

**(RE)DEFINITION OF FEMININITY IN HENRY OLE KULET'S FICTION: *BLOSSOMS***

***OF THE SAVANNAH AND VANISHING HERDS***

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## DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

### DECLARATION

This research project report is my original work and has not been presented for examination for the award of a degree at any other university.

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### APPROVAL

This research project report has been submitted for examination with our approval as the university supervisors.

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**Prof. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira**

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**Dr. Tom Odhiambo**

## **DEDICATION**

For my husband, Nathan Sankale; my daughter, Ethel Sanayo; and my son, Dylan Turere for your love and great support during the entire process of my studies . Every one of you holds a special place in my heart.

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## ABSTRACT

This study interrogates (re)presentation of women characters in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*. It looks at how such (re) presentation of female characters defines and redefines femininity within the Maasai social environment of the texts. The research then focuses on a comparative analysis of such (re) presentation of femininity in both texts. To satisfy these objectives I have employed the use of Womanism strand of feminism whose proponent Nigerian Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi contends serves as the rallying point for the women of African ancestry in their struggle to effectively assert their humanity in the face of the malevolent attitude of the men folk towards their self-fulfillment in life. Applying Womanism theory the study has done a close textual analysis of the two novels on the condition of the women characters in every text independently. My findings on *Blossoms of the Savannah* shows how the protagonist Resian's determination to pursue education in spite of resistance from a community still tied to retrogressive practices like FGM redefines the position of the women in that society. In *Vanishing Herds* the lead character is a woman called Norpisia. She redefines femininity in the society she lives in by her aggressive character when she fights for the conservation of the environment from degradation. In many instances she reminds us of the iconic environmentalist conservationist Wangari Maathai whose efforts at conservation of the environment won her accolades. Within the scope and limitation of my study I was restrained from expounding more on style in the two books. However, I feel that there is room for more research on the stylistic features of the two texts. It is an area that deserves scholarly attention as concerns the works of Henry ole Kulet and the role that he gives women. Such research will not only aid better understanding of his repertoire, but also shed light into how literature is reflecting the changes taking place in our society.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### Introduction

Over time, literature has revealed that there are variations in the feminist discourse all around the world. Acknowledging the difference in women's experience of patriarchy, literature has shown that femininity is culturally determined and society specific. We can therefore say that cultural variables are determinants of female expression. Different societies have cultural variables that fashion behavior of women and even their worldview. For that the question of femininity must also be looked at in terms of how the various unique cultures produce norms that then reproduce specific kinds of behaviours of women which are unique to that particular society.

A look into African-American literature reveals that the black women feminism caucus took note of the fact that the black woman faced different challenges compared to the European-American woman. The black woman faced a double patriarchal order that emanated from her own race and from the white race. As such writers like Alice Walker in *The Colour Purple* and Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* endeavored in their writing to unravel this experience that was peculiar to the black woman. The kind of feminist texts that dealt with the specific question of the black woman in America is what gave rise to Black femininity. Black femininity is the expression of feminism within the black culture. It emphasizes the cultural determinants within the black race and how it is shaped by forces from without (White America) and how the totality of this experience affects the feminist reaction that we find in black literature.

In the same vein, my study of femininity deals with how the image of the woman is conceptualized within the Maasai culture and how literature from that society represents the

phenomenon. It also deals with how women deal with the 'conceived' image of the ideal, either subverting them or abiding by the required image. So, on one hand, when I talk about Maasai femininity I am talking about the traditionally accepted image of a woman according to Maasai traditions as revealed in a work of literature. On the other hand, when I talk about redefinition of Maasai femininity I am alluding to the changes that happen to the traditional image of the Maasai woman when Maasai traditions come into collision with modernity.

My focus is on two novels by Henry ole Kulet: *Vanishing Herds* (2011) and *Blossoms of the Savannah* (2008). Henry ole Kulet is a Kenyan writer whose repertoire exploits Maasai culture for artistic expression. The works that he has produced thus far have dealt with the question of cultural determinism within the Maasai world. He is a writer whose works represent not only the affirmation of the evolution of culture but also the catalysts that drive that change. In his vision Henry ole Kulet projects a point of view that is empathetic to the condition of women in the society. He has strong female protagonists who drive change in society.

This is a departure from the previous decades when many African female scholars criticized the male African writers for neglecting female characters in their works. Such scholars are Mary Kolawole (1997), Gloria Chukukere (1995), Omolara, Flora Nwapa (1984) among others. Charles Fonchingong (2006) argues that Kolawole (1997) notes: "by omission or commission, most male writers in the early phase of African literature encouraged the marginalization of women. In this context, female characters are made marginal to the plot of the fiction, while only a few emerge as powerful and credible protagonists" (135). Chukukere (1995) says, "The female characters, who the male writers created, acted within the framework of her traditional roles as wife and mother" (135). Chukukere (1995) views that a woman, hence, is respected and loved due to, "her adaptations to these roles that she did perform" (135). Therefore, the male writers

showed that the women could only perform very well as wives and not in any other role. Such writers include Chinua Achebe (1958), Elechi Amadi (1966), Cyprian Ekwensi (1962), Wole Soyinka (1973) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1980).

However, the discourse that sidelined women has shifted. Contemporary female and male writers have come out to redefine and argue against the one-sided presentation of the African woman in literature. Lapin (1984) observes that “three dozen women are currently recognized as authors across the African continent, and they have been joined by some male writers in giving serious treatment and a realistic characterization and all rounded perspective of the female gender. Writers tackle the gender equation in various ways as they strive to reverse aspects of female marginalization” (142). Writers such as Buchi Emecheta (1974) Mariama Ba (1981), Ama Ata Aidoo (1996), Flora Nwapa (1990), Sembene Ousmane (1970) and Leopold Sedar Senghor “attempt to bridge the gender rifts in the African literary landscape” (135). Henry ole Kulet, who comes from a patriarchal society, is among the writers whose later works portrays an all-rounded woman.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The two novels *Blossoms of the Savannah* (2008) and *Vanishing Herds* (2011) by Henry ole Kulet show the writer's concern with the role of the Maasai woman in society. He uses women protagonists in the two novels to elevate the roles of women in the society. However, what is worth investigating is how the roles he gives to the women define and redefine their position within the Maasai society. Therefore, in this study I set out to investigate how the position of the Maasai woman is defined and (re)defined in the two novels.

## **Objectives**

1. To examine femininity in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*.
2. To do a comparative analysis of femininity in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*.

## **Hypothesis**

1. Examining femininity in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds* reveals a definition and redefinition of Maasai femininity.
2. A comparison of the two novels would reveal the different shades of Maasai femininities that Henry ole Kulet projects in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*.

## **Justification**

Interrogating the (re)definition of femininity in *Blossoms of the Savannah* (2008) and *Vanishing Herds* (2011) helps to highlight the peculiar nature in which Henry ole Kulet positions his vision of the Maasai woman character. Literary variables like characterization and plot development can help realize the inherent vision that Henry ole Kulet (re)presents in his work with regards to the destiny of the woman in the Maasai community. It is in the analysis of the (re)definition of the women that we can capture the unique feminism that emanates from Henry ole Kulet's creative works. Unraveling this kind of femininity would help to not only appreciate the nature of feminism within Maasai culture but also act as a pointer to the variant views on feminism which come from various cultures but which, the end, project the same vision of liberating the woman from traditions and customs that time has rendered untenable like female genital mutilation.

It is imperative that a comparison of the two novels is done so as to show how the two books handle the issue of femininity. This shall help us see the issue of feminism in Maasai culture in totality with regard to how Henry ole Kulet handles it in the two texts. The two novels share similarities and differences that when looked at keenly reveal the vision of the author. The comparison also shows the techniques that the author has employed in different texts so as to bring out the presentation of the woman character and in so doing give a vision of what I term Maasai femininity.

### **Literature Review**

A good research is one which is anchored in existing knowledge. This review looks at the existing literature related to this study under different topics. There are scholars who have previously done critical analyses of the works of Henry ole Kulet. A number of scholars have analyzed the images of women in Henry ole Kulet's novel based on subordination of women such as Everlyne Mengo (2010) but my study focuses on wholesome (re)presentation of women in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*. It also aims at doing additional work to the previous works done by other scholars on the concept of femininity especially work that reflects on Henry ole Kulet's novels. It provides a comprehensive study of woman (re)presentation on *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*.

One of the critical interests on Henry ole Kulet's works has come from Khaemba Wanyonyi (2003) who focuses on tension, uncertainties and conflicts among the Maasai as reproduced in the texts. This is caused by the invasion of foreign education as well as cultures. He analyses *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Daughter of Maa* in support of his argument. He closely looks at representation of beliefs and cultural values by characters that have received formal education and the backdrop of Maasai cultural practices in the selected novels. Wanyonyi (2003) argues

that the introduction of Western education precipitated change in the status of the Maasai women— transformation that has created tension and conflict. Wanyonyi’s argument is useful to my study since the issue of education acts as one of the agents that leads to women redefining themselves in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*.

Mengo (2010) portrays the way Maasai women are culturally mistreated within the Maasai community, her work provides an insight of the patriarchy society of the Maasai. Though dealing with the Maasai culture and how women have been subordinated she did not deal with the changes that are currently taking place in Maasai community hence emerging a different kind of woman as compared to the cultural expectations. However, her study is reflected in my study in terms of how patriarchy shapes the Maasai woman to be at the periphery.

Peter Mbugua (2004) discusses “Issues of Identity in Henry ole Kulet, *Is it possible?* and *To Become a Man*”. He has highlighted different identities of the female characters in *Is it Possible?* (1971) and *To Become a Man* (1972). This work is relevant to my study since it builds on presentation of women. This study is reflected in my works since am focusing on the issue of patriarchy and its domination of the women character who struggle to assert themselves.

Another critic who argues that the Maasai regard women as children is Ciarunji Chesaina (1997). When a Maasai man talks about his children, he automatically means his wife (wives) along with children, reason being that women were to be guided and protected by men (Ciarunji, 89). This argument is reflected in my study in terms of how patriarchal Maasai community views women. This aspect of addressing the women as children is also seen in my study and how women are treated as equals to the children forms also part of my study because this is part of women’s subordination that the women characters want to redefine themselves from.

Susan Andrade (2000) interviews both Ogunyemi and Wanjira on their ideologies. In this interview Wanjira and Ogunyemi disassociate themselves from Western feminists whose ideologies such as lesbianism do not fit African community. An African woman should not alienate the man in her attempt to redefine her assertiveness, they argue. They also talk about the gender sensitization program that Wanjira is working on. Ogunyemi argues that “feminism does not see beyond Western societies and hence ignores or marginalizes the specific problems of African women” (Susan, 174). This interview is relevant to my study since my work employs the theory of Womanism as articulated by Ogunyemi. This interview helps in building the perspective on Womanism in this study. My study also values the role of the man in women’s attempt to redefine their assertiveness such as is the case of Norpisia in *Vanishing Herds*, who values the role of Kedoki in saving the environment while Taiyo in *Blossoms of the Savannah* values Parmuat’s assistance to rescue her from the humiliation of FGM.

Another critic is Akote Amouzou (2006) who demonstrates how Flora Nwapa has contributed to the “Redefinition of the female gender and a counter-identification to men’s voices in literature, a fight to initiate change in the minds of her people in order to restore women’s images and dignity as mothers and wives and promote collaboration and complementarily among the sexes in Nigeria and more generally in Africa” (Amouzou, 97). Amouzou observes that in Nigeria the male writers are generally the “mouth piece of their society and they treat the female characters as disdainful, indifferent or at times in a cruel manner in which women are regarded in Nigerian society” (Amouzou, 97). For Ebele Eko (1986), “these writers invariably cast all women in the strict sexist roles of mothers and wives, submissive to the norms and regulations that restrict them” (Amouzou, 211).

Amouzou further argues that before the publication of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) "The female portraiture by men was restricted to a kind of idealization, rigid conventionally, stereotyping and a superficiality that left to be desired. Infact, women were made peripheral" (Amouzou, 98). Amouzou gives the example of Charles Nnolim (1989) who analyzed the works of Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi and Elechi Amadi and argues that the women were stereotyped as "helpless, dependent, brutalized, disparaged ... prostitutes or concubines or good time girls" (Nnolim, 59). Such women include Ekwensi's (Jagua Nana), Amadi's Ihuoma (*The Concubine*) and Wole Soyinka's Simi (*The Interpreters*). For Chinua Achebe, "The man is made the subject of the narratives; he is significant and dominates" (Nnolim, 98). Redefinition of female gender by Flora Nwapa is relevant to my study because it offers a benchmark for viewing what redefinition of the role of the woman character is all about in literature. This study also supports the argument by Charles Fonchingong (2006) who argues that the earlier works of Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o among other writers placed men as central figures and powerful unlike women.

Amouzou (2006) argues that the female characters fight the prejudices of the past in order "to restore women to their rightful place in society". Writers, such as, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa, "Present the developmental nature of the female character through a varied exploration of the theme of female assertiveness in the various societal facets which enslave the female" (Amouzou, 143). In this works, the key message is that, although women are faced with oppressive cultural norms they must strive to assert themselves. This picture of women undergoing oppressive cultural norms is vividly portrayed in the works of Henry ole Kulet but through the characters he shows that they can triumph because at the end Resian and Taiyo join Egerton university while Norpisia is awarded the best environmentalist award.



Mary Kolawole (1998) contends that “Generally, African women are presented as a subaltern group in the margin of society, docile, and accepting the multiple levels of subjugation gracefully” (Kolawole, 223). Flora Nwapa’s fiction “seems to be a cry against that degraded position of Nigerian literature”. Flora Nwapa creates a seemingly decent society for women. It is a society respectful of its women. She openly confronts the issues of gender and distribution of power by the patriarchal society. She moves her female characters from the innocent and helpless position to a state of self-empowerment and authority throughout her texts: “In all her novellas it is no more the male, but the female character who is the center of concern and she dominates the plot. This is a challenge to the old order”. This study guides my work in terms of how Henry ole Kulet has confronted the issue of gender giving women a voice and redefining themselves.

Charles Fonchingong (2006) in his interrogation of the gender gap notes,

Emecheta in *Second Class Citizen* has filled the gaping gender between male and female characterization and shown the other side of the coin. The rural back-house, timid, subservient, lack-lustre woman has been replaced by her modern counterpart, a rounded human being, rotational, individualistic and assertive fighting for, claiming and keeping her own (Obiageli and Otokunefor, 1989).

It is important to note that Henry ole Kulet belongs to the caliber of male writers who are now reconstructing the “fragmented presentation of African female in earlier works that they had written”. In literature there was an imbalance where the male were put to the centre, such as in the works of: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958); Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *The River Between* (1980); Wole Soyinka, *Seasons of Anomy* (1973), and which has made many male African writers to help the course of feminism. Due to the rise the feminist movement and the efforts that

have been expended in reclaiming the distorted image of the female gender, some of the African male writers have come up with works that (re)present women who are ‘all rounded in perspective’. Such writers include Sembene Ousmane (1970), Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1980), Chinua Achebe (1988) and Henry ole Kulet. These writers have come out strongly and given ‘the gender questions a critical dimension.’

Sembene Ousmane (1970), for instance, disagrees with the stereotypes that women cannot be good leaders and they do not possess organizational capacity through his character and portraiture of Penda. Penda mobilizes the women, as well as, being a spokesperson in the strike, hence disapproving the point that women are not vocal and strong. Henry ole Kulet, the writer whose works I study, also portrays female characters such as Eddah and Norpisia who have organizational skills such as mobilizing women to plant trees hence, rehabilitating the environment. They mobilize men too during such an event.

Ngugi, who previously had a gender bias attitude in *The River Between* (1965) later, empowers his female characters with ‘strength, foresight and perseverance.’ Gathoni in *I Will Marry When I Want* (1980) is portrayed as an independent woman in her decision to choose her own husband defying the traditional precepts where parents impose their own choices on the children. Taiyo, too, in *Blossoms of the Savannah* chooses her own lover who, seemingly, comes from the same clan as she, hence, defined as her brother according to the culture. Gicaamba, in *I Will Marry When I Want* (1980) advocates for the education of the girl- child. He says, “We the parents have not put much effort in the education of our girls, we oppressed women, giving ourselves numerous justification ... forgetting that the home belongs to boys and girls” (Ngugi).

Achebe (1988) presents Beatrice as a professional woman who operates within “the same wavelength as the most powerful men in the land”. Beatrice presentation shows “a woman shouldering the responsibility of charting the course of female emancipation.”

I, therefore, undertake to study Henry ole Kulet’s works *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds* bearing in mind that the author is a male writer who uses female characters as the heroines. He writes about the Maasai community. A community that is patriarchal in nature but Henry ole Kulet unbends the gender bias attitude by, first of all, using female characters as his main characters, for example, Resian and Taiyo in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Norpisia in *Vanishing Herds*. Secondly, he emancipates the female characters in such a way that he makes them heroines who overshadow the male characters such as Norpisia in *Vanishing Herds* where she overshadows her husband, Kedoki.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by Womanism tenet of feminism theory. This theory has two main proponents separated by the Atlantic Ocean: the American Alice Walker and the Nigerian Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. The two writers contend that the black woman is in need of a revolutionary feminist mechanism that is different from that of the white woman.

Chidi Maduka (2009) argues that Womanism in Africa was coined by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in 1982. Maduka defines womanism according to Ogunyemi as,

Womanism is black centered; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand (Ogunyemi, 65).

Maduka (2009) argues that womanism, according to Ogunyemi serves: “as the rallying –point of the women of African ancestry in their struggle to effectively assert their humanity in the face of the malevolent attitude of the menfolk towards their self-fulfillment in life”. Ogunyemi argues that womanism does not make a lesser man but it encourages the men to accept to live with women by first “abandoning their self-perception as superior partners in the collective struggle of the race for a better society” (14).

Layli Philips (2006) discusses the differences between Womanism by Alice Walker and Chikwenye Ogunyemi. She argues that both scholars coined Womanism almost at the same time but Walker’s Womanism advocates for concepts that are intolerable to the African culture, such as lesbianism, while Ogunyemi’s Womanism calls for total liberation of African women without neglecting the male who are significant part in that change. Ogunyemi believes in understanding between men and women in ending marginalization of African woman. This study shapes my study in terms of the fact that men and women participate in ending marginalization of African woman. Henry ole Kulet tries as much as he can to go against traditions such as polygamy, the value of boys against girls and FGM. Ogunyemi’s Womanism will, largely, form the theoretical framework of my study.

Ely-Sayed Adely (2014) demonstrates that *Weep Not, Child* (1964) is a womanist fiction. Adely analyses the characteristics of Womanist theory by Alice Walker. Further, Adely demonstrates by the use of the character how Womanist theory manifests its self in *Weep Not, Child*. In the study, she reveals that the female characters in the novel depict characteristics of women underlying Walker’s definition of Womanism. For example, the theory of Walker addresses the issue of being a woman and not girlish in *Weep Not Child*. They reason as women and not in a girlish way. Walker in her theory advocates that a woman is capable of loving and Adely demonstrates

that Mwikali loves Njoroge. Walker's theory advocates for a woman who loves other women, an ideology that is seen within women characters such as Taiyo and Resian in *Blossoms of the Savannah* who love one another such that they fight to achieve what they desire together. Another ideology as advocated by Walker is that: A woman who values Tears as Natural Counter balance of laughter that women a times use their tears as an expression of laughter. These characteristics of Walker's womanish are also applicable in my work and it helps my work in terms of understanding in depth the characterization of women and how they redefine themselves.

Helen Chukwume (1982) examines how female writers have presented female characters who rise above the patriarchy society, in their quest for their rights. Such writers are Flora Nwapa (1984), Buchi Emecheta (1979) and Nawal el Saadawi (2007). This study is different from my study since I am studying a male writer, Henry ole Kulet who uses female characters and tries to emancipate them. However, Chukwume's study is relevant to my study since, I am also interested in women emancipating themselves from a highly patriarchy society. This study assists my work which deals with how women have risen above the patriarchy society as they seek their rights. For example Resian refuses to undergo FGM and forced marriage in order to achieve education.

Mary Monica (2012) critically examines the portrayal of women in Nwapa's and Emecheta's works. The female characters in these novels have been emancipated, which is what Nwapa and Emecheta advocate for since the two are womanists. These characters are bold and ready to emancipate themselves. This study is relevant to my study since am also focusing on female characters who have been emancipated, women who are courageous, and characters that are

ready to face any challenges that hinders their growth. I am also looking at characters who participate in economic development such as Norpisia and Eddah Sein in *Vanishing Herds*.

German Kouadio N'guessan (2011) discusses the issue of gender. The writer argues that gender is constructed and that the woman is viewed as the other. The writer says that the sexes are socialized into accepting their roles. This study will assist my work because my study majorly focuses on how male and female have been socialized into accepting their roles. This work is reflected in my study due to the issue of women being viewed as the 'other' that helps me in bringing out the concept of emancipation and hence redefinition of women.

Amouzou (2006) argues that Womanism "wants meaningful union between men and children and wants to see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. Womanism is communal in its orientation and goes beyond the husband and wife situation. It is an ideology in which the destiny of distressed people can be urgently discussed in a meaningful context to avert disaster, not just to talk abstractly" (Amouzou, 102). Amouzou argues that Flora Nwapa, Nigerian writer, advocates for Womanish: "Her fiction shows the true nature of woman, her role, and her contribution to the development of her society, which were played down or neglected in the works of the male writers. Nwapa's major concern for improving the quality of her community, not just women's lives, marks her politics. Genuinely, democratic, her ideology is integrative rather than solely woman-centered. One can say that she does not see the problem of her country Nigeria as solely gender-specific" (Amouzou, 102). I draw inspiration from this study since I am addressing too the issue of men who are also changing their sexist stand and value the women in the society. They are also leaving in meaningful union between children, husband and wife. Just like Flora Nwapa, my work also shows female characters who participate in developing their society.

Sherley Anne Williams (1986) argues that Womanist theory is committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people. Female and male, as well as, valorization of women's works in all their varieties and multitudes (Williams, 304). This study shapes my work since my study shows how women's ability can change a society. For example Norpisia's strength, in *Vanishing Herds* (2011), changes the life of her community and that of the wildlife. She helps in resuscitating the environment hence changing the life of people.

Mary Mears (2009) argues that "Flora Nwapa writes about women and their lives, issues, and concerns within a traditional Igbo culture radically affected by British colonialism". She argues that women desire change, choice and to be accepted. Women desire to participate, just like other human beings, fully. They want to be free from traditional roles such as workers, wives, and mothers. "Instead, they wish greater freedom than traditional Igbo customs allow in the domestic and public realms". This study is relevant to my study since I study how women redefine themselves from the Maasai traditions and customs that demean and subordinates women. I also study women who participate in developing their society. They redefine themselves from the fact that they are only supposed to be house wives and mothers to better things such as taking care of environment as well as to be educated to highest levels of education.

Georgiads Mboya Kivai (2010) argues that in an effort to empower the African woman, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie crafts stories with female subjects pursuing female interests. She also structures her narrative to contest the male power with its violent manifestations (Kivai, 23). Kivai, further, argues that Adichie is involved in the creation of discourse meant to push women from margins to the centre. This study is reflected in my works in similar way that Adichie push women from 'margins to the centre' is more less the same way Henry ole Kulet pushes women from traditional roles to powerful roles such as economic participation, improving environment,

taking care of environment in *Vanishing Herds* (2011) and in *Blossoms of the Savannah* (2008) such as education as FGM and forced marriages.

Womanism theory is suitable for this study because the author, Henry ole Kulet uses women as central characters and presents them as heroines in his works. He tries to give a voice to women in a society that is dominantly patriarchal in nature. Womanism is an appropriate theory since the novels are set in Africa, focuses on the African culture, specifically, the Maasai culture and this is a feature of Womanism since it focuses on African issues. The other reason is that the central figures are women who the author places as central heroines. This, therefore, refutes the argument by Makuchi (1993) who argues that “Most male writers have been heavily criticized for their representations of African women in subservient gender roles. They are portrayed as women who are passive, always prepared to do the bidding of their husbands and family, as having no status of their own and therefore completely dependent on their husbands” (Makuchi, 7).

The theory is applicable to my work because the two novels, *Blossoms of the Savannah* (2008) and *Vanishing Herds* (2011) deal with issues of blacks of African descendants. The issues focus on women, their lives and their concerns. The narrator beliefs in the freedom and independence of women. The novels also believe in meaningful union between women, men and children as advocated for by Womanism. The fictions place the women as central characters Norpisia and Resian are heroines in the narratives and all the issues centers around them. The narrator argues that men should begin to change from the culture perception that subdues them. The novels show the struggle of women of African ancestry for self-fulfillment. Resian struggles to join university while Norpisia struggles to rehabilitate the environment. This is what brings them joy after they achieve. Womanism shows the assertiveness of women towards the men’s attitude. Resian does



not fear to fight against the plan of his father, Oloisudori and Olarinkoi. Norpisia too, does not mind what people may think when she carries weapons and fights the cattle rustlers to death. The novels value men and see them as important. Norpisia sees her husband as a very good helper in her ambitions to save the environment. Taiyo also sees Parmuat as the only person who can rescue her from the humiliation of forced initiation. Although Resian wants to pursue education but believes that one time, later in life, that she will be married and have kids. She respects her own father. Taiyo also believes in being rescued by Parmuat. Norpisia in *Vanishing Herds*, loves and respects the husband, she takes care of his needs by cooking food for him and nursing him back to health. She works together with him towards changing the environment.

The two novels project their worlds as more communal than individualistic. The families live together happily. They do things as a community. The Nasila people in *Blossoms of the Savannah* come together to welcome the ole Kaelo, they come together to fight the vice of men who attempt to rape Resian and Taiyo. Norpisia together with Masintet's community plant trees so as to protect the environment. The novels show the true nature of women. It has shown their physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual nature of women, their strength, ability and the length that they can go to achieve it. The novels show the contribution of women to the development of the society. Minik, in *Blossoms of the Savannah*, starts a ranch where she employs people. Norpisia assists women to plant trees and are rewarded with sheep according to the number of trees planted.

### **Research Methodology**

The theoretical framework of Womanism determined the methodology that I employ in this research. It influenced my focus on the characterization of the Maasai woman like Norpisia in *Vanishing Herds*. It is by focusing on the women characters that we are able to see how Henry

ole Kulet defines the woman in accordance with Maasai conception of the female. The theory helped me focus on those aspects of characterization that best exhibited the aspects that redefine femininity in the Maasai contexts depicted in the two works. The focus that I put on the character of Resian in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and her passion for education as a way of transforming her life and her opposition to FGM is inspired by Womanism theory that insists on looking at the woman in society in terms of how she tries to overcome the barriers of patriarchy to contribute to the well-being of the society. The analytical tools guided by Womanism theory helps in identifying productive and reproductive roles of women in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*. The productive roles include activities that help women acquire money, resources and all activities that bring value into the society. On the other hand, reproductive roles are day to day activities carried out women such as cooking, fetching water and firewood, caring for the family and procreation for the continuity of the community. The Womanism theory helps in identifying how women have redefined themselves in terms of leadership status, education, assertiveness and from customs and traditions that keep women in low status such as FGM, early marriages, forced marriages, dictatorship and polygamy. It brings out the value of men in their help in emancipating the women in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*.

Further, the study begins by a close reading of the primary texts: *Vanishing Herds* and *Blossoms of the Savannah* with a view to find out how the women have been presented. I examined how women characters were presented by closely examining the plot, characterization and plot development guided by Womanism theory. I analyzed how women are represented as using language in order to redefine themselves from the traditions. To do a qualitative analysis I did close textual reading of the novels. Library research assisted in adding information concerning the culture of the Maasai.

## **Scope and Limitation**

This study focuses on Henry ole Kulet's *Vanishing Herds* and *Blossoms of the Savannah*. The two novels provide an in-depth towards understanding how women have been presented leading to their redefinition. The paper focuses on (re)definition of femininity. Other books written by Henry ole Kulet have been referred to in providing more information on this research project.

## **Chapter Breakdown**

### **Chapter One**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter consists of the introduction to this study. It provides background information on the concept of women in Africa and gender. The introduction provides the statement of the problem and justifies it. It further states the objectives of the study as well as the theoretical framework employed and further explains the methodology applied.

### **Chapter Two**

This chapter focuses on examining femininity in *Vanishing Herds*. Here I focus on how the author shows the woman as defining and redefining her place within the Maasai culture as is presented in the novel.

### **Chapter Three**

This chapter focuses on the second novel, *Blossoms of the Savannah*. I, closely, look at the text so as to establish how femininity has been presented in this novel.

#### **Chapter Four**

In this chapter I do a comparative analysis of the two books. My aim is to show how the author uses plot development, characterization and language use in presenting the female characters in *Blossoms of the Savannah and Vanishing Herds*.

#### **Chapter Five**

This chapter concludes my argument by tying together all elements discussed here by making a conclusion on the topic, the research finding and a suggestion for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXAMINING FEMININITY IN *VANISHING HERDS*

#### Introduction

In anthropology studies done on the Maasai community by researchers like Stephen Sitoya ole Sankan (1971) have shown that the place of women in that community is defined by the cultural norms where cattle play a big role: “Should a man mistakenly marry a girl of the same cattle brand as himself he pays a heifer” so as “to wife off the disgrace” (Sankan, 2). Paul Spencer (1988) also says that within “... the clans the members know which families may or may not intermarry. It is recommended that the right pillar should marry the left pillar, but if marriage does occur within one pillar of clans, the prospective husband may pay a heifer to the family of his bride to wipe out the incest” (Spencer, 28). Sankan who also discusses the question of masculinity and war says that the Maasai women live separate “houses” from men (Sankan, 40). Women, do not handle warriors food unless a ceremony is carried out (Sankan, 30). Sankan also says that women welcomed warriors from war with songs and dances. Barren women, according to Sankan, go round collecting things for ancestral prayer, a women-blessing ceremony: “This is a ceremony where women are blessed so that they may become more fertile” (Sankan, 42). Andrews Fedders (1974) says it was in rare situations such as when a woman gave birth that a woman would slaughter a sheep. Removing of blood from large animals is done by men (Fedders, 20). These elements of the Maasai culture as studied by the anthropologists: Sankan, Spencer, Fedders and Saitoti are also reflected in *Vanishing Herds* and *Blossoms of the Savannah*. What defines the traditionally Maasai women is captured in these studies. They discuss the role of men as being head of the home, disciplines and protect the family. The scholars mainly studied the role of men and women in Maasai community.

### **Definition of Femininity**

The Maasai woman is shown to be first defined by the code of dress that tradition ascribes her by Henry ole Kulet. The Maasai women had their dressing code which exemplifies the traditional expectation of the Maasai community. When Norpisia was to visit Sein, the environmentalist, the women were adorned in *lesos* and multi-coloured bead necklace. The Maasai women wore *lesos* and *shukas* around their bodies depending on the clan that they came from. They wore beaded necklaces around their necks. They wore rubbers on their feet. For instance, Norpisia wore white pair of rubbers bought for her by Sein. Their male counterparts wore red *shukas* and *Enkila-oo-ndeeri*, a beautiful outer garment made from soft woolly hyrax skins sewn into gown-like cloak. This is also seen in *Daughter of Maa* (1990) where Seleina is described as wearing *shukas* and had ornaments such as multi-coloured bead necklaces around her neck (*Daughter of Maa* ,61). The *shuka* is red-ochred.

Women's role is defined by Henry ole Kulet as milking, preparing meals and looking after the young ones. She is to take care of her house. She ensures that her children as well as the husband are well fed. Norpisia had; "A pot humming on one side of the fire, stone, as two hindquarters of mutton boiled. A large chunk of lamb chops spitted over the flames, with its outer fat layer sizzling" (*Vanishing Herds*, 106). It was the woman's role to light the fire and keep the house warm. We see Norpisia lighting fire and prepare their 'evening meals' (*Vanishing Herds*, 146). She welcomes the husband warmly. For example the night when the wild beasts run off and they got back into the house, "Norpisia went straight to check on her baby. She then stirred up the fire and boiled some milk. She served her husband and took some herself" (*Vanishing Herds*, 188). In *Is It Possible?* (1971) it was the role of the women to milk for example Lerionka's mother milk's the cows (*Is It Possible?* 9). In *To Become a Man* (1972) Kitika's mother, too, milks cows that

had been brought by Kitika in their last raid (*To Become a Man*, 15). After a successful raid the women in *To Become a Man* sing soothingly as they milk the cows (*To Become a Man*, 85).

A woman had the obligation of ensuring that calves had fed, kids and lambs had suckled and dogs too, should be well fed (*Vanishing Herds*, 27). Weak animals were to be taken care of by women just like the way we see Norpisia caring for the weak ones and especially those that were unable to walk. Women were defined by the responsibility that they had at home. They fed the young ones of the animals by giving them milk. We see this when Norpisia is said to be giving the four wildebeest milk. Women had the responsibility to ensure that there was drinking water for her family.

A woman has the responsibility to take care of the husband in *Vanishing Herds*. Norpisia makes an *olchuret*, a head covering to shield the husband from rain when he had been attacked by the cattle rustlers. She also nurses the husband back to health after he is attacked by the cattle rustlers. She predicts a man's needs. The reason being, it is the man who protects her and her children from danger. For if she did not protect the man "who then would protect them in case anything happened to the husband?" (*Vanishing Herds*,91). In *Daughter of Maa* (1990), too, the woman "---had to take care of husband's interests, cattle, sheep, goats, and above all his physical well-being" (*Daughter of Maa*,108).

In nomadism, the woman followed the animals from the rear. Her work was to look after the sick animals and young ones of the animals so that they may not fall into predator's hand. This is exactly the role that Norpisia performs. She follows their animals from the rear so as they would not fall into the hands of predators. This shows that the women performed menial jobs and were

not trusted with strong and challenging jobs such as leading the animals from the front and protecting the whole herd as man was expected to do.

The Maasai women as defined by Henry ole Kulet were the ones to construct huts. Norpisia makes a temporarily hut called *olongoborr*, “She offloaded poles from one of the donkeys and erected them on the ground. Within no time, she had set a temporary hut of sticks and hides called *olongoborr*” (*Vanishing Herds*, 22). Women were to construct the houses they lived in and we see women helping Norpisia “to erect her first semi-permanent house” (*Vanishing Herds*, 180). In case of oncoming rains the women had to ensure that the roofs were not leaking at all. If they did not do that they were held as irresponsible. In *Is It Possible?* (1971) women repaired the roofs in case they were damaged and the rains were either about to fall or were falling by smearing the roofs with mud (*Is It Possible?* 16). It is also evidenced in *To Become a Man* (1972) when the rains start falling and drops through the roof at Lesho’s father’s house, Leshao’s father says that he would look for a woman who would plaster their roof since Leshao's mother had died and that was her responsibility. Immediately, two women are seen repairing the Leshao’s father’s roof (*To Become a Man*, 2).

It is the responsibility of a Maasai woman to have children for procreation of the community as shown by Henry ole Kulet. And that is why Norpisia is thinking of having children before the two of them get old. She tells him that back at her home women of her age had already got their second child: “I think it’s the way a wife tells her husband how much she loves him and cares for him, whether she has children or not but I think I need to tell you I want to have your child before I get too old” (*Vanishing Herds*, 91). Many women in marriage or before marriage desire to have children. Womanhood in any community is defined by the ability to give birth. This is also experienced through Norpisia who desires to have her own children but the husband feels



that the wilderness and the long journey cannot permit them to do so. Irrespective of where they are Norpisia feels empty without her own children.

Also women are defined in terms of their sexuality, they are beings for procreation. When Kedoki is teased by his friend, Masintet, about being Lesiote, a man who cried upon seeing a woman's parts different from his and thinking that, probably, her parts had been eaten by a terrible disease. For Kedoki he says, "I will show her tonight that I'm not Lesiote ... you will soon begin seeing my sons and daughters following one another like *Ilanguda*" (*Vanishing Herds*, 147). This shows that women are there for procreation and not for enjoying intimacy with their husbands.

A woman is defined by her ability to conceive a child as shown by Henry ole Kulet. Norpisia, as they settle down becomes pregnant and then as couples they become happy as they are living together. Still women are defined by their attitude during pregnancy. Norpisia develops mood swings and complains a lot. Norpisia undergoes labour and delivery just like any other woman does: "When she came, she ascertained that Norpisia was indeed in labour. He left her with the midwife and went to look for Lembarta and Masintet. She was in labour for nearly twenty-four hours, for it was not until the next day midnight that he was informed that she had had a difficult but safe delivery. It was a great relief. He had been anxious and restless the whole day" (*Vanishing Herds*, 157). Women are referred by their first born's name. Norpisia after giving birth is referred as *Ngoto kinyamal*, kinyamal's mother.

Maasai women are seen as weaklings in *Vanishing Herds* and, therefore, cannot engage in fights, especially, with cattle rustlers who were known to be men of strength. It is with this assumption that Kedoki felt when he saw Norpisia attempting to attack cattle rustlers. When he saw her

stalking the cattle rustlers he is gripped by fear and wishes that someone can stop her since she was just a woman (*Vanishing Herds*, 77). It is viewed as an act of foolishness for a woman to try to fight men; for men were perceived as stronger than women. Kedoki with this kind of notion and upbringing thinks that there is nothing that Norpisia could do against two cattle rustlers. She describes her as a small thin woman who could not fight (*Vanishing Herds*, 77). Masintet and Lembrata, Kedoki's friends, are also shocked to learn that the cattle rustlers were killed by Norpisia, a Maasai woman. They are so shocked to the extent that Lembrata says, "I would say with certainty that this is not a woman but a man!" (*Vanishing Herds*, 80). In *To Become a Man* (1972) it was the men who went for raids for example both Leshao's grandfathers went on raids and brought back animals (*To Become a Man*, 5). Leshao and other *morans* participate in a raid which leaves Leshao with half a leg since it was amputated and he was the the only survivor (*To Become a Man*, 135). The women, both young and old had the role of adorning themselves with beautiful ornaments and sing melodiously after a successful cattle raid by the *morans* hence proving that they never participated in wars (*To Become a Man*, 101).

Women are described as emotionally weak by Henry ole Kulet. We notice the passionate feelings that women have for things that they love. Any harm happening to things that they love makes them so emotional that they end up crying. Norpisia cried after a hyena had killed and dragged away one of the sheep. To her it is a painful experience that she cannot bear. She is sad when she leaves behind her home and her relatives. She feels sad when she is separated from her friends at Eorr-Narasha. When the people bid them bye, "Norpisia returned his wave, tears welling up in her eyes, she was suddenly overcome by the knowledge that she might never see the people of *Eorr-Narasha* again" (*Vanishing Herds*, 216). Although it is an emotional parting but Norpisia is overwhelmed by sad emotions unlike Kedoki. She is sad too when she loses her siblings.

However, Kedoki “was strong and accepted his loss stoically” (*Vanishing Herds*, 40). Such that Norpisia desired to emulate him and be emotionally strong as him.

In *Is It Possible?* (1971) Lerionka’s mother is so emotional because white people were to take one boy-child from each household so as to attend school yet Lerionka was her only son. The husband consoles her by telling her that the white men are not only taking their son but “It is the boys of all the Maasai” (*Is It Possible?*11). When Lerionka saw her mother crying he soothes her and persuades her to stop crying (*Is It Possible?*11). In *To Become a Man*, Leshao’s aunt cries after seeing the situation that Leshao was in after the unsuccessful raid that led to one of his legs amputated (*To Become a Man*, 135). Men were not allowed to cry and this is seen when ole Sulunye, the circumciser wants to see Leshao’s circumcised organ and when Leshao is about to cry he is told that “Men don’t cry” (*To Become a Man*, 109).

Women are defined as a weaker sex that is affected by issues such as death. In *Vanishing Herds* the women are not an exception to this. After the death of Norpisia’s elder brother and sister, her mother was inconsolable. She became sadder than her husband. She refused to be comforted. A woman is seen as a person who is weak and depended on the man for protection. For example, when the group saw several *morans*, “Norpisia scooped her baby and hastily retreated into her *Olngoborr*, a hut (177). While Kedoki, Lembarata and Masintet stood ready to defend themselves in case of any eventuality. A woman’s weakness is shown when Norpisia faces a herd of rhinos. She runs for her dear life and she cries as she runs. In *Is It Possible?* (1971) women are defined too as cowards. When strange men come to their homestead they leave one at a time carrying along their children to the bush: “And in the end only men were left there” (*Is It Possible?*, 12). In *To Become a Man* (1972) women scream and ran from hut to hut “snatching up their children who were playing in the moonlight ... and disappeared into the huts (*To*

*Become a Man*, 132). When Leshao and Mbulung' go to the circumciser's house all the women enter their huts and bring them honey for fear of what may befall them. Their faces too express fear (*To Become a Man*, 96).

Women are defined in terms of having occasional outbursts of anger, mood swings and being stubborn at times by Henry ole Kulet. Just like Norpisia was. And the husband learned to accept and give her, her space during such occasions when she was in such moods (*Vanishing Herds*, 46). When there is heavy rain she stands in the rain crying until Kedoki comes for her (*Vanishing Herds*, 109). The narrator portrays that women are not used to being in the wilderness for long. Norpisia though being with Kedoki was tired of loneliness such that she longs for a human soul (*Vanishing Herds*, 53). This does not bother Kedoki at all. As long as he is with his wife and his livestock he feels quiet okay and not isolated from the people (*Vanishing Herds*, 60). She weakens too during her pregnancy (*Vanishing Herds*, 156).

Women are defined as shy in front of people by Henry ole Kulet. This is expressed when the narrator says, "That when the women looked at Norpisia it made her sharply aware of the thin *lesos* she was wearing. She suddenly felt dizzy as if she was treading in the air. Kedoki quickly took hold of her arm to reassure her. It was then that he realized the damage caused to her mind by the long isolation in the wilderness. She had become xenophobic and was now wary of strangers" (*Vanishing Herds*, 129). This kind of shyness always made women to be humble before their husbands, as well as, subdued.

As a result of being described as weaker sex it was therefore, the responsibility of the man to protect the woman. Kedoki, the husband, comes out ready to protect her with a spear. When Norpisia sees a herd of elephants she runs towards him so as to be protected. This shows that

Maasai men are the ones to protect their women. For, according to the culture, the women are weaker than the men. It is with this assumption that Kedoki had dismissed the strength of women. He regarded women “as gender of little consequence. He saw them as only purposed to procreate but this was changed immediately he found Norpisia.”

When Kedoki is attacked by cattle rustlers and lies on the ground, he thinks about Norpisia. The norms of the Maa culture stipulates that, man is to protect the woman at all times and not the other way round, a woman was to protect the husband and Kedoki thinks that he has to take care of his wife. He prays that they do not find her and molest her. The narrator says that it was his duty to defend her. He thinks of what they might do to her such as molest her, rape or abduct her (*Vanishing Herds*, 75). The reason as to why Kedoki is worried about Norpisia is because a woman within Maasai community is viewed as a weakling and it is the role of the man to defend her at any given time. During any raids or fights as said by Leshao in *To Become a Man* (1972) women are never killed because Maasai men do not kill their women because they are considered as weaklings (*To Become a Man*, 95).

In matters concerning the community, the women are not informed. Matters about their forced marriage were discussed in their absentia and dowry paid. Women are married off and dowry paid without their consent. For example without Norpisia’s knowledge, Kedoki had proposed to marry her. Kedoki had entered a deal with Norpisia’s father and the deal was sealed. She was given out to Kedoki without being consulted (*Vanishing Herds*, 16). This shows that women did not participate in any decision making and in cases where decisions were made, the women did not oppose at all. It was a norm and custom that the girls knew and it was not a surprise to them when they learnt that their fathers had married them off, so when Norpisia learnt that she had been married off she was not surprised because she was already eighteen years old (*Vanishing*

*Herds*, 12). The definition of any woman beyond eighteen years is marriageable and when it came to that the girl could not question the father because matters concerning marriage lay solely on the father. This is also seen in *Daughter of Maa* (1990) where Nalotuesha asks Nariku-Nkera, “When did women of Maa protest when their husbands wanted to marry?” (*Daughter of Maa*, 72). She reminds her that her husband if he wanted would marry without even asking for her consent for the men made decisions on when to marry and who to marry without asking the wives.

Kedoki does not involve Norpisia in decision making. When he recovers from the injuries inflicted on him from the cattle rustlers he holds private discussions with Masintet and Lembrata. When the men were engaged in their private discussions Norpisia saw that it was quiet normal and it was not a surprise to her at all if she did not participate in the discussions. In *Is It Possible?* (1971) the men decide on their own to send their sons to school. That’s why Lerionka’s father takes him to school without the consent of her mother.

Women never made weighty decisions. In *To Become a Man* (1972) when the elders are persuading the poor Leshao’s father to agree to be assisted during his son’s circumcision Leshao’s aunt begs to talk. She is told to be brief and Leshao’s aunt knows very well that was a privilege and not a right. And she knew that if she abused that chance she would be definitely told to shut up. So she had to speak soothingly to “appeal to the ears of the elders” (*To Become a Man*, 61). Leshao’s father feels that “If she were his wife he would have flatly refused to let her talk” (*To Become a Man*, 61). Also the discussion concerning the persuasion of Leshao’s father to accept assistance from *Ilmolelian* clan in his son’s circumcision involved only elders, “By noon, the elders were on the hill” (*To Become a Man*, 67).

Slaughtering of animals was exclusively men's business and women did not participate in it. We see this when Messopirr, Norpisia's father, goes to the dense of the forest in order to slaughter a sheep which is exclusively to be for his family (*Vanishing Herds*, 13). Neither Norpisia nor her mother accompanies him to the place of slaughtering. They only come to the place when he calls for them. As such the slaughtering place acts as a space that determines feminine identity among the Maasai.

Women were married off to men who they did not know and went with them to their homes in distant places. Norpisia is not exempted from this, "She was now headed to an undisclosed destination with a husband she hardly knew" (*Vanishing Herds*, 21). A woman had no right to object to this and she had to follow the decision that had been made by the elders in the community.

When a woman is married she is supposed to walk behind her husband. A woman is not supposed to cross any log or any object on her way. It was the work of *shepu-Ilkerra* to remove it for her. Kedoki and the wife have to walk for long distances even though the two do not have *shepu-Ilkerra* (*Vanishing Herds*, 17). This, therefore, shows that the man was perceived as the head and it was his role to lead the woman as well as protect her.

The Maasai had a way of respecting their elders. Girls and women greeted men by bowing their heads and for their mothers, they kissed them. For example, the narrator says when Norpisia "approached her father, bowed to greet him, and went to where her mother was seated and hugged her, kissing her lightly on her lips" (*Vanishing Herds*, 14). A woman was to greet an elderly man by bowing her head. This demonstrated respect for the male counterparts in the Maa community. The old man calls Norpisia, *nakeria*, a child, a term commonly referred to all the

females (*Vanishing Herds*, 140). The *nakeria* term defines women as equals to children. Women referred to any elder who is his father's age mate as father, *Papaai* as Norpisia calls Barnoti's father (*Vanishing Herds*, 141). Therefore, definition of the traditional Maa woman equaled her to children in the face of male authority.

Further, women are defined as submissive by the narrator. Norpisia displays this character when she sees Lemeissorri, Barnoti's father, "she quickly walked up to the old man, stopped a few feet from him and bent her head in greetings. He lifted his hand and lightly touched the top of her head" (*Vanishing Herds*, 140). Unlike Kedoki who only extends his hand in greetings. Young boys and all females within the Maa community are supposed to bent their heads to greet any elder who is elderly than them. This shows that women are to be submissive towards the men for it shows their respect towards the elders.

Again weapons also defined the superiority of male and female in Maasai community. Women handled a smoothly, slender polished sticks, sticks on which they leaned slightly on. The slender stick was used for supporting them as they walked. This is different from their counterparts who carried spears and knobkerries demonstrating strength and might. For example in *Bandits of Kibi* (1999) the men carry bows, arrows, spears and knob-kerries (*Bandits of Kibi*, 21). In *Daughter of Maa* (1990) Joseph Malon was seen in the evenings working on a new stick or knobkerrie (*Daughter of Maa*, 149). In *To Become a Man* (1972) boys carried spears and that is why Leshao carries his too (*To Become a Man*, 1). The men and boys carried swords in a scabbard tied to their waist (*To Become a Man*, 7). When Leshao is asked to share meat with Mbulung' he "draws his sword from its sheath" (*To Become a Man*, 10). Leshao and Mbulung' find an old man in the forest carrying a bow, arrows and a quiver dangling on his back (*To Become a Man*,92). Leshao



sees men in his homestead ,as he arrives from his meeting with Mbulung’,“With spears, some with clubs, some with bows and some with their drawn swords” (*To Become a Man*,83).

Maasai women are defined by their height. Mostly, many of them are tall and slender. For example, the narrator says that “he allowed them to construct their cattle enclosure next to his own while his wife, a tall slender woman draped in colourful *lesos*, and multi-coloured beads, invited Norpisia into *Olgoborr*” (*Vanishing Herds*,119). Maasai women are defined as beautiful: “Her beauty was accentuated by her sparkling eyes and her beautiful smile. What a beautiful wife he had in Norpisia” (*Vanishing Herds*, 219). In *Daughter of Maa* (1990) Seleina is described as tall, thin, slender hands, large brown eyes that made look beautiful (*Daughter of Maa*, 61).

Womanhood is also expressed in *Vanishing Herds* in a number of ways that defines Maasai femininity. Eddah desires to know more about meeting Norpisia so as she knows more about her. Womanhood and sisterhood is normally a concept with women. We find Norpisia and Masintet’s wife becoming great friends and inseparable (*Vanishing Herds*, 204). She finds it hard to separate from her and wishes that her husband would change her mind so as they would stay a little bit longer. She teaches Masintet’s wife about herbs and how to cure both the people and the sick (*Vanishing Herds*, 205).

Women are defined as gossipers for when “they walked on coming across a group of women who stood by the road, their arms folded across their chests, gossiping as they stared at Norpisia” (*Vanishing Herds*, 129). Therefore, when they see Norpisia they start gossiping about her which makes her so uneasy. In *To Become a Man* (1972) women, too, are described as gossipers. For example when two women are forced by their husbands to repair Leshao’s father’s roof they speak ill of Leshao’s father unaware that Leshao was hearing (*To Become a Man*, 2). When

Leshao kept begging for food from neighbour's the women decided collectively that they would not continue feeding two men: Leshao and his father and truly whenever Leshao went begging for flour they would show him empty tins (*To Become a Man*, 9). When the moran's returned from a successful raid the narrator says that women whispered the news from one ear to another (*To Become a Man*, 100).

### **Redefinition of Femininity**

The efforts at redefinition of femininity in *Vanishing Herds* is highly praised by Henry ole Kulet. Norpisia is bestowed with high praises such that even the representative of the governors praises her for her accomplishment in the resuscitation, rehabilitation and the conservation of the environment. She is described as unsurpassed in organizational skills and leadership qualities which enables her to marshal groups "of women to plant thousands of tree-seedlings that matured into invaluable forests" (*Vanishing Herds*, 8).

Norpisia is presented as a leader. She is elected to lead women in conserving the environment: "Sein was convinced that Norpisia was a born-leader. She could successfully lead her community in tackling some of the issues that had contributed to the degradation of the environment" (*Vanishing Herds*, 196). And when the women choose her to spear head the resuscitation of the environment the narrator says, "she accepted the challenge wholeheartedly and immediately embarked on forestation" (*Vanishing Herds*, 196). This also shows her will to assist in developing her society through curbing destruction of the forests through reforestation which is one of the many qualities of a leader.

Norpisia possesses "organizational skills and leadership qualities." Which Amouzou (2006) posits that in Flora Nwapa works, "women's roles transcend the domestic and reproductive"

(Amouzou, 101). This concept is seen in Norpisia whose organizational and leadership skills enables her organize groups of women who plant thousands tree-seedlings “that matured into invaluable forests” (*Vanishing Herds*, 8). Her role as a leader transcends the domestic and reproductive roles that initially were portrayed in the earlier works of Henry ole Kulet.

Norpisia, can be compared to Penda in Sembene’s, *God’s Bits of Wood* (1970) who mobilizes the women and is the spokesman in the strike action, hence, as Fonchingong (2006) argues, “Sembene defies the stereotype that women cannot be potential leaders and do not possess organizational capacity through his presentation of Penda” (Fonchingong,145). Henry ole Kulet too defies this stereotype that women cannot be potential leaders by presenting Norpisia who leads the women in planting trees.

Eddah Sein was recognized by the governor but proposes Norpisia to be awarded. She is therefore presented as unselfish. Through her we learn the qualities of Norpisia. Norpisia is presented as an inspirational leader. She turns the desolate arid land which had been destroyed by charcoal burners, timber harvesters and expansionists into a dense green forest. She reduces the human and animal conflict between them. Norpisia had reared wildebeests that had become an attraction to tourist and formed part of the tourist package that was marketed overseas (*Vanishing Herds*, 210).

Resuscitation, rehabilitation and the conservation of the environment, generally, requires an intelligent mind. Socially, we grow up knowing that men are more intelligent than women but the author redefines this socially constructed concept and shows, equally, a woman can be intelligent and also do activities that require highly skilled brains such as this. This redefinition of Maasai femininity is what Flora Nwapa, a womanist ideologist, advocated for in her novels.

She presents characters that are intelligent and ready to save the community irrespective of their gender. Amouzou (2006) argues that in Flora Nwapa's novel *Never Again*, "the female character, Kate, seems to be vital source of hope for the generation of society. Women in this novel devote their energy to countering the forces of destruction such as hunger and starvation" (Amouzou, 101). This is similar to Norpisia who desires, dreams and even gets involved in saving the forests as well as protecting the wildlife.

The concept of pastoralism is socially constructed as a man's activity. However, in *Vanishing Herds*, the heroine, Norpisia is a "famous woman pastoralist". She was said to have miraculously changed an arid and desolate wasteland into a "Garden of Eden" (*Vanishing Herds*, 7). As a pastoralist she preserves being the wilderness and faces dangerous situations such as wild animals. She helps the husband in herding the animals. In *Is It Possible?* (1971) it was the men's role to herd. We see Lerionka's father driving "cattle, sheep and goats half way, leaving them to the care of his brother, Olodi, and his sons" (*Vanishing Herds*, 1). Lerionka looked after the cattle and calves too (*Is It Possible?*, 5). This concept of boys and men herding is also seen in *To Become a Man* (1972). Boys looked after cattle and drove them back home. They were known as herdsmen or herds boys for example Leshao is one of the herdsboy who looks after his father's cattle. As they herd or brought back the animals the boys would whistle and shout at the animals (*To Become a Man*, 100).

Norpisia is presented as determined and fearless of any threats posed to her as long as she saves life of a human being. When Masintet's mother is bitten on the hand by a crocodile, Norpisia accepts to treat her; however, she tells them that the medicine to use was strong herbal medicine. Lenjirr, Masintet's brother threatened Norpisia by telling her that in case the mother dies, he says, "I'll make sure that my spear goes through your rib-cage!" (*Vanishing Herds*, 183). This

does not scare Norpisia and she says. "I'll do it ... And bear whatever consequences!" (*Vanishing Herds*, 183).

The 'prophetess', Eddah Sein, also has qualities of a strong and unrelenting woman who is ready to "rehabilitate the destroyed water catchment areas" (*Vanishing Herds*, 161). The prophetess is said to be courageous and outspoken such that it made her a heroine in that particular community. The narrator says, "she was said to have fearlessly confronted matters of environmental degradation with the aim of rehabilitating the destroyed water catchment areas" (*Vanishing Herds*, 161).

Women, because they are viewed as weaklings, are supposed to be protected by the men but Norpisia is ready to defend herself based on the skills that she had learnt from her grandmother's home. To show that she is quiet composed and not afraid, in the morning when Kedoki questions her whether she had heard strange noises at night she says, "No, I didn't ... Only an occasional cow-bell tinkled" (*Vanishing Herds*, 26). Proving that she slept soundly, forgetting that she was actually in the forest and alone in the *Olngoborr*.

Generally, women are culturally perceived as cowards by the narrator, they cannot stand being left in the forest at night all alone by themselves. But this is not the case with Norpisia. For when the husband worried for her safety Norpisia, was totally different and relaxed. When Kedoki told her to be alert at night he expected her to fear and beg him to stay but "Kedoki was utterly surprised that Norpisia did not fret." Moreover, when Kedoki left her and went to keep vigil, the narrator says that "Norpisia curled up under her blanket and thought longingly of her warm bed at her mother's house in Olomuruti" (*Vanishing Herds*, 24). This shows that she is not afraid of

the fact that she has been left alone in the dark, in the forest. She seems to be quiet composed.

And the narrator says:

She knew she would have to face all kinds of danger. But luckily, she told herself, the training that she had had at her grandmother's home would be handy in coping with any eventuality in this wilderness (*Vanishing Herds*, 25).

Kivai (2010) argues that “Patriarchy undervalues female experiences and knowledge and is a strong ideology that controls women in several societies. Women being a muted group are compelled to follow and accept what men devise and formulate. The basic pillar of the patriarchal power within the African context is the silencing and suppression of women including the control of their bodies” (Kivai, 23). Women, within the Maasai community, are viewed as timid, weak, and backward and that they cannot do such things that Norpisia does, however, the author redefines what it is to be a woman within his fictional work, *Vanishing Herds* by presenting Norpisia who fights against the marginalized such as the wildlife. She also resuscitates the environment.

Norpisia, in *Vanishing Herds*, is presented as a very intelligent woman who questions a lot about certain aspects of the environment. For example, she asks the husband why nature introduced predators to disturb such scene tranquility. She is also disturbed a lot about why man keeps destroying the environment. She pursued such aspects as the survival of species in their natural habitat. She realized that “human interference with the habitat could only meddle with animals' life and make it much more difficult for them to survive” (*Vanishing Herds*, 68). She is passionate about the survival of species such that at a certain time she watched two reed bucks playing and a leopard stalking them: “The leopard inched closer and Norpisia felt like shouting

to alert the two reed bucks of the danger, but she dared not” (*Vanishing Herds*,69). Norpisia is more concerned about the reed bucks oblivious of her own safeness as far as a leopard is concerned that is totally masculine in nature.

Through a stream of conscious we see her intelligence in her reasoning. For example she asks herself:

How could anybody in his right mind divert a whole river for his own selfish interests? How could he do that at the expense of the poor herders who had lost most of their livestock on account of the severe drought? How could he make them work on his farm for two days in exchange of water for their animals? She felt distraught and extremely disheartened (*Vanishing Herds*, 121).

We also see how Norpisia intelligently thinks about their safety as well as that of their animals “If they had to cross the river. She asks, “Do you think it is safe driving our cattle across the river, just yet? Look at the predators across” (*Vanishing Herds*, 123).

Norpisia’s intelligence supersedes that of her husband. She tells the husband that there was a need of them to move out of the Olmakarr farm: “It is not secret that the fires we have been seeing in the past few days and the hardening drought we are witnessing are sending us a clear message. It is time for us to move out of *Olmakarr* farm before we are eventually thrown out” (*Vanishing Herds*, 153).

Norpisia’s intelligence and reasoning is also contrasted to that of her husband. Norpisia reasons so intelligently that makes the husband agree with her. She carefully and skillfully uses idioms so as to build and support her argument. “Do you know the reason why the founder said somebody else’s cow dries up in the day time?” She asked excitedly, beginning to initiate an argument. “I

believe he wisely meant that a thing that belongs to another could be taken away without warning. Similarly, whether we like it or not, we might be asked to vacate *Olmakarr* farm the moment the owner thinks our cattle are competing for grass with his”(*Vanishing Herds*, 156).

When Kedoki, Lembrata and Masintet were told to vacate Barnoti’s farm “they recalled the wisdom in Norpisia quoting the founder who said someone else’s milk cow dried up at midday” (*Vanishing Herds*, 174). Norpisia had foreseen them being thrown out of the farm but the three men could not see it at all. While the community finds it worth to fight and kill the wild animals for the destruction that they caused, Norpisia thinks contrary. When the old man tells her to join them in eating the maize so that she will help them to fight the wild animals she angrily says; “Never! ... If I were to join the fray, I would join the wild animals and fight you for having encroached their natural habitat!” (*Vanishing Herds*, 104). To her wildlife is a significant part in the community and feels that it is her obligation to defend them.

Eddah Sein, the prophetess as referred by the community is said to be “equally and well versed in the world of art, culture and intellect.” She is said to be a woman of high self-esteem. She mingled freely with the lowly pastoralists. If someone tried to discredit her in front of the multitude he or she would face the wrath of people. “As a result, she was unassailable. She was always beyond the reach of those who would have liked to put her down” (*Vanishing Herds*, 162). Eddah is well educated and described as unassailable. Therefore, Eddah could not be easily destroyed, defeated or questioned by any one.

Eddah Sein is an educated Maasai woman. She reminiscences of the days “ten years earlier when she used the route with her parents on her way to and from school, there was no trading centre to speak about then” (*Vanishing Herds*, 162). Maasai girls hardly went to school and when they



reached puberty age they were circumcised and sold off to a man that the parents choose for them. Most of the suitors were too old. Therefore, seeing Eddah Sein going through school and becoming an environmentalist redefines the notion of femininity in this fictional work. In both *Is It Possible?* (1971) and *To Become a Man* no girl goes to school. The only people who go to school are boys such as Lerionka in *Is It Possible?* and Leshao and Mbulung' in *To Become a Man* (1972).

Eddah is actually conversant with the reasons as to why the community had to conserve the forests. She emphasized the fact that the forests were the source of rivers, herbal medicine, sacred trees and shrubs: “that solemnized ceremonies and which held their people together simply put, forests were the source of life” (*Vanishing Herds*, 167). Eddah emphasized about their equal rights to the forest resources. Eddah reminded them that no one had the right to cut down tree. The insatiable appetite that both Eddah and Norpisia have towards saving the environment is clearly a redefined role of a Maasai woman.

Eddah Sein, equally, is portrayed as an intelligent woman. As we read the novel, we realize that she started an incentive scheme called “Sheep for Trees Initiative ... in which villagers were given a sheep for a fixed number of trees planted” (*Vanishing Herds*, 9). Eddah Sein possesses rare qualities that were hard to come by within the Maa community as portrayed in earlier works of Henry ole Kulet. Women, in the earlier African literature, are not portrayed in doing things that would develop the society. Things to do with economic development were, specifically, left to men. This is the reason that makes Amouzou (2006) argues that “It is a fact that from the family circle to the public sphere, women suffer many hardships, simply because they are considered inferior to men. In most traditions and especially in Africa, women are devalued and considered “Second class citizens” (Amouzou, 97). Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argues that

“women are constructed by men as passive and inconsequential objects” (Amouzou, 97). But this becomes a point of departure in *Vanishing Herds* because Henry ole Kulet presents very important female characters such as Norpisia and Eddah Sein who helps in resuscitating the environment that had been degraded.

Eddah Sein skillfully teaches the community about conservation of forests which also shows the responsibility that she had. She explains that “the roots held the soil together and prevented soil erosion while the undergrowth prevented moisture from evaporating” (*Vanishing Herds*, 167). Eddah, further, says that rivers “were kept cool by the forest cover and free from pollutants by their interwoven roots that filtered the underground water seepage” (*Vanishing Herds*, 167). In addition, Eddah Sein says that tree leaves absorbed polluted air and other gases in the atmosphere, enabling people to breathe fresh air (*Vanishing Herds*, 167). Her teaching skills portray high rates of intelligence such that it redefines women. Her teaching convinces the community; hence, the narrator says, “When she explained the link between forests, rivers and pastures, the people began to understand the genesis of the drought. They could now see how the wanton felling of trees, the clearing of the under growth and the destruction of water catchment areas had all worked together to destroy the environment resulting in the present condition” (*Vanishing Herds*, 167).

We learn that Norpisia has medicinal skills. She learnt the art of medicine from her grandmother, *enkoibaoni*. We learn that the grandmother “was a renowned medicine woman who was reputed to possess supernatural powers” (*Vanishing Herds*, 12). The grandmother, therefore, “taught Norpisia the art of clairvoyance, divination and incantation” (*Vanishing Herds*, 12). The grandmother was an expert in mixing and preparation of herbal. The narrator says that Norpisia’s grandmother used to take her to the forest; she showed her different types of roots, barks, berries

and nuts. She showed her how to prepare the medicine as well as cure the people. With this skill she finds, “herbs that would use to treat the swelling on Kedoki’s leg.” We see her so familiarized with such herbs like *Olmosilig*, *Olmagiro-ngiro*, *Olkonyil*, *Olkitolosua*, *Oloesiate* and also *Olcanilenkashe*. We also see that Norpisia knows exactly which part of the herb is used for treating. She also knows how to prepare the medicine on her own without being assisted by any one. The narrator too emphasizes this concept by saying, “In the afternoon Kedoki watched her as she prepared the herbs. He felt lucky to be with a woman who knew so much about herbal medicine. In less than a week, he was on his way to full recuperation” (*Vanishing Herds*, 87).

Supernatural powers were known to be owned by *oloiboni*, a male Maasai leader. Divines and incantations were, precisely, done by *oloiboni* or male magicians. But we see Norpisia’s grandmother possessing such qualities, which she passes on to her grandchild. Norpisia seems to be more in contact with the supernatural spirits. All the time she keeps talking of dreams, especially, that her grandmother visits her in the dream. When four young wildebeest calves, one male, three females appeared from the bush, Norpisia is not surprised. The narrator says that Norpisia , “told her husband what she had told him before: that she once dreamed of being asked to go to the highlands and join wild animals to fight human beings who were destroying the animals habitat” (*Vanishing Herds*,144). Maybe, she said, the forces that destroyed the animals “habitat were now finally departed, and the four young wildebeests were now finally defeated, and the four young wildebeests were symbolically sent by the gods to accompany their cattle and victoriously march into their liberated habitat” (*Vanishing Herds*, 144). When Masintet, calls her words “merely a figment of Norpisia imagination!” Kedoki, her husband, warns Masintet by telling him not to dismiss her words for mostly they come true. In *To Become a Man* (1972) *oloiboni* was a man’s role. He cursed whoever offended a person (*To Become a Man*,32,43)

Leshao's father seeks the service of oloiboni so as they would curse ole Sembe, his rival for many years, who had accused his son of stealing and slaughtering his goat. Leshao's aunt, too, is told by oloiboni that Leshao's father would leave his home and start wondering away from his home borrowing. This makes her go quickly to see Leshao's father to confirm the words of oloiboni whether they were to happen.

Ifi Amadiume (1987) argues that "indigenous spiritual practices empowered women in the person of the powerful Goddess Idemili. Women assumed the roles of Goddesses and their High priests could be men. There were also male deities with female High priestesses" (Amadiume, 39). In this argument Amadiume shows that women too could possess supernatural powers which are inclined to African men just like what Henry ole Kulet portrays in Norpisia's grandmother who has some supernatural powers.

Another point where womanhood is redefined concerns security. The art of self-defense and self-reliance skills is culturally a male's activity but we learn that "Norpisia was taught self-defense and self-reliance skills by her male relatives who lived with her grandmother. She mastered the use of such weapons as spears, bows and arrows, knives and knobkerries to the extent that she could wield them as expertly as any man would. She also learnt animal husbandry" (*Vanishing Herds*, 13). Henry ole Kulet redefines the concept of femininity by showing that women too can learn the art of self-defense and also self-reliance. Upon learning such skills they can do it just like any man would do, that is, defend them in case of any attack, as well as, protect the husband and the children. The issue of animal husbandry is also shown to be a quality that Norpisia learnt from the grandmother an issue that too shows that women can be familiarized with and not only the men.

The narrator also shows circumstances under which Norpisia had to learn the art of defense. The narrator says that the reason as to why Norpisia had to learn defense skills was because of bandits who were common in the area and had already killed her siblings hence the need for her to learn the defense skills. The author argues that due to the violent nature that is facing the community, that there is need to learn the art of self-defense for example the bandits at the time of attack do not discriminate whether a woman or man. The cultural perception that women and children should be protected should be abandoned and that women too can equally defend themselves so as to build the strength of fighters in times of defending themselves. And to emphasize that women too can defend themselves Kedoki says, “If you say my woman is half-man just because she is courageous and dependable,” he said smilingly, “then, I would agree with you entirely. During the period I have been with her, she had requited my trust in her appropriately by facing all manner of danger fearlessly” (*Vanishing Herds*, 58). To Kedoki Norpisia faced many dangers but she stood firmly as a man and not as a coward.

When a hyena at one time disturbed the couples in the bush, the narrator says that Norpisia knew that there was an intruder and with that “Stealthily she got up, picked a spear and stood waiting in readiness” (*Vanishing Herds*, 40). This shows that Maasai woman, irrespective of the previous notion that they were weakling and that it was the Maasai men who would protect them, Norpisia takes a spear and fights just like any other man can do. Norpisia is so happy after she protects the family’s animals from the hyenas. She says, “I am certain my spear has hit the hyena,” Norpisia said confidently, “I hope I have hit it at the right place” (*Vanishing Herds*, 41). Kedoki praises her. He notices that just like any man Norpisia is courageous and worthy a champion. In fact, Kedoki is so surprised and with utmost surprise says, “What a markswoman you are my love!” (*Vanishing Herds*, 41). Before she got married, Norpisia had vowed that she was going to take

the place of Kedoki's slain brother and help him protect their cattle. Culturally, the responsibility of protecting the animals was solely a man's role but the author redefines exactly what it is to be a feminine within the Maa community. Norpisia sounds so revengeful a fact that is not commonly seen with women she says, "If I've killed it, I'll be happy to have avenged the sheep its kith and kin killed in the plains" (*Vanishing Herds*, 41). These words, culturally, are not expected to come from a woman but in *Vanishing Herds*, Norpisia has been given that chance to say them meaning the authors seeks to redefine what it is to be a Maa woman.

Although Norpisia is good at self-defense but Kedoki underestimates the strength of Norpisia.

The narrator says,

As he lay down wounded by the cattle rustler, he saw two men 'each holding a drawn sword, crawling stealthily toward him. His end had finally come, he told himself despairingly. Just then he saw Norpisia! Her slim body stretched out along the ground under a low branch in the dust. In her right hand she held his late brothers spear, in her left hand a bow and two arrows. A quiver dangled down from her shoulders. She was stalking them! He was gripped by an uncontrollable fear. How could a young woman do when pitted against two hardened cattle rustlers? How could he warn her to retreat without the beastly brutes? Who could tell her that she was nothing but a small thin woman thinking she could face two armed men? He was troubled (*Vanishing Herds*, 77).

Here the author compares Kedoki to Norpisia. He shows that women can be even better at self-defense than the men. We see Kedoki has been stabbed by the rustlers but we see Norpisia is very good at stalking the two cattle rustlers. Kedoki feels that Norpisia is weak and cannot fight

the two cattle rustlers but Norpisia is so determined that she would fight them alone, which she eventually does. The way Norpisia attacks the two cattle rustlers is so skillful and quiet shocking for Kedoki for she does it so well like any man can do and even better than them. For example, Norpisia is swift in running towards the attackers:

Suddenly, he saw Norpisia dart across the open space in the forest. Her first step was a full stride in a headlong dash at the open space before Kedoki's mind figured out what his eyes were seeing. She was running fast, her slender body bowed backward with her right arm raised high above her head, the muscles in it knotted, as firmly held her spear. Her eyes were wide open and her lips drawn back from her teeth in an expression of wild fury. She hurled her spear, which forcefully flew through the air toward one of the two men. The tall man, who Kedoki recognized as the one who, wounded him, glimpsed at her belatedly and raised his sword as he quickly got up to face her. The sharp end of Norpisia spear pierced into him, sending him sprawling, with blood gushing off his rib cage like crimson water from a fountain. Before the other man could attack her Norpisia had shot an arrow at him. The arrow got him squarely between his shoulder blades. The man yelled as he fell backward, fatally wounded (*Vanishing Herds*, 78).

We see Norpisia killing the cattle rustlers, she does it single handedly. She has good tactics at self-defense. This is shown by how she positions herself, how she runs towards the cattle rustlers and how she throws the spear. It shocks Masintet so much because ,initially ,he thought that the two cattle rustlers had been killed by Kedoki and with this Lembrata says, “Only *Enkaikipiani* can manage such a feat! “I would say with certainty that this is not a woman but a man!”

(*Vanishing Herds*, 80). The author juxtaposes the strength of Norpisia to Masintet and Lembarta, Kedoki's friends. The narrator says that Norpisia killed two cattle rustlers while the two only killed one cattle rustler. This shows that femininity has been redefined in such a way to show that the previously weaker sex is much stronger than their men counterparts.

Although Kedoki fears for his wife's courageous trait but Norpisia is not at all because she had killed other wild animals before at her grandmother's place. Kedoki still has the traditional perception of what it is to be a Maasai woman although this Norpisia herself is beyond this traditional femininity as portrayed by the author. Norpisia is not scared by the wild animals as Kedoki thinks, for her she feels that she is equal to the task. Kedoki found the following morning the dead hyena and Norpisia's spear penetrating its rib-cage and that it had pierced its heart. He is so surprised and at this juncture he says that she is full of surprises. He asks, "Who would have ever thought a woman could throw a spear so forcefully as you did?" (*Vanishing Herds*, 42). In *To Become a Man* (1972) it was men who killed fierce wild animals such as the lion. We see this when a group of *morans*, Leshao included, goes to kill a lion. Fortunately, Leshao kills it hence emerging as the most celebrated *moran* (*To Become a Man*, 112).

The killing of the hyena by use of a spear surprises Kedoki a lot for still he does not believe that a woman "could throw a spear so forcefully as Norpisia did and she was also good at aiming and not missing her target" (*Vanishing Herds*, 42). Through the stream of conscious, we learn that Norpisia knew a lot that contradicted the social – cultural norms of the Maasai and she feared showing her husband since she had seen the way he had reacted when she had speared the hyena (*Vanishing Herds*, 42-43).



Kedoki, previously, held women with little contempt but Norpisia changes this perception; ‘his attitude towards women had been, until he met Norpisia, dismissive, regarding them as a gender of little consequence, required only for the purpose of procreation. He had therefore; surprisingly found the relationship with her to be totally different experience (*Vanishing Herds*, 43). This attitude of belittling women was there within the Maasai community such that women are referred as *Nakerai*, a child. Therefore, it surprises Kedoki when he sees such a woman who is so strong and defiant and has a strong personality than a woman. Amouzou (2006) argues that in *Things Fall Apart* (1966) “Women are lumped together with children because it is generally accepted that they are unimportant creatures who have nothing significant to contribute to nation building” (Amouzou, 223).

The Maasai culture is constructed in such a way that it was the men who carried a bow, arrows and quivers dangling on their shoulders. But the author reconstructs this by allowing Norpisia, a woman to carry them. The narrator says, “Kedoki walked down the slope briskly with his spear held firmly in his hand, while Norpisia, a bow and the arrows in her hand, and a quiver dangling down her shoulder, followed behind him” ( *Vanishing Herds*,54). And to show that the role of weapons was basically what defined a man, Lembarta, a young man who joins the couple in the forest is worried to see Norpisia armed with bows and arrows like a man. Upon Kedoki’s introduction of his wife, Norpisia, to the two men, Masintet and Lembarta, the narrator says, “and the young man knitted his brows in consternation as he looked at Norpisia, a woman armed with bows and arrows like a man” (*Vanishing Herds*, 55). In *Daughter of Maa* (1990) weapons such as spears were carried by men (*Daughters of Maa*, 109). In *The Hunter* (1985) we see men fighting using their sword which was put in a scabbard and “supported by a beaded belt tied around his loins” (*The Hunter*, 4). Leseiyo fights with a knobkerrie and a sword. Men carry

spears, wear pig-tails made into fine lines and smeared with fat mixed with red ochre (*The Hunter*, 10). Warriors carry long spears, sword and long oval shield of buffalo. Not anywhere in these works show a woman carrying such weapons or even fighting.

Masintet, too, cannot hide his anxiety by asking his friend, “Who is this lass then, who looks half man, half woman?” (*Vanishing Herds*, 56). Kedoki defends his wife by saying, “I want to assure you the woman you saw is certainly not half-man, half-woman. She is a real woman and she is my wife” (*Vanishing Herds*, 57). The author intended to show that it is not weird for women to hold weapons for the fact that it was male’s previously role but women can do it without looking odd. In fact Masintet emphasizes his shock by saying, “It is odd seeing a woman carrying a bow and arrows with a quiver dangling down her shoulders like a man. Kind of weird, isn’t she?” (*Vanishing Herds*, 57). Although according to Masintet finds it kind of weird for a woman to carry such weapons but Kedoki says that it’s the product of the environment that has turned her so due to the harsh life of the wilderness. Therefore, she has also learnt the art of defense in cases of a dangerous occurrence. Henry ole Kulet redefines the aspect whereby a Maasai woman had to be protected by the husband or the elder sons. He shows that a Maasai woman too can defend herself equally to the way men can do with no fear at all.

The author also shows that as a woman, Norpisia felt that she could also participate in keeping vigil just like the husband did. She tells the husband that from that night she would take the place of his late brother and that night she would keep vigil and her husband to sleep (*Vanishing Herds*, 26). Although the husband refuses, but through a flash back, we learn that Norpisia was equal to the task. She, previously, had killed ten hyenas, consistently, after attacking her grandmother’s animals. For ten consecutive nights, she did it using a spear. As a matter of fact, Norpisia, tells the husband to try her and if she was not good to withdraw her because she left all behind that

she loves so as to be with him. Norpisia is assertive and believes that she is capable of keeping vigil just like the man (*Vanishing Herds*, 27).

Norpisia is always ready, irrespective of circumstances; to protect their herd. When a pack of hyenas chased wildebeest at night, “She quickly got out of the *Olngoborr* in pitch darkness and collected a few stones from the ground. She threw them at the hyena to drive them away from near the cattle enclosure” (*Vanishing Herds*, 93). This is a very brave and courageous act that Norpisia possesses.

Norpisia cries for the loss and killing of their animals by the hyenas. This fact is, socially, a passionate feeling for the Maasai men who, culturally, love their animals. This shows that women too can passionately love their animals. With this the narrator says, “On seeing Norpisia weeping for the loss of a sheep that was killed by the hyenas, Kedoki understood her anxiety. He shared her feelings of devastation and loss” (*Vanishing Herds*, 32).

The passion that Norpisia has for birds is another skill that the author has used in the novel to redefine femininity. Norpisia knows the names of the birds very well and apart from that she knows how to communicate to them by whistling at them and even imitate bird calls. This skill she learned from her grandmother:

Norpisia softly whistled replicating the bird song so precisely that the mother bird stopped feeding its chicks and momentarily turned in her direction, looking for another bird. Norpisia whistled again and the bird took a few steps toward her. When she lived with her grandmother, she taught her to imitate bird calls. When she had gained skill, she would call them and they would come expecting to see other birds of their kind (*Vanishing Herds*, 52).

Such a skill of imitating the birds is a special art. Norpisia has multiple skills such as whistling in cases where she could detect a dangerous animal Norpisia whistled hence alerting the husband of the impending danger. She could whistle to control the rear as well as alert that there was danger. “Norpisia walked leisurely behind the herd, whistling and shouting at a sheep here and a goat there, when they started to break away” (*Vanishing Herds*, 122). Norpisia possesses a good art of storytelling which mesmerizes even the prophetess. Kedoki thinks every time she tells a story it feels like the first time, “Although he knew her story well, he was nevertheless drawn to the refreshing way she rendered it. She was clear and precise with exemplary word choice, accompanied by evocative gestures ... She revealed how she was trained to mimic birds and animals sounds and how she eventually managed to imitate them with such finesse that even the birds and the animals could not tell the difference between the mimicked sound and that which was their own” (*Vanishing Herds*, 171).

Maasai men are outstanding when it comes to the role of herding but this has been redefined in *Vanishing Herds* such that, Norpisia, a Maasai woman is seen to be very good at herding. This is shown when the narrator says, “Later that day, as he drove the herd through a wooded area, it pleased him to see her take charge, walking up and down controlling the movement of the cattle so that they slowed down to graze between bushes” (*Vanishing Herds*, 21). This refutes the argument by Hammod and Jablow ( 1992:150) who argue that “An African woman’s role is limited to sexual and commercial labour: satisfying the sexual needs of men, working in the fields carrying loads, tending babies and preparing food” (Kisiang’ani ,13). This is not the case as seen in *Vanishing Herds* the woman is placed high above traditional roles.

The calling of prophecy, culturally, is predominantly men’s responsibility but in *Vanishing Herds* shows that a Maasai woman can, equally, become a prophetess who can foretell the future in

truth. For example when the ‘prophetess’, Eddah Sein, visited Kedoki’s village she told them about consequences and hazards of climate change. And true to her words, it came to happen and the narrator says, “two days after she left the village, quite unexpected thunderstorms suddenly burst with unrestrained ferocity. The lightening that followed was vicious. Its great crackling tongues blasted any men, animals or trees in its path. Dung plastered as well as grass thatched roofs leaked so badly that many families, for the next few days, lived in quagmire” (*Vanishing Herds*, 158).

We also see that femininity has been redefined in *Vanishing Herds* in such a way that the main character Norpisia does her role intelligently: “Norpisia brought up the rear, occasionally combing the bushes thoroughly to ensure that no kid, lamb or calf was left behind” (*Vanishing Herds*, 71). She did her role passionately and showed high levels of responsibility. She loves their animals just like Kedoki loves them and she is not ready to see that any of them is left behind or killed by wild animals.

Norpisia is obsessed with the need to save wild animals and preserve their habitat (*Vanishing Herds*, 154). This is expressed through her encounter with her grandmother which has also been highlighted and vividly described. Her grandmother, through dreams, advises her to join animals and fight alongside them, so as to reclaim their habitat. Her grandmother urged her to request her husband to brand the wildebeest and allow them to stay among the herd for some time (*Vanishing Herds*, 155). Norpisia’s desire to save the wild animals is portrayed when she begs her husband, Kedoki to accept the four beasts and to brand them with their clan’s marks. To Norpisia she does what the other men like Kedoki, Lembrata and Masintet could not do.

Eddah helps the community plant trees; she assists them to plant indigenous trees seedlings which the community had brought. Eddah “had chosen an area that was adjacent to *Olmakarr* farm to symbolize future activities in that area where the forest was destroyed. Wherever she planted trees, she always erected a bill board with a picture of a green tree, which she said was a symbol of life” (*Vanishing Herds*, 166).

Women are presented, in the task of planting trees in Eorr-Narasha, as hard working, “for the first time in the history of Eorr-Narasha, women were way ahead of men in the number of livestock they brought into their homesteads. Most women earned more sheep than their men (*Vanishing Herds*, 202). For example Norpisia earned fifty-five sheep while her husband, Kedoki earned fifty-five sheep. Lembrata and his brother Masintet earned twenty-five sheep each, while Ngoto Lesiamin, Masintet’s wife, got forty-five sheep. This extract shows that women are more active than their men which, initially, is not the case within the Maa community.

Kedoki, Norpisia’s husband marries because he wants someone to assist him drive the herd of cattle. This shows that Kedoki believed that a woman too can control a large herd, protect them from predators and more so cattle rustlers. When, Norpisia’s father agreed Kedoki to marry her, the narrator says, “He was delighted that he had someone to assist him make weighty decisions” (*Vanishing Herds*, 19). This shows that the fact of decision making which was culturally men’s role can also be done by women. Women were not involved in any decision making. It was actually the work of men to do it. The womanist ideology does not negate men, they view them as important in the society but what they advocate for is recognition of a woman as an equal partner. Although, a male writer, Kulet, shows that Kedoki wants to marry for companionship and not the previous held myth that a woman’s sole purpose is procreation.

The love that Kedoki has for Norpisia makes him assist her to make a hut which was a woman's role. Norpisia fears that his friends might find him doing it. This reconstructs the traditional norms whereby only women constructed houses and did many house chores but this has been reconstructed, "While Masintet and Lembarta cut thorn branches to construct the cattle enclosure, Kedoki joined Norpisia and helped to offload the donkeys. Norpisia had made him breach some cultural norms, a situation that he knew would be frowned upon by other men if they came to know about it" (*Vanishing Herds*, 105). We see this when the narrator says,

They both put up the *Olongoborr*, anchoring poles into the ground to support the roof that was made of several hides linked and made to overlap one on top of the other. The oblong, dome-like structure had an opening at the top to let out smoke, if they needed to make a fire inside, though they seldom did (*Vanishing Herds*, 105).

We also see Kedoki assisting Norpisia to gather firewood, a responsibility that was primarily women's. Therefore, the sharing of responsibility draws these two couples more closer to each other. Sharing of responsibility makes the couple happy with each other. For example, the narrator says, "Once the *Olongoborr* was up, Kedoki went out to gather firewood while Norpisia lit the fire and began to prepare their evening meal (*Vanishing Herds*, 105). Norpisia's passion to save their animals demonstrate clearly that, she too, is involved in their property, "Norpisia herbs came in handy to treat the animals, but at times the sick ones were so many that the herbs ran out before treating all of them" (*Vanishing Herds*, 115). In *To Become a Man* (1972) it was a woman's role to fetch firewood (*To Become a Man*, 40).

Juliana Sam-Abbenyi Makuchi (1993) argues that one of the problems facing women in Africa is “women’s pleasure and the denial of pleasure for women” which has also been one of the issues addressed by feminists (Makuchi, 42). Women are married for the sake of procreation and not for sexual fulfillment it is the man to ask for sex and not vice versa. A Maasai woman, culturally, is married for procreation. The man hardly shows openly any love towards her wife in case the man wants to have sexual intercourse with the wife, it is his prerogative to decide on when and with who but in *Vanishing Herds*, the author has redefined the concept of femininity by showing that the Maasai men are shown in *Vanishing Herds* as capable of expressing their love to their women openly and that they are not shy in doing so. This is evidenced when Norpisia is about to be attacked by a, rhino, Kedoki realizes that “It dawned on him that he had to secure her safety and her well-being. It also dawned on him that he loved her more than he ever believed possible. Until then, he did not know he could love so much, let alone think that he nearly lost her to the beast ... From then, henceforth, he declared his eye would always be on her and for the first time since they became husband and wife, they held hands affectionately as they walked together back to where their livestock grazed peacefully” (*Vanishing Herds*, 30). Maasai husband and wife, rarely, mingle together they only meet when it is necessary and showing their love openly is such a hard thing to find in this community as expressed in the earlier works of literature.

Loving a woman in *Vanishing Herds* has been redefined when Kedoki expresses his love openly hence showing how he appreciates Norpisia. He loves Norpisia and does not want to share her with the community:

She knew it was true that he loved her. She had always known it and saw it in his eyes. Yes, she had always seen it in his brilliant, vivid, black eyes that caressed her with their look. His eyes always expressed the emotions that his cultural



sensibilities could not allow him to show, and he tried so hard to keep them under control (*Vanishing Herds*, 221).

Because of how the position of Maasai women has been redefined, we see that Kedoki, Norpisia's husband pays a keen interest to what Norpisia said. He listened attentively to what she had to say. He never gave an immediate answer but he pondered about it for some time. He allowed; Norpisia a chance to express her opinion which he never put down.

The issue of having a child to inherit the father's name especially a son is normally the desire of any man but in *Vanishing Herds* we see that it is Norpisia, a woman who is bothered about it for Kedoki still feels that they still have a long way to go. Even when his friend Masintet teases him about him being Lesiote, a man who cried upon seeing a woman and thinking that her manhood had been eaten by terrible disease, he still persists for them to wait until they are out of wilderness. Norpisia is worried that Kedoki might die and leave her without a child. She certainly need his son to inherit his name and cattle (*Vanishing Herds*, 91). She tells Kedoki about it "I think it's the way a wife tells her husband how much she loves him and cares for him, whether she has children or not but I think I need to tell you I want to have your child before I get too old" (*Vanishing Herds*, 91). But Kedoki responded by saying, "You have a long way to go ... You are still very young" (*Vanishing Herds*, 91). She purses the topic further by giving an example that "Women of my age back at Olomuriti are already getting their second child" (92). Although, Norpisia persists the topic, which really is a man's concern Kedoki respond by saying that: he should be the one complaining and not her. Kedoki thinks that Norpisia has experienced so much in her short time. The concept of having children does not bother Kedoki but it keeps nagging Norpisia to the extent that "She remained awake thinking of their discussion that evening about children" (*Vanishing Herds*, 93).

During pregnancy women are normally very weak but Norpisia who is pregnant says that if they decided to move out of the farm that she would manage in the wilderness contrary to the fear that the husband has for her that she might not manage (*Vanishing Herds*,156). Norpisia is concerned about her child's career therefore, has a career chosen for their son Kinyamal that is when he grows up she wanted him to be a game warden. This, therefore, shows that Norpisia was conversant with better jobs and also she knew that her son would help in protecting the wild animals.

The narrator shows how Norpisia appreciates nature. When they enter *Olkarsis* farm she finds the air fresh, sharper and clean. The narrator describes Norpisia's experience as "A cool fresh scent of lush green vegetation caressed her nostrils pleasantly. She inhaled the luxurious air, filling her lungs with its invigorating freshness. What a contrast between the fresh air that farm and dusty and oppressive air that blasted them daily in the windswept plains. Here, every plant was olive green" (*Vanishing Herds*, 126). Norpisia seems to be excited of her surrounding unlike her husband, Kedoki. She admires the animals found in *Olkarsis* farm: "She stopped and stared, spell bound, at a large herd of black and white pedigree cattle that grazed contentedly in a field of tall green grass" (*Vanishing Herds*, 127). She is so surprised by their udders which to her are "amazingly large and heavy." She is further amazed to see "long-bearded Angora goats, with long-haired white coats and horns that faced backward and tapered off to a point" (*Vanishing Herds*, 127). Her optimism supersedes that of her husband. She is optimistic. After seeing the animals in *Olkarsis*, she believes that one day their animals will be like that and she says. Norpisia's optimism is vividly shown where the narrator says, "Hope, optimism and enthusiasm began to take root in her heart. She began to dream positive dreams. She saw herself exciting the gloomy, despondent and hopeless world and entering into a world where there was no social

stratification, such as pastoralists, herders, nomads, sedentary or any other” (*Vanishing Herds*,131).

## **Conclusion**

From the discussion of *Vanishing Herds* we find that Henry ole Kulet has defined and redefined Maasai femininity largely through the protagonist Norpisia. She is shown as a woman who champions for the well-being of the entire society. Norpisia’s deeds in saving the environment and taking care of cattle raises her image to that of a ‘saviour’ within the patriarchal society where the destiny of the community had always depended on men and not women. Ironically, in these roles Norpisia is also performing a role that society had reserved for women — that of nurture. She uses her skills to nurture the community. The character of Eddah Sein is another woman who redefines Maasai femininity in the text. She does this through prophecy which has been a preserve of the males in the Maasai community. Overall, we see women being redefined in spaces hitherto considered sanctum of men: decision making with regards to cattle and landholding, cultural belief systems like prophecy and the space of the hero in society.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EXAMINING FEMININITY IN *BLOSSOMS OF THE SAVANNAH*

#### Definition of Femininity

Boy-child is highly valued in Nasila community as presented in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and this kind is seen by the fact that ole Kaelo desired boys but, unfortunately, he ended up with two girls who were not highly regarded in this particular community: “When his wife got pregnant the second time, he prayed for a healthy baby boy ...” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 10). A girl, as a child, is not valued as a boy child and this is the reason as to why when Resian is born the father, immediately, dislikes her for he thought that the wife would bore him a boy who would continue the ole Kaelo’s name.

A boy-child carries the family’s name to the next generation. It is with this view that ole Kaelo “prayed for a healthy baby boy who would carry the Kaelo’s name to the next generation” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 10). After the wife gave birth to a baby girl, ole Kaelo becomes annoyed because he desired a baby boy therefore he hated Resian right from her childhood. The boy child continued his father’s name and in *Is It Possible?* (1971) Lerionka vows that he would continue his father’s family name, ole Sururu (*Is It Possible?*, 3). Lerionka, according to the narrator, feels that he has the responsibility “of restoring and carrying the honour of Sururu’s name to the coming generations” (*Is it Possible?*,3). The issue of boys being valuable more than girls in Maasai community is further seen when Sophia, the chief advices Lerionka’s father to remarry so as to have more son because he had to give out Lerionka to go to school (*Is It Possible?*,14).

Women were, customarily, defined by the number of children that one bore and the sex of the children. The Boy-child was more valued than girl child. Boys were given better education while

girls were married off at an early age. An example is that of ole Supeyo, ole Kedoki's friend. He has sent his boys to school and have reached university level while the girls are circumcised and married off (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 21). So girls were not valued. They were taken as sources of wealth.

Women were defined by the fact that they bore children. If one did not, she had to participate in traditions that included all the barrens to pray for a long time so as to conceive. They sung ancestral prayer songs and praises known as *Enkai Aomon Entomon*, this was a prayer exhorting God to open women's wombs. Due to the behavior shown by the community towards the barrens, the barren women were so violent and aggressive such that if any man refused their wives to participate in the prayer, one was mobbed and thoroughly beaten by these women and all the animals drawn out of their kraal and some animals were roughly slaughtered. The women were defined and thus respected if they bore children. We see that when ole Musanka blesses Taiyo he says that "She will be a mother of the next leader of Nasila and Maa" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 54). A mother was defined by her ability to conceive children.

Women were married into polygamous marriages. They had no opportunity to refuse to be married off to a polygamous family. Each wife had her own house away from the husband. It was only, when the husband wanted any of them that she would go to his house in turns according to his preference. The women were expected to be friends and care for the children, equally. Uncle Simiren's home is polygamous but they all lived in harmony and they respected their eldest mother (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 16).

Women were married to one man, as many as the man wanted. For example, Oloisudori had married six women and he still wanted to marry Resian. The women had to fulfill certain

conditions and they had to agree to live a certain pattern of life. If a woman did not pass the test, one was rejected by the man. There was a yard stick that was used to measure the women's suitability. When the women entered the marriage they were expected to respect other wives and their position in that marriage. Women and girls were not to answer back their male counterparts no matter how annoyed they were. They were to be humble and swallow their bitterness. This is the reason as to why Resian's father slaps her for talking to him in a disrespectful manner. We see this in *Daughter of Maa* (1990) when Nariku-Nkera's husband wants to marry another wife and Naloutuesha confirms that a Maasai man can marry as many wives as possible and no one can stop them. For example she asks, "When did women of Maa protest when their husbands wanted to marry?" (*Daughter of Maa*, 72). Nalotuesha reminds Nariku-Nkera that her husband would marry without even asking for consent for the men made decisions. In *To Become a Man* (1972) a woman does not make any decision and if she tries to do she is rebuked harshly. When Leshao's mother persuades Leshao's father to take Lerionka to school as the rest of the children he says, "Woman! This is my home. It is not ours. It is mine. I do not know why you keep on forgetting this even after staying with me all these years. But for the sake of saving you the trouble of trying to remember what I have repeatedly said, get this straight. This home belongs to Kerea ole Merresho alone-" (*To Become a Man*, 4).

The women seem to accept polygamy and FGM. When the girls came from Nakuru some women came to look closely at Taiyo and Resian to see if they were marriageable so as they comment them to their husbands so as they become their *inkainito* (co-wives). Others came looking for potential wives for their sons while *enkaitoyoni* (midwife) and *enkamuratani* (circumciser) came to make acquaintances with potential clients (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 37). Because of all what

women went through, we see them accepting the culture of their community. And accepting the culture of looking for their children suitors and also the fact that they had to undergo FGM.

In a polygamous family, the eldest wife was respected by everyone in the family. Many activities such as slaughtering of a goat took place in her house. This is shown by the narrator when he talks about *Yeiyo-botorr* who was the eldest wife of Simiren and who was highly respected by the other family members. This is seen when she is at Mama Milanoi's home and Resian argues with her concerning cultural aspects such as the role of the woman. Resian's mother becomes so annoyed and sees it as disrespect.

A Maasai woman does not find her own suitor. The parents find her the suitor of their choice. For example, Mama Milanoi does not find her own suitor as described by the narrator. Her parents find a suitable suitor for her: "The suitor was a young man who was reputed to be an upcoming businessman, her parents were satisfied that their daughter would not only be in safe hands, that their grandchildren would have a dependable protector. After what appeared to her to be lengthy protracted negotiations, the parties agreed and she was betrothed" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 30). As a woman, the traditions dictated that one did not resist a suitor that the parents had selected for them and that is why Mama Milanoi accepts to be married to ole Kedoki "without any resistance. Tradition did not allow her to offer any and as expected of her, she did not resist" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 30).

The culture did not allow women to find their own suitors. We see this through Mama Milanoi who upon seeing her daughter Taiyo happily and so in love with Parmuat the narrator says, "She let her heart wander and wondered what might have happened had she met a handsome young man such as the one her daughter was speaking with, fallen in love and got married. If she had

such an opportunity, what might her life have been? May be she would not have been joined at the hip with a bully like ...” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 49). This shows that Mama Milanoi desired to find her own suitor but was not allowed.

Fathers have the right to protect their daughters and that is why they choose suitors for them. This is the reason why ole Kaelo makes a decision that “he was not going to allow his daughters ignorance destroy her future. As a father, he declared, he had a God given duty to guide her to secure future; to lead her to the honey pot that would be part of her future. Whatever happened Resian was to be married to Oloisudori” (195). The parents think that they can get better suitors for their girls than the girls themselves. Women are expected to fall in love with their husbands later after the marriage. For example Resian is said that she will fall in love with the palatial home when later she sees that is set before her such that she will curse her stubbornness for her refusal to get married to Oloisudori. Fathers have a right to take the dowry of girls from their suitors without the girls knowing or even consenting to it. In *Daughter of Maa* (1990) the love to protect the daughters is seen through Nalotuesha who prefers her husband to marry Anna Nalangu rather than Anna Nalangu to be married by Joseph Malon, her daughter’s boyfriend, who is also in love with Anna Nalangu, who might end up hurting her daughter’s heart.

Girls are to be married off to people they do not make their own choice and they are to be circumcised before marriage in *Blossoms of the Savannah*. A girl has to be married off to an old person, even older than her father and is not to be questioned because that is the Maasai custom. This is evidenced by Oloisudori who is older than ole Kaelo and wants to marry Resian who is still young.



Physical appearance defines the women of the Maasai. The notion that the Maasai women are so beautiful and well-made physically is expressed by the narrator through Mama Milanoi who is tall and has full and heavy breasts, slender waist, and wide hips and seductively curved. Women within the Maa community are defined as beautiful. Resian and Taiyo are defined too as being beautiful. Resian has a pretty face. Oloisodori gets attracted to Resian and the narrator describes Resian as “he admired her physical and sensual attraction especially those of her full breasts, her strong and supple waist, the curve of her wide hips and her shapely long legs” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 114).

The definition of beauty is “big, solid, gleaming black eyes, full lips, sparkling white teeth planted on black gums.” For example, Resian is described as “taller than the old woman, had long slender limbs and high firm breasts. She had a narrow waist that tapered down, swelling out to bulging hips. Her arms and legs were slender but shapely she moved with a natural gait and pride” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 263).

A beautiful woman is defined by the beauty of her face that looked more like a baby’s face, dimples on the cheeks, white pear – like teeth planted on black gums, natural gap called *enchilaoi* that sits between upper front teeth. The waist is narrow and has long shapely legs. The eyes are large. The concept of Maasai women being beautiful is exemplified by the lady known as Oloisudori’s wife number three who is said to be as beautiful as her surroundings.

Girls, therefore, were required to sing and adorn themselves in beautiful multi-coloured beads. They sang beautifully. During ole Kaelo’s home coming party, “A bevy of beautiful young women stepped forward, their necks bedecked with layer after layer of exquisite *lesos*. They wore over their shoulders fluttered in the windy afternoon air as they moved sedately, heads

poised, chests heaving forwards and backward, knees bowing, voices raised melodiously, as they glided smoothly into an exciting traditional dance ... Their light steps were sedate, their backs and shoulders held straight and their heads haughty and graceful” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 42).

The concept of beauty and physical appearance is evidenced in *Daughter of Maa* (1990) where girls are described as pretty, slender, graceful “Their necks laden with beautiful multi-coloured bead-jewelry” (*Daughter of Maa*, 109). Seleina is described as having a slim body, had multi-coloured bead necklaces, earrings and amulets. All these according to the narrator made Seleina more beautiful “than she had ever been” (*Daughter of Maa*, 124). In *The Hunters* (1985) Namelok is described as having charming face, large brown eyes (*The Hunters*, 45). In *Moran no More* (1990) girls are described as curvy, dark complexion, brown fascinating eyes (*Moran no More*, 15). The pastor’s daughter is described as draped in red *shuka* which “clung tightly to her small body narrow waist ... she was bedecked with multi-coloured bead ornaments. Round her forehead was tied more beads that made loops around her eyes” (*Moran no More*, 21). In *Bandits of Kibi* (1999) Lilian Soila is described as having long shapely legs which were as delicate as a flamingo’s and she had splendid strong white teeth (*Bandits of Kibi*, 3).

Girls whether above eighteen years or not were, still, referred as children, *nakerai* in *Blossoms of the Savannah*. We see this when Resian and Taiyo are called, “children,” by a woman at their uncles home who wanted to find out whether they were awake so as to take tea. They obediently accepted and responded when called by this name (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 15).

Women are supposed to be submissive to their elders and it is with this reason that when the family arrived at Nasila, the narrator says that the girls' heads were touched by their uncles, cousins, aunts and other relatives (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 11). Bowing down of heads to male defines women in Maasai community as being submissive and respectful and no one could defy this at all.

Maasai women are supposed to be submissive. This is evident in Taiyo, Resian's sister in *Blossoms of the Savannah*. We find her all the time being humble towards her parents. She is described as the paragon of virtue "a true model of Maa feminine decorum". And that was because she hardly ever talked to her father unless he spoke to her, and then only to answer him "with utmost respect whatever question he has asked her" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 178). This is what was expected of a Maasai woman; not to question or argue with the elderly at any given time. A woman who was defiant has no one to support her. She is cursed and is hated by the whole community. She is referred to as a wasp. The likes that are defiant are known as wasps, *entangoroi* and an example is that of *Emakererei*, a woman who owns a sheep ranch, who fights against FGM and early marriage. The community views her as a wasp, *entangoroi*.

Women were not supposed to sit closer to men, especially; young Maasai girls were not allowed to sit closer to their father as a sign of respect. This is what we see in ole Kaelo's home where the father sits far away from the wife and his daughters. For example, when he calls Resian during the home coming party Resian sits far away from her father. Even when the father asks her to sit nearer she hardly moves (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 187). This shows that women had to show respect to men at all given times. The distance that was put there signified respect and men and women sat far away from each other.

The Maasai women and especially girls are defined by the fact that they showed total respect to their parents. The girls do not also share the same room with their father. We see this when the narrator says, “as was their habit, when their father came into the living room, the girls quickly gathered the dishes, tidied the table and, instantly, disappeared into the kitchen” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 70). It is also expected of the culture that fathers talk to their daughters through their mothers. The direct confrontation between the father and daughters is not allowed in the Maasai community. Kaelo always talked to the girls through their mother. And when he wants to speak to them they show fear for they do not always know what their father wants. Because of the respect that they owe to their father the girls have so much fear and all the time live with their father as if he was a stranger.

Men do not enter a house if girls are in. If girls are there “elders would either move to another house or if they must enter, the mother of the girls would tell her daughters to move to one of her aunt’s houses and in such a case, the elders would politely stand outside the house until the girls had left” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 179). For example when the girls stayed at their uncle’s place they never came face to face with him. They were jealously guarded.

Women are to respect men irrespective of any circumstances. They are not to question culture at all. It is with this assumption that when Resian questions the culture that keeps the women always cooking for men and that the men such as Olarinkoi keep on sitting idle, upsets not only her mother but also her eldest aunt, *Yeiyobotorr*. Women are not supposed to speak ill of men especially those who are age mates of their fathers. If they do they are considered to be ill-mannered. When Oloisudori touches Resian’s breast and she complains this to her mother by calling him “a manner less dirty old man!” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 11). Her mother rebukes her by telling her that “Soon you are going to disgrace your father by the way you speak ... you

must bridle your tongue and be careful of what you say, otherwise you will soon be called *enadua-kutuk*” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 95). This makes Resian question by saying, “But surely, *yeiyo*, mustn’t one mention the despicable character of an old man who behaves badly before a girl young enough to be his daughter?” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 95). The mother says, “However disreputable the man be ... be careful Resian. We don’t know what connection the man has with your father and it would be catastrophic if your tongue would be the one to sever his relations with other men” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 95).

The Maasai women are defined as less talkative they are friendly and hold high decorum and dignity. This is seen through wife number three who is described as “taciturn but friendly and she served them with dignity and decorum” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 194). Women are presented as not having any say against the traditions hence rendering them powerless. For example Mama Milanoi does not say anything to stop Resian from being married to Oloisudori. She does nothing to stop the insults that the girls are going through. When the plan is hatched for Resian to be forcefully taken away by Oloisudori she is part of the plan. Even when Taiyo is lied to that Resian wants to see her, as a cunning plan to have her circumcised, Mama Milanoi is part of the game.

The women too just like Mama Milanoi supports FGM, when they were still young, because they believe that it is a rite of passage. If a girl got pregnant before marriage she was circumcised at the time of birth. Circumcision of girls is, seriously, undertaken by the Maasai community. Women are respected if only they undergo this cutting. If one does not is, culturally, despised and referred to as *intoiye nemengalana*, a term that is so humiliating to the uncircumcised girls. A man: who does not circumcise his girls; has only girls as his children; is married to only one wife is not respected by the community. It is to this respect that the narrator says,

Elders had termed reckless his decision to remain married to only one wife who only bore him two daughters. They had likened him to a mono-eyed giant who stood on legs of straw ... It would take not long before his brother earned himself the derogatory name of the father of *intoiye nemengalana* (*Blossoms of the Savannah*,13).

A woman is defined and respected by the fact that she is circumcised and that is why their mother, Mama Milanoi is worried that her girls are not circumcised. This is shown by the narrator when he says, “A creepy feeling kept on gnawing at her conscience regarding her daughter’s ... status of being *intoiye nemengalana*, in the midst of a community that cherished girl child circumcision. She, however, dismissed the feeling and relegated it to the back of her mind” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 17).

If any woman was *intoiye nemengalana* she was subjected to torture and abuse from the members of the community. This is no exception to Resian and Taiyo who as they walk back to their homestead after sightseeing, they are confronted by a man who calls them *intoiye nemengalana*. According to the vagabond, a decent woman was one who was circumcised. From the man’s words we learn that a well-respected woman within the Maa community is one who has undergone FGM and if one has not, therefore, is not respected at all. And women who have undergone FGM are the ones who are defined as decent women. As the man leaves the two girls, he tells them that “You have not seen the last of me. Soon you will come to know that there is no place in our society for women of your ilk” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 19). The uncircumcised girls have no place in Nasila society. The families are not allowed to keep girls who are not circumcised at all in their homes and if they do they are not respected as well.

Girls who have not undergone FGM undergo violent experiences wherever they go. For example, during ole Kaelo's homecoming party the girls come into contact with the vagabond again who looks at them and this send shivers to the girls hence making them uncomfortable during the party (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 47). A decent woman is properly defined if one has undergone FGM. If one has not undergone FGM she, therefore, is not a decent woman according to the norms and customs of the Nasila community. Nasila Culture demands that women have to undergo FGM and Mama Milanoi, through her stream of conscious, through the narrator we learn that "she knew that as a family, they were already in breach of the tradition, for keeping at home their grown up girls as *intoiye nemengalana* instead of sending for *enkamuratani* to transform them from little girls into young women" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 61). Mama Milanoi undergoes the same practice and because of that she is respected by elders of Nasila as well as other women. If a woman does not go through this practice one becomes "a pariah" in her own clan and the larger Nasila society.

The elders hate uncircumcised girls and it is for this reason that ole Musanka, the elder who blesses ole Kaelo's family discourages the girls from listening to Minik who fights against FGM. He curses her and calls her a wasp, "*Taba! May she go down with the setting sun!*" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 53). The elders truly valued FGM and we see this when Minik *ene* Nkoitoi, the *Emekererei*; a manager at a certain sheep Ranch persuading ole Supeyo to stop the practice but he hears none of it: "When the crusader insisted on having her way, he got angry and forcefully ejected her out of his homestead, threatening to clobber her" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 22). Supeyo believes that female circumcision "was not only an honored rite of passage that had been in existence from time immemorial, but an important practice that tamed an otherwise wild gender. Like cattle that required to be dehorned, to reduce accidental injuries to each other, a

certain measure of docility was also necessary to keep more than one wife in one homestead” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 22).

To tame women hostility the community believed that a man had to marry many wives. Because as ole Supeyo remembers the adage that says, “Two women in one homestead were two potent pots of poison” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 22). And that is the reason as to why they need to be circumcised. The women are a times defined as being naïve especially when desperate. That is why Resian naively accepts to follow Olarinkoi thinking that he was to save him from the evil plans of Oloisudori and her father. She jumps into conclusion without thinking much about it only she ends up in a worse situation than she expected. She also believes that “Olarinkoi meant no harm and that was the reason why he left her alone in that shack while he, went elsewhere to find himself a place to sleep” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 224).

Women are also, physically, abused by their husband in case they refused to consent to their demand. For example, Olarinkoi who believes Resian is his wife beats her until she loses her conscious, “Then suddenly, he hit her so hard on her ribcage with his elbow, knocking the wind out of her. He hit her again on the side of her head and she passed out” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 227). This seems to agree with Spencer (1988) who argues that within the Maasai any woman who showed any stubbornness was thoroughly beaten.

The Nasila community perceives girls as weaklings and therefore, Mama Milanoi is also worried about girls sightseeing places that they do not know. She cautions them to be weary of strangers who “might take advantage of their unfamiliarity” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 17). But the girls feel that their mother’s misplaced fears “as born of the misconception by the old people that girls were weaklings, incapable of deciding what was right” (17). Women are viewed as weak.



Although ole Kaelo gets disturbed by the fact that Oloisudori wants to marry off Resian but he does not cry like the way Mama Milanoi does. She becomes uncomfortable at night. She does not sleep and she gets distracted the whole night.

Mama Milanoi also turned in her bed. She tossed and tossed. As a woman with child and about to give birth would writhe and cry with pain, she writhed and cried with pain. Her silent anguished cry burned deep in her heart and in the pit of her stomach like an inferno in the bowels of the earth. Yes, she was inconsolable. Was that what she set out to achieve in Nasila? She lamented bitterly (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 114).

Women are the ones to do house chores. We see this after the homecoming party of ole Kaelo that “Resian remained behind for a moment helping their mother and other women gather and move utensils to the kitchen and tidy the room” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 55). While their father sat in the sitting room. The mothers have to prepare their daughters on issues pertaining to FGM and marriage. They have to prepare them properly so as no problem occurs. Pertaining to this ole Kaelo tells the wife “Now listen, you must immediately start counseling the girls to understand their roles as potential wives of the men of Nasila. Prepare them to appreciate their future responsibilities as mothers and home builders” (62). A woman’s role is to prepare the daughters on “challenges of responsible womanhood and motherhood”. If she does not do it she is accused by the community as being irresponsible. If the daughters misbehave, the mother is seen as the one who has failed.

A Maasai woman had to play a dutiful role of a faithful and obedient wife. For example ole Kaelo decides that the girls should be counseled about them being “potential wives of the men of

Nasila” (62). And that they should understand their roles therefore the issue of circumcision of girls in this community requires a thorough preparation. He also says that he would engage Parmuat, the teacher to teach about the culture and finally to call on *enkamuratani*, the circumciser, to carry out her role. Mama Milanoi does not question for culture demands that no one is to object the culture. If one does it no one will be on his or her side. In *Daughter of Maa* (1990) the woman it is said, “had to take care of her husband’s interests, cattle, sheep, goats, and above all, his physical well-being” (*Daughter of Maa*, 108). In *To Become a Man* (1972) a woman made fire, made the house warm, cooked food and prepared milk. Leshao’s house had no fire, no food and Leshao kept begging for food from neighbours due to the fact that his mother had died but when his aunt arrives there is joy “because the hut was warm with fire, lit by his aunt (*To Become a Man*, 50). This reminds Leshao of his late mother and the narrator says, “This was the first time since his mother died that he had found the hut lit by fire” (*To Become a Man*, 50).

The Maasai women are defined by their caring character in *Blossoms of the Savannah*. We see this through Nabaru who quickly likes Resian, helps her regain her health and finally helps her to escape. She loves Resian more than how Mama Milanoi loves her; as her own daughter. She feeds her well and provides her with blankets and *lesos* (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 243). Maasai women are defined by love that they show to children who are not their own. We see this kind of love through Minik, who helps Resian and loves her passionately as if she is her own daughter. She provides Resian with a two fully furnished house equipped with blankets, sheets and cartons containing utensils and foodstuffs. In *To Become a Man* (1972) women care for children who are not theirs as if they were their own children. The women such as Mbulung’s mother provide Leshao with food any time he begs her. The women feel sad when they see Leshao badly beaten

and blood covering his sheet (*To Become a Man*, 33). Leshao's aunt begs Leshao's father to allow her to cook for Leshao during his circumcision period (*To Become a Man*, 70). She stays with Leshao and the father many days later and he recovers.

It is the work of women to cook. We see this when women such as Mama Milanoi, the eldest aunt in the family, *Yeiyo botorr* and the two girls cooking in the kitchen. In their midst there is no man as they work. A woman is supposed to be so perfect that we see Mama Milanoi saying about her girls that "when they eventually get married and are accused of laziness, or when their husbands complain that they can't prepare tasty meals, they will not blame us" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 77). A woman is not supposed to be lazy and that one is supposed to be good at preparing meals. Mothers are to teach their daughters on how to become good women. If a woman is not good their mothers are blamed and anytime a woman does wrong the husband abuses her in relation to the mother.

It is the role of women to cook and present meals in cases where their husbands had visitors. We see this when Mama Milanoi prepares meals and also serves the husband's visitors (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 183). Girls are to help their mother's in house chores. This is evident when after Oloisudori and his friends leave ole Kaelo's home the narrator says, "Later in the evening after Taiyo and Resian had cleared the table, washed all utensils and cleaned the kitchen" (184).

The women have to do all house chores such as drawing water from the river. They have to carry the water containers from the river; on their backs although they were heavy. Women look after sheep, goats and young ones for example Olarinkoi's mother look after their sheep and goats. *Daughter of Maa* (1990) through Seleina we learn that it was women's role to do domestic chore such as fetching water from the river, fetching firewood and milking (149). Fedder (1974) argues

that a young girl helps her mother with housework, carries water and looks young babies (Fedder, 40). In *To Become a Man* (1972) the narrator says that behind the bush where Leshao was making preparations of a bird for his circumcision “was the path which led to the village, the path which the women followed when they went for water below the cliffs” (*To Become a Man*, 22).

Women have to learn habits, traditions and culture and according to the narrator “this would make their parents and the Nasila people proud of them” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 71). It is because of this that ole Kaelo employs Parmuat so as to coach the girls on the traditions of the society. It is expected of them to know everything about the culture such that they do not violate any of it. Women uphold the moral values in the Maa community and as such are presented as violent when they find out a man who torments a girl. They beat him senselessly and even punish the whole community such as refuse to milk, cook and light fire until the elders come in to settle the matter. The offender is made to walk long distances so as to humiliate him so as in the future he will not repeat (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 117). Spencer (1988) also says that during the women blessing ceremony the barren women are agitated, cry, shiver, shake and may even faint. They may attack any man who refuses their wife to join the gathering. They also attack his animals (Spencer, 201).

There are some decisions that are not made by women. It is the head of the house who does. Taiyo’s mother says that the request that Parmuat coaches the girls is to be decided by their father for that is his territory. In most cases ole Kaelo makes decisions such as moving from Nakuru to Nasila, starting up his business, who the girls would be married to. Men have a right to manipulate women’s body and nobody questions about it and this is seen when the vagabond wants to rape both Taiyo and Resian and the narrator says, “Resian thought how hazardous it was

to live in a society where men thought they had a right to every woman's body" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*,146). In *Daughter of Maa* (1990) men too made decisions for example when Joseph Malon starts drawing away his love from Seleina, Seleina is tempted to challenge him but the narrator says, "It was not her nature to challenge him" (*Daughter of Maa*, 63). At one point Seleina insists that she put up with Joseph Malon but he authoritatively says, "It is the man who decides."

Men value the traditions more than the women they love. Parmuat's love and respect for traditions overwhelms his love for Taiyo and the narrator says that he finds Nasila culture as valuable because it gives him identity. It is a yard stick to be used to measure when he went of its boundary. It was the father and mother who,

Brought up and nurtured its children to maturity. Nasila culture was too valuable and too important to be abandoned in its exchange of a woman's love. But was Taiyo just another woman? He searched and searched his heart again. At the end, it was the wisdom of Maa that prevailed. Its founder had said a man could never run away from his clan and his age-set .He declined her love (140).

The men demean women. They do not speak to them politely, for example, Olarinkoi speaks harshly at Resian at any given point for example he tells her, "Don't stand there staring like a fool ..." (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 223). Further mistreatment and demeaning is seen when Olarinkoi says, "You, woman, look here! ... You can either cook or keep standing stupidly and die of hunger. The choice is yours. Should you choose to cook, here is a piece of meat. The knife is over there. Of course you are not blind you can see the sufurias. There is a whole bag of maize meal there and water is in that container. There is paraffin in that can and you can collect

firewood from a stack outside the house. Any questions ?” (223). This kind of dictatorial tone is seen in *Daughter of Maa* (1990) when Seleina insists that she wants to go and live with Joseph Malon but Joseph Malon authoritatively says, “It is the man who decides.”

### **Redefinition of Femininity**

Resian, Taiyo’s sister has been presented as a person with great enthusiasm for education. For her, she says that she does not want to work in the shop that their father had started in their rural home instead she says that she wants to go back and join Egerton University. She wants to pursue a course in Veterinary doctor. She also wants to read everything until she graduates. At the end she wants to be called Dr. Resian. Being in a community that encourages early marriages for young girls Resian adamantly tells her sister that she does not want to be a parent. “At least not in the foreseeable future. I want to study. When I’ll have obtained my degree, other peripheral matters, such as a husband, children and such may be considered” (18). For her, Resian places her education at the forefront and she is not ready to relent it.

Being in a community that encourages early marriages for young girls Resian adamantly tells her sister that she does not want to be a parent. She wants to study and obtain a degree. For her matters to do with marriage and children should come much later. For her, Resian places her education at the forefront and she is not ready to relent it.

As Taiyo is busy doing chores like ferrying breakfast from the kitchen to the table Resian as described by the narrator is “Fragile and pretty in her velvet and lace morning gown, her hair piled upon her head, slumped in an armchair, her nose as always buried in a book; reading” (65). Resian has redefined the concept that women are only supposed to do house chores, instead, for her reading comes first.

Contrary, to the notion that women are meant to do house chores, Resian defies this while her sister tidies up their room, Resian sits down to read and when asked by Taiyo to assist in arranging the room she tells Taiyo to do her part and for her she will do hers the following day. This presents Resian as going over the traditional roles of women performing house chores. Resian's passion for reading is so strong that any time she has time, she is reading alone. The narrator says, "When they later walked into the practice room they found Resian waiting for them, sitting as she always did hunched up in a chair, her nose determinedly buried in a book, reading" (137).

Within the Maasai community, initially, girls were not educated. As soon as they were born, their parents choose for them suitor's. Immediately they reached the age of puberty, they underwent through Female Genital Mutilation. Upon their recovery, they were sold off to their suitors without questioning. Therefore, when the author, presents a young teenager Maasai girl, Resian, with such an insatiable appetite clearly shows that Henry ole Kulet wants to reconstruct the perception of girl child education.

The two girls had acquired education. They had not only gotten education but also had intermingled with children from other cultures. The girls as a result of intermingling with other girls from other communities know very little about the Nasila culture. Their mother defines them as children of undefined culture. Their desire for education makes them plan how to escape FGM by going back to Nakuru and enroll at the University. Resian says, "We must beat them to it. We must convince him to allow us to go before they prevail upon him to embrace the primitive, backward, outdated and archaic traditions" (35).

What seems to liberate and redefine the women in *Blossoms of the Savannah* is education. Minik had gone to Makerere University where she studied veterinary medicine and acquired the name of *Emakererei*. Because of education, Minik finds the community's ways barbaric and that is why she fights FGM in this community. Taiyo and Resian are presented as not cowards and they are not afraid of anything. They want to "sightsee around the neighborhood" (16). But her mother cautions them to be careful because of "strangers who might take advantage of their unfamiliarity" (17). The narrator says, "The girls looked at one another and giggled as they dismissed their mother's misplaced fears as born of the misconception of the old people that girls were weaklings, incapable of deciding what was right" (17). Therefore, the author wants to show that girls are not weaklings and they can protect themselves. Wanyonyi (2003) argues, in his abstract that the "introduction of Western education has precipitated change in the status of Maasai women; a transformation that has created tension and conflict. The result of the change is characters who have a dual identity, a duality that has myriad challenges, but a duality that ole Kulet seems to espouse" Education, too, in *Blossoms of the Savannah* changes the manner in which the characters present themselves in terms of arguing which plays a part in their redefinition.

When the two girls are faced by a stranger who attacks them, the two girls are strong and ready to defend themselves. Resian tells the stranger to leave her sister. Taiyo too tells him to leave her hand. She further tells him, "We are not the kind of women you have in mind!" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 19). This presentation shows that the girls are strong and not easily scared.

Taiyo is presented as aggressive towards her love for Parmuat. She cannot hide her love towards Parmuat even with her father and mother present and with the whole community looking at her. Taiyo, a young teenager, reminisces on how she battled with the father for denying her



permission to travel to Mombasa “with other young men and women who had been selected by an extravaganza” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 2). Taiyo says, “She had stubbornly put up a spirited struggle with him but the battle was so predictably and utterly lost” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 2). It is rare for a young Maasai girl to be stubborn to the father. This quality that is placed here by the author redefines what it is to be a young Maasai girl in this particular community which is culturally reserved. Taiyo is presented as a person who believes in her talents and does not want her father to stop her. Taiyo is extremely, talented in music. She excelled in music festivals “and was awarded and garlanded. Broadcasting stations recognized her talent and encouraged her to take music as a career” (45).

Resian is presented as half-fearful; half-defiant which annoys her father. Resian's strength is seen even in her dream. We see her thinking of how she was going to deal with *enkamurutani*, circumciser. She was determined in her dream that the circumciser was not going to circumcise another girl:

She was going to deal with her firmly and finally. She took hold of the old woman’s bony arm. Her fingers were now laced firmly through the old woman’s gripping the shriveled claw-like fingers that held the *Olmurunya* and twisting the hand mercilessly. The old woman shrieked with pain. Resian pounded the old woman’s head with a mallet she had picked from the ground and hit her pleadingly. When the old mono eyed *enkoiboni* came to rescue the *enkamurutani* it was as if all Resian’s energy had been reserved for her. Like a ferocious leopard, she descended upon her with vicious blows completely disfiguring her face and battering one eye. The old witch tried to say something as if to curse her, but she

would not let her. She hit her hard on the head like a snake and she sprawled flat on the ground, lifeless (249, 250).

Resian is strong and not a weak character. She strongly faces her father and tells him point blank that she cannot be married to a person of that nature as Oloisudori. She is a redefined woman and cannot accept to be married to a man whom she does not like and a man she does not consent to. Resian is presented as a spirited fighter. When she was told that she was going to be circumcised Resian reasons that Olarinkoi may take her as a wife, circumcise her but mentally she would refuse to subdue to all this. She was going to refuse it mentally and physically where she was able to do it: “She resolved to remain focused and she prayed for strength and endurance to be able to bear all those misfortunes” (235). Resian really puts a spirited fight such that we see her being a very a very strong woman.

The girls are presented as being worried concerning customs that was unfair to them. They do what they believe is fair for them and they are not scared of what will befall them. For example Taiyo, says that she does not care the fact that the community called them *intoiye nemengalana*. For her, she says, “What I know is that my body belongs to me. I belong to myself” (34). She firmly says, “Only when I am dead would anybody mutilate my body” (34). The girls in Maasai community are supposed to undergo FGM immediately they reach puberty but Resian and Taiyo so far have not undergone FGM. Although the community refers to the two girls as *Intoiye nemengalana* but the two are not at all scared about it. To them, FGM is a culture that dehumanizes a woman and the two girls are ready to fight it at all cost.

Resian is presented as a spirited fighter against the custom that is against women in the Maasai community. When forced to remain behind so as to cook for Oloisudori she stands her ground by

arguing that Taiyo should be left too. She questions her parents and argues: “It was wrong for them as a family to allow a visitor, whoever he was, to dictate as to who amongst the members of the family should attend to him!” (180).

Resian is determined to recapture or reconstruct the societal myth that women should keep always cooking and getting tired for men who just sit down and order them around. She strongly believes that men too should sweat just like any woman. She firmly says, “It is the likes of Olarinkoi I am mad at, and all those other males who come here ordering us to do that or the other for them, simply because they are males” (78). She gives an example with women who visit them; she says that those women who visit give them leeway to respond to their requests. Resian reminds her aunt, equally, her mother that “But as we burn our fingers here, Mr. Olarinkoi is dozing off comfortably in our living room waiting for his lunch and possibly a little angry and impatient with us for delaying it” (78).

Minik-ene -Nkoitoi, the *Emakererei*, a manager at a certain Sheep Ranch called *Intare-Naaju* is presented as a person who redefines femininity by crusading against girl circumcision. Minik, when trying to persuade ole Supeyo to stop FGM, “--- he got angry and forcefully ejected her out of his homestead, threatening to clobber her” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 22). People like ole Supeyo held adamantly to the culture within the Maasai community. Later as narrated by the narrator, ole Supeyo calls Minik a wasp and he says that Minik “was a great threat to the Maa culture” (22). Although Minik becomes an outcast in Nasila but she does not give up. She starts a Girls’ Rescue Centre that helps to rescue girls who are about to undergo FGM and early marriages. She offers them job and accommodation. She gives them scholarship so as to pursue their education.

Although Olarinkoi forcefully attacks Resian but she is so determined. She fights courageously by biting his thumb when he attempts to rape her. “Then desperately she took the last chance of self-defense and self-preservation. Mustering all her strength she thrust his thumb into her mouth; sunk her teeth into the flesh like a ferocious animal and tenaciously held onto it, tugging at it fiercely like a lioness. She could feel the flesh tearing and she tasted the salt of his blood as it filled her mouth but she clung unto the thumb as Olarinkoi howled with pain. He tried to push her away but she held on. He cried out loudly, but she was ...” (227). Initially, women depended on men to protect and fight for them, but Resian defends herself against the drunken Olarinkoi.

After being attacked by strangers, Resian’s strength is strengthened and she resolves that “she was a combatant in a war zone and that one day she will team up with *Emakererei* to fight for women and girl child rights” (146). That determination and strength that Resian has, presents a new Maasai woman who has been redefined and ready to fight the Nasila’s traditions. Resian detests the cultural norms of Nasila and in her heart she is determined to fight against it. This ‘fight’ redefines her position as a Maasai woman. Taiyo too feels that if they were born sons “Most likely we would have been let loose to romp about in the village and gather our experiences as we go along” (74). With this kind of reasoning, the author shows that the two girls are in search of liberating themselves in this given society that they find firmly held in cultural norms that sideline the women and sees them as object to be directed by their men counterparts.

Resian’s determination leads her to admire two people who are women, she calls them role models. Minik is admired by Resian for her fight against FGM while Wangari Maathai for her fight against forest destruction and her advocating for preservation of forest. Minik, Resian’s model, fights FGM and forced marriages of girls to old men. She does not fear whether she

becomes an outcast. She is determined to reconstruct the society's norms and culture. Minik rescues girls from the circumciser and organizes to take them back to school.

Taiyo's determination to fight against the Maa culture is, further, explained by the narrator. The narrator says since they relocated to Nasila community she has always considered herself to be in a war zone against the Nasila culture which was debilitating. To her it is a kind of war for liberation of the Nasila women. Her determination is fired by the fact that they have an example of a woman who is a good leader and they took her as a role model, Minik.

Taiyo determination to fight against women's rights leads her to compose a song that ridicules three women who she thinks are out to oppress women. She particularly wants to sing to witches (*enkasakutoni*) who are ready to curse *intoiye nemengalana*, another group that she is ready to curse is midwife (*enkaitoyoni*) who spies on girls who are giving birth and are not circumcised and lastly the *Enkamuratani* (circumciser). Through songs Taiyo is ready to fight for her feminism and her own right as a woman.

Resian believes that if women said no to detectable culture men would do nothing. She was proud to be *intoiye nemengalana* and says that she "would not trade her position for anything." The four women led by Minik, Resian, Taiyo and Nabaru promises to fight and end *emuratane-o-ntoiye* so as to come to an end. Resian is adamant and says, "Yes, because we are females, a male in the name of a clan brother is sought to come along and teach us the ABCD of a good Nasilian wife so that we shall please our future husbands. No, I refuse to be taught. I will either be taught at the university what is universally beneficial to all mankind or to be taught nothing!" (75). Resian does not support the fact that they have to be taught about the Nasila tradition. She says that she will be taught at the University what she feels will be important.

Resian is presented as a defiant and outspoken character who is ready to fight off practices that humiliate women. She questions her aunt *Yeiyobotorr* and her own mother: “Do we go to all these lengths to please some lazy bunch of busybodies who do nothing but lounge about in the living rooms, yawning and stretching, waiting for tasty food to land on the table before them?” (78). She loudly asks why women have to cook for men who are just seated waiting to be fed without participating. She refuses to be silent on such issues. She adamantly says that she totally disagree to be brought up so as her main purpose is to please the male counterparts. Henry ole Kulet gives strength to Resian to air out her grievances as a woman so as to challenge the norms that are experienced in this particular community. She further points by saying that “they can also cook, and they can, and should also learn to please us females” (78). She also wants men to do the same as women.

Resian is defiant and cannot be coerced into being married to a man who is not her choice. She tells Oloisudori that he is mad if he thinks that she is going to be her wife. She says that she can only be his wife upon her dead body. She even says that they both can kill her, that is her father and Oloisudori and take her while she is dead to his palatial home. “Without fearing the customs, Resian declines completely the fact that she is to be married off without her consent.” She questions: “Was there a curse for being born a woman that took away her right to her own body or her own mind?” (210).

Resian is presented as unrelenting character such that she is defined as a hard nut to crack. She is obstinate, defiant, an example of the new undefined culture, has an independent mind. She is hard to be handled. “If her father thought she was docile and that he would just call her and hand her over to Oloisudori, he was in for a rude shock. No amount of intimidation or threats could

easily break her. She always said she knew her rights and would not allow anyone to trample them” (120).

Resian is defensive and a seeker of justice towards women. She argues against the decision made by the *Imolelian* community about the two men who almost raped them. She argues that the thugs should be arrested and they should be taken to court. Each should get a jail term of not less than twenty years. Taiyo supports Resian’s argument. Taiyo feels that their “trauma cannot be appeased by a mere two heifers while the villains are walking freely who knows, they could even right now be stalking another pair of young innocent girls ...” (171). The girls tell their mother openly that the culture was unfair to the women.

Resian is presented as argumentative. She argues so well against the issue of FGM. FGM is a subject in Maasai land, customs and culture which could not be argued against, especially, by a young Maasai girl but Resian seems well outspoken in this subject and seems that she does not fear at all. She is ready to fight against it. She tells Taiyo about how she told the mother concerning FGM. She says that FGM is a tool of oppression. Resian does not believe in being coerced to do something that she does not like at all. She puts a spirited fight against being told that she would be left to receive Oloisudori the following morning. She pleads not to be left even though the father is adamant too. This aspect of Resian standing up so tough in her argument redefines what it is to be a female in Maasai community. The narrator says, “She shook her head fiercely. She couldn’t do it, she wouldn’t do it, she declared” (176).

Resian argues with her father by saying that he can kill her than hand over her to Oloisudori. Even when the father slaps her Resian stands firm on what she believes in. She adamantly tells her father. She repeats by telling him that she would rather die than get married to a monster. She

calls him an *Ol-ushuushi* like Oloisudori, “Never! Never! If I don’t die and live to be eighty, I will still go to the university, *Papaai*, I tell you! I hope you will be there to witness my graduation. But for now, I can as well reveal to you, and that I have told your friend Oloisudori what I think of him. Yes, he is a monster, he is a gangster, and he is a bank robber and an extortionist per excellence!” (214).

Resian strongly argues against men and their barbaric ways of continuing insisting on FGM for women and the way it is performed forever. Immediately, Resian sees Oloisudori, ole Kaelo’s business partner, she becomes infuriated and hates him. She tells her mother, “Whoever he is, Yeiyo,” said Resian angrily, “he is a manner less dirty old man!” (95). Resian is presented as a character who questions a lot on the things that she feels is not right. She is not comfortable of the fact that Joseph Parmuat is to coach them about the community values. She says to Taiyo, “I am beginning to think it disadvantageous being a woman in this society” (74). She further questions, “But I keep wondering what would have happened had we been sons rather than daughters. Do you think father would have looked for a clan sister to coach us and take us through the dim cultural paths of Nasila?” (74).

Resian deconstructs, as well as, reconstructs the idea that women cannot stand up and question anything. She is so enthusiastic that she does not fear her eldest aunt whom other children, as well as, wives had so much fear. Taiyo also does not want to be left behind. She wants to join Minik together with Resian so that they can fight the aspect of FGM. Resian at any given moment finds time to rebuke men. She believes it was men who originated the story about women initiating FGM. She says men started such myths so as to “blame women for everything that works against them”.



Resian is presented as inquisitive and intolerant to cultural practices that dehumanize women. She puts her mother to task by arguing against FGM. For her, she says, “if one discovered a nasty but potent medicine that once taken cured an ailment, must they continue to swallow it every day-ten-years down the lines” (91). She says, she finds such a kind of thing “not only ridiculous but also absurd” (91). Resian questions her mother on what is the value of FGM to women. When her mother questions whether men are the ones who are continuing the cultural rite, Resian answers so intelligently so that the narrator says that she has done it philosophically. She says, “Even if I am reluctantly convinced that it was women and not men who initiated that obnoxious ritual who provoked the women to do so? The *Ilarikon* who were purported to have pushed women into mutilating their sexuality were men. And the ancient *Ilarikon* were no different from today’s *Ilarikon*. The ancient *Ilarikon* were sadists and despotic. Today’s *Ilarikon* are worse. In addition, to being despotic, they are oppressive tyrants; and no one of their ways of oppressing us is to demand that FGM be perpetuated against us forever!” (92).

Taiyo is also presented as being inquisitive. She felt that his father was troubled therefore, she found herself questioning him, “*Papaai* ... Is something wrong?” She further questions the father about Oloisudori, ole Kaelo’s business partner. She asks him whether she was the one who had financed their business. Taiyo questions a tradition that is hardly questioned. She is also ready, just like Resian, to go against the traditions of the society. She openly questions Parmuat whether he loves her, “Joseph deny before me right now that you love me. Do it right now!” (135). Taiyo is more determined to stand against the culture that is inconsiderate to her feelings. She firmly says, “I cannot accept that a culture that does not feed me, clothe me, or house me comes to control my life. Our lives belong to us, Joseph. The destiny of our lives is in our own hands. We should guard it jealously” (136).

Taiyo is presented as being overwhelmed by Parmuat's love such that she goes to look for him in his house. We see her requesting her parents to allow Parmuat to coach them about the culture of Nasila. Taiyo knows that Parmuat comes from the same clan as her family but she does not want to hear that is the reason as to why they should not be together. She says that she does not care about the oppressive Nasila culture. She asks why she should care about the violating culture while it did not care for her own rights. She is not shy and she tells him that she knows he is in love with just like the way she is in love with him.

Resian is very observant and can easily foretell when the father is in trouble. For example the narrator says that, "Just then, their father returned. Resian looked at him and perceived something queer about him. She was alarmed. Did she imagine it or was there something unnatural about him? She wondered. And what was it?" (105). As a keen observer she can be able to detect a slight tremor in his father's voice upon seeing Oloisudori. She also detects a measure of desperation and fear in his father. Faint sheen of perspiration was also noted by Resian, who is very observant and keen expressing her highly levels of intelligence which is extraordinary.

Resian is quite observant and proves her reasoning with facts. She meets the father smiling in the morning and she detects that there is something unusual. She finds that her smile was artificial. She thinks that he was insincere. She questions herself, "Where was his usual insensate anger that she had come to expect whenever he found her in a room? Why were his eyes shifty and withdrawn into their sockets like one who had little or no sleep at all?" (122). When she feels like asking the father so as to be allowed to go to Nakuru and enroll as a student at Egerton University she feels a kind of premonition that all is not well.

The two girls are brilliant and have plans made without their parents knowing of how to exhort information from Oloisudori without him knowing. They are good at observing their parents and that they are ready to beat them at their own game. The narrator says that the girls also wanted to show that they were young modern women who had their own pride, self-respect and self-esteem, “They wanted him to know that they were not rudderless objects drifting in the sea without direction” (200). They were wanted Oloisudori to know that they were redefined women and so:

They already had their aims and projections that could only be enchanted by the lofty ideas they held and the desire for higher learning at university and career development. It was therefore, an insult to their intelligence, dignity and integrity to think that mere material things such as the gifts he lavishly gave them would sway them from the goals they had already set for themselves (201).

Taiyo and Resian hate archaic culture of female circumcision which they considered ‘obnoxious, repugnant and a threat to the health of the young girls’ (267). They do not want to get married to a man who would never give them a chance to express themselves as their mother “they concluded that if ever they too get married they would only enter into such a contract if they were considered as equal partners with spouses, and had a say in all matters that affected them ... They did not want to be like their mother who never participated in decision making. They want to be different women altogether. They declared that they would never lose their liberty and their rights in exchange of marital accommodation” (282).

The women are also presented in different ways according to their dressing. Resian and Taiyo dress modernly. Resian’s hair has braids which she styles with pins when Oloisudori is to visit

their home, Resian is described as wearing maroon taffeta dress, cream and maroon silken scarf, golden colour earrings and “a maroon handbag that matched the colour of her shoes” (202,203). Her mother too is described as dressed in modern clothes. During the home coming party the narrator says, “She was resplendently dressed in purple silk ...” (48). This kind of dressing redefines them since before women wore *lesos* and *shukas*.

The Maa community prefers boy children in a family and one who has them is highly regarded. On the other hand a man has to marry more than one wife so as to be culturally accepted but for ole Kaelo, he only marries one wife, Mama Milanoi and even though she does not bear him boy children for him he is contented. Meaning that a child is a child whether a boy or a girl and marrying one wife for ole Kaelo is quite in order. Kaelo loves the wife and the narrator says that “nature had not, however, been totally inconsiderate. It rewarded him with a gem in a form of his wife-Jane Milanoi” (9). When Simiren, ole Kaelo’s brother, informed ole Kulet about what the elders had said about him remaining married to only one wife and calling him “he called the clan elders megalomaniacs who were still trapped in archaic customs and traditions that were better buried and forgotten” (13). This shows that ole Kaelo appreciates and respect his love towards his wife.

Appreciation of femininity is shown through ole Kaelo who works to fulfill his dream. He builds them a good house. In his own words he says, “This is the home that I have always dreamed I would one day build for you and my beloved daughters” (31). This shows that even though the wife does not provide him with a boy-child but still he appreciates that the wife bears him girls for to him a child is a child.

The women, Mama Milanoi and her two girls enjoy freedom in their own family we see them happy especially when they are taken to their new home. The narrator says, “while his wife and daughters jumped out of the pick-up excitedly and scrambled to the gate of their new house jubilantly, Parsemei ole Kaelo remained behind for a few minutes” (27). We see that the women are given freedom to be happy as opposed to historical culture where they are under oppression and cannot talk at all. Mama Milanoi, through her stream of conscious says “that she always trusted her husband to do the best for her and her children” (29). She, further, says that “Kaelo had always been responsible” (29).

Mama Milanoi is presented as a happy woman who has been given freedom by the husband and not oppressed by others. One, she is the only married wife to the husband, her children are girls and that they have not even been forced or asked to undergo FGM. The narrator says that “That evening, Mama Milanoi, the perfect hostess, a woman with glamour. She was resplendently dressed in purple silk and moved happily from one group to the other talking cheerfully: her laughter ringing out pleasantly. That was her home and that was her evening. And she intended that no one present in that living room would leave with any shred of doubt in his or her heart as to who was *Enopeny enkag* of the ole Kaelo homestead”(48). This demonstrates that Mama Milanoi was not oppressed by the husband. She seems happy and enjoying a lot of freedom.

Kaelo is presented as a person who cares for the feeling of her girls. Although he is faced with the fact that he has to give out Resian for marriage but he is remorseful. Kaelo’s heart for the two girls overrides the customs. The narrator says,

It excruciatingly pained him to think that circumstances would force him to hand any of them to a man who was not their choice. He thought of Taiyo, his favourite

daughter and the apple of his eye. How terrible it would be, he thought sorrowly, to see her cry forlornly, while questioning the sincerity of his love for her, and asking him the reason for his betrayal. Even Resian, with her sullenness and gracelessness that he disliked he had found out surprisingly that he had a soft spot for her. He cried and his heart bled for her ... (113).

We see that ole Kaelo loves the two girls irrespective of their gender and does not want to just sell off her daughters with no love from any man. He treasures them unlike the community who would have found the reason to sell them off as any other woman.

Kaelo, although has girls, but is presented as having a duty to defend them at all cost. When he heard about his daughters near – rape incident he almost became mad. He raved “like a buffalo that had been infected with the East Coast Fever that was known as *Olmilo*. He was aggressively spoiling for a fight. Every now and then he groaned loudly like one in pain and clicked his tongue like a madman, he muttered to himself, making nasty waspish remarks” (160). This therefore, shows that ole Kaelo appreciates the fact that he has daughters as children and that he is ready to shield them at whatever cost.

Delegation of work within ole Kaelo’s family gives equal responsibility to each member, making them happy and eager to make the party a success. Mama Milanoi is at the tables to ensure that the trays “that came out of the kitchen laden with meat delicacies, were sorted out and arranged appropriately” (41). Taiyo was busy slicing chunks of ox tongue into manageable pieces a job she did with dexterous fingers “and Resian was busy transferring glasses from the side board onto a nearby table” (41). Kaelo is presented as a person who values his wife and children and trusts that they will do a perfect job irrespective of their gender.

The voice of women in decision making is shown through Mama Milanoi who has been presented as a person who is trusted by the husband. They discuss together what is challenging them in their home such as the threats made by Oloisudori to marry Resian. They collectively come up with the solutions to difficult situations such as marrying off Resian to Oloisudori. They also discuss how they will lure Taiyo into agreeing to visit Resian ironically so as she can be circumcised.

The author presents a community that is ready to defend the girl child for example when the community of *Ilmolelian* learnt about ole Kaelo's daughters who were about to be raped, the community defended them by punishing the offenders thoroughly. After the girls' awful incident of almost being molested the community started respecting them. The stares stopped and they were greeted with respect. The young men became friendly to them and the elderly too respected them.

Nabaru, who was to nurse Resian back to health after she had been circumcised, is presented as caring. She kindly takes care of Resian as her own child. She feeds her, gives her water, milk *olpurda*. She brought more blankets for her to cover herself so as not to catch cold and *lesos* to cover her body. She reveals to Resian all what had been planned. She plans on how she was going to rescue her out of that place and which she does until she reaches Minik's place. This presents the fact that women are ready to assist one another out of difficult situation. Later Nabaru joins Minik, Resian and Taiyo to fight off the FGM.

Nabaru is presented as a good schemer who arranges for Resian's escape without being noticed. She exchanges bitter words with Olarinkoi who follows them to the lorry that was to free them away. She fearlessly tells him, "Away with you, you good for nothing, Osuji ...". She compares

him to *embarie* that waits for the lion to kill then it steals from him because it is a coward: “How could you cheat this child who was desperately looking for help as she ran away from that villain called Oloisudori? You took advantage of her trust in you, just like *embarie* does. That is exactly what you are: *Embarie*. A good for nothing *osuuji*” (254). Resian too is not afraid to give her piece of mind to Olarinkoi. She says, “You, stupid Olarinkoi, you are worse than Oloisudori, “But the two of you have one thing in common; warped minds” (255).

Some things like prophesying was done by the Maasai men especially the Oloiboni or elders of the Maasai but Olarinkoi’s mother had prophesized about Resian’s family and that she would be married to her son. Olarinkoi’s mother is presented as *enkoiboni* who foretold the future and had the ability to see. Nabaru tells Resian, “Mostly you have only heard of a male holder of that position called *oloiboni*. Female ones are there but very rare. This particular one is famous for her prediction and prophecies that always nearly come true” (237).

The *Intapuka-e-Maa* girls sang songs to show that although they are *intoiye nemengalana* but they were Blossoms of the Savannah, they were worthy. They were ready to be doctors, engineers and teachers. They believe that they would stand side by side with the men and build the nation together. The author presents women who at the end triumphs over cultural injustices.

## **Conclusion**

The text *Blossoms of the Savannah* starts from a point where we see the society in which Resian lives as valuing the boy-child more than the girl-child. The fact that Mama Milanoi has not given her husband a boy stands him in bad stead with his peers. Conversely, we acknowledge that a Maasai woman is also defined by her ability to give her husband a male child, an heir. The issue also defines a man in that one with several males is on his way to occupy a prestigious position



in the society than the men who do not have sons. Generally, we see the definition of Maasai femininity to occur in the domestic spaces within Maasai social structure. In this novel the female genital cut appears to be a great source of conflict because it is a practice that defines the Maasai woman. When Resian and her sister rebel against it, they are redefining their femininity in opposition to the traditional constructs of the identity of Maasai women. The redefinition of Maasai femininity in the text takes place as a result of social forces outside like education. One of the main reasons for Resian's rebellious streak is because of the influence that education has on her. She builds a dream which she hopes to achieve by how education will mould

## CHAPTER FOUR

### COMPARISON OF FEMININITIES IN *VANISHING HERDS* AND *BLOSSOMS OF THE SAVANNAH*

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapters my analysis centered on how Henry ole Kulet presents the image of Maasai femininity in his two novels. And my interest was to look at how the aspect of femininity is defined and redefined in the two novels. In this chapter I shall look at how such presentation compares in the two novels. It is imperative to do a comparative analysis on how Henry ole Kulet manages to present femininity in similar and different shades in the two novels so as to get a holistic vision embodied in the two works. To achieve this I shall narrow on certain deliberate choices that Henry ole Kulet makes with respect to the characterization, setting and some aspects of style such as characterization. On one hand, my intention is to show how the narrative variables are the vortex within which presentation of Maasai femininity can be analyzed in the two novels. On the other hand, I intend to look at aspects of style so as to qualify the use of stylistic devices as being one of the points through which such presentation by use of narrative variables to present femininity can be accentuated.

#### **Comparative Investigation of Femininities in *Vanishing Herds* and *Blossoms of the Savannah***

The first point of comparison on femininities in the two texts concerns the characterization of the two protagonists. It is obvious that they are women. It is also obvious that they are young. However, what is not obvious and what I feel is worth pointing out is the fact that the two protagonist characters represent within the settings in which they are found the hope of their societies. It is within this hope for the future that we find their redefinitions of the way the

Maasai woman is supposed to be. These two women define and redefine femininity differently. They use different tools to take their societies to the next phase of their lives. Norpisia uses the environment to redefine the new role of the Maasai woman in the society as that of a heroine, much in the build of a folk super-hero. And Resian uses the issue of FGM and education to fight for the cause of young Maasai girls in her society.

As Chikwenye Ogonjo Ogunyemi (1982) argues on Womanism as serving “as the rallying–point of the women of African ancestry in their struggle to effectively assert their humanity in the face of the malevolent attitude of the men folk towards their self-fulfillment in life”, it is important to look at how Henry ole Kulet uses the women characters to assert the individuality in society where such assertion of femininity is iconoclast. One of the greatest points scored by Womanism theoreticians is the notion that the woman is the nurturer of the environment. It is her who gives the society life. In their quest for equality of the sexes proponents of the theory like Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi contends that the duty of the black woman is not to lose her role as a protector of the environment. She is the one who gives direction to the new born and shapes its life till later on. Ogunyemi does not envision the loss of such an important role for the woman in the society. And neither does Henry ole Kulet in these two selected novels.

Norpisia while rehabilitating the forest is restoring life to the society and Resian while fighting against retrogressive cultural practices is fighting for the achievement of equality that will enable the women within Maasai culture to play the same role as men in developing their societies. This is the hope that Resian’s fight promises. The aspect of nurture show the different sides of the protagonists of the two novels and so highlight some of the different shades of femininity visible in the two texts.

Also in *Vanishing Herds* the protagonist, Norpisia, is a soft-spoken woman who can be said to be very diplomatic in the way she tackles the patriarchal structures. She is characterized by the cattle. In her life the cattle occupy a prime place. She is passionate about nature. We are told that people wondered, surprised and amazed at her strength. Some when they saw her asked each other whether she was capable of doing all that she did. Some concluded that “if it was true that she had spearheaded groups of women to plant thousands of trees that had helped to resuscitate the degraded environment then, she was the people’s heroine” (*Vanishing Herds*, 3).

The author uses vivid description to show how Norpisia felt after their sheep were devoured by the hyena. She wept and was devastated as well as being at a loss. The narrator describes what happened one night when the hyena was attacking their animals. She took a spear and stood outside waiting. From this description we can say that Norpisia’s center of life is the environment and cattle. They offer her drive for existence and ‘curing’ of the environment. She is such an environmentalist that through description we see how Norpisia imitates the bird. The bird went to her thinking that it was birds of their kind. When she whistled the bird stopped feeding its chicks and went to where she was. She learned this skill when she was living with her grandmother.

In *Blossoms of the Savannah*, the protagonist is concerned about education. Her ambitions are encapsulated in her quest to attain higher standards in education. Even though different from Norpisia, she likewise is a woman who has a clear vision of where she wants to go to and how to get there. Here, again, the two protagonists are characterized to bring out the different shades of femininities. Even though there is a slight difference in age, Norpisia and Resian are relatively young women. The first score of comparison is age. Norpisia is a fairly mature woman who has been married while Resian is a young girl. This is important in showing the nature of conflict

that brings the two protagonists with the patriarchal structure in the two works. While Norpisia wages her war on the environment. She wants to save the forest from degradation so that the society may be healed. She thinks that it is because of the cutting down of trees that is why life is so miserable. This brings her in confrontation with the patriarchal structure which deems a woman who is such strong-willed to be a bad woman. In many ways, Norpisia represents the femininity of the Maasai woman who has not received much education but who none the less is assertive in the society and aims to play a greater role in social change through what she knows.

On the other hand, Resian wages her war on education. Resian, who is the second born, is defiant stubborn, aggressive in matters of education, she is also observant, optimistic of a good future, and is passionate about reading. Her main ambition is to go to a higher institution of learning so that she may play a greater role in her society. Resian represents the kind of femininity that encapsulates the dream of a young girl within Maasai culture who having been exposed to modernity and education has a wider knowledge of her place in the society and has insight of the injustices that culture could bring to her. She is the elite who are meant to change the society. The issue in the difference in character traits has a bearing on the different nature of the conflicts that take place in the two novels and hence the shades of different femininities observable.

The issue of their age then brings in another important point on characterization that is love. Since they are young, on the one hand, and newly-married, on the other, as the stories begin, the question of their love life become a point from which we come to understand not only their character traits, but, importantly, their resolve to fight for that which they feel so strongly and passionately about, and that which come to define the nature of what up to this point I have termed femininity.

The author uses vivid description to bring the feminine aspect of her characters and therefore show how physical attraction leads to the blossoming of love. Norpisia's physical appearance is described as tall, has lithe wiry muscles, long arms and legs. She is big and strong, has firm, full breasts, and that she had "womanly hips that curved back to her well-rounded body" (*Vanishing Herds*, 17). She also has a heart-shaped face, high cheek-bones, well-defined jaw, smooth narrow chin, large brown eyes, straight and finely made nose, has smooth lips "that curved up at the corners, white pearl-like teeth" (*Vanishing Herds*, 17).

Description shows that Kedoki appreciates being with Norpisia, they both walked together in nomadic pastoralism. They took care of their animals, for example, Kedoki controls their animals from the front while Norpisia from the back. Through the narrator's description we learn that Norpisia felt bad departing from her relatives and this makes her to be overcome by anguish, hence, breaking down and weeps. This saddens Kedoki for he knew that her heart was heavy because she was leaving her people and heading towards places where she did not know.

Love becomes not only one of the themes that provide the fuel, so to speak, that drives the plot forward, but on another level it also confers on the two novels a romantic atmosphere that can be said to offer relief from the issues of male chauvinism and tradition that are rather bleak. In *Vanishing Herds*, Norpisia and Kedoki are brought together by the trauma of losing siblings to cattle rustling. The love affair between these two is the point on which the novel revolves. Every occurrence is put in perspective of how it affects the couple. The beauty of their love and the most refreshing thing about it is that it is the reservoir from where the characters get their strengths to overcome tragedy, trauma, and difficulties posed by tradition.

Something unique to all these love affairs is that the lovers of the two protagonists appear to be comrades of their women in their fight against traditions that are out dated in the time of the characters. Kedoki and Joseph Parmuat are the strengths of their women. Kedoki is the source of Norpisia's strength in her quest to play a leading role in rehabilitating nature.

Similarly, Joseph Parmuat and Tayio become the two love birds whose fate appear to be futile because of the genealogical tree of the Maasai which makes these two otherwise unrelated beings to be considered blood relatives whose union is similar to incest. Still, the love affair between the two provides a point for the character of Tayio to rebel against tradition. She gets to express her own voice against a practice that denies her the freedom to choose her own marriage partner.

Another point is that the novels appear to have similar use of the environment in characterization and plot development. The women are characterized with their environment. The clothes that the women wear, the *shuka*, become a symbol of femininity in all the texts. The way nature is used in the two novels is very important in understanding the shifting moods and climate as the plot unfolds. It is as if, in both texts, Henry ole Kulet intends that the change in physical climate will lead to a corresponding change in the attitudes and behavior of the characters as well.

This use of the environment as a having a bearing on the plot of the narrative is to be found in Ng'ang'a Mbugua's *Different Colours* (2006) where the fate of Banana County is tied to the environmental change that could take place in Orange River. Miguel, Mbugua's protagonist, is a dreadlocked artist whose quest to save the river from Dick Teita is symbolic for saving Banana County itself. However, it is in Nawal el Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* (1983) where we observe in concrete terms the use of the environment to symbolize plot progression. Like

*Different Colours*, the novel's setting is a town (Kafr El Teen) near a river, the majestic Nile. This river in its flow is symbolic of Zakeya's (the protagonist) quest for freedom.

The point I was making by the above examples is on the symbol of the environment to the two novels. In *Blossoms of the Savannah*, the environmental change from Nakuru town to the country side itself is a shift that gets the characters closer to their roots. This closeness to the roots, as it were, is aimed at getting an understanding of the Maasai way of life which then leads to the basis of the conflict in the novel. In *Vanishing Herds*, the floods, which seems biblical allusion to the great floods in the book of Genesis, is a point of great turn in the plot of the narrative.

We learn that Norpisia almost lost her life in 'a freakish flood'. We learn that Kedoki and Norpisia lost all their livestock including four tamed wildebeests. The wildebeests "had become a tourist attraction during the famous annual event when migratory herds of wild animals crossed Enkipai River on their way to the southern grasslands" (*Vanishing Herds*, 1). The floods signify a new beginning in the life of the protagonist. In fact it is right to say that the place of the environment in this narrative is central to the existence of the characters and their possession, herds of cattle. Therefore, the title of the novel "Vanishing Herds" can be interpreted to mean the disappearance of flora and fauna as a result of the destruction of the environment. Henry ole Kulet could have used this novel to be a reminder to his readers on the adverse effects of environmental degradation. When Kedoki is injured by a wild animal in the hazardous trek the message is that even animals are reacting viciously to the environmental degradation, inspired invariably by greed for capital, which humans have visited upon the habitat that they share with other species.



The question of FGM offers another point on which we can compare and contrast the two works. It is the main point of conflict in *Blossoms of the Savannah* but it is not a big issue in *Vanishing Herds*. Henry ole Kulet uses the issue to characterize his protagonist. Resian is shown as a very determined woman who has the mettle to follow on her beliefs. Henry ole Kulet uses diction carefully to bring out the fight of the protagonist against FGM as an outdated cultural practice. Let us take note of the philosophical and argumentative language employed by Resian when she argues against FGM. She questions the mother the need for the FGM to be done during that time. She argues that *Ilarinkon* who had tortured the women was no longer there then why should it be done. She further argues that it is the current men who she calls *Ilarinkoi* that are causing harm to the women. She wonders why if one discovered a nasty but potent medicine that once taken cured an ailment must they continue to swallow it every day-ten years down the line. I find that not only ridiculous but also absurd. The sensible thing would be to discard the bitter medicine once they are cured. Period! She questions her mother without fear. "Tell me *Yeiyo*, what use is F.G.M to today's woman?" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 91). She assertively says that, "Today's *Ilarikon* are worse. In addition to being despotic, they are oppressive tyrants; and one of their ways of oppressing us is to demand that F.G.M be perpetuated against us forever!" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 92). In *Vanishing Herds* the points of conflicts revolve around nature. For instance, we have a scenario where Norpisia wants to fight the people in support of the animals. Minik uses argumentative tone to argue her point that culture is supposed to be dynamic and it ought to shed off aspects that had outlived their usefulness. She argues that in the past such old ways had been done away with and that they were forgotten. She argues that the name *intoiye nemengalana* should stop being derogatory and instead "*emuratare-o-ntoiye* should disappear from Maa language and should be regarded as extinct" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 268).

Through the issue of FGM the author shows other characters who are agents of change. One of them is Nabaru. Nabaru too uses an argumentative tone and says that FGM did not add value to the victims instead it “traumatized them and it was hazardous to their health.” She attests to the fact that the practice ruined young ones and she vows to join Minik in lobbying against FGM. An argumentative language is used to show how Nabaru, the *enkabaani*, found fault with the women of Maa. She argues that they were the perpetrators of the obnoxious and repugnant tradition of female circumcision and its perpetuation. She thinks that no man had ever taken up the *Olmurunya* to circumcise a girl. To her the *enkamuratani* had always been a woman. She wonders what will happen to *enkamuratani* if she threw the *olmurunya* and refused to wield it again.

Still on diction, Henry ole Kulet plays around by language of reasoning in showing how the characters are best suited for their liberation roles. Through Taiyo who says culture is dynamic and that it keeps shading off irrelevant aspects such as FGM and culture that forces people of the same clan not to marry each other yet they are not related by blood. She argues that they should have disappeared long time ago. Taiyo’s ability in reasoning is shown when she says “after all, we can’t love in darkness forever, can we?” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 137). She believes that Nasila culture would soon shed off FGM.

FGM is further used to create tension in *Blossoms of the Savannah*. An abusive language is used by Olarinkoi in talking to Resian, “You mean, woman, look here you can either cook or keep standing stupidly and die of hunger. The choice is yours. Should you choose to cook, here is a piece of meat. The knife is over there. Of course you are not blind you can see sufurias. There is a whole bag of maize meal there and water is in that container. There is paraffin in that can and you can collect firewood from a stack outside the house. Any questions?” (*Blossoms of the*

*Savannah*, 223). He further says, “You silly thing ... I tell you to prepare food and you refuse to do so, eh? Today you will know who the owner of this home is. If you are still in doubt, let me tell you frankly that from today on you are my wife, hear that, eh? You are my wife. For a long time you have been sneering at me, showing how highly educated you are. Today we shall see how educated your body is!” (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 226).

These phrases show the kind of tension that builds up around the issue of FGM. It shows that the characters occupying positions of binary oppositions are symbolic of the past and the future. *Vanishing Herds* does not focus on FGM for conflict. It focuses on the issue of the environment as a source of contestation among the characters. This is one of the fundamental differences between the two novels. This difference brings in the difference in the expression of Maasai femininities in the two novels where one is based on FGM and the other is based on the environment.

Then again the two novels also present the motif of communal spirit, for instance, when Kedoki needs help with cattle he is helped by his friends Masintet and Lembarta. The two come at a point of need for Kedoki. This shows a sense of community and brotherhood that egalitarian societies are known for. The two are warmly welcomed by Masintet’s family where they live together for a while before the couple re-embarks on their journey. Norpisia gets closer and very friendly to Masintet’s wife. The community helps her plant trees. In *Blossoms of the Savannah*, when Resian’s family moves from Nakuru to Nasila they are welcomed by the entire community. They are celebrated by each and every one. When the next day Resian and her family go to take breakfast they find themselves taking tea with everybody seated together. I can conclude that Ole Kulet uses the motif of communal spirit to show those aspects of traditional life, the egalitarian

spirit, which are good and which should be retained. Henry ole Kulet uses this sense of communal spirit to show some of the good things that Maasai femininity is unique for.

The question of literacy also plays an important role in the expression of Maasai femininity in the two texts. In *Blossoms of the Savannah*, Resian's quest to go to the university runs in tandem with her rejection and her fight against the outdated cultural practices like early marriage and FGM. Education becomes the main source of conflict between her personal ambition and her communal obligations as a young Maasai woman. Education becomes the point of change and redemption that the liberation from outdated cultural practices is pegged to.

The issue of education is not a strong factor in *Vanishing Herds*. The protagonist, Norpisia, is married fairly early in her life and she begins her crusade as a 'prophetess' of the environment not from an illiterate person point of view, but from a practical point of view which is from the degradation that she observes around her. Resian is educated and therefore operates within a different worldview as Norpisia in *Vanishing Herds*.

The question of other women characters is also an important one in the expression of femininity in the two novels. The other women either help the protagonist in their fight against patriarchy or they become the wet blankets that hinder their progress. In other words the other women characters either facilitate the protagonists' quest for agency or hinder it. In *Blossoms of the Savannah*, Resian is a woman among other women. Some are helpful in her quest such as Taiyo and Nabaru while the others are not such as her mother, her uncle's eldest wife, *Yeiyo botorr* and Olarinkoi's mother. For one Mama Milanoi, her own mother, appears defenseless against tradition. She does not know how to oppose patriarchy. When they relocate to Nasila she is

finally hit by the reality of the customs of her people from which she had been shielded by urban life in Nakuru. Mama Milanoi is not portrayed as a great determinant of change.

There is the character of Resian's uncle's eldest wife, *Yeiyo-bottor*, is portrayed as one who is an agent against change. She is the epitome of matriarchal structure that collaborates with patriarchy to disregard the equal rights of women in the local culture, to use the words of Resian when she lashed out at her mother in the presence of the uncle's wife: "It is time to circumcise your daughters and get rid of *olkuenyi*. It is that simple" (*Blossoms of the Savannah*, 79).

Here the woman is telling Resian's mother that her daughter's stupidity at talking back to the elders can only be cured by the cut—the healing cut. She is steeped in tradition that denies young girls a brighter future by marrying them early after the cut. She is a stumbling block of progress. In Virginia Woolf's *In a Room of their Own* (1962), Virginia Woolf contends that if women are to be free to express themselves and get a perspective on their condition then it is best if they can get a space where they have 'room to think.' This is the fundamental principle for women friendship in most feminist literary texts. For instance in Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* (1961), the protagonist, Ebla, in her quest to escape oppressive patriarchal tradition meets other women like the Widow and Asha who are able to impart on her philosophies that liberate and empower her. Such women can be termed as catalysts of agency. This is not the same thing that we see in *Blossoms of the Savannah*, Taiyo is Resian's sister who can be said to be very helpful to her. She is the one with whom they face the tribulations of culture together. Nabaru too is a catalyst of change as she assists Resian by caring for her, as her own child, nurses her back to health after being beaten unconscious by Olarinkoi. She cooks and feeds her; she ensures that Resian is warm by providing her with more coverings such blankets. She also reveals to her all the evil plans of Olarinkoi and her mother such as to circumcise her and taken to Tanzania where

she will be married to Olarinkoi, she assists her to escape and finally takes her to her role model, Minik.

Another point of looking into the representation of the different shades of Maasai femininity could be on the aspect of stylistic choices that Henry ole Kulet makes in both novels. Let us first look at *Vanishing Herds*. In terms of style one thing that stands out for me with regards to this novel is the manner in which the author has used the environment symbolically. The narrator says that the coming of rains had been most influenced by the trees that Norpisia had planted. This surprised the people a lot and they could not believe that she was capable of doing such a thing. They wanted to see Norpisia who was described as the famous woman pastoralist. She was said to have miraculously changed an arid and desolate wasteland into a Garden of Eden (7). This description enables the reader to learn the exemplary qualities of Norpisia. Norpisia's character are described as unsurpassed. She had good organizational skills that enabled her organize groups of women who ended up planting tree-seedlings which matured to invaluable forests.

The Womanist theoretician, Sherley Anne Williams (1986) argues that Womanist theory is committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people (Williams, 304). It is in this understanding that we locate the role that Norpisia has for her society by saving the environment from degradation. She walks through the "damp grass that was dripping wet with dew, towards a small narrow stream that flowed between giant trees" (*Vanishing Herds*, 85). She also gets into the forest searching for herbs all by herself and the narrator says she went deeper and deeper looking for herbs. To, further, show that Norpisia is not a coward, the narrator describes a situation when wildebeest were being chased by a pack of hyenas "She quickly got out of the *olngoborr* in pitch darkness and collected a few stones from the ground. She threw them, at the

hyenas to drive them away from near the cattle enclosure” (*Vanishing Herds*, 93). Norpisia is described as that her sense of horror had gone and she did not fear that a wild dog would attack her. She was preoccupied with her sense of keep going and nothing else. This then explains her character as that of being resilience.

Description of how Norpisia would treat Kedoki who had been injured by the cattle rustlers is given to assert Norpisia’s knowledge on medicine,

She found *olmasiligi*, with its thick large succulent leaves, uprooted several whole plants that she was to heat over the fire. She would place the hot, fleshy leaves on the swollen part of his leg. She would also boil the whole plant to make a wash, for it contained skin-healing and wound-suppurating curatives (*Vanishing Herds*, 86).

She also picked tiny leaves of *olmagiro-ngiro*. This she was to add to the solution: “she knew they were excellent for healing anything from bites to boils, even severe ulcers and wounds ... she dug out roots of *olkonyil* to add to his soup as a general antidote for poisons and other toxic reactions” (*Vanishing Herds*, 86). *Olkitolosua* roots helped boost energy and warm their bodies *Olesiate* was good for its antiseptic and quick –healing properties: “They were also effective in keeping flies away from a wound. She would pound them and make a strong solution that she would often splash on Kedoki’s wound” (*Vanishing Herds*, 86). *Olcani-lenkashe* herb “was not only a good fly-repellent when made into an infusion for an external wash, but an excellent addition to the soup that made a person sweat profusely and helped to open up pores on the skin - -- She then dug up tubers and collected twigs, berries and barks of trees and carried them all to their temporary camp” (*Vanishing Herds*, 86).

Norpusia attachment to the environment is described as she is overwhelmed by the beautiful scenario. There were thousands and thousands of wild animals grazing on the bluish green tall grass: “In the sky, she saw a soaring *olkupelia* bird seeking a nibbling shrew. She heard crickets trill in the nearby bushes. She knew hyraxes drowsed in the hollow of the trees in the forest and on the same trees perched the ugly vultures with their almost featherless heads and necks, waiting to find another dying animal” (*Vanishing Herds*, 88). Her passion for the environment is seen in that she does not want the environment to be destroyed. She sees that it was the human beings who destroyed the environment for they did not want to leave nature just as the way God intended them to be.

Men, too, play a significant part in the redefinition of the femininity in *Vanishing Herds* and *Blossoms of the Savannah*. In *Vanishing Herds* Kedoki loves the wife so much and appreciates her exceptional skills and encourages her in her undertakings. He also assists in her in making their hut, collecting firewood; he assists her in tree planting process and escorts her to receive her reward in Nakaru. Parmuat in *Blossoms of the Savannah* teaches the girls - Resian and Taiyo about the culture, he is friendly to both of them, he finds interesting stories to tell them, he makes them aware of Olarinkoi and Oloisudori, he accepts to fall in love with Taiyo, though a forbidden love since they are related through clan relation and finally, he assists Taiyo to escape though unfruitful since he is discovered and unfortunately killed.

Let me conclude by looking at the significance of the titles of the two novels. The title “Vanishing Herds” signifies the degradation of the environment. This destruction of flora is seen as being a precursor to the loss of fauna, most of all cattle. And as we have seen in the novel cattle is the mark of social status among the Maasai. This social status is for the man the head of the patriarchal structure. The deterioration of the environment will lead to this loss. It will make



the herds of cattle to vanish. This will lead to economic pauperization of a people for whom cattle is the backbone of the micro economy. Norpisia comes to save the day when she fights against the loss of the environment. Ironically her fight for the protection of the environment is like killing two birds with one stone — she uses the fight to overcome male chauvinism and also to protect her people's sense of identity. The second title “Blossoms of the Savannah” signifies the new shoots of new way of life among the Maasai who inhabit the savannah. To ‘blossom’ means to flourish or to flower. Resian and Taiyo are used to offers a sense of a new beginning in the novel. They blossom and in so doing they show the society the new way of life that they need to appreciate and accept.

## **Conclusion**

The comparison of the two novels reveals that Henry ole Kulet has a concern for the place of the woman in bringing change in her society. In both novels the woman is made the main agent of desired change and transformation of society. Therefore, the expression of Maasai femininity is chiefly meant to show the Maasai woman as being liberated and playing a greater role in the society. In terms of narrative variables Henry ole Kulet has used the environment symbolically in *Vanishing Herds* to situate Norpisia as the woman as the protagonist against degradation of the environment. In *Blossoms of the Savannah*, he has used education as the main stimuli of change and agent for fighting the retrogressive tradition of FGM. The differences and the similarities that I have discussed go a long way in showing the various shades of femininity in the various styles that the author uses to show them.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The study was guided by the two objectives to understand how femininity is defined and redefined in *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Vanishing Herds*. Central to my discussion was the need to show how the two novels show the image of a Maasai woman caught up in the quest to liberate herself and become an agent of productive change in the society. Guided by the Womanism theoretical framework I have argued that the two novels by Henry ole Kulet display instances where the position of the woman in Maasai culture is defined and redefined.

The author has defined and redefined femininity in *Vanishing Herds*. The definition of femininity traditionally reflects the women in terms of their dressing code. They are defined in terms of reproductive roles which can be either house chores as well as procreation. It was women's responsibility to cook, look for water and take care of husbands as well as animals. The woman is the provider of homes by constructing and mending huts. In terms of procreation motherhood is defined in terms of the ability to conceive. The way in which they behaved such as submission and respect towards their male counterparts defines them. They are defined by the aspect of FGM. They were respected if only they underwent the cut. Their strength ability also defines them in that they are viewed as a weaker gender either physically or emotionally hence the need of protection from their husbands. Men played a significant part in decision making and slaughtering of animal leaving out the women. Young girls were sold off to partners that they do not know without their consent. Motherhood defines them by the fact that they are supposed to continue the community through giving birth. Women too have been redefined in terms of their strength. They are presented as strong, courageous, fearless and ready to face even hard situations such as what Norpisia faces in the wilderness. They equally take part in socio-

economic activities such as pastoralism, rehabilitating of the environment. They help in planting trees. Women have been redefined in such a way that they are made to be leaders and they possess good qualities of leaders who assist in rehabilitating the environment. From naivety emerges an intelligent woman who arguably portrays determined woman she is supportive for example helps the husband to save the sick and their animals. Women acquire various skills such as medicine, herding, rehabilitation of environment, self-defence and even self-reliance. An ideal relationship exists between men and women.

I have also found out that the two novels by Henry ole Kulet display instances where the position of the woman in Maasai culture is defined and redefined. In *Vanishing Herds*, I have found out that a woman like Norpisia, the protagonist, sees herself as a Maasai woman. She fulfills the demand of such an identity through dressing and also through the behavior with other women. This is what defines her as a woman. However, I have also found out that she redefines these roles of the women in society in a number of ways. First, her quest to conserve the environment brings her into conflict with males who think it is their right to do with the environment as they desire. This male attitude comes from the traditional notion that males inherit land and females don't, therefore the latter have no say in matters concerning land. By championing for the course of the environment Norpisia is redefining the role of Maasai women in her society to include the space outside the domestic confine that tradition sets proscribes for her.

In *Blossoms of the Savannah*, Resian is the epitome of a woman who challenges the societal view of the destiny of a girl. She is determined to continue with her studies and achieve a better future for herself in defiance of the arranged marriage and FGM that the community sets out for her as her path to being a Maasai woman.

In *Blossoms of the Savannah* the concept of definition and redefinition can be summarized as follows. The boy-child is highly valued unlike the girl-child because the boy-child is said to be carrying the name of the family to the next generation. Motherhood is valued and a woman has to give birth if not one had to participate in ancestral prayer songs. This woman was so aggressive and bitter because God had denied her a child. Women are expected to accept polygamous marriages and respect her co-wives as well as their children. The parents had the obligation of getting girls best suitors for the marriage for parents believed they would make better choices than the girls. Some girls were even married off to old men, as old as the fathers. Due to submission, Maa women are defined as less talkative. Beauty defines the Maa women in terms of their physical appearance. Women are submissive and shows respect to men. There was a gap between fathers and daughters. The gap was filled by the mother who acted as a link between father and daughters. Father spoke to girls through their mother responsibilities such as cooking, fetching water and looking after the young animals were basically the role of women and none was to question about it.

FGM is a significant aspect that any woman is supposed to undergo. Women are defined as weaklings, naïve, humble. Women shape their daughters to become responsible and potential wives in the future. The issue of morality was highly guarded by women. They punished offenders who molested girls. They are also defined by their caring attitude and love towards children whom are not theirs. Henry ole Kulet redefines the young girls as ambitious, optimistic. They desire to pursue education to highest level. They do not mind whatever challenges that face them. Women have been redefined from a woman in the kitchen to one who wants to pursue education. Women fight against injustices such as women submission, FGM, early marriages, education in determination to redefine themselves.

My second objective was to do a comparative analysis of the two novels to find out how they present the question of definition and redefinition. In doing a comparative analysis of the two novels, the study examined characterization, plot and language use. Characterization, plot and language were used in developing the female characters and more so to highlight the definition and redefinition of Maasai femininity. The author used varied language in bringing out the characters such as rebellious tone, argumentative, inquisitive tone and so on. This has helped to illuminate the definition and redefinition of Maasai femininity in the two novels. The study found out that, while previously, some African male writers wrote their novels putting male characters at the centre while women were viewed as wives, mothers and that they were allowed to perform traditional roles only, today's some of male writers are concerned with the greater role that the woman can play as an agent of change and not a mere object of it. The characters of Norpisia and Resian show that well enough.

My final word would be that there is room for further research on Maasai femininity in literature. My study is not conclusive in itself but it is a contribution to criticism on Henry ole Kulet to understanding the way literature represents the picture of women in conservative societies like the Maasai. From this study it is clear that literature, aside from being the mirror of the society is also concerned with being an agent of change with regards to the position of the marginalized in the society.

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