbo.
   (Where there is finery - there lies the snare.)

105. Raha ya dunia ni watoto.
   (The joy of the world is children.)

106. Saburi, saburi, mtoto si wako.
   (Patience, patience, the child is not yours.)

107. Simba hamli mwanawe.
   (A lion does not eat its cub.)

108. Teke la kuku halimuumizi mwanawe.
   (A hen’s kick does not hurt her chicks.)

109. Titi la mama litamu, hata likiwa la mbwa.
   (The breast of the mother is sweet, even if it be a dog’s.)

110. Ucheshi wa mtoto ni anga la nyumba.
   (The laughter of the child is the light of the house.)
111. Uchungu wa mwana aujuaye mzazi.
(The pain of a child is known by the parent.)

112. Uke wenza una karaha.
(Co-wifely has problems.)

113. Ukimlea mwana mwema, na mui mlelee, mwema ukimpa mchele; mui mpe chelele.
(If you rear a good child, do so to a bad one, when you give the good one whole rice, give the bad one broken rice.)

114. Ukistahi mke ndugu huzai naye.
(If you respect a wife like a sister, you cannot procreate with her.)

115. Ukucha mmoja hauvunji chawa.
(One nail cannot kill a louse.)

116. Umekuwa bata akili kwa watoto?
(Are you a duck that your mind is with your children?)

117. Ushaufu si heshima ya mwanamke.
(Pride is not a woman’s virtue.)

118. Uso mzuri hauhitaji urembo.
(A lovely face needs no adornment.)

119. Uso wa kuhifadhiwa u chini.
(The face of one under obligation is cast down.)
120. **Uso umeumbwa na haya.**

(A face is made to show modesty.)

121. **Uwongo uliua wasichana wazuri.**

(Lies destroyed good girls.)

122. **Uzazi ni vita na ugumba ni vita/uzazi ni kondo na ugumba ni kondo.**

(Giving birth is war and so is bareness.)

123. **Uzuri wa mke ni nguo, wa ng’ombe ni kulimiwa.**

(The beauty of a woman is clothes for a cow it is nurturing.)

124. **Uzuri wa mke ni tabia si sura.**

(The beauty of a wife is character, not appearance.)

125. **Uzuri wa mwanamke si wa kila mpita njia.**

(The beauty of a woman is not for every passer-by.)

126. **Wanawake uchungu wao u nyongani mwo.**

(Women’s pain is in their bosom.)

127. **Wimbo mui hauongolewi mwana.**

(A bad song is not sung to a child.)
APPENDIX C

THE PROVINCES OF KENYA