

3000F

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES.

FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY ORAL NARRATIVE IN  
THE KENYA SCHOOLS' AND COLLEGES' DRAMA FESTIVAL.

BY

MARK MUTALI CHETAMBE.

A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
LITERATURE IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE  
OF KENYATTA UNIVERSITY.

APRIL, 2012.

Chetambe, Mark Mutali  
*Female characters in  
the contemporary oral*



2012/390654

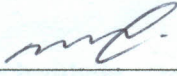
**KENYATTA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

**DECLARATION**

This project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

Signature

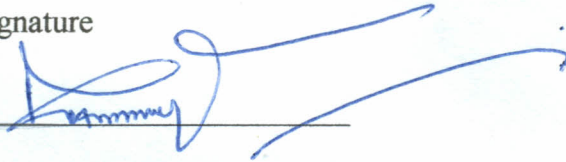
Date

1.  \_\_\_\_\_23/04/2012**NAME: MARK MUTALI CHETAMBE****C50/CE/11445/2007.**

**SUPERVISORS:** This project has been submitted for examination with our approval as University supervisors.

Signature

Date

1.  \_\_\_\_\_23/04/2012**DR. JOHN MUGUBI****LITERATURE DEPARTMENT.**

Signature

Date

2.  \_\_\_\_\_23/04/2012**DR. COLOMBA MURIUNGI****LITERATURE DEPARTMENT.**

**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my parents, Wycliffe Chetambe and Rebecca Vakhoya who took me to school;

To my wife, Nancy Chepkemei Kirong', for her love, support and sacrifice;

To my brothers, Benjamin Chetambe, Fred Chetambe and Peter Chetambe, for their moral and material support;

And to my children, Tim and Beth, for enduring the many days of my absence from home.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a lot of gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. John Mugubi and Dr. Colomba Muriungi without whose prompt, professional, thorough and friendly guidance this work would never have seen the light of day. Their amazing level of commitment and great sense of duty helped me to navigate through all the stages of this work with confidence. I will always be proud of them.

I am grateful to all the lecturers and the office staff of the Literature department, Kenyatta University for all the facilitation and help I received. The chairman, Dr. Mbugua Mungai was very helpful in the initial stages of this work.

My colleagues in the M.A class were constant consultants. The many hours of discussion with Kasigwa, Ndege, Muchina, Ayuke, Martha and the late Mwarema will always be remembered.

I am grateful to Ambassador Simon Nabukwesi and Mr. Edwin Namachanja, my principals at Friends School Kamusinga for being supportive of my studies. My colleagues at Kamusinga always encouraged me to soldier on, and my students in the English and Literature classes were a source of joy and academic energy.

## ABSTRACT

Since the twentieth century, there has been a lot of interest by literary scholars in how the female gender is portrayed in literature and in life in general. This development motivates this study which investigates the portrayal of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival. The study is informed by the fact that no gender based research has hitherto been done on the contemporary oral narrative in the schools' drama festival, which unlike the traditional narrative, begins its life as an individually authored, written text before it is realized as a stage performance. The objectives of the study were to identify, examine and evaluate the images of femininity in the oral narrative texts, to establish and interrogate the style employed in reference to female characters and to analyze other gendered references and associations in these oral narratives. The study employs radical feminist theory and focuses on six oral narrative texts written and performed between 2004 and 2009 in six different regions of Kenya. Purposive sampling was used to select both the texts and the respondents. The research was qualitative in nature and the data was analyzed using the thematic approach. The study concludes that female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text in the schools' and colleges' drama festival are largely portrayed in stereotypically negative light, and they mainly play peripheral roles which point to their discrimination. The study therefore recommends that oral narrative script writers should be taken through gender workshops to help them write more gender sensitive texts.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	ii
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	iv
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	v
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	vi
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	7
1.3 Aims and objectives of the study.....	8
1.4 Research hypotheses.....	9
1.5 Justification of the study.....	9
1.6 Scope and delimitation of the study.....	13
1.7 Literature review.....	15
1.8 Theoretical framework.....	22
1.9 Methodology.....	27
1.9.1 Research design.....	27
1.9.2 Population and sampling.....	27
1.9.3 Data collection procedure.....	30
1.9.4 Data analysis procedure.....	31

<b>CHAPTER TWO: IMAGES OF FEMININITY IN THE ORAL NARRATIVE TEXTS.....</b>	<b>32</b>
2.0 Introduction.....	32
2.1 Designation of characters by gender.....	32
2.2 Female characters as victims.....	36
2.3 Occupations.....	42
2.4 Leadership.....	46
2.5 Females as devils.....	47
<b>CHAPTER THREE: STYLE IN RELATION TO FEMALE CHARACTERS.....</b>	<b>51</b>
3.0 Introduction.....	51
3.1 Diction.....	51
3.2 Description.....	58
3.3 Repetition.....	64
3.4 Symbolism.....	66
3.5 Juxtaposition.....	68
3.6 Simile.....	70
3.7 Hyperbole.....	70
3.8 Dialogue.....	71
<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>84</b>

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

This study is based on the contemporary oral narrative text in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival. The festival is run annually by Kenya's Ministry of Education and its goal is to tap and nurture creative talent among the Kenyan youth. Since its inception in 1959, the festival has continued to grow, attracting many schools, colleges and even universities. The festival has evolved into a phenomenon, complete with its own rules and regulations. In the year 2000, the oral narrative was introduced as a genre of competition alongside plays, dances and verses. The narrative texts are expected to be original compositions and are usually written by teachers who then train their students to tell the stories on stage. In some institutions at secondary and college level, the narratives are written by students, and the teachers only come in to help in directing their rendition on stage.

The introduction of the oral narrative genre in the schools' and colleges' drama festival appears to have been a response to the call by Taban Lo Liyong (1990) for the compilation of new, individually created folktales. Taban exhorts students of oral literature thus:

Using your people's total techniques of telling stories, would you please represent an incident from the modern world in the style of your people's folktale? Modern subjects like sugar daddies, sugar

mummies, window-dressing business partners, the man who ate *miraa* all his life; these would be some of the topics we would like to see tackled.(76)

The schools' and colleges' drama festival is run on the basis of some clearly stated core values; among them is the value of non-discrimination. (*Kenya National Drama Festival Revised Rules and Regulations, 2009.*) The aim of this study was to find out if this festival lives up to its own principle of not discriminating against any gender specifically in terms of the portrayal of characters.

The situation of women in the world in general and in literature in particular has become an important area of investigation since the rise of the feminist movement. It is generally agreed that the woman is marginalized both in life and in literature, and there is therefore need to improve her status if real development is to be achieved. Jones (1987) observes that in the whole world, "women do two thirds of all the work both within and outside the home but only receive ten per cent of all the money earned on earth" (3). Odhiambo (2010) adds that in many parts of the world, the female is "an endangered species; facing child molestation, rape, arranged marriages, economic disenfranchisement and spousal battery and murder" (13).

Literature is one area where the depiction of female characters has come under sharp focus. Eagleton (1991) observes that feminist criticism has left scarcely any period of literature unaffected by its searching critiques. Fonchingong (2006)

correctly adds that “the last century has witnessed an upsurge in literature triggered by the feminist movement...various literary genres are being deconstructed to suit the changing times” (6). Agreeing with these two scholars that feminism has greatly affected and influenced literature, this study aims at establishing whether the oral narrative genre in the schools’ and colleges’ drama festival in Kenya is in conformity with the changing perception of the female gender in the African world in general and in literature in particular.

In a study by the Legal Resources Foundation, Maina and Igweta (2005) establish that in Kenyan society, there are clearly identifiable gender stereotypes which perpetuate feelings of female inferiority and male superiority. Whereas men are associated with such attributes as masculinity, strength, wisdom and leadership ability, women are associated with humility, submissiveness, naïve sincerity, insecurity, and weakness of emotion. From a young age, girls are restricted by dress style orientation, as well as names that depict fragility, such as Joy and Grace. We could add names such as Purity, Patience, Mercy, Prudence and Valentine, all of which associate females with fragility and softness.

Maina and Igweta (2005) also note that women in Kenya are victims of violence, rape, female genital mutilation, political marginalization and the increasing danger of being trafficked after being tricked with offers of lucrative jobs abroad. Women have succumbed to the outlook that they are the weaker sex, resulting in their low

representation in political leadership. One example of this marginalization is that by 2003, there were only seventeen female members of parliament in Kenya, a representation of only 7.6 per cent in a country where over half the population is female. Global statistics generally reflect this same pattern of discrimination. Kabira, et al, (1994) observe that by 1991, there were only seven women heads of state in the whole world. Similarly, by 1990, only 3.5% of cabinet positions in the world were held by women, and global women representation in the highest circles of government was less than 10%. This unbalanced share of opportunities between women and men prompts an examination of gender representation from a literary point of view in order to gauge how far fiction deviates or agrees with sociological representations of the female gender. Although gender study as a strand of literary scrutiny has existed in Kenya for a while, the contemporary oral narrative is a new genre in Kenyan literature. There has hardly been much engagement with this genre in terms of criticism.

Scholars agree that gender is an important dimension in African literature. Stratton (1994) is clear that although gender is a definitive feature of the African literary tradition, it has not been adequately addressed by critics. An overview of African literature reveals that writers seem to be changing in line with the global trends which favour the positive portrayal of female characters. This shift in the depiction of the female character is correctly summarized by Fonchingong (2006) who states that "African literature has not been spared by the universal world order" (8). For

example, although pioneer African writers like Achebe, Amadi, Soyinka, and Ngugi seem to condone patriarchy in their earlier works, they later on change and begin to portray female characters more positively. Mezu (2004) comments on this progression in reference to Achebe's female characters; she notes that Achebe is a pragmatist who changes with the world. Achebe's depiction of the woman progresses from the naïve Ekwefi and Ojiugo, the ever-beaten wives of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* to the educated, financially independent and assertive Eunice in *A Man of the People* and Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah* is the image of a liberated woman, in complete contrast with her earlier sisters in Achebe's world.

Similarly, Ngugi's portrayal of female characters changes from the helplessness of Miriamu who is a slave to her husband in *The River Between* to the assertive vigour of Wanja in *Petals of Blood* and the bravery of Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*. Although Wanja in *Petals of Blood* is mistreated by the male world, the author gives her a chance to liberate herself, especially by killing Kimeria who had tormented her previously by raping her on two different occasions. Stratton (1994) states that Ngugi presents Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* as "a heroine who is more courageous, resourceful and intelligent than any of the men in his novel" (158). This pattern of empowering some female characters continues with writers like Ayi Kweyi Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, Sembene Ousmane in *God's Bits of Wood*, Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter*, Emecheta in

*The Joys of Motherhood* and Ogolla in *The River and the Source*. This study recognizes that African literature depicts female characters both negatively and positively, hence the need to find out if this mixed fortune of the female character is replicated in the contemporary oral narrative text.

In the traditional oral narrative in Africa, the female character seems to be portrayed in two extremes. Wa-Gachanja (2002) seeks to demonstrate that females in Kenyan folktales are depicted positively as “carriers of wisdom and creativity”, “compassionate and courageous heroines who risk their lives for the sake of others”, and “protectors of life” (2-5). The Kikuyu myth of origin which credits the founding of the community to the seven daughters of Gikuyu and Mumbi seems to reinforce Wa-Gachanja’s assertion, as is the Kikuyu legend of Wangu Wa Makeri in which a powerful woman ruler presides over an all-female regime. Similar findings are made by Hasna Lebbady (2009), in a study of seven Andalusian-Moroccan tales, who concludes that these narratives are ‘feminist’ since the protagonists are female and so eloquent that they outwit their male counterparts who are often princes and sultans.

On the contrary, in a study of the oral narratives of the Jimma Oromo of Ethiopia, Alemu Abreham (2007) concludes that in such oral societies, “myths, historical narratives and the like play a vital role in propagating, validating and maintaining the subordination and marginalization of women in every aspect of life” (3). A

similar view is held by Jones (1987) who traces the depiction of the female character in literature to the mythical age in which the dominant image of the woman is that of a witch. Jones asserts that the woman is mythologically discriminated against.

In view of the fact that traditional oral narratives in Africa seem to present females both positively and negatively, this study intended to find out if the contemporary oral narrative text in the schools' and colleges' drama festival is in tandem with this lukewarm approach to the treatment of female characters.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Although the contemporary oral narrative has become an important literary genre in the last decade, it is still an evolving genre. There is the possibility that unless care is taken, the narrative of the future might erode the gains made in the literary world in terms of the favourable portrayal of female characters. This fast growing genre has even been embraced by television channels and freelance entertainment groups, but not enough questions appear to have been raised with regard to how the genre is responding to the overall gender concerns of the country.

Modern channels of communication such as advertising, movies, music and pornography tend to present the female image in exploitative terms, yet the contemporary narrative has not been fully investigated to determine whether it is

depicting female characters in a similar fashion. The contemporary narrative is a vastly popular literary genre. It is consumed by thousands of Kenyans each year in the drama festival and beyond, yet it has not been subjected to careful gender scrutiny, hence it is not known whether or not the genre is undermining the movement towards the projection of a positive image of female characters in Kenyan literature.

### **1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study is to investigate the portrayal of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify, examine and evaluate the images of femininity in the contemporary oral narrative texts in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival.
2. To establish and interrogate the style employed in reference to female characters in the contemporary oral narrative texts in the Kenya Schools' and colleges' drama festival.
3. To analyze any other gendered reference and associations in these oral narrative texts.

#### **1.4 Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses inform this study:

1. The contemporary oral narrative text in the schools' and colleges' drama festival perpetuates stereotypical images of the female character.
2. The style employed in the contemporary oral narrative text in the drama festival portrays female characters as inferior.
3. The contemporary oral narrative has enough and significant female characters to facilitate their study.

#### **1.5 Justification of the Study**

Literary studies have since the twentieth century been interested in the way the female gender is treated in general life as well as in literary texts. The place of the female person in society and in literary texts has become an important area of investigation whose aim is to achieve gender equity in a society that has hitherto been patriarchal. The literary world today is such that works of art are increasingly being interrogated in terms of how they portray female characters. This kind of interrogation needs to be extended to the contemporary oral narrative.

Hence the rationale for this study lies in the belief by some scholars that past studies of society and of oral literature have not given enough focus to images of the female character. As Caro (1983) notes, "folkloristic commentators and anthropologists have been unanimous in agreeing that women have been ignored

in past studies of society...our culture treats women as largely invisible” (ix). Caro believes that there is urgent need to investigate the kind of images of women that come through in folklore, since “to understand stereotypes of women is to understand how they have been perceived or misperceived and how perceptions have bolstered injustices and falsehoods” (xii).

There is a visible shortage of criticism on women related issues with regard to performances in the schools’ drama festival. No study in this area has singularly focused on the portrayal of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative genre. As part of Kenya’s growing literary expression, the contemporary oral narrative needs to be subjected to the gender-based criticism that other genres have been evaluated with. This will not only add to the body of literary criticism in Kenya but also establish critical gender standards for future narrative texts.

Because of the great diversity of the people who attend and participate in the national drama festival, it is likely to be a melting pot of opinions, belief systems, philosophies and attitudes. But even more significantly, the festival is likely to be a shaper of opinions and attitudes, especially among the young minds. Furniss and Gunner (1995) believe that oral narratives have the power to articulate particular visions of existing power relations and they are instrumental in affecting existing power relations. The implication here is that narratives can transform society either positively or negatively.

In the drama festival, what people watch on stage and what they discuss among themselves thereafter is likely to form part of their belief system and world view. The importance of oral narratives in shaping the character and opinions of young people is explained by Bettelheim (1975) who states that “fairy tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life” (7). Consequently, if the narratives that these Kenyans see on stage perpetuate retrogressive values such as sexism and chauvinism, there is the danger that a huge chunk of the Kenyan population will be thrown many years back in terms of their conception of gender relations. The impact of such a cultural catastrophe on Kenyan literature would be unfathomable. This study recognizes that the drama festival needs to play its role to complement the efforts towards the elevation of the status of women in Kenyan literary expression. The study is an effort towards helping the drama festival to reassess its role in Kenya’s literary evolution.

The study therefore stems from the need to interrogate the oral narrative texts at the drama festival with a view to establishing whether these written pieces contribute to or undermine the quest for gender equity in Kenyan literature and Kenyan life in general. Such a venture should hopefully guide future narrative script writers to produce texts that project a more objective and visionary image of both genders. The study is a contribution towards the fulfillment of one of the

goals stated in the Kenya National Drama Festival Rules and Regulations which is “to educate and create awareness on topical issues affecting society” (2).

The choice of the oral narrative among the other genres that are performed at the drama festival is informed by the fact that although this is a relatively new category, having only been introduced in the year 2000, it is perhaps the most popular and it has increasingly become one of the key attractions at the festival. Over the years, the narrative genre has taken the award of “the most entertaining item of the festival” (*Kenya National Drama Festival Adjudication Report, 2005*). It is also the genre that has generated much heated debate and controversy. For instance, because it is a genre that is still growing, there is no general agreement regarding the form and style that it should adopt in the contemporary world. Many of the adjudicators and even members of the audience disagree on what constitutes a good contemporary narrative. This study makes suggestions on the style of the contemporary narrative in terms of how gender identities are reflected. By introducing the gender dimension in the ongoing debate, this study makes a contribution towards shaping the contemporary oral narrative text.

In addition, since the schools drama audience consists mainly of young people, it is necessary to interrogate the gender subordination embedded in the oral narratives since these young people need to consume texts that do not bear gender discriminatory messages. This idea is consistent with the belief by scholars like Bettelheim (1975) that the narrative is the most popular art form among young

people because “fairy tales are works of art which are fully comprehensible to the child as no other art form is”(12). The implication here is that the oral narrative has a big influence on a growing mind. This investigation is therefore important because the contemporary oral narrative is consumed mainly by young people whose value systems are in the formative stages, hence the need for the genre to be a model of gender sensitivity.

### **1.6 Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

This study was limited to the portrayal of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text in the Kenya schools’ and colleges’ drama festival. This festival is organized from the sub district, district, provincial and national level. At every stage, only a few of the items presented are selected by the adjudicators to proceed to the next level of competition. This study narrowed down on six oral narrative texts performed at district and provincial level.

The narratives in this study were selected from six regions of the country, with two narratives picked from the primary school category, two from secondary schools and two from the colleges. This method of selection was preferred since it was fairly representative nationally as well as in terms of the age groups of the narrators.

The six narratives were selected from performances by Kari Mwailu Primary School in Eastern Kenya, Koyombe Primary School in Nyanza, Chesamisi High School in Western, St. Joseph's Boys' High School in Rift Valley, East African School of Media Studies in Nairobi and North Eastern Province Technical Training Institute in North Eastern Province. The texts cover the period between 2004 and 2009, and the choice was based on the fact that this six-year period represents both variety and progression in terms of the image of the female character as depicted in the narratives. The period also offered an opportunity to examine a wide range of identities of the female character as represented in the narratives. The rules of the schools and colleges drama festival require the pieces to be current and topical; hence presumably, the six-year period captured texts that represent the world view of the script writers and performers over this period of time.

It is important to note that the sampling procedure adopted was not fully representative of the Kenyan society. However, it at least provided a window into the nature of the contemporary oral narrative in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival.

This study encountered a number of challenges. Because the festival is primarily a yearly competition, some scriptwriters were unwilling to let a 'foreigner' look at their creations, with the fear being that such a person could expose their artistic

creations to rivals, hence jeopardizing their future prospects. Indeed, perhaps because of this fear, some of the script writers who were initially approached employed delaying tactics. This necessitated a change of plans, and alternative script writers were sought. The establishment of rapport with the writers and detailed explanation of the aims and purpose of the study helped in convincing them to release their work for study. In the case of Koyombe Primary School and East African School of Media Studies, the release of the scripts was delayed for over three weeks because being unpublished texts, no copies could be readily traced.

### **1.7 Literature Review**

A lot of work has been done on oral narratives both globally and in Kenya. From as early as 1928, the great Russian formalist scholar, Vladimir Propp published his famous book, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, 1968). Propp's work is phenomenal and influences such other scholars as Allan Dundes and Levi Strauss. However, his structure is male-centred and very likely lays the foundation for the relative lack of interest in the portrayal of female characters in later studies of narratives. His "thirty one functions" revolve around the heroic pursuits of a male hero whose ultimate reward is marriage to a princess. The female character in Propp's study is someone who finds validation only as the wife of a hero. Allan Dundes notes in his introduction to *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, 1968) that "Propp made no attempt to relate his extraordinary morphology to Russian

culture” (xiii). Dundes notes that for example, Propp should have related his last “function” –a wedding- to the social context of Russian life. What Dundes is suggesting is that although the Russian folktale reduces female ambition to the desire for marriage to a male hero, Propp does not explore this gender motif in his study. In this study, we sought to establish if, as is the case in Propp’s ‘functions’, female ambition was limited to marriage to a male hero in the contemporary narrative, and we explored the gender implications of such eventualities.

Secondly, Propp’s morphology seems to have had the potential to open up wider gender issues. Dundes continues to observe that Propp’s morphology has the chance to open up gender issues like whether the sex of a child determines how that child reconstructs the characters of a folktale. Dundes speculates on what a child would do if it was given an incomplete folktale and asked to complete it. He asks:

Does a little girl select a male donor figure to assist her against her wicked stepmother? Does a little boy select a female donor figure to aid him against a male villain? (xv)

These are valid gender issues that crop out of interpretations of Propp’s study, which are not pursued. The present study goes beyond Propp and relates the female characters to the roles they play in the contemporary oral narrative in the Kenya schools’ and colleges’ drama festival.

A number of studies on oral narratives in Kenya seem to follow a similar pattern of not pursuing the gender dimension, with very few exceptions. Such studies include Mbiti (1966), Finnegan (1970), Lo Liyong (1972), Kabira (1983), Kipury (1983), Nandwa and Bukenya, (1983), Odaga (1984;1985), Kabira and Adagala (1985), Kabira and Mutahi (1988), Kieti and Coughlin (1990), Chesaina (1991), Miruka (1994), Mukulu and Wakarangau (1996), and Kirmani and Kirmani (2002). All these studies do not examine the portrayal of female characters in the narratives they analyze.

However, a few studies show some interest in how the female character is portrayed in oral narratives. Ogutu and Roscoe (1974) make some effort to do a gender oriented examination of Luo narratives. They use a sample of thirty-seven stories and conclude that Luo narratives portray “a markedly fair attitude towards women” (27). In the story of *Opien and Apiyo*, it is observed that “it is a woman who dominates the plot. Apiyo is a model of sharp intelligence, maternal devotion and enormous courage; she displays greater physical bravery than her husband” (27). Similarly, the story of *Nyamgondho* shows how good fortune comes through a woman. These scholars are, however, quick to point out that in spite of the fair presentation of female characters, Luo culture is just like other African cultures where the freedom of the female gender is strictly curtailed. The difference between this research and the present study is that whereas these scholars deal with the traditional narrative and limit themselves to Luo tales, our study deals

with the contemporary narrative and addresses itself to narratives from a national constituency. The present study thus allows us to make an evaluation of the representation of the female character from a broader point of view.

Knappert (1979) studies the stories of the Swahili people and states categorically that Swahili tales portray the female character negatively. He asserts as follows:

Swahili storytellers are unanimous on the subject of the wily wickedness of women. The majority of women use their cunning only for one purpose: to obtain a maximum of sexual satisfaction. Men have only themselves to blame if their desire makes them fulfill a foolish woman's wishes; instead they should beat their wives with sticks. Women are unreliable and insatiable. They like handsome men and rich men. (6-7)

This study does not, however, subject the narratives to a detailed analysis to show tangible evidence of this gender bias. In addition, the study does not deal with the contemporary narrative in the schools' and colleges' drama festival. The present study examines the gender roles and style that illustrate the presence or absence of such discriminatory depiction of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative in the drama festival.

Another study by Okombo and Nandwa (1992) is a collection of essays that also show concern for the female image in oral art. One such essay, by Wanjiku Kabira focuses on the gender of the oral artist, and concludes that the gender of the oral artist determines the kind of story she/he reconstructs. For example, Warukenya in

this study is able to change the stories, such that she “challenges the stereotypical image of girls in traditional societies” (67). In this story, Warukenya replaces the cruel stepmother motif with the cruel brother motif, hence changing the story to one that depicts female characters in positive light.

Kabira’s study addresses gender concerns by explaining how female oral artists use their aesthetic sophistication to reconstruct the otherwise battered image of female characters in oral narratives, unlike male artists who leave the female image unreconstructed. However, her study is based on the oral artist unlike the present study which is concerned with the text itself. Secondly, the subject of her study is the traditional Kikuyu oral narrative, which, being communally owned is subject to artistic mutations depending on who is narrating it. That is unlike the present study which is based on the contemporary oral narrative text. The contemporary oral narrative text begins its life in a written form and is individually owned but nationally presented, hence it allows us to interrogate gender issues from an individual composer’s point of view. This single point of view will then be used to make generalizations with regard to gender perspectives in the composer’s society since literature is an individual’s representation of societal beliefs and values.

A similar study is done by Bukenya, et al, (1994) which focuses on the portrayal of female characters in Kikuyu, Maasai and Kalenjin narratives. Three Kikuyu oral

narratives are used to come to the conclusion that wives in these narratives are portrayed as:

Unreliable, disloyal, disagreeable, adulterous, cunning, senseless, easily cheated, forgetful, not dependable, evil, tricksters and lazy, unlike boys who are depicted as being courageous, dependable and adventurous. (79)

In these stories, the cruel stepmother motif is very common. Bukenya, et al (1994) conclude that “oral narratives have been used to perpetuate a negative image of women...and legitimized the need to control women in Gikuyu society” (83).

The study of Kalenjin and Maasai oral narratives focuses on twenty four oral texts. Out of them, only two are found to project some positive characteristics of the female character. Bukenya, et al (1994) assert that “the portrayal of women in Kalenjin and Maasai oral narratives is extremely negative” (86). The women are portrayed as voiceless, careless, dependent, vain, idle, dishonest schemers, jealous and malicious. Ogres in these narratives are “very selective in their choice of victims; they always go after girls and women” (87). The researcher finishes by calling for “images which are in line with our developmental aspirations” (91). Whereas Bukenya et al’s study adopts the gender approach in its analysis, the present study goes beyond the traditional oral narrative and examines the contemporary oral narrative to evaluate whether similar anti-female attitudes linger in today’s stories.

Kabira, et al (1994) also examine Luo narratives but arrive at the opposite conclusion from Ogutu and Roscoe (1974); the study finds that Luo narratives perpetuate patriarchy through the numerous attitudes that are embedded in the stories. This study provides a window in terms of the understanding of women characters in Luo narratives. The contradiction with Ogutu and Roscoe (1974) of course needs to be investigated by scholars who are interested in Luo narratives. Kabira's study, however, does not closely state the evidence of its gender assertions using specific images of femininity and aspects of style. The current study is more specific with regard to the place of the female character as well as how the literary style relates to images of the female character in the contemporary oral narrative texts in the schools' drama festival.

Chesaina (1997) studies the oral literature of the Embu and Mbeere. Making it clear that the two communities are patriarchal, and that females occupy very low positions, this study is useful in highlighting the cultural and gender background of the Embu and Mbeere narratives. However, the researcher does not link this background to the stories themselves. Although she emphasizes the patriarchal nature of the communities, she does not demonstrate how patriarchy comes through in specific narratives. Our study takes a more specific path of demonstrating the presence of the patriarchy, sexism and marginalization of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text.

So far, this literature review has focused on texts that deal primarily with what we refer to in this study as the traditional oral narrative. As far as the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival is concerned, we can only identify one study by Peter Otieno (1994), which focuses on the female characters in the schools' drama festival play genre and not the oral narrative. Our study therefore offers variety to Otieno (1994) by focusing on the oral narrative genre.

The conclusion from this review is two-fold: Most of the studies that have been done on the oral narrative do not interrogate how female characters are portrayed. On the other hand, the studies that attempt a gender based analysis concentrate on the traditional oral narrative and not the contemporary one. In addition, these studies only mention gender bias in a general way without picking on the specific images of femininity and aspects of style which provide evidence of patriarchy and discrimination against the female. Hence, this study makes a closer textual analysis of the contemporary narrative and makes observations about the portrayal of female characters.

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

This study is hinged on radical feminist theory. Feminism is understood to be that system of thought that is concerned with the place and status of women and girls in society. Meyer (1999) observes that feminism examines how images of women in literature reflect the patriarchy. This perspective of understanding literature

arises out of the feeling that the female has for a long time suffered discrimination and outright oppression by the patriarchal system. Radical feminism is a strand of feminism which sees the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression which cuts across race, culture and economic class. It is a movement which is opposed to the patriarchy and sexism and which aims at achieving major social change.

Modern day feminism is traceable to Virginia Woolf, especially in her book, *A Room of One's Own*. Eagleton (1991) refers to Woolf as the founding mother of contemporary feminist debate. Other pioneers include Simone de Beauvoir, especially through her book *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir (1949) asserts:

Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. The most mediocre of males feels himself a demigod as compared to women. (11)

The desire to break the myth of male superiority and female inferiority is at the core of the radical feminist theory. The pioneering work by Woolf and De Beauvoir laid the groundwork for the feminist movement which was in reality a reaction to long-held assumptions of female inferiority and male superiority. The sexism to which the pioneer feminists were responding is as old as humanity itself. In the Bible, for example, it is believed that the woman led to the downfall of man. Philosophers like Plato compounded the problem by stating that women lack certain qualities, hence

suggesting that to be female is to be somewhat incomplete. Sigmund Freud also believed that the behaviour of women is governed by penis envy, implying that the lack of a penis is a mark of inferiority and the absence of a basic human quality.

Radical feminism believes that patriarchal society treats the female as a mere appendage of the male. The woman is treated as though she lacks a complete human identity independent of the man. Welch (2001) notes that “radical feminists see the basic division in all societies as that between men and women, and state clearly that men are the oppressors of women” (2). Patriarchy is the term used to describe this universal oppression. The aim of radical feminism is therefore to overthrow the patriarchy and male power.

Our study aimed at establishing whether or not the Kenya schools’ drama festival promotes patriarchy and male domination. This study followed Lodge and Wood’s (1988) supposition that feminism aims to change the world and intended to establish whether the world of the narrative text in the drama festival has changed or has remained retrogressive in its treatment of the female character. Of particular interest was whether the contemporary oral narrative perpetuates the belief by De Beauvoir (1949) that “a woman appears essentially to the male as a sexual being; he is the subject, she is the Other” (5).

Belsey and Moore (1989) clarify that the term “feminine” is differentiated from ‘female’ in the sense that whereas ‘female’ is a biological fact, ‘feminine’ is a social label that results from patriarchal culture. The patriarchy forces all females to be “feminine”, or else they are labeled unnatural. This study interrogates the oral narrative texts and seeks to demonstrate how these labels have been used to elevate the male over the female. The study also sets out to establish whether the female characters in the texts are assigned cultural labels of femininity because of their biology.

Radical feminism regards language as a tool for the perpetuation of patriarchy and sexism. Belsey and Moore, (1991) note that women are always associated with demeaning words like: chatter, gossip, whine, nag, shrill, strident, mistress, dame and witch. On the contrary, men are associated with such glorious words as: potent, virile, aggressive, master, governor and knight. Blamines, (1991) observes that in Western literature, women are depicted stereotypically as virgin ideal, sex object, inspirer and seductress. Kabira, et al, (1994) add that the pronoun ‘he’ is always used to refer to unspecified people even when it should have been replaced with ‘one.’ Also, neutral terminology reflects bias for men; such words as ‘manpower’, ‘animal husbandry’, ‘businessmen’ and ‘man-made’ deliberately sideline women.

Today, feminism has generated a whole range of words popularly referred to as gender sensitive. Words such as chairperson, head teacher, and commercial sex worker are quickly replacing their earlier sexist versions. This study closely examines the contemporary oral narrative text so as to establish whether there is compliance with this linguistic update.

Radical feminism believes that women face exploitation in terms of their sexuality; that women's oppression began in the bedroom, (Jackson and Scott, 1996). Rape, sexual violence, pornography and prostitution are all manifestations of male domination. Hester, (1992) believes that rape is an expression of male sexuality because male sexuality is about male power, and that "pornography is the theory, [while] rape is the practice" (68). Jackson and Scott (1996) agree that "sexual violence is an enactment of male power" (17).

This study relates these tenets of radical feminist thought to the female characters in the contemporary oral narrative texts in the schools' and colleges' drama festival, and, in particular, determines how the concepts of female inferiority, patriarchy, oppression, discriminatory language, and sexual exploitation apply to these oral texts.

## **1.9 Methodology.**

### **1.9.1 Research design**

This study is qualitative in nature. A descriptive research design is used since the objective is to describe the images of the female character as portrayed in the contemporary oral narrative in the drama festival. Qualitative research is considered appropriate since the study basically involves the examination of the feelings and attitudes of the script writers as well as interviewees. This design also enables us to use the six selected narrative texts and four interviewees to make conclusions about the contemporary oral narrative text in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival.

### **1.9.2 Population and sampling**

The study focuses on six oral narratives and four interviewees. Because it would have been impossible to study all the narrative texts at the festival since the year 2000, purposive sampling was used to select those narrative texts that we believed were reliable for the study since they had been performed in the drama festival and they had some female characters. To achieve diversity, the sample was picked from the primary school, secondary school and college levels. In addition, the texts were picked across six different regions of Kenya, which are Rift Valley, Nyanza, Eastern, Western, Nairobi and North Eastern. The texts were selected from a span

of six years, hence providing more variety in terms of time frame. Finally, the texts were selected because the researcher felt that their authors could be accessed.

The four interviewees were selected by purposive sampling since the researcher believed they were knowledgeable about the subject under investigation due to their long standing experience as educators as well as adjudicators at the drama festival. They were also easily accessible to the researcher through telephone contacts. In addition, there was some consideration of diversity, such that two university professors were selected alongside two high school teachers. Although the researcher would have preferred to interview two females and two males, this was not possible since one female respondent was not readily available for the interview. However, the one female interviewee provided some level of gender representation out of the total four.

The interviewees included Professor Peter Barasa who is based at Moi University where he teaches English and Literature Education. He has been involved in the activities of the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival since 1986. At various stages, he has been a scriptwriter of award winning plays in the drama festival, a long serving adjudicator as well as a workshop resource person. He has also served as secretary of the Rift Valley Schools Drama Association for sixteen years and as a member of the National Drama Festival Committee for six years. His adjudication experience is twenty four years.

Professor Christopher Odhiambo, Associate Professor of literature and intervention drama in the department of literature, theatre and film studies at Moi University, was also interviewed. His experience with the schools drama festival includes being an actor during his high school days, and later a director of plays while teaching at high school and at a teacher training college. He has been a facilitator at drama workshops and an adjudicator for ten years.

The third interviewee was Mr. Barnabas Kasigwa, a playwright who in 1981 became a founder member of the Kenya National Drama Festival Association. Currently teaching English and literature at Moi High School Kabarak, Kasigwa has served this association as the national assistant secretary, the Eastern Province secretary and the Rift Valley Province secretary. He has been a workshop facilitator and adjudicator since 1984. His plays have been performed at the national schools' drama festival every year since 1983. Kasigwa is the author of *An Anthology of East African Plays*, published by Longman. The plays in the anthology are products of the schools' drama festival.

The list of interviewees ended with Ms Joyce Arigi, a teacher at Ribe Boys' High School at the Kenyan Coast. She has been involved in the schools drama festival as a performer, director, dance choreographer, workshop facilitator and adjudicator. Her adjudication experience goes back to the year 2005.

Through telephone, the researcher arranged with the respondents to carry out the interviews during the national drama workshop in Kisumu in January, 2011 since

all the respondents were attending this workshop. This arrangement was convenient since it cut down on the cost of travel. Structured interview was the instrument that was employed because the researcher wanted to save on time during the national workshop and also increase the reliability of the information gathered. The intention of the interviews was to find out what the adjudicators think about the portrayal of the female character in the contemporary oral narrative in the schools' and colleges' drama festival and determine how their views relate to the findings of the thematic textual analysis of the oral narratives.

The researcher considered the views of the respondents only in-so-far as they tallied with the analysis of the texts. The suggestions of the interviewees which would have compromised the findings of the analysis of the texts were considered unhelpful to the study and ignored.

### **1.9.3 Data collection procedure**

The research relied on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from interviews with the four respondents. The researcher identified the respondents and telephoned them to request for the opportunity to interview them.

The secondary sources of data were the six written narrative texts selected for this study. Permission to access the scripts was given by the Kenya Schools' and Colleges' National Drama Committee which is the custodian of all documents and scripts related to the festival. The individual writers of the narrative scripts were formally requested to allow the researcher access their works. The researcher first

sought to establish rapport with the text writers and explained to them the purpose of the study. All ethical considerations were observed, and the texts were not to be used for any other purpose other than the intended research. Once the authors had been made to understand the purpose of the study, the researcher travelled to collect the narrative scripts. Two of the scripts were e-mailed to the researcher to cut on the cost of travelling to Eastern and North Eastern Kenya.

#### **1.9.4 Data analysis procedure**

Both the primary and secondary data was subjected to thematic analysis. The narrative texts and the interview responses were interrogated in relation to images of femininity, style in relation to female characters and any other gendered reference and associations.

In the next chapter, we examine the images of femininity in the oral narrative texts.

## CHAPTER TWO: IMAGES OF FEMININITY IN THE ORAL

### NARRATIVE TEXTS

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the images of femininity in the six oral narratives under study as reflected in the numbers of characters. We also look at the images of female characters as victims, female characters in career occupations and leadership as well as images of females as devils. We finally make observations about what these images mean in terms of the position of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative and in the general Kenyan society.

#### 2.1 Designation of characters by gender

The table below indicates the numbers of significant characters according to gender in the six oral narratives under study.

TITLE	AUTHOR	NO. OF FEMALE CHARACTERS	NO. OF MALE CHARACTERS
<i>Makembwa the Carpenter</i>	Kyalo Mutinda	10	01
<i>Thiwini the Golden Chain</i>	Moses Odua	02	01
<i>Ingwe</i>	Fredrick Shitubi	03	13
<i>Nanjekho</i>	William Onacha	01	09
<i>Napukhulu</i>	Jimmy Wanjala	01	11
<i>Kasungi</i>	Monica Kiraguri	01	01

As the table indicates, there are seventeen significant female characters against thirty six male ones. This big disparity in numbers of significant characters suggests that the female character in the contemporary oral narrative in the schools' and colleges' drama festival is marginalized and underrepresented.

In Kyalo Mutinda's *Makembwa the Carpenter*, there are a total of ten female characters against one male. The females are Anina, Achieng, Wambui, Sara, Mueni, Naliaka, Moraa, Aisha, Atieno and Amina. There is also the inclusion of group characters in the form of the Sunday school pupils and the school pupils in class 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Although this is a large number of female characters, it is noteworthy that all of them are victims of rape. Each of the characters is mentioned only once, which is at the point of her encounter with Makembwa the rapist. Hence, one could argue that the large number of female characters only serves to highlight the extensive nature of the problem of rape and the fact that it affects all communities in Kenya. The presence of these characters does not therefore indicate inclusivity and equality in the portrayal of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text in the schools' and colleges' drama festival. On the contrary, their presence merely reinforces the negative image of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative as victims of widespread sexual violence and exploitation. Therefore, even though the narrative has a big number of significant female

characters, their presence emphasizes the idea of marginalization and exploitation rather than inclusivity and equality.

Moses Odua's *Thiwini, the Golden Chain* has two female characters, Apiyo and Adongo, against one male character. Apiyo is the villain while Adongo is the heroine. The presence of two female main characters could, at surface level, suggest that the writer has a favourable view of female characters since he has given them major roles. However, it is noteworthy that the two main characters fade into nothingness once a single male ogre is introduced. Even if the writer had twenty girls as main characters, it is likely that their number would be insignificant once the male ogre comes to the scene. The author's presentation of two girls as main characters is countered by the appearance of the male ogre.

Fredrick Shitubi's *Ingwe* has three female characters, Rosebellah, Rosalinda and Kazibure's wife. This small number of females, in a narrative with thirteen male characters who are chiefs, polygamists and watchdogs is a manifestation of the marginalization of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative. The female characters are outnumbered and insignificant in a world populated by powerful men, and they are reduced to some kind of scarce resource for men to compete over. The discrimination is made worse by the fact that these female characters are portrayed as people who can be confused into marriage or even stolen for sexual pleasure.

In William Onacha's *Nanjekho*, there is only one significant female character pitted against nine male characters who are her admirers, suitors and village elders. *Nanjekho's* single female character in a large group of male characters reflects the contemporary oral narrative's marginalization of female characters. It is as if from the very outset, she is disadvantaged by her minority status and she must dance to the whims of the male majority in the narrative.

Like *Nanjekho*, Jimmy Wanjala's *Napukhulu* has only one female character existing alongside eleven male admirers, suitors and village leaders. *Napukhulu* is the girl whom every man wants, and her lone appearance in the story also reflects the marginalization of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative in the schools' drama festival. Just like in *Nanjekho*, this marginalization is further reinforced by *Napukhulu's* image as a source of civil strife as well as a lonely, suffering wife.

In similar fashion, Monica Kiraguri's *Kasungi* has only one significant female character alongside one male character. Although there is mention of other girls, these remain in the shadows and are largely undefined. Because she is the only significant female character, *Kasungi* therefore reflects the marginalization of female characters in the contemporary oral narrative, and her image as the embodiment of physical ugliness reinforces this gender bias.

The fewness of female characters who play main roles in *Ingwe*, *Nanjekho*, *Napukhulu* and *Kasungi* reflects the observation by Arigi (Personal interview,

January 21, 2011) who suggests that the best way to change the image of the female character in the contemporary oral narrative is to encourage scriptwriters to create more females as main characters in their stories. Arigi is right since if the contemporary narrative is populated with female main characters, they will most likely be depicted as movers of events rather than victims of male power.

## **2.2 Female characters as victims**

In the six narratives under study, female characters are portrayed as victims of the male world.

For instance, in *Makembwa the Carpenter*, all the female characters play the role of innocent victims of rape who are preyed on by the main character. The writer says:

From the North, Amina, Achieng, and Wambui had been trapped and seriously injured. From the South, Sara, Mueni, and Naliaka could not be traced. From the East, Moraa, Atieno and Aisha were not spared. He had set a trap and trapped his own three year old Amina. (87)

All these characters have no other role; they are minor characters who are only mentioned when they encounter Makembwa, the rapist. All of them are characterized as young, helpless, voiceless and innocent angels. Some of these girls are little children in Sunday school or Primary school between class two and five. Because of their innocent young age, the girls do not make any effort to resist

the rapist or fight back; their role is reduced to giving out 'a cry of pain'. In spite of the fact that Makembwa occasionally takes the personality of a teacher with whom they must be in a position to identify, the girls do not make any such effort, so that the story ends without his having been apprehended. The girls remain on the periphery of the effort to arrest Makembwa.

According to radical feminism, rape is an expression of male power. Hester (1992) observes:

It is within the constructs of male and female sexualities that we may observe the central dynamic of male domination over women. Men are socially constructed as dominant and women as erotic and sexy. Rape is an expression of male sexuality because male sexuality is about male power. (68)

This view is emphasized by Jackson and Scott (1996) who add that "sexual violence is an enactment of male power" (3).

Makembwa is therefore expressing his male power over the little girls by systematically preying on them. His powerful status is reinforced by the fact that he sometimes takes the identity of a teacher of the victims, and sometimes a father. This is an indication of the culprits of rape in modern society; they are usually men in positions that demand respect and fear from their victims, hence making rape a difficult crime to fight since it often goes unreported. The powerful status of the culprits further contributes to the helplessness of the victims who then are unable to offer any resistance to this aggressive male power.

The writer's presentation of the rape victims as young children adds to their sense of helplessness. Although the sexual exploitation of young children in Kenya transcends gender boundaries, it could be argued that the number of exploited young females is greater than that of young males. To be female and young appears to be a position of double vulnerability. The fragility of young females in *Makembwa the Carpenter* makes it easier for the rapist to exercise his sexual prowess, hence manifesting the observation by feminists that the patriarchal world believes in male superiority and female inferiority. Sexual prowess is therefore used as an agent of female subordination and the role of the female victim is reduced to that of being acted upon.

That the narrative ends when Makembwa the rapist has not been apprehended is a statement on the extent of the suffering of the girl child in the Kenyan society and the need for the perpetrators of rape to be tracked. As Maina and Igweta (2005) observe, the Kenyan society seems to tolerate rape since the police do not take it seriously, and judges often impose lenient sentences to convicted rapists.

In addition, the situation of Makembwa's victims is similar to that of female students in Nyanza Province who suffer male sexual power as explained by Siringi (2011):

A study by Nyanza Education Women's Initiative cites sexual violation as a key reason for poor performance of female students in national examinations. Fishermen, relatives and *bodaboda* operators have been accused of exploiting schoolgirls. In the 2010 secondary schools

national examination, only 33 girls got grade A as compared to 171 boys in the province. (30)

Just like Makembwa's victims, the female students of Nyanza Province are brutalized by male power physically, sexually, emotionally and in terms of their career prospects. Hence although the writer of this narrative does not suggest ways of apprehending the serial rapist, the contemporary oral narrative seems to be sensitizing society on the existence of the Makembwas of this world.

In *Thiwini, the Golden Chain*, the two main characters are victims of the power of a male ogre. Apiyo and Adongo become weaklings when they encounter the ogre. In this narrative, the ogre is presented in the male gender, which is consistent with many ogre tales where male ogres often prey on female characters. The ogre here is a representation of male power. It is the ogre who determines the girls' destiny, and he easily tricks Adongo by rearranging the leaves and directing them to his home. He decides out of his own volition not to eat Adongo; it is not because the girl has offered any resistance. In fact, all that Adongo does in the presence of the mighty male ogre is shed tears. It is the ogre who finally shows the submissive Adongo the way back home. The ogre in this story is kind, but his kindness suggests that he is exercising male dominance rather than mere humane feeling.

The offer of help is the ogre's reward for Adongo who has fulfilled the patriarchy's expectations of feminine behaviour by being polite, submissive and helpless. It is clear that had the girl rebelled against the ogre, she would have been

devoured. This is different from many ogre tales in which a male protagonist often fights the ogre, and sometimes rescues an entire village from the belly of the ogre.

In Fredrick Shitubi's *Ingwe*, the female characters are portrayed as victims of polygamy. They are rivals in polygamous homes. Men would get wisdom from the caves on how to manage their big stock of wives. The inferior position held by female characters is emphasized when some men in this narrative are compared to King Solomon who had many wives. The wives do not determine their own course since they can even be stolen by people like Mweneshialo who steals Kazibure's wife. The females are victims of male sexual adventure.

The name "Kazibure", Swahili for a useless person, has a sexist connotation in the context of this narrative: He is useless because he cannot take care of his wife, leading to her being stolen like property.

The girls in this story such as Rosebellah are merely picked from the roadside by Nalukhombe, only to be grabbed from him by robbers. The girls are presented as items that can be picked and snatched at will. Rosebellah gets married after being 'successfully confused' by Nalukhombe, implying that she is a foolish, submissive victim who remains docile even in such an important process as getting married. The female characters are therefore cast as pawns in a man's game.

This narrative being about corruption, the writer places the female characters on the same level as public resources, since both are always getting stolen by the

powerful male and the powerful politician respectively. The powerful politician is also often male in Kenya and other parts of the world.

In William Onacha's *Nanjekho*, the female character is a victim of male brutality. As a wife, Nanjekho is discriminated against and brutalized on a daily basis. She becomes a wounded, limping woman who has lost all her beauty to the wife beater husband. Although she is a victim of domestic violence, she is chained to the abusive marriage by the dowry which has been paid for her, making her Kirkongit's property to be manipulated as he wishes.

The other girls in this narrative are portrayed as people who are overwhelmed by handsome men. They are victims of machismo and perceived male superiority. When they see Kirkongit, they open their mouths in awe and forget to close them.

In Jimmy Wanjala's *Napukhulu*, the female character is also portrayed as a victim of male exploitation and false promises. She is the inferior partner in marriage who has to stay home alone all day, waiting for her husband to return. Her husband leaves home early in the morning and comes back late in the evening. His promise to bring her a present of rose flowers is broken when he brings guava leaves instead. Napukhulu is therefore a victim of marital betrayal which is common in modern marriages. Such betrayal sometimes manifests in absentee husbands just like Napukhulu's husband. The narrative is pointing out the fact that marriage is an arena for female exploitation. The marriage also makes Napukhulu dependent on

her husband, to whom she is chained in spite of his long absence from home. Marriage is akin to slavery for her.

Similarly, Monica Kiraguri's *Kasungi* portrays the female character as a victim of male sexual appetite. The girls in this narrative have no purpose in their life other than dancing hard in order to win a place in the chief's bed.

### 2.3 Occupations

In the six narrative texts under study, the occupations available to the female characters are largely discriminative, stereotypical and peripheral.

*Makembwa the Carpenter* presents the female characters as rape victims rather than being on the path to any meaningful occupation. Although some of these characters are in school, their career prospects are not emphasized. Instead, it is clear that whatever ambitions they might have had are destroyed when they become rape victims.

In *Thiwini, the Golden Chain*, both Adongo and Apiyo are given stereotypically feminine domestic chores. Both of them are sent to the forest to fetch firewood. On the way to the forest, Apiyo plays the feminine games of rope skipping and body shaking. The ogre also gives the girls feminine domestic chores which include sweeping the house, washing utensils and feeding the baby ogres. When Apiyo refuses to perform these domestic chores, she is punished with death. The overburdening of the two girls with domestic chores echoes the belief that such

chores are an impediment to the progress of the female gender. As Jean and Stichter (1984) observe:

Subsistence agricultural and domestic labour tasks take up eight hours of a woman's day, hence hindering her attempt to increase her earning through other ventures. (21)

Apiyo and Adongo therefore have no career vision beyond what is defined for them by the confines of domestic labour. The narrative provokes us to think about this kind of female subordination both at home and in the male ogre's jungle.

*Ingwe* portrays the female character as a house wife whose occupation is the domestic rivalry that comes with polygamy. The female character has no ambition beyond the domestic arena.

William Onacha's *Nanjekho* portrays the main character as a girl who was created for marriage and not any other occupation. People grumble when she appears to be remaining single for too long. Her life revolves around the receiving of one suitor after another, including the narrator, Kip, Ole Mai, and Kirkongit. When her marriage to Kirkongit fails to work, the community's solution is to look for a better husband for her. Nanjekho's predicament echoes the observation by Bukenya (1994) that in many Gikuyu stories, marriage is the ultimate goal for the girl character.

From the very opening of the text, it is made clear that unlike people who are born to be either teachers, preachers, doctors or farmers, Nanjekho was only born to confuse men. The writer says that the beloved Nanjekho was born for only one reason: To confuse men. Her purpose in life is to be an object of desire for the men folk rather than getting into any important profession. Her position is in sharp contrast to the very men she confuses; these men are professionals in different careers. Nanjekho suffers the lack of career opportunity explained by Boserup (1975) who states that women in most developing countries are less qualified than men for modern sector employment because of higher rates of illiteracy.

The other girls in *Nanjekho* are also given stereotypically feminine duties like drawing water; hence they drop their water pots at the sight of Kirkongit. Nanjekho is similarly tied to such domestic duties. The narrator whistles his way to the river where Nanjekho usually drew her water. As argued earlier, Nanjekho and the other girls are living in a male centred world in which their identity is defined in terms of how they view their male counterparts, and their vision is limited by the domestic responsibilities thrust upon them.

Just like in *Nanjekho*, the female character's ambition in *Napukhulu* is reduced to marriage. Napukhulu navigates through a series of painful marriages since she has no career prospects beyond the marriage institution.

In Monica Kiraguri's *Kasungi*, the female characters play the role of dancers who compete to attract their political leader. Their ambition in life is limited to working

hard to be the wife of the chief. The writer says they all yearned to be associated with the chief. There is no other career opportunity open to them. Their worth is limited to their physical appearance and their dancing skill. The chief himself is the adjudicator of these dances; he is elevated above the girls since he is the one who determines their fate in life. When the chief discovers that Kasungi is not as attractive as he initially thought, he considers her to be worthless and runs away from her. The girl's humiliation is completed when she has to run after the fleeing chief to try and rescue her image, which ends up being a futile effort.

Kasungi is portrayed as a helpless girl whose redemption is not a career opportunity but marriage to the chief. She goes to great lengths to disguise her actual looks, including wearing a wig, stuffing her bust and hiding her bad leg. Kasungi's struggle to look beautiful for the benefit of men is similar to that of Clementine in Okot pBitek's *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*. Clementine's confrontation with colonialism results in her futile struggle to change her physical appearance in order to look desirable to her alienated husband. The poet says:

When she returns from cooking her hair  
 She resembles  
 A chicken  
 That has fallen into a pond  
 Her hair looks  
 Like the python's discarded skin  
 Sometimes she wears

The hair of some dead woman

Of some white woman (73)

Both Clementine and Kasungi are victims of the patriarchal demand for women to channel their career ambitions towards looking good in order to please men. This discriminatory demand exists both during the post colonial period and in the modern set up. For Kasungi, this struggle fails to validate her as a human being, because she still faces rejection and lack of any occupation.

Just like in the Russian folktales as described by Propp (1968), it appears that the ultimate ambition of the female character in *Nanjekho*, *Napukhulu* and *Kasungi* is marriage to a male hero. This similarity implies that the negative image of the female character in oral narratives transcends time and geographical boundaries. It then appears that the contemporary oral narrative in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival is replicating the negative portrayal of female characters in the traditional oral narrative.

## **2.4 Leadership**

In the six narrative texts under study, the female character does not assume leadership roles in her community.

For instance, *Ingwe* is about the people of Nalumonya who are led by chiefs such as Inguche and Itsefwe, but none of the female characters in this narrative is a

chief. When the leaders summon the citizens to deliberate on how to solve the crisis of ghosts, the female gender is not represented in this meeting. It is only men, the likes of Nabing'eng'e, Siembekho Nalukhombe, Makwata and Mulolabiosi who attend.

The absence of female characters in leadership positions is replicated in *Makembwa the Carpenter*, *Thiwni the Golden Chain*, *Nanjekho*, *Napukhulu* and *Kasungi*.

The fact that the female characters do not have a voice is consistent with the Cameroonian proverb quoted by Jones (1987) which states that 'women have no mouth'. It is a characteristic of patriarchal societies to deny women avenues through which to express their frustration with exploitation since this is often regarded as a threat to the system of patriarchy itself. The female characters in these narratives are not placed at the centre of problem solving; it is as if their opinion with regard to societal crises is inconsequential or unnecessary.

## **2.5 Females as devils**

At least two of the stories under study, *Nanjekho* and *Napukhulu* have female characters that are depicted in devilish fashion. They are the source of problems in the society, especially with regard to their relation with the males.

*Nanjekho* is described as a girl who was born to confuse men. Her image is that of a devil in a beautiful body who torments men. The author says:

The men of Alubeka were totally confused by Nanjekho's figure; every time she took a walk down the village footpaths, they would put their hands in their trouser-pockets and look at the sky. Ladies and gentlemen, when Nanjekho walked, the men of Alubeka danced to her rhythm. When she laughed, the men clapped. When she talked, they nodded their heads like geckoes. One day she smiled at Kipkoech; the fellow fainted with joy and was rushed to hospital where he was treated for an overdose of happiness. (97)

Similarly, because of her beauty, Napukhulu is the source of trouble in her community. She causes suffering to some of her admirers since her smile made men have heart attacks, and her fragrance would hit people off the road like a Hummer vehicle. Napukhulu's comparison to the glamorous Hummer vehicle does not make her respectable; it instead enhances her status as a dangerous beauty who hits people off the road. She is painted in near devilish fashion, so that her beauty is not celebrated, but rather it is something that produces violence, pain and suffering in the community. She is some kind of witch whose beauty attracts men to their peril. As her beauty continues to improve, she actually makes some men to die upon coming into contact with her.

Additionally, Napukhulu is the source of civil strife. The author says:

Men started fighting seriously for her. Things went out of control. There was chaos all over. There was fire everywhere. (104-105)

Napukhulu's position echoes the patriarchal belief, expressed in common speech, that all of man's troubles are caused by the woman, right from the Garden of Eden.

Napukhulu also retards development by making men to abandon their professional calling in pursuit of her love. She is portrayed as an agent of underdevelopment who confuses doctors, teachers and pastors. Her image is that of a prostitute since the author says that despite the fact that she was married, men still chased her. She takes on the patriarchy-defined identity of a witch who steals other people's husbands. This identity is consistent with the views of Jackson and Scott (1996), that it is women who are blamed for perceived sexual immorality and not their male accomplices.

In conclusion, this chapter has examined images of femininity in the six oral narratives under study and found that these images generally reflect marginalization. Although some stories have females as main characters, these characters often play subordinate roles, and even where they exist in big numbers, this does not translate into a positive portrayal of their image. Most of the female characters are not in meaningful occupations; they instead play the role of submissive wives or daughters engaged in domestic labour. They neither hold leadership positions nor are they at the centre of problem solving. They are often at the mercy of a powerful male figure who sometimes exploits them sexually. Occasionally, they are devilish trouble makers. These observations hold true even in a narrative like *Kasungi* which is scripted by a female author.

In the next chapter, we turn to the style used in the contemporary oral narrative text in the schools' and colleges' drama festival. We discuss how style enhances

negative images of the female character and make suggestions about what needs to be done about style in the contemporary oral narrative text.

## CHAPTER THREE: STYLE IN RELATION TO FEMALE CHARACTERS

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter examines how diction, description, repetition, symbolism, juxtaposition, simile, hyperbole and dialogue are used across the six narrative texts and analyzes these techniques in relation to how they depict female characters. The chapter ends with conclusive statements regarding how style in the contemporary oral narrative text needs to be updated to conform to gender concerns in Kenya.

### 3.1 Diction

In *Thiwni the Golden Chain*, the diction that is ascribed to Apiyo accentuates her wicked character. She is portrayed as a cruel girl who 'had vowed to teach her sister a lesson'. She answers the ogre's questions 'very rudely' and when she is given a parcel, she literally 'grabbed it from the ogre's hands and did not even say thank you'. Apiyo is portrayed as an impolite and very ungrateful girl who ultimately suffers the pain of a snake bite and an early, undignified death in front of a crowd of people. Apiyo's death is patriarchy's punishment for this rude, assertive and hence 'unnatural' female character who fails to conform to the accepted cultural prescriptions for female behaviour.

On the other hand, the diction that is ascribed to Adongo accentuates her fragility and stereotypically feminine attitude as well as her helplessness. When the ogre

sees her, he immediately starts to plan to eat her. Adongo is portrayed as food to be eaten, just as in *Makembwa the Carpenter* where rape is seen as consumption. Her presence triggers yawning and salivating on the part of the ogre. Her sense of helplessness is indicated by the fact that rather than fight or try to run away, all she does is explain to the ogre with tears in her eyes. In this narrative, rather than try to outwit the ogre, Adongo resorts to crying which is a female stereotype that is associated with weakness. This agrees with statements such as 'don't cry like a woman' which are common in social discourse in many patriarchal societies, Kenya included.

The present that Adongo receives from the ogre is 'a beautiful golden necklace' which is a stereotypically feminine item since necklaces are associated with the female gender and are meant to enhance their physical attributes. The necklace, which is a reward for politeness, meekness and helplessness, enhances Adongo's femininity.

Similarly, in *Ingwe*, the diction that is employed in reference to female characters enhances their commodification. The writer says 'if you wanted a new wife, you sneaked into the caves', and 'if you needed wisdom to manage your big stock of wives, you vanished into the caves'. Such words as 'a new wife' glorify the practice of polygamy which elevates one man above several women. In addition, the reference to 'a big stock of wives' reduces female characters to the level of stocks of domestic animals. The fact that this big stock needs to be 'managed' by

the husband completes the denial of humanity for the female characters. Wives in this case are seen as property that needs to be managed by their husbands.

In *Nanjekho*, some of the words used in reference to the main character reflect stereotypes about the female gender. The writer says 'like all good ladies, Nanjekho's actual age will remain her secret weapon'. The belief that women and girls hide their actual age for fear of being thought old is a stereotype that this statement builds on. This statement also perpetuates the male-centered view that the value of a lady is related to her age or that it deteriorates with age. When Nanjekho appears to be delaying to get married, the elders mourn and say 'such beauty to be wasted'. This lament reinforces the stereotype that if a beautiful girl is not married, then her beauty is going to waste. Hence, female beauty is seen as something that is meant to be exploited by men. This stereotype is further reinforced by the writer's statement that Nanjekho's potential 'lay unutilized, unexploited'. The statement also carries the intimation of sexual exploitation since Nanjekho's 'potential' in this case can only be understood in terms of her sexuality. This narrative therefore reinforces the view of radical feminists captured by Welch (2001) that "women's role in reproduction is sexually exploited by men" (2). It is also evident that this sexual exploitation leaves no room for Nanjekho's own sexual pleasure, hence as radical feminists would observe, Nanjekho is socialized to give sexual pleasure to men but not to expect any, (Jackson and Scott, 1996).

The stereotype that a woman is destined only for marriage is emphasized when the elders decide at the end of the narrative that they will look for 'a better husband for Nanjekho'. Having endured a cruel marriage, it is stereotypical for Nanjekho to be immediately hurled into a new relationship with no guarantee that it will be better than the previous one. Nanjekho is portrayed as a woman who can only find validation in marriage. Marriage therefore enhances the subordination of the female gender since it tends to reinforce the patriarchal belief that women are mere property that is supposed to be owned by men. To Nanjekho, marriage is some kind of slavery that her womanhood has consigned her to and from which there is no escape. She is moved from one marriage to another in a manner best described as moving from the frying pan into the fire, since she merely leaves one cruel and exploitative husband for another.

Some other words portray Nanjekho as a victim of battery. The writer says Kirkongit 'beat Nanjekho every day; she would get slaps for breakfast, kicks for lunch and strong lashes for dinner'. The words 'beat', 'slaps', 'kicks' and 'lashes' portray Nanjekho as a helpless wife who is physically abused on a continuous basis. The words 'her chains' portray Nanjekho as being in some kind of slavery. The writer says 'once dowry was paid for a girl, she could not run away until after five years'. The idea of dowry as a form of payment portrays Nanjekho in a commercialized sense, the undertone being that her value is equivalent to the dowry that is paid for her. Dowry is a form of enslavement since it ties Nanjekho to her husband until after five years. The slavery and exploitation of the female

character is a mirror of the exploitation that the nation's leadership, often male, metes out on the citizens. As argued earlier, just like the citizens of an exploited nation, Nanjekho is at the mercy of the male figure who has procured the five year license to exploit her. Hence because of her gender, the female is oppressed both at domestic and national level by the same male figure.

The words that are used in reference to the main character in *Napukhulu* portray her as a trophy that is contested for by men. The writer says that for Napukhulu to get married, "the elders called for a contest for men to prove how strong they were". The "contest" suggests that rather than get married to a man of her choice, Napukhulu is bound to marry the man who wins the competition, in spite of what she feels about him. Her image as a trophy is further developed by statements like 'men started fighting seriously for her', and 'may the contest begin'. Indeed, when the Maasai man is asked where he is going, he explains that he is going "to grab the girl". This suggests that Napukhulu is like an item that is up for grabs by the strongest man. It is therefore not surprising that when Sichinjili wins the contest, he "carried his newly wedded wife on his shoulder and went to his house". Sichinjili is proud to lift Napukhulu high up on his shoulder just like a trophy or like some market goods.

Because she is portrayed as a trophy, Napukhulu is owned by several men. When Sichinjili fails to be a good husband, the villagers simply decide to conduct a ceremony 'to choose Napukhulu's next husband'. Her image is that of a trophy

that is rotated among several men. This image reinforces the patriarchal belief that female destiny does not go beyond marriage. Napukhulu cannot find validation and independence outside the marriage institution. In addition, marriage is not a matter over which she has the freedom to make a personal choice since it is the elders who sit to choose a husband for her, hence deciding her destiny.

Some other words portray Napukhulu in stereotypical feminine terms. When her husband arrives at night, she starts 'blushing'. When Napukhulu realizes that Sichinjili has lied to her, all she can do is to start 'crying'. Blushing and crying are both attributes that are associated with patriarchy's idea of feminine behaviour. Another stereotype here concerns Kuloba's wife who is portrayed as a lazy woman who does not help her husband fight the bear. Instead, she is content to be caressed by her husband's hand as the other hand wrestles the bear. Kuloba's wife exemplifies the patriarchal opinion that whereas women are weak and lazy, men are brave and strong and so they offer protection to women.

Monica Kiraguri's *Kasungi* is a narrative that addresses the folly of making hasty decisions. The main character, Chief Tamaa quickly chooses a bride, Kasungi based on her perceived beauty but it turns out later that she is ugly. The narrative starts by declaring that in Mulinditiland, 'women were women and men were men'. This assertion is informed by patriarchy since it seeks to establish the fact that in this society, there was a clear demarcation between men and women, and women were inferior to men.

The writer's choice of words portrays female characters in this narrative as people with limited ambition whose main preoccupation is to try hard to catch the eye of Chief Tamaa. When the chief decides to choose a bride on account of her dancing skills, the writer says all the girls "registered for the dance, for they all yearned to be associated with the chief". The writer says "all assortments of girls paraded themselves before the chief". This statement commodifies the girls and reduces them to the level of goods which are paraded on the market for the chief to make his choice. The girls are dehumanized since they are mere assortments.

In addition, the girls perform degrading activities such as twisting, bending, and smiling in their effort to get noticed. All this is done 'until Chief Tamaa would be satisfied'. The girls are portrayed as engaging in such antics which are as self degrading as prostitution. The image of these girls is that of people whose human dignity is compromised, akin to the description by Kabira (1994) that in Gikuyu oral narratives, "girls are depicted as foolish and preoccupied with competing over men, quarreling over who is more beautiful and who has more ornaments" (81).

In *Ingwe*, *Nanjekho Napukhulu* and *Kasungi*, the diction used in reference to the female character is consistent with what Blamines (1991) describes as sex object and seductress. These are stereotypes of the female character that exist in these texts because the female characters are deliberately made to appear as if their beauty is meant for the consumption of men, and their existence has no purpose except for the sexual satisfaction of the male.

The portrayal of female characters as people who are cheap commodities paraded for grabbing by men is not just confined to narratives like *Kasungi*. It is visible in some parts of African societies. For example, every year in Swaziland, near naked girls participate in the reed dance in which they parade themselves before the king so that he can choose a wife from the crowd. The idea of a king acquiring a new wife every year indicates that some African societies still hold to degrading patriarchal practices which inhibit the progress of women. The fact that such aspects of culture are reflected in the contemporary oral narrative in an African society like Kenya shows that modernity is not moving fast to save women from their subordinate status. This study therefore argues that the writers of the contemporary oral narrative should strive to use this literary medium to revise the situation of the female character since literature can be a powerful agent of societal change.

### **3.2 Description**

The writer of *Makembwa the Carpenter* employs description to further highlight the rape problem. For example, the rape victims are described as young, helpless, voiceless and innocent angels. These words portray the female characters as people who are weak and vulnerable. The undertone is that these are young girls who are unable to defend themselves and who cannot even speak out against this evil since they are voiceless. From the point of view of patriarchy, their image is

that of the weaker sex. Their description as 'angels' suggests that they are fragile and harmless unlike their attackers.

In *Ingwe*, Nalukhombe's courtship and marriage of Rosebellah is described in a manner that commodifies the lady. The writer says Nalukhombe had picked from the grasslands a girl anyone would die to own: Rosebellah. Rosebellah is not wooed; she is merely 'picked' as if she were a lost item. The fact that she is a girl that anyone would 'die to own' repeats the implication that wives are the property of men. Instead of courting her, Nalukhombe 'successfully confused her.' This portrays her as foolish and incapable of reasoning with him. When the ghosts arrive, they rob Nalukhombe of two things: His wife and his trousers. This pairing of Rosebellah with the trousers implies that the lady and the trousers are considered to be more or less of equal value. In other words, Rosebellah is depicted as being of no bigger value than Nalukhombe's trousers. She, just like the trousers, can easily be stolen. She is mere property; she is completely robbed of her humanity by this comparison. She is described as Nalukhombe's 'prized trophy', meaning that her humanity is secondary to her value as a commodity that is proudly displayed as part of a man's possessions. Hence this is further commodification of Rosebellah.

Rosebellah is ranked as a girl who had all the ingredients of a 'Class A beauty'. The use of the word 'ingredients' describes the girl in culinary terms, hence portraying her as some form of food to be consumed by men. In addition, her

description as a Class A beauty implies that her value is only aesthetic and not intellectual.

Ingwe, the public watchdog reported if any man visited a woman. This portrays female characters as the weaker sex since they are visited by men instead of taking initiative in sexual relationships by being the ones who visit men or who decide which men should visit them. This belief in female weakness is reinforced by the fact that the women have to be watched over by the male public watchdog, meaning that they need male protection.

The writer says 'Mweneshialo stole Kazibure's wife.' Even as wives, female characters are portrayed as commodities that can be stolen. The underlying idea is that the women themselves do not have any say in the process of being 'stolen', since they are considered to be voiceless property.

The public watchdog, Ingwe considers it a serious crime and reports when Rosalinda slaps her husband, one of the chiefs, for sleeping out. There are two stereotypes inherent here: There is the belief that only men can sleep out of their marital homes in acts of marital infidelity. This belief subordinates women even in modern marriages since male sexual permissiveness is tolerated and even considered heroic, while females are expected to be models of marital fidelity. This sexual discrimination and exploitation is consistent with the feminist observations by Jackson and Scott (1996):

Double standards of morality have entitled men to sexual freedoms denied to women. Women's sexuality has been policed and regulated in a way which men's has not: It is the woman prostitute who is stigmatized and punished; not her male clients. Women also face male sexual violence and coercion. (3)

Secondly, there is the belief that when a woman slaps her husband, it is a crime worth reporting on but when a man slaps his wife, it is not news. This belief is rooted in patriarchy which persists in the modern age where wives are expected to take spousal battery patiently and happily. Some Kenyan communities even make it a cultural requirement for a newly married wife to be beaten by the husband, yet no such demand is made with regard to the men in these communities. For example, among the Luhyia community to which the researcher belongs, some sub tribes have traditions that compel a man to beat his newly married wife, and only after her public wailing is the union considered to have been cemented.

*Napukhulu* also employs description in a manner that emphasizes the male world's stereotypical obsession with female physical appearance. The writer describes *Napukhulu* as a girl who had 'all her anterior and posterior parts fully developed'. Physical beauty is the only quality that her admirers identify in her. The writer uses puns to emphasize this male interest in female physical looks, so that in the narrative, doctors left patients in I.C.U and started saying I see you *Napukhulu*, thieves started stealing their way towards *Napukhulu*, and teachers stopped examining students and started examining *Napukhulu*. These puns, cutting through

a cross section of society, portray Napukhulu as a girl whose physical appearance makes her a victim of stereotypical male obsession. Napukhulu's beauty is also described in words that compare her with food, hence portraying her as someone who is available to be consumed by men. The writer says 'her skin was like drinking chocolate'.

As a wife, Napukhulu is portrayed as 'a very sad and lonely girl' who is almost abandoned in the house all day as her husband roams about. Marriage for her is akin to slavery and confinement.

The main character in *Kasungi* is widely described in a manner that projects her as a very ugly girl. The message of the narrative is that her apparent beauty is deceptive and that her true looks are very unpleasant. She is portrayed as a balding girl who has artificial breasts stuffed with cotton wool, as well as a crooked leg. Her physical appearance is summarized as 'her ugly geography'. *Kasungi* is portrayed in physically unpleasant terms. This reinforces the patriarchal perspective of women as objects of aesthetic rather than intellectual usefulness. *Kasungi* is considered valueless just because of her physical appearance. Her basic humanity is ignored since in the chief's mind, she is meant to be only an object of sexual attraction.

The fact that *Kasungi* conceals her actual looks in order to attract the chief is consistent with the observation by Knappert (1979) that narratives present women as people who seek to attract men by being wily, wicked and cunning. *Kasungi* has

to camouflage herself in order to get noticed by the chief, meaning her inner human self is secondary to her physical looks. She represents the girls in the modern age who resort to skin lightening creams and cosmetic surgery in order to change their looks.

The portrait of Kasungi fits in what Kasigwa (Personal interview, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011) describes as a caricature. He observes:

Change must come so that we reverse the presentation of the female characters as caricatures, hence trivializing the contemporary narrative. The narrative should present female characters with dignity, as pillars of society who carry the burden of imparting values and morals. The role of the woman should be celebrated. (See appendix ii, pg 114)

Kasigwa's observation holds with regard to Kasungi's image since she is presented with such extravagant negativity that she is robbed of her dignity.

Generally, the portrayal of female characters in *Makembwa the Carpenter*, *Ingwe*, *Nanjekho*, *Napukhulu* and *Kasungi* is congruent with the observation by Arigi (Personal interview, January 21, 2011). Arigi states:

The contemporary oral narrative in the schools' drama festival portrays female characters as sex objects. In most narratives, female characters are described in a manner that suggests their work is to entertain men, especially with their physique. (See appendix ii, pg 115)

Odhiambo (Personal interview, January 19, 2011) agrees with Arigi, stating that the contemporary oral narrative in the schools' drama festival portrays female characters as objects to be gazed at by men.

Both Arigi's and Odhiambo's views find illustration in the way in which female characters in the four narratives are described derogatively and presented as victims of male sexual appetite.

### 3.3 Repetition

The writer of *Makembwa the Carpenter* repetitively uses phrases that depict the pain suffered by the young girls who are raped. The phrase 'we heard a cry of pain' is repeated in reference to the horrific experience of the victims of rape. This repetition portrays the girls as people who are perpetually being subjected to the pain of sexual violation. Similarly, the writer repeats the idea of girls being trapped. He says:

His traps were now attracting and trapping the young. Achieng and Wambui had been trapped and easily injured. He tricked the young attendants and trapped them into agony. He trapped his own three year old Amina. Class 2, 3, 4 and 5 pupils had been trapped and cannibalized. (57-58)

This repetition as well as the use of the word 'cannibalized' reduces the female characters to the level of wild animals since it is animals that get easily trapped for human consumption. The fact that the girls are easily 'tricked' portrays them as gullible people who easily get carried away by the luring tongue of the rapist. The

trapping of three year old Amina, who is the trapper's own daughter, portrays the girls as victims of not only rape but also incest. Makembwa, the trapper in this narrative exemplifies the feminist thoughts of Spooner (2010) who asserts that "men are socialized into forms of masculinity; men are meant to be strong and tough, and to use force to assert dominance over women" (2). Makembwa's dominance over the female gender is emphasized by the big number of girls that he, a single man, is able to ravish. The trapper's exploits at the expense of young girls also puts these girls in the kind of situation that agrees with Odhiambo (2010) that men's disregard for the female gender has led to child molestation, rape of school girls, and arranged marriages.

The trapper is therefore representative of the male members of society who dehumanize the female figure through rape. The manner in which the rape victims in *Makembwa the Carpenter* are presented agrees with the observation by Kasigwa (Personal interview, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011) who says:

The contemporary oral narrative portrays female characters as underdogs; people who are battered and looked down upon. Girl children are depicted as people who are overworked, raped and brutalized. (See appendix ii, pg 113)

*Makembwa the Carpenter* provides some evidence that this observation by Kasigwa is possibly valid since the young girls in the narrative are all victims of repetitive rape.

William Onacha also employs repetition in *Nanjekho* to portray the main character as an unpleasant girl whose trademark is her famous sneering. The writer says ‘every time a man suggested marriage, Nanjekho would sneer and walk away’, ‘she became a professional at sneering’, ‘she sneered at me’, ‘she sneered at Kip and walked away’, and ‘she unleashed her legendary sneer’. Such persistent repetition of the unpleasant act of sneering portrays Nanjekho in repellent terms that paint her as rebellious and rude, hence one that is wild and who needs taming. From a patriarchal viewpoint, Nanjekho is expected to be gentle and polite in order to be considered marriageable. Her sneering is a rebellion against the idea of being enslaved to men in marriage; hence this shocks the male world into thinking of her as being unnatural. Her bad luck in the abusive marriage could be seen in patriarchal terms as a punishment for her pride.

### **3.4 Symbolism**

In *Makembwa the Carpenter*, the writer uses female names from different communities in Kenya to symbolize how rape is widespread. The use of names like Achieng, Wambui, Sara, Mueni, Naliaka, Moraa, Aisha and Amina symbolically suggests that a wide range of female populations in Kenya are potential victims of rape. This state of affairs is consistent with the feminist belief that rape as an expression of male power and dominance over females is widespread. Spooner (2010) alludes to this widespread nature of sexual abuse in Africa when she notes that “From Cairo to Cape, the continent’s daughters

continue to face gruesome sexual attacks from their male peers” (2). Hester (1992) affirms that “rape is an expression of male sexuality because male sexuality is about male power” (61). Hence, the symbolism in this narrative enhances the expression of male power over the female victims. The symbolism also projects stereotypes of the female character as a helpless victim of sexual perversion, quite in line with the belief by Caro (1983) that fairy tales make female subordination seem romantically desirable. The symbolic description of rape using such hunting terminology as ‘trapping’ dehumanizes the female characters and compares them to wild animals. ‘Trapping’ portrays the female character as cornered and helpless in the face of the male sexual urge.

In Fredrick Shitubi’s *Ingwe*, the female characters are portrayed as commodities to be consumed or enjoyed by men. The narrative, a symbolic castigation of corruption in Kenya compares the theft of public resources to the theft of people’s wives. The corrupt politicians are referred to as ghosts who rob people like Nalukhombe of his wife, Rosebellah. This symbolism reduces female characters like Rosebellah to the level of public resources that can be stolen and consumed.

William Onacha’s *Nanjekho* is a narrative about a girl who refuses many eligible suitors only to end up marrying a wife beater whom she cannot run away from until after five years. The girl, Nanjekho is a symbol of the country of Kenya whose fate is sealed for five years once bad leaders have been elected. The use of the female identity to symbolize a nation highlights the exploitation and misuse

that the female-nation is subjected to within the five year 'marital' contract. The female figure mirrors the politics of the country, often full of corruption, plunder and violence.

This symbolism also portrays Nanjekho as a girl who lacks foresight and who is incapable of good judgment and good choices. She refuses to marry good men like Kip and Ole Mai and marries the cruel Kirkongit. The political myopia of the electorate in this country is symbolized by a female character, hence perpetuating the patriarchal view that females are naïve and intellectually inferior.

Jimmy Wanjala's *Napukhulu* addresses post-election violence concerns in Kenya. The protagonist in this narrative, Napukhulu, is the author's symbol of the country Kenya, and the vicious battles waged by her competing suitors represent the violence that hit the country after the 2007 presidential elections. Napukhulu's fighting suitors come from different communities, representing the ethnic nature of the electoral violence. Just like in *Nanjekho*, the female-country symbol is used in this narrative to mirror female exploitation.

### **3.5 Juxtaposition**

In Moses Odua's *Thiwni, the Golden Chain*, the striking literary style that is employed is the juxtaposition of the twin girls, Apiyo and Adongo. This comparison intends to portray Adongo as the good girl and Apiyo as the bad one. Hence Apiyo, the bad girl is described as rude, headstrong and vile. She is also

lazy and jealous of her sister's good manners. She is rude, proud and arrogant. When Adongo triumphantly returns home, Apiyo is described as 'burning with envy and anger'. This depiction casts Apiyo in negative light as an antisocial and wicked character. Apiyo's description ties up with the belief in Kenyan politics and social life that a lady is not supposed to be proud and arrogant but she should instead be meek.

The juxtaposition of Adongo and Apiyo resonates with the views of Barasa (Personal interview, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2011) who states:

A number of scriptwriters of the contemporary oral narrative have very little respect for women. The female characters that are portrayed as good are submissive while the assertive ones are intentionally portrayed as bad. (See appendix ii, pg 110)

In this narrative, Adongo is celebrated for her submissiveness and Apiyo condemned for her assertiveness, which as Barasa notes, ascribes patriarchal expectations of femininity on the two girls.

Although Adongo, the good girl is portrayed in such glowing terms as polite, nice and virtuous, this depiction projects a stereotypically feminine image of the girl. It depicts Adongo as submissive and weak rather than being assertive and strong. Hence the juxtaposition suggests that a virtuous girl is the one who, just like Adongo, reflects stereotypical feminine behaviour. Her image reflects what Belsey and Moore (1989) refer to as the feminine label that is a creation of patriarchal

culture. On the other hand, because she fails to conform to this feminine label, Apiyo is labeled as ‘unnatural’ by the same patriarchal culture.

### 3.6 Simile

In *Ingwe*, the glorification of polygamy is enhanced by the writer’s use of simile. The behaviour of polygamists is referred to as being “like King Solomon who had many wives”. This statement suggests that polygamy and the subordination of women has existed since the Biblical days, hence it cannot die even in the modern society. In addition, since the Biblical King Solomon is associated with wisdom, the simile reinforces the view that polygamy is a wise practice since there seems to be a relationship between the number of wives King Solomon had and his great wisdom. It is necessary therefore that the writers of the contemporary narrative script should write texts that do not glorify such discriminatory practices as polygamy.

### 3.7 Hyperbole

The writer of *Nanjekho* employs exaggeration to portray the main character as a beautiful girl. However, this hyperbole betrays an obsession with the female body, hence suggesting that Nanjekho’s value lies only in her physical appearance. She is described as having grown only upwards for ten years, frontwards for five years and backwards for another five years. She is ‘a perfect figure eight, unlike the

figure zeroes we see rolling around these days'. Kirkongit wins her heart by promising to double her beauty in one hundred days. Nanjekho, becomes 'a mass of ugliness' when Kirkongit beats her regularly. These exaggerations reinforce the patriarchal attitude which sees the female only in terms of physical beauty or ugliness.

### 3.8 Dialogue

Dialogue is mainly employed in *Nanjekho* and *Kasungi*. In *Nanjekho*, the dialogue emphasizes the main character's submissiveness to her husband. Nanjekho prostrates herself before Kirkongit and tells him, 'I am yours from head to toe'. Her words as well as the act of prostrating herself reinforce her inferior position as a wife. As a victim of battery, she limps to the elders and tells them, 'save me'. Her words portray her not only as a suffering woman but also as one who cannot save herself. The institution of marriage in this narrative conquers even the proudest of girls and reduces them to people who have to bow before men. In marriage, Nanjekho is no longer sneering, but she is totally subdued by her husband.

The writer of *Kasungi* also uses the following dialogue which portrays the girl as feeble and submissive:

"You know you are the most beautiful thing on earth," he said.

"I am flattered," she replied.

“Will you bear me an heir for my seat and wealth?” The chief continued.

“If you make me,” Kasungi said. (107)

These statements indicate that she is helpless, desperate and at the mercy of the chief. Her fate in life will take the form that the chief wills for her. In matters of marriage, conjugal relations and child bearing, Kasungi exists only for the purpose of serving the chief, and her own needs are irrelevant.

This chapter has examined the style used in relation to the female characters in the six narratives under study. We have established that in all the six narratives, the stylistic techniques employed portray female characters as sex objects, as people whose value lies only in their physical rather than intellectual endowments. They are presented as commodities and trophies to be owned by men and as people whose only ambition and validation in life is the oppressive institution of marriage. Given this scenario, it is necessary for the writers of the contemporary oral narrative text in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival to revise the representation of female characters rather than perpetuate the old order. This will be a move in line with the global trend for women empowerment and may help change the patriarchal view of women.

In the next section, we recap the arguments in this research report and make some recommendations for further study of the contemporary oral narrative text.

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.**

This section attempts to summarize the arguments made in this research with regard to the images of female characters as well as the style used in reference to female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival. Towards the end, the chapter also makes recommendations for further research into the contemporary oral narrative.

This study found that in the six oral narrative texts that were examined, there were eighteen female characters against a total of thirty six male characters. Secondly, even though some narratives had a significant number of female main characters, this did not translate into positive images of these characters. This is evidence of discrimination since it appears to perpetuate the patriarchal view that one man is equivalent to several females. The number of female characters in the six narratives studied generally reflects their marginalization.

One way of changing the situation is by redesigning the marking scheme of the oral narrative so that marks are awarded for the development of both female and male characters equally. This would disadvantage the narratives that have few or no female characters, thereby making the drama festival to be a channel for the revision of gender stereotypes in Kenya. In addition, a special award needs to be created for narratives that focus on female main characters who are realistically portrayed.

In all the six narrative texts, the visible images of female characters suggest that they are victims of the discriminatory male world who are neither in gainful employment and careers, nor in any positions of leadership. Some are innocent victims of rape while others perform domestic chores such as fetching firewood and water. These characters are excluded from communal problem solving efforts and are, instead, trophies to be stolen, or they are locked in slave-like conditions as wives for whom dowry has been paid. Because of their beauty, they sometimes are devil-like agents of confusion and civil strife. In addition, they are submissive subjects of chauvinistic chiefs to whom they hope to get married as a way of liberating themselves from their inferior conditions, although in most cases, marriage tends to subordinate them further as demonstrated earlier in this study.

Even as main characters, females are subordinate to the male characters present. The writer of the contemporary oral narrative in the schools' drama festival therefore needs to balance between the female and male characters who play central roles in the plot of the texts. The female main characters need to be modeled on existing female role models in the Kenyan society. The texts need to have female characters who are not always subordinate to male ones and who are not always confined to domestic chores. More so, the contemporary narrative needs to have female characters as presidents, professionals, scientists, inventors and opinion shapers. This change can be achieved by sensitizing the narrative writers through gender and writing workshops, and through specific gender

guidelines by the ministry of education which is the organizer and sponsor of the schools' and colleges' drama festival.

The style used in the six narratives under study largely portrays female characters as physically and emotionally weak, vulnerable, fragile and unable to defend themselves against their tormentors. The female characters are also portrayed as helpless victims of rape. In some of the narratives, they are foolish, rude, lazy, jealous, and submissive. They are food to be eaten by men as well as male ogres, and they cry rather than fight. They are presented as commodities to be stolen and eaten, as properties of men in polygamous homes, as trophies for men to boast about and as victims of domestic violence and domestic labour. Most of the female characters are beautiful rather than intelligent. Some of them are sad and lonely wives whose husbands make unfulfilled promises, while others are miserable dancers on the village pavilion, struggling to catch the eye of the chief and hoping to become his wives. Finally, some female characters bear the image of people who are deformed, ugly and unpleasant to look at.

There is therefore need for the writers of the contemporary oral narrative text in the schools' drama festival to use style in a manner that does not project a subordinate and unpleasant image of female characters. We agree with Professor Peter Barasa who thinks the writer of the contemporary narrative needs to use his text to help in deconstructing the stereotypical views about women. It is necessary to create heroines in the contemporary oral narrative, in line with Professor

Barasa's suggestion that our narratives need female characters in the mould of Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai.

This view is shared by Professor Christopher Odhiambo who suggests that there is need to sensitize the creators of the contemporary oral narrative text on the need to depict female characters positively.

Mr. Barnabas Kasigwa also suggests that the language of the contemporary oral narrative needs to be free from vulgarity and sexist innuendo and that it needs to celebrate the positive role that the female person plays in society. This is a suggestion that needs to be taken seriously because it reflects the craving of modern society for gender sensitivity in literature.

The writers of the contemporary narrative texts therefore need help in terms of raising their awareness on the need for positive images of female characters. This can be achieved by getting them to attend gender and writing workshops so that their language is updated in accordance with the gender needs of Kenyan literature.

The four respondents, who are long serving adjudicators of the Kenya schools' and colleges' national drama festival, Professor Peter Barasa, Professor Christopher Odhiambo, Barnabas Kasigwa and Joyce Arigi agree on the need to portray female characters in the contemporary oral narrative text in the schools' drama festival

positively. They suggest that the current status of the female characters needs to be revised so that they are given role model positions in the contemporary world.

In conclusion, from the aforementioned observations, whereas the contemporary oral narrative texts in the Kenya schools' and colleges' drama festival have enough and significant numbers of female characters to warrant their study, the texts nonetheless perpetuate stereotypical images about female inferiority. In most of these oral narrative texts, female characters play peripheral roles. The narratives also employ style that further promotes the marginalization of the female character. It is therefore necessary to revise these images of the female character so that the contemporary oral narrative text becomes a model of gender sensitivity. This revision needs to start with sensitizing the writers themselves and recognizing those who effect the change in their future narrative texts.

This study also recommends further research to establish the level of participation of female oral narrative script writers in the schools' drama festival and whether there is a correlation between this participation and the portrayal of female characters in the narrative texts. In addition, this study recommends that the Kenya National Drama Festival Committee revises the oral narrative marking scheme so as to include aspects of gender responsiveness and equity as one of the requirements of a good oral narrative script. This is necessary not just for affirmative action but also in order to move in line with the international call on equal gender representation. The authors of the contemporary oral narrative script

**KENYATTA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

also need to be sensitized on gender concerns through the organization of gender and writing workshops. Finally, there is need for a more specific and more intensive regional based study to establish the differences in gender views since this study examined six oral narratives from across the country and took a general approach.

## REFERENCES.

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Achebe, C. (1966). *A Man of the People*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Adeola, J. (Ed). (1990). *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. London: James Curey.
- Aderanti, A., and Oppong, C. (1994). *Gender and Population in Sub-Saharan Africa*. London: James Curey Ltd.
- Alemu, A. (2007). *The Woman in the Oral Narratives of the Jimma Oromo*. Addis Ababa: Journal of African Cultural Studies, Volume 19 Issue 1, June 2007.
- Atkins, G.D., and Morrow, L. (1989). *Contemporary Literary Theory*. Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press.
- p'Bitek, O. (1972) *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- Belsey, C., and Moore, J. (Ed). (1989). *The Feminist Reader*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Bettelheim, B. (1975). *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.
- Blamines, H. (1991). *A History of Literary Criticism*. London: Macmillan.
- Bukenya, A., Kabira, W and Okombo, O. (1994). *Understanding Oral Literature*. Nairobi: Nairobi University Press.
- Caro, F. (1983). *Women and Folklore*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Chesaina, C. (1991). *Oral Literature of the Kalenjin*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd.
- Chesaina, C. (1997). *Oral literature of the Embu and Mbeere*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Costa, M., and Costa, G. (1995.). *Paying the Price: Women and the Politics of International Economic Strategy*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Degh, L. (1994). *American Folklore and the Mass Media*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The Second Sex*. Retrieved December, 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010 from [PhilosophyArchive@marxists.org]
- Dundes, A. (1965). *The Study of Folklore*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Eagleton, T (Ed). (1991). *Feminist Literary Criticism*. New York: Longman.
- Emenyonu, E (Ed). (1991). *African Literature and African Historical Experiences*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fonchingong, C. (2006). *Unbending Gender Narratives in African Literature*. Journal of International Women's Studies, November 1, 2006.

- Furniss, G., and Gunner, L. (1995). *Power, Marginality and African Oral literature*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Guerin, L. et al (Ed). (1979). *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Hester, M. (1992). *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination*. London: Routledge.
- Jackson, S., and Scott, S. (1996). *Feminism and Sexuality*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jean, M., and Stichter, S. (1984). *African Women South of the Sahara*. Essex: Longman Group Ltd.
- Jones, E.D, (ed.) (1987). *Women in African Literature Today*. London: James Currey.
- Kabira, W.M. (1983). *The Oral Artist*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Kabira, W.M., and Adagala, K. (1985). *Kenyan Oral Narratives*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Kabira, W., Masheti, M., and Mukabi, M. (1994). *Delusions: Essays on Social Construction of Gender*. Nairobi: FEMNET.
- Kabira, W.M., and Mutahi, K. (1988). *Gikuyu Oral Literature*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Kenya Government. (2005). *Kenya National Drama Festival Adjudication Report*. Nairobi: Ministry of Education.
- Kenya Government. (2009). *Kenya National Drama Festival Revised Rules and Regulations*. Nairobi: Ministry of Education.
- Kieti, M., and Coughlin, P. (1990). *Barking, You Will Be Eaten*. Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers.
- Kinyanjui, M. (2006). *Perspectives on Gender Discourse: Gender in International Agricultural Trade Agreement: A Kenyan Synopsis*. Nairobi: Heinrich Boll Foundation.
- Kipury, N. (1983). *Oral Literature of the Maasai*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Kirmani, M.H., and Kirmani, S.K. (2002). *Oral Literature of the Asians in East Africa*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Knappert, J. (1979). *Myths and Legends of the Swahili*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Kumah, C. (2000). "African Women and Literature." *West African Review Journal*, volume 2, 2000. Retrieved August, 17, 2010 from [iuiicode:<http://www.icaap.org/iuiicode?101.2.1.15>]
- Labbady, H. (2009). *Feminist Traditions in Andalus-Moroccan Oral Narratives*. Palgrave: Macmillan.
- Liljencrantz, C., and Boserup, E. (1975). *Integration of Women in Development*. U.N.D.P. publication.
- Lo Liyong, T. (1972). *Popular Culture of East Africa*. Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd.
- Lo Liyong, T. (1990). *Another Last Word*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Ltd.

- Lodge, D and Wood, N. (Ed) (1988) *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Essex: Longman.
- Maina, H., and Igweta, R. (2005). *Introducing Human Rights in Secondary Schools*. Nairobi: Legal Resources Foundation.
- Mbiti, J. (1966). *Akamba Stories*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Meyer, M. (1999). *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*. Boston: Bedford and St. Martin's.
- Mezu, U.R. *Women in Achebe's World*. Retrieved August 16, 2010 from [womanist@www.uga.edu](mailto:womanist@www.uga.edu).
- Miruka, O. (1994). *Encounter with Oral Literature*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Moi, T. (1987). *Sexual Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Mukulu, E., and Mukarangau, M. (1996). *Narratives from Africa and India for Secondary Schools and Colleges*. Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.
- Nandwa, J., and Bukenya, A. (1983). *African Oral Literature for Schools*. Nairobi: Longman.
- Nikoi, G. (1998). *Gender and Development*. Accra: Ghana University Press.
- Odaga, A.B. (1984). *Yesterday's Today: The Study of Oral Literature*. Kisumu: Lake Publishers and Enterprises.
- Odaga, A.B. (1985). *Literature for Children and Young People in Kenya*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.
- Odhiambo, T. (2010, November 14). Is this how to be a Kenyan man? *Sunday Nation-Lifestyle*, pp13.
- Ogutu, O and Roscoe, A. (1974). *Keep My Words*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Okombo, O and Nandwa, J. (1992). *Reflections on Theory and Methods in Oral Literature*. Nairobi: Kenya Oral Literature Association.
- Otieno, P. (2000). *In Search of an Equilibrium: A Study of Gender Roles and Styles in National Drama Festival Plays*. Nairobi: M.A Thesis, University Nairobi.
- Propp, V. (1968). *Morphology of the Folktale*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Raman, S. (Ed). (1988). *The Theory of Criticism*. London: Longman.
- Showalter, E. (1997). *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*. New Jersey: Princeton Press.
- Siringi, S. (2011, April 27). Where sex pests ride on bikes and boats. *Daily Nation*, pg 30.
- Spooner, S. (2010, November 19). Women bear the deepest scars from Africa's wars. *Daily Nation- DN2*, pg2.
- Stratton, F. (1994). *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge.
- U.N.O. (2001). *Millennium Development Goals*. New York.

- Wa Gachanja, M. (2002). *Images of Women in Kenyan Oral Narratives*. Retrieved April, 20, 2011 from <http://related.springerprotocols.com/lp/de-gruyter/images-of-women-in-kenyan-oral-na>
- Wa Thiong'o, N. (1965). *The River Between*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Wa Thiong'o, N. (1982). *Devil on the Cross*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Wa Thiong'o, N. (1997) *Petals of Blood*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Welch, P. (2001). Strands of Feminist Theory. Retrieved April 24, 2011 from [URL: <http://pers>]
- Welleck, R., and Warren, A. (1942). *Theory of Literature*. London: Cox and Wayman.
- Woolf, V. (1991). *A Room of One's Own*. London: Random House UK Ltd.
- World Bank. (2007). *Gender and Economic Growth in Kenya: Unleashing the Power of Women*. Washington: World Bank publication.

**INTERVIEWS**

Arigi, J. Interviewed on 21/01/2011 at Tom Mboya Labour College, Kisumu.

Barasa, P. Interviewed on 21/01/2011 at Tom Mboya Labour College, Kisumu.

Kasigwa, B. Interviewed on 20/01/2011 at Tom Mboya Labour College, Kisumu.

Odhiambo, C.J. Interviewed on 19/01/2011 at Tom Mboya Labour College,  
Kisumu.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I: Narrative Texts

#### (i) MAKEMBWA THE CARPENTER.

Written by Kyalo Mutinda

{Performed by Kari-Mwailu Primary School at the Eastern Province Drama Festival, 2005.}

Hello! Before we tell you anything, kindly receive greetings from the land of Kakumba, along the banks of river Mamba. In that land, when they greet, they say “*weka wiper!*”(Switch on the windscreen wipers.) So in Kakumba village a great baby boy was born, and his name was Makembwa. Makembwa was an original baby who took exactly nine months from germination to harvesting in his mother’s womb. He was not like these miracle things people keep talking about nowadays.

He grew quite fast; in fact nobody noticed how Makembwa moved from year one to two and class one, two, and three. Makembwa’s growth was so fast that people said, “*alipitia katikati yao na hawakumuona.*”(He passed in their midst, but they did not see him.)

Makembwa was the darling of the village. When songs were sung, they were sung for him. When prayers were prayed, it was all for him. When parties were

organized, they were organized for him; in fact Makembwa was the wonder boy of Kakumba village.

He went through Kakumba Primary School, Kakumba Secondary School and Kakumba University, where he graduated with a degree in carpentry, disaster management and damage control. Kakumba village was lucky to have Makembwa.

In this village farming was the main activity. People grew sugarcane, maize, beans, tomatoes, avocados, water melons and even guavas.

But one big problem in Kakumba village was that wild animals and other pests always destroyed the crops planted by the farmers. So there was hue and cry from the village. For many seasons farmers planted and never harvested. A cloud of hunger covered Kakumba village and a solution had to be found. This was a disaster and like all other disasters, it had to be managed. This is where Makembwa came in handy.

Makembwa was an expert in trap making. All the neighbouring villages depended on him. He made traps that could capture any animal that came to destroy the crops. Talk of a squirrel; there was a trap for it; talk of an ostrich, there was a trap for it. Talk of an elephant, a zebra, a dik dik, a hippopotamus whatever, and Makembwa had a solution for all these animal species.

For five good harvesting seasons, Makembwa managed to control the disaster of animals destroying crops in Kakumba village. From the North, to the South, East

and West, the whole village sang songs in praise of Makembwa and his magic traps.

As the celebrations hit the high points and villagers expressed their confidence and loyalty to Makembwa, something strange happened in the village. A strange problem struck, affecting only the young ones of animals. These young ones of animals started disappearing. The kids, calves, chicks, piglets and even puppies started disappearing. The young ones of all the animals which did not destroy crops went missing. There was an alarm. There was panic. When Makembwa was asked he said he was doing something about it. But soon, Makembwa, himself also disappeared.

“The young ones have disappeared, and Makembwa himself has also disappeared,” the villagers lamented madly as they went around, all looking for Makembwa.

As the search went on, information trickled in that Makembwa had changed the marking scheme of his disaster management programme. He had extended his area of operation and he had changed focus.

Makembwa the disaster manager had turned into a disaster master. His traps were no longer made to trap the wild animals destroying crops in Kakumba, but they were now attracting and trapping the young, helpless, voiceless, and innocent

angels of all animals. From the North Amina, Achieng and Wambui had been trapped and seriously injured.

From the South, Sara, Mueni and Naliaka could not be traced. From the East, Moraa, Aisha and Atieno were not spared. What happened in the West is not anything to mention in this story at all.

The whistles were blown, the drums were sounded, and the bells were rung. All the villagers gathered, and the search for Makembwa commenced. Up the hills, down the valleys, across the ridges, the desert and the forests, it was “Makembwa, Makembwa!” But he was nowhere.

Then as we crisscrossed the forest, we heard a cry of pain from a nearby Sunday school. We ran there. Makembwa had turned himself into a Sunday school teacher, tricked the innocent attendants and trapped them into agony and pain. We saw Makembwa; we ran after him. He dodged left, right and as usual, *alipitia katikati yetu na hatukumuona*. (He passed in our midst but we did not see him.)

We still ran after him. From a distance, we heard a cry of pain in another school. We ran there. Makembwa had turned himself into to a teacher. And consequently, class 2, 3, 4 and 5 pupils had been trapped and cannibalized by Makembwa. We saw him; he dodged right, left and disappeared in a flash! Again *akapitia katikati yetu na hatukumuona*. (He passed in our midst but we did not see him.)

We did not give up. The chase continued. We traced Makembwa to his own home, where he had set the trap and trapped his own three year old Amina. We blew the whistle, rang the bell, and wawawa! Makembwa, *alipitia katikati yetu na hatukumuona*. (He passed in our midst but we did not see him.) That is how and why we are here today.

We are looking for Makembwa. We have a list of accusations and tangible evidence. Makembwa must be here.

Honourable adjudicators: You are the only people we can trust there! Have you seen Makembwa?

## **(ii) THIWNI, THE GOLDEN CHAIN**

Written by Moses Odua Onyango

(Performed by Koyombe Primary School at the Nyanza Provincial Drama Festival, 2007)

In the village of Opuk, there were twin girls. One was called Apiyo and the other was called Adongo. Apiyo, the one who had been born first was rude, headstrong and vile while her sister was polite, nice and virtuous.

One day, their mother sent the two girls to the forest to fetch firewood. They started walking quickly to the forest. But after some distance, Apiyo started

playing. She started skipping her rope and shaking her body as she sang a happy song. She even plucked some wild fruits and sat down to eat them.

Adongo on the other hand went straight to her duty. She quickly fetched a big bundle of firewood by climbing the trees and breaking the dry sticks. As Adongo climbed these trees, she also dropped some leaves on the ground so that they could use them as signs on their way back home.

On top of being lazy, Apiyo was also jealous of her sister's good manners and had vowed to teach her a lesson. She therefore disorganized the leaves that Adongo was dropping and threw them around carelessly. After this she ran off and left Adongo to grope her way home.

As Adongo struggled to find her way out of the forest, an ogre was rearranging the leaves and redirecting them to his house. So poor Adongo with her very heavy load of firewood followed the leaves right up to the ogre's home. Of course the ogre was planning to eat her. When the ogre saw her, he started salivating and yawning.

But on seeing the heavy load of firewood, the ogre asked Adongo what had happened. She explained, with tears in her eyes. The Ogre changed his mind and did not eat Adongo. It asked her to perform some domestic chores. Adongo went about her duties very well while singing her song. She swept the house, washed the utensils and fed the baby ogres. She was just excellent in her work. The next

day the Ogre gave Adongo a present. It was a beautiful parcel which she was to open only after reaching home. The Ogre then directed her and showed her the way to her mother's home.

On opening the parcel at home in front of her parents and sister, she found a beautiful golden necklace, 'thiwni'. This necklace, thiwni was also magical and so it gave Adongo some magical and supernatural powers.

The following day Apiyo, burning with envy and anger, decided to go to the forest so that she could also get the beautiful present.

On reaching the Ogre's home, she answered the ogre's questions very rudely. She refused to perform the domestic duties which the ogre gave her. She was rude, proud and arrogant.

The next day, the Ogre gave Apiyo a parcel. With a frowning face, she grabbed the parcel from the ogre's hands and did not even say thank you. Then she excitedly ran home.

When she opened the parcel, a poisonous snake emerged and bit her on the legs. She wailed and collapsed on the ground. As people watched, Apiyo met her untimely death.

Luckily, her younger and good sister Adongo applied her good magical powers and she was brought back to life. From that day, Adongo changed and became a

good girl. Whenever she was asked to fetch water or clean the house, she did it willingly and happily.

**(iii) INGWE**

Written by Fredrick Shikuku Shitubi

(Performed by Chesamisi High School at the Western Province Drama Festival, 2009.)

Greetings! Greetings! For those who have been having anxious moments waiting for us the story tellers from the mountains, we are glad to disappoint your frustrations. We are here; with something in our bags to spice up your day.

Today we bring you the gripping story of Ingwe, picked from the sacred mountains right inside the caves of Nalumonya, where we meet the ghosts of Nalumonya and the great dog –Ingwe. For those of you who love dogs, this is your story. But for those who sweat and even wet pants when a dog is mentioned, then receive our apologies for a nightmare is here.

While everyone craved for change and its aftermath, the Abamonya took solace in the past and its impact. The people of Nalumonya suffered from one major malady- slowness. Even development had left them many kilometers behind on its forward march. They worshiped their customs, snakes and traditional chiefs. They rarely appreciated change. They solidly stood and supported their chiefs, led by

Inguche the hard skinned, the only man who had killed a dead elephant, and Itsefwe, the weaverbird, the one who had sweet talked a python out of its hole.

Nalumonya had very amazing caves; the caves of Nalumonya had hidden treasures that everyone wished to access. If you wanted wealth, you sneaked into the caves. If you wanted a new wife, you sneaked there. If you were like King Solomon who already had many wives, like some of us, and you only needed wisdom to manage your big stock of wives, you just vanished into the caves and re-emerged transformed with tones of wisdom. Many chiefs met and administered from the caves.

However, Nalumonya also had terrible ghosts. These ghosts could constantly keep people awake and scared. Whenever people planted their crops, the ghosts could sneak out of the caves; with their blazing eyes, fire spitting tongues and descend on these crops in one swoop. Then the fields would be bare, like the Sahara desert.

I remember my friend Nalukhombe the warthog with a lot of sadness. One day he had picked from the grasslands a girl anyone would die to own: Rosebellah. How does one now describe Rosebellah? Rosebellah had all the ingredients of a class "A" beauty. So when Nalukhombe had successfully confused her into becoming his wife, on that great day that we escorted him, the ghosts arrived. They looked at him. And he looked at them. Then one roared, "Your life or your wife? If you were the one, what would you have chosen? Nalukhombe the warthog was a wise man and he remembered that cowards live longer. When the ghosts left with

Nalukhombe's prized trophy – his new wife, and his trousers, he cried for many days. I also shed a tear in solidarity, for is it not spoken by those who came before us that a stranger visiting a home death has raided may as well shed a tear? I shed tears furiously too.

Ghosts disturbed the Abamonya for many days. The people rarely talked, save in whispers. The people were worried; even their chiefs, Inguche and Itsefwe were worried. Something had to be done to save the caves and Abamonya. The ghosts were even stealing people's cereals right from the granaries. Cows disappeared, chicken disappeared; even big mansions like Grand Runje's house where people went for celebrations and *busaa* disappeared just like wind! This could not go on. People like Nabalolwe claimed they had seen some of the ghosts, including Angolo Lisa and Kolopaka, but no one was sure.

So the chiefs summoned all of us, and we came. Nabing'eng'e, son of Mosquito came. Siembekho the eunuch was there. Nalukhombe the warthog was there. So was Makwata of the big stomach. I, Mulolabiosi the idler, alias Storyteller was also there. It was then decided we had to hire the services of a tough dog called Kass Kass to sniff the caves and smoke out the ghosts from our caves. Kass Kass was wildly welcomed by the drumbeats of Nalumonya. And like all good dogs, he arrived barking and looking as fierce as ever. A few people were picked to handle and lead it.

For a few days, people slept soundly in the knowledge that we were safe. Kass Kass would bark, and then it would smile at the moon and the stars. Kass Kass just perfected the art of dancing and sleeping. The ghosts would sneak in with a fraction of meat, feed Kass Kass, and the dog would true to its name just start dancing to kass kass music. The ghosts would then raid our farms.

The Abamonya were shocked! But just then, Chief Itsefwe the Weaverbird, the one who had sweet talked the python out of its hole identified another dog called Ingwe. Ingwe was a unique dog. It had good eyesight, sharp memory and an amazingly sharp sense of smell. It was tasked to spy on the ghosts and alert the Abamonya. Mulolabiosi the storyteller was tasked with the job of handling it. Ingwe was like some god. If any man visited a woman, it reported. When Rosalinda slapped her husband, one of the chiefs for sleeping out, it reported. Even when Mweneshialo stole Kazibure's wife and proceeded to have stolen moments with her, it reported. Ingwe did his job with the courage of a leopard. It gave the Abamonya first hand details of everything. And whoever had made a mistake would be punished. Now, even when the ghosts came out to loot the granary, it barked, recorded and reported everything! Ingwe would bark repeatedly and then scales would fall from Abamonya's eyes. We would see what we had not been seeing.

Then something unprecedented happened. One of the ghosts captured by Ingwe was one of our chiefs! With sacks full of our hard earned simsim! People were

shocked. Our chiefs called us to a *baraza* and all of us gathered. People were elated, including me the proud handler. Ingwe growled and mischievously wagged its tail in ecstasy. I managed a sheepish smile. We came pregnant with expectations for the accolades Ingwe would be given. The awards tumbled in like the Israeli missiles in Gaza. Then suddenly, the accusations flew: This dog sees too much. This dog barks too much. This dog sniffs and hears too much. Ingwe our great dog was declared a liar! A rumour monger! Malicious!

The next day Ingwe was quiet. So the people went all the way to the caves, and it was there! With a rope tied on its mouth! It could not bark or even growl. But whoever had tied it had forgotten to cover its eyes. It had seen everything; it told us the chiefs had told it, "You can see and watch but never should you bark."

The Abamonya's wrath turned to our chiefs. Their actions had been well documented in the dog's eyes. As we speak, several chiefs with more bags of our communal simsim have been arraigned in the people's courts. The ghosts were actually human engineered. Ingwe has just been untied and is as fierce as ever. It is saying: You may kill my body but not my spirit. It is asking, "Can a dog be a dog if it cannot be allowed to bark?"

There, good people, the story of Ingwe must take a commercial break.

**(iv) NANJEKHO**

Written by William Onacha

(Performed by St. Joseph's Boys High School at the Trans Nzoia District Drama Festival, 2006.)

Listen, people! Listen to the story that will be told in this great land every five years. This is the story of Nanjekho.

Ladies and gentlemen, Nanjekho was born in the famous village of Alubeka. This girl was born before calendars became popular, so, like all the good ladies in this room, her actual age will remain her secret weapon.

Now people, some people are born to teach. Others are born to preach. Some are born to be doctors; others are born to be sugarcane farmers. Some people are born to make life boring; others are born to doze off whenever they get the chance. But Nanjekho was born to confuse people. Nanjekho was born to confuse those who wear trousers. Of course these days everybody wears trousers, but we are talking about the original wearers of trousers; that is, men! Our beloved Nanjekho was born for only one reason: To confuse men.

The confusion began with the way she was growing up. For the first ten years, Nanjekho grew in only one direction: upwards. For the next five years, she grew only in one direction: frontwards. And for the next five years, which direction do

you think she was growing? Backwards! Nanjekho became the most beautiful girl in Alubeka. If you drew a line along her body you would end up with a perfect figure eight. Not like some figure zeros we see rolling around these days. The men of Alubeka were totally confused by Nanjekho's figure; every time she took a walk down the village footpaths, they would put their hands in their trouser-pockets and look at the sky.

Ladies and gentlemen, when Nanjekho walked, the men of Alubeka danced to her rhythm. When she laughed, the men clapped. When she talked, they nodded their heads like geckoes. One day she smiled at Kipkoech, the fellow fainted with joy and was rushed to hospital where he was treated for an overdose of happiness.

But every rose flower has thorns. Our beautiful Nanjekho had a problem. She would talk to men and laugh with them, but if any man suggested friendship or marriage, she would sneer at him and walk away. She became a professional at sneering and walking away. I was one of the first men to approach her. I armed myself with the best proverbs of Alubeka. I crammed most of the verses in "Song of Solomon." I borrowed some oversize shoes from Sang, a maroon blazer from Kosgey white trousers from Arap Tuwei and a black shirt from Cheruiyot. I whistled my way to the Alubeka River, where Nanjekho usually drew her water. As I waited, I invested in a few proverbs to steel myself. When she appeared, I collapsed with nervousness. But she smiled and helped me to my feet. Then I immediately forgot all the proverbs and all the verses from "Song of

Solomon.”We talked about the weather for a while, and then I dropped the bombshell. “Nanjekho, be my wife,” I begged. She sneered at me, drew her water and left without a word.

The elders of Alubeka became concerned, and whispers of worry moved from one elder to another. “Who will marry this one?” Some asked. “Such beauty to be wasted,” others moaned.

And as the villagers of Alubeka watched Nanjekho’s ways, behold Kip appeared. He was the richest and most handsome man in Alubeka. He arrived, loaded with luxury. He offered hundreds of cows in dowry, monthly allowances for Nanjekho’s parents and weekly supplies of food. He told Nanjekho that if she married him, she would live like a queen. People told Nanjekho, “Grab the chance!” but our beautiful Nanjekho just walked up to Kip, sneered at him and walked away. The people of Alubeka mourned the loss of this great suitor.

Next came Ole Mai. He was a natural leader. He promised love, peace and prosperity for Nanjekho. He promised to be a model husband; a 21<sup>st</sup> century husband. But Nanjekho unleashed her legendary sneer and walked away.

The elders held one crisis meeting after another. Nanjekho was forty years old, yet she remained unmarried. Her potential lay unutilized, unexploited.

But one day, behold a very tall and dark man descended from the mountain like Moses of the Bible. His name was Kirkongit. He was so handsome that when he

walked down the footpaths, our girls opened their mouths and forgot to close them. Some girls dropped their water pots. Kirkongit walked to Nanjekho and made one promise: "If you marry me, I will double your beauty in one hundred days." Nanjekho replaced her sneer with a smile of hope. She was disarmed. She threw herself at Kirkongit's feet and said, "I am yours from head to toe." And there was a great celebration as the two became a family.

But almost immediately, we heard terrible stories. Kirkongit was a wife beater. In his house, tears of pain and sorrow flowed endlessly. He beat Nanjekho daily. Nanjekho would get slaps for breakfast, kicks for lunch and strong lashes for dinner. Instead of making Nanjekho beautiful in one hundred days, he turned the girl into a mass of ugliness. Her mouth became twisted towards the left ear. Nanjekho mourned her fate. She limped her way to the elders. "Save me," she begged.

The elders shook their heads with bitterness, for in Alubeka, there was a rule that once dowry was paid for a girl, she could not run away from her husband until after five years. So Nanjekho limped back to her cruel husband. The elders could do nothing but wait for the end of five years. They remembered the story of the girl in the Alubeka folklore who had refused many good young men and ended up marrying an ogre.

And so the people of Alubeka continue to mourn the fate of their once beautiful Nanjekho. But there is some light at the end of the tunnel. After the end of five

years, they will withdraw their daughter from her chains. And there will be joy and celebration once again. Please join us as we look for a better husband for Nanjekho. And that is the story of Nanjekho.

#### (v) **NAPUKHULU**

Written by Jimmy Wanjala

(Performed by East African School of Media Studies at the Nairobi Province Colleges Drama Festival, 2008.)

Ladies and gentlemen, for the sake of sanity in this place, let me advise you: The images you are about to watch are highly disturbing hence recommended for the people above the age of retirement and below the age of one year! Anyway, I was in the East with my great grandfather Matumbufu and he told me to tell you one of the greatest stories of the times. And so, like a pregnant woman on a wheelbarrow being rushed to Pumwani, here is "*Napukhulu*": An East African School of Media Studies production.

In the Eastern part of the big continent of Africa, a beautiful child called Napukhulu was born. She was born when men were building only friendly things. She was born when there were environmental friendly bombs, such that when they exploded, instead of people being thrown away, they were brought together. And this was not a normal kind of a girl. She was born at 7.00 P.M and at 7.05 P.M, all her anterior and posterior parts were fully developed.

Napukhulu was a beautiful girl from birth. After eighteen years, she was eighteen years old. She looked more beautiful than ever. Her skin was like drinking chocolate, her smile made men have heart attacks. When she passed by you, her fragrance would hit you off the road like a Hummer vehicle. She was so beautiful that it became an issue in the village. Men started fighting seriously for her, until the villagers got involved.

They said, "Now, if anyone wants to marry Napukhulu, he must first prove that he is worth every bit of the girl. He must prove that he is strong enough to take care of Napukhulu."

So they called for a contest for men to prove how strong they were. We saw the wonders we had never seen ladies and gentlemen. Men tried all forms of things to impress this girl, and for many days the contest went on. But one day there came a man from the valleys of the rift. He had never been seen before anywhere else. His name was Sichinjili. He was so strong that if you saw him approaching from a distance you would think it was a triangle upside down. Immediately he arrived, the village elders gave him instant approval. And Sinchinjili sang a love song for Napukhulu.

He carried his newly wedded wife on his shoulder and went into the house and embarked immediately on his roles as a husband. Napukhulu and Sichinjili had the best time on earth. But there was one big problem. Sichinjili always left the house

very early in the morning and came back very late in the night. Because of this, Napukhulu was a very sad and lonely girl.

And so one day she asked her husband, “Why do you always leave me in the house alone from morning till evening?”

The husband replied, “Every day when I go out, I am going to bring you presents. Tomorrow when I go out I will bring you red roses.”

The following day, Napukhulu waited for her red rose flowers. Late in the night, Sichinjili arrived with his hands behind the back. Napukhulu was already blushing even before she saw the flowers. When Sichinjili extended his hand...ehhh! Ladies and gentlemen, he was not carrying red valentine rose flowers; they were leaves from a guava tree! Haiya yah yah! Immediately, Napukhulu started crying. She went to the village elders and told them everything. Even before she finished her story, the villagers were already evicting Sichinjili from the house. They were saying, “*Bwana* you don’t know how to take care of a woman!” Sichinjili was kicked out like a ball, and immediately, the villagers presented themselves for a ceremony to choose Napukhulu’s next husband.

After a while, the village elders announced officially, “May the contest begin.”

We saw men we had never seen before. Some of them walked for days to come to the contest. I particularly remember a Maasai man who was walking dangerously in a carnivore- infested national park. He walked amidst the lions and he could not

see any threat: All he saw was Napukhulu. That was when I passed him on my colonial car. I asked him, "Where are you going?"

He replied, "I am going to grab the girl."

The contest continued for days. And behold one day, there appeared a man from the mountains. His name was Kuloba. This man was so big that with every step he made, the ground trembled and smaller men scattered. Kuloba was so strong that his muscles looked like balloons on his arms. He was so powerful that he could wrestle a bear with one hand, while the other hand was busy caressing his wife. Immediately Napukhulu saw this man she fell in love. The elders gave him a big approval. When Kuloba turned his face and saw the beauty of Napukhulu, he was hypnotized, and automatically started singing a love song for the girl.

Ladies and gentlemen Napukuhulu and Kuloba had the best of time in the house. But all was not to be a bed of roses, the reason being that Napukhulu was now more beautiful than ever. Instead of growing old, she was growing younger and younger every day. Those who initially thought her skin was like drinking chocolate were very wrong. Her skin was now like Cadbury's drinking chocolate. Those who initially thought her fragrance could hit you off the road like a Hummer vehicle were very wrong. Now if she passed by you, you would think it was an environmental friendly bomb. Those who initially got heart attacks when they saw her smile had not seen anything yet. For now, they just died on the spot.

She was extremely beautiful. Despite the fact that she was married, men still chased her. She was so beautiful that even women got attracted to her. She was so beautiful that everybody abandoned what they were doing and started going in pursuit of Napukhulu. Those who were doctors left patients in I.C.U and started saying, "I see you Napukhulu!" Those who were thieves started stealing their way towards Napukhulu. Teachers abandoned students on the final day of their examination and went to examine Napukhulu. Even pastors left their flock in the middle of a prayer and went to search for the spirit of Napukhulu. Some of them went, "Napukhulu, I want to marry you in the name of the lord!"

And because of this, things went out of control. Men started fighting seriously. A man clobbered another one below the belt. A man gave his friend a serious blow, uprooting his teeth and confusing his dental formula, so that when he smiled, you would think he was crying. A man called Omondi from the lake side was eating fish. He just forced his brother Onyango to swallow the back bone of a fish without chewing it. Another man called Wafula, was eating chicken from a maize plantation. He just took a chicken leg and pierced his brother Wanjala. The man called Njoroge from the wetlands was cooking Mokimo. He just took the hot cooking stick and rubber stamped his brother Kamau with a slap. And he was not done with him; he told him, "My brother, I will *Sadam* you from a *Mungiki* point of view."

Ladies and gentlemen, there was chaos all over. There was fire everywhere. And a few reasonable villagers like us were reduced to singing a very sad song.

But anyway, that was not the end of the road. We immediately recollected ourselves and swore to stop this fight because Napukhulu was getting more injured emotionally than the way people were injuring themselves. And so ladies and gentlemen, please join us as we join Napukhulu in a campaign towards peaceful contests. She is growing beautiful by the day, and the contests may get even more fierce. For those who are in pursuit of Napukhulu, please whatever you do, whatever step you take towards Napukhulu, please do it in peace. Join us people, as we sing this song to launch our campaign.

#### **(vi) KASUNGI**

Written by Monica Kiraguri

(Performed by North Eastern Province Technical Training Institute at the North Eastern Province Drama Festival, 2004.)

The people of Mulinditi were a happy people. Mulinditiland had very wonderful people and even more wonderful scenery. In Mulinditi, it was known clearly that women were women and men were men. The men of Mulinditi were so lazy that they could not even yawn. What they were good at was the art of seduction and

wooing of brides to take them to their homes. This was done best during dancing parties. These men of Mulinditi, eh! They could even dare seduce a wounded lioness if given the chance.

The women of Mulinditi were very beautiful and very good at their dancing. If you ventured on the village pavilion, you would be fascinated by the girls doing their twilight dance. The song went like this:

*I still believe some day, you and me*

*Will find ourselves in love again.*

Now Mulinditiland was ruled by a very strong muscled leader known as Mzee Chief Tamaa. He had an immense chest and strong biceps. He was fairly handsome, but he had remained a bachelor all his years. So the time came for the chief to choose a bride from the best dancer in the land. All the girls registered for the exercise, for they all yearned to be associated with him. They were varied in complexion. Some had dimpled faces, others had long jaws. Some had big eyes so full of love that they could even pierce the heart of a stone. Others had squinty and shy eyes. Oh! All assortments of girls paraded themselves before the chief.

People of all kinds came to witness the choice of the first lady of the land. The well wishers, the donors, friends, enemies; all presented themselves at the village pavilion. And now the time came, oh yes, the time came for the chief to choose the first lady of the land. The girls were allowed to dance their bodies on the

village pavilion; twisting here and there. Bending here and there. Smiling here and here, until chief Tamaa would be satisfied. And do you know who the adjudicator of the dance was? Of course it was Chief Tamaa himself. He did not bother to declare the runners up.

As the music sounded, there was one beautiful girl who had stolen Chief Tamaa's heart. Her dress glittered merrily and her face shone with the radiance of her fairness. Her name was Kasungi. Oh yes! Kasungi the dancer! This girl fascinated chief Tamaa so much that his mouth remained agape. The crowd cheered as the chief stood to identify the queen of the dance. He walked through the crowd. The other girls froze as they watched the chief talking to his bride for the first time.

"You know you are the most beautiful thing on earth," he said.

"I am flattered," she replied.

"Will you bear me an heir for my seat and wealth?" The chief continued.

"If you make me," Kasungi said.

The chief was overwhelmed by this infatuation. The crowd cheered as they watched chief Tamaa walk with his wife for the first time. They sang and cheered more.

Kasungi was welcomed to Chief Tamaa's home with pomp and music. And as you may know, custom demanded that a few gymnastics were to be performed by the

bride and groom. As the chief was making himself ready for this ritualistic function, he noticed that Kasungi had begun to look sad.

“Why are you not making yourself ready? Chief Tamaa thundered.

So Kasungi feebly started to remove her regalia. First, she removed her wig, revealing a bald head. Then she removed her artificial breasts, two bulbs of cotton wool, and suddenly, her chest sank. Chief Tamaa quickly noticed that one of legs was crooked. He did not wait for any more shocking revelations. He zoomed off like lightening. He ran away and did not return to Kasungi. Kasungi ran after him, exposing her ugly geography to everybody, and people fled away from her.

It was a pity for Chief Tamaa who made a hasty decision without consultation. It was mourning time for Mulinditiland.

**APPENDIX II: Interview Dialogue.****(a) Interview with Professor Peter Barasa (Lecturer in English and Literature education at Moi University.)**

Date of interview: 21/01/2011.

Place of interview: Tom Mboya Labour College, Kisumu.

Question: Please state your full name.

Prof. Barasa: Peter Barasa.

Question: What roles have you played in the schools drama festival?

Prof. Barasa: I have been a script writer of award winning plays, adjudicator, and workshop resource person. For many years I was the drama secretary for Rift valley Province. I have also been a member of the national drama committee.

Question: How long have you adjudicated the schools and colleges drama festival?

Prof. Barasa: Twenty four years.

Question: In your view, how are female characters portrayed in the oral narrative text in the schools and colleges drama festival?

Prof. Barasa: They are objects of admiration by virtue of their beauty. Some narratives present females in idealistic terms as people who represent the virtues that society stands for. However, most of the texts depict females as vessels of evil and modern diseases. They are also shown as vessels of entrapment for men. A number of script writers have very little respect for women. The female characters portrayed as good are submissive while the assertive ones are intentionally portrayed as bad. In narratives with animal characters, there are hardly any women.

Question: Do you think there is need to change the way these female characters are portrayed?

Prof. Barasa: Yes. The contemporary narrative should help society to deconstruct the stereotypical views about females. We need to see heroines in these narratives, based on the role that women play in society. The oral narrative always has a moral; hence it stands a big chance of causing change by depicting a positive image of female characters. Women like Wangari Maathai have not been reflected in these narratives.

Question: What would be the best way of effecting this change?

Prof. Barasa: The narrative should reflect the positive effort females are making in society. The marking scheme needs to be revised so as to question the way the text treats female characters. The writers need to be taken through workshops on gender and good writing. There are few women script writers; perhaps if we had more, they would present female characters better.

**(b) Interview with Professor Christopher Odhiambo (Associate Professor of literature and intervention drama at Moi University.)**

Date of interview: 19/01/2011.

Place of interview: Tom Mboya Labour College, Kisumu.

Question: Please state your full name.

Prof. Odhiambo: C.J Odhiambo.

Question: What roles have you played in the schools drama festival?

Prof. Odhiambo: I started as an actor when in high school. Later, I became a director, adjudicator and facilitator of drama workshops.

Question: How long have you adjudicated the schools and colleges drama festival?

Prof. Odhiambo: Ten years.

Question: In your view, how are female characters portrayed in the oral narrative text in the schools and colleges drama festival?

Prof. Odhiambo: As objects to be gazed at by men. Often they are depicted as agents of evil and their bodies are sites for playing out the effect of HIV/AIDS and conflicts. They are symbols rather than characters with their own identity.

Question: Do you think there is need to change the way these female characters are portrayed?

Prof. Odhiambo: Well, I doubt whether some of these creators of the contemporary narrative are even aware that they are depicting female characters negatively.

Question: What would be the best way of effecting this change?

Prof. Odhiambo: They just need to be made aware of the need for gender sensitivity in the way they imagine female characters depicting a positive image of female characters.

**(c) Interview with Barnabas Kasigwa (Teacher of English and drama trainer at Moi High School, Kabarak.)**

Date of interview: 20/01/2011.

Place of interview: Tom Mboya Labour College, Kisumu.

Question: Please state your full name.

Kasigwa: I am Barnabas Kasigwa.

Question: What roles have you played in the schools drama festival?

Kasigwa: National assistant secretary, Eastern Province secretary, Rift valley province secretary, workshop facilitator, adjudicator author of award winning plays since 1984. .

Question: How long have you adjudicated the schools and colleges drama festival?

Kasigwa: Twenty seven years.

Question: In your view, how are female characters portrayed in the oral narrative text in the schools and colleges drama festival?

Kasigwa: Female characters are obviously underdogs. They are battered and looked down upon. They are blamed for spreading AIDS. The girls are maids who are overworked, raped and brutalized. However, we need to

note that there is some effort to protect the girl child, so some writers are sensitive to gender issues. But I don't recall any narrative in the festival that celebrates the female character.

Question: Do you think there is need to change the way these female characters are portrayed?

Kasigwa: Of course yes. Change must come so that we reverse the presentation of the female characters as caricatures, hence trivializing the contemporary narrative. The narrative should present female characters with dignity, as pillars of society who carry the burden of imparting values and morals. The role of the woman should be celebrated.

Question: What would be the best way of effecting this change?

Kasigwa: Workshops can be done to sensitize script writers. These writers need to also read and research so that they understand the theoretical dynamics of oral narration. The writers should use language that is free of vulgarity and sexist innuendo. The concept of "mother is gold" needs to be emphasized in the contemporary narrative.

**(d) Interview with Joyce Arigi (Teacher of English and drama trainer at Ribe Boys High School, Mombasa.)**

Date of interview: 21/01/2011.

Place of interview: Tom Mboya Labour College, Kisumu.

Question: Please state your full name.

Arigi: Arigi Joyce.

Question: What roles have you played in the schools drama festival?

Arigi: I have been a performer, director, dance choreographer, workshop facilitator and an adjudicator of the festival competitions.

Question: How long have you adjudicated the schools and colleges drama festival?

Arigi: Six years.

Question: In your view, how are female characters portrayed in the oral narrative text in the schools and colleges drama festival?

Arigi: They are presented to us as sex objects. In most narratives I have heard female characters being described in a manner that suggests that their work is to entertain men, especially with their physique.

Question: Do you think there is need to change the way these female characters are portrayed?

Arigi: There is need to change the negative image of the female characters.

Question: What would be the best way of effecting this change?

Arigi: The narrative writers need to start creating more female characters as main characters in their stories.

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY