

## CONSTRUCTION OF A PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY IN GUSII ORAL POETRY

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### ABSTRACT

Abagusii people of Western Kenya, just like any other human community world over, are socialized to operate within prescribed ideologies, and one such ideology is patriarchy. These ideologies are constructed and inculcated Abagusii's mindsets through oral poetry, the oldest and most versatile of the genres of oral literature and one which has had an intimate relationship with people, hence, the choice of Gusii oral poetry as a vehicle for studying Gusii's patriarchal ideology and relationships. This paper thus examines the Gusii oral poems as a semiotic system and discourse of encoded signs which embodies the Gusii socio – cultural ideology. The objective of the paper is to establish how the patriarchal ideology of Abagusii has shaped social relationships between Abagusii themselves and their neighboring communities. In the analysis of the sampled oral poems, this paper uses a conceptual framework developed from the Chandler (1995) strands of semiotics in which he argues that culture produces signs and attributes meanings to them. The semiotic tenets are then linked to the sociological literary theory strands by Rosenblatt (1978) in which he argues that literature mirrors protocols of the society which produces it and serves specific social purposes. Finally, strands from the two literary theories of semiotics and sociological theories are further interlinked with the Althusserian (1989) and Eagleton (1976)'s tenets of Marxism in which they argue that art is a product of a specific historical epoch and its purpose is to be an Ideological State Apparatuses which interpellates people into becoming subjects of given ideologies. This paper has adopted an analytical study design. Secondary data was obtained from the review of published works and primary data was the textual analysis of Gusii oral poems collected from the Abagusii resource persons and libraries. The sampling of data and resource persons was both purposive and through snowballing. The study is significant in the sense that it contributes towards celebrating the role of oral poetry as a vehicle for enabling humans to perceive themselves, their environment and their world in ways unique to themselves and enhancing of intercultural relations as well as forms a basis for related studies.

**KEYWORDS:** Patriarchy, Ideology, Emissary, Initiation Oral Poetry, Perceptions, Stereotypes & Enhanced Relations.

### INTRODUCTION

From the historical perspective, Ochieng's (1974), Abagusii are a Bantu speaking community currently occupying the South West portion of the Kenyan highlands. Abagusii recognizes a common ancestor named Mogusii, hence a common ancestry and a common socio-cultural, economic and political heritage. The community is divided into seven clans and is neighbors to communities of unrelated language families except for the Abakuria. These communities are the Nilotic-speaking Luo to the North, West, and to the South West; the Nilo-Hamitic Kipsigis to the East, and the Nilo-Hamitic Maasai to the South East. Finally, to the South, are the Kuria (Abatende), whose language is mutually intelligible with *Ekegusii*.

Abagusii, just like any human community world over, operates within the precincts of specified ideologies. These ideologies are inculcated into the mindsets of Abagusii through various avenues and more often than not, through oral poetry, the oldest of the genres studied in the literature (Habib 2005) and one which has had an intimate relationship with the human societies for eons. Abagusii as a distinct community performs and listens to its verbal arts and in the process of doing so, Abagusii engages in the process of perceiving themselves and their cosmos in a way that is unique to them. In the process of performing and consuming their oral poetry, they construct an ideological cosmos which defines their socio-cultural identities and limits. Equally, as they perform, they get “interpellated” into aligning their thinking and mannerisms according to the dictates of their own society.

## REVIEWED WORKS

In grounding this study, this paper has borrowed from Classical theoreticians such as Plato and Aristotle who have delved into oral poetry in great depths and presented their views on ideology from a multiplicity of angles. This is so because, ever since the times of these classical thinkers to date, the relationship between oral poetry and ideology has provided ground for intellectually protracted discourses and has been at the heart of many societies. In this regard, oral poetry was and still is at the center of people’s lives and through it, communities can and have studied their history, social, political and economic relations as they construct their world in relation to themselves and the outer world. For this reason, the patriarchal ideology of the Abagusii community is a construct of their conscious actions and it is a reflection of their wishes as artistically constructed by their oral poetry.

According to Plato in (Habib 2005), literary works expose images and that through those images, man is cast as chained deep within the recess of a cave. According to him, humans are bound, so their vision is restricted. This study intimates that what binds people and restricts their vision are the various ideologies which are constructed and inculcated into their mindsets through various Ideological State Apparatuses such as oral poetry. Ultimately, people’s perceptions of their world are conditioned (bound) to subscribe to the specific ideologies as they are constructed through their oral poetry which is treated by this study as an Ideological State Apparatuses.

In relating ideology to oral poetry, Plato in (Habib2005) has averred that education (a vehicle for constructing and inculcating ideology) through oral poetry is most sovereign. This is because more than anything else, rhythm and harmony combined as is found in oral poetry find their way to the innermost soul of an individual and they take the strongest hold upon it. He further says that ideology operates and continues to operate by its formal expression rather than by its explicit content; thus, making oral poetry a powerful force in molding public opinion. This he argues, is achieved through oral poetry’s inbuilt ability to present arguments coherently and persuasively. These insights by Plato though general to poetry, this study borrows these Platonic insights about poetry and points out that in the Gusii oral poetry, there are “chains” (ideology) which binds, condition and restrict the vision of Abagusii people.

Aeschylus, in (Habib 2005), said that mighty thoughts and heroic aims (ideology) were and are often created by high style and lofty language which in the case of this study, is the hallmark of oral poetry. Such are some of the foundations upon which this study is anchored. Such insights attempt to demonstrate that communities operate within prescribed sets of ideas, ideals, and principles which are often constructed and conveyed to them through the high style and lofty language of oral poetry.

The Pan-Hellenist movement (Habib 2005) suggested that truths were and are constructed and local myths are enacted through oral poetry. Soyinka (1976) looks at myth as a primal phenomenon which is an embodiment of nature and cosmic principles. In African contexts, The Gusii context being one of them, myths are instituted to explain the relevance of people's customs, to control and regulate people's moral and social behavior as well as protect and enhance people's traditions, beliefs, and morality; hence a part of people's socio-economic and political ideology. In this regard, oral poetry connects the mind with what really happens in the past, present and the future.

From the Pan-Hellenist movement period to date, poetry is still looked at as a repository of collective wisdom accumulated over ages and as an expression of universalized truths whose public function is to educate and ascertain the truth. Such truths include training up children and members of an entire community to be subjects of various social, economic and political ideologies of their community. The training is both an overt and covert endeavor which calls for informal and formal sessions of training and subsequent interpellation. This is perfectly achieved through exposing the trainees to messages wrapped up in subtle images, allusions and other aspects of style which are the hallmarks the lofty language of oral poetry. Given its versatility, appeal and general acceptance to people of all cadres of life, oral poetry fits the bill which interpellates the people to be proper subjects.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle (Habib 2005) has stated that from childhood, men have an "instinct" for imitation. He affirms that human beings rely on imitation to learn and that through this process they infer the nature of each object. Therefore, for Aristotle, imitation is both a mode of learning which is associated with pleasure. He further postulates that philosophical mindsets and universal truths (ideologies) are espoused by poetry. These views by Aristotle is echoed by Ngugi (1978) who correctly states that literature results from conscious actions of men in society as the society give it impetus and direction. Therefore, because poetry is imitative in nature, it is through the study of the imitative human actions as embodied in oral poetry that humans can be able to comprehend their world in totality.

Finnegan (1970) analyzed the literariness and social functions of various genres of verbal art. Among the genres analyzed by her study were songs sung by and for children. While taking cognizance of her classification of various sub-genres of African songs texts, this study considered the content and specific characteristics of Gusii oral poetry. Of particular significance is Finnegan's assertion that oral texts carry the basic features of literariness and can, therefore, be analyzed as literary texts. This study thus went on to identify the literariness of the sampled oral poems and their semiotic significance and demonstrate how they "interpellate" Abagusii into constructing a patriarchal ideology whose masculinity is reflected in the multiple socio-cultural relationships of Abagusii.

Ngara (1990), has looked at poetry as an artistic production and a medium of human consciousness through which human conception of religion, politics, morality, and science is deeply influenced. He further singles out categories of ideology which are products of a crucial understanding of poetry. They are the dominant ideology, the authorial ideology and the aesthetic ideology. In regard to the dominant ideology, he avers that these are the beliefs, assumptions, and sets of values that inform the thoughts and actions of people, hence, people's ideologies. If poetry is a medium for constructing human consciousness, then this study posits that oral poetry of Abagusii midwives the community's consciousness (ideologies).

Alembi (1991) has stated that various communities adhere to their specific norms and cultural values which are preserved and conveyed by their oral poetry. This, he says, is a utilitarian dimension of oral poetry. This view is the same as Ngugi (1978) which asserts the sociological significance of literature. This means that oral poetry shapes and directs

people's attitudes to their daily struggles with nature, daily struggles with the community and the daily struggles with their souls and selves. In this respect, this study grounded its choice of oral poetry of the Gusii as a vehicle for studying the patriarchal ideology of the community. The effects of this genre are enormous since these oral poems are prescriptive products of the Gusii community whose intentions are to produce grounded and or specific responses from Abagusii people who compose, perform and consume them.

Kichamu and Odaga (1982) have noted that many communities round Africa have oral poems which form an important part in their lives and their thinking. They further note that oral poetry is about people's conditions of life hence, they embody the history, philosophy, beliefs, and wisdom of the people. While borrowing from their approach, this study demonstrates that the oral poetry of the Gusii community generates ideas whose tenacity is to direct the relationships of Abagusii amongst themselves as well as the levels to which they engage their neighboring communities.

Therefore, borrowing a leaf from classical studies and recent ones, this paper has demonstrated that Abagusii has continued to use their oral poetry to teach social norms to its members. The norms interpellate members of the community to a consciousness which dictates their various levels of engagements within and without the community.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The centrality of literature as a vehicle for socialization is undisputable. This is so because its effects cut across and influence one's perception of life from childhood to adulthood. When oral poetry is the reference point, the interest is even greater given its timelessness and versatility. Therefore, given the fame of oral poetry, it is compelling that a scholarly analysis of it be undertaken to establish the ideology into which it socializes members of a given community. Socialization of Abagusii, especially the youth through Gusii oral poetry is compelling. As a community that is grappling with an eternally shifting socio landscape, there are possibilities that their social ideology is as well shifting so that the community can align itself to the dynamic global realities. The question then is: to what extent then is the oral poetry of the Gusii shaping the community's patriarchal ideology, more so, among the youth. Secondly, Njau (1994) has observed that literature from a patriarchal setting is bound to interpellate members of that society into being subjects of machismo. In the same wavelength, Alabi (1998) has expounded that literature with patriarchal orientation cryptically hail women into being "virtuous women", while men are abrasive in character. The question then is; could the oral poetry of the Gusii people, the poetry they so much enjoy be training men to be "abrasive" while at the same time instilling feelings of silent frustration and low self-esteem to women? The observation that a community could be celebrating a gender biasness thus forms the basis upon which this study was undertaken.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an analytical research design. It limited itself to a textual analysis of six oral poems of Abagusii purposively sampled from a large population of oral poems collected during field research in the Kisii and Nyamira Counties of Western Kenya. In addition, various contemporary lyre (*Obokano*) performers and resource persons were purposively interviewed and recorded. Observing and listening to the discourses of those engaged in the performance of the texts equally helped the study to infer some of the meanings constructed and conveyed by the oral poems. Lastly, library research and online accessing of information were handy.

## PATRIARCHY AND MASCULINITY

Patriarchy has variously been viewed as a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of the property. Some patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. Patriarchal ideology acts to explain and justify this dominance and attributes it to inherent natural differences between men and women. Sociological theorists see patriarchy as a social product and not as an outcome of innate differences between the sexes and they focus attention on the way that gender roles in a society affect power differentials between men and women. Patriarchal ideology is profoundly expressed through masculinity. Masculinity also called manhood or manliness is a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with boys and men. As a social construct, it is distinct from the definition of male biological sex. Standards of manliness or masculinity vary across different cultures and historical periods. Both males and females can exhibit masculine traits and behavior. Traits traditionally viewed as masculine include strength, courage, independence, violence, and assertiveness. Masculine qualities and roles are considered typical of, appropriate for, and expected of boys and men. Masculinity is also associated with avoidance of femininity; restricted emotions; sex disconnected from intimacy; pursuit of achievement and status; self-reliance; strength and aggression and homophobia. These norms reinforce gender roles by associating attributes and characteristics with one gender.

## MASCULINITY AND THE PROUD AND IMPERIOUS GUSII EMISSARY

From a sociological theoretical perspective, social patterns can create domination and suppression. This explains the knack by the human community to 'export' its very best with the intention of dominating. This reality is reflected in individual humans who act as microcosms of the societies out of which they are social constructs. After chapters of childhood in one's life are closed, new chapters of life are opened. The oral poetry of Abagusii constructs a patriarchal ideology, a social pattern through which male members of the community are infused with masculine tendencies hence, becoming dominant figures in their dealings within and out of the Gusii geographical boundaries. The oral poems of Abagusii, especially the initiation and panegyrics are embellished with encoded semiotic signs which, when decoded, construct a mindset of positive pride in Abagusii. Positive pride in the sense that the owners of the Gusii culture are meant to develop feelings of happiness out of their achievements and possessions. Positive pride is the expression of feelings of satisfaction in regard to one being a distinct human community. Consequently, in their relationships, they exude confidence as being proud envoys and distinguished social ambassador of the Gusii patriarchal ideology. In this regard, therefore, this study starts off with the verse below taken from a panegyric oral poem that is performed during the circumcision festival of Abagusii.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <i>EkondeseitonkaigwaOnchong'aominto!</i>     | While at home I heard that Onchong'a      |
| <i>Nkaigwanyanchaabenegete</i>                | That Onchong'a has drowned in the Lake    |
| <i>Onchong'aomintonkaigwanyanchaaberegte!</i> | That indeed Onchong'a is dead in the lake |
| <i>Nyagetwoniakabutoraegetinge</i>            | Nyagetwoni has cut her leg ring           |
| <i>Kabutoraegetingeonchong'akaremoyo</i>      | Cut the leg ring yet Onchong'a is alive   |

Analysis of the verse above from a Gusii oral poem titled *Konde Seito* – "While I was at home" – is a worthy prelude to the power in Gusii oral poetry to construct skewed patriarchal relations. A semiotic theoretical perspective in

regard to the understanding of literature postulates that cultural images are signs to be interpreted within a cultural context. Secondly, the cultural images and artifacts which are interpreted within specific cultural contexts are fluid hence their interpretation is dependent on environmental circumstances. This being the case, *Onchong'a*, the character in the verse above, apart from it being the name of a person, it is a fluid and connotative sign encoded with multiple meanings depending on the cultural context of its performance. One such social context is the patriarchal context in which it is interpreted to mean the Gusii male world, a world that knows no failures in its engagements.

On the other hand, *Nyagetwoni*, equally a feminine emblematic name, is an encoded Gusii cultural sign, a rather derogatory patriarchal construction assigned to headstrong women within the Gusii cosmos. For the purposes of this study and for literature's sake, *Nyagetwoni*, though an emblematic name, it is a sign for the abrasive Gusii feminine identity which has defied "acceptable" confines. It is emblematic in the sense that it refers to a lady who has done the unthinkable – ventured into the "male world"; albeit in nefarious connotations. This being the case, the conflict in the oral poem from which the above verse has been extracted rests on the foundation that a woman 'Nyagetwoni' has initiated a divorce process, a sacrilege and something unthinkable in the patriarchal world of Abagusii. She cuts her leg ring (*Egetinge*) while her husband, *Onchong'a* is still alive. A leg ring is a Gusii cultural sign for marital fidelity.

### MASCULINITY AND GENDER RELATIONS IN GUSII ORAL POETRY

This study avers that the patriarchal ideology that is partly constructed by the community's oral poetry, in a way allows its male populace, like the cock, to have multiple sex partners but denies its females the same largesse. *Nyagetwoni* has cut her leg ring, an equivalent to the present-day wedding ring which symbolizes marital fidelity. She has either initiated a divorce process or has been caught in acts of marital infidelity and this has immensely disgraced her husband *Onchong'a*, the sign of Gusii machismo. It is this disgrace that has compelled *Onchong'a*, into committing suicide by drowning himself in the lake waters so as to save his face (the proud patriarchal culture) and integrity by avoiding the mockery of being seen as a man who would not ameliorate the marital challenges hence, forcing his wife to initiate a divorce process.

As intimated above, the sign *Nyagetwoni* in connotative terms can be extrapolated to signify the negative and extreme end of the male world. *Nya – g – etwoni* is a derivation from the term *etwoni*, a word in the *Ekegusii* language which means a cock. *Nyagetwoni* – therefore implies 'as does the cock'. It is worthy understanding then that this use of local imagery in this poem needs further understanding. A cock, in its true nature, is regarded as a proud, amorous and jealousy bird. It is known for its inclination towards "infidelity". To be kind to it, one can say it is a bird proud of its *polygamistic* instincts and tendencies. At the same wavelength, a cock is known to be a proud and ruthless defender of its "wives" and territory. Its head is always held high, possibly to be on the lookout over any possible intruder. Equally, as it crows to announce and declare its unchallenged reign in its territory, its head is stretched high. It should thus be understood that the use of this cultural sign in the Gusii cultural context to describe a lady who has committed a felony of initiating a divorce process contrary to the expectations of the Abagusii culture. This is preposterous. It is this felony which has driven *Onchong'a* into committing suicide by drowning himself in Lake Victoria (*Nyanchaabenegete*). Being a cultural sign for the Gusii male world, the committing of suicide by *Onchong'a* is explicit about the proud intolerant male world of Abagusii.

It is thus clear that this oral poem constructs and conveys an irredeemably proud patriarchal culture in which the male character is a proud emissary of his cultural beliefs and social norms right in the Gusii territory and to the territories

beyond. The macho character here has no room for challenge whatsoever. *Onchong'a* (the Gusii male world) cannot withstand the magnitude of the shame/sacrilege committed in his home and like the fictional Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *Omogusiipatriarch* is such an aggressive and proud carrier, defender and emissary of his cultural beliefs and privileged patriarchal position to the point that he is better off dead than remaining alive to face the mockery of his ego as it is deflated by the audacity of the challenge thrown at him from the female world. In this regard, there is a way in which the oral poetry of Abagusii constructs a patriarchal ideology which cryptically permits the male to dominate the female through cultural systems such as polygamy.

A further analysis of masculinity in Gusii oral poetry is in the oral poem below locally known as *Esimbore*. It one of the Gusii initiation poems.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Baisia bake bororobwabarire!</i>        | Uncircumcised little boys have felt pain!        |
| <i>Isemokamioirirembochiaito;</i>          | The circumciser has taken our penis;             |
| <i>Batureirweitimonangubambibo.</i>        | He has made them a spear and a hard shield.      |
| <i>BarwaneSigisi, barwaneSigisi!</i>       | Fight the Kipsigis! Fight the Kipsigis!          |
| <i>Barwanebosoba, barwaneBosoba!</i>       | Fight the Abasuba, fight the Abasuba!            |
| <i>Baisia bake e-e-e, bororobwabarire</i>  | Uncircumcised little boys have had pain!         |
| <i>Isono ria ng'ina, isono ria ng'ina,</i> | Mother's clitoris, mother's clitoris,            |
| <i>Oboya bwa ng'ina, oboya bwa ng'ina,</i> | Mother's pubic hair, mother's pubic hair,        |
| <i>Baisia bake tetang'ina, tetang'ina!</i> | Uncircumcised little boys, copulate with mother! |
| <i>Baisia bake bororobwabarire</i>         | Uncircumcised little boys have had pain!         |

The term *baisia*, like all other cultural signs, is semiotically fluid and connotative and therefore, prone to multiple literary interpretations. In one context, this term can be used to be little way ward males and, in this context, it bears derogatory connotations. Conversely, the same cultural sign can be applied when praising young men and urging them to add vigor in their pursuit of a collective objective. In the verse above, the young initiates have withstood pain; pain, a cultural sign for oath and binding. They have been purified through the pain hence bonded to the Gusii culture. They have gone through the "furnace" and now they are the finished products of their Gusii cosmos. From being a child, one has thus become a young man. Curiously; the poem instructs the young initiate's mother respect him. The question is; why the mother and not the father? Equally, conventionally so to say, it is the prerogative of the child, regardless of the age, to respect the parent and not the other way around. Why is it required of the mother to respect the son and NOT the son to respect the mother?

Aligning this verse with the one of *Onchong'a* hereinabove, there is clear evidence that the oral poetry of the Gusii is a covert ideological state apparatus which constructs a patriarchal culture which in turn exalts the world of the male far above and higher than the world of their womenfolk. When a poem instructs a mother to respect a son and not the son respecting the mother, then it is obvious that there are some amounts of pride being instigated into the psyche of the males to expect and even demand some kind of servitude out of their womenfolk, regardless of their age and social standings. Mother, in the world of literature, is a trope for nourishment and nurturing. The trope mother can further be

stretched to mean systems of production. If a culture demands that a mother respects the son, then sociologically speaking, a patriarchal ideology is constructed in which gender relations of male domination and female suppression is the ultimate outcome.

Well, it can be argued that a little bit of arrogance cannot miss out in such gender relations but over and above it all, it is clear that here is an oral poem alongside many others which construct a patriarchal ideology in which a masculine male world is domineering and fearless and the females are coy. The patriarchal order created expects no challenge to its supremacy, no wonder then, *Onchong'a* must commit suicide – the total rejection of female domination - rather than stare at an open challenge, that is, an attempt to subvert the patriarchal hegemony. The fictional *Okonkwoin* Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as discussed above cannot live to see his once heroic clan of *Umuofia* being humiliated by foreigners and so, he commits suicide. On the same wavelength, the *Omogusii* male is socialized to be a proud emissary of his cultural heritage and he is interpellated to go to great extremes to protect his patriarchal hegemony and is willing to pay the ultimate prize to protect his macho status.

Given the connotative nature of semiotic signs, the spear as a cultural sign in the oral poem above has other meanings. Given the cultural context of circumcision in which the oral poem is performed, this spear that has been forged for the young initiate could connotatively imply his genitalia which has been “sharpened” after the circumcision surgery. The sharpening of the spear thus means the circumcision operation. The poem can be inferred to be interpellating the young men of Gusii antecedents to the effect that after initiation, they have been granted some sexual liberty. Accordingly, in regard to gender relations, they are to relentlessly “hunt” down members of the opposite sex and begin working towards getting brides of their own. To “hunt” implies to conquer and conquering implies social domination and this is one of the levels to which patriarchy in Gusii oral poems influences gender relations. This construction of domination and suppression is augmented by the presence of the hard shield (bravery) given unto the initiate alongside the spear. Therefore, as a proud bearer of his community's blessings, the oral poems of the Gusii are active constructors of a patriarchal ideology which interpellates the young males into exercising domination in their cross-gender relations.

Aristotle has advocated for the philosophical mindsets and universal truths (ideologies) which are espoused by poetry. He has looked at poetry as a vehicle for constructing various ideologies which express the inner structure of probability hence, shaping events and actions of mankind. For this reason, literature can tell the present and even predict the future. Therefore, it is worthwhile to further examine the two cultural signs of spear and shield, get their other connotative implications as the study gets to further ground itself in the moral utilitarian functions of literature. This is bearing in mind that the poems being analyzed by this study have been preserved by the Gusii community and therefore, they serve specific contemporary purposes.

## **PATRIARCHY AND CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS IN GUSII ORAL POETRY**

Human relations are not confined to gender interactions. Human beings establish relations beyond their cultural boundaries hence, the need to further examine cultural signs and artifacts in the sampled poems. This will ground the relevance of these oral poems to contemporary realities. Sample the lines below extracted from *Esimbore*.

*Batureirweitimonangubambibo.*                      Have been handed a spear and a shield.

*BarwaneSigisi, barwaneSigisi!*                      Fight the *Kipsigis!* Fight the *Kipsigis!*

*Barwanebosoba, barwaneBosoba!*                      Fight the *Abasuba*, fight the *Abasuba!*

In the discussion of the construction of patriarchy and gender relations herein, the spear and shield as Gusii cultural artifacts and signs have elucidated meanings on how the male gender in the Gusii cosmos dominate the female gender. Another semiotic interpretation of the spear and a shield could mean instruments of war. Given that war is not a value that can be celebrated in literature, the two semiotic signs of spear and shield are best interpreted within the Gusii cultural context. Better still, within that cultural context, they are fluid and connotative and therefore, prone to a multiplicity of meanings. From a sociological perspective, the same signs of a shield, spear and fighting are created for a given context (Gusii) to serve a specific purpose and one such purpose is to construct relations and social patterns that can create domination and suppression. Well, a spear and shield can be signs of aggression and defense. A disambiguation of these connotative signs reveals that they are stately/kingly symbols. They are given to kings in times of coronation to symbolize authority and readiness by the king to defend his subjects from any real and perceived threat. It therefore, is the submission of this discussion that these are Gusii cultural signs and artifacts designed and possessed by Abagusii because it is a community on the vanquished.

Firstly, it should be noted from the three lines of the oral poem quoted above that the poem constructs a mindset of dependable (stately) adults out of the young initiates. It is the position of this study that the spear as a cultural artifact is a semiotic sign which implies that the males in Gusii land to whom the poem is performed are hailed to be defenders of their household as well as be part the defense council of their Gusii community. With a shield (a sign of bravery), Gusii males are required to fearlessly defend their geographical territory and go fourth and conquer new territories (Kipsigis, Maasai, Bosoba) for the good of their community. Conquering new territories may have various implications other than the savagery attacks which a simplistic interpretation of the oral poem can imply. Conquering new territories include new business ventures, conquest in the world of academia and many other profitable frontiers. Well, these are some of the supposed expectations and accomplishments of the proud and imperious emissaries of the Gusii people. This is the patriarchal dimension that these oral poems achieve. They construct a domineering masculine identity of Abagusii, a bold, courageous, aggressive and abrasive male personality whom the Gusii community can depend on in both times of tranquility and threats.

The verse further tells the young man who has been initiated to fight the *Kipsigis* and the *Abasoba* (Kuria). Vansina (1985) has said that all art is metaphor hence, the fighting in this oral poem is metaphorical. Sociological theoreticians among them Rosenblatt (1978) have posited that literature is created to serve a specific and utilitarian purpose. Savage fights then cannot be a value that is celebrated by literature. Fighting in the poem, when accorded semiotic and sociological interpretation has positive implications, though savagery attacks cannot fully be ruled out in neighboring communities due to struggle for resources. Perhaps, historical sporadic skirmishes between Abagusii and their neighbors could have heralded the infusion of such “military” signs into their cultural oral poetry. The verse below implies such an eventuality.

*Chiarimeire, Chiombechiarimeire*                      Cows have disappeared  
*Obechiarimeiregochiabomanyi*                      Disappeared to Maasai land  
*Aaaee! AaaeOmosaiga!*                      Come on agemates, let’s pursue them!

The lines above are from a Gusii beer drinking oral poem titled *Omosaiga* – Agemate. The subject matter of the

poem is that agemates are encouraging each other to go in hot pursuit of their cattle which have been stolen by their Maasai neighbors. Understandably, the Maasai are a pastoralist community in Kenya. Beer is for mature men in Gusiiland hence, defense and recovery of lost property are masculine duties which form exclusive discourses of the male in a patriarchal culture. Though defense is a prerogative of the male in this Gusii culture, it is not a *carte blanche* for a community to train its subjects to think about savage aggression all the times. Therefore, there must be other social meanings and values embedded in the signs of fighting the *Kipsigis*, *Maasai*, and *Abasoba* in *Esimbore*.

The Kipsigis, Maasai and the Abasoba are geographical neighbors to the Gusii territory. The sign of taking the war to these neighboring communities is a patriarchal interpellation to the male subjects of the Gusii culture to extend and exert their domination from their home ground to another territorial yonder. Being sent or being expected to go against the grain in ensuring that the needs and interests of one's immediate families and those of the Abagusii nation are well taken care of is a form of masculinity which builds up the patriarchal ideology of Abagusii. The Gusii cultural sign of fighting is hereby interpreted to mean getting into serious engagement with the other (outer world) in order to bring home gainful knowledge and resources. Home means one's immediate family as well as one's community – the Gusii community.

Masculinity, as amplified by the aggressiveness of Abagusii, is further accentuated by the oral poem from which the verse below is extracted whose title is: *TumaBuya* – Jump well. To jump, dance --- are signs of emulating the best in aggressiveness as enshrined in the patriarchal ideology of Abagusii.

|   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <i>MoitebuyakonyatundoNyarisinange</i>      | Dance like Nyadundo of Sinange |
| <i>NyieriabuyakonyatundoNyarisinangee –</i> | Smile like Nyadundo of Sinange |
| <i>TumabuyakonyatundoNyarisinangee –</i>    | Jump like Nyadundo of Sinange  |
| <i>SunabuyakonyatundoNyarisinangee –</i>    | Pinch like Nyadundo of Sinange |

Spear, shield, fighting and now jumping up like --- in the verse above are masculine signs of strength, courage, and assertiveness. Theirs is a construction of a patriarchal ideology. It is a kind of ideology constructed to interpellate Abagusii males into exporting their best to the outer world hence, patriarchy and cross-cultural relations. For this reason, it is the submission of this study at this point that the oral poems above bear the intention of enriching the Abagusii males with the confidence that is necessary for marketing the good of the community and to be the worthy neighbors.

As proud emissaries of their patriarchal culture, Abagusii is therefore contented with their achievements are likely expected to exude considerable amounts of wit. Humanity lives in a world in which the wit controls the global destinies. For this reason, it is plausible to further front an argument that the purpose of the spear, a tool which bears some resemblance with the shape of the pen, is a cultural sign purposed to hail Abagusii males to apply wit in their undertakings. Ngugi (1993) has said that healthy cultures are those that blossom in a give and take relationship with other cultures. These are the cultures that reflect the ever-changing dynamics of internal relations and which maintain a balanced give and take with external relations. Those that remain closed ultimately shrink and meet their natural deaths. The wit through the pen (education) is constructed in a Gusii oral poem titled *BomwenuMbwagera* – Because of Pride as seen in the verse below:

|   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| <i>Obomwenumbwagerangatigaamasomo</i>       | Rudeness caused my dropping out  |
| <i>Obee baba ngatigaamasomoobee baba</i>    | of school. To remain at home and |
| <i>Obee baba nkanyakwagichindaobee baba</i> | extract jiggers.                 |

|  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Abana bane mogendeesukuru</i>         | My children, go to school            |
| <i>Obee baba mogendemosome</i>           | pursue education so that you         |
| <i>Obee baba mocha kombwekana</i>        | not live hopeless life like me.      |
| <i>Engakiyareroboremomboiyo</i>          | Nowadays there are no pieces of land |
| <i>Engakiyareromwandotoiyo</i>           | No other form of inheritance is left |
| <i>Obee baba omwandoorero</i>            | The only inheritance one can get     |
| <i>Obee baba omwando o reronamasomo.</i> | Inheritance is education.            |

The oral poem above exalts education as the most reliable vehicle for Abagusii to emancipate and empower themselves. While concurring with Ngugi's (1978) observations, it is the submission of this study that the shield (bravery) is a stage on which the drama that is wit is performed. Therefore, the construction of a patriarchal ideology of Abagusii is that every grown-up male of the community has to actively play the role of going beyond the physical, economic, social and political boundaries and be the community's envoy in matters that are of great benefit to the well – being of the community, especially on the academic front; given that a spear - *pen* has been forged for every male member of the Gusii cosmos.

To this point, the analysis of Gusii oral poems has revealed that a patriarchal ideology of Abagusii is the end product. The pain experienced by initiates in transition as captured by *esimbore* is a semiotic sign of oath of purification and commitment to the world of Abagusii. It is a form of purification in the sense that it is a departure from the formative stages of juvenile deeds of the world of the uncircumcised. An emissary who has been purified is by all means expected to uphold the highest standards of moral uprightness. Given that the "war" is taken to the Kipsigis and Abasoba, meaning the external world, it is the view of this discussion that Gusii oral poetry is filled with meanings designed to create a decorous male whose personality is acceptable beyond the boundaries as he represents the best image of his Abagusii kinsmen.

A brave person can at times extend his bravery a little and exude some "acceptable" degree of belligerence. Even when this is the case, an individual should not be treated as a microcosm upon which a stereotype that affects the perception of an entire community is constructed. Stereotypes blur people's perceptions and it is for this reason that a variety of meanings of the signs of spear and shield are explored and documented to make it clear that the ultimate goal of Gusii oral poems is to construct a revered patriarchal order of the Gusii world.

Finally, and still, in the cultural sign of fighting, the fight is directed to the neighboring communities. When this study stretches the gender relations discourse a little, the signified meaning is that the poem is granting sexual permission for procreation purposes. It is the submission of this discussion at this point that oral poetry constructs a patriarchal ideology through which males are encouraged to foster friendly relations with neighboring communities through marriage bonds. When young men from the Gusii world use their "spear" to "fight" and "tame" girls from the neighboring and unrelated communities, health nations are born who are strong and devoid of weaklings who are products of incest. This discussion envisages a scenario in which the youth after graduating into the adult world, are encouraged to exude their confidence not to girls within their villages. They should seduce women from far and avoid their immediate neighbors some of whom might be their close relatives with blood bonds. By this, the poem is socially interpellating the *Omogusii* man to be a proud and imperious emissary of a health society devoid of genetical weaklings who are brought

forth from the frowned upon relations of incest. The poem thus constructs and transmits knowledge and understanding to the effect that humanity should forge strong inter-communal marital ties in which there are no traces of consanguinity. By being encouraged to marry from other communities, hopefully, the patriarchal ideology of Abagusii envisages a tranquil scenario in which neighboring communities live in harmony because of shared relations through marriage. Fighting therefore, goes beyond issues of marriage and implies wrestling with the outer world ideologically with a view to benefiting mutually. The term wrestling here is borrowed from Amuka (2017) in which he argues that wrestling is a language that shuns destructive actions in which contesters do not break one another; they hug and the victor does not crack the ribs and skull of the vanquished. In this regard, wrestling, as it is captured in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, in good wrestling, the wrestlers win love as *Baroka* does in the play. Therefore, the intent of these oral poems is to construct a social mindset which is designed to create a combatant – a proud and imperious emissary who is sent out to win and not to kill. The Gusii proud and imperious emissary is sent out to win love for the community and not to bring death.

Curiously, the oral poem excludes the Luo from the “neighbors” who should be fought yet the Luo are geographically neighbors to Abagusii. The vague explanation this study can give as to why the Kisii man should not fight the Luo is based on stereotypes. Given that the poetry under investigation here is the circumcision poetry, its composers took into consideration the antiquated but hitherto obsolete stereotype that in matters of circumcision. To them then, a community which celebrated the initiation festival as Abagusii do is bound to compare itself to communities which celebrate similar festivals. Unlike the Kipsigis, Maasai and the Kuria, the Luo community; up to the recent past has not been circumcising its males. It therefore holds some water for this discussion to suggest that the circumcision poetry of the Gusii makes direct reference to the Kipsigis, Maasai, and Kuria given their similarities in matters to do with circumcision. By and large, these oral poems are constructing bravery that is pointed towards a specific direction. The young men are interpellated to prove their worthiness in the face of their equals or those that are thought to be mightier than them.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The patriarchal ideology of Abagusii as constructed by the community's oral poetry is long and protracted discourse which cannot be covered fully in a small enterprise such as this one. Though this is the case, this study has endeavored to capture a small but significant portion of the said ideology; how it shapes various interpersonal and intercommunal relationships. This study has so far demonstrated that oral poetry of Abagusii is beautiful literature which is rich in values. It interpellates its males to take up leading roles in heterosexual relationships within the Gusii territory. It also has posited that among other social values constructed for the Gusii populace, it is the formation of intercommunal relationships which are based on mutual gain. The poetry equally constructs a patriarchal ideology which interpellates the youth of the community to be vigorous in their undertakings. Equally, the oral poems of the Gusii construct in the mindset a fellow who is sociable and generous. More significantly, the patriarchal ideology of the Gusii youth as envisaged in the community's oral poetry constructs ideals which demand that the youth of the Gusii community must be socially bold and aggressive so as to avoid inbreeding, a social taboo among many African communities. Therefore, it is important that such studies be encouraged as to exult the real place of African oral poetry in making the African world the best place to live in.

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## APPENDIX - SAMPLED OF GUSII ORAL POEMS

### KONDE SEITO: WHILE AT HOME

|   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Ekondeseitonkaigwanyanchaabenegete</i>     | While home, I heard He's drowned      |
| <i>Onchong'aomintonkaigwanyanchaabenegete</i> | Onchong'a has drowned in Lake         |
| <i>Nyagetwoniakabutoraegetinge</i>            | <i>Nyagetwoni</i> had cut her legring |
| <i>KabutoraegetingeOnchong'akaremoyo</i>      | Cut leg ring yet Onchong'a was alive  |
| <i>Bwabokire! Bwabokireobwanchani</i>         | Real love has been rekindled          |
| <i>Bori bwa kare, boribwakareobwanchani</i>   | Love of the old times is alive        |
| <i>Bwabokire, bwabokireobwanchani</i>         | Real love has been rekindled          |
| <i>Temanaende, temanaendetorore</i>           | Try once again, let's see             |
| <i>Yaye abana baito – eekwaniaObino</i>       | Ohh! Ourchildren, greetObino          |
| <i>Ase rituko buna riarero!!Ooh!</i>          | On a daysuch as thisone               |
| <i>AyeOnchong'aagatangaekworo</i>             | Onchong'athoughtonlyof himself        |
| <i>EekwaniObino</i>                           | Ooh yes, GreetingstoObino             |

*Kani Kimaiganayebwate*  
*EekwaniObino*  
*Nyatundonyar'SinangekwaniaObino*  
*Moitebuyako'NyatundoNyar'Sinange*  
*Nyieriabuyako'NyatundoNyar'Sinangee*  
*Tumabuyako'NyatundoNyar'Sinangee*  
*Sunabuyako'NyatundoNyar'Sinangee*  
*Chenchiabuyako'NyatundoNyar'Sinangee*  
*Eee! NyatundoNyar'SinangeKwaniOnchuru*

Even Kimaiga has same afflictions  
 Greetings to Obino  
 NyadundoofSinange, greetObino  
 Dance like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 Smile like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 Jump like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 Pinch like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 Change like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 NyadundoNyar'Sinange, greet Onchuru

### **SIBERIA ONG'E - SIP AND GIVE IT TO ME**

*Siberia ong'e, aye,*  
*Sibeiaong'eomosaiga,*  
*Siberia ong'e,*  
*Siberia ong'eomosaiga*  
*Aeee! Aee! omosaiga*  
*Toa monto, aye*  
*Toa montookobayabaya*  
*Toa monto,*  
*Toa montookobayabaya*  
*Aeeee! Aee! Omosaiga*  
*Chiarimeire,*  
*Obechiarimeiregochiabomanyi*  
*Chiarimeire,*  
*Chiarimeiregochiabomanyi*

Take a sip  
 Take a sip my agemate  
 Take a sip and pass it to me  
 Sip and give it to me my agemate  
 Oh yes my agemate  
 Do not give it to  
 Give it not to a vagrant  
 Do not give it to a person  
 Do no give to a vagrant  
 Oh! Yes my agemate  
 Off they have disappeared  
 Disappeared to Maasai land  
 They have disappeared  
 Disappeared to Maasailand

*Aeeee! Aee! Omosaiga*

### **KONYATUNDO NYAR'SINANGE – LIKE THE BEAUTIFUL ONE OF SINANGE**

*MoitebuyakonyatundoNyarisinange*  
*NyieriabuyakonyatundoNyarisinangee –*  
*TumabuyakonyatundoNyarisinangee –*  
*SunabuyakonyatundoNyarisinangee –*  
*ChenchiabuyakonyatundoNyarisinangee –*  
*Eee! NyatundoNyarisinangeKwaniOnchuru*

Dance like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 Smile like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 Jump like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 Pinch like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 Dance like Nyadundo of Sinange  
 Nyadundo of Sinange greet Onchuru

### **ESIMBORE: CIRCUMCISION POEM**

*Baisia bake bororobwabarire!*  
*Isemokamioiriremborochiaito;*  
*Batureirweitimonangubambibo.*  
*BarwaneSigisi, barwaneSigisi!*

Uncircumcised little boys have felt pain!  
 The circumciser has taken our penis;  
 He has made them a spear and a hard shield.  
 Fight the Kipsigis! Fight the Kipsigis!

*Barwanebosoba, barwaneBosoba!*  
*Baisia bake e-e-e, bororobwabarire*  
*Isono ria ng'ina, isono ria ng'ina,*  
*Oboya bwa ng'ina, oboya bwa ng'ina,*  
*Baisia bake tetang'ina, tetang'ina!*  
*Baisia bake bororobwabarire*

Fight the Abasuba, fight the Abasuba!  
 Uncircumcised little boys have had pain!  
 Mother's clitoris, mother's clitoris,  
 Mother's pubic hair, mother's pubic hair,  
 Uncircumcised little boys, copulate with mother!  
 Uncircumcised little boys have had pain!

#### **BOMWENU MBWAGERA – BECAUSE OF PRIDE**

*Obomwenumbwagerangatigaamasomo*  
*Obee baba ngatigaamasomoobee baba*  
*Obee baba nkanyakwagichindaobee baba*  
*Abana bane mogendeesukuru*  
*Obee baba mogendemosome*  
*Obee baba mocha kombwekana*  
*Engakiyareroboremomboiyo*  
*Engakiyareromwandotoiyo*  
*Obee baba omwandoorero*  
*Obee baba omwando o reronamasomo.*

Rudeness caused my dropping out  
 of school. To remain at home and  
 extract jiggers.  
 My children, go to school  
 pursue education so that you  
 not live hopeless life like me.  
 Nowadays there are no pieces of land  
 No other form of inheritance is left  
 The only inheritance one can get  
 Inheritance is education.

