

**ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLISM AND TRANSIENCE IN THE
ORAL LITERATURE OF ABAGUSII OF WESTERN KENYA**

BY

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and, to the best of my knowledge, has not been presented for a degree in another university.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work, and all my academic pursuits, to my dutiful parents; *Omogambi* Boniface Orina Ombori and *Omong'ina* Anastancia Kenyansa Masese, to my teachers and researchers who have contributed to the preservation of African oral heritage.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Oral: that which pertains to the mouth, for instance oral communication.

Literature: it is an art form that relies on imagination and whose media can either be performance, live word of mouth or print.

Context: the context of an idea or event is the general situation that relates to it, and which helps it to be understood

Transient: the quality of passing and disappearing with time. Something that is temporary, brief or fleeting.

Transience: the name for being transient and the likelihood of changing.

Oral poetry: a composition in verse or language exhibiting conscious attention to patterns

Song: a composition in verse or language exhibiting conscious attention to patterns, mostly performed by singing.

Lore: a collection of a people's total culture: stories, songs, history, beliefs, and wise sayings and proverbs.

Narrative: a story delivered by narration.

Proverb: a popular string of words with a popular figurative meaning.

Performer: a person who acts, sings, or does other entertainment in front of audiences.

Respondent: a person who replies to something such as a survey or set of questions.

Symbols: these are signs, words, things and images taken to represent something else.

Symbolism: refers to the act of assigning signs, words, things and images representational roles and meanings.

Worldview: this is the way a people see and understand their world, especially regarding issues such as politics, philosophy, religion, etc.

Signifying: refers to ways of encoding messages with meanings. It involves, in most cases, an element of indirection. This kind of signifying might best be viewed as an alternative message form, selected for its artistic merit, and may occur embedded in variety of discourse.

Popular Art: any genre of art that has a wide appeal amongst the general public of a society dominated by urban culture and advanced technology, especially music with less complexity than classical music.

Artistic Relevance: this is the connection between the literary text and the social experience of the audience.

Literary Representations: same as literary symbols.

Literary Motif: a recurring or dominant element in a literary work, such as a symbol or theme.

Gusii: the region originally occupied by the Abagusii people and anything that originates from there.

Gusiiland: the region occupied by the Abagusii and its boundaries; the nation of Abagusii.

Kisii: refers to both the entire region occupied by the Abagusii as well as well the smaller central region of administration that is Kisii County. Kisii can also refer to Ekegusii.

Ekegusii: the native language spoken by the native occupants of Kisii or Gusiiland. It is also known as Kisii.

Abagusii: these are the native occupants of Kisii or Gusiiland.

ABSTRACT

It is frequently argued that the oral artist has no control over his material, and, therefore, no raw material to work on since everything is handed down to him/her. Much as the argument may not be dismissed off-hand, we aim to argue that both the language and the content of oral texts are audience and context specific, thus giving the artist some degree of control over and some room to decide—consciously or otherwise—what to say to and do for their audiences. We are further, disputing charges that either disassociate mainstream linguistic devices from modern oral literature, or, worse still, limit stylistic devices to racial or ethnic specificities instead of treating them as part of universal literary parallels. It is therefore important to call into question the meeting point between symbolism and the contexts of performance. The questions we are asking include: What is the nature and role of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii? Is the use of symbols static or transient? Does transience identify a thread that runs through earlier representations into the contemporary? What is constant and what are the variables? Furthermore, the study is comparative in nature and employs the tenets of the theories of semiotics, phenomenology, hermeneutics and feminism to show that symbolism is prominently present both in the traditional oral literature of Abagusii, and in the community's modern oral forms, and that while the indigenous forms reflected the traditional order that was based on the stringent hierarchical order that set out strict gender roles, and which was reinforced by a moral order that distinguished good from evil, the contemporary oral literature is influenced by such contemporary influences as Christianity, urbanisation resulting in popular tendencies and more uninhibited lifestyles. Amid the change, however, the old forms remain in the background as some form of cultural/artistic legacy. The study should then lead to further questions on the effect on globalisation as well as new systems of governance on African oral literature.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly held that the fundamental nature of a literary text is to say as much as possible as briefly as possible with utmost effect (Fadaee, Elaheh. 2011). In consequence, the ambiguity that emanates from figurative expression becomes an important source of multiple meanings and aesthetics in a work of art—whether oral or in print. Despite major shifts in social realities and the emergence of modern literary traditions, oral literature among the Abagusii forms a very important part of the community's literary rainbow, thanks to the ingenuity in the oral artists' use of language.

The Gusii oral artists continue to employ the word of mouth to comment, as much as possible and as aesthetically as possible, on various fashionable feelings, values and ideologies within the social and cultural purview of the community at various points in the people's history. Symbols, by virtue of their figurativeness and beauty of expression are a preferred vehicle for conveying the said messages. The artists are constantly churning out symbols to capture both traditional and the emerging issues. In studying the nature and role of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii, therefore, we will be able to account for both the resilience and dynamism that the genre has demonstrated. Secondly, we should also be able to understand and interpret both the social and cultural experiences of the Abagusii as well as the various value systems/codes within which their literary representations may be interpreted and understood.

The use of the terms "traditional" and "modern" in the study of oral literature is widely documented. Owing to the demarcation, there have indeed emerged two dominant trends of studying oral literature: on the one hand, is the traditional school which treats oral literature

as never changing and as unresponsive to the social and cultural dynamics. On the other hand, there is the modernist approach whose main preoccupation is the various aspects of oral literature relating to rapidly changing social milieus. Much as the two schools may be one of the more eminent impetuses to research focused on transience in oral literature, it is unclear whether there is any interface between them. There seems to be, as Ruth Finnegan (1970) observes, an unnecessary disparity between the two approaches. She says: There is a tendency to think of two distinct and incompatible types of society “traditional” and “modern” and to assume that the individual must pass from one to the other by some sort of revolutionary leaps.” We concur that change in society is ever gradual, and that it is probable to come across old features in the new things. Our aim in the present study, therefore, is to use symbolism as a basis for demonstrating that oral literature is not only resilient but also sensitive to emerging realities.

Luke Eyor (2011), while investigating the relevance of ethnic oral poetry in contemporary Nigeria, in *Indigenous Oral Poetry as a Tool for National Unity*, cites Ime Ikiddeh (2005), in *Historic Essays on African Literature, Language and Culture*, who argues that “literature, particularly of the oral mould, is a social product that has its roots in a defined cultural context”. Eyor explains this to mean that “oral literature of a people is intricately tied to the social, cultural and political aspirations and goals of the people at given points in time...” (1). Eyor also makes reference to the views of Liz Gunner (2007), in *Africa and Orality*, who asserts:

Orality needs to be seen in the African context as the means by which societies of varying complexity regulated themselves, organized their present and their pasts, made formal spaces for philosophical reflections, pronounced on power, questioned and in some cases contested power, and generally paid homage to

“the word”, language, as the means by which humanity was made and constantly refashioned. (67)

Without doubt then, a study of oral literature that considers the context is likely to be more resourceful than the one that only looks to the past, and seeks to archive oral genres—be they traditional or modern. The disconnection between “the old” and “the new” is, indeed, wasteful. In the present study, we seek to synchronize the role of the two social and historical epochs that underlie the oral literature of Abagusii guided by the following core questions:

1. What is the relationship between the past and present use of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii?
2. Is the relationship a dialogue of epochs or simply plagued by disparities, inconsistencies and discontinuities?

Statement of the Problem

The study sought to examine the relationship between context and the oral artist’s use of symbols, on the one hand, and the audience’s response/interpretation on the other. The main purpose of the study was to use language—the most essential element in literary art—to reveal both resilience and transience in the verbal arts of Abagusii. We aimed at establishing the interplay between old contexts and emerging ones in the oral artist’s use of symbols and also examine how traditional texts are being performed and understood at this point in time, in a process of decontextualisation and recontextualisation. Through a detailed comparative examination of three closely related and more common genres of the oral literature of Abagusii: proverbs, narratives and songs, we also sought to investigate whether the use of symbolism across sub-genres is inspired in the same manner, even if responding to unique

realities. We would then be able to show the link between the social context and symbolism as well as the new trends in the use of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

1. Examine the role of social context in both the deployment and the appreciation of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii.
2. Determine the interplay between past and successive contexts in the use of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii.
3. Explore how probable shifts in ideology and interpersonal relationships have impacted on symbolism in the oral literature of Abagusii.
4. Establish the emerging trends in the use of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii.

Justification of the Study

There had not been sufficient investigation on the stylistic patterns and trends in oral literature, as a whole and in Gusii oral literature in particular. Even more, the relationship between artistic language and a dynamic social milieu was largely unappreciated and unexplored. Studies on the oral literature of Abagusii were yet to tackle the link between literary devices in oral literature and specific social and cultural realities. Most available studies on the role of context in oral literature had tended to concentrate on general features relating to either traditional or modern aspects of oral literature as opposed to examining both phenomena in tandem and within a comparative framework. The result was a knowledge gap on the relationship between context and style, generally, and the connection between the old and the contemporary contexts in terms of language use in oral literature and its transience. Rather than focus on isolated characteristics of either modern or traditional oral literature,

there was also need to look into artistic representations as emanating from specific social realities. We could then begin to understand how social realities influenced both content and literary language in oral literature and, by extension, the response/interpretation by various audiences. The study could therefore contribute to a rich literary framework to be used as a yardstick in appreciating the transient nature of oral literature along with other social aspects. Above all, the study should demonstrate that oral literature yields to contemporary stylistic studies away from the traditional “salvage” approach.

Literature Review

As above indicated, our interest lay in interrogating the factors that influenced the conception, deployment and interpretation of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii, as a way of accounting for and appreciating the resilience and transience of the community’s verbal art. In a way, therefore, the study was stylistic in nature. In this review therefore, we first assess the extent to which style has been made a subject of interrogation in the oral literature of Abagusii. Secondly, we review studies that have interrogated the role of context in oral literature before finally examining those that have dealt with the theoretical aspects of style and context in oral literature.

Studies on the Oral Literature of Abagusii

Studies on the oral literature of the Abagusii are generally few and far apart. The pioneering studies have mainly been undertaken, not within literary, but historical and anthropological canons. A case in point is Monyenye Solomon (1977) who, in *The Indigenous Education of the Abagusii*, examines the historical contribution of folklore forms of Abagusii as creative didactic vehicles. His focus is on the educational process through which the traditional Omogusii went from the time he/she was born up to the time he was regarded as an adult who

can start his/her own life (Monyenye, 1977, iv). He argues that the traditional methods of education were, just like the modern ones, meant to prepare the child to fit into the accepted cultural patterns and the life that awaits him after reaching and successfully passing the adolescent stage. The socialisation tools, such as riddles and other art forms, were carefully suited to different age sets and gender, and while the period between six years and twelve was very important in childhood education—for it was the period when the true foundation for the future was laid—the adolescent education was the most important with their education being most deliberately planned and executed (Monyenye, 1977, 189). Monyenye's study is vital to the present one since it avows the connection between the traditional social values and the content of the oral genres. Besides, Monyenye's position concerning the pragmatic nature of the Gusii oral artist resonates well with our study, since we too have interest in the significance of the artist's symbols in drawing specific responses from the audience both in times gone and presently. Incidentally, we are also interested in establishing the various categories of symbols that may present in the oral literature of Abagusii. Our focus is, however, to hold current artistic representations against the background of and with reference to earlier ones with the aim of identifying both the correlation and the point of departure in the two patterns of representation.

Evans Nyamwaka (2008), in *Creative Arts and Cultural Dynamism: A Study of Music and Dance among the Abagusii of Kenya: 1904-2002*, has looked at thematic concerns and dance patterns in both the traditional and the contemporary musical compositions. He observes that the content and dance patterns in traditional and modern musical compositions, respectively, reflect the social realities of their time. Nyamwaka's study, though not linguistic in nature, is important to us because of the way it dwells on the dynamic nature of both the context and the oral compositions and performances of the Abagusii. Equally, Nyamwaka's interest in

dance patterns is akin to our interest in the changing performance techniques in the oral art forms among the Abagusii. Further, with his focal point being the historical development of music content, dance, and accompaniment in both traditional and contemporary music among Abagusii, Nyamwaka's study provides the present study with a crucial comparative model for mounting a literary examination of oral art forms among Abagusii. It is nevertheless true that the two studies above, being historical in their conception and outlook, are rightly least concerned with the literariness of the genres, besides not being sufficiently intensive in analysing forms to yield tangible models for studying literary trends in the oral literature of Abagusii. The present study, being purely literary, is well suited to provide tangible models for the study of literary techniques in oral literature.

A literary study on the oral literature of Abagusii comes from Atunga Atuti O.J. (1996) in his MA project, *Gusii Folktales: Structure and Aesthetics*, where he synthesises Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Oral Narrative* and then applies it to six Gusii oral narratives using the 31 functions. His interest is in subjecting the plot of the Gusii oral narratives to a universally accepted and tested tool of analysis. He then concludes that the structure of the Gusii narratives can be sufficiently analysed using Propp's linear structural formula. By so concluding, Atuti proves to us that a structural analysis of oral texts is actually possible and worthwhile. Nevertheless, one of the most important differences between Atuti's approach—as derived from Propp's syntagmatic analytical approach—and ours is his lack of concern for social and cultural context. He is interested in formalistic similarities in the Gusii oral narratives, and hence ends up with a study firmly situated within a static as opposed to a dynamic analytic framework the present study envisages. Another difference is that whereas Atuti focuses exclusively on narratives, our structural analysis will extend to oral forms other than the folktale such as proverbs and songs.

Oral Literature and Context

Being a performed art, oral literature relies significantly on the situation. Oladele Caleb Orimoogunje (2011), in *The Social Contexts of Verbal Arts in Yoruba Indigenous Healthcare Practices*, says context “could be regarded as a phenomenon that describes how, when, where, to whom and by whom the verbal arts under question are rendered” (91). Indeed, this weighs on context as a key component in both the creation process and the actual delivery of oral genres. Suffice to say then that the oral artist’s view of their context, in relation to past ones, would, indeed, impact on the various components of the oral artist’s performance, key among them language use. Literature is synonymous with heightened language, sometimes with linguistic elements that have gained repeated, even conventional use. It would, however, be worthwhile to establish whether there is anything the oral artist does to ensure past conceptions make sense within contemporary contexts or whether, in the absence of such a metamorphosis, old conceptions are discarded for new ones.

The role of context in oral literature performance cannot, therefore, be overemphasised. The relevance and survival of the oral artist seems to hinge on how the artist navigates an increasingly dynamic environment. There exist studies that uphold the argument that oral literature that is appreciated in isolation from its social context is indeed cut off from its aesthetic life cord. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira (1992), in *The Oral Artist and the Gender Dimension*, for instance, demonstrates through a study of narrative renditions by two artists—Warukenya and Kabebe—that style and form in oral narratives emanate from the artist’s knowledge of his/her social context as well as understanding of the audience’s aesthetic needs. Hers is, fundamentally, a two-pronged study propelled by the interest in both the artist’s style and its impact on the audience, aesthetically. Significantly, Wanjiku draws attention to the adaptive nature of oral literature: “Narratives are capable of impromptu

extension, variation, embroidery, interpretation of events, flexibility and adaptability. We believe there is much more to this” (Kabira, 1992, 64). Kabira’s views form a worthy impetus to the present study which investigates the role of the social context in both the conception and deployment of linguistic symbols in at least three genres from the oral literature of the Abagusii—proverbs, narratives and oral poetry. To gain a significant understanding of the said adaptive nature of verbal arts, however, we contrasted long-established linguistic forms in the oral literature of Abagusii with contemporary ones.

Robo Sekoni (1994), in *Current Trends in the Use of Trickster Tale Discourse*, takes a different path from Wanjiku’s when he interrogates the adoption of the traditional trickster motif in contemporary Nigerian written Literature. Sekoni examines the use of the trickster motif in contemporary “Tele-fiction” to conclude that some modern Nigerian writers, especially those among the Yoruba, have, to varying degrees, employed the traditional trickster motif as a medium of both epistemic and aesthetic exchange between them and their audiences (Sekoni, 1994, 104). Writers cited by Sekoni include Wole Soyinka—The Trials of Brother Jero, A play of Giants and the Swamp Dwellers; Tom Aluko—Chief the Honourable Minister; Femi Osofisan—Red is the freedom Road; and Kole Omotiso—The Scales. Giving an illustration from one of Soyinka’s works, Sekoni notes: “In The Trials of Brother Jero, the author employs the motif of “tricksterism” as both dramatic promise and means of social message” (Sekoni, 1994, 121). Further, Sekoni observes:

In *contemporary urban tales*, the image of the trickster as an immoral and maladjusted character is given to hegemonic characters—politicians, business men and bureaucrats. The contemporary tales imbue socially well-endowed or

privileged characters with the insatiable and unscrupulous acquisitiveness often attributed to the trickster.... (Sekoni, 121)

Nonetheless, Sekoni, while acknowledging probable limitations of his study, has this to say concerning traditional and contemporary literary studies:

On the popular theme of the interaction between pre-colonial literature fictive strategies, represented largely by the tradition of oral literature and post-colonial literature, and predominantly by Afro-English writings and rural art in African languages.... This aspect of critical enterprise will be more systematized and more significant if such researches are preceded by attempts to identify the special aesthetic features of pre-colonial and non-westernized fictive forms. Such study of selected aspects of traditional aesthetic discourse will primarily assist in focusing debate or sociological poetics.... (Sekoni, 122)

The present study relates more to Sekoni's latter views rather than the former where he creates the impression that verbal art is of necessity a precursor to the written form. Much as we take cognisance of the possible interaction between oral and written forms of literature, we agree with Finnegan when she argues that "progress" in society does not reduce oral forms to mere survivals of an antique past or even impugn their pedigree in the face of written forms (Finnegan, 1970, 91). In other words, our interest is not to find traces of orature in contemporary written genres, but rather to use context and the technique of symbolism, as Sekoni does "tricksterism," as part of the agents and to show transience in the oral literature of Abagusii. The present study, mainly, rides on the view that interrogating the nature of

contemporary artistic trends could be a lot more productive if done in the backdrop of earlier experiences within a systematic comparative approach.

Peter Wasamba's *Nyatiti and Enanga Praise Poetry in East Africa: Perspectives and Insights*, embodies Sekoni's latter view of the possible interaction between pre-colonial fictive strategies and modern literature, but remarkably manages to keep them apart. He observes that the popular Nyatiti and Enanga praise poetry is as traditional as it is contemporary. The genre has not discarded traditional features, such as the use of traditional instruments, yet there are apparent modifications in themes, form, audience and conventions governing performance (Wasamba, 2004, 1). He further observes:

Nyatiti performance in the past relied on the praise-poet and his lyre, but this has changed a lot. The genre has developed by expanding its thematic focus, back-up instruments, and the number of accompaniments. This change has been driven by the poets' desire to respond to the sophistication and polyrhythmic harmony that the complicated audience yearns for.... (Wasamba, 2)

Certainly, a complicated audience calls for a compliant artist who uses language innovatively, but neither in an unsophisticated manner nor unorthodoxly. In the current study, we intend to cross-examine linguistic symbols in the backdrop of a changing social and cultural milieu. It is our intention, therefore, to interrogate not only how specific philosophical contexts are a source of linguistic symbols, but also whether there exists any affinity between various symbols and the genres that bear them. Wasamba's interest in both the present and the past will greatly inform the present undertaking, since, like him, our bid to understand the present

is such that it impels us to have an adequate understanding of the past. Also in agreement with this position is Ruth Finnegan who has the following to say concerning studies based on the transient nature of oral literature:

To one who thinks African society has remained static, for, perhaps, thousands of years, recently induced changes must appear revolutionary and upsetting in the extreme.... As far as oral literature and communication are concerned, the changes over the last fifty or hundred years are not as radical as they may sometimes appear. It is true that these years have seen the imposition and withdrawal of colonial rule.... But the impact of all this in literature can be overemphasised.... Literacy, a paid job, even an urban setting need not necessarily involve repudiation of oral forms for descriptive or aesthetic communication. (Finnegan, 53)

Finnegan, here above, seems to counsel moderation in endeavours aimed at breaking with the past. We concur that it would be quite productive to tackle a present that is not removed from its past within a transient context. Finally, the unmistakable interest in the notion of context in oral literature only validates the immense and blatant impact context has on oral texts, and therefore the need to adopt a broader and more inclusive approach. Wasamba has pointed out modifications in the realms of thematic focus and performance; three major aspects form our focus: the factors that influence the conception, the deployment and the audience's response to various types of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii.

The above conglomeration of views on the place of context in oral literature go to underscore the complex connection there is between time, on the one hand, and oral literature aesthetics

on the other. Henni Ilomaki, in *Time in Finnish Folk Narratives*, argues that the concept of time is a fundamental aspect of any given culture and that it is possible to measure time by taking note of repeated events and representations (Ilomaki, 1996, 5).

Still on the aspect of time, Ruth Finnegan, under title *The Social, Linguistic, and Literally Background*, argues that studies covering this aspect have been rather in-exhaustive, if not skewed:

Unfortunately there are few if any African societies whose oral literature has been thoroughly studied and recorded even at one period of time, let alone at several periods. But with increasing interest in oral art it may be hoped that enough research will be undertaken to make it feasible, one day, to write detailed literary and intellectual histories of particular cultures. (Finnegan, 116)

It is in the background of the foregoing positions that we undertake to investigate factors that influence the conception and use of symbols in the oral literature of the Abagusii with a view to ascertain transience in oral literature. It is not clear yet whether previous and succeeding conceptions have a meeting point, given that scholars have mostly dealt with perceived “old” and “new” features separately. Below, Finnegan suggests ways of making a study such as ours, which is focused on the transient nature of oral literature, more comprehensive:

Far from being something completely mysterious or blindly subject to some Strange force of “tradition”, oral literature, in fact, bears the same kind of relation to its social background just as written literature. In each case, it is

necessary to study in detail the variations bound up with differing cultures or historical periods, and to see the significance of these for the full appreciation of their related literary forms. In neither case are these studies necessarily easy. But it is a disservice to the analysis of comparative literature to suggest that questions about African oral literature are either totally simple (answered merely by some such term as “tribal mentality” or “tradition”) or so unfamiliar and mysterious that the normal problems in the sociology of literature cannot be pursued. (Finnegan, 55)

Literary Devices in Oral Literature

There exist studies that have interrogated the role of literary techniques in African oral literature. Asenath Bole Odaga, in *Education Values of Sigendini Luo: The Kenya Luo narratives*, posits that the artist’s creativity in the use of language is crucial in appreciating the didactic value that is pertinent in Luo oral narratives. Indeed, the word of mouth and performance makes or breaks the oral artist (Odaga, 1981, 31). Additionally, Bole establishes a link between the traditional values and the oral artist’s style. Nevertheless, a few questions still arise concerning the nature of style in oral literature: Does, for instance, style ever change in both quality and use? If yes, what inspires the change, and can the variations be accounted for? These questions would be sufficiently addressed with an interrogation of aspects that have weighed on symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii at various points of the community’s social and cultural transitions.

Maxamed Daahir, in *Rural Imagery in Contemporary Somali Urban Poetry: a Debilitating Carryover in Transitional Verbal Art*, while exploring the divide between the old and the contemporary in oral literature, asserts that the modernization of verbal art is normal and

inevitable. Hence, any attempt to use traditional images conflicts with the aesthetic tastes of young urban audiences. Such images, he argues, were useful only in the context of traditional/rural Somali poetry but not relevant to modern poetry associated with the contemporary urban environment, both in terms of theme and audience (Daahir, 2000, 1). Daahir laments:

Many Somali poets or composers of modern songs must have suffered such a communication breakdown in their unsuccessful attempts to impress young town dwellers by using the wrong tools ... “high standard” language and highly stylized technique from the past such as symbolism, allusion and rural imagery. (Daahir, 3)

One of the concerns Daahir’s position is likely to provoke may have to do with the impact of an over-simplified language on both artistic quality and the audience’s aesthetic appeal. Another is whether artistic language ever fails to be of “high standard” or embellished—the context notwithstanding—or, still, whether the past conceptions are of no consequence to the current ones. Daahir's study is, nonetheless, of interest to us in the manner it affirms the dynamic nature of folklore amid changing realities. We hope that by paying equal attention to both the old and the new, it will be possible to ascertain the place of high-minded (literary) language in contemporary oral art. Daahir himself supports such approach saying:

Skilful and conscious use of certain elements of tradition, legendary characters in this case, could be useful in terms of linking the past and the present, especially in the case of the society experiencing the transition from a traditional to a modern way of life. (2000, 4)

Precisely, the present study investigates the use of oral symbols in both the traditional and contemporary contexts of the community with the aim of determining a possible link between the present and the past, and as a means to understanding and even predicting future trends.

Njogu Waita, in his MA thesis, *The Significance of Literary Devices in Ndia Oral Narratives*, has pointed out a gap in the study of stylistic devices in oral literature. He recommends:

There is need to investigate how far social change has affected technique in oral literature. This way we may be able to learn whether the literary devices change and develop with society. We will then be able to know the place and future of oral narratives. (Waita, 147)

In many ways, Waita's proposal echoes the character and intent of the current study. Specifically, however, our interest is mainly motivated by the need to establish whether earlier worldviews meet the subsequent ones in the oral artist's symbolic expressions and portrayals. Our broad based study that is both intra and extra-generic, and which focuses on one major literary feature—symbolism—is likely to be richly productive and illustrative of these aspects of oral performance.

Aleksandr V. Gura, in *Coitus in the Symbolic Language of Slavic Culture*, has specifically dealt with symbolism in oral literature. He views symbolism as particularly handy when referring to taboo topics such as sex. Gura further indicates that symbols of sex in popular culture are numerous and diverse. He says: “Usually coitus is referred to with euphemisms and other substitutes that can be both neutral and expressive, or even humorous. He gives the images of a “sting” or a “bite” as the more popular symbols of sex. Others include a wolf

biting or gnawing its game with a suggestive erotic meaning or the one of a hare eating cabbage where the hare symbolizes the male and the cabbage female genitalia (Gura, 2005, 136).Gura then sums up the significance of symbolism thus:

We can understand the comic effect only if we reveal the hidden symbolic meaning of the text: a foreigner is going to have sexual intercourse with a woman (goes to buy cabbage, a common female sexual symbol in folklore) and exactly at this moment he himself becomes the object of sexual violence (a fly bites or flies into his rear). (Gura, 137)

It is in the background of such views that we consider it self-defeating to categorically consider the contemporary audience ill equipped to decipher elevated artistic language, since it is also true that no listener is equipped to appreciate an innuendo whether simple or complex; contemporary or old-fashioned. In spite of the fact that the oral artist suits his language to his audience, it may be mistaken to assume he avoids indirect language because the contemporary audience is not as sophisticated as the traditional one, linguistically speaking. In the current study, therefore, we not only aim at exposing the symbolic expressions in specific genres in the oral literature of the Abagusii, but also identifying their significance and relevance within their context of creation and use as a way of interrogating transience in the oral literature of Abagusii, in particular and oral literature in general.

It is indeed evident from the foregoing review that language and transience have begun to capture the attention of modern oral literature scholars. The prospects of capturing and explaining emerging trends should therefore be reasonably appealing. Furthermore, such studies would be even more resourceful if conducted within a comparative framework taking

into consideration both preceding and successive contexts that have influenced the oral artist's use of language. Glenn W. Butler, in *The Challenger, the Winner, and the Lasting Legacy*, quotes T. S. Eliot, in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, on the nature of literary criticism and context: Any poet must prepare himself to be judged against the great works of the past and that the extent to which a new work conforms to the old when they are measured against each other is one test of the new work's value (Butler, 2006, 3). Indeed, the true worth and significance of what is expressed today could be best appreciated when held up to similar successful expressions both in the present and the past.

Theoretical Framework

Three main theoretical strands guided us through this study: Semiotics, hermeneutics and phenomenology. *The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1987)* defines semiotics as a “study of patterned human communication behaviour including auditory and facial expression, body talk, touch, signs and symbolics. In another definition, Daniel Chandler (1995), in *Semiotics for Beginners*, traces the term 'Semiosis', to Charles Sanders Peirce, and Eco, his follower, who used it to designate the process by which a culture produces signs and/or attributes meaning to signs “a study of signs generally; their use in language and reasoning, and their relationship to the world, to the agents who use them, and to each other” (Chandler, 2005, 11). Simply put, therefore, semiotics deals with the production and processing of meaning within a specific social context. Chandler further captures the significance of semiotics thus:

Semiotics is important because it can help us not to take 'reality' for granted as something having a purely objective existence which is independent of human interpretation. It teaches us that reality is a system of signs.... It can help us to

realize that information or meaning is not 'contained' in the world or in books, computers or audio-visual media. Meaning is not 'transmitted' to us - we actively create it according to a complex interplay of codes or conventions of which we are normally unaware. (2005, 36)

The above argument and definitions are particularly relevant in verbal arts where meaning is transmitted through action and linguistic portrayals that resonate with the world the artist is depicting. Indeed, the audience's response is, to a larger extent, dependent on their ability to decipher and visualise the world the artist has painted for them.

Additionally, semiotics is intricately related to linguist Ferdinand de-Saussure's work in linguistics where he calls it 'a general science of signs' arguing that language is composed of signs that are arbitrary to conventionally assigned meaning that underlies actual speech acts. According to de-Saussure, (quoted in Jonathan Culler *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*, 1975) "linguistics, though designed to study the system of rules underlying speech, will be by its very nature compel the analyst to attend to the conventional basis of the phenomena he is studying, hence semiotics.... Signs do not just convey meanings, but constitute a medium in which meanings are constructed" (Culler, 1975, 29). The science, according to the Sausserian tradition, that "studies the life of signs within a society is semiotics or semiology". (Hawkes, 1977, 123, quoted in Mahfouz A. Adedimeji's *Semiotics: The Science of Signs*, 1) Adedimeji further quotes (Saussure, 1983, 16—17) where the acclaimed father of modern linguistics considers linguistics a branch of semiology:

Linguistics is only one branch of this general science. The laws which semiology will discover will be applied to linguistics. As far as we are

concerned the linguistic problem is first and foremost semiological... if one wishes to discover the real nature of language systems, one must first consider what they have in common with all the other systems of the same kind.... By considering rites, customs, etc. as signs, it will be possible, we believe, to see them in a new perspective. (Adedimeji, 1)

With arguments such as above, we could, indeed, be justified to view a work of art as a linguistic/performed text whose full appreciation is dependent on understanding the underlying structure which constitutes the social and cultural context. We could also have a basis to consider ritualistic artefacts as communicating important information that may be understood upon examining the context and circumstances within which the artefacts were expected to make sense and to be adequately aesthetic.

Besides Ferdinand de Saussure, another prominent theorist within modern semiotics was Roland Barthes. In *United Colors of Benetton*, Frostholm P. and Andersen T. quote (Barthes, 1967, 9) as having declared: "Semiology aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and the complex associations of all these... constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification." Barthes and Saussure are said to have agreed on the first order of signification: the signifier (denotation), but Barthes described the relationship between the signifier (denotation) and the signified (connotation) within a sign, as being much more complex than Saussure did. The former argued that meaning was not fixed, hence, that different meanings and understandings can be constructed depending on who the interpreter is (Frostholm and Anderson, 2011, 14). In our view, this kind of argument gave leeway to the interpreter to consider other meanings that may be emanating from changed contexts, as well as operate from contexts that are not his

own. This caters for the notion of transience in both context and meaning. Barthes is, however, said to have later modified his view on denotation and connotation with his argument that “denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations, herein indicating that no matter what the interpreter sees, or hears, first, the last connotation (the meaning) will be the denotation (the form) (Frostholm and Anderson, 2011, 14). With such assertions, the process of interpretation and even re-interpretation is justified. Similarly, interpretation is envisaged not as instant perception, but as an intricate process that is dependent on interlinked systems such as the social and cultural realities.

M.A.K. Halliday, an ardent follower of Barthes, is accredited with the notion of socio-semiotics, which he developed after reviewing Barthes’ theories on meaning. In *Introduction to Functional Linguistics*, Halliday argues that meaning is not random but always issuing from clear context. As a component of social semiotics, he sees language as always expressing a dual aspect in its semantic system, which is organised around the twin motifs of reflection and action. Hence he argues that language is a means of reflecting on things and language as a means of acting on things (Frostholm and Anderson, 2011, 15). Halliday suggests a particular interpretation of language within a conceptual framework where social reality itself constructs meaning (Frostholm and Anderson, 2011, 15). Hence language is one of the semiotic systems that constitute a culture, which in contrast to Saussure, suggests that language is a social fact. Furthermore, Halliday defines semiotics as interpreting language within a social cultural context, where the culture itself is interpreted in semiotic terms. Further, Halliday says, the interrelation of language and social context ensures that language does not only serve to facilitate and support other modes of social action that form its environment but also to create own environment. Hence Halliday goes beyond the traditional

semiotics and includes the social and cultural aspect of language (Frosthalm and Anderson, 2011, 16). The way Halliday treats language, meaning and context is incredibly vital to the present study. It means we can use context to decode literary symbols as much as we can use literary symbols to reconstruct, if not recognize, contexts.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Halliday made serious considerations on the impact of the existing reality on both the signs and their meaning. It is probable indeed that changing times could lead to new signs with new meanings. Similarly, new meanings may be assigned to old signs in what Alembe Ezekiel (1998, 4) in *Telling Tales: the Use of Oral Narratives in Religious Sermons in Kenya*, refers to as the “re-assignment of the palace”. Indeed, as Halliday explains, semiotics helps us to realize that “meaning is not passively absorbed but arises only in the active process of interpretation” (2004, 9). Consequently, an artist using a traditional symbol may facilitate the appreciation of it by effectively appropriating it to the existing situation. In which case, the traditional meaning becomes irrelevant unless the oral artist has indicated that he/she wants to uphold it. Owing to the above perspective, it could be inappropriate, in this age, to study oral literature from the point of view of, “how it used to be” (salvage approach) instead of looking at it from the perspective of dynamism and relevance (Wasamba, Peter. 2010, 4). Indeed, it is in order to be more forward-looking so as to keep abreast with equally important emerging tendencies and features of the verbal art.

The semiotic approach is akin to the theories of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Elizabeth Anne Kinsella (2006, 1), in *Hermeneutics and Critical Hermeneutics: Exploring Possibilities within the Art of Interpretation*, quotes Maurizio Ferraris (1976, 14) who, in *History of Hermeneutics*, defines hermeneutics as "the art of interpretation as transformation" and contrasts it with a view of theory as "contemplation of eternal essences unalterable by their

observer". The theory of hermeneutics states that in order to arrive at a common understanding, subjects must have access to shared linguistic and interpretive resources. It is further argued, in the theory, that linguistic meaning is inevitably open to infinite interpretation and re-interpretation due to the "interpretation ambiguity coming from presuppositions, the conditions of usage different from authorial and to the evolution of words" (15). The theory is critical to this study as it accommodates viewpoints emerging from different lenses of interpretation. The theory, therefore, more than any other, opens up an analytical window of viewing artefacts, in our case symbolism in the oral literature of Abagusii, within diverse historical contexts, so as to ascertain their meaning and relevance.

Phenomenology is described as the science of phenomena by its main proponent Edmund Husserl (1859—1938). According to him, the substance of the theory revolves around the following specific questions: Do essences of things show up in phenomena? Does *Being* (my italics) peek through appearances and disclose itself in them? Whereas hermeneutics forges for interpretation, for instance, Phenomenology questions what we can get from interpretation and whether we can get to the Essences of things. Husserl's greatest achievement is his notion of the Phenomenological Hermeneutical Circle in which he advocates for suspension of judgment about the world until all the parts making the phenomena have been experienced (David Weiniger, 1999). The two theories were important to us because they specify context as entailing understanding texts, historical periods, and the people behind the texts, which we aim to do.

Finally, since we were also interested in understanding how relationships between men, women and children at different points in the history of Abagusii are portrayed in the texts under examination, the theory of feminism became an important part of the present study.

Nancy Fraser, in *Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History: An Introduction* has identified the three different strands of feminism: “the radical, the feminism of recognition and the emancipatory feminism (2012, 5). In the present study, we shall, however, lean more towards the principles contained in African feminism which, as Taiwo Oladele puts it, attempts to present past and contemporary African society in a way generally favourable to the standpoint of the woman, amid the changing role of women in traditional and modern society (1984, ix). We shall, therefore, seek to understand the place of women as portrayed by oral artists in the oral literature of Abagusii as well as ascertain the extent to which the gender relations have been evolving. By so doing, we could also understand the standing of the patriarchal system among the Abagusii and the effect it has had on representations in the oral literature of Abagusii.

Conclusion:

In the present chapter, the objectives and need for the present study have been stated. It has been made clear, through our review of literature, that there is need to review pedagogical standpoints in the study of oral literature in the face of a modernising verbal art. A gap in the study of style in oral literature has also been created. In the next chapter, focus shifts to the methodological aspects of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In chapter one, the aim and motivation of the present study was revealed through an explication of the research problem, research objectives, justification for the study and a review of related literature. In this second chapter, we take a closer look at the impact of our chosen methodology on both our fieldwork and, ultimately, textual data processing and analysis. We commence with the amplification of the methodology with a theoretical conceptualization of symbolism and transience. There will then follow an elucidation of our methods of data collection and processing before, finally, elaborating on how the methodology was replicated in actual textual analysis.

Theoretical Conceptualization of Symbolism

The nature of art is that information is communicated in a manner that does not bare everything. Since time immemorial, Abagusii have endeavoured to store their values, identity and important historical realities in coded expressions, art and rituals, collectively referred to as *Chimbacheri Chiabagusii* (the hidden ways of Abagusii) (King'oina, 1988, 6). In fact, the names of the areas they occupy, names of persons and their respective clans have always had coded information and meanings. We regard coded expressions and acts which may be decoded for meaning within specific contexts as being symbolic and, by extension, as containing aesthetic/artistic value. Ezekiel Mphahlele, in *The African Image*, says of symbolism: "An art that speaks to the people in terms of their feelings and ideas about the world" (1962, 66). In the context of the present study, we conceive symbols as images, concepts, behaviours and artefacts that are used to represent both individual and collective feelings, attitudes, knowledge and values connected to social, political, religious, and ideological patterns among the Abagusii at various points in time. The oral artist, therefore,

deploys symbols to figuratively and suggestively hold up ideologies, ideas, positions and actions, or contest them, in a world that has shaped not just their own thoughts, but those of their audiences as well.

While quoting Shamisa (2004), Elaheh Fadaee categorises symbols into arbitrary symbols and personal symbols, where the former are common and familiar with easy to recognise meanings, and the latter are the fresh new ones which the writer or poet newly created, and, therefore, relatively difficult to recognise and interpret (Fadaee, 2011, 4). While we appreciate Fadaee's classification, our position is that all artistic symbols, whether used in the past or present, can be interpreted because, in the first place, the artist intends that they be interpreted, otherwise he ceases to communicate. In addition, we argue that most, if not all, artistic symbols are public, because they are inspired by a reality that is public, whether that reality is well mastered by the audience or not. We are, therefore, in the our study, proceeding with the understanding that symbols used by the Gusii oral artists within various contexts can not only be placed in context but their relevance can too be established.

As could be the case in many communities, witty expression among the Abagusii is highly celebrated. Whether in commonplace discourses, at juries and negotiations, and among people of varied social hierarchy: peasants and the highly placed alike, plain speech is still not only abhorred, but also sooner forgotten. In the traditional set up, the skill was a prerequisite to being ordained diviner, priest, prophet and even spokesperson. Indeed, it was known that metaphoric language had greater impact and was a distinctive mark of patriotism as well as an indication of one's social standing (Monyenye, 1977, 337/8). Keri Yankah concurs that oratorical cleverness in the traditional setup was so highly esteemed that competent members gained elevated status, mostly as disseminators of wisdom and opinion

makers (Yankah, 1982, 3). It is against such a background that it is important to examine the extent to which the contemporary oral artist of the Abagusii uses language in a manner that mimics and/or deviates from his predecessor's.

Theoretical Conceptualisation of Transience

Interest in the dynamic nature of literature as well as its relationship with the social and cultural context may indeed be traced back to the classical period when Plato described literature as an imitation of society. Oladele Caleb Orimoogunje (2011), in *The Social Contexts of Verbal Arts in Yoruba Indigenous Healthcare Practices*, points out that context “could be regarded as a phenomenon that describes how, when, where, to whom and by who the verbal arts under question are rendered” (Orimoogunje, 91). We, on our part, grasp context as the totality of the various historical, cultural and circumstantial peculiarities within which artistic features employed by the oral artist are most expressive aesthetically.

Peter Wasamba (2010) in *Centring the Devoiced: Rethinking Personhood in Oral Literature Field Research* has decried the tendency by oral studies to make oral literature synonymous with “pastness and stability” instead of aiming to bring out the dynamic features of the genre (Wasamba, 4). We are of the view that the “preservative approach” (in Wasamba's words), unlike the progressive approach, not only undermines the significant roles of both the artist and the genre, but also side-steps the prospects of wholesomely appreciating social and artistic trends in societies. Earlier on in a paper entitled *A Multidimensional Approach to Oral Literature: a Proposal*, Heda Jason (1968) had asked pertinent questions on how oral literature should be studied: is it a survival of some previous stage of development of the society? Is it a reflection of its contemporary society? Is it created in order to express the psychological problems of the members of its society? Does it exist to be used as a weapon of

in some social conflict, or as means of entertainment, whether of adults or children?(Jason, 5) He then concluded that oral literature is none of these alone—rather it is and does all of them together. He is also of the opinion that oral literature is literary work, a work of artistic presentation and as such can be handled by the methods of literary criticism. Furthermore, he proposes that oral texts (items) need to be put at the centre of interest and the question should not be “what can I learn about the society I happen to be interested in from its oral literature?” but rather, begin with oral literature and ask, what are the innate laws that shape an oral literature? What are the outer forces that shape it? And what are the interrelations of oral literature and its contexts (literary, cultural, social, etc)? (Jason, 7) Indeed we agree with the above scholars, particularly on the need to distinguish between anthropology and oral literature. There is need to go beyond studying oral literature from the perspective of how it used to be and instead focus on how it is or might be in the future. It is on the foregoing platform that we have made our common point of textual examination to be the dynamic cultural forces that have inspired the use of symbols in three selected genres of Gusii oral literature. The said cultural forces have been divided into two main categories in line with the dynamic nature of social order: the traditional context and the contemporary context. Both the general and specific features of the said cultures/contexts are clearly spelt out before their influence on symbolism and the target audience could be established. Of particular interest to us, therefore, is the relationship between the existing social context at various points in the community’s history and the oral artist’s conception of symbols, on the one hand, and the audience’s appreciation of them on the other.

Research Locale and Sampling

The research covered the two counties inhabited by Abagusii: Kisii and Nyamira, (see maps in appendix) where the six sub-tribes of Abagusii inhabit and are spread right across.

Abagusii are informally grouped into six sub-tribes, which are further grouped into two broad categories: “*Bogirango Maate and Bogirango Rogoro*” (lower and upper Gusii), guided, on the most part, by the geography of the region as well as settlement patterns. Such a demarcation helped to make our sampling a lot easier and representative, with our initial aim being ten performers from each sub-tribe to cater for differences in age groups and gender. We, however, succeeded to get thirty six potential artists (personal details at the appendix) from whom we obtained our final representative sample of twelve artists. Artists who lacked a clear understanding of the significance of the items they performed, as well as those who were unable to perform complete items—perhaps due to memory lapse—or who performed items they had learnt and rehearsed for purposes of competition, such as pupils and students were excluded from the final sample of artists.

Equally, one of the six sub-tribes of Abagusii (*Abamachoge*) is not represented due to rampant insecurity along Gusii and Maasai border. We were unable to access the lower part of South Mugirango, because at the time of our research—November 2012 to April 2013, the *Abamachoge* were embroiled in boarder and cattle rustling feuds with their Maasai neighbours. Similarly, in Nyaribari Chache, some potential respondents became uncooperative citing their past experiences with university students. Incidentally, students from a local university who had gone there to attend a funeral of their colleague turned rowdy at the end of the exercise, looted shops and hotels around the Minyinkwa area and caused injury. We failed to convince them our mission and intentions were different.

We chose to employ purposive sampling because not everybody could perform. Besides, some artists, especially those whose music has been stored in digital devices, were already known to us so we chose to approach them directly. Purposive sampling was also convenient

to us since we had enlisted the support of the provincial administration and, most importantly, that of the Abagusii cultural and Development Council, who had offered to assist us in identifying potential performers and respondents. Most orators, who also happen to be knowledgeable in the Gusii lore, have either found their way into various positions of the community leadership or are widely known and could be identified easily with the help of provincial administration and competent research assistants. With the help of our research assistants, we attended many events graced by such orators, such as the July Gusii A.S.K. show where the Abagusii Cultural Organization have a permanent stand where they showcase various oral traditions, mostly of the past. Additionally, we made plans to attend events where young performers were expected, such as circumcision ceremonies as well as the Kenya Primary and secondary schools music festivals. With the help of my research assistants, we identified three pastors/church personalities who were known to frequently use oral forms and sought their permission to both attend church services they presided over as well as interview them. We, however, managed to interview only one of the three with the rest expressing disinterest in publicity.

The snowball sampling was also useful to us in the absence of an explicit record of all performers and respondents across Gusii land. Hence, we asked our initial respondents and performers to identify others that could meet our criteria. Cluster sampling, on the other hand, enabled us to not only select and categorise performers on the basis of whether we perceived them as traditional or modern, but also to focus on particular characteristics of our population, such as inclination to use figurative language, the artist's intention in relation to the audience's response and the connection between personal features such as gender and age and the nature of symbols used.

Methods of Data Collection

The study called for both primary and secondary data. The more appropriate methods of data collection were therefore participant observer, focused groups and interviewing. Efforts were made to attend public functions where target genres were likely to be performed. Mostly, however, sampled performers took part in solicited renditions that we attended and, at times, took part in. Data collected using both the pocket recorder and camera was labelled and stored in print and in digital form for further analysis.

Secondary sources of data included various publications and critical works such as newspapers, textbooks and journal articles by scholars of diverse backgrounds. We also relied on the national archives for historical and cultural data on Abagusii. Nevertheless, most of the data on the social organisation of the traditional Abagusii was obtained from a group of elders as well as young people through both individual interviews and, mostly, focused group discussions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis begins with the identification of the symbol followed by an explanation on why we think it is a symbol based on the clues available in the text. The study being qualitative, analysis progresses on the basis of observation, description, comparison and the elucidation of the relevance. We have divided sample data into three main categories: the first category has texts that contain symbols reflecting socio-economic and political realities of the past, while the second and third categories have texts with symbols that depict the changing economic, political and socio-cultural circumstances of the Abagusii. Although it may not have been possible to accurately date all the sample texts, the symbols we identify from various texts, together with the data obtained from our informants through focused group

discussions, help us to identify the various socio-economic and political circumstances which inspired various artistic representations. We have used the two broad social contexts (traditional context and the modern context) not only as a means of attaining a comprehensive methodical analysis but also as a measure of accurate interpretation since they provide us with Abagusii's shared interpretive resources. We divided our respondents into three different groups based on age and gender. Each group contained at least twelve members, excluding the researcher, his three assistants or any other person in attendance. To address interpretive ambiguities, we either attended or listened to performances together before meeting later in our respective groups to discuss the meaning as supported by the whole context of the texts. We addressed the interpretations of one group to the two remaining groups to facilitate interpretation and re-interpretation of texts. For effective utility, the focused discussion lasted one to one and half hours. Each group had three separate meetings which culminated in two final meetings that brought all the groups together.

For ease of comparison, we have analysed the nature and role of the symbols contained in the three genres under our scrutiny under the two contextual epochs. An analytical table helps us to map out the origin and development of various symbols and motifs. Comparison is then drawn between the traditional use of symbols and the modern use of symbols. So as to realise a systematic analysis, we have dealt with symbols within different domains of Abagusii's life: Symbols of Socialisation, Symbols Home Making, Symbols of Old Age and the traditional Religion and The influence of the Modern Religion. In addition, we use the prevailing mood and general audience reactions during performances to establish the impact of the symbols on the audience. In addition to the oral data collected, we also subjected photographs taken during fieldwork to analysis so as to ascertain their link to the underlying symbolism.

Scope and Limitations

The study focused on the relationship between context and literary symbols employed by the oral artists in the oral literature of the Abagusii. The nature of the study, therefore, called for a reconstruction of both the traditional and the contemporary contexts that give rise to and provide a basis for the interpretation of the symbols the artists employ. We remained alive to probable difficulties of determining both the exact contexts and actual dates surrounding certain events and texts. We, however, countered this limitation with the help of carefully sampled panellists of the focused group discussions who could provide additional contextual and interpretive perspectives, besides the primary and secondary data we had already obtained.

The textual analysis was conducted on three main genres within the oral literature of Abagusii, namely: proverbs, narratives and poetry. Our choice of the three genres was informed by our being aware of a number of texts from the above categories containing symbolic expressions derived from both traditional and contemporary situations. Additionally, the three genres easily coexist given notable intertextuality that exists between them. The ease with which the three genres obliterate their boundaries and flow into each other is profound. Proverbs and songs are frequent in narratives, just as much as some songs and narratives are based on certain adages. This is not necessarily so with other genres such as riddles, puns, tongue twisters, and the like. The said intertextuality between the three genres is further confirmed by the Ekegusii term *omobayeno* (proverb). The primary meaning of the term is “proverb,” however it also refers to songs and narratives that carry camouflaged messages and values, further linking the above three genres. Moreover, the present study is more or less linguistic in nature, thus we required genres that are language intensive as

opposed to those that use language in a limited manner such as in puns, riddles and tongue twisters.

Note on Transcription and Translation

We based our analysis on the original transcriptions of the sample data. Where possible, we employed the direct word by word translation of the oral texts. We, however, could resort to the functional approximation method where direct translation would lead to the distortion of the original or intended meaning of the texts.

Ethical Considerations

One of the ethical dilemmas we faced was deciding the kind of data to include in our study since, apparently, not all researchers were going to meet our specifications for performances and interviews. Though we could gather information about various performers from secondary sources, we made a choice not to make our research clandestine by relying on the artists' previous performances or seek alternative sources of information for those who declined interviews. We, therefore, ensured that every one of our participants freely consented to participate without being coerced or pressurized. For participants who were initially suspicious, we, with the help of officials from Abagusii Cultural Development Council, made it clear what the research entailed and reassured them that they had the liberty to withhold their participation and cooperation at any point of the research exercise.

In addition, we often found ourselves in a tricky situation having to negotiate with performers before hand on how they were going to be rewarded. It felt like engaging in an illegal trade and a digression from our core objectives. Whenever such situations arose, we tried to explain to respondents the important contribution we were both making to scholarly work in

oral literature, as a whole, and Gusii oral literature in particular. Above all, we made them understand that being students, we could only afford a token of appreciation for their cooperation and labour. We eventually managed to convince a sufficient majority of the potential performers, but had little choice but to give up on a negligible minority whose demands were out of our reach.

Equally, for purposes of confidentiality, some artists did not want to perform from their own homes. We organized for such performers to be brought to The Abagusii Cultural and Development council offices in Kisii Town together with a few other members of their sub-tribes whom they had had they handpicked so as to meet the threshold for a focused group discussion before and after the performances. In extreme cases, we protected the identity of the participants by recording their performances and then later playing them out to the rest of the participants for discussion. All that while, we maintained contact with the “anonymous” participants for both their reactions and further insights. In compiling and analyzing data, we have referred to data from such performers only by their titles.

Above all, one of the greatest ethical dilemmas we faced was our role as researchers in the same community that we happen to come from. We faced a real challenge of sometimes going ahead of the performers or even prejudging their performances as well as their significance. We also faced the temptation to exercise patriotism or, in Wasamba’s words, “ethical loyalty” and always present the community in positive light (Wasamba, 2009, 6). We, therefore, not only tried as much as possible to unlearn, prior to presentations, whatever experiences we thought we had concerning the various items we were going to collect, but also sought to confirm whatever we knew about both the performers and their items with the performers themselves. Our field working strategy of choice was, therefore, “open

classroom” which meant we were going “to wear the community lens and empathetically partner with the community in the research process” (Wasamba, 2009, 5). Where a common position did not materialise; we have indicated our own independent position. Such positions have either been given with permission from the performers or with utmost sensitivity not to compromise the participants’ privacy or injure their reputation.

Conclusion

An explication of the methods of data collection, the modes of analysis and the scope of the study reveals the measures we took to guarantee the validity of the findings of the present study. By connecting the chosen methods to the study of symbolism and transience in the oral literature of Abagusii, the procedures employed in the study are exposed to scrutiny, hence increasing the chances of making our study fully scientific. In the next chapter, a cultural context within which indigenous and contemporary symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii may be assigned meaning is created.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF ABAGUSII

In the present chapter, we share our fieldwork experiences and findings with details on both the present and past social economic features that inform the context of the Gusii oral artist, as well as provide the bio data of the various participants whose views and texts form an integral part of the present study. Our aim is to construct a basis for explicating the nature and role of symbolism in both the old and the contemporary oral literature of the Abagusii. A thorough awareness of the circumstances of the community's existence could provide us with the necessary codes for appreciating the symbols used by both traditional and contemporary Gusii oral artists. Within the scope of the present study, we view historical values and practices as those that once existed, but are now redundant or have since been replaced by new ones. On the other hand, contemporary practices are those that replaced previous ones, those still in existence and as well as those that are emerging. Those that have defied time in their relevance will be treated as traditional.

Abagusii in their Traditional Context

Until around 1906, the year missionaries ventured into Gusii land, Kisii central, the region inhabited by Abagusii was virtually, perhaps as were most other African communities prior to the inception of colonialism, closed to the outside world. At the core of the traditional existence of Abagusii were customary laws that not only laid down strict procedures for ceremonies and rituals that marked each and every member's life from birth to death, but were also tremendously important in the individual member's economic, social, religious and political development and well being. As Nelson King'oina Nyang'era, (1988) a renowned Gusii anthropologist has recorded in his book, *The Making of Man and Woman under Abagusii Customary Law*, the laws were not only dynamic, but were meant "to keep pace

with the requirements of the society” (King’oina,1). Additionally, most the values and beliefs held dear by the indigenous Abagusii were rarely taught out directly to the members of the community. They were instead presented indirectly in rituals and art (Monyenye, 1977, 26). Indeed the desire to equip various categories of the members of the community with valuable life skills and values, in a manner that entertained as well as instructed, was the basis of symbolism in the oral literature of Abagusii. Below, we discuss the various aspects of the traditional Abagusii way of life as gathered from focused groups and interviews with the aim of uncovering a system of codes that we may rely on when decoding the various oral items that we gathered from among oral artists of the community.

Social, Economic and Political Perspectives

The traditional Abagusii were a peace loving community that believed in justice, togetherness, equality and democracy. From the beginning, the community was keen to celebrate and preserve their unique existence and identity. In many oral traditional genres, Abagusii endeavour to proclaim their identity, peculiar aspirations and idiosyncratic values. To begin with, Abagusii traditionally identified themselves by some sort of a praise name, *Mwanyagetinge*, which translates in English as “descendants of the house of anklets or leg rings”. *Egetinge* was a metallic ring won around the ankles of the female spouse whose marriage had been solemnised in an elaborate traditional marriage ritual. The anklet was proof that the prized ritual had indeed taken place, besides indicating the bride’s life-long commitment and fidelity to her husband. Additionally, the rings which encircled the bride’s ankles signified the desire of the community to exist in one peaceful and inextricable fold (Interview, Mama Rebecca Machini, at Manga D.C.’s office on 21 June 2013). The fact that the community drew their name from the ritual not only reveals the significance they attached

to the institution of marriage, but also indicates their desire to store the core values of their existence in representational notions and artefacts.

The family guaranteed the continuity of the community. According to Monyenye (1977, 14) the family belonged to one father who was the political head, if he happens to be alive, if he is dead, his eldest surviving son. The traditional society believed that in numbers, their security and prosperity were guaranteed. Marriage was considered sacred and the ritual of uniting two prospective partners was not only punctilious but also communal. When a man performed the traditional wedding (*envying*) for his wife, the wife was elevated to the status of a respected woman who could then perform certain social functions strictly reserved for married women. She was eligible to become circumciser, diviner, priestess of other marriage ceremonies and all those magico-religious ceremonies requiring women of her status (Monyenye, 1977, 337/8). A couple was expected to eke a living independently, but within the fold of the extended family. The elderly in the community saw to it that nothing stood on the way of the new couple begetting children. In the traditional set up, a new-born occasioned wild celebrations marked by ululations—two quick ones for a girl and three prolonged ones for boys (Yamaha, 2008, 66). The new-born boy was adoringly referred to as *eri ya geita* (the ox that keeps the gate—in reference to the boy's prospective role as provider of security for his family and beyond). Both girls and boys were expected to lead virtuous lives. Young men were expected to be courageous, hardworking and generous. Whenever a young man grew into a disgraceful coward, or generally fell short of the community's expectations, the title changed to *mabembe* or *masiato*—one always weeping or with a constant urge for long calls. (A recording by Pastor Moronya and Nahor Atumba, 2008) In this same category are men who consulted their wives, or any other woman, before

making major decisions. Such men were seen as cowards and were derogatively referred to as *amang'ina* (big women).

When boys and girls clocked teenage years they were initiated into adulthood (Monyenye, 1977, 26). Circumcision of girls is however on the decline due to modern pressures. Prior to western education and religion, a number of rites aimed at instilling values in the initiates accompanied the ritual. The said rites were gender specific and helped prepare the initiates for their gendered roles. For instance, the fire that burnt in the boys' hut throughout the period the initiates remained in seclusion, communicated the undying spirit the initiates were expected to demonstrate later in life. The initiates were expected to grow into fierce warriors, just like the fire they watched over. Moreover, while watching over the fire, the initiates, together with their sponsors, were trained to be more vigilant and watchful. The above rites were insinuated in the various oral genres that accompanied them.



Image1: In this picture that I took in December 11th, 2013, men and women take part in a traditional initiation ceremony. The costumes and props signify the importance of the occasion. The spear, bow and arrow, and shield signify the making of a future warrior and leader. Women keep a safe distance as men take the lead to indicate that on matters touching

on the community's well being, men led from the front. The picture symbolises the modern Abagusii's unbroken link to their traditional heritage.

Irritating the circumciser was considered a serious threat to the institution of initiation. When it happened, the circumciser was pacified with a ram which he slaughtered and ate with whoever he chose in order to cleanse his *orotuba*—them all wooden manger that carried his paraphernalia (King'oina, 1988, 18). The initiation period was also a time to confer blessings on the initiates. A special type of grass known as *esuguta* (turf grass) was grown in the initiate's seclusion hut, and the initiate ensured it was adequately watered by washing his hands over it ahead of every meal. If the grass showed no sign of sprouting, it was a sign of a bad omen which called for a cleansing ceremony. If the grass sprouted well, it meant the initiate would grow into a prosperous man (Monyenye, 1977, 36; King'oina, 1988, 19). A young man that grew into a courageous wealthy leader was assumed to have endured and gone through proper initiation rites, as is suggested below. When the initiate left seclusion, he was thoroughly washed of all the ash and red ochre, and also thoroughly pampered as a sign of entry into a new life. Nelson Kin'goina supports this when he says: "Prior to the time the boy was shaved again. He was thoroughly washed and oiled. The New apparel that had been prepared for him for the occasion was given to him to dress up" (27).



Image2: in the above photo collected by the researcher, a young initiate (holding an improvised bow) is allowed to mingle with his siblings after a long absence in seclusion. On his forehead and torso are signs of a cross—a Christian symbol, an indication of changing times and, even more, the fusion of traditional practices and modern ones.

Similarly, Abagusii had an elaborate social structure. The community existed in seven different sub-tribes, each identified by a totem that symbolised their unique values and aspirations that unified them in their diversity. The totems had deep psychological and even spiritual significance (Yamaha, 2008, 167). The sub-tribes were further sub-divided into clans that intermarried. Most of the totems were obtained from animals, as follows:

- Abagirango – Engo (Leopard)
- Ababasi – Enchage (Zebra)
- Abanyaribari – Engoge (Baboon)
- Abagetutu – Enchogu (Elephant)
- Abanchari- Engubo (Hippo)
- Abamachoge – Eeri (Ox)

According to Mzee Benson Omariba (an interview, 26/05/2013) who hails from the Abagetutu sub-tribe, each of the sub-tribes took special pride in the qualities found in the objects they identified with. It symbolised what they thought about themselves as members of a family within the larger family of Abagusii, as well as their contribution to the whole of which they are a part. The intricately symbolic titles were equally a source of pleasure. For instance, *Abagetutu* took pride in the massive stature of the elephant which symbolised their numerical superiority over the other sub-tribes, as evident in various oral genres such as proverbs and wise sayings that refer to the sub-tribe: *a'benda y'enchogu n'abaya, n'ekiane bariete nkaigwa bororo* (the numerical strength of the elephant sub-tribe make easy work but they are a pain when they sit to eat), as well as, *nguru chi'abamura nchogu egwatia mbara* (young men's strength is equivalent to an elephant splitting wood) (Omariba, an interview, 26/05/2013). In the above two proverbs, the numerical strength of Abagusii's largest sub-tribe is portrayed as both a blessing and a curse; a blessing because the numbers make them stronger than any of their neighbours, and a curse because they both consume too much and occupy too much land. Evidently, representations born of the mainstream culture were imbued with sensitive information about the tribe that younger members were expected to espouse.

In a myth by Mzee Benson Omariba, Abagirango, who identify with Leopard (engo), narrate how the sub-tribe's father, Mogirango, is said to have miraculously escaped the wrath of a leopard. In the story, Mogirango, whose name is coined from *omogirwa engo* (he who was rejected by leopard), was in his hut when Leopard suddenly sauntered in. In a tense moment that lasted a few minutes, Mogirango and Leopard stood there staring at each other fiercely. Then, in an apparent act of defeat, Leopard turned and left quietly. Since then, Mogirango is

believed to possess certain magical powers over nature. His descendants also believe to be the luckiest of the sixsub-tribes (Omariba, an interview on 26/05/2013).

Besides the sub-tribe totems, Abagusii also devised suggestive titles for their neighbours whom they interacted with through wars/raids and batter trade. Besides carrying the community's secret attitudes towards their neighbours, some of the allusive titles bordered on stereotyping:

Kikuyu – *kenyambi* (“Couch grass,” known for its deep roots and ability to spread in a manner quite unpredictable and difficult to contain.

Kamba – *abanyangori* (“The weavers,” representing their meek temperament, associated with the demanding and intensive nature of their trade.)

Luo – *Abaru Roche* (“Those who emerge from water with nourishment,” which gave them provider status)

Maasai – *Abamanyi* (“Safari ants” known for their ferocity and predatory tendencies.)

Kuria – *Abatende* (“those who went away” to suggest the assumed kinship between the two communities.)

True, the totems as well as tribal titles may no longer be in everyday use, but whenever and wherever they apply, a feeling of kinship, identity and belonging is created. Specifically, however, the tribal titles were aimed at ensuring members of the community knew themselves through the knowledge of others, besides indirectly teaching the younger members of the community how to relate with members of various communities.

The Traditional Economy

The traditional economy of Omogusii was built on agriculture. The community inhabits fertile equatorial highlands with adequate rains round the year. The favourable climate supported the growth of such crops as finger millet, sorghum, beans, sweet potatoes, maize and vegetables of all kinds. In addition, Omogusii loved animals and birds. He domesticated cattle, goats that provided him with milk, meat and skins for clothing. He also kept sheep, chicken and a variety of birds. With such livestock, Omogusii was enabled to enter marriage contracts, as well as engage their neighbours in batter trade. Among Abagusii, therefore, livestock keepers were held as shrewd wealth creators (Yamaha, 2008, 77).

The traditional Omogusii was immensely democratic. For the sake of order, Omogusii made laws that were adhered to without exception. Conflicts and disputes were impartially decided by elected elders. The greater the degree of one's integrity and dignity, the higher up in the council of elder's he was placed.

Traditional Religious Perspectives

The traditional Omogusii was deeply religious. Abagusii believed *Engoro* was living up in the sky and that he manifested himself through the wonders of heavenly bodies, like the sun, the moon and the stars. They conceived Him as being full of goodness, pureness, impartiality, love and generosity (Monyenye, 1977, 27/8). The traditional religion formed a fulcrum on which tranquillity and order prevailed. *Engoro* (God) was the supreme ruler of Omogusii. Indeed, the community's philosophy was engineered around Omogusii's understanding of *Engoro*. God was synonymous with justice while *nyachieni* (Satan) weaved evil schemes. The traditional diviners and priests were meant to counter Satan's evil whims. Omogusii turned to *Engoro* on issues beyond his understanding. For instance, whenever there was a persistent

drought, women of impeccable character performed *Ribina* (a supplication dance) at the top of Manga Hill.

More historical dreadful occurrences such as the outbreak of malaria in 1877, *Enyamoko Oborwaire* (1892, the year of great small pox), *Enyakoira* (eclipse of the sun), *Esao-sao* (the civil war between Abagusii and Kipsigis of 1893), and *Abasongo Abangeresa* (1907, the year the British came) saw Omogusii turn to *Engoro* for answers and direction. Thus people had to maintain a good relationship with *Engoro* if they needed any favours from him. (A recording in print by Pastor Moronya) Bellow *Engoro*, were prophets (*ababania*) whose role was to intercede for the people and warn them of whatever lay ahead. Cleansing ceremonies that were meant to appease the spirits of the ancestors were presided over by priests and diviners. With the foregoing details on the social systems and organisation of the traditional Abagusii, we may then be able to interpret the various literary symbols that we associate with the period in question within the context they were born.

From the foregoing, it may have been clear that the traditional way of life of Abagusii was based on a moralistic system which was aimed at setting aside good from bad in both private and public engagements of the members of the community. In our subsequent analysis of texts, we shall seek to ascertain the extent to which, the puritanical ideology of the indigenous Abagusii was reflected in their oral literature.

Modern Perspectives

Since around 1900, so much has changed in Gusii land that it is adequately tedious to recount with absolute accuracy the various developments in the socio-cultural landscape of Abagusii. It therefore seems more practical to focus on the most overt of modern influences on the

Abagusii traditional way of life. It may however not be speculative to argue that most alterations on the social fabric of Abagusii may be attributed to the coming of the white man, and the missionaries specifically.

The coming of the white man to Gusiiland, much as it presented a direct challenge to the exclusive authority of traditional systems, was not altogether unexpected. Long before the first white man set foot in Kisii, Sakawa, one of the greatest prophets of Abagusii that ever lived had prophesied: *amandegere name Getembe o'nabamura nere o'rayaae* (Getembe—present-day Kisii Town—will one day be a “garden” full of mushrooms and only those with strong sons will claim their share) (Peter Nchore). Propheying was serious business, and for it to retain the status the language used had to be above the ordinary. Mushrooms, a nutritious and treasured delicacy among Abagusii, communicated the numerous opportunities the future growth of Kisii would offer. A mixed reaction, therefore, awaited the white man. Those who readily collaborated were known as *abasomi* (the educated), given their enthusiasm for Western education, while the hesitant were considered backward, *chinogo* (Moronya, an Interview on 27/06/2013). Mainly, Abagusii have come under the influence of the following modern realities: modern education, modern religion, modern politics and modern economy.

Modern Education and Religion

The biggest influx of missionaries into Gusiiland took place in 1911 (Kenya National Archives-DC/KSI/3/2). The first missionaries to arrive were the fathers of Mary Hill Society of Roman Catholic Church. They put up the first missionary station in Gusiiland at Nyabururu, Kisii Central in 1911. The Seventh Day Adventist set up theirs at Nyanchwa in 1913 (KNA/DC/KSI/3/7). The first missionary school in Gusiiland was set up by Father G. Beadsman in 1912. The two missionary centres formed initial command stations from which

the early missionaries executed evangelisation and “civilisation” of Abagusii. Indeed, the first impression about the Africans was that the latter “were essentially without God, and without hope in the world, and that their civilisation was infinitely inferior to their own” (Tšiu, 2008, 60).

Schools were therefore civilisation instruments of choice where early converts of Abagusii were taught to read the Bible. The spread of Christianity put a number of Gusii customary rites and rituals on the path of extinction, since *abasomi* preferred fashionable Christian rituals to customary ones—Gordon, P.M., *An Outline History of the District of South Kavirondo-Kenya Colony, 1880-1946*, 44. In the early years of colonial administration, educational activities were overshadowed by attempts by the colonial administration to develop a steady economy. Interest in matters education by the colonial administration started much later in 1930s—*KNADC/KSI/1/4, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports, 1933-1939*. Campaigns by both Christian missions and government officials saw a sharp increase in the number of school-going converts in Gusii land. This interest hit a crescendo when it became apparent that those with literacy skills were waged better. Currently, interest in education in Gusii land is at its highest point ever. With one of the highest population densities in Kenya, the community’s alternative investment to farming lies in education. The inception of middle level colleges and a fully fledged university in Kisii County, with campuses in Nyamira County and in three other sub-counties, has seen a large number of Abagusii get enrolled for higher education.

Modern Money Economy

Records indicate that transition to a modern money economy in Gusii land was precipitated by the introduction of wage labour. The introduction of hut tax pushed Abagusii out of their farms to such destinations as Magadi Soda and nearby Kericho Tea Estates(*KNA DCLKSI/1/13 South Nyanza District Annual Report 1957*). In his MA thesis, *The Tea Plantation Economy in Kericho and Related Phenomena to Circa*, Arap Kipkorir K.M. labour migration “became a major means through which a large number of Gusii men raised money for tax” (52). This trend has seen the community export their labour to various major towns and cities and yet a sizeable number get absorbed in emerging opportunities in their rapidly modernising two counties. One would expect that the said rapid modernisation may have impacted on the use of language in the oral art forms of Abagusii.

Modern Political Perspectives

Abagusii have existed through three main political dispensations: the traditional system of governance, the colonial administration and the current universal suffrage representational political system. The traditional system was characterised by total reverence of the council of elders and unwavering allegiance to customary law. Yamaha Evans supports this when he says: “the traditional way of life that comprised of various cultural practices and rituals was perceived as religious” (Yamaha, 39). The said practices came under increased threat at the start of colonialism. The colonial administration saw the reign of several paramount chiefs such as senior chief Musa Nyandusi and chief Angwenyi of Abagetutu. The chiefs exercised authority on behalf of the colonial government and their word was as good as that of the white man himself. On the other hand, Modern-day Kenyan politics has been through far-reaching upheavals. From experimentation with federalism in the early days of independence; single party state of retired President Moi; inception of multiparty democracy to, currently,

the devolved system of governance under the new constitution promulgated in 2010. My considered opinion is that the above mentioned political developments may have exerted some degree of influence on the Gusii oral artists' artistic minds and use of language, for the period they lasted and even beyond. After the above review of the various circumstances Abagusii have existed we may now turn the attention to the specific socio-political contexts in which individual artists found themselves, as well as their personal circumstances.

Artists and Their Personal and Social Contexts

After the above review of various contexts in the history of Abagusii, it is now time to align those contexts with personal life experiences of individual respondents. To the best of my knowledge, the artists whose biographies appear below have not been subjected to any literary analysis, until now. With biographical information given below, the centrality of context and transience in the present study is clearer.

Benson Mageto

Benson Mageto omariba was born in 1931 at Bobaracho—Kisii County—to Abagusii's biggest sub-tribe, Abagetutu. *Mzee* Mageto has no formal education. He has however privately learnt to read and write and now has a modest collection of written records and documents on various aspects of Abagusii culture, and even beyond, under his custody. He is of the opinion that society has to adapt itself to changing realities while still seeking to understand why the forefathers had certain views about life. He not only has a rich repertoire of Gusii proverbs and cultural practices but also knows a lot about the community's history and organisation. He was therefore instrumental in providing the historical, social and cultural background of Abagusii. He also gave us crucial information on the genealogy of the various sub-tribes of the community and their totems; the community's seasons complete

with their indigenous names, as well as significance. Interestingly, *Mzee* Omariba traces his lineage all the way back to the first father, Adam. Omariba was also resourceful in providing us with traditional chants, proverbs and anecdotes, such as BO1, BO6, et cetera.



Image4: Mzee Benson Omariba gesticulates during one of his performances. Before him are many exercise books in which he has recorded many significant events in the history of Abagusii. The picture was taken by me on 29th November 2013 at his home.

Christopher Nchore

Next is Mzee Christopher Nchore, an 84 year old octogenarian, who, besides being highly knowledgeable in the ways of the various sub-tribes of Abagusii, is privileged to have served as priest of his sub-tribe, *Ababasi* of South Mugirango—Kisii central, who occupy the furthest end of Gusii land, bordering the Luo to the south and the Maasai to the East. In his lifetime, Mzee Nchore has traversed the entire Gusii-land to either preside over or ensure various rituals to which he was invited went well. Additionally, *Mzee* Nchore is a respected herbalist, but insists he is in the practice not so much for pecuniary considerations as for the sheer pleasure he gains from the “science” itself, as well as from watching a patient recuperate under his watch. Nchore was instrumental in explaining the symbolic significance of various practices and rituals of Abagusii, such as *Enchogu n’eyamete ‘menge* (the elephant

lives on leaves), CN6, which emphasizes the need to take herbs seriously besides adapting healthy lifestyles, especially now when there exist many lifestyle related diseases. Essentially, therefore, symbolic references in texts performed by Nchore draw their significance from both traditional and contemporary situations.

Mwalimu Peter Getate

At 62, *Mwalimu* Peter Getate may be considered the youngest among the three elders that make the final sample population, but not, by any means, the least experienced or knowledgeable. Getate is a retired teacher of unrivalled experience. He retired 7 years ago, and of his 35 years of service, he served as principal of various secondary schools for a total of 29 years. Mr Getate is, at present, the secretary general of the Abagusii Cultural and Development Council, which has enabled him to sit at the National Council of Elders representing Abagusii. Besides, *Mwalimu* Getate is the regional chairman of the National Anti-corruption Campaign Steering Committee. Above all, *Mwalimu* Getate is an enthusiast of the Gusii lore and language. Getate points out that much as he is retired, he has a new calling to put useful ideas in the minds of “interested” youth who, he says, are at cultural crossroads and facing a grave crisis of identity. He blames the state of affairs on the lackadaisical attitude by both the old and the young toward Ekegusii, which, according to him, is the sole repository of Abagusii’s wisdom and age-old values. From Getate, we collected about 100 indigenous terms and names for important day-to-day events and occurrences in the community, as well as traditional narratives. His taste for indigenous wisdom has endeared him to Ekegusii proverbs and wise sayings arguing that old wisdom never grows old or expires using a proverb, PG8, that goes: *noba kerema naye baba, okanyibora nkaba mosera* (whether crippled or otherwise, you are my mother who has made

me what I am). In the proverb, the significance of one's identity is symbolically captured; one need not reject his/her mother simply because of his/her social status.



Image 5: Mwalimu Peter Getate makes a point during one of the focused group discussions held at Abagusii Cultural and Development Council offices. To his right is Pastor Moronya. The picture was taken on 7th February 2014, in the presence of one of my supervisors, Prof. Peter Wasamba, seated far right in the front row.

Pastor Moronya

Retired Pastor Humphrey Moronya (appearing in image 6) hails from Mogonga, Kenya District of Kisii County. He was born in 1938, and, a prolific orator, Retired Pastor Moronya has served as clergy of the SeventhDay Adventist Church for close to 40 years. His calling aside, Retired Pastor Maronya has few peers in his knowledge of Abagusii lore, mainly proverbs and wise sayings. Frequently, Pastor Moronya uses traditional proverbs and sayings to reinforce his teachings, a pointer that traditional forms are flexible enough to be redeployed in modern circumstances. According to Pastor Maronya, the elderly custodians may be fast exiting the scene, but resurgent interest among younger tribesmen goes to

indicate an appreciation of both the aesthetic and practical nature of traditional oral art. Due to his practical and “hybrid” approach in the delivery of sermons, his smitten congregation have literally pulled him out of retirement and has now started his own church. Pastor Moronya’s strength lies in infusing practically every façade of Abagusii’s life, contemporary and traditional, with Bible teachings with exceptional ease. For instance, Pastor Maronya uses the proverb PM13, *kae ababisa egeku, batekere morumbe, k’onya na mbura egotwa, bironche bikwe mbeo* (wish death to your enemy, erect traps on their way, but when it rains, the lonely dog dies of cold). One may wish their imaginary enemies all sorts of evil, only for them to feel lonely the moment the enemies vanish). Pastor Maronya uses the proverb to preach against tribalism arguing that there is enough space for all of us and that communities cannot survive in isolation.

Mwanyagetinge and Amariba Women Dancers

Equally, we have, in the final sample population, two women troupes of traditional dancers: Amariba Women Traditional Dancers Group and Mwanyagetinge Traditional Dancers. True, both groups subscribe to the Gusii traditional values, going by the range of texts we collected from them. Nevertheless, their respective approaches are to a large extent poles apart. Led by Mama Teresa Nyaboke Sagwe, Amariba Traditional Dancers have kept alive both old songs and the “old” way of performing them. Occasionally, however, the troupe performs songs that comment on contemporary issues, such a solo recitation on HIV/AIDS by *Mama Teresa Nyaboke Sagwe* in *Mwarire hotel Mono* (You are too frequent in Hotels). Incidentally, *mama Nyaboke* is a volunteer community health worker and care giver, village elder and a leader of Amariba S.D.A. Church Women Group.

On the other hand, Mwanyagetinge Dancers display a dual identity in both their texts and performances; they are traditional and modern in equal measure. Under able leadership of young and talented Jared Mombinya and *Mama Sabinah Gesare Nyarieko*, Mwanyagetinge Dancers have literally traversed Kenya, and even abroad, entertaining and engaging their audiences on topical and age-old issues alike. In an interview published in *The Standard* of Friday, August 12, 2011, under the heading “Singer Uses Music to Tackle Taboo Topics,” Jared Mombinya points out that through artistic language, Mwanyagetinge have ignited debate on matters otherwise widely considered taboo in the community.



Image 6: Mwanyagetinge and Amariba women dancers jointly perform a Gusii traditional song at the Abagusii Cultural and Development Council offices on 7th February 2014. The picture was taken by the researcher.

Jared Mombinya

Jared Mombinya was born in Gesangero sub-location, Nyamira North District of Nyamira County in 1989, and, clearly, the youngest of all the performers. He completed his secondary school education in 2009, and has since been preoccupied with the running of

Mwanyagetinge troupe. So enthusiastic has been Mombinya that his fame has spread right across Kenya and beyond, such as in Tanzania and Rwanda. Mombinya confides that his continued relevance rests squarely on his keenness in tackling contemporary issues of interest such as family planning, HIV/AIDS, and, lately, the essence of the devolved system of government, but through socially acceptable language. In a traditional chant MD1, *Mosaiga Siberia Ong'e* (my age-mate, sip and pass the cup to me), Mwanyagetinge celebrate the age-old values of altruism and unity, especially in the wake of a new political dispensation. In another song, by Jared Mombinya *Amaya mbosiare*, (better things lie ahead), Mombinya express optimism in the new political dispensation, besides advising listeners to avoid risky behaviours that will stop them from witnessing what the future holds.



Image7: Jared Mombinya leads Mwanyagetinge Dancers Perform a song at a political function at Kisii Show Ground. The Picture was taken by the researcher on 08/07/2013

Rebecca Machini

Rebecca Machini was born 72 years ago in Nyandoche Ibere, Marani District of Kisii County. She has immense knowledge in Gusii lore. Of all the female interviewees and performers, Rebecca Machini is the only one with a first-hand experience of the Abagusii traditional wedding. She also happens to have undergone Abagusii circumcision rites, and therefore has immense knowledge in matters to do female circumcision. Her prowess in music is known across many quarters earning her many friends and acquaintances, mostly politicians.

As earlier pointed out, the foregoing biographical reviews of oral artists together with first-hand information obtained from various respondents will help us establish the link between context and oral literature, and, particularly, why artists used language the way they did. We now wish to turn the attention to at least three modern Gusii musicians whose songs we have subjected to analysis. When we embarked on actual fieldwork we wouldn't have imagined there would be need to include the work of contemporary (*Benga*) Gusii musicians. We nevertheless had to adjust the methodology to accommodate popular and frequently performed *Benga* compositions. We quickly noted the possibility of there being a relationship between traditional and contemporary use of language. Essentially, the most popular musicians from Gusii land so far, and whose compositions we have had an opportunity to collect, include: the late Christopher Monyoncho Araka, of New Kegogi Jazz Band; and contemporaries Andrew Matara Aganda, of Riakimai Jazz Band, Henry "Man Pepe" Sagero of Bonyakoni Jazz and Christopher "Embarambamba" Mosioma.

Christopher Monyoncho “*Riyo Ri’ebasweti*”

Christopher Monyoncho is the undisputed father of modern Gusii music. Monyoncho, who passed away on 3rd October 2013 aged 65 years old, was born in 1948 in Kegogi, Kisii County. He attended Nyansakia primary School and, later, Matongo Government School. A disciplined, hardworking, talented pupil, Monyoncho was much liked by his teachers who made him a student leader. He however could not go further in his education because of lack of school fees. He later got a job as a primary school teacher, but quit to go to Kericho Tea Estates, where he was employed as a tea picker. He left Kericho two years later so he could focus on his music career. According to Yamaha Evans (2008), he later teamed up with other young talented musicians of his time such as Andrew Gitenyi, Moses Oyaro Memba and Charles Omweri to found Kegogi Jazz in 1975. Many people who know him, say Monyoncho, with his musical anecdotes, was the best musician of his time.

Later, between 1992 and 1997, Monyoncho represented Kegogi ward as councillor. Away from politics, the late Monyoncho, a patriarch in a polygamous family with fourteen children, was already a leader in his own right. According to Jeff Omondi who had interviewed Monyoncho in the year 2000, Monyoncho used his music to comment on socio-cultural issues and the politics of the day (Daily Nation Friday, 04 October 2013). Monyoncho’s first song ‘Emeremo Yamasamba’ nearly earned him a jail sentence, after he was accused of incitement. He was however acquitted after it proved difficult to build a substantial case against him given his highly figurative language. Monyoncho was a prolific composer with over 100 songs in his illustrious career. We intend to use four of his notable compositions: *Emeremo Yamasamba, Abamura more Chitaoni, Nyaboke and Keemba.*



Image 8: The late Christopher Monycho in this photo sourced from the internet.

Andrew Matara Aganda

Henry Matara Aganda (appearing in image 7 above) was born in Riakimai village in 1964. He belongs to the Abasamaro clan. He joined Nyakongo Primary school in 1973, but was forced to leave school after standard 8 due to lack of school fees. A staunch Catholic, Matara joined Kebuko Catholic Church choir in 1985, where he helped them record at least three gospel music albums between 1987 and 1989.

In an interview with us, Matara says the church brought out the musician in him. He further reveals that his inclination to the church has never quite left him, the reason most of his compositions are laden with religious messages. He attributes his use of proverbs and old sayings to the many lessons he received from his late grandfather. Among his popular compositions include, *chinderia*, *ekenagwa* and *chinsanako*, all of which we intend to analyse in successive sections.

Henry “Man Pepe” Sagero

Henry Sagero, or *Man Pepe* as he is popularly known, is one of the most successful musicians to come from Gusiiland. He is both energetic and flamboyant. Sagero was born in Chaina village, Bonyakoni in 1978 to a family of musicians. His mother sang in the church choir. His uncle, the late John Arisi o’sababu, popularly known as Kanda O’ Gusii (Kanda Bongoman of Gusiiland) after the renowned Congolese Lingala maestro, Kanda Bongoman, was for a long time the most popular musician in Gusiiland, with close to 800 compositions. Sagero joined Chaina Primary School in 1986, but had to leave school after his standard eight due to lack of fees. In an interview (15/03/2014, Bridge-Waters Hotel), Sagero said he became interested in music after participating in primary school music festivals as a percussion player up to provincial level. He also attributes his love for traditional Ekegusii to his long stay with his grandparents.



Image 9: Henry “Man Pepe” Sagero performs at Bridge-Waters Hotel on the night of 15th March 2014. The photo was taken by the researcher.

Sagero became famous after he sang *Abakimbisi* (Refugees) as commentary to the 2007 post election violence in Kenya. His other compositions that we have earmarked for analysis include: *Emeika Yo'mosiki* (The Spirit of Music) and *Eng'ombe Nengima* (The Cow is Whole)

Christopher Nyang'wara Mosioma “Embarambamba”

Christopher Nyangw'ara Mosioma, popularly known as *Embarambamba*, was born in 1988 in Keroka, Kitutu Chache. He belongs to the sub-tribe of Abagetutu. Like his predecessors, Nyangw'ara attributes his love for Ekegusii to the time he spent with his grandfather. He went to school at Kierira Primary school but could not proceed to secondary due to lack of school fees.



Image 10: Christopher “Embarambamba” Mosioma (left) performs at Bridge-Waters Hotel on the night of 15th March 2014. The photo was taken by the researcher.

In an interview, (15/03/2014, Bridge-Waters Hotel) Nyangw'ara was categorical that his preference for figurative language is meant to guard against alienating and disenfranchising his audiences with blunt messages. He desires to entertain as much as he instructs. He further reveals that he owes his grounding and encouragement to "Mr Ongeng'o, a Gusii musician turned radio presenter, who went out of his way to meet his initial recording cost. Nyang'wara became famous when he sang *Amatindogoro* (Passion-fruits), in which he celebrates modern dancing moves among Abagusii. He has also sung *Chiabagoire* (The Bulls are at large) and *Abachumbe*, (Our Representatives) which we herein analyse.

The foregoing overview of the social, political and cultural patterns of Abagusii alongside background experiences of oral artists is by no means exhaustive, but does provide a background against which old and current symbolic expressions in the oral literature of Abagusii may be analysed. As Patrick Oloko (2008) in 'New' Nigerian Poets, Poetry and the Burden of Tradition," points out, "It is not 'wise' to talk about new things in a historical void" (2). The critical fact that emerges from the foregoing is that language/form and context in the oral literature of Abagusii are two inseparable phenomena. Indeed, it is also clear that socio-political realities and subject matter in the oral literature of Abagusii are interconnected. Further, the overview confirms an entrenched tradition of symbolism in both the traditional and modern social life of Abagusii, and may therefore serve as a reference point for assessing and conceptualizing the extent to which the prevailing conditions influence the individual performer's use of figurative language. In the next chapter, we proceed to examine the relevance of symbols inspired by the traditional social context of Abagusii.

Conclusion

Details on the circumstances within which precedent and contemporary Gusii oral artists have operated, alongside their bio data, are important because then we have a basis to attempt an explanation as to why the oral artists employ language the way they do. I believe that changing social circumstances will continue to influence the manner in which modern oral artists conceive their representations. In the next chapter, the relationship between the traditional context and symbols employed by the traditional Gusii oral artists is examined.

CHAPTER FOUR

SYMBOLISM IN THE TRADITIONAL SOCIAL CONTEXT OF ABAGUSII

Discussion in the previous chapter focused on the various social forces that have, over time, weighed on the social inclinations of Abagusii. It became clear that Abagusii have developed through two main idiosyncratic phases, each with a corresponding social order: the traditional phase and the contemporary phase. In this chapter, and the subsequent, we seek to examine the influence of the above distinctive social orders on the conception, nature and significance of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii. We shall also seek to understand how symbols relating to the two contexts interrelate. We shall begin by examining the impact of the traditional ideologies.

As already established above, the said traditional order/identity was hierarchical in nature and male dominated. It was characterised by stringent customary laws which not only prescribed strict procedures for ceremonies and rituals that marked each and every member's life from birth to death, but also outlined specific roles for each member based on age and gender. The conduct and activities of individuals—young or old, male or female—was appraised using the laid down standards and norms and determined as either being appropriate or inappropriate.

Using Pastor Moronya's chant, *Omokungu Omong'aini* (A Wise Woman), we could show that the old patriarchal system gained form at the level of the nuclear family where each member was expected to know and perform their roles diligently:

Omokungu Omong'aini

A Wise Woman

Tango omokungu agotacha riiga, The woman could step on the firestone,
Arosie endagera, And prepare enough food,
Omwana oria, Which the child took,
Osoka isiko, Before going out to the open,
Ekeru omogoko ochire gekuba, His chest full of joy,
Ochenga nabagisangio baye, To play with age mates,
Omogaka obeka ekemigere kiaye, while the man, in his skin,
Oboria keore mang'ana Sat to interrogate his wisdom and experiences. (PM26)

In various ways, the above chant typically represents the traditional social order with its characteristic hierarchy that placed men at the top followed by women and children. The image of a woman working diligently in the kitchen is a symbol of submission and order. Her dutifulness made it possible for the man to attend to more important matters of the community:

Omogaka obeka ekemigere kiaye, while the man, in his skin,
Oboria keore mang'ana Sat to interrogate his wisdom and experiences. (PM26)

The portrayal of the woman as a passive partner resonates with the realities of the time which required the married woman to devote her time to the family's welfare and to bringing the children up properly.

On the other hand, a man in a skin—the fashionable attire for the traditional Gusii man, comparable to a well cut suit in our day—is a symbol of status and authority. Conversely,

therefore, the assertive woman is a symbol of chaos, as is evident in Jared Mombinya's *Ese* *N'omokungu* (Dog and a Woman) and Rebecca Machini's *Omoibi Bw'emiongo* (A Thief of Pumpkins). In addition, naivety, whether real or feigned, on the part of the woman, was synonymous with submission, a key factor in the family's stability. The very first image the audience is shown in the chant is the cooking stone which is taken from the hearth of the traditional kitchen. The image deliberately emphasises the traditional role of the mother as the provider food and comfort to her family. Even, in the contemporary setting, the cooking stones point to food, though not necessarily to the mother as the agent. The images of a relaxed man and children running in the field imply that the woman has played her role well both in sustaining life and the patriarchal system. The children seem to know their domain and will remain under the instruction of their mother until they have grown into adults and, therefore, ready to take up serious community roles and responsibilities. Further, the foregoing representations are in line with the rational and utilitarian traditional order where anyone acting outside their traditional sphere was considered a threat to social stability. For convenience, we have categorised symbols born of the traditional order in a manner reflecting the social hierarchy we have exemplified above: Symbols of socialisation—mainly targeting women and children; symbols of home-making—which guide married adults through their matrimonial endeavours and duties; symbols of old age and the traditional religion and, finally, symbols that show the impact of the modern religion.

Symbols of Socialisation

Among the traditional Abagusii, children were not only vital for continuity but also as important indicators of the community's present and future well-being. In the contemporary context they would be spoken of as the future leaders, therefore the need for proper upbringing. Values learnt in childhood were more likely to be practised in adulthood, because

the learners were assumed to have grown in them. Again, by addressing children, a window was opened for continuous learning among adults who may have missed certain lessons during their childhood. According to Elder Benson Makori, (an interview, 26/05/2013), a person was deemed “still growing” from the time of birth up to around the age of 25 years old when he was deemed ready to start a family(an interview, 25/05/2013). One never stopped growing until they had mastered and were seen to practise the key traditional teachings.

A sample of oral texts from the traditional Abagusii reveals a consistent fascination with children and childhood, leading us to believe that portrayals of children and childhood in the traditional art may have emerged and been perceived from deep rooted traditional philosophies that resonated with that important stage of growth. It is important to note that the image of a child is positively received because most oral texts, particularly RM1 and Pm1, portray childhood as a symbol of innocence and virtue.

Quite often, in texts from the oral literature of Abagusii, the child is a symbol of the individual’s soul. A proverb from Benson Omariba implies that all children are born without blemish: *omwana taachi kende*, (a baby has not learnt anything). The message underlying the proverb is that children are born innocent and it is society that turns them into either upright or crooked individuals. Childhood is, herein, a symbol of virtue which the community advocated even unto old age. The proverb, therefore, challenged community members to ensure young people grew to lead responsible lives. Further, the proverb implies that everybody, by virtue that they all were once children had the inherent capacity to do what is right. If a community is grappling with evil deeds, as is common in urbanised environments, then that could be enough evidence they have failed in their responsibility to inculcate values

in the young ones. In the contemporary society, formal education is generally considered a “factory” that turns the youth into reliable upright mature adults.

Another proverb by Benson Omariba: (BO7) *Nyang’era ndotungi na’mori yaye ndotungi* (what the cow does, is what the calf does) suggests an inalienable connection between children and their mothers, especially in the formative stages of their lives. The deployment of the images of a cow and her calf is, by no means, accidental. Normally, the role of the bull (man) in the traditional environment ended at siring the young ones, while the mother ensured it was properly brought up. The choice, therefore, seems to place the responsibility of raising a child on the mother, while justifying the man’s lethargy. The underlying message is that if the mother was deviant, the child is likely to carry the same traits, hence emphasising the need for the mother to do what society (the man) expected of her. At another level, the mother, being the main custodian, may symbolise the community as a whole. A child is then expected to behave as community behaves. With such portrayals, women were conditioned into accepting their traditional subservient role.

Another proverb by Omariba, *Omwana ong’areka mochiere ng’ora, nigo akogenda na’goto agotega korwa gesieri buna ng’ina agotega* (go slow on a wicked child, who, like his/her mother, have ears that are trained to pick things) the child’s bad ways are assumed to have come from the mother. The image of children wandering around aimlessly with the aim of causing trouble by misrepresenting what they heard symbolises lack of control. In other words, an untamed mother begot untamed children. It is clear from the above representations that besides charging the mother with the responsibility of raising children, the traditional order expected mothers to remain loyal to the community’s unwritten laws, including playing second fiddle to their husbands. Indeed, the tendency to associate women with the character

of their children is reminiscent of the traditional order where men are responsible only to the higher power while women (and their children) are not only answerable to men but as possessing a penchant for acting irresponsibly and irrationally. Pastor Moronya's proverb, *Omwana omuya no'yoise omobe no'yong'ina* (a successful child belongs to the father, but the irresponsible one to the mother's) not only associates women with failure but uses the children's success to associate men with good. To heap blame on the woman for everything that went wrong was not only an act of suppression but also clearly furthers male authority without seeming to do so. A woman that is put in the same category as children, and who is busy safeguarding the family's welfare is much less likely to challenge her man's authority.

Similarly, in some texts children, and their various attributes, as symbolise restoration and clemency. The proverb, *Ekiomogoko nomwana ogatoire* (the stingy woman's food was given to us by her child) implies that child-birth brings forth many rewards at both the family level and community level. The proverb has, at least, two other meanings: in the traditional setting, childbirth occasioned celebration and feasting. The ritual was a symbol of peace and unity. When guests flocked the homestead to bless the newborn and mark the important occasion, the father was under obligation to entertain his guests whether the woman of the house was known to be generous or not. The jubilation that the newborn occasioned was therefore a blessing to all. Similarly, the proverb is associated with the traditional notion that a person visiting a household that has children is not likely to miss something to eat, since parents worked hard to provide for their children.

Another credible meaning is expressed better through a common allegory that illustrates the proverb. In the anecdote, narrated by Benson Omariba, *Omokungu Omong'iti*, (The Stingy Woman) a child's innocent act of reminding the mother about the flour they had in the house

not only saves a starving neighbour but also shames the stingy mother. The child's generosity is a symbol of longevity, a sign that life will continue. Overall, the multiple meanings of the proverb all point to the unblemished spirit of children. In light of the prevailing meanings, the act of giving birth, in itself, and, by extension, motherhood, becomes not only a symbol of life but a form of generosity too. A woman that gave birth is not only made a worthy contribution to the community but also transforming herself into a better person. Surely, if they are capable of bringing such joy into the world through birth, then they have the capacity to be good, by, for instance, being obedient to their husbands. Indeed, the motif of a dejected rejected woman finding salvation in her progeny has a major presence in the oral literature of Abagusii, as will be illustrated in the present discussion. It is nevertheless probable that in the face of modernity, new agents of liberation, such as education, career and equal opportunities for women, may have emerged. We shall examine the current portrayals in the next chapter.

The penchant to use children as a parameter of measuring the woman's net worth is even stronger in Rebecca Machini's *Omokungu omonyaka mbana bamokorire enting'ana* (a dirty woman was turned into a virgin by her children), which implies that a disgraced woman may be handed back her respect by their successful children who are their greatest assets and achievement. The word *omonyaka* (an adjective, dirty) and *obonyaka* (noun, dirt) may mean any despicable conduct: from being immoral to being lazy, headstrong, or any other quality that did not meet the patriarchal threshold. To suggest that a woman of such demeaning repute could turn round and become *enting'ana* (a virgin) depicts the value the community placed on the character of the children in relation to their mothers. The woman's sudden change of status also indicates that the traditional moral standards were not definitive but rather aimed at fostering positive living. Although it looks like a last-minute rescue for the

mother, it is not lost that the real recipient of praise is the man who owns both the woman and the children.

In Moronya's proverb, *Ensinyo managokwanwa mbamura etabwati*, (a despised neighbourhood lacks warriors) a neighbourhood is representative of a sub-tribe, the entire community or a family. To be a subject of discussion (*managokwanwa*) is similar to being despised, or to under threat. A household could be despised because of poverty, their unbecoming mannerisms or for lack of enough male children who were considered a source of security and wealth in the traditional order. Two or more male children from such a household were enough to turn round the family's fortunes. In modern times, however, when the role to secure communities has been taken up by the state machinery, and girls and boys are regarded equally, a despised home may be that which has failed to raise children (both boys and girls) of noble character, and who, in consequence, are of no use to society and to their parents, especially in their vulnerable old age. Warriors, in the modern world, have been replaced by successful young men and women who have improved the standing of their respective families and communities.

In another proverb by Omariba, *Gesimo tikianya kong'ainiyia ngokinia kegokinia*, (in seclusion, one can surely grow, but may never be wise) the traditional community's philosophy on growth and maturity is clearly expressed. "*Egesomo*" is an indigenous term for an area that is isolated or hidden. The term means to be ignorant. From history, especially in the era of migrations, families came together to form small villages, primarily for security reasons or to avoid falling off from the common fold. Nevertheless, some parents kept away from such communities, either in favour of their privacy or some other reasons such as fear of

witchcraft. Such individuals, who were not in touch with society's affairs, were considered ignorant and cowardly.

The proverb, therefore, has its basis in traditional Abagusii's support for communal life, where everyone contributed to the collective good. *Okong'ainia*,” which translates in English as “to be experienced or enlightened,” is herein associated with experience that comes from interaction with fellow humans. In the face of a changing social order, however, young members of the community are now encouraged to venture out of their homes into urban centres (where other adults are competing for opportunities) so as to bid for a stake in modern opportunities as well as acquire useful life skills. In reality, however, rural-urban migrations are no longer a panacea to the many modern challenges, and therefore the migration is transitional rather than physical. It entails developing an enlightened mentality as opposed to a reserved one; a capitalist mind-set that leads one to competing favourably for available opportunities and resources. The proverb was also a call on people not to insulate their progeny and themselves against the traditional values which guaranteed one an identity and full membership to the community.

Still on maturation, Omariba's proverb *Eamate nengiya ekogera mwana achega* (a neighbourhood is vital because it gives children playmates to taunt and bully) further reflects the community's view concerning growth and maturation. It expresses the notion that a neighbourhood is important because it gives the young ones playmates “to taunt and bully”. Taken literally, it is ironic that assaulting and antagonising others could be considered a good thing. It may not, however, be accurate to conclude that Abagusii's traditional worldview condoned physical aggression among children. To the contrary, the proverb brings out the positive side of aggression as part of the socialisation process. Indeed, children not only

learnt to protect their entitlements but also developed the skill of resilience and group survival as well.

In addition, the community understood that children needed to learn through trial and error, because, anyway, nature had a way of correcting misconduct. Indeed, what they learnt to do correctly in their childhood, they would perfect in their adulthood. It is, equally, not lost that until quite recently, men simply carried away or abducted women that they thought would make suitable spouses. Equally, a woman that was never harassed by young men was thought not adequately appealing—a real source of pain for a maturing woman. In a way, the young girls grew knowing what they thought or felt was not important and that they were almost completely powerless against their male counterparts whose approval determined their “wellness”.

The traditional Abagusii considered teenage years and youth as a whole as the most important stage of development (Monyenye, 1977, 246). The value of youth is best captured in a chant performed by the late Nahor Atumba—an immensely talented youth—and recorded, in both print and voice, by Pastor Moronya, in his capacity as board member of the ACDC (Abagusii Culture and Development Council). Youth, a period when one was most energetic, was experienced but once in a lifetime and therefore the community expected one to make the most of it, particularly in terms of mastering useful skills of survival. Nevertheless, there is a clear indication that the freedom young men almost took for granted was never available for their female counterparts.

The animal imagery is the main source of aesthetics in the chant:

<i>Ntankoreti omoke</i>	What couldn't I do in my youth?
<i>Inguru chiamang'aine chiaguto</i>	With ant bear's yoked strength
<i>Ang'era ko nechianchogu</i>	Like a rhino or
<i>Eguatia 'mbara</i>	An elephant splitting planks (NA1)

The untamed strength of the ant bear, the mammoth stature of both the rhino and the elephant seize the audience's imagination while representing the ability and relative impunity the young men enjoyed. The persona could carry out tasks that were nearly impossible:

<i>Monyenche bwamaguta</i>	Easy and flexible like oil and
<i>Moseto ko morere</i>	With my marrow young and tender
<i>Nare kominyoka nkobongia</i>	I'd run and pick things simultaneously
<i>Nkorama kande anchera ntiga</i>	I could insult and injure
<i>Anchera gateneine buna gete kiandara,</i>	I left the feeble erect like lone sticks
<i>Akagokwa gakwa</i>	The weak ones died
<i>Na'agakoba kaba</i>	And the lucky survived (NA1)

The persona could shock and disenfranchise the less endowed with his aggression yet go scot free. Death is treated almost as a sport to indicate that the youth needed to be strong to survive. A degree of aggression was therefore necessary. The diction and word combinations evident in the poem reflect a command on Ekegusii language that can only be accredited to the most experienced of the members of the community. The result is a nostalgic tone which confirms the acts of impunity were an entitlement rather than an oversight. It was upon young

men to take advantage of them. It may also be remembered that the elephant is one of the totems of the traditional Abagetutu sub-tribe, one of the six traditional sub-tribes of Abagusii, who cherished their numerical advantage over their neighbours and the rest of the sub-tribes, hence their elephant stature. The chant, therefore, not only appeases Abagusii's largest sub-tribe, but extols the lengths to which individuals have to go to acquire useful life skills and be successful. In the contemporary context, success in such fronts as education, politics, philanthropy, sport, and business is legendary and attracts commendation. Aimed at young men, the strong words were perhaps meant to stoke the singer's sense of heroism that was critical in sustaining patriarchy.

Representations in a few other traditional texts capture juvenile morality as not only gendered but also as a matter that occasioned some sort of an ethical dilemma. Peter Nchore's proverb *Ekiabana nomotwe igoro gekogunda korwa* (that which belongs to children begins to rot from the head) portrays youth as a period that was prone to mistakes and experimentation. To rot, which is a natural process, represented the notion that children would always be children, and anything left under their care, whether valuable or not, was likely to be damaged. According to Elder Nchore, the proverb was taken from the pumpkin plant whose fruit and only believed to be medicinal but also were a treasured vegetable among Abagusii. A tropical disease that attacked its fruits made them to putrefy just before they were fully matured, rendering them inedible and useless. The implied meaning therefore was that mischief was part and parcel of growing up and one needed not be frustrated by the things children did.

The "head" image, whenever it occurred in Gusii oral literature, symbolised utmost significance. When, for instance, they said that the father was the head of the family, they meant he was the most important member of the family. Elder Nchore adds that when (in

families still steeped in tradition) the head of a chicken slaughtered for a meal is reserved for the man of the house, the act signifies two things: the pecking order in the family as well as the recognition of the man's authority. By extension therefore, when children, or grown persons with a penchant for childish acts, commit transgressions, they turn out to be most devastating. The text also implies that, in the traditional context, the authority of a man in his home determined whether his family was headed to prosperity or failure. Fundamentally, therefore, a woman that wanted her family to succeed ensured that her husband was enabled to remain in charge.

In another proverb by Nchore, *Toitera omorisia enkundi negesaku ogosiria*, (To preserve your tribe, don't hit a shepherd with a clenched fist) the indigenous community's predisposition for the boy child is evident. People were warned to let young boys be, because they are both the wealth makers and the future of the tribe. Among the traditional *Abamachoge* sub-tribe who were represented by the ox totem, and famed for their herding prowess, teenage boys ensured animals were taken to the pastures. Due to mischief, the boys at times forgot to keep an eye on the animals. When it so happened, the boys were often punished by caning. Infuriating as their actions clearly were, care was taken not to maim the future wealth makers and custodians of the tribe.

It may be remembered that cattle, which were a symbol of wealth in the traditional Abagusii way of life, were a typical measure of influence. Destroying a young man was, therefore, tantamount to undermining the community's future strength and power. The rule of thumb was therefore moderation as opposed to utopian morality. No one could be allowed to derail the entire tribe in the name of instilling discipline. Equally, the more imperative effect in such representations could be to embed in the girl's psyche the notion that all property, including

women and children, belonged to men, paving the way for continued domination and repression of women. Equally, one gets a sense of commoditization of women and children which, as further developed in subsequent sections, we feel has been carried over albeit with slight modifications to the modern social order.

Based on the foregoing, the favouritism the boy child enjoyed in the traditional order is quite unmistakable. The portrayal of boys as the custodians of the tribe orchestrated a system that systematically excluded and marginalised the girl child in favour of her male counterpart. The disparity, however, according to Mwalimu Peter Getate, whom we consider to be a modern traditionalist, is not irreparably disparaging, given that the title “man” has become more and more an earned title than a reserve for men. Traditionally, the groom was known as *omosacha* (the one who toils—a common noun and traditional title by which a married man was known by virtue of his traditional role as the provider,) while the bride was known as *omokungu*(the caretaker). The woman, therefore, provided the crucial support the husband needed in order to succeed.

The Ekegusii word *Omosacha* is derived from the main word *omosachi* which means the bread winner or the provider. *Ogosacha* is the act of providing or winning the bread for the family. In cases where the woman is an equal, if not a superior, contributor to the family kitty, as is plausible in the contemporary society, she may not only qualify for the title *omosachi*, particularly if she is the sole provider of the family, but may be called *Omosacha* (the man) though with tongue in cheek, and with the aim of lampooning the man for his aloofness which may have given the woman a chance to outshine him. The traditional term, *Omosacha*, then becomes available for use outside of the traditional sense to include women

and young people who exude qualities traditionally considered manly, such as bravery, courage, determination and success.



Image10: in the above picture taken by the researcher on 23rd July 2013, Hon. James M. Araka (wielding a shield and a spear) is ordained chairman of Abagusii Cultural and Development Council at a ceremony attended by prominent community leaders. The traditional regalia point to the resilience of traditional core values in the face of changing realities. The presence of women leaders is telling of a liberalised social order.

Another traditional cultural institution that has been a significant donor of symbols to the oral literature of Abagusii is that of initiation. Traditionally, by the age of sixteen years old, the young people had learnt the basic ways and values of the community and were now ready for initiation. As it were, initiation marked the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. From then on, successful candidates were full members of the community who worked for and contributed to the common welfare. Initiation was, therefore, in itself symbolic. A lot of training accompanied actual initiation. The training was both direct and indirect. Direct

through what was said directly to the candidates, and indirect through the various folk forms that accompanied the occasion from the start to finish. Such forms carried the value the traditional Abagusii attached to the cultural practice and what it stood for. As King'oina (1988) posits, one of the points made clear to the initiates, particularly the boys, was that they had to be tough to be men and submissive to be respectable women. Those charged with the responsibility of preparing the initiates could for instance pinch the boys' genitals, just to test their bravery and readiness for the responsibilities that lay ahead.

Besides the physical training, indirect messages were further relayed to the initiates through various folk forms that were performed throughout the period the initiates remained in seclusion. For instance, stories—most of them imaginary and overly exaggerated—of past cowardly initiates who ended up badly in life were repeatedly told to the initiates. Besides the stories, there were also songs and proverbs which were loaded with indirect messages and values. Yamaha Evans (2008, 42) confirms this when he says: “Those songs were very significant to the initiates because they informed them of their responsibilities and obligations to the community”.

The circumcision song, *Oyo* (Here he is) was collected from a circumcision ceremony conducted within the traditional specifications in Nyanchwa village, Kisii County on 16 December 2013. It was sung by young men after the boy had been successfully initiated. The participants sang joyously (see image1 below) as they escorted the initiate back home to his newly built hut that symbolised a new phase of life. The song is traditionally known as *Esimbore* which translates in English as “you are a lion”. The initiated boy had demonstrated the courage and bravery of a lion throughout the entire operation, and now the rest of the company were singing his praises. In verse 1, the soloist announces the triumphant return of

the boy-now-turned-man. He is a total man because he stared death in the face without drawing back:

<i>Oyo oyoo</i>	Here he is here he is (<i>soloist</i>)
<i>Oyoo</i>	Here he is (<i>response</i>)
<i>Obeire momura</i>	He is now a man
<i>Obeire momura eee</i>	He is a man indeed (CS1)

It was held among the traditional Abagusii that a man was not a man because he was male but because of his extra-ordinary feats. To be called a man was therefore equal to being a conqueror.

Verse three is built on a well known traditional proverb:

<i>totogia momura kieni X 2</i>	Never praise a man for his looks X2
<i>motogie makora X 2</i>	But for his deeds X2 (CS1)

A man is praised because of his achievements, and not because he is handsome. Of course, the community had very high expectations on a man: get through circumcision successfully, get married at prime age, raise a family and be useful to society. Whoever fell short of the threshold greatly undermined his social standing and pedigree. The fourth verse is rich in symbols and wordplay. To say *Ritimo riaye riatierigwe* (His spear has been sharpened) may have at least two meanings: given the volatile nature of security between the traditional communities, a successful initiate joined a regimen of warriors who protected the community's nation from her belligerent neighbours, mostly the Kipsigis and the Maasai. The implication was that the boy was now man enough to protect both his family and community.

The second meaning entails an allusion to the candidate's genitals which have been made ready to fight at the family front to ensure sufficient progeny. A good hunter conducted his activities away from home and not among relatives: *Tiga arwane sigisi* (Let him fight against the Kipsigis). The statement is a veiled attack on sexual delinquency such as rape and incest. Further, to portray sexual intercourse as a battle that must be won by the man not only captures sex as a tool of aggression but as part of a wider scheme to ensure women remained in their place. For sure, a woman that has been conquered sexually is much more likely to show disinterest in fighting the infringement of her rights than their "unconquered" counterparts. The sexual fantasies captured in the song, therefore, signify sex as one of the tools meant to sustain patriarchal supremacy.

The last verse of the song is a curse targeting the cowardly boy who ran away from the circumcision ground. "He may go marry his mother" because he is not courageous enough to face the world and fight the wars of men. Just like in Pastor Moronya's proverb, *Omwana omuya no'yoise omobe no'yong'ina*, (a successful child belongs to the father, but the irresponsible one to the mother) a disgraced man is a curse to his mother. Such men belong home with their mothers and are irreparably condemned. They were referred to as *moisurumba*, meaning the one who never wants to leave his mother alone, hence the derogatory language directed at the failed candidate:

<i>Omoisia nyoko teta</i>	Fearful boy you fuck your mother
<i>Teta nyoko</i>	Fuck your mother
<i>Omoisia nyoko teta</i>	Fearful boy, fuck your mother
<i>Teta nyoko eee</i>	Fuck your mother (CS1)

He is not better than a toddler who derives a lot of pleasure from the mother's lap and arms. With such propensity for multiple interpretations, the above genre ends up voicing more than a single social concern or ideology.

Women too had a song they sang for their initiated girls. Just as in the above song for initiated boys, the song was performed while returning home from the riverbank where circumcision was conducted. The journey to and from the initiation ground symbolised a change of status as indicated in the song *Eaoye eaoye* (The Celebration Song) by Rebecca Machini. Many a time, events for both girls and boys took place concurrently, and just as in the men's song, the subject of the women's song is the female initiation candidate who features prominently in verse one. She is said to have acquired beauty; the beauty of a grown woman that has matured in the ways of the community, hence the reason to celebrate *Eaoye eaoye* (the celebration song). The exhortation of the initiates not only created an ecstatic feeling but also reflects the participants' reverence for and unvanquished attachment to traditional practices such as marriage and procreation.

It is apparent in the last line that the successful candidates earn praise for living up to the patriarchal expectations. Such seemingly harmless representations may not only influence the grown woman's personality and psyche, but was also likely to inhibit their development into mature liberated individuals:

<i>Goka okorire buya</i>	Be happy she has done well
<i>Oreng mokabaisia</i>	She was a wife of uncircumcised boys
<i>Obeire mokabamura</i>	Now she is wife of circumcised boys (RM3)

The only attraction men seemed to notice in the ladies was their sexual readiness. Those already initiated happily identified with the gallant initiate, while those yet to face the knife felt encouraged to do so, because without the mark they would never be beautiful in the eyes of men. The ecstatic atmosphere that the song brought about could explain why it has been difficult to totally eradicate the ritual of clitoridectomy among the Abagusii.

Worthy mentioning also, *Eaoye eaoye*, though rarely performed openly for fear of reprisal from the authorities, is one of the most dramatic rhythmic dances Abagusii women ever performed. It is really difficult to stand there and just look while the song is being performed. To take part in its performance was indeed fulfilling and a big honour among women. Only elderly/married women who had undergone the ritual took part in the dance. Their dress code was *chingobo* (traditional leather dresses—see image 6) which *Mama* Rebecca Machini called ceremonial attire for respectable Gusii women. The women had reason to celebrate because they had fulfilled the demands of tradition: to prepare as many women as they could for adult life and matrimony.

The elderly women attended the ceremony to take credit for their momentous achievement. Just like the song's powerful innuendoes, the women's vigorous gyrations reflect their excitement and vigour. Equally, by referring to the men's song, *Esimbore*, there emerges an indication that the women's excitement has something to do with men:

<i>Esimbore yaito</i>	Our men's song
<i>Yarure sugusu</i>	Has come from up
<i>Eaoye eaoye</i>	<i>Eaoye eaoye</i> (RM3)

The reference had other innuendoes though: it did not just indicate the direction from which the men could be heard singing their initiation song, but also elevated the man higher than the woman, in terms of authority.

Rogoro Ndwochabe Up of Ochabe (name of a man)

Irianyi neyaito Down is ours (RM3)

In Ekegusii, “the North” and “the South” loosely translate into “up” and “down” respectively, positions that are sexually suggestive.

Coming from women, the innuendoes suggest they had internalised their subordinate role. Hence, they were not only fulfilling the man’s imagination of a matured woman but also playing to the men’s sexual fantasy which, as we saw earlier, was a patriarchal tool for conquering women. The suggestive language is not considered vulgar because the circumstances permitted it. Participants were unambiguous about the mindset they wanted to inculcate in their now adult target audience. Having attained marriageable age, the community owed the youngsters some liberty as they looked to find their matrimonial partners. The essence of the uncensored use of language indicated to the initiates that adulthood came with both autonomy and a degree of free will. The free will was not absolute because the performers are expected to stick to the original script and not introduce any outlandish expressions into the song they are performing.



Image1: In this picture that I took on December 11th, 2013, men and women take part in a traditional initiation ceremony. The costumes and props signify the peculiarity of the occasion. The spear, bow and arrows, and shield signify the making of a future warrior and leader, and, of course, the initiate's "spear" has been sharpened. Women keep a safe distance as men take the lead to indicate that on matters touching on the community's welfare, men take the lead. Some women are adorning the traditional ceremonial attire (chingobo). Clearly, initiation rituals still express certain core values of Abagusii.

Having undergone all the training the young members in their late teens were now expected to behave accordingly. Omariba's proverb, *Inguru chiabamura nchogu egwatia mbara* (a young man's strength is like an elephant splitting planks) which compared a young man's strength to an elephant splitting planks of wood, could be used to praise young men who showed mastery of the traditional ways and were making good progress. The humour and a sense of triumph that is aroused by the image of an elephant, with its blunt feet, splitting planks indicate that the elders are happy in their young men. It is also a symbol of what the young men could achieve if they remained faithful to the old teachings.

In contrast, youngsters who deviated from the ways advocated by the community were regarded the same way as failed ventures. Such youth were, in various texts, symbols of greed, foolishness and utter irresponsibility. The above traits are present in Rebecca Machini's *Okanyang'au na Okang'ombe* (Hyena and Cow). During the performance, Rebecca was clearly conscious of the feelings and reactions she wanted to arouse in her audience. "In a world full of trickery," the narrator said, "my aim is to warn you against ungrateful characters in your midst" (an interview, 27/06/2013). Hare's wisdom is used to uphold justice, and although Cow's motherly generosity is abused, her actions are vindicated by Hare's shrewd intervention. The message then was that the larger community and the collective good always prevailed above personal will.

The significance the traditional Abagusii community attached to animals in their systems of thought and communication has already been exemplified in chapter two through the community's totemic system which extends into various folk forms herein discussed. Briefly, below are some traits that various animals were assigned in the Gusii folklore:

1. The elephant: symbol of power and strength
2. The lion: symbol of bravery and power
3. Dog: symbol of obedience
4. Cat: symbol of dark forces
5. Cock: symbol of sovereignty and being in charge
6. Snake: symbol of power and agility
7. Hyena: symbol of greed and foolishness
8. Hare: symbol of wit
9. Sheep: symbol of simplicity and foolishness
10. Cow: symbol of sufficiency and infinite motherliness.

A lot of bitterness accompanied the depiction of the youth who failed to meet the elders' expectations. As is evident in Rebecca Machini's proverb, *eeetata, geutere gekobamboka gekebambokere* (yes, it's true, you will make a fire for it to warm itself but when it is warm and has expanded, it will explode on your face). Through the proverb, those raising children are warned to prepare for unexpected results. The symbols are pastoral. When a chick or any other animal developed a chill after being rained on or being exposed to cold, a fire was lit for them to keep warm. It was totally frustrating and disgusting that such animals could turn violent on recuperating. The imagery of something that was initially pitiable and on the verge of death turning on its benefactor-turned-victim evoked a sense of caution in the audience, encouraging them to exercise prudence in their acts of generosity. The indication is that the young people that the community had so dutifully raised had turned against the same community.

Further, the proverb resonates well with *entankana ekwabwata buya nero ekomenya* (an orphan that knows how to live with people prospers) as well *astuga ntakana ya ng'ombe totuga ntakana monto* (you are better off raising an orphaned calf than a child) since all of them emphasise the treacherous nature of humans. Appreciation of the above proverbs is significantly dependent on one's understanding of the rustic environment they allude to. Calamities among the traditional Abagusii were communal. Often times, however, individuals that benefited from communal acts of benevolence turned out to be ungrateful. From this, it was concluded that human beings will always be human beings and any help accorded to them should not be deemed an investment.

When appropriated to the contemporary situation by Jared Mombinya, in *Amaya Mbosiare*, (better things lie ahead), the proverb, *entankana ekwebwata buya nero ekomenya*, (an orphan

that knows how to live with people prospers) helps amplify the message contained in the song which counsels restraint in all undertakings, particularly in the era of HIV/AIDS pandemic. The term *entankana*, an orphan, helps the audience capture the severe condition of an individual that is in a state of desperate want. In their vulnerable situation, such individuals are wont to give much less scrutiny to any help extended to them. The two words which constitute the proposition part of the proverb, “*ekwebwata buya*” translate in English as “who carries himself with decorum”. The expression may then be taken to mean conducting oneself magnanimously even in the face of adversity and suffering. Such was the test of true heroism. The completion of the proverb, *nero ekomenya* (is the one that survives or prospers) implies that only those capable of looking beyond quick fixes and passing pleasures will experience true and lasting victory.

Tuga ntakana ya ng’ombe totuga ntakana monto, (you are better off raising an orphaned calf than a child) on the other hand, seems to out rightly point out that it is better to raise an orphaned calf than a human child. According to Peter Nchore, however, (an interview on 22nd July 2013) his intention is to put it through to the youth that irresponsible behaviour will not be condoned and anybody that ignores the warning faces a worse fate than that of an orphaned calf. In a way, therefore, the negative images helped whip the youth into upright persons through an influx of severe ramifications.

The foregoing folk texts are among those meant to form part of the training for the young boys and girls among the traditional Abagusii. By exposing the youngsters to values conveyed through the texts early in their lives, the chances of having them internalised are higher. The grandparents, under whose watch the young people grew, performed the forms at every opportune time as a way of ensuring the young people knew exactly what was expected

of them. It is also clear that childhood captured the imagination of many a traditional oral artist and that it was both a source and a fertile ground for the symbolic values that the traditional Abagusii, through the oral artists, sought to inculcate in the youth. With the passing of childhood, the youth were considered ready for the next phase of their lives as envisaged in the traditions and customs of the indigenous Abagusii: family life. In the next section, we shall discuss the various symbols that refer specifically to the traditional Abagusii's ideologies about parenthood and the family.

Symbols of Home Making

Within the traditional cultural system of Abagusii, the institution of the family, was the fourth most important after the tribe and the sub-tribe. While the tribe was the largest political unit, and the sub-tribe the second largest, the family was the smallest. Each sub-tribe comprises several exogamous clans. A clan may be seen as a social grouping comprising a number of households whose male heads claim descent from a common ancestor (Monyenye, 1977, 12). It is therefore accurate that the family was the core of all cultural practices and ideologies of the traditional Abagusii community. In this section, we are going to identify and discuss the nature and role of the literary representations that have the traditional institution of the family as their foundation.

In the Abagusii traditional system, reproduction was the essence of marriage. Large families were associated with wealth and security. One of the expectations on couples, especially women, therefore, was to bear as many children as possible. Peter Nchore's proverb, *Nguba emo tiyana koirwa roche* (a lone shield has never delivered animals to the watering point)

Illustrates the significance the traditional Abagusii attached to child bearing. A shield and a spear formed the basic traditional weaponry exclusively wielded by the tribe's warriors.

Women had no recognised role in matters relating to wealth creation and security, hence it was a serious abomination for women to handle the weapons.

In the olden days of cattle raids, a lone warrior leading a herd to a water point was a big risk. The more the shields (representing a bigger number of young men) the more secure the community felt. A family with more sons was, therefore, better-off than the one with only daughters or fewer sons. The shield was also a symbol of the community's inclination to counter external hostilities. The community's security lay in the hands of young men and not women. Omariba's proverb, *totogia mokungu kieni, motogie mwana*, (praise a woman for her deliveries, not her beauty) further indicates that in the traditional community women's fertility was not a personal or even a family issue, but a matter of communal interest. Regardless of any qualities a woman may boast, she was useless if she was not mother to many children, notions that are clearly not relevant any more. Evidently, in the traditional context, childless marriages were viewed with contempt.

In Rebecca Machini's proverb, *Nyamokungu omo aye imosiereko okobera tobunera abagaaka chinkore*, (you who has one wife will sit close to the door lest you break the elders' drinking straws) categorically placed the onus of ensuring the community had enough children on men. Men who hesitated were caricatured as a sorry lot that was emasculated by their wives. Ironically, such men were a laughing stock even among women simply because society had no place for women who emasculated their husbands. The image of a lonesome monogamous man seated by the entrance, exposed to the cold indicates the ridicule and lowly status such men had to bear with.

The elders' drinking straws were a symbol of their authority and breaking them was a great abomination. There was, therefore need to keep them out of the way of a monogamous man who could break them as he scampered to respond to distress calls from his only wife. The argument was that, in case of an emergency, monogamous men were more likely to panic, because they feared losing their only wives, while elders could take time to inquire who among their many wives needed their attention. The fright associated with monogamous men reduced them to mere boys who lacked the capacity to fathom grave matters. To boost their ego and standing, therefore, such men needed to go for more wives. It then becomes clear that polygamy was a matter that had its bearing, not on individual discretion, but at the core of the community's gender ideologies.

In addition to the foregoing, the ideal traditional couple roles of the breadwinner man and the home maker woman were replayed in oral texts in many different ways. A praise song for devoted mothers by Mwanyagetinge Dancers, upholds the image of a selfless dutiful mother as a symbol of love and a successful family:

<i>Baba okomanya kinomire</i>	Mother who knows when I'm starving and drying up
<i>Namatori akoboko</i>	Morsels ever ready at hand
<i>Na'tesibia</i>	Even with her dirty hand
<i>Kogicha indie 'nyigote</i>	I eat and fill my tummy
<i>Baba nyambere ibere</i>	Mother, of two full breasts (MD4)

In the folk song, the new couple were reminded of the duties and responsibilities that awaited them and the need to perform them faithfully. The rich imagery of "Mother, the owner of two full breasts/ Mother who crouches/Walks sideways/Crawls/All for my comfort" demonstrate

that parents worked hard to win their children's esteem. Traditionally, the mother's breasts are referred to as the glands of love. They therefore symbolised the unique love that only the mother could give her young ones. There are also many extra ordinary things that only the mother, out of her special love, could do for her children:

<i>Baba ominto amagenda tugutugu</i>	Mother who crouches,
<i>Amagenda seremani</i>	Walks sideways,
<i>Amagenda magunkura</i>	Crawls,
<i>Ko' chinda chioreka nsabo</i>	All for my comfort (MD4)

By honouring mothers in such strong terms, the song ends up with an equally strong implication on the gender ideology among the traditional Abagusii. To begin with, the voice in the song being that of a man, women are portrayed as the ones who reap most from a well brought up man. A strong successful man was indeed the pride of the mother. It may also be a concession from men that some things could only come from women. Likewise, the text offered some sort of consolation to women. Indeed, children who were well behaved and successful—whether by hard work, by luck or by marrying into a prosperous family—were a surety for mothers gaining respect and recognition as communicated above in Rebecca Machini's proverb, *Omokungu omonyaka mbana bamokorire enting'ana* (a dirty woman can be turned into a virgin by her children).

In another praise song by Mwanyagetinge Dancers, *Egetinginye Ekeng'aini* (The Clever Weaver Bird) the community's expectations on the man, who is the head of the family, are divergent from those on women. In the song the ideal man is hard working and successful, a symbol of sophistication and perfection:

<i>Egetinginye ekeng'aini</i>	The clever weaver bird
<i>Kerigie oboundi keagache</i>	Finds strong grass for weaving
<i>Embura egotwa</i>	When it rains
<i>Gesoe mwaye</i>	He shelters in his own house (MD1)

Traditionally, the male weaver bird was known never to raise his family in a condominium and congested neighbourhoods. He worked single handed with no extra means of working but only his beak. He weaved together a strong shelter for his future family. With the entrance at its base, the nest had to win the approval of his bride before they move in officially. The weaverbird pulled the intricate duty through by sheer discipline and hard work. The song, therefore, helped project qualities that could guarantee a prosperous family, such as a hard working figurehead. In the traditional context, skill, more than anything else, made a man: skills to attract a worthy wife as well as develop mechanisms to control her. The notion is further strengthened by two proverbs from *Mama Rebecca Machini*: *Omokungu omoing'onyi origirie abereke* (a nagging woman wants to be pregnant) as well as *Omokungu omotindi moe omogondo bwekenyambi areme* (a woman that makes too much noise should be given land full of couch grass to plough). The former insinuates that lack of coitus could turn a woman into a nag, while the latter implies that an idle woman would often make too much noise. The woman was here treated the same as the beast of burden that is subdued only through hard labour and plenty of sex; a child that needs to be preoccupied lest she gets mischievous. The portrayal of women as ever weak and unreliable only serves to demonstrate the traditional Omogusii man's determination to preserve his domination. The notion of planning ahead of the rains signifies the foresight the man as the head of the family needed to have. After all is said and done, it was the man's prerogative to ensure the family was never in want and had somewhere to shelter.

The centrality of the man's foresight and tenacity to the family's prosperity is further captured in Omariba's proverb, *Chiombe ne chianyakemogi nyariso riomo* (cows belong to him who blinks but retains a dry eye). The proverb recreates a situation where a man that was determined to succeed in his undertakings managed to retain a dry eye(s) even after being pricked. The images of one fighting on despite the challenges signify the qualities of courage and determination as necessary for survival in the traditional context. The proverb, like many others in the present chapter, is steeped in the traditional Abagusii way of life.

As earlier shown, the true sign of wealth among the traditional Abagusii was a herd of cattle. The cattle were the traditional man's bank and reserve. With cattle one was sure to get married and win admiration amongst his peers and potential spouses, the reason the cow is a symbol of womanhood and prosperity. With a sizeable herd, the man could also keep his family nourished with a sufficient supply of milk, a symbol of sufficiency. Men, therefore, worked hard to keep a herd he could call his own. Whether through raids or shrewdness, it was imperative for men to go about their business without complaining or showing weakness. The images of one being pricked in the eye but refusing to allow tears to cloud his view represent the ideal man who was resilient and determined, qualities that women were believed to lack but, nevertheless, attracted to.

Like men, women too needed to be shrewd so as to raise a successful family. A good wife knew her place. Some of the portrayals of women, therefore, ought not to be taken at face value. While discussing the role and relevance of the family setup among the traditional Abagusii, (Abagusii cultural centre Kisii, on 27/07/2013) Mama Rebecca Machini performed *Tata nomochoberi*, (My father is a creeper) a traditional marriage song, in which fathers are

Such a portrayal was important in a system that continually assigned women subordinate roles.

Verse 2 starts with a rhetorical question which points to the bride's dilemma and innocence, "How will it turn out?" The allure of the life she had left remained, yet she also desired to start a new life as a married woman. Her future is, however, totally dependent on her husband. Even babies come as a surprise: "Miracles are mysterious/fire begets ashes/Reeds beget water." The bride was used to fire producing ashes, and reeds water, but never had she imagined of one day giving birth to her own babies. 'Ash' and 'water' are, therefore, symbols of nature's processes, which reflect on what is happening to the bride. The series of events that lead to the consummation of the marriage seem beyond the young woman's control. Nature seems to be on the man's side. Portraying women as not being in control of the changes that happen is more likely meant to boost the man's ego rather than to highlight the general naivety of women.

In the same verse 2, men who hesitate to plunge into marriage are encouraged to overcome their fear and become real men

<i>Auma aaka ng'umbu,</i>	Auma (a man's name) get to the other ridge,
<i>Kende tikeri roche,</i>	There is no danger in the valley,
<i>'esasati ekona kwoga</i>	That noise comes from reeds,
<i>Ing'o bono okoibora aba?</i>	Who bears your kind? (RM4)

The rhetoric both blackmails and reminds Auma that men take risks for the sake of society, as well as prove their manhood by getting their own women. By urging the man on, the voice in the song manages to make marriage and raising a family a measure for manhood. A simple

undertaking that makes all the difference. Crossing the valley symbolises the things one had to do to become a real man. “No! We’ve enough men in our home/Men of fair complexion”. Fair complexion in this context has nothing to do skin tincture, but rather the man’s courage and daredevilry, qualities that made a man in the traditional context.

In yet another marriage song by Machini, *Tata Agantebia*, (Father Told Me) the image of a woman as a symbol of naivety is upheld. The bride blames her father for deceiving her into marriage, further implying that marriage was some sort of a conspiracy between men. Such a representation was soothing to the man’s ego since it comes with the impression that men are in charge. The song comes from the traditional practice which charged parents and relatives with the responsibility of ensuring their sons and daughters married rightly. In the song, the speaker feigns total ignorance in her claim that she thought the man in whose hut she had been sent to spend the night was “her brother”. Besides signifying the woman’s submission, the feigned inexperience was an indication a false personality on the part of women, calculated to disarm the man. The implied conspiracy between the speaker’s father and her suitor only confirms an institutionalised passive role of women in matters marriage in the traditional Abagusii way of life. A further implication is that men needed to be good schemers in order to get good things in life. Such portrayals could not only feed men’s ego, but also set the bar higher for potential grooms. As already shown above, a man needed to be shrewd and a trickster, albeit in a good sense, in order to succeed as a family man.

In another marriage song performed to us by Mwanyagetinge Dancers on the 24th of June 2013, “*Ning’oria?* (Who is that?), the heroic status accorded the man is deserved:

<i>'ing'oria okorwa ng'umbu eria</i>	Who is that approaching from the other ridge
<i>Nigo abwekaine tata</i>	He resembles my father (husband)
<i>Tobaisa komomonya</i>	He shouldn't be the subject of your backbiting
<i>Ndangererie omwanchi one</i>	Let my love come to me
<i>Omwanchi ondusetie seito</i>	My love who made me a woman
<i>Tobaisa komoaka</i>	Don't hurt him
<i>Tobaisa komomonya</i>	He shouldn't be the subject of your backbiting
(MD2)	

The singing voice is full of praise for her spouse ostensibly for making her a “woman”. The respect the newlywed accords her spouse is at the same level as that she accords her own father, making him such a suitable spouse. The woman is protective of her man because of the good things he has done her. The heroics of the groom include his courage, bravery and, above all, being wealthy:

<i>Ongoro nomokunyi</i>	Ongoro works hard
<i>Ere agakunya isano nemo</i>	He won me with six heifers
<i>Ne'chimbori ikomi nemo chioka</i>	And eleven goats
<i>Nachio chiandusia minto</i>	Now I'm a woman (MD2)

The commoditization of women and their portrayal as incomplete without a man further draws from the traditional hegemonic social order. Women that could not fit in the foregoing stereotyped categories were rejected and caricatured as outsiders who symbolised failure. Such women were a symbol of headstrong defiance and were often earmarked for punishment.

Rebecca Machini's *Omoibi Bw'emiongo*, (A Thief of Pumpkins) is built on the negative symbol of a doomed woman who disrespects order. The story is, unmistakably, a traditional moral tale, containing a symbolic female figure that defies order, only to set herself up for misfortune. There is no mention of the woman's husband, thus the woman lacks someone to control her. It is deplorable for a woman, the custodian of morality not only to steal, but bring the baby along, strapped to her back and witnessing the wicked act. At a deeper level, therefore, the act of the owner of the garden taking possession of the child is not just punitive to the woman, but also meant to save the baby from the mother's negative influence. The main message in the text, therefore, is that a woman operating on her own without a man is a recipe for chaos and will come up to no good.

In addition, the traditional Omogusii superstitiously associated pumpkins with the spiritual world; death and immortality. It was abominable either to steal or to refuse one a pumpkin. For one to steal such a thing, they must be something of crazy or carelessly daring: an irredeemable thief who, punishment aside, falls under a spell by stealing things that should not be stolen. Among the traditional Abagusii, therefore, there were petty thieves and odious thieves. Petty thieves could be let go but not the odious ones. Elders could often intercede for the "small" thieves saying: *motige, motige nenchara* (let him/her go, leave him/her alone. It is hunger!) Such unsolicited defence was really embarrassing and sufficient retribution in itself. For the big thieves, caught or otherwise, ill omen always dogged them and capital punishment awaited them, unless they were cleansed upon confessing voluntarily. Even *Engoro* (God), his unending mercy notwithstanding, gave up on such people, much as they may not be beyond hope. A fitting sacrifice could be sufficient to exorcize *Emeika emebe*, the evil spirits.

The reference to the sky, or any other celestial body, is, of course, a veiled reference to the omnipotent Creator, *Engoro*. The traditional Omogusii tended to associate the sky with God as suggested below by Nelson King'oina Nyang'era in *The Making of Man and Woman under Abagusii Customary Laws*:

After four to six days (following birth—my addition) the navel-chord dropped and early morning when the sun had arisen, the mother took her baby outside and did point her breasts to the sun, squeezed milk out while uttering the words—*rioba nderere nainche nkorere* (sun (sky), nurse this baby for me as I too nurse it for you—my translation). Thus she dedicated the infant and its well being to God.... (15)

Indeed, “The sky could then shine, but where was the baby?” in Machini’s *Omoibi Bwemiongo*, (A Thief of Pumpkins) is meant to suggest that the pumpkin thief’s day had finally come, since even the most powerful of external forces had given up on her.

Above all, it may be noteworthy that the traditional symbolism that shrouds the pumpkin has found its way into the local Catholic Church followers’ idiom. Up to this day, when a baptised catholic among Abagusii confesses, to the priest, of having eaten a pumpkin, they are confessing to having bewitched and devoured human flesh. According to Father Jeremiah Matogo of the Kisii Parish of the Catholic Church, the symbolism has been institutionalised and priests working among Abagusii have been initiated into the idiom. The sin of devouring human flesh, due to its heinous nature, can be forgiven but only once.

In other contexts, the unrestrained woman comes through as a symbol of evil and temptation, to be avoided by all men. For instance, in addition to calling for praise for the gallant warriors of the community who returned home with several head of cattle following a successful raid, Omariba's proverb, *Timorora chigocha mochisekere, mbamura chiarire menuko* (don't be too happy when you see the warriors arrive with cattle, a lot of red blood has been shed) is a warning to men to be weary of women who are keen on sharing their loot. The proverb is linked to the 1911 *samsamwar* (explained above) that claimed thousands of lives among the invading Kipsigis warriors who were trying to recover their stolen stock. The use of force to acquire wealth is herein palpable. The dead blood symbolises the inevitable sacrifices one had to make for the sake of success. In the traditional context, therefore, men who avoided challenges had effectively forfeited their manliness.

There was also the image of an unmarried woman who is a symbol of a temptress and unrestrained sex. The woman was visible everywhere and her aim is to trap men. In the proverb below, expressions like "don't be too happy when you see warriors arrive with cattle, a lot of red blood has been shed," are full of innuendoes that are clearly aimed at signifying unmarried mature women as perverted lazy creatures bent on living off the sweat of hard working young men. Even in modern times, such portrayal is upheld in such texts as Christopher Monyoncho's *Nyaboke*. Blood, here, represents both men's sacrifice and the lazy women's aversion to hard work that requires one to sacrifice his/her blood (work hard). To say, therefore, that a lot of red blood (meaning invaluable blood) has been shed deliberately excludes women from those to be acknowledged. Instead, the returning warriors are warned to be wary of women who would cajole them to waste the wealth they acquired with their blood.

Similarly, in a chant by Mwanyagetinge Dancers, *Ng'ererie obokombe*, (Give me a hoe) MD3, the neighbourhood was warned to be cautious about lazy unrestrained women who loiter with ill intentions. Images of a neglected garden and a beautiful praying woman that ever loiters and keeps borrowing things from neighbours help to portray female beauty as valueless and even an unnecessary distraction and an object of suspicion in the traditional situation:

<i>Ng'ererie obokombe</i>	Give me a hoe
<i>Nekebago egesera</i>	With a beautiful handle
<i>Ng'ende koabusera omogondo</i>	So that I may sow
<i>Omogondo onyakieni kebariri</i>	In the land that belongs to the beautiful woman
<i>Omokungu siomiasiomia</i>	The woman that loiters
<i>Ng'ayi akomanya bwarugeirwe</i>	How does she know who has cooked
<i>Gose mboke gose mbwa mwana</i>	And whether it was for the baby? (MD3)

Female beauty is, in this context, a symbol of unharnessed value. The immoral woman's beauty was on the outside rather than within. True beauty lay in the woman's character and started from within outwards. In the chant, the beautiful woman is lazy; a master of deceit. Such women were, for instance, assumed to spend too much of their time attending to their looks, and thus had little time for their families and gardens which remained untilled. Such women were hard to please or satisfy and were ever on the move in search of elusive satisfaction: "So that I may sow/In the land that belongs to the beautiful woman/The woman that loiters". The woman, with her ill manners, is evidently unwelcome in most homes.

Verse two is, unmistakably, an extended symbol. Apparently, the addressee has a habit of borrowing other people's things, but fails to return them in good time. According to Mama Teresa Nyaboke Sagwe, (an interview on 21/07/2013) women who fit in the above description are more likely to be of loose morals and could ignite family conflicts and breakage by tempting and hoarding other women's husbands. In the contemporary society, such women are likely to have an urban liberated mentality as captured in a song by Christopher Monyoncho, *Abamura Bechitaoni* (Men living in Towns). In the song, Monyoncho warns men working in big towns to keep off such women. Set in the urban centres, the song then ends up addressing more than one issue, most prominent of them all being the relationship between beauty, urbanisation and immorality. It seems the constant disparaging of beautiful women is both a phobia and a veiled effort by forces of male hegemony to have power over potentially rebellious and self opinionated women by subjecting them to patriarchal standards.

The disparaging treatment of beauty is further evident in Omariba's proverb, *Omosacha onywomete Omokungu omonyakieni aabwekaine omonto osimegete obori eteyeye* (a man that marries a beautiful woman shares the same fate as that who plants sorghum in the open). The unlucky man that ends up with the beautiful woman must not only be vigilant, but also be prepared to go that extra mile to satisfy or please his partner: "Give me a hoe/With a beautiful handle/So that I may sow/In the land that belongs to the beautiful woman". The man's concerted efforts are represented by the "beautiful hoe" with which he aims to impress the woman. Worse still, the man may as well prepare to lose his restless spouse to a more endowed man. The stereotyping of beautiful women may be seen as an attempt by the patriarchal order to reign over women.

The third meaning of the song was revealed to us by Mama Teresa Nyaboke Sagwe (an interview on 21/07/2013). In her interpretation, loitering meant the same as keeping multiple sexual partners. A woman that did not care to watch over her movements would never even be able to identify the men who had sired her children, because she had had intercourse with too many of them: “How does she know who has cooked/And whether it was for the baby?” (MD3) It may be observed that the traditional society held women responsible for almost everything that failed to meet the strict traditional moral standards so long as they happened to be involved.

From the foregoing analysis, it is evident that the traditional Abagusii entrusted the prosperity of the community to the dominating man. Women, on the other hand, are portrayed as unreliable, idle, weak and, at worst, evil. Nevertheless, much as traces of negative portrayal of women may still persist in modern texts of oral literature among Abagusii, the trend may have been significantly reversed in the background of, among other dynamics, the rise of feminist activities and increased participation of women in the social, economic and political activities among the modern Abagusii. In the section that follows, the role of old age and the traditional religion in the symbols employed by Gusii oral artists is examined.

Symbols of Old Age and the Traditional Religion

Old age, among the traditional Abagusii, symbolised wisdom, cultural maturity and sophistication as well as sound instruction. Old age and the traditional religion have a close affinity because both are based on an intricate hierarchical order. As earlier noted, *Engoro* (God) was the supreme ruler of Omogusii. Below *Engoro*, were prophets (*ababani*), such as the great Sakawa, followed by priests and diviners—all of them drawn from among male elders. There then followed middle aged men (heads of family), women and children in that

order. Male elders were presumed to be closer to God and elderly women were only allowed to rise to the level of diviners. (Monyenye, 1977) Old age and the traditional religion were, therefore, a key part of the traditional patriarchal system. Members of the community were expected to carry out designate roles on the basis of their age, gender and social status as set in the traditional and religious order.

In a proverb by Pastor Moronya, *Magokoro nsaro maya bantina bagwa boreba*, (my grandmother is a pouch full of good things, those who refuse to draw from it fall into trouble) old age is a symbol of mature wisdom that only comes with experience. The proverb advocates for respect and obedience toward the custodians, because obedience is the surest way for one to rise to the level of elders. The image of one deeping his or her hands into a basket full of goodies and drawing their share symbolises the benefits that await those who respect elders.

Likewise, another proverb by Moronya, *Abagaka nobirorire, na'bana nobiganyire*, (elders have seen, the young are waiting to see) sustains the image of elders as occupying the top of the traditional social pecking order. The key message is restraint and patience when dealing with the elderly in society. The images of elders who have seen it all in their long life and youngsters who know nothing as yet not only show the audience pictures of a teacher and a student respectively, but also represent the social hierarchical order that defined the indigenous Abagusii, and along which the religious doctrines of the traditional community were founded. On the other hand, a male youth that demonstrated a mature grasp of issues coupled with a deep perception of the traditional social order was not only a source of pride for male elders (who welcomed such a youth to sit with them) but also a symbol of merit within the traditional order. Moronya's proverb, *Moino ochire bake* (wisdom may seek out

the youth), portrays such youth as gifted and way ahead of their time. The proverb further depicts the indigenous system as having had a place for merit. When the proverb was said with a sense of shock, coupled with its shortness, it reflected a sense of pride in the elders. The biased recognition of the male youth both drew and contributed to the traditional patriarchal system.

Omariba's proverb, *Ngoma chigoita tari mwega okobara* (near fatal head knocks must not be operated on by novices), which straightforwardly venerates the older persons due to their wealth of experience. At a closer look, however, the latter is actually a call on people to respect the authority of elders as specified in the traditional order. The image of a deep wound that could only be attended to by an experienced traditional male physician not only represents the elders' vital contribution, but also infused in the young members of the audience the need to acknowledge authority.

In Rebecca Machini's song, *Mogaka otachi meino* (An elder that can't sing), set the standards that elders needed to measure up to: they must be authoritative and charismatic.

<i>Mogaka otachi meino</i>	An elder that can't sing
<i>Agende mwa Kwamboka obiranya</i>	Should visit Kwamboka Obiranya
<i>Asibore emeino ne'bitonga</i>	and carry basketfuls of songs
<i>Achie kona gotera mwaye</i>	He could sing back at home
<i>Aaa eee</i>	<i>Aaa eee</i>
<i>Aaa eee</i>	<i>Aaa eee</i> (RM19)

The traditional song is addressed to an old man that has a handicap in either singing or speaking the beautiful language of the traditional Abagusii. He is advised to take lessons from a female member of the community who could sing better. “An elder that can’t sing/Should visit Kwamboka Obiranya/and help himself to basketfuls of songs/He could sing back at home”. “Singing and speech,” here, represent individual conduct that impresses fellow community members. The text, therefore, not only represents the vital role language played in comprehending and fitting into the traditional order but also indicates that lacking in charisma could lead to one losing his social status. Indeed, nothing could be more unseemly than asking an elder to seek advice from a woman, whatever the matter. This further indicates that, within the traditional system, the title *omokungu* (woman) had another function of referring to men who failed to meet the threshold set by the traditional order. In total, the song, having been obtained from a woman, signifies deeply entrenched traditional modes of inequality.

Having made their contribution to society when young energetic, the elders’ remaining role was to teach and impart useful lessons into the youth who were notorious for erring. It was, however, necessary for the elders to communicate such wisdom in a language that was not direct and injurious. In any case, it could be irrational for elders to cross the youth who were much stronger than them. Moronya’s proverb, *Ase ribego rire noo chinsoti chogosangererekana*, (vulturesgather where a weakness has been noted) warns elders against being too confrontational in their altercations since that can only be irrational and even reckless. To have a way with words was therefore quite handy to the elders. In a way, the proverb implies that the elders’ might was not physical but spiritual.

In the previous chapter, we explained that the customary laws of Abagusii were mainly meant to safeguard the spiritual wellbeing of the members of the community. Spiritual wellness was apparent when members of the community rigorously adhered to the various cultural practices so as to avoid ill omen. When disasters considered strange struck, the diviner diagnosed the causes and advised necessary steps to avert reoccurrence. Contravening taboos (*emegiro*) was cited as the main cause of calamities. Some of the common taboos included incest, torching a house and committing murder. In actual fact, therefore, religion lay in the difference between good and evil.

Webster International Dictionary (2000) defines religion as a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of the superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. Going by the above explicit definition, there emerges a basis to posit that most, if not all, texts discussed above have some sort of a religious inclination by virtue that one of their core functions was to pre-empt chaos and conflict—both personal and interpersonal—among members of the community, in favour of an explicit order of existence free from evil. Our presupposition could find support in N. K. Dzobo's *African Symbols and Proverbs as Source of Knowledge and Truth*, as well as in John S. Mbiti's (1969) *African Religions and Philosophy*. Dzobo is of the view that most of the African visual symbols he discusses in his paper “were born of religious and philosophical beliefs” (Dzobo, 2009, 10). Mbiti, on his part, posits that a philosophy of one kind or another is behind the thinking of every people, the most dominant of them being religion:

Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has (sic) its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. A study of these religious systems is, therefore, ultimately a study of the peoples themselves in all the complexities of both traditional and modern life (Mbiti, 1).

But while critiquing Mbiti's work, Taban lo Liyong, in a paper he presented in the Second African Writers' Conference Stockholm 1986 entitled *Reverend Doctor John S. Mbiti is a Thief of Gods*, finds fault in Mbiti's deductions which, according to the latter, "set out to study African religions, not to glorify and/or propagate them, but with the view to reduce them and their effectiveness to the extent that they begin to look like precursors to Christianity; as if Christian monotheism evolved from their polytheism" (83). Taban, then, follows up his claim with a recommendation on how the traditional African religions ought to be studied:

Instead of deriving the essence of African religions, the Reverend could have cast a glance at the Asian mainland to look for analogous religious beliefs. One would have wished religious scholars from Hinduism, Buddhism or Shintoism had come here to study the relationship between their faiths and African religions. One also wished the ancient Egyptian religious practices and texts were made available and useful to modern Africans for us to derive inspiration from, to see the possible connections; and even to revive some aspects of, if need be. (Mbiti, 86-7)

Despite the altercations between the likes of Mbithi and Taban, our aim shall remain to examine the influence of both the traditional religion, which had no written laws, and the modern religion on symbols that were specifically meant to inculcate values to all members of the society. The basis of our approach is founded on the fact that both religions were aimed at separating the good from the bad and vice-versa.

During our focussed group discussions, and from the church services we attended on four different occasions, we observed that traditional religion, just as contemporary religion, was aimed at modelling followers along religious values of justice, respect and morality. Further, our interviewees opined that there have not been major conflicts between the traditional Abagusii culture and Christianity. “If anything,” Pastor Moronya argues, “the two forms of religion supplemented each other, since some doctrines in the traditional religion enabled Christianity to appeal to Abagusii” (an interview on 24/08/2013). Moronya even has the audacity to collectively refer to Gusii proverbs as the Traditional Abagusii Bible. As outlandish as his claims may sound, Moronya’s perspective, nevertheless, finds support from C.S. Momoh (19...) who, in *The Logic Question in African Philosophy*, as cited by Ademola Kazeem Fayemi (19...), in *Deconstructing proverbs in African Discourse: The Yoruba Example*, observes:

Proverbs are to the traditional Africans what the Bible or Quran is the religious leaders; where the religious leader would reach for passage in the Holy Book, the African would reach for a proverb. Proverbs are to one traditional African, what a book is to a student; he studied and mastered proverbs just as a student studies his subject matter in books (Momoh, 361).

Protestations such as above are important in relating the traditional religion with the contemporary or Western religion. Much as we are not going to be sucked into the debate on which, between the traditional and contemporary religious practices, is superior, we find the foregoing interlocutions illuminating considering that our main objective in this section is to identify and make sense of indigenous artistic symbols that are rooted in the indigenous religious doctrines, as well as, since we are interested in transience in the use of symbols among Gusii oral artists, examine how modern Western religion has impacted on the use of the traditional religious symbols and/or conception of new ones.

To begin with, I would wish to ascertain the presence of symbols that express specific indigenous spiritual doctrines of the traditional Abagusii. In the traditional family set-up, for instance, the man of the home was the contact between his family and the traditional religious figures and deities. If the head of the home remained in charge, and was respected and heeded by all, the family could then function optimally and steer clear of ill omen. The resulting hierarchy was in itself religious and had near absolute adherence. In Rebecca Machini's girl's initiation song, above, the women taking part in the traditional circumcision song sang: "The upper side belongs to Ochabe (name of a man)/the lower side is ours". The fact that the man stands on a ground higher than that of a woman depicts an established hierarchical order: Deity—man—woman—progeny. The symbol of hierarchy was, therefore, used as a guiding principle for leadership, and younger people who had already been introduced to the hierarchy through the various art forms they had participated in readily obliged to be led. The performances were vital in making the traditional social hierarchy look like the normal order of things. The excitement that accompanied the performance of the song went to indicate that the notion was being taken as a norm rather than an exception.

Omariba's proverb, which posits that a man ought to be praised solely for his actions, not his appearance, could, in the present context, be a symbol of merit and reward for achievement. The proverb introduces a sense of a covenant between the people and their God who could reward them for maintaining a good relationship with Him (Monyenye, 1977, 27). Though not, precisely artistic, the many rituals performed by Abagusii were a symbol of supplication to a Higher Being. Nelson King'oina (1988, 6) observes: "Any mistakes or errors did call for a cleansing ceremony where shedding of blood of an animal to appease the spirits of ancestors was necessary."

Further, according to King'oina, the indigenous Abagusii had formulaic incantations that they used as a kind of prayer. Some of the incantations, however, had artistic qualities. A case in point is the Morning Prayer by nursing mothers to *Engoro*, God of infinite power as captured King'oina:

Early morning when the sun had arisen, the mother took the baby outside and did point her breasts to the sun squeezed milk out while uttering words to this effect: Sun, nurse this baby for me as I also nurse it for you (King'oina, 15).

As a form of sacrifice as well as a pledge to do the best as *Engoro's* appointed guardian of the young one, it was the first thing the mother did in the morning, signifying that nothing superseded one's relationship with their creator. The practice seeking the Almighty's protection, first thing in the morning, echoes King David's proclamations in psalms 5:3 in which he says: *O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.* The punctilious ritual brought about a reassuring effect and sense

of excitement on the performer. The subject could now go about his business knowing he had the protection of a higher power.

The text above, among others, captures the mighty creations of *Engoro* (God) as symbolising His powers, thus the use of the technique of apostrophe in the above text. In Rebecca Machini's *Omoibi Bwemiongo* (the thief of pumpkins) above, the thief of pumpkins addresses the sky thus:

Sky, please shine on me,

I want to see my baby,

And throw the pumpkin,

Sky, I no longer need this pumpkin

Give me the light with which to see my baby

(The sky could then shine, but where was the baby? (RM1)

By addressing the sky, the pumpkin thief knows that she is actually addressing her creator, and seeking mercy. She rues her actions and, therefore, seeks forgiveness. The sky then shines but the baby is not found yet. The main point here is that God is omnipresent and actually hears the cries of His creation. The baby is not found because a time has come for the evil spirits, *emeika emebe*, that have taken possession of the woman's spirit to be exorcised. Through the turn of events, the audience could appreciate that there was a limit to the wrongs they did. Such portrayals made perfect sense in the traditional community that believed that God manifested himself through the wonders of heavenly bodies like the sun, the moon and the stars (Monyenye, 1977, 29).

In yet another supplication song known as *Ribina*, (The Rain Song) by Amariba Women Dancers, the link between God and His spectacular creations is manifest. The song was performed at the top of the hill whenever rain was needed.

<i>Amabera arure manga</i>	Mercy has come from Manga
<i>Ee Amaya arure manga</i>	Yes, good has come from Manga
<i>Eeee! Amaya arure manga</i>	Yes! Good has come from Manga
<i>Omgunde tureti chia Nyakongo</i>	Thick clouds from the sides of Nyakongo
<i>Noo omgunde osoka</i>	That is where the clouds have appeared
<i>Enkanga yarerire keera ime</i>	A goose has cried from Keera (AD3)

Line one, *Amabera nigo arwera Manga*(Mercy has come from Manga) depicts the reverence the community has had for the tallest hill in the region which is also considered the most outstanding and sacred of all the geographical features found in Gusii land. ‘Keera,’ in line six, is also a spectacular water fall found in Nyamira County. Abagusii believed that their God, Engoro, lived high above them but manifested Himself to them through his various creations (Monyenye, 1977, 27). By supplicating to God atop the hill the performers were, in a way, drawing closer to God’s mighty presence and also coming to a place where He possibly could be found. The old reverence for Manga Hill still remains as is manifest in the presence of a modern recollection centre erected at its summit by the Diocese of Kisii Catholic Church.

Furthermore, elements of devotion are manifest in the various traditional oral texts that accompanied the various rituals in which members of the community took part at various stages of their lives. One such ritual is initiation. The period the initiates remained in

seclusion was not only meant to teach them the principles of adulthood but also a time of exceptional significance when initiates were presented to God for heavenly blessings. King'oina (1988) outlines the significance of the hibernation period thus: "Within three days of the operation ... the grandmother went for special grass called *Esuguta* (sod) and transplanted it in the hut. The initiate's duties included sprinkling water or washing hands over the sod so as to keep it alive. Its growth and health signified that the evil spirits were kept at bay. If it died a ewe was strangled to cleanse the initiate by shedding blood" (King'oina, 31). *Esabari* (The journey) is the song the initiates sang whenever they were washing their hands over the sod: The journey motif in the song *Esabari nyarumo bare* (The journey of the sod for initiates) symbolised both the physical growth and the spiritual development of the initiate. Spiritual in the sense that while in seclusion, the initiate has a chance to confidentially relate with his ancestors and creator.

Traditionally, the period the initiates stayed in seclusion marked the transition from childhood to adulthood. When the initiates emerged from seclusion, they were changed individuals ready to serve the community. *Makomoke oremire nchera igoro* (My aunt has ploughed the path) refers to the act of planting *esuguta* (sod) in the seclusion hut. It is indeed bizarre as insinuated in the song but symbolised the initiate's agony concerning the life ahead. Once again, the initiate's life was depicted as a journey whose destination is uncertain, but through anguish, the initiate hoped to benefit from sacred grace and benevolence. The period the initiate remained in seclusion was such demanding and it thoroughly tested their perseverance. They were never allowed to mix with the rest of the family members and fed on bitter herbs and roots. "Where pain and anguish beget cows," therefore depicts the perseverance that the youth were expected to put into practise throughout their later lives. Cows, which depict wealth, were the object of great desire for any growing man who was to

work tirelessly and patiently to have their own. The determination to acquire wealth is further enshrined in Omariba's *Chiombe ne chianyakemogi nyariso riomo* (cows belong to him who blinks but retains a dry eye). The texts were therefore meant to prepare the young men for the rigorous hassles of adulthood.

When the period in seclusion came to an end, the initiate reverted back to the normal rhythm of life, albeit as an adult. Just as in other important occasions, texts were performed to mark the important occasion. On the night before the material day of "coming out," the young adults was taken to his parents' house as well those of his close elderly relatives and neighbours to seek their blessing through an antiphonal chant by Omariba, *tata na baba borania* (father and mother, may you consult). In the chant, the initiate's interlocutors wish him peace and plenty of children and cows: "yes, our child, we've consulted and agreed/children and cows are all yours". The interlocution continued until the young adult was satisfied with the response. The initiate wanted the parents to consult before agreeing that the former should now begin a new and prosperous life. Just as they had agreed to marry and bear him into the world as a toddler, they again needed to agree on his second birth, as an adult. The ritualistic prayer was conducted by night, and by day the initiate, in new clothes, was ready to begin a new life, full of hope and blessings. From the foregoing, we could indeed agree with Mbithi (1969) who opines that "the traditional religion permeated into all the departments of life so fully that it was not easy or possible always to isolate it" (Mbithi, 1). Below is the interlocution:

Tata na Baba Borania

Initiate: *tata na baba borania*

Parents: *ee mwana one borania*

Chiombe amo n'abana

Father and Mother, Consult

father and mother, may you consult

yes, our child, we've consulted and agreed

children and cows are all yours (King'oina, 26)

The traditional images of conversation (peace) and children (procreation) and cows (wealth) are juxtaposed in the chant, *tata na baba borania* (father and mother, may you consult). The symbolic import in the chant is that here can be neither blessings nor prosperity in a society plagued by suspicion and disagreement and conflict, adequately summing up the earlier argument that the traditional religion encompassed the entire way of life of the community. Clearly, then, peace was one of the pillars of traditional morality, which, in turn was the key principle in the traditional religious order.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that symbols that appear in the traditional oral texts have their basis in the traditional ideologies and philosophies of Abagusii. The texts are, therefore, a reflection of the thinking processes of the traditional Omogusii, such as the stringent social hierarchy as well as various traditional spiritual beliefs and practices. In the next section, the influence of the modern religion on both the traditional ideologies of the Abagusii as well as their representations is examined.

The Influence of Modern Religion

Christianity has been one of the greatest influences on Abagusii's modern living. The influx of Western missionaries into Gusiiland occasioned a severe mauling of the community's traditional spiritual values and practices. The missionaries viewed the natives as people who were essentially without God, and without hope in the world, and that their civilisation was infinitely inferior to their own (Tšiu, 2008, 60). The aim of the missionaries therefore was to sever the natives from such "barbaric" practices as polygamy and deliver them to a totally new civilised state (Tšiu, 2008, 61). It then follows that the new religion not only served to greatly undermine the traditional order but also represented an alternative value system that signified a new sense of freedom from the traditional order whose effects continue to be felt

in society even up to this day. As may be evident in texts that reflect this intermediate phase in the community's development, the meeting of the two systems inevitably occasioned a clash whose impact is noticeable in representations by oral artists as well as in the codes that were going to be used to interpret those representations. We could then talk of symbols of change which, we expect, reflect a double consciousness that characterises social transitions of such a magnitude. Ezekiel B. Alembi (2005, 103) puts it thus:

Upon gaining independence, the churches in Kenya largely came under African leadership. Since then, there has developed a blend of African and Western hymns, references are made to the Bible and African song, dance, musical instruments, proverbs and narratives are incorporated.

We then expect that from the time Christianity became an alternative value system, oral artists adjusted both their representations and use of language to reflect the new realities, in either rejecting or accepting the new order. This could later lead to many other latter day representations which we hope to map and account for in the present study. A church sermon we attended on 6th July 2013 yielded representations that we associate with the intermediary stage of social development. The sermon dwelt on the role of women in bringing up a successful family. The preacher began with a chanted proverb, follows:

Mechi maburu

Homes are like Hearths

Mechi maburu

Homes are like hearths

Bichuri bi namang'ana

Pinnacles have stories to tell

Bakungu bonsi indoche twoni

women have become cocks

Na'bana babeire emegwe

while children are arrows against their fathers

Yogokorera Emeremo

To work with (PM26)

Through the above proverbial chant, the attention of the audience was drawn to the sermon of the day which revolved around family matters. By metaphorically referring to homes as hearths, where different species of wood burn into ash, the proverb enabled members of the congregation that were familiar with the traditional hearth to visualise the many things that happen privately in homes all the time. By referring to the pinnacle, which is the highest point of the traditional Abagusii hut that ends with a sharpened elongated wooden pole pointing upwards to the sky, to give the hut the recognisable cone shape, the preacher was drawing his audience's attention to the traditional gender hierarchy. In the traditional Abagusii culture, the pinnacle, while remaining erect, communicated that the home was still functional under the man's stewardship. Its absence indicated the husband (head) of the home was now deceased.

Ironically, however, pinnacles remain in place even when families are going through serious upheavals, or even when the man has totally lost his control, hence symbolically dead. Pinnacles may, therefore, not be a reliable parameter in determining the welfare of the family. Hence, "Pinnacles have many secret stories to tell". The preacher then concluded that there is not a single household without challenges and all that is needed is patience and tolerance. The attentiveness noted in the people's demeanour was enough evidence that the message had been received well by members of the congregation. In the contemporary realities, the symbols in the chant may represent the cultural conflicts that have resulted from modern liberties.

The most powerful image in the traditional chant, however, is that of women changing into a cock. It refers to family set ups where women have usurped their men's leadership roles, with the help of their grown children. The "cock" is here a symbol of domination and force, as opposed to being charismatic and diplomatic, while an arrow is a symbol of aggression and callousness. Both symbols are repulsive to a modern audience that is more receptive to mutual respect and support between spouses and their offspring, rather than total domination by women. The symbols therefore portray the modern man as threatened by an increasingly aggressive modern woman. There was a resounding affirmation in the form of "Amen" when the preacher criticised family infighting and recommended arbitration by church on all matters of matrimonial misunderstandings.

Essentially, the representations in the chant are indicative of the gender tensions that the integrated value system has brought about. The chant then represents efforts aimed at regaining control over the changes that were unfolding in the society. By the time the preacher was reading from Ephesians 5:22, "Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands," as unto the lord appropriate response was already forming in the minds of the congregants who responded with a resounding "Amen" to the preacher's "Alleluia". On children who are set against their parents, by either parent, Ephesians 6:1-2, "Children obey your parents in the lord for this is right; honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise," (King James Version) was used to adequately warn them. Ultimately, the sermon painted a picture of model family setups where women submitted and supported their husbands without reservation, and children remained obedient.

A proverb, *Omokungu twoni kai anyigwera kingotera nyakiaberia* (how did my cock wife overhear me as I sang for my mistress), was used to further support the position by criticising

women who attempt to henpeck their husbands by seeking to control all their actions. We consider the proverb fairly modern, because the act of keeping mistresses had little space in the traditional order. The “cock” motif is once again evident. “My cock wife” is a derogatory image that symbolises an overbearing wife. The image discourages women folk from any attempt to become household “cocks” (gain authority) because it may both be in vain and undesirable. Patience and tolerance, as opposed to imperiousness, are, therefore, the defining qualities of a virtuous woman.

The fact that “the cock wife” has, nevertheless, the audacity to take her husband to task over his actions signifies a shift on the woman’s role in a changing environment. A woman that from time to time turned a blind eye to her husband’s transgressions helped build a strong family, yet it also true that the undivided commitment and fidelity of the father are crucial not only for the children’s development, but also in the era of HIV/Aids. The traditional notion was upheld by the preacher who quoted from proverbs 12:4: “A victorious woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is rottenness in his bones”. The preacher also read from proverbs 14:1: “Every wise woman buildeth her house; but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.” On this regard, therefore, the Bible seemed to be in tandem with the traditional order with its stringent hierarchy that handed women subservient roles. Nevertheless, it is not lost to us that the Bible indirectly empowers the woman with a decision making role when it places the future of her family in her hands.

In another sermon drawn from Luke 18:16, the preacher belaboured the significance of obedience among children, reminding the congregants that they were all children of God. The verse reads: “But Jesus called them unto him and said, suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God”. A seasoned orator, the preacher

began with a song, *Intwe Abana Abake*, (We Children) which clearly suited his chosen topic. The song is built, almost entirely, on a metaphor. It brings together both pastoral images (chicken, chick and hawk) and modern images (church, God, Jesus) to communicate the value of obedience among practising Christians. The Biblical counsels of Jesus is likened to a chicken that constantly watches over her chicks, but may, at times, be unable to protect the disobedient obstinate ones. As happens in the case of humans and Satan, the chick's disobedience provides a preying opportunity to the unforgiving hawk, which in this context symbolises Satan.

The hawk, just as the devil, is scheming, confident and clinical in executing her plans: "Then the hawk comes/Slowly and undetected/It spreads its wings/It picks the chick/Kruukruuuu". Everything is anticipated and happens at lightning speed which symbolises Satan's machinations. The metaphor of the chicken is not only exciting, but also leads audiences to appreciate the punishment that awaits obstinate non-believers. Above all, it may be noted that in regard to the above song, the expression "God's children" has an equalising effect on the congregation who are made aware that they are all (women, children and men) are equal before God. The foregoing assertions are not only new but also standing parallel to the traditional order, hence acting as a new ground for the empowerment of women. Women and children could now bypass men and access God, the highest authority. The idiophone "*Kruukruuuu*" symbolises the last ditch efforts from those present (Jesus/preachers/church and adults) to save the chick that has got into trouble, but which come to naught. At the end, the chick is to blame for what befalls her, the sympathy induced by the sad tone that prevails in the song notwithstanding.

The song resonates well with yet another proverb used by the preacher, *okoibora okobe nkwa 'nyoni etagotoma* (The unfortunate parenthood is that of a bird that cannot be obeyed by its young ones). The choice of the image of a bird (*enyoni*) in the proverb above is by no means accidental. The traditional Omogusii was a great admirer of a bird's foresight and work ethic, as evident in the song, *The Wise Weaver Bird*, and also in the saying, *enyoni e'namage tiyana konora* (a bird that has nestlings never grows fat). In many similar texts, the bird is portrayed as a good investor, prudent and caring. It is these qualities that the song projects onto Jesus. The main point here is that parents, just as Jesus, invest in their young ones, often selflessly, only for the children to turn against or even abandon their parents at their hour of need. Children that grow only to turn against their parents are appalling traitors and a disgrace. The pitiable image of a shrivelled bird that lacks support her draws the audience to the neglected parents' side, as well as evokes the desire to obey Jesus and to do what is right.

The relationship between the bird and her nestlings symbolises the relationship between God and human beings who turn away from God when they fall into temptation. God has tasked humans with the preaching of His word, but most have unfortunately turned a deaf ear and got engrossed in their own earthly enterprises. The message was further enhanced by a saying, *Moirana matongo makoro kegocha, tente etometi natache tairana* (Whoever gives in to the charm of the old homestead they had fled may get stuck and perish in the marshy plains) which, in the contemporary use, warns those who backslide of the punishment that awaits them. "The charm of the old home" symbolises the enthralling nature of evil and sin as depicted in the Bible, while "may get stuck" means the eventual destruction for those who cannot resist temptation and sin. In the above instances, tradition seems to be in one accord with the modern religion. The traditional symbols above are a demonstration of how oral artists can appropriate symbols inspired by earlier contexts to successive ones.

It may also be noted that the Biblical parables may have contributed to the survival of traditional representations. While preaching on the crucial role of women in families on 17/11/2014 at the Kisii Parish Cathedral, Father Matogo had readings from Proverbs 31:10-31 (which about worthy wives whose value is far beyond pearls); Mathew 25:14-30 (which is about a master that was going on a journey and who entrusted his servants with his possessions) and from Mathew 25:1-13 (which is about the five foolish women whose lamps had no oil). Matogo interpreted the verses to mean that God expects us to have faith in Him, to serve Him like faithful wives and to prepare for his second coming. We observe that the only difference between the traditional symbols and the Biblical symbols is that the latter treat all humans as equal while the former have a bias towards men. Nevertheless, it may also be argued that the occurrence of Biblical symbols may have bolstered the traditional artists in their use of both the traditional and modern symbols. Indeed, the Biblical parables were further evidence of how effective representational communication can be.

The topic of discussion during our third focused group discussion, attended by the Kisii District S.D.A. church youth leader, Mwalimu Evans Aricha, was the general view of God that people held, both young and old, traditional or modern. It emerged from the argument that people, generally, had the same view and understanding of the Supreme Being. Aricha read three Bible verses, namely: John 3:16, Psalms 23:1 and Isaiah 1:18. The three verses revolve around God's love for all people: John 3:16 goes: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believeth in him should not perish but may have everlasting life." Psalms 23:1 reads, "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want." Finally, from the book of Isaiah 1:18 came the message: "Come now and let us reason together, said the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red

as crimson, they shall be as wool. The message running through the verses is that of a kind and merciful God.

The reading of the Bible was followed by a story from Denis Ontonyi, *Entakana* (The Orphan). The story has both human and non-human characters. In a way, therefore, the story communicates at a metaphorical level. It illustrated Aricha's message that God's love and kindness are never ending despite our perennial ingratitude. The protagonist is a symbol of human fickleness which stands in stark contrast with the Creator's dependability and consistency. The protagonist leaves immediately his needs are met and only returns to his benefactor, the berry tree, when faced with a new problem. Just as God did through Jesus, the tree gives up its life for the sake of the protagonist's needs. Aricha then concluded that God's kindness will never cease. Ultimately, God, in the Bible, comes through as able to provide what no human being can, especially freedom. On that regard then, God, and by extension Christianity, becomes a symbol of emancipation from all the powers that control human life.

The fourth and final church service we attended was centred on generosity and forthrightness. As with previous sermons, the Pastor quoted from both the traditional oral art and Bible teachings. We are all expected to be honest and generous to both God and man. His main scripture came from the book of Acts 5: 1-6 where a man known as Ananias and his wife Sapphira are destroyed for attempting to short-change God. Traditionally, the choicest of animals were set aside for sacrifices because *Engoro* (God) deserved the best. With the help of a number of oral texts, the preacher portrayed stinginess as evil. The proverb *oyomino moromie esukubi egechuria nere maarekana agocha aita* (allow your brother to have a piece of the hump (fatty meat from the back of the cow, considered fatty and tasty) for he has a duty to bury you later), captured stinginess as being wasteful.

God, in contrast is portrayed as representing generosity and perfection. *Omokungu Omong'iti* (The stingy woman) portrays stinginess as destructive. In the story, narrated by Denis Ontonyi, a rich woman causes her husband's death by refusing to pay for his treatment. Later on, her son, Nyakiore, was also taken ill and as was the widow's nature she never bothered to seek treatment for him. This time, however, neighbours intervened and made the woman to spend some money on her son's treatment. Unfortunately, the son's illness had gone too far and was irreversible. Both the proverb and the anecdote, therefore, serve both as a warning to stingy tendencies, and as leverage to people to intervene in cases where stinginess takes life threatening proportions.

It may be observed from the foregoing discussion that character portrayal in most of the genres appearing in the present section is much balanced than in the previous sections. This may be attributed to the influence of Christianity which has an equalising effect on all. Clearly, the focus is not so much on who is superior to the other but on what all human beings need to do to remain righteous in the eyes of the Lord. We may observe that, unlike in earlier representations where men are assumed to be spiritually superior to women, in the present section, both men and women come through as struggling with various inequities. It may then be concluded that one of the most important outcomes from the interaction between the traditional way of life and Christianity was the introduction of another centre of power that was even more accommodating than the previous one. Biblical verses like Isaiah 1:18 which says: "come now and let us reason together; though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson they shall be as wool," provide testimony to the liberal open handed attitude that Christianity helped to infuse in the traditional Abagusii. as the alternative centre of authority, played an emancipatory role on, not just men, but on other marginalised groups as well. We expect that the liberty that was started off by

Christianity may have taken different forms and spread out to influence various aspects of life among the Abagusii as may be illustrated in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Overall, it is evident in the foregoing analysis that there exists a clear connection between the prevailing social context and the conception, deployment and the appreciation of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii. The more apparent influences on the symbols used by the traditional Gusii oral artists include the traditional morals, ethnic identity/nationalism, traditional religion and the social organisational structures. The foregoing influences explain the moralistic and hegemonic nature of earlier representations in the oral literature of Abagusii. The last section of the chapter has served as a manifestation of the meeting between traditional values and practices and modern values largely ignited by Christianity, Western education and urbanisation. In the next chapter, we will examine the impact the modern ways of life, religion included, have had on the conception and deployment of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii. We shall then be able to establish whether there exists any shift in the way symbols are conceived and deployed in the oral literature of Abagusii.

CHAPTER FIVE

SYMBOLISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

In the previous chapter, we looked at the relationship between the traditional way of life and the symbols used by indigenous Gusii Oral artists. We saw that the symbols employed by the indigenous Gusii oral artists were steeped in the traditional environmental, economic and social order. In the present chapter, we shall examine how the contemporary circumstances of the Abagusii have influenced the nature and role of symbols in modern Gusii Oral literature.

Earlier on, in chapter three, we identified the following modern aspects as defining the Abagusii community's contemporary existence: modern education, modern religion, modern politics as well as the modern money economy. Austin Emielu, (2008) in *Foreign Culture and African Music*, agrees when he says: "By far the most far reaching influence on African music both in the colonial and modern times is Africa's contact with Europe. This European legacy has come through trade, Christianity, colonialism and western education" (Emielu, 5). The said modern forces may have hastened the reengineering of the stringent traditional social, economic and cultural order to bring about a modern social system which, much as it may not be totally free of traditional influences, is founded on socioeconomic class differences. It is in the backdrop of such developments that we purpose, in the present chapter, to bring into question the complex relationship that exists between emerging social forces and symbols that abound in Gusii oral art.

Specifically, we wish to examine what has become of the old representations in the face of new realities: have they fallen out of use and got discarded? Are they still in use? If yes, how are they being used? Are they bearing the same old meanings that came from the traditional context or have they acquired new meanings that are inspired by the new realities? We are

cognizant of the possibility that just as societal issues, the content and structure of the traditional oral genres may have evolved too, shifting their boundaries and reinventing their mode of delivery and even reception, yet we also know that the shift may not have been that drastic.

Jenifer Muchiri, in *What Culture and Art are Kenyans celebrating at 50*, has observed that, as a genre of art, “music, in various languages, has proven to be a versatile form of communication; a powerful call to unity and, sometimes, a vehicle for propaganda (The Standard on Sunday Magazine, August 4, 2013, 10). With views such as Muchiri’s, we may then need to consider modern music among Abagusii as one of the latest additions to the oral literature landscape of Abagusii. Among the Abagusii the genre has manifestly taken advantage of the modern technology to meet the taste of a modernising audience, while at the same time continuing to exploit the rich literary heritage of the local dialect. An examination of how the genre (popular music) employs language could therefore be of value to the present study.

Evans Yamaha (2008) is of the view that much as popular/modern music and its performance are accompanied by foreign musical instruments—such as the guitar, accordion, piano, and the like—it “was apparently a mixture of foreign and traditional cultures” (Yamaha, 138). Likewise, Mavis Mpola (2007), in his PhD dissertation, *An Analysis of Oral Literary Music in IsiXhosa*, concurs that both genres—the traditional and the Westernised—“employ elements of poetry and language to portray the culture of amaXhosa” (Mpola, 235). It is our intention, in the present chapter, to establish whether the elements of language spoken about by the likes of Mpola are in any way reflective of the modifications the traditional culture may have undergone due to its interaction with foreign cultures and lifestyles. We shall tackle

the task at two different levels: first, we shall interrogate the possible existence of symbols that reflect both the old and the new contexts, hence hybrid in nature, and secondly, examine linguistic elements that may have resulted from the subversion of both the traditional and new patterns to result in new representations.

Symbols Depicting Hybridity

As earlier shown, transience in oral literature has attracted the attention of many cultural and literary scholars. One such scholar is Maxamed Daahir Afrax (2000) who has given the analogy of putting “old shoes on new feet” to mean the adaptability of orature to changing conditions and realities. He says, “...the skilful use of certain elements ... could be useful in terms of linking the past to the present, especially in the case of a society experiencing the transition from a traditional to a modern way of life” (Daahir, 4). Abagusii, just like most other modern African communities, are gradually transforming from the traditional order to modern lifestyles and ways of doing things. We, therefore, expect that whatever transformation the Abagusii are going through will reflect on their oral literature, especially in the use of linguistic symbols. We expect that the said change may either be happening within existing structures or forms or may have brought into being totally new structures, patterns and forms.

Henry “Man Pepe” Sagero’s *Omoika bw’omosiki* (The Spirit of Music) whose live performance we attended at the Bridge-Waters Hotel on the night of 15th March 2014, symbolically captures the split identity the transient society has literally imposed on the contemporary Gusii artist. He portrays the musical/artistic inspiration (muse) as never changing and as continuing to inspire artists and their audiences just as before safe for normal variations. In the song, Sagero uses various symbolic images as he defends the role of art.

The expressions are clearly reflective of the modern realities that he shares with his audience. He, for instance, equates the benefits of art to the points subscribers earn for remaining loyal to a modern local telecommunications operator:

“Mbwachete omosiki eee	Do you love music, eee
Mbwachete omosiki aaa	Do you love music, aaa
Rirorio tokogota bwango.	Then you’ll remain strong
Omoika bwomosiki minto	The spirit of music, my people
Nechibonga point chiomobere	Is like bonga points to your body
Ase eraha nekerage baito	It has magical pleasure (HS1)

Reference to such a recent phenomenon as advertisement gimmicks and slogans not only highlights the artist’s ingenuity, but also accurately captures the impact of a changing context on artistic expressions. The artist has symbolically captured the benefits of music and entertainment in the most practical of ways. The excited cheers from the audience indicated that the expression (Is like bonga points to your body) was in their domain and was creating the intended effect. They were happy to hear their favourite musician confirm to them the benefits they would reap for simply being lovers of music and entertainment: they would grow healthier and become physically fit, perhaps, out of dancing. Sagero, however, warns that it is common to come across individuals who lack proper understanding of the artistic spirit.

Emeika eye estate tata	Then you will not age quickly
Ekobwatia esiko yomomto	All linked to one’s reputation
Omoika Omotang’ani okogera	The first spirit makes the insane
Chibarimo Chiatenga echiro	To dance at market places

Oyokabere otoka emeyega	The second type is found at feasts
Ebiiririato naboigo ebichuri	Ululations and whistles abound
Oyogatato noro inagete	The last, which I hate
Omorebi agotenga redio etaiyo	A drunkard dances without a radio (HS1)

The main idea above is that just as it was in olden days, music/art is prone to abuse and misuse. Decorum and loyalty are thus advocated. With this, the dancing became more vigorous, with levellers joining in the singing, perhaps, happy in the knowledge that they were enjoying music at the right place and with the right person. The audience seemed to be in agreement that it is never evil to enjoy music, so long as those involved do so within the agreeable limits.

In the stanza that follows, the modern realisations of the artistic music spirit are enumerated:

Chidalili chiomonto bw'omoika	signs of people possessed by the spirit
Rahisi sana komanyekana	Are easily known
Mwaye goika atware chiredio ibere	They have two radios at home
Esimi lazima etware ememori	Their phones have memory cards
Gari yaye mosiki tokomocha	His car has loud music
Nase 'edansi ere tokomocha	They grace most dancing parties
Ogotenga origamora saana	Sweats on dance floors
Omosiki otenene araito omonto	They curse if the music is stopped
Ekanisa ochengera chikorasi	Jubilant to choruses at church
Amarandia kagochaka orara	But dose off when the sermon starts
Naya namang'ana akabeireo	It used to be like that
Are rero nankio nabeo	It is the same today and even tomorrow (HS1)

The intended message is that whether in the olden days or in the contemporary society, art has always been part and parcel of life, always with a varying degree of individual indulgence. The artist stops short of declaring music the most important component of life. The modern gadgets/images enumerated in the song help communicate the message that art remains the same; only the modes of conveying it have changed. Next, the commercial aspect in art/music is portrayed as having played a positive role in strengthening the important social institution:

Ebahati ebe embe osianye mama omino	If by bad luck you catch your mother
Kagotenga nyomba ekemanching'i	Dancing the traditional vigorous dance
Tari omwomanie mosegete	Don't tell her off
Echio tari sambu oyio nomoika	It's no taboo, the music spirit is at work
Iroka ochie komotimia ebesa	Put a coin in her hand
Goika omanya rituko ere aiboretwe	And you will know the day she was born (HS1)

“*Ekemanching'i*” is a traditional dance in which participants, while leaning forward slightly, thrust backwards gyrating vigorously. The dance was deemed sensual in the traditional setting and was, strictly, for courtship, especially during the circumcision period (Monyenye, 1977, 56). The message is that art has a way of rejuvenating one's youth. It also means that music has a power to excite and can sometimes lead one into compromising if not embarrassing situations. The revellers were, at this point, ecstatic because they had been assured that things that they might end up doing in their excitement, such as vigorous dancing, may be condoned within their present circumstances. In addition, the artist introduces the commercial perspective of art, with “Put a coin in her hand/And then you will know the day she was born” which means that artistic talent needs to be appreciated rather

than condemned, and that, indeed, money can guarantee happiness such as in the present situation, as well act as a motivating factor in art. Hence, those who want to be entertained must be ready to pay for it and to treat their entertainers with decorum and appreciation, as a way of paying homage to the artistic spirit. At this point, revellers who knew Sagero for his coitus innuendoes, burst into laughter and loud cheering. Finally, the poor workmanship in music is deplored as follows:

Nekebiriti giatete omware	The matchbox that made the initiate's fire
Tikeri gouterwa morero	Must not be used to light another fire
Notongia esigara esese enywe	Or even used to light a dog's cigarette
Igo gwaitire omoika bw'omware	That could kill the initiate's spirit (HS1)

A talented musician is here above compared with an initiate because he is “specially marked” to both entertain and teach. As earlier mentioned, the fire that remained lit throughout the period the initiates stayed in their seclusion huts symbolised the emerging adult spirit. The fire, and everything associated with it, was, therefore, a sacred affair. In fact, the wood that was drilled to make the fire was securely put away and only brought out for destruction when the owner was dead and buried: His/her “fire” died with him at that point. On this account, therefore, talent becomes a personal affair, and those who try to imitate or pirate it simply weaken its potency.

The image of the initiate's matchbox being used to light a dog's cigarette is a new representation that points to compromised standards of art. In the song, the traditional ways of making a fire have been replaced with a more modern one, a matchbox. The matchbox is, therefore a new symbol of potency replacing the old method of making a fire. The warning is

particularly important in the era when music producers, unscrupulous businessmen and fans stand accused for engaging in music piracy. A smoking dog also symbolises fashionable modern acts that have little value. It, then, becomes important for the musician to clarify that the kind of respect he is demanding is not spiritual but earthly. The move is in order given that a number of modern musicians have been accused of delivering their followers to satanic ways. Sagero resists such a title:

Tari sanamu ‘nkobasasimia	I am not asking you to worship satan
Morore buya inche timondama	Beware not to insult me
Mokore inwe buna nkobatebia	Do as I tell you
Kogicha timokora buna ngokora	Not as I do (HS1)

The above proclamation goes to further capture the musician’s modern consciousness. Nevertheless, Sagero thinks that religion must not be forced upon an individual who has different calling altogether. He advises preachers to, if possible, stay away from such people and only preach to the more receptive ones.

Pastor, ee gokorora ‘ekanisa	Pastor, if you see at church
Omonto okona gosundoka	A member dose off
Oyio nabwate omoika bwomosiki	That one has the spirit of music
Pastor Naphtali Ondieki Osebe	Pastor Naphtal Ondieki Osebe
Randia abanto igoro yomoia bwekanisa	Preach to people about the church’s spirit (HS1)

The end of the text is as supple as the rest of it. There is, however, a palpable conciliatory tone with the pastor being encouraged to continue sensitising the people on the “church’s spirit”.

It may have become clear from the above analysis that the artist is determined to communicate through “word pictures” as opposed to plain language. The images he uses are drawn from both the contemporary and traditional settings, but capable of communicating to the modern audience who, in turn, decode them using their experiences in the modern environment. The artist’s ability to juxtapose old and new symbolic images and still manage to communicate discernible messages confirms that the old and the new epochs can intersect, particularly in the hands of an innovative artist. The above trend in which the oral artist picks their symbols from both the present and the past environments is reflected in several other texts. In this section, therefore, we would wish to follow the theoretical beacon that old contexts can effectively be recovered without necessarily compromising the artist’s ability to communicate effectively and resourcefully with their contemporary audiences.

Traditional Symbols in Modern Contexts

The use of traditional symbolic images to capture contemporary concerns is evident in the three songs we collected from Andrew Matara Aganda. In the songs, Matara is preoccupied with purely religious themes mostly relayed in traditional symbolic images. In *Ekenagwa* (The Mauritius thorns), for instance, the artist compares Christian life on earth to the local thorny plant known as *ekenagwa*—the Mauritius thorns—which is a symbol of growth in the traditional context of Abagusii. In the song, the blending of traditional images and Biblical messages is indeed striking. The Biblical reference of Jesus as the saviour of the world and

the giver of life blends well with the image of a healthy Mauritius thorn that is reduced to nothing due to lack of a stronger plant to scale on.

The artist indicates his intention to make use of the audience's knowledge and experiences on the real Mauritius thorn by identifying its features as follows:

Ekenagwa n'egento kiogokumia	The Mauritius thorn is indeed wonderful
Gekere atobu nigo gekoranda	On a fertile ground it spreads
Gochia moino na moino	Further and further sideways
Gochia maate na Rogoro	Upwards and downwards
Gochia igoro aro tige koranda	But it can't stand upright
Getabwati ase gekoranderera	Without some support (AM1)

The musician then applies the features he has mentioned to the present context:

Bono ebinagwa nigo bire mbali mbali	Mauritius thorns are of many types
Ekenagu mwanabanto	It can be a human being
Abanto mbare bagotarera abande	Some people cling on others
Yesu Kristu nere omote togotarera	Jesus Christ is the only tree to cling on to
Erinde togende igoro	So as to go to heaven
Onye mote toiyo igoro teiyo	No strong tree, no heaven for us (AM1)

The appropriation of the traditional imagery assists the audience to deeply appreciate the important role of Jesus as the saviour of humanity and as the head of the Christian church.

Without Jesus there could not a single Christian standing.

A similar approach is evident in *Chinsanako* (Safari Ants), a song about the omnipotence of God the Almighty. The song also recognises the Creator's supremacy through His extraordinary creations. As earlier mentioned, the traditional Abagusii saw God in His various creations. On his part, Matara was fascinated by God's creation of the safari ant.

Mwanyabanto tiga amachieso nomotongi	Humans, stop playing with God
Omonene tari kegori kiao orachiesere	God is not your age mate to play with
Omonene tari kegori kiane inche indachiesere	He is not my age mate to play with
.....	
Omonene ase gototomera onye namakonde	If He sends us worms
Omonene ase gototomera onye nechinsanako	If He sends us safari ants
Aki amaene nabo chigotoita	They would surely plague us
Ninki rende aye kere ekiao ogwetogeria?	What is there to boast about? (AM2)

Overall, the musician has used a traditional image, safari ants, whose symbolic industry, discipline and miniature viciousness are extensively reflected in the community's folklore and ideology. The artist uses the Safari ants to evoke feelings of veneration for the highest power, particularly for His unlimited power symbolised in His awesome creations.

Nevertheless, of the three musical texts, it is in *Chinderia* (Heredity), that the artist is most effective in juxtaposing traditional and modern images. The song begins with four traditional proverbs whose symbolic import has already been discussed above. The proverbs are followed up by a reference to a Biblical story of Abel and Cain from Genesis chapter four.

Buna moigwete ngoteba	As you've heard me say
Nigo iminetie goteba	I mean to say
Chinderia chiechimbu chimbe	We have evil lineages
Abana benda eyemo nabo bakorwana	Brothers can fight
Omoerio bang' entane	Or even kill each other
Ekeru togotuka nigo tokonyora ing'a	This could be historical
Ororeria nigo rwarenge orwogoita	It flows from the forefathers
Bono ekeru ogoita oyomino	When you kill a relative
Aye kwaragererigwe obogima bwao bwensi	You fall under a curse
Naboigo egesaku kiao kiarageregwe	Your offspring is also cursed
Ekeru togosoma egetabu kiomochakano	When we read Genesis
Igoro ya Abel na Cain	About Abel and Cain
Cain agaita Abel omwabo	Cain killed Abel
Baiboretwe kowa enda eyemo	They were brothers (AM3)

By merely placing traditional and modern images side by side, a strong feeling of permanence is evoked in the audience. The images symbolize the unchanging nature of God, His love and even vengeance for evil doers. The structure also implies a degree of conservatism in handling moral issues; curses, jealousy, vengeance or murder remain just that, whether in traditional or in Christian environments.

Moving on from matters religion, it is also evident that, in some texts, artists have modified traditional symbols and suited them to modern issues of concern that revolve around, but are not limited to, modern relationships, modern lifestyles as well as modern tastes and values in general. As we demonstrated in the last section of the previous chapter, the traditional values

are carried over to new audiences by relating them to contemporary issues and through a medium that is recognizable to the target audience, such as modern music. The music of the late Christopher Monyoncho Araka “Riyo Riebasweti” and Christopher “Embarambamba” Mosioma fittingly exemplify this category.

In Christopher Monyoncho’s *Nyaboke* (a lady’s name), Monyoncho derides the culture of materialism which has eaten into the social fabric of the community, in particular, and the nation as a whole. Monyoncho uses the traditional motif of an unmarried and unrestrained woman (prominent in the indigenous verbal art) to comment on negative capitalist/materialistic tendencies in the society.

Ngachicha oboko Nyaboke	I came to your home
Ngachicha seino	Intending to marry you
Okaimoka okanga Nyaboke	You totally rejected me
Tindi na amali	Saying I had no money
Ogachaka korigia Nyaboke	You started looking for, Nyaboke
Oyobwate amali	Only the rich
Toramonyora Nyaboke noore seino	You are still unmarried, having failed
Omomura oyomo akaigwa namari otagete	One man heard about your desires
Akareta etebe Nyaboke agaichoria amaroba	He filled a container with soil
Akabuncha chibese akabeka korwa etebe igoro	And then covered the soil with coins
Ogakaga nechibese chiichire etebe, gento!	You thought it was money, but nothing! (CM1)

Monyoncho’s portrayal of *Nyaboke* as beautiful but gullible parallels that in the traditional oral texts discussed under chapter four above, such as Rebecca Machini’s *Omoibi*

Bwemiongo (A Thief of Pumpkins) and *Mwanyagetinge Dancers' Ng'ererie Obokombe* (Give me a Hoe). The disparaging portrayal of beautiful women as being gullible is familiar especially among senior members of the audience. The traditional motif of an uncontrolled impulsive woman is here above quite manifest albeit in a contemporary context. Monyoncho, a self-confessed crusader against consumerism, was here launching a scathing attack on the rampant greed that characterised the independence government's ideology of choice, free enterprise/capitalism. The symbol suits the message it conveys, because, like the greedy mother in Machini's *Omoibi Bw'emiongo* (A Thief of Pumpkins) or the uncontrolled woman in *Ng'ererie Obokombe* (Give me a Hoe) the motherland had taken the wrong course with her leaders engaging their Western development partners in ways that would harm the young nation and affect the morals of her people by pushing them into an unsustainable culture of self centred consumerism.

Agacha agakong'aina inche ninde nechibesa	He lied to you saying I've a lot of money
Chiichire etebe nechinde chire ebengi	Kept in a container and in the bank
Inchwo togende orarora echire etebe	Come and see the money in the container
Inche nomonda Nyaboke ninde nechibesa, gento!	I am rich, with lots of money, nothing!
Ogaika sobo Nyaboke agakoorkia	When you reached his house
Etebe eichire amaroba	You saw a container full of soil
Chibese chibekire igoto	And a few coins on top
Ogakaga nechibese chioka chiichire etebe	You thought it was just money (CM1)

Though composing and performing in modern times, the subject of female beauty is here once again being prodded by Monyoncho. Just as in *Give me a Hoe*, outward beauty is despised, unless it matches one's deeds. Moreover, in the present context, Monyoncho uses

beauty to portray the vanity of chasing comfort and fine things in life which confirm our colonised mentalities. By indicating that he was enjoying life with his ugly wife, Monyoncho seems to emphasise the difference between reality and appearance. Real beauty, therefore, is one's ability to remain loyal and fully committed to social values as opposed to greed.

Ingacha nkanywoma omoiseke otari kieni	Later, I got married to an ugly woman
Omomwamu ti orakage negekondo	She is as black as a monkey
Toigwanaine nebinto togosenyenta	We live happily, eating together
Aye Nyaboke bono toranyora bwoo	Nyaboke, you are yet to marry
Na Nyasae agacha akaba omuya igo	God has been kind on us
Akang'a eng'ombe egokamwa	He gave me a dairy cow
Ebibere mbiroo abana bakonyora basiberia	My children can get a little milk (CM1)

Whereas in *Give me a Hoe* the woman is said to be lazy and is loitering all day long borrowing small things from neighbouring households and keeping them, in Monyoncho's *Nyaboke* the subject is walking on a winding tarmac road that does not seem to bring her to an end she desires. The portrayal could indeed strike a chord with the modernising audience who in their time identify with the image of a person walking on a tarmac—a symbol of modern intrigues and distress—chasing a distant dream, than that of a non-welcome guest dashing from house to house.

Nyaboke ere nerami akona goita kogenda	Nyaboke is still tarmacking
Akorigia oyore n'amali, gento!	Looking for a wealthy man
Monyoncho namange orarore	Monyoncho, you will see a lot (CM1)

From the above last stanza, Monyoncho's imagery seems to culminate in extolling the traditional socialism while parodying the foreign values enshrined in capitalism. Capitalism/the culture of materialism is portrayed as a beautiful temptress bent on leading unsuspecting targets astray. Equally, the images demonstrate an evolution from the traditional ways of getting a spouse to the modern requirements. In the traditional setting the man only needed to get hold of the girl he had admired and simply elope with her (Rebecca Machini's *Omomura Otagete Konywoma* (A Young Man that Wanted to Marry)). Later, Christianity introduced some decorum with the ideas of love and God's will, as evident in *Entakana* (The Orphan). In Monyoncho's times (contemporary), however, ladies like Nyaboke seem to be attracted to money more than anything else. Their new freedom seems to be leading them to unseemly ways.

Monyoncho's political messages are sustained and even more incisive in his second song, *Keemba* (a lady's name). It is on record that the song earned him a stint in detention after the government of the day charged him with incitement. He was however acquitted after it became difficult to build a substantial case against him given his highly figurative language. In the song, the members of the national assembly, as well as other elected representatives are depicted as corrupt, greedy and self centred.

Ngachika abageni bane bachiche gonkwani	I invited my guests to my home
John Sitora, Isaka Otworu, Sammy	John Sitora, Isaac Otworu, Sammy
Mokaya nainche Monyoncho noonare	Mokaya and myself
Obosoku obonene rituko erio Keemba kwang'ete	That day, you embarrassed me, Keemba
Ekero abageni bachete	When the guests arrived
Omorugi one Jane	My wife Jane

Akogenda roche kwoyia amache	Went to fetch water
Arugere abageni baito baragere lunch	to cook lunch for our guests
Keemba okagenda echikoni	Keemba, you took over in the kitchen
Ochie koigereria engoko eyie bwango	You went there to fan the fire so that
Abageni bane baragere	Guests could have their meal on time
Okayesorora okaboa ekerebi kwabwate	You wrapped the best parts
Machani kabichi	In your green head dress
Keemba ogatama okagenda	And escaped with them
Egento kiogokumia Keemba	To my surprise, keemba
Ogachora chinyama chiria	You picked the parts
Abageni banchete	Guests love most
Okaira omotwe, okaira omogo ngo,	You took the head, the back
Amo nechimbaba ogasang'ania emondo	The wings and the gizzard
Ogatama okagenda	Then you ran away (CM2)

From the above images, it is clear that Monyoncho is condemning the act of stealing and corruption. The image of the greedy, selfish and impulsive woman who shamelessly wraps pieces of meat in her head dress and runs away is reflective of the reality of modern-day leaders who fleece the very masses whose interests they are meant safeguard. Traditionally, a thief of vegetables and food, generally, such as in Rebecca Machini's *Omoibi Bw'emiongo* (A Thief of Pumpkins) is such despicable. Monyoncho not only places people who steal from hard working citizens in that same category, but also seems to be basing his representation on a traditional motif of condemned thieves. The song becomes satirical when the listeners are made to laugh at Keemba's humiliating manoeuvres such as wrapping cooked food in a dirty headdress before dashing off. In a humorous turn of events, the headdress seems to be

Keemba's most valuable ornament, since she wears it all the time and people can recognise her by it. Incidentally, petty thieves like *Keemba* never seem to improve their lot despite their unseemly ways and greed. Upon his release from detention, Monyoncho then recorded his brush with the authorities in the song *Minto* (Our people). Much as he seems to state his experience in quite plain terms, the song captures a high level of political intolerance that had engulfed the nation as the ruling class worked hard to secure their stay in power. In a veiled reference to the rising tribalism, Monyoncho says that it was now clear the plantations had been taken over by only a few tribes. The plantations are a modern phenomenon which symbolise modern capitalism and affluence. At the end of colonialism, a number of large tracks of land formerly occupied by white settlers fell into the hands of Kenyans. The song, therefore, infuses listeners with a strong sense of betrayal and dispossession:

Minto mwensi tegerera	Listen, my kin
Monyoncho ninche inkobatebia	It is me Monyoncho telling you
Tarehe ishirini na nne	On twenty – fourth
Omotienyo oikomi omwaka sabini na nne	October 1974
Inche Christopher Monyoncho bwaraka	I, Christopher Monyoncho, son of Araka
Nkamochia goiterwa inse	I almost lost my life
Abanto baito ba Nyanza goika momanye	Our people of Nyanza, you need to know
Emeremo yamasamba yabeire eyabo boka	Jobs in plantations are reserved for them

(CM3)

Christopher “Embarambamba” Mosioma’s *Abachumbe* (Our Representatives) is another instance where traditional and modern symbols have been fused. The song draws quite significantly from the traditional proverb from Mzee Omariba, *eki giasireire nchera maate kirigerie rogoro* (what you lost at the lower end of the path may be found at the upper section

of the path) which advocates for persistence while seeking to improve one's living conditions, especially by correcting mistakes and learning from them. After making a bad choice, the voter rues his wasted opportunity and seeks a remedy by being more careful next time.

Baito, oyio, baito	Our people, there he goes, people
Nintantaine, nkorigiande, oyio	I am confused, I'm still searching, there
Ntige minyoke, oyio	Let me run, there he goes
Ncharoke chimbago	Let me run, there he goes
Amakori ime gotira, oyio	Up along paths
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa nkai ndanyore	Where will I get a true representative?
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa otarikweba	One that never forgets
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe omanyete obotaka	One who understands poverty
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa ogotoika ang'e	One that is close with his people
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa ambwate okoboko	One that could hold my hand
Nkorigiande	I'm searching
Ntige iminyoke, oyio	Let me run
Inteme inturungane, wewe	I'll try and roll over, careful!
Nyaribari masaba	Nyaribari Masaba
Nyaribari chache, oyio	Nyaribari Chache, there he comes
North mugirango, karwe nchera	North Mugirango, make way!
Borabu rogoro, ariririri	North Borabu, aririririri
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa	Where will I get a true representative? (ME1)

Just as the forefathers advocated for perseverance and determination in every undertaking, matters of choosing leaders require an equal level of vigilance. The voter is “running” all over confused not to escape punishment, but rather in search of the truth and the right leader. Those who have expressed interest in leadership don’t seem to have the qualities he is looking for. He is looking for a leader that is selfless, hard working, approachable, impartial and supportive.

Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa	Where will I get a true representative?
Omanyete ebikorwa, nkai ndanyore	A man of action, where will I get one?
Okoigwa ebirero biabang’ina nkai ndanyore	One who hears the cries of women
Okoigwa ebirero biabasae nkai ndanyore	One who hears the cries of young people
Okoigwa ebirero biabagaka nkai ndanyore	One who hears the cries of men
Okoigwa ebirero biondebwensi nkai ndanyore	One who hears everybody, where?
Nintantaine, ninchwo monyoyie	I’m confused, come fetch me
Intige iminyoke	Let me run
Bomachoge Rogoro	North Bomachoge
South Mugirango	South Mugirango
Bonchari seito	Bonchari, my home
Yaya nkominyokande	No I must run (ME1)

The problem with the current crop of leaders, it seems, is that they become too complicated and inaccessible the moment they are elected into office. Campaign slogans like *Oiye oiye nyarebe bweka* (Oh! Oh! Oh! Our candidate alone!) are reminiscent of the excitement that surrounds the election of such leaders, but which vanishes the moment they are sworn into office.

Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa otarikweba	One that never forgets
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa ogotara namagoro?	One that walks on foot?
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa ogotoika ang'e	One that is ever available
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa otarikorimia simi	One that has his phone on always
Oiye oiye nyarebe bweka	Oh! Oh! Oh! So and so, alone!
Ogenda Nairobi omenya aroro	but he's soon a resident of Nairobi
Ngochia goaka esimi	Whenever I call him
Nigare omuteja	He can't be reached
Nonye mbwoye agocha botuko	He arrives home at night
Asiegete ebirore	His car windows rolled up
Egari mbaka igoro	Tightly closed (ME1)

Images of modern political impunity include unanswered calls, clandestine whereabouts, and rolled up car windows. The use of *Mwanamberi bayaye* (A new-born is here) drawn from the Luhya oral literature, not only restores hope but also suggests change and a growing awareness on the part of the voter.

It may be observed from the above texts that the four popular artists are, without doubt, responding to the modern realities in their immediate environment, and even expressing similar values, through veiled references. Nevertheless, the impact of the traditional context and representations on their current representations is varied. Monyoncho, who is the oldest among the three, has representations that resonate quite strongly with the traditional philosophies of the indigenous Omogusii, such as on the value of beauty. Conversely, the

younger musicians seem to have enjoyed greater liberties in redeploying the old representations, or even creating new ones. They have synthesised the representations and given them a much practical orientation within the contemporary situation, such as when Sagero talks about the old '*ekemanching'i*' dance to mean being carried away by music. We could then categorise modern artists into two main categories: the early modern artists who still rely significantly on old representations and philosophies and the intermediate modern artists who are operating further away, and with much greater freedom from the original patterns and ideologies.

New Symbols for new Realities

There exists another category of symbols that have been inspired almost exclusively by the modern realities. They come from artists who are not only operating from contemporary historical realities but also who have much less contact with the previous contexts. For instance, Benson Omariba's story, 'Why?' captures the importance of acquiring modern education and learning to converse in English within the rapidly modernising environment. The anecdote is about a man who saved his friend from muggers by simply shouting, 'Why!' Set in the city and containing images of modernity such as getting drunk in a bar, moving freely at night and being attacked by robbers, the story is clearly born within the modern context, from which it, in turn, draws its meaning. In order to communicate with his contemporary audience and encourage them to go to school, the narrator, in spite of old age, knows that he has to use images his target audience can identify with:

After walking a short distance, the man ducked into one of the dark alleys to relief himself. While at it, he heard his friend call for help. He had been attacked by muggers. He responded immediately by shouting, 'Why?' 'Why?'

On hearing this, the muggers fled thinking they had attacked a very important person who was in the company of some white people. As they fled, one of them was heard asking, “Was that a white man?” What they didn’t know was that the man that had scared them stiff was illiterate and was simply repeating words that he had heard people use. (BO23)

In terms of significance, Omariba’s story is comparable to Prophet Sakawa’s prophecy, *amandegere name Getembe o’nabamura nere o’rayaae* (Kisii Town will one day be a “garden” full of mushrooms and only those with strong sons will claim their share), because both warn Abagusii to ensure they are compliant with the needs of the changing times. Evidently, however, the tools of communication they use are drawn from their respective contexts. Unlike Sakawa, Omariba can comfortably talk about bars and muggers because his target audience know them. Sakawa could only refer to mushrooms because that is what the people of his generation knew.

Similarly, Mwalimu Peter Getate’s story, *Embisi no’mogati* (The Houseboy and a loaf of Bread) captures the value of modern education among the Abagusii within the contemporary situation. The houseboy who hides a receipt behind a bush before eating one of the loaves of bread he had been sent to buy by his white master symbolises the ignorance that had engulfed the locals before they acquired literacy. Education/literacy was necessary if their eyes were to open to the new realities.

When he came to where there was a thicket, he sat, but before he un-wrapped the loaf of bread, he carefully hid the receipt behind the thicket and even covered it with some dry leaves. After eating to his fill, the houseboy

retrieved the receipt, checked for anything that could tell on him and then proceeded home. (PG11)

In the first place, the image of a houseboy is a symbol of subservience which places the individual right at the bottom of a modern social ladder that is based on one's educational and economic background. Further, the man's job is menial because he lacks education and expertise. Even that lowly position rejects him because he has not mastered his changing world. If he had, he would easily survive. The images of a "white man" and "bread" draw their symbolic import from the contemporary context. Overall, Western education comes through as a gateway to the modern and better standards of living. The audience easily get the impression that if they don't want to be anyone's servant, or want to afford their own good food; they have got to go to school.

More representations inspired by the importance of education come from Jared Mombinya, in his song *Amaya Mbosiare* (Better Things lie ahead). Being only twenty five years old, Mombinya is a whole generation younger than the artists with whom he is grouped. Though not populist, his symbols are both ingenuous and entertaining. Interestingly, Mombinya's message comes through almost in the same spirit as the Great Sakawa's prophecy above. The truth, however, is that the messages are delivered over a century apart, and therefore both the contextual concerns and the artistic intentions are at variance. Mombinya uses images like men with protruding bellies and the prospects of contracting HIV/Aids and dying poor to urge young people to remain in school:

Aye tata ominto nkiekekwarire
osendete ebitore

You, my friend, what did you eat
to make your tummy so big?

<i>Abande tokorera enchara</i>	When the rest of us are crying about anger
<i>Buna namasomo ao okoria</i>	Did you say you are eating your education?
.....	
<i>Abana Besukuru Motagwancha</i>	You, school children
<i>Motige chitaro</i>	Stop loitering
<i>Goeta aamkori</i>	In hidden paths
.....	
<i>Oborwaire bwachire</i>	A disease has come
<i>Takong'aina Mokaya</i>	Stop cheating me Mokaya
<i>Tiga twensi torende</i>	Let us all be careful
<i>Nyaboke ondereire</i>	Nyaboke is crying to me
<i>Ekeru are konywa echa</i>	When she was taking tea
<i>Tinarengi aroro</i>	I was not there
<i>Agwetontia You</i>	When smearing herself with “You”
<i>Tinarengi aroro</i>	I was not there
<i>Ninki rende akondera?</i>	Why then does she cry to me? JM4

Through the above images, Mombinya contrasts the fleeting pleasures of life outside school and the wisdom of staying through the difficulties of schooling. “You” is a trade name for a modern perfume with a strong fragrance which, according to common myth, makes it useful in mortuaries to conceal the stench, symbolises the temptations that lead pupils and students astray. It has therefore come to symbolise death.

Mama Teresa Nyaboke’s *Mwarire hotel Mono* (You are too frequent in Hotels) also falls in this category. Born in 1958, ten years after Christopher Monyoncho, Mama Teresa grew at a

time when Monyoncho was the undisputed leader of Gusii music. Nevertheless, her diction is markedly different from Monyoncho's. For instance, instead of Monyoncho's *emegobani* for "hotel" she prefers *hotel* which appeals directly to her modernised audience. Her language is akin to that in Christopher Mosioma's *Chiabagoire* (The Bulls are at large) where he talks about men who prefer maize roasted on the streets of towns despite the fact that they have gardens teeming with green maize back at home. Teresa's poem goes:

<i>Mwarire hotel Mono</i>	You're too Frequent in Hotels
<i>Mwarire hotel mono</i>	You are too frequent in hotels
<i>Mwarire hotel mono</i>	You are too frequent in hotels
.....	
<i>Magoroba no'teli</i>	In the evening you eat there
<i>Inka ebiage ebiayiete?</i>	Did the food stores at home burn?
<i>Aye tata ebisima biabekirwe esumu</i>	Wells have now been poisoned
<i>Endagera yo'teli yabeire embe</i>	Food in hotels is no longer good
.....	
<i>Aye baba renda egiokoria</i>	My sister, take care what you eat
<i>Ebosi yane renda egiokoria</i>	My boss, take care what you eat
<i>Ragera inka</i>	Eat at home
<i>Endagera yo'teli yabeire embe</i>	Food in hotels is no longer good (<i>TNI</i>)

Teresa and Mosioma are using different sets of modern images to warn their target audiences against promiscuity. The meanings of the two sets of images are, of course, privately conceived. Nevertheless, the audience can decipher them because the reality they capture and the context in which they are used are in the public domain.

From the foregoing analysis, the hybrid nature of the symbols appearing in the oral literature of Abagusii is clearly evident. It is also clear that in some instances the traditional representations are recovered and carried over in expressions that are not only appreciable in the contemporary realities but which are inspired by the traditional values. On the other hand, some representations are unambiguously modern and are aimed at representing emerging realities and values, such as education and urban life. In the following last section of the present chapter we turn our attention to an emerging trend of radical representation that defies the mainstream representation that we have dealt with so far. Perhaps unable or reluctant to follow the stringent rationalistic mainstream codes, the modern generation of artists, who are progressively more fascinated with the urban environment, have resorted to operating from codes that almost exclude those from earlier situations. They have either assigned subverted meanings to old symbols or created new ones that reflect and perpetuate their contemporary urban liberties.

Symbols that Depict a Popular Subversive Subculture

Most cultural historians concur that a lasting European legacy in Africa has to do with the modern money economy which has precipitated a “commodity” culture. In an article, *Popular and Highbrow Literature: A Comparative View*, Peter Swirsky (2007) observes that one of the defining features of modern art is a tendency by artists to be overly concerned about “ticket sales...maximizing audiences and turning a profit’. We equate “ticket sales” with populist tendencies in a majority of modern musicians who want draw huge crowds by all means possible. Swirsky further opines that the aim has mostly been to “gratify the base tastes of the paying audience” at the expense of “pollinating culture with commendable ideas and attitudes” (Swirsky, 8). On a similar line of thought, Kevin Motaroki, in an article *Social Apathy or Social Evolution?*, describes the modern society as “aloof and detached”. He bases

his argument on a PhD dissertation by Johan Galtung (1995), *On the Social Costs of Modernisation, Atomie/Anomie and Social Development* where the latter argues thus:

Many human societies are in a state of advanced disintegration that tends towards destruction and deculturation heading for structurelessness and culturelessness. (Sunday Lifestyle, March 2, 2013)

It is indeed our considered thought that Abagusii, being part of the modern society, may not have been left behind in the unfolding Cultural Revolutions. In *Don't Blame the FM Radio Hosts, Kenyans just Love the Mundane Stuff*, Nzau Musau observes that topics discussed in leading FM radio stations in Kenya are more and more hypersexual and have literally turned such hosts as Ciku Muiruri, Maina Kageni, Jalang'o, Mwalimu King'ang'i into celebrities with an "enviable following" (Standard on Sunday, 4th August 2014).

Indeed, a look at contemporary art among Abagusii reveals a preoccupation with themes arising from urbanized environments, such as sex, women, partying, Aids, drugs, and so forth. Comments on the said issues are made in highly suggestive and exclusive language that is out of mainstream language use, as well as out of reach for older generations, and for the uninitiated contemporary generation. According to Nathan Oyori Ogechi in *Sheng as a Youth Identity Marker: Reality or Misconception*, the increasingly influential mass culture that is powerfully sweeping across Kenya was sparked off by a younger generation of artists in the 90s, such as Nonini, Abbas Kubuff, Flex, Juacali, Kleptomaniacs and, especially, Circute and Joel of the revolutionary sex-themed song *Manyake* (meat) which not only presented sex as a commodity, but did so in highly imaginative and coded language(2009, 15).It is evident that most modern artists have followed cue and have either invented new codes of expression that

target specific audiences or carried over the traditional codes, corrupted them and given them interesting new interpretations in a process Wiseman Chijere Chirwa, in *Dancing Towards Dictatorship: Political Songs and Popular Culture in Malawi* refers to as the “subversion of tradition and culture” (2010, 10).

Henry Sagero’s *Eng’ombe Nengima* (The Cow is whole) subverts tradition both in terms of the subject matter the artist is preoccupied with and also how meaning is created. Released in the year 2013, the song generated interest and controversy in equal measure. The highly suggestive language in the song generated a lot of hullabaloo. An interview of the musician by Evans Makori of Minto FM, a Gusii vernacular radio station, on 10th March 2014 never helped matters as it failed to yield a convincing interpretation of the coded images listeners wanted Henry Sagero to interpret for them. During a charged call-in session, most listeners accused the widely esteemed musician of breaking taboo and expressing sexual fantasies publicly. The musician defended himself saying the song had nothing to do with sex and that he was being genuinely creative. Nevertheless, our interview with the musician on the night of 15th March 2014 at Bridge-Waters Hotel, Kisii, coupled with the artist’s pronouncements during the live performance, aided us to not only decipher the codes that underlie the song, but also informed our subsequent decision to place the song under the popular art trend in the present study. Above all, it also became clear to us that one needed to have some degree of competence in the mass culture in Kenyan music landscape in order to meaningfully interact with most of the songs we have categorised under the mass culture movement.

The expression, *Eng’ombe Nengima* (The Cow is whole), for instance, is borrowed from the butchery register, where it is used to re-assure potential buyers that there is still plenty of beef left for whoever that wants to buy. Intriguingly, though said in Ekegusii, Sagero’s expression

is remarkably similar to Circute's and Joel's Sheng expression "*Manyake all sizes*" which effectively treats sex as a commodity that can be bought much the same way as meat from the butchery. Below is how Sagero has arranged images in the song:

Moiranerie Nyasae buya	Give praise to God
Onye Atatotongerete omokungu	Had He not created a woman
Kango ning'o ogotera mwanchi	Who could sing about love?
.....	
Togotera chingencho chiabasacha	We sing the ways of men (HS2)

In above, the artist has made it clear to his audience that his subject is women, matters of affection and, most importantly, the perception of women by men. Further, the artist seems to be interrogating the role of women in the modern society, where upon he concludes that women are imported because they form the corporeal and emotional part of life which men cannot do without. His leaning toward the popular world is indicated to the listener through the following signs:

Timanyeti gose nigo indatere	I don't know if after my singing
Intige mokong'ung'ura	I'll leave grumbling
Korende erieta riane Sagero	But my name is Sagero (HS@2)

In the above pronouncements, Sagero seems to make a claim to the right to express himself freely as a modern artist. Moreover, being 'Sagero' the renowned musician, nothing lies outside his scope of discussion. There is also a very familiar axiom:

Abasacha, enyama yachire rino	Men, a piece of meat stuck in your teeth
Tari okorusia omere	Should not be swallowed after being freed
Nyetige eserie ebirecha	It should be left to guard against evil spirits (HS2)

“A piece of meat stuck in your teeth” is a traditional symbol for inconveniencing situations.

The joke behind the analogy of a stuck piece of meat is that the piece did not want to accompany the rest into oblivion, hence it held tightly onto the teeth. It should, therefore be spared so as not to give the evil spirits reason to haunt the man. In relation to sex, the images signify that the only thing that should stop a man from engaging in coitus with the next available woman is taboo. By viewing women as an unavoidable inconvenience on men, Sagero is upholding the traditional symbol of women as objects of temptation and seduction for which men should be constantly on a watch out. In the context of the song, however, the stuck piece of meat refers to the close relatives of the man (including his daughters) with whom men should not have sexual intercourse. Incest and rape have, in recent times, become a real threat to the social fabric, with more and more cases being reported every day. A reveller that gave the above interpretation, amid excited cheers from the rest of the patrons, earned himself a Sh. 500 token from the musician himself. We interpreted the artist’s gesture to mean he shared in the interpretation. Amid the laughter, the audience got the message that to engage in incest is indeed an act of nothing but greed. The next string images turn the listener’s attention to how the man and his wife need to relate.

Enchera omosacha aresitontie	Men have a way with pride
Ekero are nabagisangio	When with age mates
Tokaga nabare mbaka nyomba	At home he is totally different
Emegoko eria okorora abwate	The happiness he usually has
Ogoika geita kiaye	When he steps at his gate

Agochenchia oba egento ekeng'ao	He changes and becomes a different thing
Nyomba nogotogonya gwoka	At home, he raves all the time
Chinsa chionsiaresaine orakage	He looks like a bloated man at all times
Aanyagora eriogo	You would think he stepped over a spell (HS2)

In the above excerpt, Sagero chides men who show off their power over women by treating them with arrogance. Sagero portrays this as outdated, saying the real power lies in love and mutual respect. The resulting message is that men and women need each other and should strive to satisfy their legitimate partners. The message is enhanced further by the following words:

Esiri yomosacha neyemo bono	Men have but one secret
Inse yerioba	Under the sky
Mosacha taiyo motindi nonye	There is not a single fierce man
Oria mokagete omotindi	The one you consider fierce
Nyomba mwaye omokungu aamogamberete	He is henpecked at home
Kwanyora onde okogambagamba	Some are quite talkative
Orakage nebarimo	Just like a mad man
Ko' nyomba mwaye nerimama	But in his house he is dumb (HS2)

The message that accrues from the above is that many a time, men's show of bravado is a cover-up for their deficiencies. The truth remains that men are hugely dependent on women and are, most of the time, falling short of their women's expectations. Amid such remarks, Sagero seems keen to subvert long standing stereotypes on women's inferiority and subservience to men. Sagero portrays patriarchy as a relic of the past that has become redundant in the contemporary world. His view is that both men and women should be

content with their unique roles. He is quick to condemn women who are bent on humiliating men.

Ebirecha biomokungu nomware	The initiate is the woman's devil
Mosacha naba ekiarabe	A man whether big or small
Nigo okomoita arere	Can be beaten by a woman (HS2)

Traditionally, a woman that came face to face with a male initiate that had just come from seclusion fell under a spell (King'oina, 1988, 47). In the context of the song, however, an initiate portends one more man that has come of age, and, by extension, one more woman falling under his rule. Women respect men who are old enough to be their husbands, yet the same men pester women for sexual favours. Women too have made intercourse a new ground for grumbling. The complaints, it emerges, are aimed at justifying the secret lovers the woman entertains. Sagero says:

Ninki gekogera inwe abakungu	Why do, you, women
Mokweroka ogasori	Pretend to be good
Ekero omogeni are nyomba mwao	When entertaining guests but
Engaki eria omogeni atakaiyo	When alone with your husband
Nigo mobiteranete	You can't even talk
Okoing' onyerana gwoka	Always complaining (HS2)

In a clear break from tradition, the images are consistently presented in a manner that refrains from placing one gender above the other. Above all, there is a veiled challenge to men not to be content with the title "men" but instead work hard to earn the title through responsibility

and appropriate conduct, as well as to foster some understanding between men and women. With such an understanding, the partners would realise that they still have a lot to offer each other in their love and sex life (That the cows are still whole).

Abasacha barore nechirongi	Men are made by their trousers
Nechinegita igoti	And by their neck ties
Abakungu nigo babagamberete	Most are henpecked (HS2)

The message is that men should stop behaving as if they are special by birthright. Sagero's approach is clearly aimed at both dismantling stereotypes and pushing his audience to drop their pretences and, for once, look at life realistically and honestly. His approach is relevant at a time when people are more and more inquisitive. In continuation with his radical approach, Sagero advises women to stop complaining that their men no longer fulfil their imagination of a real man and instead help them to become effective spouses. His standpoint seems to be that men and women are as good as any other, all factors remaining the same; hence "the cow is whole".

Abakungu manya aiga	Women, here is something you need to know
Eng'ombe nigo ekorendwa ekorende	Take care of a cow and it will take of you
Yamanya koba eng'ombe nengima	And then the cow becomes whole
Eng'ombe nengima	The cow is whole
Nonyenyerwa eeri aye togokora	If you demand for a bull, you won't finish
Eng'ombe nengima	The cow is whole (HS2)

From the foregoing context, the image of an emaciated cow becomes a symbol of an emasculated and neglected spouse. The images in the above song may then be interpreted as aimed at promoting gender equality, as well as championing a new social order that stems from a desire to respond to human challenges and experiences naturally. It is true, however, that the meaning one gets from the text is negotiated and, therefore likely to change with the context. Sagero's approach typicalizes a trend in which artists have appropriated traditional representations and turned them into popular symbols that gain their relevance from the modern realities.

Another set of popular symbolic images are manifest in Christopher Mosioma's song *Chiabagoire* (The Bulls are now at Large). Once again the traditional image of a bull is given a more fashionable meaning. Bulls that have broken loose from their closets become fierce and dangerous, especially in the presence of cows. In *Chiabagoire* (The Bulls are now at Large) the image of an ensuing dangerous pandemonium is appropriated to capture the new danger the killer disease, HIV/Aids poses to the community:

Wewe! Inkai abarendi bagenda? Tataa!	Careful! Where have keepers gone? Ooh!
Yaya, yaya, baba omintoe, chenchia rikori	No, no! good mum! Change course
Omwana ominto, chiabagoire	People, the bulls have broken barriers.
Timorara, omwana ominto	Don't sleep, good people
Soka isiko chiabagoire	Come out, they are at large (ME2)

In the above song, both old and new symbols are used to communicate the callousness of the marauding plague. Without necessarily digging up their original references, traditional symbols are assigned rather superficial meanings in new contexts. In appendix 1 we have

marked the traditional symbols used in the song as METS. METS1 (Ekioba nakio kemenyete (The coward lives longer) and METS2 (Eyekoroma ne' gete egosererwa (anything that bites is kept at bay using a stick) are traditional sayings that emphasized the need for caution and moderation in all human undertakings. In the context of the song, however, they are used to preach abstinence. METS3 are expressions lifted from a traditional trickster tale in which Hare used trickery to prey on his unsuspecting friends.

Endii gokoigwa bwebache	If something is flying in your direction, duck
Epagapaga omwanaominto otame mono	If the sound is menacing, please run, brother
	(ME2)

In the present context, however, the expressions are expressly used to communicate the need for frugality and guarding against common human instincts whose immediate gratification could lead one to self-destruction. Images in the third and fourth stanzas full of satire. They lead the audience to condemning reckless sexual behaviours albeit in a light hearted manner.

Abande baimokire basimegete ebituma	Some, despite being maize growers
Bire bwoye ebineene	With high healthy cobs in their garden
Ere omoika ogenda etaoni	He sets off for the town
Ase bigasambeire	Where they are roasted openly
Oimoka ere ogora	And choose to buy those ones
Obongorora omoerio oruta monwa	He plucks the corn and eats hurriedly
Kogochia komoboria oteba ekegwansa	When asked, he says they are tastier
Egesusanu, oteba ekegwansa	Drooped ones, he says they are tastier!
Twarorire buna abwo	We've seen many of such kind
Omoerio bachiire	At the end, they're departed

Dalili ya mvua ni mawingu	Clouds precede the rains
Ngoma ikipigwa kunajambo	The sound of a drum implies news
Ikipigwa saana upasuka	If it is beaten for long, it bursts
Ikipigwa sana uvunjka	If it is beaten for long, it breaks
Abande baimoka beroka chintereba	Others claim to be qualified drivers
Ing'a barabwo serious	That they are serious type
Egari bakogendia	They really want to drive
Enisan rero	A Nissan (van) today
Mambia neturera	A trailer the following day
Egari ero yaimoka yamotwomeria	Then it knocks him against the wall
Twarorire buna abwo	We've seen many of such kind
Omoerio bachiire	At the end, they're departed
Babwate obwerori	Full of haughtiness
Omoerio bachiire	At the end, they're departed
Batari gotacha ebureki, obe!	They can't step on the brakes
Omoerio bachiire	At the end, they're departed
Bagosokia omotwe isiko	They stick their heads out (ME2)

In a sharp departure from custom, men who sustain prostitution are rebuked more than their female counterparts. Such men are portrayed as foolish and plainly gullible. Unlike in olden times when men were famed for their sexual conquests, *Chiabagoire* (The Bulls are now at Large) views such behaviour as unnecessarily risky. Men no longer have the liberty to do what they want, since a more powerful enemy (The bull—HIV/Aids) is on the rampage. In this kind of situation, patriarchy is surely not fashionable, since it has become the bait that

leads men astray and even unto death. It seems men have to trim their appetite and ego if they want to survive.

The last stanza follows with a number of popular sayings that may not amount to much than as an act of bravado and artistic exploration by the artist. At a closer look, however, the source of the sayings seems to be the mundane excuses that people make to rationalize reckless sexual escapades, such as “condoms make sex less enjoyable,” “one sex partner is boring,” “sex keeps one refreshed.” The images appear as below:

Mchezo wa meno ni njugu karanga	Nuts are a game for teeth
Gotakuna ebigichi ayio namadoido	To chew gum is haughtiness
Konyunyunta ekoo otioke omonu buya	Sucking a breath freshener
Something monotony itakuja kutubore	can be monotonous and boring
Oborabu nobuya bokonyete omotino	Light is of help to the deaf
Bokogera okwane naye	It helps them to talk to you
Bomochani bobore tokonyara komokonya	Without light communication ceases
Obwansu bwokoigwa tibong’ anaobwokorora	To hear is not as pleasant as to see
Obwansu bwogoncha tibonga’ na obwokorora	To see is not as pleasant as to taste
Chaga oborwe omonto ogokoenora	May you lack someone to enlighten you

(ME2)

In spite of their structural weaknesses, Mosioma’s improvised proverbs are sufficiently aesthetic, because they call for a degree of interpretive cleverness. The last line in the excerpt implies that the youth need to be enlightened if they are to escape the malevolent traps of modernity that have sprung up everywhere and are determined to devour them.

The same trend of lining up newly created symbols that are severed from the old continues in *Amatindogoro* (Passion Fruits) where the artist's desire to exercise his creativity fully seems to be the major consideration in the deployment of a symbols. Most of the symbols are characteristically original. Examples include:

Gento tikeri ekebe	There is nothing as worse as
Otang'anie omotino nyomba	to ask a deaf person to go into a house first
Ochie komotura orare	And then later seek to enter later so as to sleep

Appearing in a song with a political message, the proverb captures the calamity that awaits people who blindly elect leaders that have neither the vision nor the will to facilitate meaningful development. It is akin to being led by a blind person.

Kumbe omonto enda ekoroma	Yet a person whose stomach is aching
Nomogambia amang'ana amaya	Even with sweet words
Takonyara gosumaeli yaa	He may not smile

The above proverb captures the ineffectiveness of empty political rhetoric in the face of real problems that the people face. The proverb portrays the modern politician as a noise maker that is not only blind to the peoples suffering, but also lacks ideas to solve the myriad social challenges. It is, therefore, a call to politicians to talk much less and work more.

Tobaisa gochegia ebunda	Don't taunt a donkey
Buna nigo ere emwana	Thinking it is just a baby
Ochie koyekuna engonkero	Or try to touch its teats

The above saying equally derives its meaning from a socio-political context. It refers to the tendency by politicians to underestimate their voters' wit. A warning is thus fired to them to change their bad manners or soon learn the folly of underestimating the intelligence of the voter.

Ese enyama ere amache ime

A dog, meat in water

Tekonyara korusia

He won't get it out

Ekio negetinge

That is the leg ring (ME3)

The images in the above saying communicate at two levels: at the political level, the musician emphasises the need to put in place measures that could prevent corruption and misappropriation of public resources. At another level, the singer seems to be comically commenting on the effect HIV/Aids has had on people's behaviour. Like meat immersed in water, HIA/Aids has become an effective deterrent to immorality, since people now have to think twice before engaging in careless sexual escapades.

The above expressions point to the artist's ingenuity. *Amatindogoro* (Passion Fruits) has nine such sayings—see appendix. The sayings posit a structure that borrows profoundly from the traditional proverb, complete with the proposition and completion. Aesthetically, however, the proverbs are laced with more of the “shocking images” than the intense reflection and thought that the traditional proverbs are known to provoke. “The shock effect” is apparent in a proverb appearing in Henry Sagero's *boda boda*, where people are asked to respect motorcycle taxi operators thus: *abarundia chipigipigi basikwe buna egoti yegetondo* (The motorcycle taxi operators must be accorded the same amount of respect as that accorded a

dead man's jacket). In the same song, the musician also says: *oyokobarama atenge buna etongiro* (whoever abuses them should dance like a ten cents coin).

While performing a narrative to us during one of the assemblies, Jared Mombinya opened with a formula that deviated from everything that we had heard before: "As the saying goes, you need to pay attention to a story teller because, being a good orator, he may as well be your mother's boyfriend!" Such is the bravado that informs the popular sayings. Their messages are coded, but their meanings not guaranteed. Much as they seem shallow, in comparison with their traditional counterparts, popular sayings and representations are not lacking in creativity. Nevertheless, they are more privatist, because, unlike their traditional counterparts whose contexts were more concrete, their context lacks a definite form; they can mean anything.

Another popular culture phenomenon that plays out in *Amatindogoro* (Passion Fruits) is the use of images of sexual fantasy. One's dancing prowess is attributed to their good "passion fruits," referring to well-formed buttocks. The expression is seemingly addressed to old and young dancers alike. This is a clear break from custom since, traditionally, good dancers were said to be 'spineless' to mean flexible. Additionally such mundane idle subjects were never known to be directed at elders.

Further, some symbols appearing in narratives seem to have undergone some modification. For instance, the traditional stereotyped figure of "the evil woman" in *Nyaboke* and *Omoibi Bwemiongo* (A Thief of Pumpkins) is turned round to incorporate the irresponsible man in Jared Mombinya's *Esese no'mokungu* (Dog and a Woman). In the place of the customary ending where a punishment is meted out to a nonconforming woman, both the woman's lover

(Dog) and the husband are punished commensurate with the role they have played in causing the woman discomfort:

While still in bed, the woman heard her husband knock at the door. He had returned home unexpectedly. Dog and the woman were now cornered. In the great panic of the moment, the woman cut off Dog's tail, but, with no time to waste, Dog dashed off through the window without his precious tail. After that, the woman chopped the tail into small pieces and prepared a delicious meal for the man, which he thoroughly enjoyed. (JM1)

Translated directly, "tail" in Ekegusii becomes "penis". The thought that one man's genitals can be fed to another is, indeed, anticlimax and a source of intense humour. The situation attracts more ridicule than sympathy because promiscuity and absconding deserve punishment. More importantly, however, we recognise that the portrayal of women in the narrative has changed from the naïve happy victim to a conscious and liberated actor. The modern woman is no longer docile but very intelligent with an instinct for survival. She can surprise, and outrageously so, if circumstances drive them into a corner. Incidentally, the audience have no problem with such portrayals because it is actually their reality and they know everybody has to be smart to survive.

Conclusion

It may have become clear from the above discussion that the conception and deployment of symbols in the modern Gusii oral literature follows two main divergent styles. The first one involves the appropriation of symbols conceived in the traditional context into contemporary situations to convey messages with a contemporary bearing, as well as the old values that may have a contemporary relevance. In this approach the contemporary message conveyed through the traditional symbol is either independent from the original or complementary. In the second trend, we have symbols that have been conceived within the contemporary reality and they are therefore totally new and uniquely suited to the modern realities. In the same category there are traditional symbols that have been assigned new meanings in a process that is totally subversive as evident in the works of both Henry Sagero and Christopher Mosioma. Indeed, the modern Gusii oral artist is not hindered by lack of an in-depth understanding of the alien traditional context. Rather, he is determined to create relevance for himself by experimenting with old representations in new situations or even creating his own new ones. All in all, the various patterns of symbolism go to demonstrate that, contrary to common belief, symbolism in oral literature is not dormant but has taken up new trends that reflect the social dynamics. There, therefore, exists a clear relationship between past and successive contexts in the use of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii. Equally, shifts in ideology and interpersonal relationships among the Abagusii, mostly due to exposure to modern values, have impacted on the nature of symbols used by Gusii oral artists.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the present study we set out to examine the role of context in the conception, use and appreciation of symbolic expressions in the oral literature of Abagusii. We sought to bring into question the interplay between the vagaries of situation and the conception of symbols, their deployment as well as aesthetic impact, with a view to account for the resilience and transience of the oral literature of Abagusii. Among other things, we wanted to understand the nature and role of symbolism in the oral literature of Abagusii and also whether the use of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii is static or transient. Above all, we wanted to know whether transience identifies a thread that runs through earlier representations into the contemporary, and whether it was constant or had variables.

From the foregoing discussion, the study has provided attestation that symbolism, one of the so called “high standard language and highly stylised techniques,” in oral art (Maxamed Daahir Afrax, 2005) is prominently present in not just the traditional oral literature of Abagusii, but in the community’s modern oral forms as well. It has also become clear that symbols in both the contemporary and the indigenous oral literature of Abagusii can be described in terms of ideologies and social structures that are either corresponding or at variance. While the indigenous forms reflected the rationalistic traditional order that was based on the stringent patriarchal hierarchical order that set out strict gender roles, and which was reinforced by a moral order that distinguished good from evil, the contemporary oral literature has fallen under the influence of such contemporary influences as Christianity, literacy, urbanisation and increasing democratic space and civil liberties that have resulted in popular tendencies and more uninhibited representations that have either rejected the rationalism and pragmatism of the old order or appropriated them to changing realities.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii are inspired in the same way, at least in the three genres under our study. The common denominator in the use of symbols in the oral literature of Abagusii is the dominant role of the context. Both the old and the new representations are inspired by the old and the new contexts respectively. There is also a relationship between ideology—whether personal or communal—and symbolism. Whereas, the traditional symbols reflect the social, economic and political realities of the traditional Abagusii; the basic living in the oriental villages, the modern representations in the oral literature of Abagusii reflects the everyday concerns of a rapidly modernising community.

The second critical point of connection between the traditional and the contemporary representations in the oral literature of Abagusii is the process of appropriation of old symbols to new situations. Appropriation applies at two different levels: in the first level, the old representations that were inspired by ideologies that still remain are used as they are or with minor modifications to capture the contemporary reality, such as in Christopher Monyoncho's *Nyaboke* which represents neo-colonialism and unsustainable urban/modern consumerism. The resulting mode of representation is, thus, static. Secondly, in cases where old symbols represent ideologies that have become alien to the new generation of Abagusii, the symbols have either been adjusted to reflect the new realities, such as in Mosioma's *Chiabagoire* (The Bulls are at large) or discarded altogether to pave the way for new representations. In effect, the artist has to de-link the old representations from the old order in a process of de-contextualisation and make them relevant to his situation in a process of re-contextualisation.

The transient nature of the oral literature of Abagusii is manifest in the intermediate stage of the oral literature of Abagusii. Christianity, having been the earliest manifestation of European presence in Africa, and in Gusiiland, is well the one most significant trigger of the intermediate trend of symbolism in which symbolic expressions derived from the traditional order are used to comment on emerging issues and modern developments within the community. Some of the symbols in this trend, however, are influenced more by the modern reality than the preceding and therefore point to the emerging trend. The other activators may include modern education, the modern economy and urbanised lifestyles, all of which are in one way or another related to Christianity. The intermediate trend is, indeed, the meeting point between the old and the new and the emerging. It is also a field of contention where the new is threatening to take over and the old refusing to let go.

The contemporary trend is recognized by a level of freedom that is not enjoyed by the traditional oral artist. The contemporary symbolic patterns either appropriate the traditional symbolic patterns and give them totally new meanings or ignore the ready patterns altogether and replace them with new ones. In some radical instances, the old order does not hold, except in providing old models and structures to be emulated, and has therefore given way to new representations, such as in Christopher “*Embarambamba*” Mosioma’s *Amatindogoro* (Passion Fruits) where passion fruits are representing sexualised body parts; or *bonga points*, in Henry Sagero’s *Omosiki Neriogo* (Music is Medicine), which represent the therapeutic value of music and art generally or female beauty, in Christopher Monyoncho’s *Nyaboke*, which represents neo-colonialism and unsustainable urban/modern consumerism. We have also noted that, unlike the traditional symbols which were communal and homogenous in nature, the modern symbols are more and more privatist, thus lending them to many different interpretations depending on the audience’s background within the modern realities.

Similarly, in the contemporary subversive trend, the demarcation between good and evil is obliterated, as both the popular and individual artist's ethical disposition take precedence. The contemporary trend is, therefore, more likely to contain representations that are founded on fleeting values and ideologies that are hugely dependent on the prevailing tastes of the audience. One could then talk about the existence of the canonical and the popular strains of oral literature where the canonical is more likely to be found in the in both the traditional and modern trends and the popular in the modern urbanised trend.

Be that as it may, it is also true that the link between the old and the new has not been totally obliterated. Even in instances when the departure is quite obvious, the artist's awareness about the traditions that precede his is palpable; otherwise he would not have come up with a new proverb if the genre was not there in earlier traditions. The same is true with oral literature as a literary form, as a whole, and language use, including experimentations in the genre. In such a case, the traditional forms provide some form of artistic legacy which the contemporary artist may borrow from or learn from even as he deviates. With such mechanisms, we could as well talk about continuity in the midst of change.

Ultimately, we could observe that the oral literature of Abagusii is as vibrant as ever, and that the oral artists of the community, young or old, have, at various points in time, ever understood and responded to the realities of their dynamic environment. The use of both traditional and modern symbols by modern Gusii musicians, for instance, indicates a strong awareness on the part of choral composers of the need to combine traditional patterns with modern musical trends in order to remain relevant. Equally, the new genres that do not adhere to the old structures, as well as subversive recasting of traditional values and ideologies, are signs of entry into a new era. An era in which, the younger generation, lacking in the

traditional understanding but not silenced, have turned to the reality they know even as they defiantly question discriminatory traditional systems that side-line them. With increasing freedoms and democratic space, as well as the adoption of global standards of government, owing to the adoption of the devolved modern systems of governance in Kenya, and the spread of the modern technology, researchers interested in the emerging patterns of communication in oral literature may wish to investigate further the surfacing of patterns and trends as well as the extension of generic boundaries in the modern oral literatures. It could then be visible, in not so distant a future, to study the diffusion of various oral literature elements across cultures within Kenya and beyond as we anticipate increased influence for global trends of oral literature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1a: A List of all performers, their items and county of origin

Name of Performer	Items	Date	Venue	County of Origin
Rael Maroro	3	11/06/2013	Kisii Culture Hall	Nyamira
Jared Mombinya	4	11/06/2013 21/06/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Rebecca Machini	11	26/06/13 27/07/2013	Manga D.C office Culture Hall	Kisii
Moronya Humphrey	26	27/06/13 24/08/2013	Culture Hall	Kisii
Teresa Nyaboke Sagwe	3	21/07/13	Culture Hall	Kisii
Jane Ogeto	2	21/07/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Peter Getate	4	21/07/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Jackson Mombaki	2	08/10/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Sabella onsongo	2	08/10/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Pastor Edwin Mogeni	4	22/06/2013	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Evans Omariba	3	08/10/13	Culture Hall	Kisii
Benson Mageto	24	22/06/2013 07/02/2013 19/07/2013	Culture Hall Manga Manga	Kisii
Evans Aricha	4	08/10/13	Culture Hall	Kisii
Jane Nyang'au	2	13/06/13	Culture Hall	Kisii
Christopher Monyoncho	3	Recorded	Recorded	Kisii
Agnes Kibwage	2	13/06/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Catherine Nyakundi	2	13/06/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Sabina Nyarieko Gesare	2	11/07/2013	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Briscah Nyaboke	2	21/06/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Nahor Atumba	1	Recorded	Recorded	Kisii
Joseph Mageka	2	22/ 08/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Catherine Ooko	2	22/08/13	Culture Hall	Kisii

Mary Mageto	2	22/08/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Christopher Nchore	7	21/06/2013	Culture Hall	Kisii
Alice Mboga	3	21/06/2013	Culture Hall	Kisii
Bonventure onsongo	2	22/08/2014	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Henry sagero	3	15/03/2014	Bridge Waters Hotel	Nyamira
Andrew Matara	3	22/12/2014	Riakimai	Nyamira
Nemwel Osoro	2	07/04/13	Culture Hall	Nyamira
Amariba Women Dancers	3	08/07/2013	Kisii Show Ground	Kisii
Samuel Mochama	2	07/04/13		Nyamira
Christopher Mosioma	3	15/03/2014	Bridge Waters Hotel	Kisii
Reuben Agasa	2	07/04/13	Isecha	Nyamira
Denis Otonyi	3	21/06/2013	Culture Hall	Kisii
Sabella Onsongo	2	08/10/13	Culture Hall	Kisii
Edwin Makori	2	07/04/13	Culture Hall	Kisii
Mwanyagetinge Dancers	4	08/07/13	Kisii Show Ground	Nyamira

Appendix 1b: Analytical Table

Artist	Item	Age	Gender	category
Rebecca Machini (RM)	15 proverbs Eyaa Oye (song) Hyena and Cow (narrative) A thief of pumpkins (narrative) An Elder who cannot Sing (song) A Man who Wanted to Marry	over 50	F	Old Old Old Old Old Old
Jared Mombinya (JM)	The Best is yet to Come (song) Dog and a Woman (Narrative)	Below 30	M	New New
Pastor Humphrey Moronya (PM)	The wise woman (song) When I was Young (song) 20 proverbs	Over 50	M	Old Old Old
Teresa Sagwe (TN)	You are too Frequent in Hotels (song) (Leader Amariba Dancers)	Over 50	F	New
Peter Getate (PG)	Houseboy Who ate A loaf of Bread 5 Proverbs	Over 50	M	New Old
Benson Mageto (BO)	The Stingy Woman (Narrative) “Why?” (Narrative)	Over 50	M	Old New
Christopher Nchore (CN)	10 proverbs	Over 50	M	Old
Amariba Dancers (AD)	The Rain Song (Song)	Over 50	F	Old
Mwanyagetinge Dancers (MD)	The weaver Bird (song) Who is that? (song) Get me a Hoe (song)	Mixed	Mixed	Old Old Old
Denis Otonyi (DO)	The Orphan (narrative) The Stingy Woman (narrative)	Below 30	M	New
Pastor Edwin Mogeni (PE)	Bible Verses 5 proverbs	Below 30	M	New Old
Andrew Aganda (AM)	The Thorny Tree (song) The Safari Ants (song)	Below 40	M	New New

	Heredity (song)			New
Christopher Monyoncho (CM)	Nyaboke (song) Keemba (song) Our People (song)	Deceased	M	New New New
Christopher Mosioma (CE)	Our Representatives (song) Passion fruits (song) The Bulls are now at Large (song)	Below 30	M	New New New
Henry Sagero (HS)	The Spirit of Music (song) The Cow is whole (song)	Below 40	M	New New
Evans Aricha (EA)	Bible Verses	Below 30	M	New

APPENDIX 2: TRANSCRIBED TEXTS AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS.

i) SYMBOLS OF SOCIALISATION

BO6: *omwana taachi kende*, (at birth the baby has not learnt anything)

BO7: *Nyang'era ndotungi na'mori yaye ndotungi* (what the cow does, is what the calf does).

BO3: *Omwana ong'areka mochiere ng'ora, nigo akogenda na'goto agotega korwa gesieri buna ng'ina agotega* (go slow on a wicked child, who, like his/her mother, have ears that are trained to pick things)

PM6: *Omwana omuya no'yoise omobe no'yong'ina* (a good child belongs to the father, but the bad one the mother's)

BO1: *Ekiomogoko nomwana* ogatoire (the stingy woman's food was given to us by her child)

Name: Benson Omariba

Title: Omokungu Omong'iti

Circumstances: Arranged

Date:

Venue: Bobaracho Village

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

Long ago, a woman and her family were on the verge of death in the face of unforgiving famine. In spite of her sorry state, her neighbour, Bosibori, seemed to lack nothing. The woman and her family seriously needed help or else they all perished. She decided to seek help from Bosibori, ignoring Bosibori's reputation for being stingy. Bosibori was seated outside her hut when the begging woman arrived to a cold reception. As expected, her pleas fell on a deaf ear, as Bosibori insisted she too had nothing left. Just as the woman was turning to leave, Bosibori's young daughter emerged from the hut struggling with a pot full of sorghum flour. The young benevolent soul thought her mother had forgotten about the flour she had kept under the bed. The innocent act of the child had saved lives.

RM24: *Omokungu omonyaka mbana bamokorire enting'ana* (a dirty woman can be turned into a virgin by her children)

PM12: *Ensinyo managokwanwa mbamura etabwati* (a despised neighbourhood lacks warriors)

BO4: *Gesomo tikianya kong'ainiyia ngokinia kegokinia* (in a secluded hidden area, one can surely grow, but will never be wise)

BO5: *Eamatengiyakogeramwanaachega* (a neighbourhood is vital because it gives children playmates to taunt and bully).

Name: Nahor Atumba

Title: Ntakoreti kinde moke (When I was Young)

Circumstances: Recorded

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

NA1

<i>Ntakoreti omoke</i>	What didn't I do in my youth
<i>Inguru chiamang'aime chiaguto</i>	With ant bear's yoked strength
<i>Ang'era ko nechianchogu</i>	Like a rhino
<i>Eguatia 'mbara</i>	Or an elephant splitting planks
<i>Monto ankoru moke</i>	If I was made young again
<i>Monyenche bwamaguta</i>	Easy and flexible like cooking oil and
<i>Moseto ko morere</i>	With my marrow young and tender
<i>Nare kominyoka nkobongia</i>	I'd run and pick things simultaneously
<i>Nkorama kande anchera ntiga</i>	I could insult and injure
<i>Anchera gateneine buna gete kiandara,</i>	I left the feeble erect like lone sticks
<i>Akagokwa gakwa</i>	The weak ones died
<i>Na'agakoba kaba</i>	And the strong survived

PC3: *Ekiabana nomotwe igoro gekogunda korrwa* (that which belongs to children begins to rot from its head)

PC4: *Toitera omorisia enkundi negesaku ogosiria* (To preserve your tribe, don't hit a shepherd with a clenched fist)

Name:

Title: Oyoo (He is Here)

Circumstances: Natural

Venue: Nyanchwa village

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

CS1

1.

Oyo oyoo

He is here he is here (*soloist*)

Oyoo

He is (*response*)

Obeire momura

He is now a man

Obeire momura eee

He is a man indeed

2.

Oyo oyoo

He is here he is here

Oyoo

he is

oyo oyoo

He is here he is here

oyoo

He is

omoisia nyakebororo bwakorire X 2

boy you are hurting and seething with anger

oyooo

He is here

3.

oyo oyoo

He is here

oyoo

He is here

oyo oyoo

He is here he is here

oyoo

He is here

totogia momura kieni X 2

Never praise a man for his looks X2

motogie makora X 2

But for his deeds X2

oyoo

4.

oyo oyoo

He is here

oyoo

He is here

oyo oyoo

He is here he is here

oyoo

He is here

Ritimo riaye riatierigwe

His spear has been sharpened

Tiga arwane sigisi

Let him fight against the Kipsigis

5.

Omoisia nyoko teta

Fearful boy you fuck your mother

Teta nyoko

Fuck your mother

Omoisia nyoko teta

Fearful boy, fuck your mother

Teta nyoko eee

Fuck your mother (CS1)

Name: Rebecca Machini

Title: Eaoye Oye

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

RM3

1.

Eaoye eaoye

Eaoye eaoye

Goka okorire buya

Be happy she has done well

Oreng mokabaisia

She was a wife of uncircumcised boys

Obeire mokabamura

Now she is wife of circumcised boys

Eaoye eaoye

Eaoye eaoye

2.

Eaoye eaoye

Eaoye eaoye

Esimbore yaito

Our men's song

Yarure sugusu

Has come from the North

Eaoye eaoye

Eaoye eaoye

3.

Eaoye eaoye

Eaoye eaoye

Sugusu Ndwochabe

The North of Ochabe (name of a man)

Irianyi neyaito

The South is ours

Totogia moiseke kieni

Never praise her for her beauty

Motogie mwana

But for bearing a child

Eaoye eaoye

Eaoye eaoye

BO7: *Inguru chiabamura nchogu egwatia mbara* (a young man's strength is like an elephant splitting planks)

Name: Rebecca Machini

Title: Okanyang'au na Okang'ombe (Hyena and Cow)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

RM2:

Abukare ching'iti chionsi chiorosana nigo chianchaine mono korende boboete Okanyang'au mono kiagera arenge omonto bw'obworo obonene na bw'ebitina ebinge. Korende nonye n'okanyang'au bwangetwe neching'iti chinde, nigo banchaine n'ogasusu mono kiagera asigete Ogasusu as'engecho y'obong'aini bwaye. Kende gionsi Ogasusu arenge komotobia akore, nigo arenge gokora atari koboria kende. Rituko erimo Okanyang'au gakonyagotara korigia amauga ekenyorokiaye ebitutu ime akaba ogosoa kera ase erinde arore gose nanyore kende arie.

Gakonyagoeta, akanyora ogure engoro entambe yabwate amache amange. Ani tamanyete buna ching'iti chinde konye chiaremire egesima egetambe kiarengi gocha kobaa amache. Egesima imaria Okanyang'au agachandeka mono no'bokendu bokarigia komoita. Akaba okorera mono. Egesio gekaba buna Okang'ombe nere ngoeta arengi akorisia. Akaigwa Okanyang'au okorera korwa egesima keria ime. Bwango bwango, akarasia engasi ye'ngori agatirimboeria Okanyang'au gochia egesima keria ime erinde akabwaterera agasoka. Ekero asoka aika isiko, okanyang'au tachieti goakera Okang'ombe buya, akamotobia buna enchara yamorire monoaseigo mbaka arie Okang'ombe. Ee tata geutere gekobamboka kekebambokere. Abuo Okangombe akaba okomoebereria mono buna amwabere, korende Okanyang'au tatagete koigwa ayio. Akeigo Ogasusu akarwa moino akobugia omororia. Akaboria Okang'ombe ninki kiaba erinde akamoeresa kera egento. Abuo Ogasusu agekona buna taigweti buna ninki bakomoeresa. Akaboria Okanyang'au nainde asoe engoroime erinde arore buna okang'ombe amonyorete. Erio Okanyang'au agatereria agasoa egesima ime. Ekero asoa ime, Agasusu akarusia chingasi chiria agatebia Okang'ombe bakagenda bagatiga Okanyang'au egesima ime okonya korera. Abuo noo omogano orerete.

Translation:

(Long long ago, all animals lived together in the jungle harmoniously. Lion, leopard, cow, snake, all lived together as brothers and sisters. Most animals however abhorred hyena's laziness and love for feuds. Hyena had few friends except Hare whose wisdom he greatly

admired and even envied. Hyena heeded Hare's warnings and counsel as religion. He did anything and everything that Hare asked him to. One day hyena, while scavenging for carcasses in the thickets, fell accidentally into the well the rest of the animals had dug for water. Hyena stayed in the well for a long time with no sign of help coming from anywhere. He cried loudly with panic thinking he was going to die in there.

Fortunately, Cow happened to be coming to the well for water. When Cow heard Hyena's cry of distress, she reassured him and began to devise a way of rescuing him. She quickly tied strings together and made a ladder which she then lowered into the well. Cow was extremely excited when Hyena finally emerged from the well. He looked shaken but out of danger. Cow was turning to go when Hyena said something that shook cow to her roots: Hyena was going to have cow for his meal because he was totally angry. Cow knew she was in trouble because Hyena meant what he said. The old proverb that says you will make a fire for it to warm itself but when it expands it will explode on your face had come true. Luckily, just then, Hare happened to pass by. Cow quickly told her story to Hare, who as usual listened attentively. Hare then asked Hyena to tell his side of the story, but whenever he tried to explain himself, Hare pretended not to comprehend. Hare then asked Hyena to demonstrate what had exactly happened. Once again, Hyena tripped and fell into the well, just like before. Immediately, Hare folded up the ladder that Cow had made for Hyena and simply walked away. When Hyena realised his folly, he began to wail and plead for help, but it was too late. And there ends my story.

RM10: *geutere gekobamboka gekebambokere* (yes, it's true, you will make a fire for it to warm itself but when it is warm and has expanded, it will explode on your face).

PN5: *entankana ekwebwata buya nero ekomenya* (an orphan that knows how to live with people prospers).

PN6: *tuga ntakana ya ng'ombe totuga ntakana monto* (you are better off raising an orphaned calf than a child)

ii) SYMBOLS OF HOME BUILDING

PN2: *Nguba emo tiyana koirwa roche* (a lone shield has never been taken to the river)

RM9: *Nyamokungu omo aye imosiereko okobera tobunera abagaka chinkore* (you who has one wife will sit close to the door lest you break the elders' drinking straws)

BO8: *totogiamomura kieni motogie bikorwa* (praise a man for his actions, not his appearance)

BO9: *totogia mokungu kieni, motogie mwana* (praise a woman for her deliveries, not her beauty)

Name: Mwanyagetinge Dancers

Title: *Baba ominto nomuya* (My mother is pleasant)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Office

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

MD4

<i>Baba ominto nomuya</i>	My mother is pleasant
<i>Na tata ominto nomuya</i>	My father too
<i>Baba ominto ondereire kwaa</i>	My mother who raised me in her arms
<i>Na magega aboronge</i>	And on her back
<i>Na ngobo chimarera</i>	And in warm clothing
<i>Baba okomanya kinomire</i>	Mother who knows when I'm starving and drying up
<i>Namatori akoboko</i>	Morsels ever ready at hand
<i>Na 'tesibia</i>	Even with her dirty hand
<i>Kogicha indie 'nyigote</i>	I eat and fill my tummy
<i>Baba nyambere ibere</i>	Mother, of two breasts
<i>Baba ominto amagenda tugutugu</i>	Mother who crouches,
<i>Amagenda seremani</i>	Walks sideways,
<i>Amagenda magunkura</i>	Crawls,
<i>Ko' chinda chioreka nsabo</i>	All for my comfort

Name: Mwanyagetinge Dancers

Title: *Egetinginye Ekeng'aini*

Circumstances: Live Performance

Venue: Kisii Show Ground

Audience: Natural/ mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

MD1

<i>Egetinginye ekeng'aini</i>	The clever weaver bird
<i>Kerigie oboundi keagache</i>	Finds soft grass for weaving
<i>Embura egotwa</i>	When it rains

<i>Gesoe mwaye</i>	He shelters in his own house
<i>Gesoe mwaye baba</i>	He shelters in his own house, indeed
<i>Mbura egotwa gesoe mwaye baba</i>	When it rains, He shelters in his own house
<i>Mbura egotwa gesoe mwayee</i>	When it rains, He shelters in his own house

RM6: *Omokungu omoing'onyi origirie abereke* (a nagging woman wants to be pregnant)

RM7: *Omokungu omotindi moe omogondo bwekenyambi areme* (a woman that makes too much noise should be given land with couch grass to dig)

BO9: *Chiombe ne chianyakemogi nyariso riomo* (cows belong to him who blinks but retains a dry eye)

Name: Rebecca Machini

Title: *Tata nomochoberi*, (My father is a creeper)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

RM4

<i>Tata nomochoberi,</i>	My father is a creeper,
<i>Agachobera akareta baba,</i>	He crept on my mother and brought her home,
<i>Neng'aya kere gekuba X2</i>	With the girl's beads still hanging on her chest,
<i>Obe aaa eeeee X2</i>	Obe aaa eeeee, (interjection for surprise) X2
<i>Mbura egatwa bokaira</i>	It rained the whole day,
<i>Baba tarenge nagesero</i>	My mother had no skin to lie on,
<i>Aaa eeeee X2</i>	Obe aaa eeeee X2
<i>Baba tarenge nagesero</i>	My mother had no skin to lie on,
<i>Obe aa eeeee X2</i>	Obe aaa eeeee X2

<i>Nga'ki bonokerabe,</i>	How will it turn out?
<i>Bikone mbikone,</i>	miracles are miracles,
<i>Morero oibora ibu,</i>	fire begets ashes,
<i>Sasati eibora maache,</i>	Reeds beget water,
<i>Auma aaka ng'umbu,</i>	Auma (a man's name) get to the other ridge,
<i>Kende tikeri roche,</i>	There is no danger in the valley,

<i>'esasati ekona kwoga</i>	That noise comes from reeds,
<i>Ing'o bono okoibora aba?</i>	Who bears your kind?
<i>Yaya bamura mbare seito</i>	No! We've enough men in our home,
<i>Abamura nyakieni kebariri</i>	Men of fair complexion,
<i>Ebibwato emeng'ento</i>	Men with well formed thighs,
<i>Amaino monwa akengire</i>	Well formed teeth
<i>Aaa eeeee X2</i>	Obe aaa eeeee X2
<i>Abamura nemeng'ento</i>	Men that are well built
<i>obe Aaa eeeee</i>	Obe aaa eeeee X2

Name: Rebecca Machini

Title: *Ontebiri rara saiga* (He told me to sleep down in the boys' hut)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

RM8

<i>Tata ontebirie rara saiga X2</i>	My father told me to sleep down in the boys' hut X2
<i>Ngakaga Ogembo noyominto</i>	He made me believe Ombego was my relative
<i>Ngakaga Ogembo noyominto</i>	He made me believe Ombego was my relative
<i>Chimori isano nemo</i>	Six heifers
<i>Ne 'chimbori ikomi nemo</i>	And eleven goats
<i>Nachio chiandire</i>	Are what my husband forfeited
<i>Seito nkorera bare</i>	There is a cry at home
<i>Ntare koba momura</i>	They wish I were a man
<i>Onyore ngokwana seito</i>	They could hear me
<i>Mambia na marogoba</i>	Morning and evening
<i>Ngachia koba nyarinda</i>	I put on a dress
<i>Ngachi gokwana ronde</i>	Now I speak elsewhere
<i>Ontebiri rara saiga</i>	He told me to sleep down in the boys' hut
<i>Tata ontebirie rara saiga</i>	He told me to sleep down in the boys' hut

Name: Mwanyagetinge Dancers

Title: Ning'oria? (Who is that?)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

MD2

<i>'ing'oria okorwa ng'umbu eria</i>	Who is that coming from the other ridge
<i>Nigo abwekaine tata</i>	He resembles my father (husband)
<i>Tobaisa komomonya</i>	He shouldn't be the subject of your backbiting
<i>Ndangererie omwanchi one</i>	Let my love come to me
<i>Omwanchi ondusetie seito</i>	My love who made me a woman
<i>Tobaisa komoaka</i>	Don't hurt him
<i>Tobaisa komomonya</i>	He shouldn't be the subject of your backbiting

<i>Ongoro nomokunyi</i>	Ongoro is a winner
<i>Ere agakunya isano nemo</i>	He won me with six heifers
<i>Ne' echimbori ikomi nemo chioka</i>	And eleven goats
<i>Nachio chiandusia minto</i>	Now I'm a woman
<i>Tobaisa komoaka</i>	Don't hurt him
<i>Aaa eeeee X2</i>	Aaa eeeee X2

<i>Tobaisa kong'akera omwanchi one eee</i>	Don't hurt my love
<i>Obe aa eeeee</i>	Obe aa eeeee

Name: Rebecca Machini

Title: Omoibi Bwemiongo (A Thief of Pumpkins)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

RM1

Abu kare, omong'ina oyomo osimegete emiongo akanyora buna emiongo yaye yachakire koibwa. Akaba okonagoaka ekoko buna emiongo yaye nkona koibwa ere, korende omoibi

tatogeti. Ere tamanyete buna omonto orege komoibera nomong'ina omoamate oye. Omong'ina oria omoibi nigo amanyete bweka kiagera omogaka oye nigo arenge omoturi are na'nka. Bono omong'ina oria omoibi nigo arenge n'omwana ekeng'werere oyio agachire nere koiba. Nigo arenge kogenda n'omwana omobekerera inse, otwa emiongo eria yarenge emenene mono, bwetweka, omanya koimokia omwana oirana bwoye. Rituko erimo omong'ina oria orengokoiberwa akarora buna tiga arende isiko arore ning'o okare komoibera emiongo yaye. Gakirete akanyora omong'ina oria omoibi oyo, etegetege! Agaika akabeka omwana nsinyo iga agachaka gotwa emiongo. Omong'ina oria akarwa igaria ase ebisete, akabogoria omwana nagochia bichuko nere. Ekeru omong'ina oria omoibi akora gotwa emiongo, agachia korigereria akanyora mwana taiyo. Agachaka gotera:

Rioba otakomesa ndorere omwana ntugute eriongo.

Erioba rimesa korende mwana ere tari kororekana,

Nainde atera

Rioba otakomesa ndorere omwana ntugute eriongo.

Rioba otakomesa ndorere omwana ntugute eriongo.

Erioba rimesa korende mwana ere tari kororekana,

Nainde atera

Rioba otakomesa ndorere omwana ntugute eriongo.

Omoerio oye, ekeru aenekia buna mwana taiyo, agatiga emiongo eria nsaria agatama gochia bwoye. Mambia yaye, omong'ina oria agaaka egekuro erinde abanto bagaichora amo nang'ina omwana. Abwo agasokigwa mono nagotebigwa agende sobo arête chimbori ibere

(Once upon a time there was a widow who due to her hard work maintained a big garden full of pumpkins. One day, as she was tending her garden, she noted the big pumpkin fruits she had noted two days earlier were. She got alarmed and became keener. A few days later, more pumpkins were missing. All doubt was gone, and apparently someone was raiding her garden under the cover of darkness. One day, she decided to lay a trap. At the fall of darkness, she went to her garden and sat a corner. After a short while she saw a woman with a baby strapped to her back. From her hiding place, she could positively recognise her tormentor. The thief, in a hurry to accomplish her mission, sat her baby in one of the dark corners and immediately got down to work. Immediately the thief got herself busy, the widow emerged from his hiding and carried the baby away.

When the thief had finished and was ready to go, she went back to where she thought she had put the baby but there was nothing. She searched and searched but couldn't see anything. She began to sing:

Sky, please shine for me,
I want to see my baby,
And throw away the pumpkin,
Sky, I'm not interested in this pumpkin
Give me the light with which to see my baby
(*The sky could then shine, but no baby in sight*)

Sky, please shine for me,
I want to see my baby,
And throw away the pumpkin,
Sky, I don't want this pumpkin
Give me the light with which to see my baby
(*The sky could then shine, but no baby in sight*)

She searched and searched and sang until she was totally exhausted. She also cried but there was no baby. She retired fearing for the worst. The following morning, wailing was heard from the widow's house. People gathered immediately, and after listening to the widow's story, a judgement was made: what the other woman had done, exposing her baby to such danger, was an abomination. She was immediately sent to her home to fetch two goats, with which to appease the ancestors and cleanse the people.

BO11: *Timorora chigocha mochisekere, mbamura chiarire menuko* (don't be too happy when you see the warriors arrive with cattle, a lot of dead blood has been shed)

Name: Mwanyaagetinge Dancers

Title: Ng'ererie Obokombe (Give me a Hoe)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

MD3

1

<i>Ng'ererie obokombe</i>	Give me a hoe
<i>Nekebago egesera</i>	With a beautiful handle
<i>Ng'ende koabusera omogondo</i>	So that I may sow
<i>Omogondoonyakieni kebariri</i>	In the land that belongs to the beautiful woman
<i>Omokungu siomiasiomia</i>	The woman that loiters

Ng'ai akomanya bwarugeirwe How do you know who has cooked
Gose mboke gose mbwa mwana And whether it was for the baby?

2

Mokungu siko moino Woman in the neighbourhood
Kae Bosibori Give Bosibori
Ensio yaye Her grinding stone
Nero yoka abwate it is the only one she has
Achie goserera mwaye She needs to grind flour for her people

Name: Rebecca Machini

Title: *Omomura otagete Konywoma* (A Man that Wanted to Marry)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Manga DC's Office

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

Abu kare omong'ina nareng'e aroro obwate omomura oyomo. Omomura agakina buya akaba omonto obwate amasikani. Eker'o akina abeire omonto omonene agatebia Ngina buna bono natagete konywoma. Ng'ina eker'o aigwa igo akagoka mono. Erinde agatebia omomura oria oye. Bono onye kwaimokire konywoma, bwata chinche echi iga ogende nachirochio korigia omosubati. Gokogenda gokonyora abasubati ase bare abange gwatera ogotera oko:

Bari bare mogondo tenena ango

Ndore oyonga babaee

Bari bare mogondo tenena ango

Ndore oyonga babaee

Aye baba nyagesike monto

Eker'o amanyete ogotera koria omomura oria akaimoka korwa inka. Agatara amatuko amange ataranyora basubati bande. Eker'o achicha koumera abasubati abatang'ani, agatera ogotera koria. Akarigereeria akarora onde taiyo obwekaine ng'ina. Akabwatia enchera akagenda.

Rituko rinde, omomura oria akaumera abasubati bande bakorema. Eker'o atera ogotera koria, akarora oyomo obwekaine ng'ina. Abwoabwo akareta chinche chiria. Abasubati bande bagatama bonsi otatiga oria obwekaine ng'ina. Ere agachaka kobongia chinche. Abwo omomura oria akarundoka akamosamia na komoira sobo. Ng'ina eker'o amorora

akagoka mono.Ise nere akagoka mono agaita eeri akarangeria abanto bagacha bagakora omoyega.

Omomura otagete Konywoma (A Man that Wanted to Marry)

Once upon a time there was a woman who had only one son. The son grew up well and became a handsome well behaved man. When he was a fully grown man, he approached his mother and told her he wanted to marry. The mother was happy because she knew her son was fully grown. When the time came for the boy to get out and find a wife, the mother gave him many good looking beads and taught him a sweet song. She then told him: whenever you come across a group of young ladies you can sing the song to them. They will then stop whatever they are doing and look at you. If you see one that resembles me, throw the beads at them and the one that resembles me will surely stop to pick them. When that happens, go grab her and bring her home. The song went like this:

<i>Bari bare mogondo tenena ango</i>	Those working over there stop and look at me
<i>Ndore oyonga babaae</i>	I want to see the one who resembles my mother
<i>Bari bare mogondo tenena ango</i>	Those working over there stop and look at me
<i>Ndore oyonga babaae</i>	I want to see the one who resembles my mother
<i>Aye baba nyagesike monto</i>	My upright mother

The man went to many villages without success. But on the second day, He came across a group of good looking ladies working together. When he sang his song they all looked at him. He then spotted one that looked like his mother. He immediately threw the beads at them, and all ran away except the one who resembles his mother who got busy picking the beads. He immediately got hold of her and took her home. When he reached home his mother was excited. His father slaughtered a big bull and there was a big feast.

BO26: *omosacha nigo agwanacha Omokungu, no 'mokungu osika omosacha* (the man is the one who loves a woman, and all the woman does is respect the man)

BO12: *Omosacha onywomete Omokungu omonyakieni aabwekaine omonto osimegete obori eteyeye* (a man that marries a beautiful woman shares the same fate as that who plants sorghum in the open)

iii) SYMBOLS OF OLD AGE AND TRADITIONAL RELIGION

PM11: *Magokoro nsaro maya bantina bagwa boreba* (the grandmother is a pouch full of good things, those who refuse to draw from it fall into trouble)

PM12: *Abagaka nobirorire, na'bana nobiganyire* (elders have seen, the young are waiting to see)

PM13: *Moino ochire bake* (wisdom may seek out the youth)

BO20: *Ngoma chigoita tari mwega okobaara* (near fatal head knocks must not be operated on by novices)

Name: Amariba Dancers

Title: Ribina (The rain Song)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii cultural hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

(AD3)

Ribina

Amabera arure manga

Ee amaya arure manga

Eeee! Amaya arure manga

Omogunde tureti chia Nyakongo

Noo omogunde osoka

Enkanga yarerire keera ime ani

Namagena atwereirwe

Ning'o ogokania baba tarera

Ning'o ogokania tata tarera

Omogunde orure manga

Amabera arure manga

Ribina (The Rain Song)

Mercy has appeared from Manga

yes, there come good tidings from Manga

yes! There come good tidings from Manga

Thick clouds from the sides of Nyakongo

That is where the clouds have appeared

a goose has been heard crying from Keera

Her eggs have been rained on

Stop mother from crying

Who will tell father not to cry

A dark Cloud has appeared from Manga

Mercy has appeared from Manga **(AD3)**

RM19:

Name: Rebecca Machini

Title: *Mogaka otachi Meino* (An Elder that can't Sing)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Manga DC Office

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

<i>Mogaka otachi meino</i>	An elder that can't sing
<i>Agende mwa Kwamboka obiranya</i>	Should visit Kwamboka Obiranya
<i>Asibore emeino ne'bitonga</i>	and carry basketfuls of songs
<i>Achie kona gotera mwaye</i>	He could sing back at home
<i>Aaa eee</i>	<i>Aaa eee</i>
<i>Aaa eee</i>	<i>Aaa eee</i>
<i>Oyio no mogaka otachi meino eee</i>	That is the old man that cannot sing, eee
<i>Oyio no mogaka otachi meino eee</i>	That is the old man that cannot sing, eee
<i>Obe aa eee</i>	<i>Obe aa eee</i>

PM14: *ase ribego rire noo chinsoti chogosangererekana* (storks flock where there is a carcass or a weakness)

Name: Benson Omariba

Title: Esabari

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Bobaracho village

Audience: Researcher/ four assistants

BO14

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

<i>Esabari Nyasuguta y'abare</i>	The journey of the sod for initiates
<i>Esabari Nyasuguta ya'bare esabari</i>	The journey of the sod for initiates
<i>Makomoke oremire 'nchera igoro</i>	My aunt has ploughed the path
<i>Eee tiga areme mboremo bwaborire</i>	Let her, since she lacks land
<i>Esabare nyasuguta ya'bare</i>	The journey of the sod for initiates
<i>Ase obororo bokorusia ng'ombe kiebo</i>	Where pain and anguish beget cows
<i>Makomoke oremire 'nchera igoro</i>	My aunt has ploughed the path
<i>Eee tiga areme mboremo bwaborire</i>	Let her, since she lacks land

<i>Esabari Nyasuguta ya'bare</i>	The journey of the sod for initiates
<i>Esabari Nyasuguta ya'bare esabari</i>	The journey of the sod for initiates
<i>Esese endabu yaeta</i>	A white dog has crossed
<i>Mache ng'umbu</i>	Over the ridge
<i>Yarabirie ekemincha nekerenge</i>	Its tail and feet glow

iv) THE INFLUENCE OF MODERN RELIGION

PM17: *Omokungu twoni kai anyigwera kingotera nyakiaberia* (my cockish woman overheard me as I sang for my mistress on my way home)

Name: Withheld

Title: Intwe Abana (We the Young People)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

PM18:

<i>Intwe abana abake</i>	We, the children
<i>Intwe abana abake</i>	We, the children
<i>Togende ekanisa</i>	Should go to church
<i>Toigwe ring'ana</i>	And listen to the word
<i>Riomonene yeso</i>	Of the lord Jesus
<i>Engoko yabuga</i>	The hen cries
<i>Kweee kweee</i>	come, come, come
<i>Ninki ekorangeria</i>	What does she call?
<i>N'ebichuchu biaye</i>	Her chicks
<i>Biaminyoka gocha</i>	Which then run to her
<i>Keria getaigweti</i>	The one not attentive
<i>Giatigara aaria</i>	Remains where she is
<i>Ekebaki giacha</i>	Then the hawk comes
<i>Ng'ora ng'ora ng'ora</i>	Slowly, slowly, slowly
<i>Kiara chimbaba</i>	It spreads its wings
<i>Kiaimokia egechuchu</i>	It picks the chick
<i>Kruukruuuu</i>	Kruukruuuu

PM19: *okoibora okobe nkwa 'nyoni etagotoma.* (Unfortunate birth is that of a bird that cannot be obeyed by its young ones).

BO16: *enyoni e'namage tiyana konora* (a bird that has nestlings never grows fat)

BO17: *moirana Matongo makoro kegocha, tente etometi natache tairana.* (Whoever gives in to the charm of the old home they had fled may get stuck and perish in the marshy plains)

BO21: *eki giasireire nchera maate kirigerigwe rogoro* (what you lost at the lower end of the path may be found at the upper section of the path)

Name: Pastor Humphrey Moronya

Title: *Mechi Maburu* (Homes are Hearths)

Circumstances: Natural

Venue: Marani SDA Church

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

(PM26)

Mechi maburu

Homes are like Hearths

Mechi maburu

Homes are like hearths

Bichuri bi namang'ana

Pinnacles have stories to tell

Bakungu bonsi indoche twoni

women have become cocks

Na'bana babeire emegwe

while children are arrows against their fathers

Yogokorera emeremo

To work with

Name: Pastor Humphrey Moronya

Title: *Omokungu Omong'aini* (A Wise Woman)

Circumstances: Natural

Venue: Marani SDA Church

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

(PM26)

Omokungu Omong'aini

A Wise Woman

Tango omokungu agotacha riiga,

The woman could step on the firestone,

Arosie endagera,

And prepare enough food,

Omwana oria,

Which the child took,

<i>Osoka isiko,</i>	Before going out to the open,
<i>Ekeru omogoko ochire gekuba,</i>	His chest full of joy,
<i>Ochenga nabagisangio baye,</i>	To play with age mates,
<i>Omogaka obeka ekemigere kiaye,</i>	while the man, in his skin,
<i>Oboria keore mang'ana</i>	Sat to interrogate his wisdom and experiences.

Name: Denis Otonyi

Title: *Entakana* (The Orphan)

Circumstances: arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

Abwo kare, omwana nareengoo oyo okweretwe na abaibori baye korende akagenderera na masomo aye kiagera anchete esukuru mono. Rituko erimo akaba oseriigwe korwa esukuru kiagera atakeire echometiko set. Ekeru aika inka akaigwa enchara yamonyarire mono akarina omote bwebitambura biarenge esiko akang'ea koria. Kagendererete koria akaigwa omote gokomotebia: omwana one gatwe ebitambura ebinge ogende oonie erinde ochie ogore echometiko. Omwana oria agakora boigo akagora.

Omwana oria akaba okonyakogenda esukuru mbaka ekeru engaki yokwerika amatemu yaigete. Tarenge na besa nonye akarora airane ase omote oria. Kare igoro akaigwa: bono genda origie omonto onde achiche akobwatesie erinde oisanie chibesa chiokwerika amatemu. Agakora boigo erinde akanyora chibesa chiaisaine. Matuko make agakora amasomo akanyora egasi. Egaika engaki akarora arigie omosubati anywome korende naganeirie enyomba. Buna botambe akagenda akarina omote oria. Erinde okamotebia: namanyire nenyomba oganetie koagacha. Rusia amaaga ane amanetu erinde oogache. Agakora boigo akagacha nainde akanywoma. Matuko make akaera akirana egasi yaye akaberaoo amatuko amange. Egaika engaki akarosia obwato erinde egokerie gotara enyancha. Ekeru aika ase omot'oria okamotebia akarusia ritina erinde akarosia obwato bwaye. Ekeru engaki yaera enene, omomura oria akarora tiga airane aakere omot'oria mbuya mono. Ekeru aika aroro, agakumia mono ekeru anyora ng'a omote oria bwomete nemeru eteng'engete. Akarera mono korende omote oria okamotebia asoe ase emeru yaye arare aroro.

Along ago, a young boy known as Evans lost both his parents and therefore became an orphan at only twelve years old. In spite of his predicament, Evans never dropped out of

school, but instead continued to struggle. One day, he was sent home from school because he didn't have a geometrical set.

By the time he reached home, he was extremely hungry and tired. He therefore climbed a wild berry tree that stood in front of their house and hurriedly picked the berries into his mouth. After a short while, the young boy heard a strange voice that addressed him thus: "Young boy, I do understand your troubles. Just pick enough berries and take them to the market. Sell the berries and use the money to buy what you need. Evans was greatly elated and comforted. He did as he was instructed, and, by the following day, the boy was back at school with a brand new geometrical set.

Back at school, the boy continued with his studies without any trouble. After a few years, the boy needed to register for his K.C.P.E, but of course he didn't have the required money. He didn't know what to do, but while at home he decided to climb the wild berry tree once again. While on the tree, the boy heard a voice tell him: "I know what you are going through right now, my son. But you don't need to worry because I can always help you solve your problems. I know you need much more money than did last time; you need someone to help you pick as much berries as necessary. The boy did exactly that.

The wild berry tree continued supporting Evans until he successfully completed school. Soon, Evans got employed and started earning a salary. Having grown into a full man, Evans felt he now needed to marry. But he first needed to build his own house. He agonised for long on how to go about it since he didn't enough money. He then decided to seek advice from the wild berry tree. As usual, the tree had a ready solution for Evans: "my son cut my overgrown branches and use them as poles. Evans did as he had been told and soon he had a beautiful house. After getting married, Evans and his spouse needed to go on a honeymoon, but he didn't know how. When Evans consulted the berry tree, it instructed him to take its trunk and chop it into a boat which they could use to sail around the world. After sailing around the world Evans and his spouse left for city sure that by the time he returned the berry tree will have sprouted again. After a long while, Evans felt he needed to visit his benefactor. When he got where the berry tree once stood, he almost fell off in shock. The berry tree's trunk was dry, and roots badly exposed. He couldn't help but weep uncontrollably. But, almost immediately, the trunk spoke. "Son, you don't need to cry. Look at the gaping hole under my trunk, doesn't it look like a cafe. Year, this is all yours whenever you want to shelter from the troubles of life. Once again, a smile appeared on Evan's face. He knew his guardian's benevolence will never end. They embraced and remained like that for a long time.

BO18: *bwanchi maoncha Okienda akagenda magenda akabora, ongecheire kwana ang'iranere amasiaka.* (friendship is important, when Okienda lost it, he did everything to end the enmity that had replaced it)

PM21 *eyekeranya timoyechongeria nekeng'wanso eganyete* (the animal that has been set aside (struck) for sacrifice must be respected).

PM22: *esaro ya mogoko teita Ondaye yaitete Nyakiore oye.* (The miser's pouch should not be allowed to kill Ondaye as it did Nyakiore).

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

Do: *Omong'ina Omong'iti* (the stingy woman)

A rich woman caused her husband's death by refusing to pay for his treatment. Later on, her son, Nyakiore, was taken ill and as was the widow's nature she never sought treatment for him. This time, however, neighbours intervened and made the woman to spend some money on her son's treatment. Unfortunately, the son's illness is severe and he therefore succumbs.

PM24: *oyomino moromie esukubi egechuria nere maarekana agocha aita* (allow your brother to have a bite of the hump for he has a duty to bury you later)

PM25: *ngakina motaka, motaka mwere, ngakerorwa n'Omwange monda, agankora monda okoagamwa* (I grew up poor, totally poor, then I met the wealthy and generous Omwange who made me rich and now I can support many others)

SYMBOLISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CONTEXT

i) SYMBOLS DEPICTING HYBRIDITY

Name: Henry Sagero

Title: *Omoika bwo' mosiki, (The Spirit of music)*

Circumstances: Live Performance

Venue: Kisii Bridge Waters Hotel

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

HS1

Mbwachete omosiki eee	Do you love music, eee
Mbwachete omosiki aaa	Do you love music, aaa
Rirorio tokogota bwango.	Then you'll not age quickly
Omoika bwomosiki minto	The spirit of music, our people
Nechibonga point chiomobere	Is like bonga points of your body
Ase eraha nekerage baito	It has magical pleasure
Egokinia amaberera ase abanto	It causes body temperatures to rise
Emeika eye n'etato tata	The spirit exists in three types
Ekobwatia esiko yomomto	All linked to one's reputation
Omoika Omotang'ani okogera	The first type makes the insane
Chibarimo Chiatenga echiro	To dance at market places
Oyokabere otoka emeyega	The second type will be found at feasts
Ebiiririato naboigo ebichuri	Accompanied by ululations and whistles
Oyogatato noro inyangete	The last, which I hate
Omurebi agotenga redio etaiyo	Drunkards dance without a radio
Chidalili chiomonto bwomoika	signs of people possessed by the spirit
Rahisi sana komanyekana	Are easily known
Mwaye goika atware chiredio ibere	The have two radios at home
Esimi lazima etware ememori	Their phones have memory cards
Gari yaye mosiki tokomocha	Their cars can't miss music
Nase 'edansi ere takomocha	They grace most dancing parties
Ogotenga oriramora saana	Sweat on dance floors
Omosiki otenene araito omonto	They curse if the music is stopped
Ekanisa ochengera chikorasi	Jubilant to choruses at church
Amarandia kagochaka orara	But dose off when the sermon starts
Naya namang'ana akabeireo	It used to be like that
Arabe rero n'ankio nabeo	It is the same today and even tomorrow
Ebahati ebe embe osianye mama omino	If by bad luck you catch your mother
Kagotenga nyomba ekemanching'i	Dancing the traditional vigorous dance
Tari omwomani mosegete	Don't tell her off
Echio tari samba oyio nomoika	It's no taboo, the music spirit is at work

Iroka ochie komotimia ebesa	Put a coin in her hand
Goika omany Rituko ere aiboretwe	And you will know the day she was born
Nekebiriti giauterete omware	The matchbox that lit the initiate's fire
Tikeri goiterwa morero	Must not be shared
Notongia esigara esese enywe	Or even used to light a dog's cigarette
Igo gwaitire omoika bw'omware	That could kill the initiate's spirit
Tari sanamu 'nkobasasimia	I am not asking you to worship satan
Morore buya inche timondama	Beware not to insult me
Mokore inwe buna nkobatebia	Do as I tell you
Kogicha timokora buna ngokora	Not as I do
Pastor, eh gokorora 'ekanisa	Pastor, if you see at church
Omonto okona gosundoka	A member dose off
Oyio nabwate omoika bwomosiki	That one has the spirit of music
Pastor Naphtali Ondieki Osebe	Pastor Naphtal Ondieki Osebe
Randia abanto igoro yomoia bwekanisa	Preach to people about the church's spirit

Name: Jared Mombinya

Title: *Amaya Mbosiare*, (better things lie ahead)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Nyabioto Village

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

Jm4

<i>Abang'ina baito</i>	Our mothers
<i>Amaya mbosio are</i>	Better things lie ahead
<i>Abamura baito</i>	Our young men
<i>Amaya Mbosio are</i>	Better things lie ahead

<i>Aye tata ominto nkieke</i>	You, my friend
<i>Kwarire osendete ebitore</i>	What did you eat to make your tummy so big?
<i>Abande tokorera enchara</i>	When the rest are crying about anger
<i>Buna namasomo ao okoria</i>	Did you say you are eating your education?
<i>Aye baba ominto</i>	You my sister
<i>Bororo titori goita gotango</i>	Suffering kills only slowly

<i>Nyeng'ente gose ing'ite omonto?</i>	Do I commit suicide? Or should I kill somebody?
<i>Ngatebigwa nsome inkanga?</i>	I was told to study but I refused
<i>Abana Besukuru Motagwancha</i>	You, school children, please listen
<i>Motige chitaro</i>	Stop loitering
<i>Goeta aamkori</i>	In hidden paths
<i>Aiya obee</i>	Watch out
<i>Gaki amasomo</i>	Lack of education
<i>Naro ang'ita</i>	Has killed me
<i>Naro ang'ita</i>	Has killed me
<i>Oborwaire bwachire</i>	A disease has come
<i>Takong'aina Mokaya</i>	Stop cheating me Mokaya
<i>Tiga twensi torende</i>	Let us all be careful
<i>Nyaboke ondereire</i>	Nyaboke is crying to me
<i>Ekeru are konywa echa</i>	When she was taking tea
<i>Tinarengi aroro</i>	I was not there
<i>Agwetontia You</i>	When smearing herself with You
<i>Tinarengi aroro</i>	I was not there
<i>Ninki rende akondera?</i>	Why then does she cry to me?

Name: Andrew Aganda

Title: Ekenagwa (The Thorny Tree)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Riakimai

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

AM1:

Ekenagwa, ehe egento kiogokumia	The mauritus thorn is indeed interesting
Oyobwaganda, narero oyo ngotera	The son of Aganda, it's my voice you hear
Ngotera ekenagwa	I' singing about the thorn tree
Ekenagwa negento kiogokumia	The thorn tree is indeed interesting
Kogokenacha nigo keriete eirs	The thorn tree has vowed
Amanyinga nigo kegokorusia	To tear your flesh
Etukia nigo gekogosumora	To pull out your hair

Amaiso nigo kgekogokonora	To gouge out your eyes
Chianganigo kegotandora	To tear off your clothing
Kiagotiga getirianda	And leave you naked
Rituko erimo nkagenda gotera	One day I went out to sing
Nkairana chinsa chiabotuko	It was dark when returning home
Bikambwata ngasinywa gotara	I got stuck in them
Nkarangeria Kabwere orange goeta	I called on Kabwere who was passing by
Kabwele inchwo onduisie	Kabwele, come get me out
Gakondusia nere gekamobwata	He came, only to get stuck also
Togasinywa ning' o ogotokonya	Nobody was there to help us
Ekenagwa negento kiogokumia	The thorn tree is indeed interesting
Gekere atobu nigo gekoranda	On a fertile ground it spreads
Gochia moino na moino	Further and further sideways
Gochia maate na Rogoro	Upwards and downwards
Gochia igoro aro tige koranda	But it can't stand upright
Getabwati ase gekoranderera	Without some support
Ekenagwa negento kiogokumia	The thorn tree is indeed interesting
Bono ebinagwa nigo bire mblai mbali	Thorn trees are of many types
Ekenagu mwanabanto	It can be a human being
Abanto mbare bagotarera abande	Some people cling on to others
Yesy Kristu nere omote togotarera	Jesus is the only tree to cling on to
Erinde togende igoro	So as to climb to heaven
Onye mote toiyo igoro teiyo	No strong tree, no heaven for us

Name: Andrew Aganda

Title: *Chinsanako* (Safari Ants)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Riakimai

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

AM2:

Mwnayabanto tiga amachieoso n'omotongi	Humans, stop playing with God
Omonene tari kegori kiao orachiesere	God is not your agemate
Omonene tari kegori kiane inche indachiesere	He is not my agemate to play with

Ndiriri enyongo yachaya oria oyerosetie	the pot can't despise its maker
Ase anyebegete noo ekoba mbaka ache koyioyia	It can only stay where it has been placed
Totige koamererania amo nomotongi	We must stop challenging God
Ribaga erio tiga tosange na komwegena	Instead, let's pray and grow our faith
Ribaga erio tiga tomwegene na komosasima	Instead, let's trust and worship him
Ase achiete gotoroseria ng'aang'e are gocha	Our place is set and he's returning soon
Omonene ase gototomera onye namakonde	If He sends us worms
Omonene ase gototomera onye nechinsanako	If He sends us safari ants
Aki amaene nabo chigotoita	They would plague us
Ninki rende aye kere ekiao ogwetogeria?	What is there to boast about?
Ninki rende kere kiane ngwetogeria	What is there to call mine own?
Baminto enseye tomenyete neyomotongi	This world belongs to God
Nakende gionsi kere enseye nekiomotongi	Everything belongs to Him
Ninki rende inche kere ekiane nkonya gwetogeria?	Why then should I brag around?
Nosoma amasomo okore mbosa ase omonene	Education is nothing to God
Nochie otware amali amange mbosa ase omonene	Riches are useless to Him
Kera egento gekoeyana kebeke amaru inse	Living things must kneel before Him
Erinde omonene tata Nyasae aegwe obonene	And praise Him

Name: Andrew Aganda

Title: *Chinderia* (Heredity)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Riakimai

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

AM3:

Abakoro bagateba	Our ancestors once said
Nyang'era ndotungi	What the mother does
Na mori yaye ndotungi	Is what the calf does
Nainde boigo bagateba	They added
Etakogwa eng'ina	If it doesn't take after its mother
Egwe ise	It takes after its father
Nainde boigo bagateba	They also said
Totuga ntakana monto	Do not raise an orphaned child

Tuga eya 'ng'ombe
 Otuge ntakana ngombe
 Aye nabo oranyore amabera osiberie
 Lakini entakana monto
 Aye nabo orayetuge Nainde omoerio egoite
 Nkiabête ing'a geutere
 Gekobamboka gekobambokere
 face
 Buna moigwete ngoteba
 Nigo iminetie goteba
 Chinderia chiechimbu chimbe
 Abana benda eyemo nabo bakorwana
 Omoerio bang' entane
 Ekero togotuka nigo tokonyora ing'a
 Ororeria nigo rwarenge orwogoita
 Bono ekero ogoita oyomino
 Aye kwaragerigwe obogima bwao bwensi
 Naboigo egesaku kiao kiaragererigwe
 Ekero togosoma egetabu kioochakano
 Igoro ya Abel na Cain
 Cain agaita Abel omwabo
 Baiboretwe kowa enda eyemo
 Arenal komobunia okwegena kwaye
 Wahenga alisema kwamba
 Bahati ya mwenziwe usilalie mlango wazi
 wazi
 Togokora togoteba
 Omonto nachie akomochere
 Toakana esegiomba
 Tuanze raha ya muziki ya kienyeji sasa
 Togende keroka totenge nabana bamiinto
 Togeende

Raise an orphaned calf
 if you raise an orphaned calf
 Will one day give you milk
 An orphaned calf
 Could one day kill you
 You will warm it with a fire
 But when warm, it will explore on your

 You've heard me
 I mean to say
 We have evil lineages
 Brothers can fight
 Or even kill each other
 This could be historical
 It flows from the forefathers
 When you kill a relative
 You fall under a curse
 Your offspring is also cursed
 When we read Genesis
 About Abel and Cain
 Cain killed Abel
 They were brothers
 But not equally endowed
 Wahenga walisema kwamba
 Bahati ya mwenziwe usilalie mlango

 A wish to end with the following
 Whether wronged or not
 Never be vengeful
 let's now enjoy the secular dance
 let's go to Keroka and dance with our kin
 Let's go

Togende Nyamira totenge nabana baminto
kin
Togeende

Let's go to Nyamira and dance with our

Let's go

AM1: Name: Christopher Monyoncho

Title: Nyaboke

Circumstances: Recorded

Venue: Kisii Cultural Office

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

Noraita eramu X3

You'll beat (walk on) the tarmacX3

Nyaboke oche kwerosera

Nyaboke, until you tire on your own

Abaiseke ba rero

Ladies of these days

Baito bebire amachiko

Have forgotten the old values

Baiseke bakare baito

Ladies of olden days

Ekero barenge gosoka

When they got married

Tibare gochora Nyaboke

They never chose, Nyaboke

Oyore namali

Only those with wealth

Chorus

Chorus

Ngachicha oboko Nyaboke

I came to your home

Ngachicha seino

Intending to marry you

Okaimoka okanga Nyaboke

You totally rejected me

Tindi na amali

Saying I am poor

Ogachaka korigia Nyaboke

You started looking for, Nyaboke

Oyobwate amali

Only the rich

Toramonyora Nyaboke noore seino

You are still unmarried, having failed

Omomura oyomo akaigwa namari otagete

One man heard about your desires

Akareta etebe Nyaboke agaichoria amaroba

He filled a container with soil

Akabuncha chibese akabeka korwa etebe igoro

And then covered the soil with coins

Ogakaga nechibese Nyaboke chiichire etebe, gento! You thought it was money, nothing!

Agacha agakong'aina inche ninde nechibesa

He lied to you saying I've a lot of money

Chiichire etebe nechinde chire ebengi

Kept in a container and in the bank

Inchwogende orarora echire etebe	Come and see the money in the container
Inche nomonda Nyaboke ninde nechibesa, gento!	I am rich, with lots of money, nothing!
Ogaika sobo Nyaboke agakwoorokia	When you reached his house
Etebe eichire amaroba	A container full of soil
Chibese chibekire igoro	And a few coins on top
Ogakaga nechi bese chioka chiichire etebe	You thought it was just money
Ingacha nkanywoma omoiseke otari kieni	Later, I got married to an ugly woman
Omomwamu ti orakage negekondo	She is as black as a monkey
Toigwanaine nebinto togosenyenta	We live happily, eating together
Aye Nyaboke bono toranyora bwoo	Nyaboke, you are yet to marry
Na Nyasae agacha akaba omuya igo	God has been kind on us
Akang'a eng'ombe egokamwa	He gave me a small dairy cow
Ebibere mbiroo abana bakonyora basiberia	My children can get a little milk
Nyaboke ere nerami akona goita kogenda	Nyaboke is still tarmacking
Akorigia oyore na' amali, gento!	Looking for a wealthy man
Monyoncho namange orarore	Monyoncho, I've seen a lot

Name: Christopher Monyoncho

Title: Keemba (Keemba)

Circumstances: Recorded

Venue: Kisii Cultural Office

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

CM2:

Ngachika abageni bane bachiche gonkwani kegogi	I invited my guests to visit me in Kegogi
Nigo barenge: John Sitora, Isaka otwori, Sammy	They were John Sitora, Isac Otwori, Sammy
Mokaya nainche Monyoncho noonde	Mokaya and myself
Obosoku obonene Rituko erio Keemba kwang'ete	That day, you embarrassed me, Keemba
Ekero abageni bachete	When the guests arrived
Omorugi one Jane	My wife Jane
Akogenda roche kwoyia amache	Went to fetch water

Arugere abageni baito baragere
Keemba okagenda echikoni

Ochie koigereria engoko eyie bwango
Abageni bane baragere
Okayesosora akaboa ekerebi kwabwate
Machani kabichi
Keemba ogatama okagenda
Egento kiogokumia Keemba
Ogachora chinyama chiria
Abageni banchete
Okaira omotwe, okaira omogongo,
Amo nechimbaba ogasang'ania emondo
Ogatama okagenda
Stora tontera, naye otwori tontera,
Naye Sammy tontera
Omosubati oyio nabo nkomoraga
Ing'a kaa nansokie
Ase abageni bane
Nabo are omoibi
Omoibi bwechinyeni amo nenyama
Yanga tarikoiba
Nebiriero bioka akoba

To cook for our guests
Keemba, you took over matters in the
kitchen

You went there to fan the fire so that
Guests could have their meal in time
You wrapped the best parts
In your green head dress
And escaped with them
To my surprise, Keemba
You picked the parts
Guests love
You took the head, the back
The wings and the gizzard
Then you ran away
I beg Stora and otwori and Sammy
Not to capture the incitement in a song
I've always doubted the woman
I knew she could shame one day
In front of my guests
She is a thief
A thief of cooked vegetables and meat
She never steals clothes
She only steals cooked vegetables

Name: Christopher Monyoncho

Title: *Minto* (Our people)

Circumstances: Recorded

Venue: Kisii Cultural Office

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

CM3:

Minto mwensi tegerera
Monyoncho ninche nkobatebia
Tarehe ishirini na nne

Listen, my kin
It is me Monyoncho telling you
On twenty – fourth

Omotienyo oikomi omwaka sabini na nne
Inche Christopher Monyoncho bwaraka
Nkamochia goiterwa inse
Abanto bainto ba Nyanza goika momanye
Emeremo yamasamba yabeire eyabo boka

October 1974
I, Christopher Monyoncho, son of Araka
I almost lost my life
Our people of Nyanza you should know
Jobs in plantations are reserved for them

Name: Christopher Mosioma “embarambamba”

Title: *Abachumbe* (Our Representatives)

Circumstances: Live Performance

Venue: Kisii Bridge Waters Hotel

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

ME1:

Baito, oyio, baito	Our people, there he goes, people
Nintantaine, nkorigiande, oyio	I am confused, I’m still searching, there
Ntige minyoke, oyio	Let run, there he goes
Ncharoke chimbago	Let run, there he goes
Amakori ime gotira, oyio	Up along paths
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa nkai ndanyore	Where will I get a true representative?
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa otarikweba	One that never forgets
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe omanyete obotaka	One who understands poverty
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa ogotoika ang’e	One that is close with his people
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa ambwate okoboko	One that could hold my hand
Nkorigiande	I’m searching
Ntige iminyoke, oyio	Let me run
Inteme inturungane, wewe	I’ll try and roll over, careful!
Nyaribari masaba	Nyaribari Masaba
Nyaribari chache, oyio	Nyaribari Chache, there he comes
North mugirango, karwe nchera	North Mugirango, make way!
Borabu rogoro, ariririri	North Borabu, ariririri
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa	Where will I get a true representative?
Omanyete ebikorwa, nkai ndanyore	A man of action, where will I get one?
Okoigwa ebirero biabang’ina nkai ndanyore	One who hears the cries of women
Okoigwa ebirero biabasae nkai ndanyore	One who hears the cries of young people

Okoigwa ebirero biabagaka nkai ndanyore	One who hears the cries of old men
Okoigwa ebirero biondebwensi nkai ndanyore	One who hears everybody, where?
Nintantaine, ninchwo monyoyie	I'm confused, come fetch me
Intige iminyoke	Let me run
Bomachoge Rogoro	North Bomachoge
South Mugirango	South Mugirango
Bonchari seito	Bonchari, my home
Yaya nkominyokande	No I must run
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa nkai ndanyore	Where will I get a true representative?
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa otarikweba	One that never forgets
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa ogotara namagoro	One that walks around on foot?
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa ogotoika ang'e	One that is ever available
Nkai ndanyore omochumbe yaa otarikorimia simi	One that has his phone on always
Oiye oiye nyarebe bweka	Oh! Oh! Oh! So and so, alone!
Ogenda Nairobi omenya aroro	but he's soon a resident of the city
Ngochia goaka esimi	Whenever I call him
Nigare omoteja	He can't be reached
Nonye mbwoye aagocha botuko	He arrives home at night
Asiegete ebirero	His car windows rolled up
Egari mbaka igoro	Tightly closed
Mwanamberi bayaye	A new-born is here

Name: Peter Getate

Title: *Embisi no'mogati* (Houseboy who ate a loaf of Bread)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

PG11:

Abu kare ekero omosongo achete Gusii, omoindi nere nachete Gusii akaba ogokora obwonchorerania. Omosongo omenyete ang'e na seito nigo agatomire chimbisi chiaye chiamoretera ebinto ao ao. Ekero agatomire chimbisi chiaye koagara ebinto korwa bwomoinde, omoindi nigo arenge kobaa etigiti ekoorokia buna ninki amooneria. Chimbisi chiria ekero chiagaikirie ebinto ase omosongo, nigo omosongo akamosabire etigiti erinde

origereria omanyanya kogacha ebinto biaye amo nechibesa chietabauti. Chimbisi chionsi chikamanya buna etigiti eria barenge koegwa nero yareng kobasoera ase omosongo. Bakayianga sana.

Rituko erimo, omosongo agatoma Embisi yaye eyemo konye ariikire obwango obwo amoretere emegati ebere korwa eduka yomoindi. Ekero agora emegati, Embisi eria ekaegwa etigiti ekoorokia emegati agorete, chibesa aakanete ano netabauti aetwe. Ekero Embisi eria yaika inchera, ekarora buna takoira megati yonsi ase omosongo nenchara kemoriete egesaku ekio. Akarora egetutu kiareng aang'e agaikaransa inse akemuria ime.

Atarasansora omogati oria oyomo, akarusia etigiti eria omofuko oye akaribisa omote magega. Akaria omogati ogakora, agetinyia omonwa buya akamanya gosokia itigiti eria akabeka mobuko akagenda. Ekero aigete inka, akaa omosongo ebinto biaye amo netigiti eria.

Omosongo akayerigereria erinde akagechigwa mono nakomoboria aseomogati onde ochiete. Embisi eria egakumia mono kiagera tamanyete buna etigiti eria yamoroche okoria omogati oyomo. Abwo abwo, omosongo akamobuta nakomoruta echera akabeka omonto omong'ao.

The Houseboy who stole a loaf of Bread

Long ago when the first white man pitched camp in Gusii land, Asians followed and shopping centres began to mushroom. Now, the white man used to send his houseboys to bring whatever he wanted from the shops. Whenever the boys brought items from the shops, the shopkeepers gave them receipts that indicated what had been brought and the cost. The white man had the habit of asking for the ticket every time the boys returned from the shops. The ignorant boys thought that the ticket had a way it communicated with the white man and therefore developed hatred for it.

One day the white man sent a houseboy that he had recently employed to bring him two loaves of bread. On the way coming back, the houseboy was tempted to eat one of the loaves of bread. He agonized about it and finally discovered a trick. When he came to where there was a ticket he sat, but before he un-wrapped the loaf of bread, he carefully hid the receipt behind the thicket and even covered it with some dry leaves. After eating to his fill, the houseboy retrieved the receipt, checked for anything that could tell on him and then proceeded home.

At home, the houseboy was shocked when the white man asked for the missing loaf of bread. He thought the receipt really sly for still managing to tell on him. Immediately, the white man asked him to pack and leave.

Name: Benson Mageto Omariba

Title: Why?

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Bobaracho Village

Audience: Researcher/four assistants

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

BO23:

Rituko erimo omonto oyomo n'omosani oye barenge korwa omogobani oyomo ASE konye babutire mono. Konye omosunte obeire buna nkobwata ore kiagera babutete omogobani mono. Kibare inchera gochia nyomba, omonto oria agatigara magega akeigo erinde ekonye. Kagochia gokora gwekonya akaigwa omosani oriaoye okare koruta ebikuro.

Erio kengima akaminyoka bwango gotoria omosani oria oye okwoga ase eriogi ria igoro mono ogoteba "why? Why? Amang'ana konye aigure omosongo ogotumia.

Ekero abaibi baria baigwa omonto oria akominyoka gocha ore noboremu obonge, bagatiga ekio barenge gokora bakagee buna nabanyanyimbo barenge. Omonto oria nomosani oye bagakonyeka igo.

One day, a man and his friend were coming from a restaurant where they had the better part of the evening. Night had fallen by the time they were leaving for home. After walking a short distance, the man ducked into one of the dark alleys to relief himself. While on it, he heard his friend call for help. He had been attacked by muggers. He responded immediately by shouting, 'Why?' 'Why?' On hearing this, the muggers fled thinking they had attacked a very important person who was in the company of some white people. As they fled, one of them was heard asking, "Was that a white man?" What they didn't know was that the man that had scared them stiff was illiterate and was simply repeating words that he had heard people use.

Name: Teresa Nyaboke Sagwe

Title: *Mwarire Hotel Mono* (You are too frequent in Hotels)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Kisii Cultural Hall

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

TN1:

<i>Mwarire Hotel Mono</i>	<i>You are too Frequent in Hotels</i>
<i>Mwarire hotel mono</i>	<i>You are too frequent in hotels</i>
<i>Mwarire hotel mono</i>	<i>You are too frequent in hotels</i>
<i>Maambia n’oteli</i>	<i>In the morning you eat there</i>
<i>Mobaso n’oteli</i>	<i>In the afternoon you eat there</i>
<i>Magoroba n’oteli</i>	<i>In the evening you eat there</i>
<i>Inka ebiage ebiayiete?</i>	<i>Did the food stores at home burn?</i>
<i>Aye tata ebisima biabekirwe esumu</i>	<i>Wells have now been poisoned</i>
<i>Endagera yo’teli yabeire embe</i>	<i>Food in hotels is no longer good</i>
<i>Aye tata renda egiokoria</i>	<i>Take care what you eat</i>
<i>Aye baba renda egiokoria</i>	<i>My sister, take care what you eat</i>
<i>Ebosi yane renda egiokoria</i>	<i>My boss, take care what you eat</i>
<i>Omwana one renda egiokoria</i>	<i>My child, take care what you eat</i>
<i>Ragera inka</i>	<i>Eat at home</i>
<i>Endagera yo’teli yabeire embe</i>	<i>Food in hotels is no longer good</i>

ii) **SYMBOLS THAT DEPICT A POPULAR SUBVERSIVE SUBCULTURE**

Name: Jared Mombinya

Title: *Esese n’omokungu* (Dog and a Woman)

Circumstances: Arranged

Venue: Nyabioto Village

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

JM1

Rituko erimo, omosubati oyomo orengere koru roche kwoyia amache akaumerana n’esese eyemo yabogoretie omena ne’sagasaga. Omosubati oria agakwania Ogasese na komoboria amoatanere omena inke. Ogasese takoreti kende korende akamotobia omosubati oria buna rirorio nigo baragende mwomosubati oria erinde arosie endagera barie amo. Bakagenda amo gochia inka kiagera omogaka bwo’ mosubati oria tarengere inka konye ochire esabari ya are.

Ekeru baika inka, omosubati oria agasoa riko akarosia endagera eyio bariete n’ogasese. Korende ekero bakora koragera ekaba bwairire mono. Abwo ogasese agatebia omosubati oria buna bono bwairire mono takogenda bwoye. Ogasese akaboria omosubati oria amwarere inse erinde arare bokiere. Omosubati agaseka mono na koboria ogasese, “Inkoruri esese yarara nyomba na mwanabanto?”

“Onye totageti aye ing’a omena yane ing’ende,” ogasese akairaneria.

Omosubati oria agachi koigwa igo, akaoboa mono. Abwo akarigia ebinto akabekera ogasese inse akarara.

Egachi goika butuko gati, ogasese agachaka kwemurungania. Ekeru omosubati amoboria ninki kiarenge komoria, ogasese agateba “Inche obokendu bwanyarire. Nigo intagete gocha korara naye abwo borere!”

Omosubati oria agaseka na komoboria ogasese, “Inkoruri esese yarara oborere obomo na mwanabanto? Abwo ogasese akairaneria, “Onye totageti aye ing’a omena yane ing’ende,” Ogasese akaairaneria.

Omosubati agasinywa ninki agokora aganchera ogasese achiche borere barare nere. Ogasese akagenderera kogosereria omosubati oria goika agakora nere obonyaka. Maambia kobaraire bataraboka omosubati oria akaigwa omogaka oye okare gotura gesieri. Bakaboka ase obwango mono akaigorera ogasese etirisa erinde agatamera aroro. Korende ase okoagaga koria babwate, ekemincha kiogasese gekabutorwa n’omosubati oria orange nobororo obonene. Omosubati oria takora kende korende agakerusia, akabutorana na gokarangera omogaka oye. Omogaka oria akaria na kogoka mono.

One day, a woman that was coming from fetching water met a dog. She could see that the dog was carrying some dagaa fish in a paper bag. The woman greeted Dog before asking for a little of what he was carrying. Dog told the woman that although he didn’t have enough to share, he could accompany the woman to her home where they could share the dish the woman would prepare. To dog’s suggestion the woman simply laughed and said: “Since when did women cook for dogs?” to which Dog replied, “Fine. Then you’ll leave me alone with my dagaa”. Sensing Dog’s determination to make good his threat, she changed mind and allowed Dog to come with her, especially since her husband had gone on along journey and was not expected back home soon.

At home, the woman prepared a delicious meal which they ate together after Dog refused to eat off the ground as was the custom. After eating, Dog had one more demand. Since it was not late, he would have to spend the night in the woman’s house. To this the woman retorted, “Since when did dogs sleep in the same house with humans?” to which Dog timely

responded: “I am ready to go my way so long as you give back my dagaa!” Alarmed, the woman had no choice but oblige. She made a temporary bed in the lounge and they both retired.

After a short while, Dog started muttering things that the woman could not understand. When she enquired, Dog said it was too cold at the lounge and therefore he wanted to come where the woman was sleeping. The woman was shocked and she strongly protested: “What, have you lost mind? Since when did dogs share a bed with humans?” As usual, Dog replied, “I ‘, ready to leave as long as you return my dagaa”. Once again the woman had no choice but give in to Dog’s, incessant demands. Before long, Dog finally got what he wanted.

While still in bed, the woman heard her husband knock at the door. He had returned home unexpectedly. Dog and the woman were now cornered. In the great panic of the moment, the woman cut off Dog’s tail, and Dog with no time to waste dashed off through the window without his precious tail. After that, the woman chopped the tail into small pieces and prepared a delicious meal for the man, which he thoroughly enjoyed.

Name: Henry Sagero

Title: *Eng’ombe Nengima* (The Cow is whole)

Circumstances: Live Performance

Venue: Kisii Bridge Waters Hotel

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

HS2:

Moiranerie Nyasae buya	Give praise to God
Onye Atatongete omokungu	Had He not created a woman
Kango ning’o ogotera mwanchi	Who could sing about love?
Erio nainche ing’iranerie buya	I also wish to say thank you
Ase omogambi Samuel	To Elder Samuel
Ase okoraa ebandi eye	For leading this band
Obosemi bwaye nabwo bwagerire	It is because of his counsel
Togotera chingencho chiabasacha	That we sing the ways of men
Abasacha, enyama yachire rino	Men, a piece of meat stuck in your teeth
Tari okorusia omere	Should not be swallowed after being freed
Nyetige easerie ebirecha	It should be left to guard against evil spirits

Timanyeti gose nigo indatere	I don't know if after my singing
Intige mokong'ung'ura	I'll leave gambling
Korende erita riane sagero	But my name is Sagero
Abasacha abange kibare isiko	most men when out and about
Nigo bakweroka okaya	They want to look good
Kobare chinka chabo nendwari	At home, they are a plague
Enchera omosacha arestontie	Men have a way with pride
Ekeru are nabagisangio	When with age mates
Tokaga nabare mbaka nyomba	At home he is totally different
Emegoko eria okorora abwate	The warm smile just vanishes
Ogoika geita kiaye	When he steps at his gate
Agoochenchia oba egento ekeng'ao	He changes and becomes a different thing
Nyomba nogotogonya gwoka	At home, he raves all the time
Chinsa chionsi aretaine orakage	He looks like a bloated man at all times
Aanyagora eriogo	You would think he stepped over a spell
Esiri yomosacha neyemo bono	Men have but one secret
Inse yerioba	Under the sky
Mosacha taiyo motindi nonye	There is not a single fierce man
Oria mokagete omotindi	The one you consider fierce
Nyomba mwaye omokungu amogamberete	He is henpecked at home
Kwanyora onde okogambagamba	Some are quite talkative
Orakage nebarimo	Just like a mad man
Ko' nyomba mwaye nerimama	But in his house he is dumb
Ebirecha biomokungu nomware	The initiate is the woman's devil
Mosacha naba ekiarabe	A man whether big or small
Nigo okomoita arere	Can be beaten by a woman
Ninki gekogera inwe abakungu	Why do, you, women
Mokweroka ogasori	Pretend to be good
Ekeru omogeni are nyomba mwao	When entertaining guests but
Engaki eria omogeni atakaiyo	When alone with your husband
Nigo mobiteranete	You can't agree even when on errands
Okoing' onyerana gwoka	Always complaining
Mwakirana mbaka mwaika nyomba	No talking until you get back home
Abasacha barore nechirong'i	Men are made by their trousers

Nechinegita igoti	And by their neck ties
Abakungu nigo babagamberete	Most are henpecked
Nyomba nigo bariete andire	At home, they are in hell
Abakungu manya aiga	Women, here is something you need to know
Eng'ombe nigo ekorendwa ekorende	Take care of a cow and it will take of you
Yamanya koba eng'ombe nengima	And then the cow becomes whole
Eng'ombe nengima	The cow is whole
Nonyenyerwa eeri aye togokora	If you demand for a bull, you won't finish
Eng'ombe nengima	The cow is whole
Nonye neritororo aye togokora	Even a heifer, you still won't finish
Eng'ombe nengima	The cow is whole
Noiterwa rikongo aye togokora	Even an old cow, you won't finish
Eng'ombe nengima	The cow is whole
Noria aamagunchara aye togokora	Even after eating horns, you haven't finished
Eng'ombe nengima	The cow is whole

Name: Christopher Mosioma “Embarambamba”

Title: *Chiabagoire* (The Bulls are now at Large)

Circumstances: Live Performance

Venue: Kisii Bridge Waters Hotel

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

ME2:

Wewe, wewe, inkai abarendi bagenda, tata! Careful! Where have keepers gone, oops!

Yaya, yaya, baba omintoe, chenchia rikori No, no! good mum! Change course

Omwana ominto, chiabagoire People, the bulls have broken barriers.

Timorara, omwana ominto Be vigilant, good people

Soka isiko chiabagoire Come out, they are at large

Chorus

Soka isiko

Omwana ominto chiabagoire

Bugia egechuri

Omwana omi nto chiabagoire

Chorus

Come out, everybody

Brother, they've broken the barriers

Blow the whistles

Brother, they've broken the barriers

Rusia egoti	Remove your jacket
Omwana ominto chia bagoire	brother, they've broken the barriers
Rusia ebisandurusi	Remove your slippers
Omwana ominto chiabagoire	Brother, they've broken the barriers
Charoka orobago	Jump over the fence
Omwana ominto chiabagoire	Brother, they've broken the barriers
Siomeria angu	Peep, check quickly
Omwana ominto chiabagoire	Brother, they've broken the barriers
Uui omosacha bori	Uuu! A man, Really!
Omogusii agateba	Omogusii said
Ekioba nakio kemenyete	The coward lives longer
Eyekoroma negete egosererwa	Anything that bites is kept at bay using a stick
Endii gokoigwa bwebache	If something is flying in your direction, duck
Epagapaga omwanaominto otame mono	If the sound is menacing, please run, brother
Timorara	Be vigilant

Abande baimokire basimegete ebituma	Some, despite being maize growers
Bire bwoye ebineene	With high healthy cobs in their garden
Ere omoika ogenda etaoni	He sets off for the towns
Ase bigasambeire	Where they are roasted openly
Oimoka ere ogora	And choose to buy those ones
Obongorora omoerio oruta monwa	He plucks the corn and eats hurriedly
Kogochia komoboria oteba ekegwansa	When asked, he says they are tastier
Egesusanu, oteba ekegwansa	Drooped ones, he says they are tastier!
Twarorire buna abwo	We've seen many of such kind
Omoerio bachira	At the end, they're departed

Dalili ya mvua ni mawingu	Dalili ya mvua ni mawingu
Ngoma ikipigwa kunajambo	Ngoma ikipigwa kuna jambo
Ikipigwa saana hupasuka	Ikipigwa sana hupasuka
Ikipigwa sana huvunjika	Ikipigwa sana huvunjika

Abande baimoka beroka chintereba	Others claim to be qualified drivers
Ing'a barabwo serious	That they are serious type

Egari bakogendia	They really want to drive
Enisan rero	A Nissan (van) today
Mambia neturera	A trailer the following day
Egari ero yaimoka yamotwomeria	Then it knocks him against the wall
Twrorire buna abwo	We've seen many of such kind
Omoerio bachiire	At the end, they're departed
Babwate obwerori	Full of haughtiness
Omoerio bachiire	At the end, they're departed
Batari gotacha ebureki, obe!	They can't step on the brakes
Omoerio bachiire	At the end, they're departed
Bagosokia omotwe isiko	They stick their heads out
Omoerio bachiire	At the end, they're departed
Mchezo wa meno ni njugu karanga	Nuts are a game for teeth
Gotakuna ebigichi ayio namadoido	To chew gum is haughtiness
Konyunyunta ekoo otioke omonwa buya	Sucking a breath freshener
Something monotony itakuja kutubore	can be monotonous and boring
Oborabu nobuya bokonyete omotino	Light is of help to the deaf
Bokogera okwane naye	It helps them to talk to you
Bomochani bobore tokonyara komokonya	Without light you can't help him
Obwansu bwokoigwa tibong'ana obwokorora	To hear is not as pleasant as to see
Obwansu bwogoncha tibonga'na obwokorora	To see is not as pleasant as to taste
Chaga oborwe omonto ogokoenora	May you lack someone to enlighten you
Nachire, gose ninchiikere	I'm off, to chase the missing heard.

Name: Christopher Mosioma "Embarambamba"

Title: *Amatindogoro* (Passion Fruits)

Circumstances: Live Performance

Venue: Kisii Bridge Waters Hotel

Audience: Mixed

Transcribed and translated by: Researcher/Research Assistants

ME3:

Gento tikeri ekebe	It will be a terrible mistake
Otang'anie omotino nyomba	Asking a deaf person to secure a house

Ochie komotura orare
 Tobaisa kominyokia ekemoni
 Ekemwamu omosunte ime
 Ing'a otagete otenenke yaa
 Tobaisa gosuma omouko
 Oteneine ang'e nengoro
 Nigo orarikerwe ekebe, yaa
 Omwana oyo embarambamba
 Omwana bwomogusii yaa
 Ing'a oyio nomogusii yaa
 Ni nani huyo alisema
 Ati paka mzee hawezi kunywa maziwa
 Omokungu siomasiomia
 Ng'ai akomanya bwarugeirwe

 Gose mboke, gose mbwamwana
 Kumbe omonto enda ekoroma
 Nomogambia amang'ana amaya
 Tokonyara gosumaeli yaa
 Omwana oyo embarambaba
 Tobaisa gochegia ebunda
 Buna nigo ere emwana
 Ochie koyekuna engokero
 Iberia yachencha giesere
 N'agiesere yachencha Iberia
 Oyiere nomogusii yaa
 Esese enyama ere amache ime
 Tekonyara korusia
 Ekio negetinge
 Kiamwabo omorondo
 Nyegeria amareko
 Nyegeria okore buna omoeto
 Ogotenga buya obwate amatindogoro
 Ayii, ng'aki kiare

And then later seek to enter so as to sleep
 Don't run after a black cat
 In the dark
 Just because you want to be rich
 Don't call a blind person
 Standing by a gaping hole
 You will bear the blame if he falls inside
 This is Embarambamba
 The son of Omogusii
 The Kisii talks like that
 Who said that
 An old cat can't take milk?
 The woman that keeps loitering
 How does she know where a meal is
 ready?
 And whether it is a little or for the baby?
 Yet a person whose stomach is aching
 Even with sweet words
 He may not smile
 This is Embarambamba
 Don't taunt a donkey
 Thinking it is just a baby
 Or try to touch its teats
 Iberia derides Gesere
 While Gesere derides Iberia
 Those words are from Omogusii himself
 If you immerse meat in water
 He won't get it out
 That is the leg ring
 A sibling of the ankle
 Shake the shoulders
 Shake and make them look like a bow
 You dance well, you have passion fruits
 Ooh! Were things always like this?

Ogotenga buya obwate amatindogoro
Omogakaoria
Ogotenga buya obwate amatindogoro
Omosubati ooria
Ogotenga buya obwate amatindogoro
Atenga gochia magega
Atenga atenga
Atenga buna ebianda
Atenga buna amachini
Atenga atiinana
Atenga arara inse
Atenga buna ebirecha
Atenga buna Saitani
Atenga buna omosori
Atenga buna omorogi
Atenga buna omoibi
Engoko ere omobuko

You dance well, you have passion fruits
You, old man
You dance well, you have passion fruits
You, lady
You dance well, you have passion fruits
His/her dances backwards
His/her dances His/her dances
His/her dances like worms
His/her dances like Jinns
His/her dances staggering
His/her dances lying down
His/her dances like demons
His/her dances like the devil
His/her dances like soup
His/her dances like a witch
His/her dances like a thief
Achicken in his/her pocket

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ALL RESPONDENTS.

- i) What is your age?
- ii) Do you have any education?
- iii) Why do you engage in oral creation and performance either as:
 - a) A performer?
 - b) A member of audience?
- iv) Do you have specific group of audience that you target?
- v) Are there issues in our society today that you find unsettling?
- vi) Do some of the texts you perform help you address the issues?
- vii) How do you expect your audiences to respond to the texts?

B: SCHEDULE FOR FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Art and Socialisation

Date:

Venue:

- i) What do you think is the role of children in our society?
- ii) Could you perform any oral text that makes clear the place of children?
- iii) What kind of response was the text expected to draw from the children?
- iv) How is the parents' role captured in the text?

2. Art and Home Building/ Gender Roles

- i) What is the role of a family set-up in the traditional society?
- ii) Are there texts that assign roles to the various members of the society?
- iii) What kind of response were the texts expected to draw from the members of the community?

3. Tradition and Religion

- i) What is the role of the senior members of the society?
- ii) What was the role of religion in the traditional society?
- iii) Could you perform any texts that reflect the traditional religious beliefs?
- iv) What kind of response were the texts expected to draw from the audience?

4. Oral Art and the Modern Context

- i) Why do you take part in modern oral creations and performance?
- ii) Do you think modern performances are in any way related to the traditional performances?
- iii) Are there any values that you aim at propagating through your performances?

- a) If yes, what topics do you mostly touch on?
- b) If no, what are your objectives of performing?
- iv) How do expect your audiences to respond?

NYAMIRA COUNTY MAP



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