GENDER, LITERATURE AND RELIGION IN AFRICA

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CODESRIA Gender Series 4

COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
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Preface

Over the years since its founding in 1973, gender research and training activities have assumed a progressively important role and place in the work of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). Within the framework of the Council's strategic plans for the period 2002–2007, a decision was made to carry the existing institutional commitment one step further by launching a *CODESRIA Gender Series* that would also serve the goal of creatively extending the frontiers of the institution's publications programme. The hope was that through the *Series*, not only would the Council take a lead role in showcasing the best in African gender research but also provide a platform for the emergence of new talents to flower. The thematic variety and analytic quality of contemporary debates and research in Africa around gender issues is testimony to the mileage that has been successfully covered since the early days when African feminists struggled hard to make their voices heard. Today, few are the social scientists who are not aware of the basic issues in gender research and the community of those who apply the gender approach is growing. But as several of the participants at the CODESRIA-sponsored April 2002 Cairo international symposium on new directions in African gender research also observed, the challenges that remain in engendering the social sciences and the policy process are numerous, and addressing them requires the mustering of the capacities and convening powers of institutions like CODESRIA. The Council stands ready to play its part in meeting these challenges and the new *Gender Series* is designed as a modest contribution which in full bloom will capture current debates and deepen the African contribution to reflections on the theme of gender, feminism and society.

As indicated earlier, CODESRIA's commitment to the goal of engendering the social sciences and humanities in Africa dates back a long time. Some of the early research which the Council supported was instrumental in the development of new perspectives in African gender research while an investment has also been made in recent years in the provision of opportunities for training younger scholars in gender methodologies. In this connection, the CODESRIA Gender Institute has run every year since its inception in 1998, covering a variety of

themes and gaining in respect and recognition among female and male scholars alike. The path-breaking 1992 international conference which the Council hosted on the theme of engendering the social sciences stimulated a series of initiatives and debates, and also generated some of CODESRIA's best-selling publications. The emergence of an active and networked community of gender researchers in Africa in which CODESRIA has played a frontline role underscores the point that a positive wind of change has blown across the social research community, and there is no turning back the clock of the struggle for gender equality. This notwithstanding, the term 'feminist' still generates fear among some male (and female) researchers, and as Fatou Sow observed in her keynote address at the CODESRIA 10th General Assembly, it is still not completely given that women can fully enjoy their rights without let or hindrance (*'les femmes ont le droit d'avoir les droits'*).

Through its gender-related scientific activities and the launching of its *Gender Series*, CODESRIA acknowledges the need to challenge the masculinities underpinning the structures of repression that target women. It is to be hoped that the *Series* will be kept alive and nourished with insightful research and debates that challenge conventional wisdom, structures and ideologies that are narrowly informed by caricatures of gender realities. While much research has been done in this regard by feminist scholars elsewhere, in Africa, sustained research remains to be initiated in ways that are sensitive to the predicaments of women at different levels of society within and across national and regional boundaries. CODESRIA is committed to encouraging research along these lines. However, the rigour with which such research is conducted is of utmost importance, if gender studies and feminist scholarship are not to fall prey to the same myopia that accounts for the insensitivities of mainstream male-centred perspectives or the irrelevancies of western approaches masquerading as a universalism that takes no cognisance of the African historical context or which is ill-adapted to African concerns.

Most of the papers that have been selected to launch the *CODESRIA Gender Series* were initially presented at the April 2002 Cairo symposium which was organised around five main objectives, namely, to: (a) provide a space/platform for an exchange of ideas as well as a sharing of visions on gender-related themes and issues from pan-African perspectives; (b) prioritise areas of gender research that have a potentiality to transform social relations; (c) encourage gender-based knowledge production which is informed by African realities and give a "voice" to younger African scholars; (d) identify ways and means of improving advocacy and consolidating linkages between knowledge production and activism for the advancement of women interests; and, (e) work towards a cross fertilisation of ideas, methodologies and epistemologies, as well as consider ideas for the creation of comparative research networks on issues affecting women and their livelihoods. The first four publications chosen to launch the *CODESRIA Gender Series* bear

testimony to the diversity of interests in the field of gender research, diversities which are necessary for a healthy debate that advances knowledge. The Council hopes that readers will be sufficiently stimulated as to consider contributing manuscripts for consideration for publication in the *Series*.

Adebayo Olukoshi
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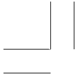
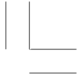
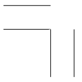
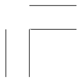

1

Understanding Gender Through Genre: Oral Literature as a Vehicle for Gender Studies in East Africa

F.E.M.K. Senkoro

Introduction

This paper attempts to preliminarily capture the relationship between gender issues and the form, content, performance and delivery of East African oral literary genres. It seeks to show that while gender issues have been included, discussed and even disguised within the various genres, it has not been the case in the discourses on the majority of those genres. The paper raises and tries to answer a few critical questions that posit gender studies alongside East African oral literature. For example, how do male and female narrators resemble or differ in the oral literature delivery process? How do male narrators depict female and male characters and how do female narrators depict the same in such a process? Are there any similarities and/or differences? If so, how and why? How does the listener perceive of such differences or similarities of treatment and portrayal.

The paper argues that in trying to understand this process, one may need to unveil the symbolic meanings that are mediated through aesthetic impulses that are, in turn, prompted by a proliferation of various styles and a wide range of oral literary expressions, techniques, general worldview and outlook. As an illustration, the paper shows how the attempt to break the Adam-Eve metaphor from East African lullabies can shed some light on gender relations among the people of East Africa.

The inquiry of this paper recognizes the relationship between genre and gender alongside the self-consciousness of the audience that involve systematic, culture-bound reflections on, and interpretations of, the different levels of abstractions obtained in oral literature. It is argued that further research into this area may examine the interdependence of belief and understanding in the whole enterprise of the delivery and reception of oral literature as well as generic and gender studies in relation to various products of the cultural industries of the East African people.

The folklore of a people enables us to observe, as though through telescopic eyes, the belief patterns and customs of the people. Thus, a people's philosophy of life is revealed by way of their folkloric wisdom. Folklore characters can make one discern how people react to social pressures in their environment. The voices of the story characters in a folktale, for example, provide the means for us to share the moral precepts and principles guiding a people's social interaction. Moreover, the folklore of a people enables us also to enjoy a good story and, in the process, satisfy our aesthetic sensibilities. For example, the humor and witticism, buffoonery and amusement so typically found in folktales make us chortle and smile inwardly and even embarrassingly, as we sometimes see ourselves and our own follies, foibles and whims mirrored and reflected in the antics of the folklore characters.

Further, through such folklore genres like the folktale, a person's socialisation process in his or her society/community is not only metaphorically depicted but also effected. This is done through manipulation of various symbols that may even represent the *rites de passage* that imprint all the necessary qualities a person is supposed to attain in order to graduate into adulthood in his or her community. Our research into most East African folktales that specifically deal with heroes and heroines of adventure indicate that these qualities imprint the readiness to do service to the community and even to sacrifice oneself in doing so. Included here also is the necessity to value one's family in one's life. Rites of passage depicted in folktales reveal social processes that sustain and modify the conduct and behaviour of individuals of a given community. The social processes do, in turn, involve conflict management or even mismanagement that would ultimately give indications of the resolution or non-resolution of such conflicts. This is a very important aspect of oral literary outputs especially in today's conflict-ridden world. It would make an interesting research to look into the way folklore items, especially the folktale, tell and re-tell the different conflicts such as the ones in war-torn zones, and, perhaps, discover the suggested resolutions that may help the mediators of such conflicts.

This paper however, focuses on a different issue altogether. It uses two Kiswahili literary genres to inquire into a gender view of the people that produced such pieces. First, it uses the folktale to examine issues of delivery and reception vis-à-vis gender issues; and secondly it uses Kiswahili lullabies specifically to assess how gender matters can metaphorically be manipulated

in the products of a people's cultural industries that are conventionally not meant to be used so.

Narrator vis-à-vis Gender Perspectives

The folktale in Appendix I tells how long, long ago there was a bad King. He was known as King Pride because he was so boisterous, self-centered and selfish. In fact he was so selfish that he wanted only himself to know the art of reading and writing and let his subjects remain totally ignorant. He, thus, sent his soldiers to scout around and ensure that no one tries to become literate. The overzealous soldiers went from house to house in search of those who would go against the orders of the King. After long and tedious searches they managed to catch one old man who was giving instructions to his daughter on how to read and write.

The way the story develops and even ends, varies, and, interestingly, the variation is gender-driven. Most female narrators would end the story at the point where the daughter outwits King Pride to the extent of making him take off his royal robes and crown and giving them to her so that the people declare her their ruler. As a logical conclusion to the story, and by the incitement by the daughter, King Pride is killed by his angry subjects and the land flourishes under the new ruler's regimen. On the contrary, the male narrators would add a portion to the story to the effect that after outwitting the King and assuming all the powers, the daughter then hands the power over to her father, and the land flourishes under the latter's rule.

This kind of a twist in the folktale produced a variety of reactions from my students at the University of Dar es Salaam, based, again, on gender lines. Some of them argued that the twist by the male narrators is a logical conclusion aimed at maintaining the patriarchal status quo. Others insisted that the assumption of power by the daughter symbolizes the emergency of a new, liberated woman in the face of a patriarchal society that has all along been reserving the right to access to political power to men. Since this is a very preliminary study that is still going on, and we are still collecting more data on the relationship between narrator and gender outlook within the narrated pieces, I will leave it at that and concentrate on an area whose research has been more or less conclusive. This is the genre of lullabies as sung or hummed by East African women.

Breaking the Adam-Eve Metaphor in Tanzanian Lullabies

Contextual identification is necessary in any discourse on a perceptual reflection of a society's social development presented in literary and other cultural industries. This is so since such industries are, by and large, categories of history that reflect a given people's mentality at a given time in their social development. Looking at Tanzanian oral literature vis-à-vis the upbringing

of children, one notices that the child who was born in pre-colonial Tanzania was exposed to, and experienced, various forms of literature from a very tender age when the mother, elder sister/brother or ayah/nanny sang lullabies to it. These lullabies aimed mainly at rocking the baby to sleep and expressing verbally the mother's joy of playing with her child or of having a child like the one presently carried on her back or lap. The lullabies were also used as a medium of instruction in language and music.

However, as I have shown elsewhere, the genre had a number of other uses as well, which were, in effect, meant for adults (Senkoro 1996).[1] Most of these uses can be summarised as a way of talking to oneself, where mothers would like to have silent sympathies of their children regarding their adult grievances. This leads one to wonder whether most of the lullabies that we generally classify as children's literature are not, in effect and fact, veiled adult literature. I have stated in the same paper cited above, the following regarding this matter:

> One can say that the lullabies are used here as a form of "talking to oneself", in spite of the dual audiences of the child and the father who might, indeed, not even be present at all when they are sung or hummed. These are the moments when a mother would like to have someone to listen to her and sympathize. The silent sympathy that the mother gets from the lulled baby seems to be the most appropriate. The lullabies, sung or hummed at such times, might contain some therapeutic values, which can, indeed, rival those contained in fairy tales. (Senkoro 1996:135)

We are arguing therefore, that sometimes the women who compose and even sing the lullabies do not mean to have the attention of their children regarding the actual contents of the lullabies. Here is where one has a piece of literature whose form is meant for one audience (children) and contents for another audience (husbands/ayahs). A few lullabies here from Zanzibar will serve for illustration.[2]

Lullaby 1: Ukiwa wa Baba na Mama ("Loneliness Caused by My father and Mother").

Angole ngole mwanangu, mwanangu nakuchombeza
Usilie usilie ukilia waniliza,wanikumbusha ukiwa
Ukiwa wa Baba na Mama, kunioza dume kongwe
Halisafiri halendi, kazi lapiga matonge
Likiingia kitandani hunguruma kama ng'ombe
Likiingia mvunguni, lagongoresha vikombe.

(Hush, hush my baby, I am lulling you my baby
Do not cry, for when you cry you make me cry
As you remind me of the bitterness and loneliness

Caused by my father and mother
Who have married me off to an old man
A docile, inactive and useless man
All it knows about is gluttony
And when it goes to bed
All it does is snore like a cow!
And when near the bed,
It knocks the utensils over.)

Before we comment on this lullaby, let us look at another lullaby.

Lullaby 2: Salamu za Siri ('Secret greetings')

Ukenda nisalimie
Kwa jina usinitaje
Mlangoni pana watu
Kidege nitapitaje?
Ukenda nikonyezee
Jioni mwambie aje.

(When you go pass on my greetings
But do not mention my name
There are many people at the door
How can I, poor bird, pass through?
So, when you go there give him a wink
Tell him to come in the evening.)

In the first lullaby the singing mother is not only protesting against forced or arranged marriage, but also that being married to an old and useless man makes her condition worse. The protest is hidden in the second lullaby in which the woman portrays herself as a chained, imprisoned bird, unable to go out and meet her loved one. The lullaby is, thus, a veiled speech of a veiled woman. Notice the use of the word 'it' for the husband, which reduces the man to a thing rather than a human being.

The next lullaby is actually sung while a woman is doing some work at the same time trying to silence the baby on her back. It is very similar to Lullaby 2 quoted above as it expresses a longing faced by a lonely woman:

Lullaby 3: Kile Nini Ng'ambu ya Mto? (What Is That Across the River?)

Kile nini kilicho ng'ambu ya mto?
Hakiita hakiitiki kazi kunipa majuto
Majuto ua kungumanga na ndiko roho iliko
Nangojea maji yatoke nende huko.

(What is that on the other side of the river?
I have desperately called for it
All it has given me are regrets,
Regrets in a nutmeg flower[3]
Where my heart resides.
I await the water to reside
Then I will go there)

We shall elaborate on the meaning contained in the above lullaby later. Since East African lullabies seem to play a double role as both children and adult literature, perhaps it is important here to state that the adult part, the non-cradle part that deals with the man-woman relationship, revolves around what one can term, for lack of a better word, the Adam-Eve metaphor, and the delicate institution of marriage. If one needs to go beyond the lulling role to the child and the protest function to the adults, one needs to break open the delicate Adam-Eve metaphor and, perhaps, in the process, replace it with another. The following part gives a summary of the attempt to do that tricky exercise that I have done elsewhere.[4]

The Psychology of the Adam-Eve Metaphor

These lullabies that can be re-named East African Blues have the expressive qualities of speech - rhythm, inflection and intonation. These, and the use of soft liquid vowels, among other speech qualities, are important for lulling the baby to sleep. However, it is these same qualities that are important in matters of sexual behavioral relationships aptly applied to, and operative in, the Adam-Eve metaphor. In examining this metaphor, we want to know the relationship between two phenomena: the woes of Eve and the reception by Adam. We want to see how much the 'high' values expressed in one variable (Eve) are associated with the corresponding values of the other, and how the 'low' values in the other variable (Adam) correspond in the same manner.

Definitely, from the lullabies that have been collected so far, it is clear that there are very few matches of *high* <=> *high* and *low* <=>*low*. The Eve side is crying out for mercy and help, showing how, the other side, the Adam side, is the source of the woes. Let's take a look at some more lullabies. These are shorter ones that are repeatedly and, thus, *emphatically*, sung.

Lullaby 4: Uchungu wa Kuzaa (Birth Pangs)

Nichombezapo mwanangu
Mtu halipati langu
Maji moto na uchungu
Nauona peke yangu.

(When I lull my baby No one can interfere,
I single-handedly
Faced hot water and the birth pangs)

Lullaby 5: Ngumi Hailei (A Punch Does Not Bring Up a Child)

Hailei hailei mama, ngumi hailei
Ukinilea kwa ngumi mama, wanitia maradhi
Kukosea si kugwa, ni kwenda mbele.

(A punch does not bring up a child, dear mama
If you bring me up using punches, you cripple me mama,
To err is not to fall; it leads one forward.)

Lullaby 6: Na Leo Pia (Today Too)

Na leo ukalale
Ulikolala jana
Usambe uongo
Paondoka jino
Pakaa pengo.

(Today too, go and sleep
Where you slept yesterday
Don't think it's a lie
When it is said,
"Where a tooth departs
A gap resides)

Lullaby 7: Nakuuliza Mwenzangu (I ask you my mate)

Nakuuliza mwenzangu
Nakosa kitu gani?
Mja hukosa kwa
Mola Akapata
Samahani
Yawache uliyo nayo
Tuishi kama zamani.

(I ask you my mate
What wrong have I done?
A man errs to God
And yet he is forgiven.
Forget the misgivings you have
Let's live like before.)

It is in these lullabies that a negative correlation manifests itself. Except for Lullaby 7 where the woman admits to have done something wrong (although my informers tell me that it can as well be just a false admission for the sake of peace, harmony and reconciliation), in the rest of the lullabies, high values of one variable are constantly associated with low values of the other. Perhaps, in order to break this metaphor, it is important to ask why this relationship of high-low is so one sided in most of these lullabies.

Lullaby 5 is a veiled commentary on either domestic or socio-psychological violence, and is, very likely, directed at the husband rather than the mother. It is a very sad song in which the mother, pretending to be the child, cries out for help against the 'punches' of the mother on the child that are in reality, representative of those from the husband. At the risk of stereotyping and generalizations, one is tempted to delve into the socio-cultural view of such violence. The reasons for the violence are definitely not instinctual. Neither do personality or pure brain traits cause them. Rather, they stem from the socio-economic realities that determine matching social and cultural rules about when to aggress and against whom. It is important, therefore, to identify the situational, economic and cultural factors that encourage such anger and aggression between sexes. Thus, invariably, the reduction or elimination of such violence would require not just individual change of Adam's heart but general social and cultural change.

A work of art is a consequence of the social milieu. Social and economic contexts shape every aspect of human behavior that is captured metaphorically in works of art, and we must emphasize here that the social component of a socio-cultural perspective at the same determines the feminine-masculine relationships within and even outside the institution of marriage. Should one wish to break the metaphor of such an institution, therefore, one needs to concentrate on that perspective. I have tried to use this method elsewhere, and I think that the results were a good basis for generalization. In the paper on lullabies that is cited above, I collected lullabies from matrilineal societies in Tanzania and compared them with those from other societies like the Zanzibari one, which are predominantly patriarchal. I will quote just two short examples of lullabies from the Kaguru people from Morogoro, Tanzania mainland, to illustrate the comparison that I made. The lullabies are in Cikaguru, a language of the Kaguru people.[5]

Lullaby 8: Saga, saga, saga! (Grind, grind, grind!)

Saga, saga, saga; saga, saga, saga
Sagile dilume dyangu, saga
Didie sinda simeme, saga
Kigana wakwe dyalima, saga
Kumbe wa mai na baba, saga

(Kiswahili translation)

Saga, saga, saga; saga, saga, saga
Ngoja nilisagie liume langu, saga
Ili lile hadi lishibe, saga
Kama kwamba ndilo lililolima, saga
Na hali ni baba na mamangu, saga

(English translation)

Grind, grind, grind; grind, grind, grind
Let me grind for (it) my husband, grind
So that it eats to its full, grind
As if it's the one that worked for this, grind
While it's my father and mother's work, grind.

Lullaby 9: Chidiage chisumuke (Let's Eat Fast)

Chidiage chisumuke
Chidiage chisumuke
A malume genghali genda
Hona gejile Amalomo gwaya.

Kiswahili Translation

Hebu tule harakaharaka
Hebu tule harakaharaka
Wakati wanaume wanarandaranda kijijini
Na hapo watakapowasili
Midomo yao itakuwa ikigwaya.

English Translation

Come let's eat fast
Come let's eat fast
While the men are roaming the village over
So that when they return
Their (hungry) mouths will be drooping.

These two lullabies actually mock the man. They poke fun at the men in the village, and clearly indicate how the woman in this society is independent and self-confident since she owns even the land on which her husband built their house. Never at one time during this research among the matrilineal societies was a lullaby showing the woman as a docile creature at the mercy of her husband's whims found. The social, cultural and economic realities of the Kaguru society, when it was still a real matrilineal society did not allow for

such a woman. Conversely, such realities in Zanzibar and other similar patriarchal societies do not only allow but they condemn the woman to the docile position at the mercy of her husband. Breaking the Adam-Eve metaphor, therefore, would mean entering and breaking open the social and economic fabric of the relevant society, and changing it so as to bring along a *high* <=> *high* variable relationship.

What the discussion above implies, then, is that one needs to approach this metaphor by placing the questions of the politics of culture at the centre of its corresponding products. There is a need to rethink the current discussions of cultural production that compartmentalize such products, so that we put emphasis on community construction and disjunctures vis-à-vis identity politics built on gender lines. Through this, the different voices of high versus low can be discerned and elaborated on in a round and cross-disciplinary manner that takes into account all forms of cultural production. Again, in order to break well that metaphor, one needs to go beyond the cradle. Doing so may show how the other folkloric modes have dealt with the matter of socio-cultural power relations that would be critical of the issues of domesticity as an ideology that, in turn, confines the woman to the roles of a bitter wife, a sad mother, and a broken homemaker.

Lullabies 4 and 6, though, indicate some kind of change in the metaphor we have been talking about. Lullaby 4 designates the mother's love and possessiveness to her child – a mother instinct kind of love that reminds one of the possessiveness of the chicken to its chicks. The mother relates the possession of her child to the birth pangs that necessitated her being massaged with hot water to try to reduce the pain. It is these birth pangs that make the mother proud and possessive. The fact that no man knows the extent of this pain makes woman superior to man, and it gives woman the secret, superior power that no man can exercise. This same stance is seen in Lullaby 6 where the singing woman dares, like in the matrilineal societies, to tell her husband off as she insists that he must return to where he spent the night, which is presumably, at another woman's place. The emergency of many lullabies of this type in recent times is indicative of the changes that seem to be taking place between these two sides. Invariably, this means that if this is the trend, then, perhaps there is no need to try to break open the Adam-Eve metaphor. The social changes taking place in society are, themselves, breaking open that metaphor.

Perhaps, as a way of concluding our enterprise, we should stir some further comparative discussion concerning the lullaby as literature for adults. Isidore Okpewho, in his book, *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character and Continuity* (1992) quotes an example of a lullaby from the Akan of Ghana taken from Nketia's 1979 work, 'Akan Poetry', that is sung by a mother to her child in the cradle. We would like to quote the lullaby here for the sake of

1.senkoro.p65 10 13/05/2005, 20:41

comparison. Unfortunately Okpewho has just given us the English translation that goes as follows:

Someone would like to have you for her child
But you are my own.
Someone wished she had you to nurse on a good mat;
Someone wished you were hers; she would put you on a camel blanket;
But I have you to rear on a torn mat.
Someone wished she had you, but I have you.

Okpewho says that the lullaby is just a touching expression of the love of a poor mother to her child. He touches on the fact that this poor mother wishes that her child could have the benefits of all those comforts that a child in a rich household enjoys. The mother is, still, proud to have the child, her poverty-stricken life notwithstanding. One is tempted to urge Okpewho to develop his theory of the lullaby further to show that in instances like the quoted lullaby, there are veiled cries of the lower class, of the have-nots against the rich who own it all. It would seem that the lullaby, like all the other 'innocent' literary modes, is used in a veiled manner to express class and gender issues in a manner that satirical literature would generally do.[6]

General Conclusions

Basically, the examination above is, in effect, a scrutiny of a people's worldview accrueing from their literary outputs. A worldview and, thus, philosophical tradition is, first and foremost, an idealism that ultimately identifies itself with reality. This worldview, possibly presented though abstract imageries and symbolism, is reflectively meditated through the word or metaphoric language. One then needs to closely examine the workings of *story* in the minds of its listeners. In this case, the mind's eye that is infused and permeated with the capability and norms of literary and artistic sensibilities, has the authority of churning metaphors that are culture-bound to produce images of a people's reality. An inquiry into a worldview of a people is, necessarily, an investigation into that people's culture shaped by the social and historical contexts, which birthed, and nurtured the accompanying artistic products, including literary outputs.

Let me end by reiterating that the arts and the humanities play a major role in liberating the mind. Without liberating the mind, the psyche, the imprisoned world outlooks, the beliefs, the attitudes that often effect self-denial and denigration, no positive gender awareness can be achieved. Thus, our research efforts and ensuing discussions in symposia like this will end up as mere theoretical deliberations that are useless to the majority of the stakeholders in this enterprise, especially women in rural communities who are most affected.

Notes

1. The ideas in this paper have been expanded significantly in my forthcoming book, *A Gift of Truthful Lies: A Critical Bilingual Anthology of Lullabies, Riddles and Fables from Tanzania.*
2. Again, for a fuller analysis of lullabies from Zanzibar, see the forthcoming book mentioned above.
3. I am told by one of my informers that since some East African coastal women use the nutmeg as an aphrodisiac, the reference here could, therefore, be sexual. Which means that the woman has, among other longings, sexual yearning for the man 'across the river'. The flower here represents the open, waiting woman who is still in the prime of her beauty, the nutmeg is a sexual symbol that would consume that beauty as it happens in nature too where the flower has to be 'consumed' by the fruit, and the river represents and, therefore intensifies, the distance between the two lovers.
4. See my forthcoming book mentioned above in footnote 1 above.
5. Thanks to Prof. Penina Muhando-Mlama who made these lullabies and their Kiswahili translation available to me.
6. Chapter 6 of my other work, *Let the Story and the Lies Come: A Critical Bilingual Anthology of Folktales from Zanzibar* (forthcoming, Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota) explores further, the use of the satirical mode in Zanzibari oral literature.

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Appendix I Mfalme Majivuno

Muda mrefu uliopita alikuwepo mfalme mmoja aliyekuwa akiitwa Mfalme Majivuno. Mfalme huyo alikuwa ni mwenye kupenda anasa. Kajenga na kiburi kwa hivyo akawa hamthamini mtu mwengine yeyote. Kitu kikubwa alichokuwa akiringia ni elimu yake, hivyo alijiona ana akili nyingi kupita wote.

Mfalme alikuwa akiishi katika nyumba yenye kila mambo ya mastaajabu ya kuvutia. Nyumba hiyo haikufanana na nyumba yoyote pale nchini. Tofauti ililyopo baina ya nyumba ya mfalme na raia zake ni sawa na mbingu na ardhi. Katika mazingira ya nyumba kulikuwa na bustani za aina aina. Watumishi kutwa wapo katika kusafisha na kuchuma maua ya kila aina kwa ajili ya mfalme na mkewe. Maua hayo yalikuwa na harufu laini kwa kutuliza pua. Isitoshe upepo uliopita katika maua hayo ulibeba harufu hiyo na kuisambaza nchi nzima. Hapa kitaluni pakawa ni masikani ya ndege wazuri, hivyo nyimbo nzuri nzuri zilikuwa zinaimbwa na denge hao. Watu waliokuwa wakipita hapo walihusudu bustani hiyo. Hapa ndipo maskani makubwa ya Mfalme ambaye wakati wote huupoteza hapa.

Siku moja alikuwa amekaa kwenye bustani yake, mara akapata lepe la usingizi. Wakati akiwa katika mang'amung'amu ya usingizi, mara ndoto ilimjia. Alihisi kuwa watu wanajifunza elimu, jambo ambalo kalikataa katakata kusikia mtu anajifunza elimu.

Baada ya kushituka akahamanika sana kwa ndoto ile. Akawatuma askari wake kumfanyia upelelezi kuhusiana na jambo la kufunzana elimu. Katika pita pita za askari wakagundua mzee mmoja anamsomesha mwanae elimu aliyoipata zamani kwa siri. Mzee huyo alikuwa na mtoto wake mmoja tu wa kike. Kwa kugunduliwa na askari, hoja nyingi na mwisho vurugu zilimiminika kama mvua kichwani kwa mzee. 'Yalaa! Yalaa!' Mzee aliomboleza. 'Hapana cha msalie mtume hapa. Twende kwa Mfalme!' Askari walimfokea. Mzee na mwanawe walipelekwa kwa mfalme.

Mfalme alipopelekewa watu hawa alifurahi sana. 'Ha! Ha! Wewe unataka kuwa kama mimi, unajifundisha elimu. Hujui kama hilo ni kosa la jinai katika nchi yangu?'

Mara mfalme akaamrisha ipigwe mbiu ya mgambo. Ngo! Ngo! 'Mbiu ya mgambo ikilia kuna jambo! Watu wote wakusanyike kwa Mfalme, kuna mambo makuu!' Hapo tena asomwana aeleke jiwe. Mbio kwa Mfalme. Umati ulikusanyika kwa mfalme kama siafu.

Nae Mfalme Majivuno akawatoa wale watu waliokamatwa, akawaeka juu ya jukwaa kama samaki wanaotaka kutiwa 'felisi' mnadani. Hapo Mfalme akatoa hoja zake kwa washitakiwa, 'Nina suala langu mukilijibu nitakuachieni mkishindwa mtauwawa'. Mfalme akauliza 'Mwenye enzi Mungu amesema kwamba kila siku kutatokea shani mpya mpya. Je, mwaka huu tulio nao kunatokea shani gani? Nipeni jibu haraka'. Mzee alipigwa na butwaa asijue afanye nini au aseme nini? Kuona kimya yule binti yake akamwambia, 'Baba

wewe nyamaza nitalijibu mimi'. Msichana akasema 'Mfalme suala lako nitalijibu mimi, lakini nakuomba uniazime hilo vazi lako la kifalme kwa muda wa dakika tano, baadaye nitakujibu'. Mfalme kwa kujiona kwake alicheka sana, 'Ha! Ha! Unataka vazi langu ndio ujibu? Kuvyaa vyazi langu hakutokusaidia kujibu hoja'. 'Litanisaidia', mtoto akachagiza. Mfalme akajivua vua majuba na malemba akampa yule mtoto. 'Jee mimi nimekaa kama mfalme?' Mtoto akauuliza umati wa watu.

Watu wenye huzuni wakasema, 'Ndio' huku wakiitikia kwa huruma. Msichana aliendelea kusema, 'Basi kama ndio, hili ndilo jibu la swali la Mfalme. Shani afanyavo Mungu muda huu huu ni kumtoka yeye Mfalme ufalme wake. Na kuanzia sasa mimi ni mfalme, naye huyo Majivuno muuweni!' Pale pale watu walimrushia Mfalme upanga kama mithili ya radi na umeta. Hapo hapo Majivuno alifariki dunia na yule mtoto akawa mfalme. Watu walifurahi kwani walikuwa wamechoka na takaburi ya mfalme huyo. ***Baadaye yule msichana alimkabidhi baba yake ufalme. Watu wote walimpokea vizuri sana na kumpa hadhi kamili ya kifalme. Na nchi sasa ikawa kila mtu kupewa hifadhi ya kibinadamu na pia kuwa na uwezo wa kusoma na kujiendeleza atakavo alimradi havunji sheria. Tena nchi ikawa mithili ya pepo.***

2

Imaginary Evidence:
Finding the *Non-Dit* in Fiction

Elizabeth Le Roux

> 'Sources' are whatever scratches on paper or parchment or stone or earth we find from some past human engagements from some past world. We will listen a long time before they speak—unless they are made to, by the reconstruction of the particular context, by attentiveness to the range of contemporary vernaculars, by our learning to distinguish breaches or absences in the record from willed, resounding silences (Clendinnen 1996).

The social sciences, particularly anthropology, history, philosophy and sociology, are concerned with describing what people do, and analysing the reasons behind behaviour. In the past, these disciplines were almost wholly concerned with the lives and behaviour of men. In the late 19th and early 20th century however, with contributions of anthropologists like Margaret Mead, attention began increasingly to shift to women, and their interaction with men. A distinction between sex (biological role) and gender (social role) was developed as feminism grew during the century, to the extent that gender studies is now a field in its own right.

This development also involved the study of gender and power relations in Africa. While obviously a vast field, women and gender studies in history, sociology, and other disciplines, have resulted in a 'restoration' of women's stories and histories.[1] For example:

> political history has tended to focus on activity in the public sphere and on office holders, both of which highlight male experience. The evidence demonstrates that women also have exercised power… (but) Because women's political participation did not always appear in obvious places or ways, it has been regarded as peripheral or absent, a view that ignores the complex processes through which power is exerted in societies (Berger and White, 1999:xxix).

This bringing of women 'back into the fold' has in some cases been referred to as a 'compensatory scholarship' phase (Visweswaran 2000:1), which places the spotlight firmly on 'how we think, or do not think, or avoid thinking about gender' (Flax 1987:622).

While they are the visible aspects of gender studies in Africa, these 'restorations' do not always recognise (with some notable exceptions), that there is no single, monolithic category of gender, or women, or poor women, or African women. There is no single 'Third World woman' whose life is identical and interchangeable with every other Third World woman. Indeed, there are women who lead basically similar lives in every society, just as there are also those who break out of these conventions. Kumah (2000:5) has pointed out how, 'Third world women are typically considered in terms of how they are affected by certain social institutions and systems, not in terms of their own agency, and certainly not in regards to the specific cultural/ historical contexts in which they live'. Similarly, Mohanty has warned against 'othering' Third World women by regarding them as exotic and as Other (quoted in Weedon 1999:191). What is important for gender studies in Africa is to be acutely aware of both *context* and *agency*—to recognise that women's lives differ even under the same or similar conditions, and even within the same societies. Thus, it is not enough to merely 'restore' women to the texts of history, anthropology or sociology, but also to reveal the many differences within the lives of women around the world.

One of the results of this homogenising tendency, I would argue, is that there is still a category of people, especially women, who slip through the cracks, as it were. Their experiences still do not make it into the 'mainstream', 'authoritative' or 'scientific' texts of their society, including the new, 'gender-sensitive' rewritings. These people always remain on the periphery, marginalised and alienated, and unseen by most. Anthropology has a term for them—'marginal ethnographic subjects'—although it seldom studies them. They are, to all intents and purposes, silent subjects. Yet, as noted by Adrienne Rich, the silence of those on the margins should not be 'confuse(d) with any kind of absence'. They are there, but they are excluded:

> Silence can be a plan
> rigorously executed
> the blueprint to a life
> It is a presence
> It has a history of form
> Do not confuse it with any kind of absence (Rich 1980).

The reasons behind this exclusion, which may or may not be deliberate, relate directly to the tendency to homogenise. Sociology and anthropology, and perhaps to a lesser extent history, tend to attempt to describe the dominant patterns in society—the norms and conventions—and the dominant groups

as well. Such disciplines tend to focus on what is visible and quantifiable, such as census results and the public sphere of work, economics and resources. Within every study, too, there is a selection process at work: of what to include and exclude, of what the researcher has been told or not told, and of what is considered important or not. This is closely linked to the question of *authority*, which reveals the underlying power dynamics at work in all research. Those texts which study the dominant groups in a society have the stamp of authority and of acceptance—what they do not say is what need not be said, or even what does not exist. And John Ruggie (1989:32) tells us that 'what we look for obviously has an effect on what we find'. Thus, in 'authoritative' texts, such as surveys, ethnographic research (especially in 'developing' areas such as African countries) or history books, only certain kinds of people and their identities are depicted; these are often classified as 'skilled' or 'unskilled', 'literate' or 'illiterate', 'legal' or 'illegal', not to mention 'male' or 'female'. There is no space in authoritative texts beyond these binary opposites for other identities to emerge, a situation exacerbated by the gender bias characterising much policy and research.

Yet there is a space, beyond such polarities and preconceptions, in which the *non-dit* operates. The term *non-dit* is used here to refer to what is not said in a society, what is swept under the carpet or excluded. It also refers to that which is difficult to study, because it is occluded, hidden or silent—such as sexuality, or taboos. There are evident difficulties in trying to make the *non-dit* an object of academic research. Where such studies do examine what usually goes unsaid—whether they term it 'outsiders', 'misfits' or the marginalised—the tendency is to look at their marginalisation as a *phenomenon*. They are not studied as individuals or groups of individuals with their own views of society. Such identities may even be effaced in 'authoritative' texts, showing up only as statistics. For example, societal outcasts such as prostitutes may only emerge in newspaper reports when they become 'faceless' victims of crime, or are described in terms of a social problem (to be eradicated, usually). Additionally, although taboos may regularly form the subject of anthropological research, the breaking of taboos is not as easy to discern, or to record as part of an academic study. As well, a group of individuals may be marginalised or punished for not respecting the conventions of fertility (through sterility or miscarriage), marriage (for example, by refusing to enter into a polygamous marriage), and so on, but their behaviour does not form part of the mainstream account of their society.

One of the few anthropological theories challenging this view is the muted group theory of Shirley and Edwin Ardener. Shirley Ardener argues that 'too many anthropologists [have] focused on the dominant male model of how a society worked, and ignored the possibility that other groups in the culture (such as subordinate men, women, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, or

outcasts) might have a different understanding of the ways in which their culture operated' (quoted in Delamont 1995:173). Moreover,

> … because the arena of public discourse tends to be characteristically male-dominated and the appropriate language registers often seem to have been 'encoded' by males, women may be at a disadvantage when wishing to express matters of peculiar concern to them. Unless their views are presented in a form acceptable to men, and to women brought up in the male idiom, they will not be given a proper hearing (Ardener 1975:viii-ix).

Thus, according to this theory, more attention should be paid to discovering how members of muted groups express themselves and construct their identities and philosophy. The assumption, moreover, that 'muted' groups are silent, or silenced, may be incorrect. Edwin Ardener points out the ambiguity of using the term 'muted', as it can mean 'both "dumb" and "of a reduced level of perceptibility". The muted structures are "there" but cannot be "realized" in the language of the dominant structure' (Ardener 1975:22). In this context, it is the mainstream texts that are silent, that, deliberately or unwittingly, do not mention the unmentionable or speak the *non-dit* (unspoken).

Michel Foucault has richly demonstrated how society only allows certain things to be said while classifying others as 'aberrant', or even 'madness'. This enables certain voices in society to gain authority, and others to be completely ignored. The effect is to stifle whatever has no acceptability in the dominant field of the discourse. Shirley Ardener, too, has noted that

> The theory of mutedness, therefore, does not require that the muted be actually *silent*. They may speak a great deal. The important issue is whether they are able to say all that they would wish to say, where and when they wish to say it. Must they, for instance, re-encode their thoughts to make them understood in the public domain? (Ardener 1978:21).

Bell Hooks also wrote about this wilful ignoring of voices that do not match the dominant discourse, specifically in relation to the muted group of black women. 'In black communities (and diverse ethnic communities), women have not been silent. Their voices can be heard. Certainly for black women, our struggle has not been to emerge from silence into speech but to change the nature and direction of our speech, to make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard' (Quoted in Hitchcott 2000:154).

Yet, there are further complexities to the seeming silence of the marginalised. They may be keeping quiet for reasons of their own. Foucault (1977) describes a tension between discourse (or authoritative speaking or writing) and silence when he describes the workings of power: 'Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance'. As Trinh Minh-ha

points out, 'Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored' (Minh-ha 1988).

However muted their voices may be then, these groups—or, more likely, individuals—certainly do exist. But where should one turn to find out about such groups, to discern their models of society, and to trace their attempts at agency? How does one study what is not usually visible—and indeed is often deliberately made invisible? The indicators required to substantiate such academic research would indeed be difficult to establish. However, exploring 'non-scientific' methodologies can fill this lacuna in research.

Speaking the *Non-Dit*: Fiction as Source

If certain people or groups of people (especially women, excluded because of unbalanced gender relations and other factors) are not included in the 'authoritative' descriptive texts of society, how then can their story be told? If disciplines such as history (especially social history), anthropology and sociology do become interested in such excluded groups, where do they turn for sources? We have already noted that other means should be sought: *alternative sources*, that are able to say the unspoken or unspeakable:

> … finding women in the histories of the non-Western, just as in the Western, world requires persistence due to the silence or obliqueness of 'traditional' historical sources such as documents written by historical actors themselves. The roles of women in agriculture, health, crafts, religion, politics, the arts, and other arenas have often been regarded as negligible, exceptional and infrequent, or irretrievable for other than the very recent period. However, far more is available than one may think; much of it lies hidden in non-obvious sources: oral testimony, mythology, life histories, genealogies, religious records, missionary and explorer accounts, archaeological excavations, language, legal codes, land tenure arrangements, *oral and written literature*, or cultural lore and fable (Berger and White, 1999:xxxi; emphasis added).

Shirley Ardener also acknowledges that 'women's ideas or models of the world around them might nevertheless find a way of expression in forms other than direct expository speech, possibly through symbolism in art, myth, ritual, special speech registers and the like' (Ardener 1975:ix). I would add that the symbolic world of fiction is another key source for forms of expression from a muted group, especially the new writing emerging from women in Africa. The *non-dit* can find a voice in the literary genre. Coundouriotis (1999), for instance, has illustrated how historical narration in French and English African novels of the colonial and postcolonial periods 'not only "answers back" to Europe's colonialist legacy, but also serves as a complex form of dissent among Africans themselves. Coundouriotis therefore gives voice to African novelists' defiance of colonialism and nationalist ideology' by exploring the dialogue between literature and history.

There is some debate, of course, as to whether fictional texts can be used as a reliable source for historical or sociological research—it has been dismissed as 'imaginary evidence', as 'subjective' or even as 'inadequate science' (Mitchell 2000; Visweswaran 1988). Since fiction is not based on empirical data or fieldwork, for the most part, and cannot be 'verified', it has not been valued as a source of ethnographic data in anthropology. Additionally, because it is not necessarily based entirely on documented facts, historians tend to dismiss it as a non-historical source. Likewise, literary criticism tends to avoid labelling fiction as 'mimetic' or reflective of social reality. Yet, because not all social reality is recorded or researched, it can be argued that fiction fulfils a valuable function by making visible the patterns, networks of influence and questions of identity that are central to the maintenance of a prevailing society. Fiction reveals subjectivities, in very specific contexts. The paper will show that in certain cases, fictional texts are perhaps the only ones that can be used to highlight particular issues and illuminate the existence, perceptions and experiences of certain kinds of people.

The question of fiction as source is a complex one, raising theoretical questions for both the social sciences and for literary theory. For example, the genre of autobiography, especially autobiographical fiction, raises questions about authority, about authorship, and about the extent to which all written accounts of reality can be said to be constructed (Plummer 1993; Stanley 1992 & 1995; Swindells 1995). The well-known historian AJP Taylor noted that history, 'is not just a catalogue of events put in the right order like a railway timetable. History is a *version* of events' (quoted by Rainbolt 2000; emphasis added). So, too, anthropological texts are versions of the lives of groups of people. They depend on what the author is told, who is interviewed or observed, what is remembered, what is written down, whether the subjects tell the truth, and a variety of other factors, not excluding the gender of the anthropologist. The researcher can also only go so far in using methods like participant observation. In other words, the author *always* has an influence on what is written down, by emphasising certain points, downplaying or excluding others, and thus enabling the reader to trace his or her prejudices, bias and beliefs through the written text.

Despite a growing tendency to read all texts as prejudiced, and all realities as constructed, the reluctance to use fiction as a source remains deep-seated. Redi Mitchell (2000) notes that, irrespective of 'history's origins in storytelling, narrative has not been the dominant mode in the history profession for quite some time'. Yet, observes Visweswaran, '[f]or a movement which claims interest in experimenting with how selves are constituted or represented, experimental ethnography has been strangely reluctant to embrace other forms of writing, like the novel, short story, diary or autobiography. At a time when

literary critics read such texts as expressive culture, why can't anthropologists?' (Visweswaran 1988). The question is a valid one.

> In anthropology, there is a tradition of women ethnographers, not always professionally trained, often writing in a novelistic or fictive voice about culture. Some of these women were the wives of male anthropologists, men who upon completion of their fieldwork continued in the mien of publishing for a professional audience. Kevin Dwyer has noted that the male seemed to adopt the 'objective' explanatory mode, and the female a 'subjective, anecdotal' mode… He suggests contrasting the books of Laura Bohannon, Elizabeth Fernea, Margery Wolf, (and I would add Marion Benedict), to those of their anthropologist husbands to get some idea of this division. I would also consider others consigned to the genre of confessional or popular literature: Jean Briggs, Hortense Powdermaker, and Elizabeth Marshall Thomas. We might ask why it is that this genre consists largely of women, and why it is that women more frequently adopt first person narrative as a means to convey their cross-cultural experiences (Visweswaran 1988).

The question is why are these 'fictionalised' versions of anthropology less valued than the 'authoritative' versions written by their husbands? These texts can be read as much as ethnographic sources as fictionalised, constructed worlds, since they do maintain a keen respect for the social reality on which they are based. Moreover, fictional texts can be used as a means to 'observe' behaviour that is inaccessible to the traditional methodologies of participant observation and collecting empirical data, by making visible experiences which are often hidden. Donna Haraway acknowledges this by raising the question of using fictional texts specifically in the field of anthropology and women's studies. She argues that, 'Fiction may be appropriated in many ways. What will count as fiction is itself a contentious matter, resolved partly by market considerations, linguistic and semiotic practices, writing technologies, and circuits of readers' (Haraway 1988). She goes on to argue in more detail for the usefulness of fiction in accessing women's lives, in particular:

> What may count as 'women's experience' is structured within multiple and often inharmonious agendas. 'Experience', like 'consciousness', is an intentional construction, an artifact of the first importance. Experience may also be *re*-constructed, re-membered, re-articulated. One powerful means to do so is the reading and re-reading of fiction in such a way as to create the effect of having access to another's life and consciousness, whether that other is an individual or a collective person with the lifetime called history (Haraway 1988).

Similarly, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie has argued for the use of 'imaginative literature as a data source for the study of women and society' (1994:43). This is particularly the case when, as many African women authors argue, they specifically write 'in order to comment on society, on the way in which women are treated in society, and on that society's attitude to the rights of the

individual' (Claire Dehon quoted in Hitchcott 2000:33). Such 'committed literature' (*littérature engagée*) may form an especially rich source for details on the lives and identities of the muted group.

This use of literature as an ethnographic or historical source is not only problematic for anthropologists and historians. Literary theorists too regularly debate the question of realism and the mimetic function of texts. Traditional literary theory accepted that a fictional text 'reflected' the world it claimed to represent. Although this simple relationship has been considerably problematised since then, a large number of critics still maintain a mimetic stance:

> The first thing that should be noted about this group of books [i.e. the *Vies africaines* series] is that they appear to be addressed, not to a European or expatriate readership, but to Africans, who will recognize situations that reflect their daily lives… They are important because they depict a society in transition. They constitute a *sociological document* that *reflects* the life and concerns of the people of post-independence Africa (Alain Fresco quoted in Hitchcott 2000:50).

A more nuanced reading of the social function of fiction, and of its role in 'reflecting reality', asks questions regarding the nature of 'reality', rather than the nature of literature. John Lye (1999), writing from a poststructuralist perspective, sums this position up in one question. He asks, 'Most compellingly, is literature a means of representing reality, or it is a means of representing particular imaginative constructions that we take to be reality but which may have ideological, cultural, political meanings which ground and shape the "reality" we think we are looking at?' Perhaps ironically, it is poststructuralism (and postmodernism) that most vehemently rejects the mimetic function of literature, which has provided the theoretical basis for equating all texts as equally constructed, as equally near to and far from 'reality'. Based on the argument that there is no foundational 'truth' or 'reality'—no absolutes, no eternalities, 'no solid ground of truth beneath the shifting sands of history'—these theories read the past as 'textualised remains'. They teach that social reality is structured by discourses, and that, 'A representation does not represent an "original"; rather, it re-presents that which is always already represented'. In emphasising the need for context, it is argued that there are only 'local' and 'contingent' realities, generated by various groups through their cultural systems in response to their needs for power, survival and esteem. Consequently, realities—and thus identities—are cultural constructs, not stable entities. Therefore, any text can only be a representation of reality (which itself is neither singular, nor tangible). Indeed, such a reading is stretched to the extent that the usual sources of sociology, anthropology and history—ethnographic texts, 'mainstream' texts, and so on (often referred to as 'master narratives')—can only be regarded as 'problematically non-fictional' (Lye 2000).

The implications of the poststructuralist emphasis on 'reality' as constructed, and thus as fragmented, diverse, tenuous and culture-specific, are of particular interest here. For a start, poststructuralist theories recognise the need for context, and for greater attention to specific histories, details and local contextualisations of concrete instances. This in turn leads to a greater emphasis on the body, which represents the actual insertion of the 'subject' into time and history, and a greater focus on the specifics of cultures and cultural practices. There is also a specific focus on the role of language and *textuality* in constructions of reality and identity. Textuality is a term referring to the constructed nature of reality. If there is nothing 'outside of the text' (*il n'y pas de hors-texte*), as Jacques Derrida has remarked, then everything we know is constructed through signs and symbols, governed by rules of discourse, and related to other texts through the tropes of filiation, allusion and repetition. John Lye (2000) notes this 'understanding does not mean that all reality is textual, only that what we can know of it, and how we can know, is textual, constructed through discourse, with all its rules; through symbols, linguistic and otherwise; through grammar(s)'.

Due to the political agenda of deconstruction, in particular, this argument can be taken further, to deconstruct the 'master narratives' of history, anthropology and sociology, among others. Being mindful that the term 'history' suggests an objectively existing, cognitively available reality, the term 'historicity' is preferred here, as it implies that what we conceive of as history is tentative, situated, contingent. In arguing that hierarchies, including historical hierarchies, depend on exclusions, deconstruction requires that attention be paid to the marginal. Thus, in deconstructing the so-called 'master narratives', we should look for exclusions, for what has been edited out of 'characterisations of human experiences' and in this way engage in what is referred to as 'affirmative deconstruction', or the construction of alternative, revisionary, and counter-hegemonic histories (Lye 2000; Spivak 1987; Niranjana 2001). As the following statement indicates, this position is slowly being recognised, albeit outside the mainstream of the social sciences:

> As I read the situation, 'we historians' thrive on our own mistaken identity... It is commonly asserted we are historians, not philosophers; *we write history, not fiction*. But these oppositions carry within themselves the seeds of our own deconstruction. If we examine them carefully, it is no longer clear where the boundaries lie between our discipline and others, between us and others. And if this is the nature of the identity crisis which poststructuralism provokes among those who consider its implications for the study of the past, perhaps the task before us is that of reconstructing our disciplinary self, so that 'we' may thrive once again (Hearn 1993:7; emphasis added).

Poststructuralism tends to focus on fragmentary, experimental texts. It has hardly been applied to the realist genre or those texts which most clearly

attempt to make a link between the created reality in the text and reality as it exists 'out there'. Postcolonialism, too, has tended to argue that non-realist texts offer the best opportunities for resistance and struggle, a key part of the reason for writing postcolonial texts (where 'post' often means 'in opposition to'). Yet, realism, and the tracing of links between realities, has its own value. Moss argues that perhaps,

> one reason that realism not only persists but thrives, at least in many postcolonial contexts, is that contemporary postcolonial realist novels are capable of resistance…. Theoretical responses to realism produced in postcolonial locations have ranged from viewing it as a form that interpellates the ideology of imperialism, to characterizing it as naïve or simplistic, to configuring it as an attempt at the representation of a single authenticated experience (Moss 2000:1).

In using literature as an ethnographic source—in other words, in seeking a version of reality within a fictional text—then, are we assuming that texts are a direct reference to a 'real' world outside the text? Or are we instead assuming that all texts are equally constructed, whether literary or otherwise?

One of the objections to fiction as a source is that it is not 'authentic'. However, the 'reality' constructed by a writer of fiction—rather than an anthropologist, who is usually an outsider—can claim a certain 'authority' or 'authenticity' of its own. Minh-ha argues that, '[a]n insider can speak with authority about her own culture, and she's referred to as the source of authority in this matter' (Minh-ha 1988). It should be noted, however, that the authors considered in this paper are not necessarily insiders or outsiders. Many are privileged, living abroad and having benefited from a good education, but still choose to focus on outsiders in their writing, while others work daily with the development of their countries and communities, and have made a conscious decision to stay in Africa. These pressures in turn create a tension within the works of such authors. As Minh-ha goes on to say, 'The moment the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside' (Minh-ha 1988). Similarly, the insider becomes an outsider when she leaves her country. For example, Calixthe Beyala lives and works in France and thus risks losing 'authority' and even 'authenticity' as an insider and writer.

This question of the writer as outsider is an interesting one, as Rangira Béatrice Gallimore notes:

> When a woman writes, she forces her way into a space that was previously closed to her. She pulls herself up to a higher rank and places herself outside the social structure reserved for her. With this subversive movement she breaks the rules preestablished by tradition and custom, and cannot escape her own marginalization. For an African woman, to write is to place yourself voluntarily on the *margins* of society (Quoted in Hitchcott 2000:5).

Tanella Boni, an Ivorian writer, spells out her experience of being an outsider in this way:

> [I write] when, in a way, I have broken with the world that surrounds me. When I have dared to speak: me, a woman ordinarily doomed to other kinds of work… No. I do not write because I am part of the world. When all is said and done, I write because I am at odds. With the world. With others. With myself (Quoted in Hitchcott 2000:26).

There is thus tension between authenticity and being an outsider in fiction writing. Perhaps this tension also exists in the writing of other kinds of texts, but has not been thoroughly explored as yet. It is certainly a fruitful basis for illuminating areas of social life that usually remain hidden or unspoken.

It must be noted, however, that not every fictional text can be used in the search for the *non-dit*, since not all raise the same issues. It has often been said that African male writers depict few women characters in their works while those that do, present them as mere cardboard cutouts (and perhaps vice versa). Kumah, for instance, notes that due to 'the male-dominated literary tradition, many of the depictions of African women are reductive—perpetuating popular myths of female subordination. Female characters in male-authored works are rarely granted primary status—their roles often trivialized to varying degrees—and they are depicted as silent and submissive in nature; remaining absent from the public sphere' (Kumah 2000:7). D'Almeida suggests that the work of many African authors 'is far removed from the reality of women's daily existence' (quoted in Kumah 2000:9). This is not only the case for male writers; well-known woman writers such as Aminata Sow Fall do not deal with women in much detail, either. For these reasons, then, one must look carefully for texts that do elicit the *non-dit* if one is seeking to raise awareness of those who do slip through the cracks. This is the case for fiction as for any other kind of text.

Interestingly, however, it would seem that the majority of 'authoritative' texts that exclude the *non-dit*, are written by men, while themes of marginalisation and exclusion come up in a large variety of women's writings. While women writers, in Africa and elsewhere, are not exclusively concerned with the *non-dit*, a large proportion focus on the forgotten, the marginalised, and the silenced. This raises the question of whether it is only through the sympathetic words of other women that marginalised women can be heard. In this way, they do what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has called 'speaking for the subaltern'. They provide a space for the stories of such women to be heard, through their focus and indeed insistence on the primacy of women's experience. Although this act may not be without problems, it is one way of creating awareness of women's diverse identities, and the ways in which they may be struggling against more accepted identities. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to be aware of both *context* and *agency* when looking at the lives of women in Africa.

Revealing and Reflecting: What Remains Unspoken?

The fact that the *non-dit* is located outside of conventional society and does not easily show up in the written word does not mean that muted groups lack their own models of society or even attempt to access conventional society. People may be marginalised or silenced for various, often overlapping factors, including religion, race, class, and gender. Issues which have specific relevance here, as they do not lend themselves to traditional forms of academic study—such as sexuality—also have particular relevance for the workings of power in a gendered society. Thus, we focus specifically on sexuality and gender, understood not only as a social and political construction but also as *irreducible*, not to be subsumed under class, race, ethnicity, cultural or national identity.

Experimental ethnography, with its focus on the relations of power, knowledge and fieldwork, has opened up some interesting possibilities for the study of gender. Arguing from the Foucauldian basis that 'power originates in power over the body' (quoted in Synnott 1993:232), gender is revealed as a symbolic system not separable from domains like the family, the economy, and politics, but embedded in discourses and images marking social boundaries and self-reflective identities. The actual power of women in society is linked to kinship and residence patterns, to the social structure and modes of production, and to ideological representations of women in art, ritual or belief systems. Consequently, the body becomes a focal point for understanding gender performativity and agency, because people, or 'subjects', are material beings, embodied and present in the physical world, and entrenched in the material practices and structures of their society (Niranjana 2001).

This emphasis on the body and sexuality with regard to the gendered place of women in society is not coincidental: 'Throughout history, societies have generated ideological systems that link female identity to female sexuality, and female sexuality to women's role in procreation' (Berger and White 1999:xxxvii). However, as Foucault points out, merely speaking out about sexuality can be seen as a subversive act in itself:

> Repression is a sentence to disappear, an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such subjects. Repression has been seen as the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age and nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, *an irruption of speech*, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required to free ourselves from it. If sex is repressed, then *the mere fact that one is speaking about it* has the appearance of a deliberate transgression (Foucault 1978).

However, Foucault goes on to note that modern power can perhaps be characterised as productive, rather than repressive. This means that, in sexual as in other discourses, new techniques and regulations are being generated for

controlling social activity and perceptions. These in turn induce other schemes of power relations like techniques of self-management by people subjected to control (Foucault 1978). The fluid and multiple nature of power relations become part of the everyday life of young women in developing societies. The tension between tradition and modernisation in many postcolonial African countries, for instance, has been accompanied by an inflationary increase in the social meanings of gender and sexuality: these are negotiated and contested in relation to other discourses about social difference and domination in African society.

But where does one find evidence of these new meanings of gender and sexuality? Again, let us look to fiction as a source. In fictional texts, especially those written by African women, the identities of the female characters are often over-determined by their sexuality. They often fall into the extremes of the range of sexuality, as prostitutes (i.e. always sexually available, and defined in terms of their sexuality), or virgins and old maids (i.e. taking the ideal of sexual purity far beyond the social norms, and rejecting marriage and motherhood into the bargain). This means that they fall outside the conventional range of roles available to young women in these societies, and thus become part of the muted group. When they take their unconventional behaviour still further, by attempting to do violence against men, or to revolt against the enforced ideals of heterosexuality and the nuclear family, they become outcasts—a far more muted part of the muted group, or the *non-dit*.

Such women do not adhere to society's directives for conformity and acceptance. They are not dutiful daughters, wives or mothers. Their bodies do not adhere to socially accepted norms (such as those who have escaped clitoridectomy or who use their bodies as an economic commodity). Above all, they resist the constraints of roles imposed by a male-dominated, conservative society. They are aberrations: prostitutes, spinsters, politicians, madwomen! Examples could be provided from a whole range of novels by African writers. For example, Ken Bugul focuses on the effects of polygamy and religious power relations on the lives of women in certain parts of Senegal and in exile in Paris. She describes both women forced into polygamous marriages and those who embrace such a situation. Her novels also reveal how autobiography and fiction can intertwine. Her first work, *Le baobab fou*, based on her own life experiences, examines many forms of exclusion: prostitution, madness, drug-taking; abortion and homosexual episodes (many of which are taboo in African societies). Similarly, examples from Tanella Boni reveal the lives of an urban underclass in the Côte d'Ivoire. She describes how women can be treated as commodities while investigating a quasi-incestuous Oedipal triangle in *Une vie de crabe*. Her use of a child as protagonist in this novel also reveals the world-view of a different kind of muted group: children, and those classified under the law as minors (such as wives have

been at various places and at various times). Sembene Ousmane exemplifies a male writer who has depicted marginalised groups such as beggars in his books and films, for example, *Xala*. However, although he maintains his 'commitment to speak[ing] for those in society whose voices are seldom heard' (Ousmane 2001:40), his depiction of women is at times problematic, as will be shown later.

In this paper, I will focus briefly on the fictional works of Calixthe Beyala, the most prolific and well-known woman writer in francophone Africa. In Beyala's novels, the women characters, especially the protagonists, are good examples of a muted group that does not show up clearly in 'authoritative' or 'mainstream' texts except as passive constructions, even stereotypes. Beyala overtly focuses on the experiences of 'forgotten' women, especially in Cameroon and immigrant communities in Paris, and on drawing attention to the constraints and problems of their lives. This makes Beyala's novels seem particularly shocking, while encouraging a sense of alienation from what we as readers think we 'know' about Beyala's society. Madeleine Borgomano comments on the subversive nature of Beyala's fictional voices when she writes that, 'she does not respect the law of silence: she also writes that which must not be spoken' (quoted in Hitchcott 2000).

One interesting 'muted group' which Beyala and many other authors write about is prostitutes. This is an interesting and complex example, because prostitutes are not entirely invisible. However, much of the received wisdom about them as a group is from diverse perspectives other than their own—from the point of view of crime, disease, social morals, a social service, and so on. Moreover, while prostitutes are overwhelmingly female, this wisdom tends to be overwhelmingly a male viewpoint. In other words, prostitution is, perhaps paradoxically and certainly hypocritically, both over-determined and erased where possible. Shirley Ardener has proposed a reason for this paradoxical situation:

> The inconsistency of requiring women to be chaste while chased, and at the same time requiring men to prove themselves by defeating the women's success, is obvious. One way of resolving this dilemma is to have a category of females who are kept outside the recognised universe—perhaps prostitutes, 'women of the streets' who belong nowhere, or strangers from other universes, who are not fully women—for men to use to complete their 'manness' (Ardener 1978:36).

Prostitutes thus clearly form a muted group. While they are relatively visible in society, they remain unheard, and not to be spoken about—*non-dit*. Dr Melissa Farley, an activist and one of the few researchers working on prostitution from the point of view of women involved in prostitution, argues that prostitution is 'socially invisible'. Prostitutes, she wrote, are 'the most silenced group of women, the most raped group of women, in the world, and their voices are not heard' (Farley 1998 & 2000). She goes on to make a point

about how current research looks at the prostitute from the point of view of the client and its social effects rather than on the muted women themselves. She writes, 'if you look through the professional medical journals and literature on prostitution, you know what you see? HIV and HIV risk factors. That's about 90% of what's written about prostitution to "educate" professionals. You know how I interpret that? It's the perspective of the john who is interested in 'clean meat' (Farley 1998).

These studies fail to address the sexual violence and psychological harm that both precede and are intrinsic to prostitution. Rather, they focus on the medical and soial effects of prostitution on others besides the prostitutes themselves. (Farley 2000). Prostitutes also feature regularly in fiction, unfortunately often in male-perpetuated stereotypes as foils for the male protagonists. There is the prostitute with the heart of gold, the happy prostitute, the selfish, gold-digging prostitute. One example is Sembene Ousmane's depiction of Penda (in *God's Bits of Wood*), a prostitute who is despised and looked down upon until she renounces her 'calling' and becomes politicised, leading a women's march in support of the men's strike. In contrast to this approach, there is a western feminist view of prostitution as a form of sexual and economic liberation of women.

In Beyala's novels, prostitution is pervasive. Nevertheless, she questions whether 'sex work' is a path freely chosen by women, as either the stereotype of the 'happy prostitute' or the feminist view of emancipated sex workers would have it. She shows how her female characters have been forced into situations beyond their control largely because they are women, and because power relations in society are predicated on their sexuality. In her early novel *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, about the construction of the identity of Tanga, a child prostitute forced into this profession by her mother, Beyala asks probing questions. Tanga vehemently rejects this label and the work it entails, declaring 'je ne suis pas une pute!' and 'je refuse l'habit qu'il veut me faire endosser' ('I am not a whore!' and 'I reject the clothes [i.e. the identity] they want to put on me', p 25). Tanga in fact ends up in jail because she runs away from her fate, in a vain attempt to earn her own money, and is caught with a gang of thieves. In *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*, the protagonist, Amina, is not a prostitute, but her best friend is, and she dies after an abortion. Amina then kills a man when she, in turn, is forced to turn to prostitution—thus violently rejecting the role enforced on her.

In Beyala's depiction of Cameroon, women are commodities, and prostitution is an overt means of exploitation, whereby men's domination of the powerless is most clear and complete. At the same time, however, she does not judge those women who are prostitutes. She treats them not as the outcasts they clearly are in society, but as people with their own aspirations and notions of their own identities. Ironically, Tanga's aspirations lie in the

socially sanctioned dream of marriage, motherhood and happiness—a fairytale which is sold to women from a young age, and forms a key part of their identity construction as they grow up. Shirley Ardener notes in this regard that 'counterpart models (whether generated by women or by ethnically or otherwise defined groups) are not generated independently of those of the dominant structure, but are to some extent shaped by them' (Ardener 1975:xiii). Yet, because Tanga's position in the social structure does not allow her to access its privileges and stability, this dream remains unattainable, and indeed, she is punished for questioning her own position. Her lack of 'fit' with the dominant model leads her to believe that she is going mad, and the system, too, identifies her with the mad and isolated. This is part of Beyala's point: that women in Tanga's position cannot escape society's constrictions, because they are outside of 'acceptable' society, and thus have no power whatsoever.

In addition, while the dream of motherhood and marriage may appear unachievable, a number of Beyala's characters actually reject the role of motherhood, an act which further dooms them to the status of outcasts, in a society which bases much of women's value on their ability to reproduce. In other writings, Beyala has noted that, as an African woman, she wanted to 'extend the dream of a free woman to [her] continent where the value of women is decided in terms of their physiological capacity for reproduction. As for sterile women, *they don't even exist*, effaced by a society which makes it a point of honour to procreate' (Beyala 1995; emphasis added). Tanga's 'mothering' of a crippled young beggar, and rejection of the opportunity to become a 'real' mother, reflects this, as does Saïda's desperate hold on her virginity certificate and her later thwarted attempts at adopting a child in *Les Honneurs Perdus*. Both Tanga and Saïda become obsessed with virginity, in a total repudiation of the role of motherhood—Tanga even goes so far as to plug her vagina with mud. This is a deliberate strategy, aimed at liberating women from the constraints of this role. Failing to live up to the expectations of motherhood results in pain, madness, and even death for Beyala's protagonists.

In addition to the protagonists not becoming mothers themselves, they also experience a distinct alienation from their own mothers, unlike in many other African novels, especially by women. Such novels depict the family as the primary unit holding the social fabric together. In contrast Beyala shows families falling apart. She explains Tanga's alienation from her mother, for instance, as a direct result of her clitoridectomy, a process by which 'elle est devenue femme' ('she becomes a woman', p. 24). This is one of the ways in which she is forced to 'become' a woman, and it has a lasting effect: 'One of the first images of adulthood engraved in her mind, and even more so on her body, is the excision performed on her by 'l'arracheuse de clitoris'. ...Tanga's body can be used, abused and even commodified as a source of revenue to

her mother and family' (D'Almeida 1994:75). This is an interesting irony, because while the function of female circumcision is to integrate a woman into her society, it can have the opposite effect, alienating families and contributing to the breakdown of relationships. Beyala has noted that she believes the commercialisation of the mother-child relationship is responsible for a general breakdown in family ties in Cameroon, saying 'the child has a market value in our society, and if she contributes nothing, she cannot enter into the family circle' (Bah-Diallo 1988:85).

Thus, Beyala uses the stereotypes and dominant models of women as either mothers or prostitutes, not unthinkingly or in perpetuation of these stereotypes, but firstly to reveal the plight of women who do not 'fit' into their societies, and secondly to question the kind of society which creates (only) such roles for women. This is achieved through the construction of protagonists and characters who find it almost impossible to live within the constraints of such limited roles and subject positions available to them. Indeed, such figurative constraints become a physical prison in *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, that repository, like the mental institution, of all that is not socially acceptable, and a metaphor which describes the way in which female characters operate within the(ir) world, as opposed to the ideal and oft-repeated image of a bird flying free. Beyala's novels can thus be seen as part of her greater activism for women in Africa.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I asked the questions, 'how does one study what is not always visible, what happens in the margins of society, what is *non-dit*? How does one go about theorising what one cannot see clearly, but which is, certainly, present?' My answer is that alternative forms of sources need to be mined for what they reveal of muted groups, the excluded, the marginalised and the deliberately omitted. In particular, I propose that we use fictional texts as sources where little or nothing else can be found.

As shown in the above readings, fictional texts reveal certain patterns of how power operates in society, and in particular allow for the excluded—the *non-dit*—to move out of its hidden, occluded subject position and become visible. This enables the construction of an alternative discourse in the narratives of anthropology, history, and sociology, and a fuller understanding of human experiences and human behaviour.

Notes

1. The hard sciences too are concerned about the place of women in disciplines that were/are popularly regarded as male domains: Physics, mathematics, nuclear sciences, and so on.

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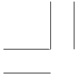
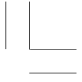
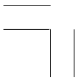
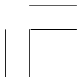

3

The Hold of Patriarchy: An Appraisal of the Ganda Proverb in Modern Gender Relations

Isaac Ssetuba

Traditional Values and the Proverb

One of the most outstanding new elements of social research in the last quarter of the 20th century, in Africa and elsewhere, is undoubtedly gender. Academics, social researchers and decision-makers have had to contend with sensitivity to gender issues as an essential aspect of all their action.

Based on the theme of this symposium, we highlight a living challenge to modern gender relations through an appraisal of the lasting aspects of human culture. We expose patriarchy as an impediment to gender parity through an examination of the proverb perceived as linguistic phenomenon and enhancer of culture. At the dawn of the new millennium, gender research would not close its eyes to aspects of traditional African culture that challenge the streamlining of gender relations.

Patriarchy is a social system where much of the power rests in the hands of men, who also dominate private and public spheres of life. Gender parity implies equality between men and women, especially in terms of rights and power. Putting gender relations right is thus the search for this parity.

Definitions of the term 'proverb' have centred on its economy of words, origins in human experience and observation of social phenomenon, folkloric and communal belonging as well as the claim of being general or absolute truth. Of all the 'definitional ingredients', the claim over truthfulness is rather disturbing. It actually reflects the user's or society's aspiration for control and desire to impose a given view of life as unshakeable and accepted. This is

where the proverb helps patriarchy to live on from generation to generation by presenting it as a stable immutable part of social order.

Scholars illustrating the functions of the proverb have centred their analyses on one or the other of its characteristics. Some have noted the proverb's prescriptive nature as it seeks to pass over the values 'entrusted' to it for preservation and transmission' (Alcove 1996). Others have not only pointed out the intent of proverbs as the preservation of 'the lives of those who would pay them heed' but also admired their faithfulness to 'the principle of modesty which they preach', citing brevity and precision (Muranga 1996). The proverb is highly regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition, a custodian of a people's wisdom and philosophy of life. As a literary genre and aspect of living language, the proverb is, stable, concise and fairly fixed and can therefore be transmitted to future generations with minimum alteration. It has been noted by certain scholars that since the proverb is a 'fixed form' genre, any significant textual modification would tantamount to 'deformation of tradition', thus compromising the 'functions of proverbs in archaic societies' (Chevrier 1990). The proverb is durable and resilient and can stand as shaper of mentalities over several generations. Its in-built stability augurs well for the persistence and 'perenniality' of patriarchy in African societies.

Proverbs of the Baganda[1] of Uganda who inhabit the northern shores of Lake Victoria will serve as a sample study of implicit attempts by predominantly patriarchal societies to preserve and sustain patriarchy through language use. However, we should point out that there is nothing special about the nature of patriarchy in this community and that it has been mainly chosen for author's familiarity.

The general Luganda word for 'proverb' is *olugero* (plural:*engero*), a polyvalent term used to mean story, proverb or parable, as Ruth Finnegan notes (1971). However, strictly speaking, the equivalent Luganda term for 'proverb' is *olugero olusonge* (plural: *engero ensonge*), which could be interpreted with some 'literaliness' as 'pointed comparison'. What brings me to 'comparison' in this approximate attempt to find a befitting translation, is the etymology of the noun '*olugero*' which corresponds to the verb '*okugera*' meaning 'to measure', 'to compare' and 'to time'? Besides, the same word is used for 'recounting' but in *olugero olusonge*, the target sense is 'comparison' encompassing the three meanings of *okugera* with the underlying idea of 'pointing' to meaning. This further asserts Finnegan's view on the allusive and figurative nature of the African proverb. The African words translated as 'proverb' lay the emphasis on 'the significance of speaking in symbolic terms' (Finnegan 1971).

The corpus of proverbs in focus is a selection from three published sources in Luganda language and one, with translations into English (Nsimbi 1989; Mugerwa 1996; Magoba 1997; Walser 1984). Attention is also given to proverbs and versions of proverbs in contemporary use although they may not be

documented in any written sources. Proverb compilation in particular and the documentation of Ganda oral tradition in general, had a good start in the first half of the 20th century but such cultural activity later subsided due to negligence and socio-political malaise. This area of social study was badly hit and it experienced serious problems of publication that linger on up to the present day. The two recent Luganda proverb collections (Mugerwa 1996; Magoba 1997) referred to above are self-published and Father Walser's collection with English renderings, completed in 1958, only got published in 1984. The translations into English of proverbs in this paper are mainly by the author. They are rather free, meant for explanation and should, therefore, not be taken as definitive. In our translation, for the purpose of this paper, fidelity is more to the matter than to the manner.

The Woman: As she is seen and wanted

Ganda proverbs give us images of the woman that translate the way traditional society perceives her and wishes her to be. Ultimately, we are led to some stereotypes about what the woman is and should be. In the first instance, we note that Ganda proverbs generally depict women as weak, inferior and subsidiary. To uphold this machoistic attitude, the Muganda says:

- *Omukazi ntamu nkadde; togiteresa munno* (A woman is an old cooking-pot; you never entrust it to a friend).
- *Alima ne bba; taba munafu* (A woman who digs with her husband cannot be taken for weak).
- *Ekwata omwami; tereka muganzi* (The disease that catches the husband never spares his favourite wife or the husband's slogan is equally that of his favourite wife). There are two versions of this proverb because the subject prefix 'e' in 'ekwata' (that catches) is not preceded by a noun and could therefore refer to 'engombo' (a slogan) or 'endwadde'(a disease), the former being more common.

Further, a woman is expected to be totally subservient, submissive and obedient to her husband. In many African societies, this is a value that elders strive to inculcate in young women getting ready for marriage. The proverbs below call for husband's respect and submission to his will:

- *Kaggwe ensonyi; ng'omukazi ayomba ne bba* (As abominable as a woman who engages her husband in a quarrel). Another version replaces 'ayomba' (who quarrels) with 'awoza' (who pleads), and the abomination is 'pleading with one's husband'.
- *Gaanya bba; ng'alabye obugyo* (She affords to disobey her husband once she has found an alternative haven).
- *Anyoma bba; abula obugyo* (She that despises her husband shall lack a haven/refuge).

- *Nyinimu atiibwa* (The lord of the house deserves respect).

A woman also has to be tolerant and cultivate resilience before suffering and trying experiences. The suffering is portrayed in the proverbs as enshrined in female destiny. Among the many rewards for bearing the burden of suffering is a lasting marriage:

- *Nnaku za bakyala;buli omu azisinda bubwe* (Women's suffering; each one has a different story to tell).
- *'Zansanze' y'afiira mu bufumbo; nga 'siibisobole' yeekunidde* ('Suffering is my lot', lasts in wedlock when 'I wouldn't stand such,' is long gone away (divorced)).
- *'Siiwemuke' y'afa n'omwami* ('I fear dishonour', keeps husband for good).

A marital practice that any woman had to come to terms with, traditionally, despite discontent and misery, was polygamy. The proverbs present polygamy as natural, befitting and unquestionable. Rivalry among co-wives is part of the game and many ganda sayings are constructed on the motif of the 'omuganzi' (the favourite) against the 'omukyawe' (the disliked). Quite often, not much good is expected of a co-wife:

- *Mukazi muggya kabugo kakadde; tekabulamu nsekere* (A co-wife is an old backcloth; it is never free of lice).
- *Mukazi muggya nsingo ya munya; tebulako keeringiriza* (A co-wife is a lizard's neck; it always has reason to turn).
- *Empaka ennemeremu; zikubya mukyawe* (Prolonged arguments earn the disliked a beating).
- *Kyoterekera omuganzi; omukyawe yakirya* (What's meant for the favourite could, sometimes, go to the disliked).
- *Ogguzibwa omuganzi; omukyawe yagumala* (The disliked answers for the favourite's wrong).

Some form of brutality on the part of the husband, in this polygamous setting, would not raise eye-brows. Disciplinary action and chastisement against disobedient wives is part of a husband's duties:

- *Omukazi birenge bya ddiba; bw'otabikunya tebigonda* (A woman is (like) extremities of a hide; they need rubbing to soften).
- *Muganzi lwazza; omukyawe lwacacanca* (The day the favourite is in the wrong; the disliked celebrates).
- *Akaggo akaakuba muggyawo; bw'okalaba okakasuka* (The stick that whipped your co-wife ought to be thrown away).
- *'Omwami alidda ddi?', ku ggwe kwatuukira* ('When is the husband's return?', gets beaten up first/She that long for the husband's return; is first to be beaten when he is back).

A woman, in spite of her perceived 'weakness', is supposed to be very hardworking. Her role as a farm-hand is crucial in the sustenance of the husband and the family. A woman is somewhat an economic asset and farm manual chores are part of her existence. Proverbs showers praises on the hardworking woman and emits fiery scorn against the lazy one:

- *Omukazi agumira ku nkumbi* (A woman stands by the hoe).
- *Omukazi omulima azaala mmere; omunafu azaala muddo* (The hardworking woman brings forth food; the lazy one, weed).
- *Omukazi omunafu alayira enkuba okutonnya* (A lazy woman resents the falling rain).
- *Akyogerako siyakireeta*; *(omukazi)omunafu tayita njala kugwa* (S/he that talks of something doesn't invite it to occur; a lazy woman never invites famine). Versions of this proverb exist with or without the word 'omukazi' (woman).
- *Okuddiza guba mwoyo; (omukazi) omunafu asala ku lusuku lwe naddiza ensiko* (Sharing (eats) with the giver, out of one's will, is generosity; a lazy (woman) returns parts of her garden to the bushes.
- *Omukazi omulima akuliisa n'engabo ku mmere* (A hardworking woman allow you to keep a shield nearby at mealtime). Our own interpretation points to the well-fed man who, as a result, is always ready to go to war but generally, the 'shield at mealtime' is taken to be the man's hand gesture to indicate to his wife that he is satisfied and should not be served more food (Walser-1984).

It should, however, be underlined that the images of the woman in the enlisted proverbs do not necessarily relate to what she is but rather what is ought to be. It is basically a matter of the way she is 'seen' and 'wanted' and not the way she is. This is an illustration of culturally imposed and enhanced stereotypes that, ultimately, aim at conditioning the woman perception both by herself and others.

The Man: Dominance and Vitality

On the other hand, man or, more precisely, maleness, is depicted in terms of dominance, strength, might and vitality. Implicitly, the proverbs in this section complete the contrasting image of man and woman where male activity is constantly opposed to female passivity. This is a view of male-female relations that patriarchy as social order strives to assert. Man and 'male being' is, first and foremost, active, indulgent and adventurous:

- *Ssegwanga gyekoma okweereega; n'emiwula gyegikoma obugumu* (The more the Cockerel indulges in dispute; the stronger his muscles become).
- *Ennume ekula bigwo* (The male (being) grows up wrestling).
- *Musajja gyagenda; gyasanga basajja banne* (Where a man goes; he (surely) finds fellow men).

- *Busajja bukirana* (Men supersede each other in manly qualities).
- *Basajja ssubi; erimu lisiba linnaalyo* (Men are grass; they tie each other).
- *Basajja nsolo; ezimu zirya zinnaazo* (Men are animal; they feed on each other).
- *Basajja mivule; giwaatula negiggumiza* (Men are Mivule[2] tree; they shed and blossom)
- *Bw'ogoba musajja munno; olekamu ezinadda* (As you chase a fellow man; spare some strength for running back).

The culturally desirable male and female attitudes and perceptions are summarised in a popular Ganda pun around the words 'omusajja' (a man) and 'omukazi' (a woman). The man domineeringly asserts, 'Nze eyajja *omu sajja* (Me, who came alone, didn't I reach) while the woman laments, 'Nze eyajja *omu kazzi* (Poor me, who came alone). The woman's sentence contains 'kazzi', an interjection of pity.

Some Shades of Gender Awareness?

Despite the manicheist view showing man as strong and woman as weak or the dominant man versus the submissive woman, there are a number of Ganda proverbs that carry positive messages for gender relations. Some studies have highlighted this rare but persistent tendency of the African proverb that could represent 'a more gender balanced perception of the women's image' (Natukunda 1996). Marriage is a treasured virtue and co-existence and co-habitation between the sexes is both desirable and inevitable:

- *Eka egwana mukazi na bba* (A home suits man and wife).
- *Awagumba ennume n'enduusi* (The male's abode is the female's too).
- *Tosala gwa kawala nga tonnawulira gwa kalenzi* (Never judge in the girl's favour before to the boy's pleading). An alternative version of proverb, in use, is the reverse.
- *Ontuuse; Nnalunga yatuuka Jjuuko* (We are a perfect match; just like Nnalunga and Jjuuko). This is the ideal couple in Ganda mythology.

In a way, Ganda proverbs enhance the survival of the marriage institution by calling upon the woman to endure suffering that may arise from it, thus depicting wedlock as necessary and inevitable. Further more, in proverbs alluding to marriage, deviants, failures and probably the unfortunate, are subjects of ridicule. These ones include the bachelors, spinsters, the unmarried and the divorced. Nonetheless, how ever approving the above attitude is of the marriage institution, it may end up reinforcing patriarchy if the man is to unquestionably have the upper hand with woman's suffering naturally implicated. In the sayings below, the bachelor get a fair share of scorn and ridicule despite his maleness:

- *Kawuulu gagezi kagenda okunywa ogw'obusogozi kaleka keeyalidde* (A 'wise' bachelor first makes his bed before going out to drink his brewer's share).

- *Kiraza mwoyo ng'omuwuulu ayimba nti, 'ndibula naye'* (As mind-meddling as a bachelor who sings, 'I will elope with her').
- *Bw'olaba omuwuulu aliko entumbwe; ng'asula wa jjajjaawe* (If you see a fine-legged bachelor, then, he is surely under grand parent care).
- *'Ntegedde', omuwuulu ategeera awudde* (By the time he says 'I have got it', the quarrelsome man is already a divorcé).
- *Ssematiko agaggibwa omuwuulu; omufumbo yagagaba* (Mushroom picked by the bachelor are given out by the married man).
- *Yeetematema ng'omuwuulu omusawo nti, "Ejjembe lyange lifunyisa abakazi"* (As contradictory as a bachelor medicine-man who claims, "my deity wins over women.")

The Luganda word for 'bachelor' is 'omuwuulu' but in the first proverb above, it is replaced by its demunitive form'(a)kawuulu' to translate despise and contempt as society's attitude to the bachelor. Here the 'demunitive' 'ka' takes the place of the normal subject prefix 'mu'. Similarly, in proverbs referring to the divorced woman, the 'emaciative' 'lu' replaces the 'mu', and we hear of '(o)lukazi' (emaciated unpleasant woman) instead of '(o)mukazi' (woman). The inferred 'smallishness' for the man and 'longishness'/'thinnishness' for the woman all express the derogatory attitude toward the divorced and the single. The divorced woman or one contemplating divorce is held in low esteem:

- *Lunaanoba; terubula ntondo* (She that intends to divorce is easily angered).
- *Lunaanoba; Terubulako kyerwekwasa* (She that intends to divorce always finds a (weak) reason to do so).
- *Yeeyogeza ng'olwanobako nti, 'baleete omwenge bannone', nti, 'olubereberye baaleeta mazzi?'*(As nonsensical as the divorced woman's talk; she say, 'let them bring beer (part of bride price) to reclaim me', as though they had offered water the first time they came for her).
- 'Siringi zenfuna simanyi gyezidda'; awasa banobye ('I wonder what takes away my earnings', he insists on marrying divorcées). This is a new saying; the word 'siringi' is a corruption of 'shilling'.

The other two severely attacked categories of women are the 'Nakyeyombekedde', the spinster far beyond her prime who is not interested in marriage, and the 'ow'obusa', the unmarried young woman who is ripe for marriage. Some of the spinster's favours boom-rang as self-provoked troubles. The saying goes: Nakyeyombekedde; gw'ayiisa gwegumukubya (The spinster is beaten for the beer she brews). The 'Ow'obusa,' literally meaning 'the one of nothing', is the subject of unkind remarks to make her loathe her situation and hasten to find a suitor. Unfortunately, she usually has no total command of over the circumstances around her. Traditionally, she may not freely choose a husband or determine when to get married without extensive

family involvement. She is, perhaps unjustifiably, associated with ill behaviour and depicted as an attraction to quench all curiosities:

- *Akola bya mbyone; ow'obusa by'akola ewaabwe* (As ill-mannered as an unmarried woman before her own people (family)).
- *Ow'obusa ngabi; n'ataafumite akootakoota* (An unmarried woman is an antelope (in the hunting field); even that who wouldn't throw his spear stoops about).

Paradoxically, the polygamist or, precisely, 'the two-homed man', to be more faithful to the letter of the proverbs below, is pitied in traditional wisdom. Apparently, the issue is not the number of wives but keeping them in more than a place. Such a man ends up not well catered for and disoriented:

- *Namakabirye; asula njala* (The 'two homed man' sleeps hungry).
- *Amaka abiri musango; bw'olwanirira agali e Kyaggwe ng'ag'e Ssingo baganyaga* (Keeping two homes is a 'burden'; when you defend one the other is looted). This proverb is rather geographically-bound, we have left out names of places.

Undoubtedly, the woman is treasured as mother and culturally perceived as prime in matters of fecundity and procreation. The mother is given a lot of respect, deserving care and protection. Mother's dishonour is abominable just like disobedience of one's husband. A proverb earlier noted in the paper has two versions, with the same introductory bit, 'Kaggwe ensonyi', but different endings. This phrase expresses abomination but taken literally it means 'shedding modesty'. One version calls for respect of the husband and the other for the mother: Kaggwe ensonyi; ng'omwana abba nnyina (As abominable as a child stealing from its mother). Concern and fear for the mother is preached in the proverbs below:

- *Anakuggya ennimi; ageya nnyoko ng'olaba* (S/he that wants a quarrel with you; backbites your mother in your presence).
- *Gwekitaliiridde nnyina; nti, 'linda bukye'* (If the beast hasn't eaten your own mother; you may afford to relax till day-break).
- *Atwalira nnyina talemererwa* (One carrying for his/her mother never fails).

Although a mother's respect is cherished, the child belongs to the father's clan and nation, and this is a true mark of patriarchy. A mother gains more value and attains higher status if she gives birth to a boy child. The boy is definitely come into the world to strengthen the father's clan in belonging and number. A boy child is so dear and he even commands some reverence from his parents, particularly the mother. To institutes 'stately' patriarchy besides its other shades, the Muganda says:

- *Nnyoko abanga omunyoro; nakuzaala ku kika* (Let thy mother be foreign but be born into a clan). Children born of foreign women belong to the Ganda nation, the reverse is inadmissible.

- *Bakidambya kye kizaala eddenzi* (The unloved woman may bring forth a boy child). The term 'Bakidambya' refers to 'the not much loved, mistreated woman'. In this proverb, she is objectised' or equated to 'a thing' to indicate her lesser value. And it is this kind of woman that gives her husband a boy child, 'eddenzi'. Once again, desired meaning plays around 'omulenzi' (a boy) given in its 'super augmentive' form, 'eddenzi,' to express grandeur and superior value attached to the boy child.
- *Senkuzaalenkuzaale; ng'omwana ow'obulenzi* (A boy child is parent to you as you parent to him). The meaning of this proverb is expressed in 'archeatypised reciprocal-duplicative' verbal construction 'Senkuzaalenkuzaale'. This construction is built around the verb 'okuzaala' (to give birth / to father or mother). With cultural context, the proverb's text is more of a mother's words.

However, Ganda proverbs occasionally depict that legendary woman of great courage and assertiveness who is ready to challenge and measure to the heights of men: *Omukazi Nnambaalaala; omwenge agunywa kisajja* (The woman 'Nnambaalaala' who drinks her beer like men). The etymology of this courageous woman's 'nickname' points to 'flatchestedness' that translates as 'manly'. In the study of African proverb, more research is needed in this direction because the etymological root of a word could reveal the target meaning. Generally, there are several words in popular use without traces of their origins where their hidden sense often lies. Other words that would call for such investigation are 'Nakyeyombekedde' and 'Nnalukalala'(10).

Considerable 'archeatypisation' exists in Ganda proverbs expressed in the grammatical gender forms of 'sse' (masculine) and 'nna' (feminine). Remember that many Ganda names are differentiated by these gender prefixes, thus we have 'Ssettuba' for men and 'Nnattuba' for women, keeping the name root 'ttuba' (ficus tree). Proverbial constructions with 'sse' and 'nna' exist in Luganda without necessarily targeting men or women but merely, people. Such sayings are usually critical of human conduct and are advice against undue excesses. Could this imply implicit sense of parity expressed in this 'arbitrary' and 'alternate' use of both male and female 'archetypal' grammatical forms to target 'the human' as mere 'being'? Here are two examples:

- *Nnabyewanga; ng'akaliga akaliira mu nte* (An intruder/meddler, out of place, like a tiny sheep feeding amidst cows).
- *Ssebingi bwebikwalira; ogamba tebirimbula* (In abundance, one imagines there will never be shortage).

Loosening the Hold

Our analysis has given us an overview of Ganda proverbs on gender relations. The major shortcoming of the study is having to read a culture through the

eyes of a foreign language. A culture and its language are entwined and a translation is never as good as the original. We believe that the proverbs can talk for themselves and more meaning should be sought in what they say and not in the commentary. They have equally suffered the inconvenience of having to speak in a language other than their own.

It is quite evident that patriarchy as a social system has held firm for ages thanks to cultural value-enhancers like proverbs. The proverb as linguistic and philosophical phenomenon has served to uphold patriarchy in many societies. Linguistically, a proverb is stable and versatile and thus easily absorbed in everyday speech and into other oral genres like riddles, short stories and songs, all often used for instructional purposes. Philosophically, in a traditional African setting, the proverbial messages are the gist of one's way of life representing treasures of wisdom inherited from forefathers. The proverb is then granted authority and prestige in shaping social perception and behaviour. And patriarchy, deeply embedded therein, had to live on and hold firm.

In our era of gender awareness, primarily seeking gender parity, proverbs that offer positive messages for gender relations should be boosted to show that somewhere in the forefathers' (or ancestors, to be less sexist) mentality lay some awareness of gender balance, how ever faint. Other proverbs need simply to be understood differently bearing in mind the polyphony of their meaning. We could simply extract the desirable and favourable meanings then stick to and live with that. A woman digging with the husband could mean complementality and likening a woman to 'an old cooking pot', manifestation of concern over delicacy. Dismantling, re-reading and re-phrasing proverbs could constitute a form of deconstructive re-interpretation to give them a new lease of life a line with the demands of the times.

Originally and basically, the proverb is an oral genre and adaptation and constructive change are no strangers to it. But one wonders where to fix the limits of change, with compilation of oral forms weighing heavy on their true nature while ensuring their preservation besides users' wisdom. In addition, these written forms can be far from the authentic and original setting. Nevertheless, a wise saying transcends space and time to become universal human heritage. In case of wisdom gone sour, a rereading or retouch could save gems of the noble oral genre.

Notes

1. Baganda: Bantu ethnic group of southern Uganda. Ganda (root word), Luganda (language), Buganda (Nation), Muganda (member of group).
2. *Muvule*: hard, heavy, light coloured tropical wood.

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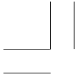
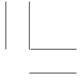
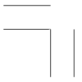
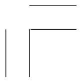

4

The Nomiya Luo Church: A Gender Analysis of the Dynamics of an African Independent Church Among the Luo of Siaya District

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Introduction

The study of independent churches in Africa is a growing and crowded field. Publications have increased exponentially during the last three decades while mastery of the literature is beyond the grasp of a single scholar (Turner 1977). Independent churches appear in fascinating variety. Therefore, the term is just a working definition and a recent terminology applied to break-away Christian churches which were identified in older studies as syncretistic, nativistic, separatist, sectarian, messianic, Zionism, prophetic and cultic. In Africa the increase of such religious breakaways has been immense (Turner 1971; Lantenari 1963; Barret 1968).

Earlier, these churches were seen as a reaction to colonialism but when they continued to mushroom into modern times, society began to reconsider the causes. Today, there are about 9,000 African Independent Churches (AICs) with millions of followers estimated at 15 per cent of Africa's total Christian population. According to some sources these estimates are too conservative since the movements are growing faster than scholars are studying them.

Independent African Churches emerged at a remarkably earlier date in Kenya. Even before the First World War there was articulate independency. The independent African Church Movement in Kenya, however, grew in

response to colonial presence and became a vital part of the political history of the country. It became especially important at a time when there were few other expressions of African response to colonial presence. Consequently, independency in church has gained increasing significance by virtue of its scale (Barret 1978). After independence, by 1966, Barret (1968:30) identified 166 independent churches in Kenya. By 1978 they had become a matter of state concern.

These movements have both reshaped and rocked the stability of the mainline churches. Their aim has been to rectify the Christianity of the mainline churches by injecting the dynamic aspects of the traditional religion, the social mannerisms and world-view as well as the practical aspects of the gospels into their religious movements. Consequently, they brought about a new conception of the cure of souls and an African theology with a new appreciation of the African personality and its cultural and religious customs (Barret 1970:153). They rejected the paternalism shown in areas such as sharing, simplicity and compassion. They also rejected the monopolistic attitude of the mainline churches. Instead, they aimed to create a fraternal spiritual understanding geared towards arousing a sense of identity amongst the followers while fulfilling immediate needs of the communities (Baeta 1962:6; Sundkler 1963:31).

The rapid increase in the number of independent churches in Kenya has generate significant attention and scholarship documenting their rise and spread (Muga 1978; Wipper 1977; Jassy 1973; Opwapo 1981; Hinga 1980; Welbourn and Ogot 1966; Ogot 1973; Welbourn 1961; Muga 1975). Some scholars have also explored various other issues pertaining to independent churches, such as their theological stances. However, most of the independent movements in Kenya have been described, at least in the colonial period, from the viewpoints of westerners. Sex, superstition, magic, witchcraft were therefore fore-grounded by journalists and novelists in their discussion of independent churches. The government and the missionary churches reinforced this picture and some scholars also supported the colonial view (Ogot 1963:249-73 and Lonsdale 1964:363).

Currently, there are various sympathetic approaches to the study of independent churches. These make important, sometimes contradictory, contributions to the understanding of religion and change in Kenya. For example, because independency involved direct break from mission control, one might expect that they too would emphasise influential roles for women in reaction to the limited roles held by lay African women in mission organisations. Additionally, women predominate numerically in the churches and have played a great part directly or indirectly in the troubled life of the church. However, these studies do not analyse the participation of women in these churches and their role in the process of social transformation. In fact, with the exception of research done on women's participation in the Legio

Maria church, there is little information on how gender shapes religious ideology or the experience of conversion in studies of the Kenyan independent churches.

Theoretical Focus

In her 1995 book, Kretzshmar questions the necessity of churches and missionologists giving serious consideration to gender. She argues that while gender debate proceeds apace in academic circles, it is not taken seriously in the church. She concludes with the questions: 'Can we afford to ignore the vital issues of gender?' Kretzashmar's questions are relevant here because we need to ask how those who are proclaiming the good news, respond to the oppression or subordination of women. Can the church preach liberation if it oppresses women within its own ranks? What is the reason for the subdued silence of women in church and other areas? What does this convey of the church and its perception of women. This comment is carried further by the remark made by Ramodibe (1996):

> There can be no argument that the church is one of the most oppressive structures in society today, especially in regard to the oppression of women. About three-quarters of the people in the church are women, but men make decisions affecting them alone (with very few exceptions). Once women are acknowledged as pastors, as the body of Christ, we can build a new church (in Africa). I say a new church because the church as we have it today is a creation of male persons. As women, we have always felt like strangers in this male church

The term 'gender' is used here simply to denote the distinctions of male and female. As such it is closely related to the term 'sexuality' as opposed to the narrower term 'sex'. Whilst the latter is generally used in relation to sexual intercourse, the former refers to our human identity and ways of relating to the world around us. Gender represents that which constitutes femaleness and maleness and the social constructs and expectations that influence how gender identity and differences are perceived.

Although these definitions appear to state the obvious, when examined more closely, a host of difficulties arise that I will not delve into. We will just focus here on how women experience oppression, and how they are oppressed. Oppression simply means the imposition of the will of a certain person or group on another person or group. It may be structural (repressive cultural customs) or more personalised. It can be expressed externally and internalised by the oppressed. Externalised oppression is manifested through androcentrism, exclusion and subjection.

Androcentrism is the habit of thinking about the world from a male perspective. It drowns or silences women's voices and perceptions by the continual outpouring of male perceptions into the world (Wehr 1987:16). Androcentrism, then, is a male-centred worldview, which devalues or excludes

female perceptions, critique and contributions. It is also seen in instances where women are not permitted to define themselves or their roles but simply discover that they have been defined and categorised by the others. So they become the silent other. Women are then perceived as non-men, those who have neither the status nor the roles of men. Very often women are defined in terms of their relationships with other people.

Another way of oppressing women is through exclusion, or restriction to certain areas and from certain responsibilities, for instance church government. Women are mainly prevented from occupying positions of leadership, power and authority or from participating in significant ecclesiastical roles in churches. This means that men control the decision-making sectors. Consequently, women can attend church services, raise money and teach children, but they cannot be ordained or serve in positions of leadership. The third form of oppression is by subjection, which also has cultural forms. Clearly then, oppression has very concrete and damaging forms. These forms of oppression have one thing in common: men in various categories of life impose them. Hence, all forms of oppression can be encompassed under the rubric of patriarchy, literally the rule of fathers or men for the benefit of men.

Internalised oppression is insidious, especially for women. In religion and other areas, it makes women become compliant victims. Such women are difficult to liberate. They have accepted the order and systems of the powerful and therefore need to be convinced about the necessity of liberation. Internalised oppression becomes something of a vicious circle because once women accept the judgements of androcentrism or patriarchy, they are unable to critique it.

The question then is: why the oppression of women? The major reason, I would say is patriarchy. Although the precise origins of patriarchy may be difficult to establish, its presence is notable in the persistent male domination current in all spheres of life. In a dominant patriarchal society, women and men are considered unequal in an oppressive world-view perpetuated in fact by both men and women. In the independent churches this has remained as the norm.

This paper explores the connections between gender and independent Christian ideology in the formation of new social relations and affirmation of traditional relations of dominance between men and women. Women's roles in these movements are examined. A case study of the Nomiya Luo Church is used to aid in the analysis of these issues. This paper therefore discusses the history and tenets of the Nomiya Luo Church, which emerged in colonial times and persists in independent Kenya. Being developed among a group of people with a semi-patriarchal set up, it provides a forum for analysing male dominance and its persistence in the society, including the church. The religious doctrines, beliefs and value systems that denigrate women, the unconscious fears of the men and how they affect the roles and values concerning women,

are also considered. The ways these systems have exerted controls on women are also discussed. Roles of women in independent churches, the opportunities for leadership, their roles as healers and patients in relation to their background and daily life concerns are discussed. The hidden sub-cultures and practices of women, which influence the groups are also examined in order to establish the nature of gender roles and attitudes in this church.

The Luo Background of the Nomiya Luo Church (NLC)

The NLC developed among an ethnic group of Nilotic origin, the Luo of Kenya, who were settling in their present localities in the 17th and 18th centuries. By 1900 the Luo settlements was complete and their politico-religious and socio-economic systems were intact. *Dala* (homestead) was the basic unit of society politically, socially, and economically. Thus the structure of the Luo society was dictated by the grouping of a man, his wife/wives and children as well as the type of economic production utilised by the household (Schiller 1982:67). The owner of the homestead was the primary authority in his compound.

In a polygamous homestead, the husband was the head of many households. Co-wives lived in separate houses (Ocholla-Ayayo 1980:34). Each co-wife was, therefore, *wuon ot*, that is, the head of the house and the leader of its domestic and economic activities. Under her were her children who grew up with the idea of *odwa* (our household) thus planting the concept of collective ownership. In the struggle for the recognition and independence of *odwa*, children of one household became antagonists of those of another household. Wives also became rivals in the possession of property and competition for the household favour (Ogutu 1975:19). Thus rivalry (*nyiego*) was practised as a means of promoting self-pride and unity. (Ochieng 1974:29). Sometimes favourable circumstances could lead co-wives to co-operate.

Each household (*ot*) was charged with all the activities required for the maintenance and needs of its members, including production, deployment and use of labour power as well as the determination of economic objectives. Land was allocated to the household. The land of one's mother (*puoth min*) was shared by the sons as they married or rather when the wedding was considered finalised (*riso*). A mother usually gave her son a part of her farms and his wife retained usufructory rights. It would henceforth be referred to as *puoth nyar kumanyio*, literally, the farm of the women from the foreign village, and this became the inalienable property of her sons. If a woman, however, deserted before bearing a male child, the farms reverted to her husband (Wilson 1965:12). If she had a male child before desertion, her farms became his future inheritance no matter how long he remained with his mother elsewhere.

Spiritual and political leadership went together and there were two ways of gaining this. The first was a man's lineage position that had significance in the matter of ritual. There was also charisma, which was individualistic in lineage structure. Apart from its influence on leadership, religion played a very significant part in the day-to-day life of the Luo and was generally practical at the family level. The Luo recognised the ancestral spirits and the supreme God and they also contended that each individual had his or her God (*Nyasache ni kode* – when one escaped from danger) who, in collaboration with the ancestors, was responsible for his or her wellbeing (Odaga 1980:23). They also believed that man was moulded in the womb of the mother. The uterus that was considered the point where life began was called *Nyasach dhako* meaning the uterus. It was here that God's moulding work was carried on. Reference to the uterus meant that a woman's social strength and power rested in her ability to give birth, preferably to sons, to continue the lineage of her husband. When a woman gave birth, there was rejoicing and people made reference to the fact that God had helped her. If she got a boy, it was said that she had brought forth the handle of the spear (*bol*) in reference to future male responsibilities. If she brought forth a girl, then she had produced the wild cat (*Ogwang'*), a symbol of unknown abode. The Luo also believed in spirits of non-human origin, magic and witchcraft.

In all matters of protocol, the senior wife (mikayi) was very important. Often she participated in the settlement of homestead land disputes. She always began the clearing of fields planting, weeding and harvesting before anyone else. Failure to wait for the chief wife to act first was bad omen and a breach of village discipline. However, every Luo wife basically controlled the crops grown on her land, which was used to feed the family or, if need be, for exchange. She was responsible for all labour provisions on the farm and processed the crops afterwards. According to a Luo myth, women infuriated God by disobedience, marking the beginning of hard labour for the women. Since the women caused the problem, her toil was greater, as evidenced by the division of labour leaving a lot of continuous agricultural labour to the women. Indeed, a young woman only received a recommendation as marriageable if she showed powers in the fields.

Within a typical homestead, division of labour was based on sex and age. Women and men had different roles (though overlap occurred in certain instances), as did the young and the old. Males were heads of homesteads and sometimes households, depending on the number of wives and family size. In decision making some men exerted control over many aspects of household operations while others tended to delegate authority to wives and sons. In homesteads with fewer people, the heads would be involved in many aspects of household operations. In larger homesteads, delegation was

easy. No matter how involved the men were in household operations women were in control of the domestic economy. (Oswald 1915:27-28).

While women were not expected to express their views publicly on important matters, they were consulted privately. Before a man took a decision with repercussions on the family he might say '*We apenj orindi mondi* (Let me consult the head rest before making the decision). This headrest was a woman, frequently the first wife (*mikayi*) (Odaga 1980:22). Men consulted particularly with *mikayi* because of her prominence in performance of all crucial rituals. She was considered the co-owner of the homestead with the husband. On attainment of menopause, all sexual relations with the husband ceased but she participated in decision-making. Older women were regularly consulted on numerous issues of significance.

The contribution of women to societal development was always recognised despite the fact that women were viewed as dependants. They were considered the weaker sex needing protection of the men in the homesteads. Nevertheless, in spite of these allowances to women, the Luo system was patriarchal and theoretically the men were expected to dominate. This was a system that could be easily manipulated by a more dominant system. Colonialism, which was a male dominated system, generated the alienation of women through practices like the monetisation of a variety of Luo practices. Several colonial economic, social and political policies were to have adverse effects on the Luo family life and specifically on the women.

The Founding of The Nomiya Luo Church

Yohana Owalo, the founder of the NLC, was a man with great experience within this new colonial worldview. He got involved with the colonial government possibly as a porter when the railway construction was approaching Kisumu before 1900. He became a migrant labourer in Kisumu and then proceeded to Mombasa to work for a court judge, Alexander Morrison. While in Mombasa, he had several visions and revelations that convinced him of God's call upon his life.

The most spectacular one that completely transformed him came in March 1, 1907 when he was taken to the first, second and third heaven by the spirit. He saw various revelations in these heavens. He noted that the first heaven, the abode of men was a remarkable place. All races of the world were attracted to it but the angels Raphael and Gabriel secured the gates. They allowed in the Arabs, the Jews and the Luo only because they had prophetic representatives. However, attempts by the Europeans (the Pope inclusive), the Goans and the Indian Bunyans were thwarted violently. They failed to meet the prerequisites. The second heaven housed numerous angels. In the third heaven he met the Godhead. God the father instructed Owalo to acknowledge that He was the only true God and beside Him there was no

other: Nor shall there be any after me. But currently the creation has deviated into the worship of images. Go! Take a well-sharpened knife to circumcise all men. He who has an ear let him hear and adhere but leave the disobedient alone. (NLC Prayer Book 1973:118).

Owalo was instructed to discard all human efforts to reach God (for example, Holy Mass). He was provided with a long cord whose other end was held by Jesus in heaven, to take to the earth. Jesus himself confirmed to Owalo that he was not of the same substance as God and so Owalo was to serve God alone. He was further instructed to take a long sharp sword and circumcise his adherents as a sign of distinction between his adherents and other Luo.

After his heavenly experience, Owalo was deterred by Morrison from starting his movement until he had acquired adequate education. Consequently he joined Catholic Ojola mission until it became apparent that his beliefs were inimical to the Catholic faith and he was sent away in 1907. He had a brief spate with the Muslims in Kisumu and was probably circumcised before he joined the CMS School in Nairobi in 1908. Later, he joined the Church of Scotland in Kikuyu by 1909. (Judicial 1/297 and Judicial 1/474, KNA). In October 1910, he joined Maseno as a teacher. Here, his controversial beliefs – that Jesus was not of the same substance as God and his rejection of monogamy an unbiblical European idea – became known and he was expelled in 1912. He left Maseno to start his Mission to the Luo later (1914) renamed Nomiya Luo Mission. This was the first African Independent Church in Kenya (For details on the life of Owalo, see Opwapo, 1981).

The thesis that these churches arose in reaction to colonial oppression does not adequately account for their emergence and proliferation (Lantenari 1963). Certainly the link between colonial oppression and initial religious reactions is clear and has been proven by scholars (Blandier 1971:417-487; Lantenari 1963:19-62). Yet, the situation is more complex, incorporating problems handled by religious and secular authorities within a given group and their susceptibility to, and contacts with, external groups.

J.M. Lonsdale (1964: 350) gives four factors in Nyanza environment that determined the character of the movements. The first related to the religious tug of war that existed in Nyanza. The European Missionaries appeared to be an auxiliary arm of the colonial government since there was mutual understanding between the missionaries and the government. This made the Africans conclude that, although their methods were different, government and missionaries had similar objectives. The second factor that determined the nature of the movements was the more immediate frictions of foreign rule, such as taxation, which forced people to go out far from home to labour. Third, the multiplicity of missions brought confusion to the people. Moreover, in Nyanza, independence was not purely an African phenomenon.

Willis Hotchkiss of the Friends African Industrial Mission decided to pull out of the mission and establish an independent mission in Lumbwa. Multiplicity of missions was an invitation to the indigenous religious heritage, which was interfered with, to react. It created a very suitable background or setting for these independent churches (Lonsdale 1964:350). This background was perhaps the basis for the emergence of the NLC.

A lot of literature on Yohana Owalo, shows political causes as basic to the emergence of the NLC. Lonsdale (1964) and Wipper (1977) suggest that Owalo utilised the movement as a vehicle for inter-clan rivalry, since he belonged to the clan traditionally opposed to the chiefly clan (Lonsdale 1964:208; Wipper 1975:157). Oginga Odinga says that the movement was a political protest because when Owalo was questioned by the District Commissioner in a public baraza, he said, 'Leave me to preach. I am preaching to Africans not whites' (Odinga 1968:6869). Ogot describes Owalo as the first Christian rebel in Nyanza, who, on discovering the hypocrisy of 'Westernism' decided to be a Christian but on his own terms (Ogot 1973:262).

In spite of these indicators, to conclude that political reasons generated this movement seems simplistic. A new religious movement does not necessarily become a political outlet. Its presence therefore, does not in itself signify the frustration of other expressions of power. In Owalo's call, the only indication of rebellion was his vision that Europeans, Indian-Bunyans and goans were denied entry into heaven. This could be explained as follows: Due to his inability to express his dissent, Owalo was content, for the moment with the notion that, in the realm of the spirit, colonialists and missionaries would miss out while the Luo, Arabs, and Jews will enjoy the splendours of heaven. Of course political factors were latent. Possibly he sought a movement to release the Luo, politically, socially, religiously, economically, and culturally, from colonial domination but realised that, given strong political overtones, his movement would experience severe reprimands from the colonial government which already responded violently to such movements.

Such responses were already noted in how the government dealt with the cult of Mumbo in South Nyanza between 1913-1915 (Wipper 1975:32-40) and the Chilembwe uprising of 1915 in Malawi. Owalo had to prove that his movement was not dissident by reporting regularly to Kisumu for a period of two years, a probationary period slapped on him by the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. John Ainsworth, before the movement could be registered. When it was evident that it was 'not subversive to good order and morality', it was registered. At the same time, Owalo got a political appointment to serve as (DC CNI/5/2 1919-1923 KNA) the sub-headman for Kochieng' clan. A reconstruction of the history of this movement reveals that a religious movement goes through several phases as it emerges and that its relationship with a larger political context changes overtime.

Owalo had a poor family background and perhaps sought the economic prosperity that seemed obvious in the mainline churches. However, economic causalities may not be adequate as explanations for his church's emergence. In fact, his mission station at Oboch spent, rather than obtained, money for feeding the numerous adherents who had to reside with him for one reason or other. This particular station was actually established to provide ample fellowship time for the adherents as they prepared for missions while also serving as a haven for his adherents from the rampant conscriptions of Africans for the First World War. These adherents had to undertake farm work for subsistence and not mere economic gain. Hence, the appeal of a new movement can be approached but not completely explained in terms of economic variables or even ethnicity.

The NLC arose in the context of a strong Western power through the colonial government, Christian missions and white settlers whose influence on the political, religious, economic and social issues had strong repercussions on the lives of the people (migrant labour and taxation). These were accompanied by profound efforts by schools and missionaries to introduce Western religion and culture. Adoption of European customs seemed indispensable to a true understanding of Christianity. The two missionary groups that evangelised Nyanza were the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Catholic Society of the Mill Hill Fathers (MHF).

European occupation resulted in political dependence and the Luo, who were accustomed to consensus policies, now had to obey orders. Economic pressures caused by taxes and other measures forced people to obtain cash, which was possible only through migrant labour. This had detrimental effects, particularly on the institution of the family. Although the Luo were willing and even eager to derive benefits from the new conditions, education and Christianity were to disrupt traditional patterns as much as migrant labour did. Respect for taboos, structures and values on which the society depended for its security and harmony, was beginning to shake (Ndeda 1992). Solidarity of the clan and family was under constant attack. The stability of tribal marriage patterns, including polygamy, the levirate, divorce and dowry were beginning to disintegrate and yet there were no secure new alternatives. Since traditional leadership structures were no longer valid, disappointment and loss of identity seeped in, without a corresponding outlet for these emotional repercussions. Subsequent stress possibly led to tension and unhappiness, loss of identity and sense of belonging (Whisson 1964:63–163).

Yohana Owalo lived within this set-up but also had a wider experience due to his interaction with people from other parts of Kenya. He was also aware of their responses to colonialism. He, probably, longed for an African pattern of worship and a meaningful local community that formed a transition between the old and the new. As Erasto Muga writes, he might have desired

a church with a Luo hero, a saviour of the people. His attitude represented rejection of missionary paternalism and certain Western Christian values, such as monogamy, which were integrated in Christian teaching (Muga 1975:167).

Wilson (1970:231) claims that those who start their own religious movements are relatively deprived. However, separation sometimes comes from schism in existing sects not necessarily from external causes. Owalo's religious dissatisfaction can be inferred from his movement from one denomination to another and even from Christianity to Islam. Christianity as it was then preached did not seem suited to his needs and understanding. He needed an institution with equal recognition to Christianity and Islam and of superior quality to the Christianity introduced by Europeans. When he visited the heavens, God wanted to admit the Luo, like he had done to Arabs and Jews, but they had no prophet. Owalo was then given the Mission to make God's message relevant and usher the Luo, who accepted his message, into heaven. However, they also had to have a unique experience like that of Jews and Arabs, that of circumcision of the male adherents.

In Owalo's heavenly experience recorded above, there was evidence of theological issues that were basic to the rise of NLC. He refuted the reliability of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory since on his way to heaven he only saw hell, not purgatory. Consequently the NLC catechism clearly instructs against the belief in purgatory. On a man's death he is ushered into heaven or hell according to his deeds on earth (Ogut 1978:50, 53). Owalo was warned against these because they marred the image of God.

This experience touched very closely on the cardinal Catholic belief in the supremacy and infallibility of the Pope, and the intercession of the saints, particularly that of Mary. In fact, in the first heaven, the abode of men, he informed that the Pope was barred from heaven because of misleading the faithful to rely on relics and images in worship and to believe in the intercession of the saints. In the third heaven, another cardinal Catholic sacrament, the Holy Mass, was declared an unacceptable sacrifice before God and Owalo was instructed to teach his adherents that the only acceptable sacrifice was a broken and contrite heart. The Catholic practice of the sacrament of bread and wine, which they consider as the real or actual body and blood of Christ was declared sinful and Owalo was reprimanded for having tasted the components and hence the NLC catechism teaches vehemently against it.

All the churches he attended believed that Jesus Christ was not only a son of God but also of the same essence as God. However in the third heaven, Owalo was instructed that God alone was to be worshipped. The church hymnals stress the supremacy of God. In his Bible, he deleted sections that equated Jesus with God. In the many hymns borrowed from the Anglican Church, he replaced the word Jesus with Jehovah. For Owalo, Jesus was a perfect man endowed with power to perform miracles to furnish evidence

that God was and that he was God's messenger. Perhaps this is why Ogot (1973:256), Willis, and Whisson describe him as a 'Unitarian', while suggesting that the Unitarian Judge, Alexander Morrison, impacted on Owalo's faith (Whisson 1964:154). Since Owalo had an intimate relationship with Alexander Morrison, it is possible that apart from working together on the study of Luo grammar, they had serious theological discussions (Opwapo 1981:18).

However, the two most immediate antecedents to the founding of the church were firstly, that he was called by God in March 1907, and secondly, his expulsion from the council in Maseno which forced him to start his own Mission. Additionally, with a rapidly changing society created in part by Christianity, certain important factors were overlooked. First, spiritual, emotional, moral and religious needs of the Luo were ignored. Visions, dreams, spirits and even their idea of God were considered futile. The society needed solutions to existential problems such as fears of the forces of evil as well as emotional outlets and religious healing. Owalo's teaching emphasised the spiritual world, especially angels that, for him, comfortably replaced the Luo spirits. Second, whereas the healing world was ignored and rejected as futile, however, Owalo prayed for the sick and exorcised the possessed. Third, while polygamy and the levirate were castrated, Owalo accepted these as practical within his movement.

It is also probable that the local people did not comprehend several aspects of Christian teaching but lacked the courage and forum to declare it or to formulate something more suitable. This was a part play by Owalo. With the magnitude of his experience and as a courageous person, he noted a problem and sought a solution. He engaged in a most serious search for a more acceptable reality. When he had established what seemed relevant to a people who had to adjust to change, he started propagating it in 1912. He was mainly concerned with his tribe, the Luo, and this concern has continued to affect the development of the church membership.

In conclusion, it could be said that Owalo seemed to be an original and imaginative thinker, despite his limited education. He also had the charisma of leadership, which made it possible for him to have followers. Secondly, Owalo's movement had both religious and political components, but the political aspect was disguised in his theology. His was an attempt by a person in a rapidly changing society to create a kind of dialogue between Luo traditional beliefs, Islam and Christianity as he looked for meaningful experiences in different traditions. He used the idea of the centrality of God in the three traditions and related every other idea to it.

The African NLC did not advance through organised evangelism. The church developed through contact by migration, which continues to date, or through the initiatives of local adherents. A new community formed around the first converts, since among the Luo, a man of plenty draws people to

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himself. Other groups were formed as disciples multiplied and spread out from the initial centre. The best illustration would be that of Tanzania's North Mara. The NLC was introduced in North Mara in 1929 by Nickodemu Siwa, who reached there accidentally while searching for pasture. He settled at Ochuna where he formed the first community. With the development of the movement in the area, he became the Bishop and then, relinquishing daily affairs to his assistant, he settled in another area of the district when the pasture was exhausted. After settling down in North Mara he then invited other members from Kenya to go and baptize. This sort of growth ran a risk of slackening off as the initial dynamism of the movement gave way to routine.

Soon after the death of the founder, the evangelical impetus diminished. After 1920, there were adherents in North Mara District of Tanzania, Gem Ahono and Alego and continued expanding until early 1930s. A government report in 1933 said, 'Nomiya Luo Mission (African) continues to gain ground and is spreading its activities in South Kavirondo and among the Luo settled areas' (DC/CN1/6/2, 1932–34:KNA). However, soon after 1934, the government report said that, 'The Nomiya Luo Church continues to function but I have not heard it spreading' (DC/CN1/6/2, 1932–27:KNA). Whereas its expansion could have been curbed by the pattern it took, the most serious drawbacks were connected with internal feuds. The church experienced crisis at the death of the founder. Beginning from 1920, it survived sixteen and a half years of leadership crisis. Today, the church survives as Nomiya church with numerous splinters.

The Nature and Attractions of the Nomiya Luo Church

This religious movement of the Nomiya Luo Church was attractive to both men and women and spread with such marked rapidity that by the time of the death of the founder, it had spread all over Luoland and into some of the white settled areas. When the growth rate of a movement is so rapid, several issues need to be responded to, for instance, why were people joining? What features did it display that made it attractive?

First, when Owalo appeared in Asembo, it is possible that he recognised the situation of the Luo Community in the face of colonialism. He capitalised on this situation and then articulated it. He introduced a movement attuned to the traditional fears, needs and aspirations. Several cultural practices of the Luo disgusted the Europeans, especially missionaries, who militated against them. Indeed their attitude to the indigenous culture and religion was generally disastrous. To the missionaries the Luo practice of polygamy was offensive to Christian morals, therefore, the baptism of polygamous men and of women and children of such marriages, was not allowed. Owalo's movement contributed significantly to the process of de-culturation. His curtailed

campaigns against certain religious practices, customs and institutions, for example, polygamy.

The controversial issue of polygamy was touchy because it was an integral part of the local culture and people were bewildered with the idea that there should be anything wrong with it. The crusade against polygamy by Christianity directly affected all, particularly the women. Wives of polygamists suffered if their husbands became Christians because the man was only permitted to keep one wife and the others were often sent away suffering the stigma of rejection and disgrace. Robins (1979) suggests that women joined independent movements seeking religious legitimisation for the rejection of polygamous unions. Europeans attacked it as originating from sinful lust but failed to recognise it as an economic and social institution. Thus, the campaign against it was conducted with colonial criteria, methods, and aims, which took little account of the real and immediate exigencies of women.

For women, this constant conflict between mission and polygamous establishments was tantamount to an assault on the family. Luo women had managed to co-operate with co-wives. Polygamy worked for them since it guaranteed them some autonomy, personal freedom and greater mobility than would be possible in monogamous nuclear family. They could also use it as a means of maximising their own interests. Several wives in a homestead meant that women had more time to themselves and could develop strong bonds with other women. Although the practice of polygamy has declined, it persists to date and perhaps today the attitude of women towards it is completely different. However, from Owalo's time through to early post-independence days, at face value women felt quite comfortable.

Owalo authorised men to keep a maximum of four wives if they were interested in leadership positions, but gave no limitation to those with no leadership interests (Opwapo 1981). He, however, advocated for equal treatment for all wives by the husbands. He maintained that polygamy was not immoral but scriptural since patriarchs like David, Abraham, and Solomon practised it with no godly vindication. He insisted that polygamy was more acceptable than adultery. Thus entry into the church became easy; polygamists did not need to discard extra wives and the polygamous women and children were relieved of the stigma. They acquired recognition and acceptance, which they had been denied in the mainline churches. Owalo actually stopped Daudi Migot, his colleague in Maseno, from divorcing his second wife. Many adherents such as Samuel Otieno of Manyatta, Nickodemu Tambo of Nyakach, joined the movement because of its teaching on polygamy.

Yohana Owalo Christianised and incorporated customary marriage patterns into the religious and social life of the people. His acceptance of polygamy in particular endeared his movement to the people. He recognised the social significance of this type of marriage to the Luo people. Anyone intending to

marry was advised to negotiate with the girl's parents and fulfil the dowry according to the traditional requirements. When his effort to get such marriages officially registered by the colonial government in Kisumu failed in 1914, he instituted his own pattern of marriage arrangement that was in line with that of the community. Henceforth when dowry requirement was met, the faithful gathered in the groom's home and ceremonially went as a group to convey the bride from her natal home. The marriage was not consummated on the first night; the man spent the whole day and evening with Owalo in prayer (Opwapo 1981:159). Breach of this order was a serious offence.

Currently, everyone intending to marry notifies the church leader three months in advance to enable them to make public announcements of this intention at both the man and the woman's local churches. After this, the bride and groom would register at the judiciary before the church ceremony and other celebrations. Intention of marriage to a junior wife would still be announced in the churches. After dowry is fully paid, the faithful will gather at the man's home for celebrations and prayers to welcome the woman. However, life is dynamic and changes have occurred to the extent that adherents intending to take junior wives do so secretly because women's attitude towards polygamy has changed over time.

Despite the strategic advantages of the church's acceptance of polygamy, we still recognise that in some African Independent Churches, other issues and situations waging direct and significant assaults on the family have emerged. Some of the movements have been established by women, who have abandoned marriage and all sexual relations in order to be free to preach, for example, Gaudencia Aoko of Legion Maria who left her marital home after the death of her two children. In Ivory Coast, the Deima cult was established in 1942 by Maria Lalu, a married women who took a vow of chastity. The same could be said of Mai Chaza and Alice Lenshina in Zambia. The majority of these leaders relate strange tales, for example of death that leads to going to heaven and being entrusted with a ministry which they can only fulfil effectively without marriage.

Yet, for NLC adherents, marriage is important. The practice the levirate, whereby on a man's death his widow was inherited by his brother in order to raise children to carry on the line, was abhorred by the Europeans. In the view of the missionaries, the practice posed a serious threat to a widow's ability to remain steadfast in her loyalty to the church. In the early years of the British administration, the Christian widows were protected by the marriage ordinance of 1912, the missions and the government wanted to confront this issue but no satisfactory solution was reached (Spencer 1973:108). According to the Luo, the practice of the levirate ensured that the widows and their children had their rights to a secure home. Owalo advocated for the retention of a reformed levirate. By this practice wives were not inherited at their

husbands death. They were regarded as still formally married to the dead men and referred to as chi liel (wife of the grave). The leviratic union was not regarded as marriage, although some of the elements are common. This was like the Luo version of the life insurance policy and women had a choice in who to be their levir. The leviratic union finds a close parallel in the Old Testament. It was on this type of marriage that Israelites based their approach to polygamy. The widow was cared for in some ways by this arrangement. To date, it is the practice of NLC to ensure that widows are inherited and they claim a biblical basis for it. (Genesis 38; Deuteronomy 25:5–10; Ruth 4).

Handling of the dead and deceased is a big score to the church because the Luo celebrate death. When an adherent died, they actively participated in the celebrations, ceremonies and burial. Seventy (70) days after the burial a ceremony to free the dead to proceed to heaven was conducted by the faithful. The NLC members believe that after death the spirit of the dead continues to hover in the air space watching the handling of his affairs. After seventy days, all that pertains to burial should have been appropriately handled to release the spirit to rest in peace. Henceforth if the dead was a man then his wife/wives was/were free to pick a levir.

Owalo therefore built a community out of the breaking pieces of the old and the ill adopted offerings of the new. He understood the importance of witchcraft and ancestral spirits among the Luo and viewed them as issues to be dealt with through the ministry of the church. Consequently, he promised both mental and physical healing of illnesses. Adherents cite several instances of healing and exorcism. The majority of the exorcised were women and exorcism remains a common practice in the NLC. The tolerance shown towards polygamy, the levirate and other traditional patterns was compensated for by the rigorous and legalistic taboos on drinking, smoking, dancing and wearing of shoes in holy places. Traditional religious concepts and practices were re-interpreted in a Christian sense. This kind of re-interpretation seemed acceptable within the changing circumstances.

This movement also met a need in a society disturbed by the colonial impacts. Specifically, the Luo could neither provide from their resources nor accept without disruption the Europeans life style. Europeans paid little attention to cultural beliefs and practices of the Luo. This was despite warnings by Provincial Commissioner John Ainsworth asking: '[a]ll persons who have dealings with the natives of this country to investigate their customs and beliefs before attempting to govern them, to proselyte them, to trade with them, or to live amongst them and employ them as labourers, for it is only by understanding and appreciating their superstitions and habits that one can hope to win their sympathy and affection' (PC NZA 2/3. 1908-15, KNA).

After disrupting this kind of community, the Europeans failed to offer any alternative community to replace the lost solidarity of the society. By

introducing the new movement Owalo was providing a home, a community, for those experiencing the disruption. The First World War enhanced their disruption of the traditional patterns even further and therefore those who joined the NLC found it accommodative.

Thirdly, Owalo's personality also played a significant part in the formation, development and the nature of the message of the church. The movement was a product of a revelation received by him directly by divine will. His doctrine emanated from the heavens. Through the account given of the supernatural world, the character of the mission and the message can be perceived. The important element was the role of the prophet in relation to the movement he founded. He was chosen by God to be the interpreter of God's will for men and their guide on their way to salvation. Before the message was communicated to the rest of the humanity, the call of the prophet and the promise of salvation were first addressed to the Luo, the particular group of which he was a member. He was to be the intermediary between God and his people.

Through him, the group was to be made equal to other races, to ethnic and social groups dominant in the material world, and even better than some, like the Europeans, Goans, and the Indian Banyans, who were kicked out of heaven by the angels. His people became a chosen people, like Jews and Arabs, because, henceforth, they also possessed in him direct line with heaven. The prophet, therefore, was the incarnation of every desirable quality and, through him, the people participated in the revelation of which he was the instrument. Owalo's relationship to the people is therefore an essential part of his message.

Although the church is not clear whether Owalo was a messiah or a divine person, what mattered was the divine character of the message and the revelations that continued throughout his career as a prophet. In other words, a direct communication with God was the source of the movement's dynamism. Without it, the church would have diminished or simply stagnated. Owalo's charisma, which was associated closely with divine revelation, helped him claim and gain obedience and the respect of his fellows in the Luo community. The pattern of fasting, visions and returning with power is a feature of many stories of how a `Jabilo', (medicine men) among the Luo, gained his power. The charismatic person was usually the arbiter in society, he had the energy and personality to unite people and to turn the society in the direction of his ambition and to bring order where there were problems. The personality of Owalo, particularly after the heavenly experience, was such that it commanded obedience and respect, especially when he could be considered a charismatic person. His charisma was recognised by friends, and foes and adherents. A charismatic person usually appeared in the hour of need, so Owalo showed a masterly judgement in the selection of his moment.

The NLC was an African movement, not only in its leadership and the growing membership, but also in its attempt to come to terms with the African existential situation. This African-ness was at first a definite asset. Through it God's word was made to belong to the Luo, thus the Luo self-respect was regained. To date one of the articles of faith is that the NLC will provide eternal life for all its adherents. This movement also attracted almost everyone. Men who had nasty marital experiences with the colonial system joined with their whole families. Those most attracted to the movement were women. Studies on independency ascertain that women make up at least two thirds of the non-missionary church members and have often noted the greater attraction of religious faith and religious participation to women than to men. This is particularly true for the independent churches (Sundkler 1969; Seeley 1984).

Membership of the Independent Churches provided certain benefits. Women in particular gained a caring support network outside the formal structures (e.g. fellowship groups with shared experience) of society as well as opportunities for personal advancement. These churches also formed a legitimate space within which women freely participated outside the home without questions or need for justification. On the other hand, they provided that spiritual solace and community in a world in which hard work, social, economic, physical and emotional violence were the order of the day. Nervous breakdowns or mental disturbances are not rare among women with such stresses. In these small local communities, there was relief. Women found a relaxing escape from the arduous daily tasks and an opportunity of entering into a sympathetic relationship with women under similar strains. When the woman was prayed for or when she prayed alone, she underwent a psychological treatment that gave her emotional relief. Increasing drift of women into independent movements was also due to barrenness, delay in conception, and domestic difficulties. The churches responded to these problems through deliberate and open prayer and healing sessions. And as Barret (1968) claims, it is in the independent church movements of Africa that women had the chance to recover some of their traditional status and position, which had been undermined by the teaching of the Christian missionary churches.

Apart from the tensions and anxieties of the family, the women in colonial times were also the victims of the policies of the mission churches. Missionaries had often criticised and undermined the African forms of religious expression in which women had a part to play. Lehmann (1963) suggests that many women were attracted to the independent churches because they replaced the functions of customary institutions that were weakened by culture change. Barret remarks that the: 'missionary assault on the family complex caused women to act, for they felt the issues at stake more keenly than the men. With

more to lose, they vehemently defended their traditional institutions and way of life' (1968:147). It can thus be stated that the African independent churches gave women the opportunity to be involved in the churches' activities as participating actors not as silent observers.

Independence and the Subordination of the Luo Women

Ethnographic and historical studies of women and religion have thoroughly documented patterns of women's exclusion from positions of significant religious leadership. In many societies, women have active religious lives, yet ecclesiastical hierarchies rarely include women. In addition, official or great tradition religious concepts generally reflect men's and not women's priorities and life experiences. However, scattered throughout the world and centuries, there are instances of religious domination by women—in which women have been the leaders, the majority of participants and in which women's concerns have been central (Sered 1994:3).

In the available literature, the most puzzling issue is the immense power and influence which female leaders often wield in the independent churches as opposed to male dominance in the mainstream churches. In some of these churches, prophetesses have left indelible marks on the African continent, for example, Alice Lakwena of Uganda and Mother Jane Bloomer of Freetown. In Côte d'Ivoire, Marie Lalou was inspired by a dream to start a cult so women have ceremonial leadership and a clear sense of gender roles is maintained. In the movement of William Harries Wade women become leaders and gender roles are well balanced but polygamy is not renounced. Such independent churches believe that it is the Holy Spirit that raises people to positions of authority irrespective of gender. Locally, there is Mary Akatsa of Kawangware and Maria Aoko of Legio Maria who carved a niche for themselves in Kenya's religious history.

Bengt Sundkler (1976:79) says that from early times the church was like a women's movement. It functioned as a women's liberation movement long before that term was invented. Indeed, he points outnumerous examples of churches in South Africa where women excelled as leaders but he also gives instances of the efforts of women that have failed to be fully recognised and appreciated just because of gender. An example is that of Grace Tshabala who brought great revival in her church but was just described as 'after all she was merely a woman' (Sundkler 1976:79). Her husband and other Zionist leaders admitted, 'yes they can pray all night but of course man's prayer is stronger, for he is the head and leads in everything'. Perhaps in South Africa, the fact that women lead as presidents of churches, while others carry both the financial burdens and evangelistic outreach, Zionist's great contribution to African society. Zion gave women a central and honoured position, in healing activities, in worship and social life of the church, new emotional contacts of

care and concern were found where women and men could meet on equal terms. These terms were regarded as those of the ultimate authority, the Holy Spirit. But perhaps this was also determined by other parallel occurrences, for example, in 1955 women led in the bus strike in the Rand. There was also an upsurge in women's involvement in business and women's organisations were even stronger in the churches.

Some charismatic independent churches are more of a man's world than women. Many women scholars have criticised African Christian traditions for being sexist. Despite the church being populated by women, they still play a marginal role in power structures of the church. The African churches are like 'inverted pyramids' where the many women are led by the few men. One Kenyan Independent Church leader once commented that ordination of female priests was a deviation from Christian teachings and called for its immediate end. He claimed the practice would bring confusion. This was after the ordination ceremonies of a Presbyterian Church of East Africa and a Church of the Province of Kenya's female priests. The ceremony was attended by representatives from Akorino sect, Nomiya Luo Church, Salvation Army, Roho Israel and Nomiya Roho sect (KNA 18/1/1983).

Leadership is an important feature of any church. The hierarchy provides outlets for the exercise of leadership ability and at the same time ascribes status to the office bearers. It is also important to note that in various Christian denominations women have been striving to open up the churches' hierarchies to the participation of women and to increase women's representation in church and decision making bodies. Those who do not find immediate scope of advancement within the church are potential seceders unless new positions are created for them with new responsibilities. What we are saying is that women's roles in their religions vary tremendously between and within religions. Some religious organisations are founded on fundamentalist principles that promote a traditional or even regressive social position of women while others are welfare oriented. The NLC does not fall within the category of those that enhance the positions of women.

In some literature dealing with independent churches, the churches are seen as allowing outlets for expression of leadership qualities and disputes (West 1975:49, 74-75). The NLC developed its form of leadership with time. Owalo established what seems as a paramount chief type of leadership, in that the leadership went beyond clan boundaries. He mingled the Luo leadership pattern and the Christian one. The church was his ethnic group and he insisted that true Luo could only be his followers. Owalo was the first leader of the group. However, he failed to appoint his successor. He had no son to inherit leadership. Hence after his death wrangles over leadership ensued. However, Petro Ouma became recognised as leader.

In 1930 Petro introduced new positions in the leadership structure, that is, secretary, treasurer, and archdeacon. He held the position of Bishop in spite of the recurrent wrangles until his death in 1954. G.C. Owalo born to Alila wife of Yohana Owalo through leviratic union took over as Bishop. Writing the first constitution of the Church, G.C. Owalo included the following on leadership: 'The direct descendant (male) of the spiritual leadership will normally succeed to the spiritual leadership of the church at the maturity age of thirty or more years'. During his leadership, the area of jurisdiction was divided into two pastorates managed by two male pastors. Hence the leadership had two pastors, locational teachers, preachers and lay readers. Lay posts like the general secretary and treasurer were also introduced. All of the holders of these positions were men.

The Bishop was the overall head assisted by the archdeacon. The chief pastor, the direct representative of the Bishop, supervised locational priests and lay readers who were directly responsible for small communities. The secretary general was responsible for all church correspondences and the administration of the church. The treasurer was in charge of all church finances. This was the pattern of leadership until 1972 when the whole hierarchy was revised and made more elaborate. The new hierarchy included the synod as the supreme and final authority, chaired by the Archbishop. This synod met annually to deliberate on matters affecting the Church. The new offices introduced were the archbishop and the rural deans. One other important office that has caused numerous problems for the church is that of the *Sharriff* (The circumciser). There's the office of the chief sharriff, diocesan *sharriff* and the pastorate *sharriff*. However, those who claim to be able to circumcise are too numerous and several decrees have had to be promulgated to stop them from practising.

In the NLC, titles are important, as well as marriage and age in conferring status. The ideal leader must be male, at least be middle aged, and married. The leader must be literate but not necessarily have a high level of education. Ordination precedes the assumption of spiritual leadership position. This consecration must be done in the presence of many adherents. During the ordination of the leader, his duties are clearly delineated to avoid conflicts.

Based on the foregoing, it is evident that in the NLC, women have always been subordinate (Collins 1971; Caulfield 1981; Leacock 1981). Women's subordination occurs within the social process of their relationship with men and the way those relationships work to the detriment of women. Collins (1971) argues from the Freudian perspective that women's subordination is fundamentally as a result of men's sexual lust and their superior size and strength. Tiger, on the other hand, asserts that male dominance arises from their social bonding. The argument here is that the subordination of women in the NLC was not solely the result of the policies imposed by foreign capital and other forces of colonialism. Rather, patriarchal value systems in

both colonialism and the traditional African system reinforced and transformed one another evolving into new structures and forms of domination. Hence neither Owalo nor later church leaders seriously challenged the basic structure of gender relations and inequality between men and women remained rooted and perpetuated.

Therefore, independence lost its liberating function for women since it reinstates, determines and distorts traditional values. NLC mainly affirmed traditional relations of domination between men and women. Thus women were and continue to be actually victims of male dominance. Patriarchal value systems borrowed from both the Luo patterns and colonial system were supported by religious beliefs of the NLC and exerted social belief in male superiority and female inferiority. Hence subordination of women was rubber stamped by the NLC. Thus, despite the attractions of this movement, it was still guided by strong patriarchal tendencies that were real and quite durable. This system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women was clearly replicated in the Nomiya Luo Church, causing the subordination of women in the movement. The NLC developed fundamental organisational principles based on the traditional social structure with gender as the major determinant of the division of labour. As in the rest of the society, the major decision-makers and functionaries are men. The main figures in the church are the male bishops, elders, administrators and so on.

This religious movement was viewed as everyone's concern but with the specific responsibility and privilege of men. Women were extremely important, absolutely essential and highly regarded but primarily as facilitators of the men's religious activities. Most of the women were not aware of their own giftedness, dignity, potential and self worth because they were unconsciously victims of male domination, social prejudices and discrimination. Their valuable contribution to the church was either insignificantly appreciated or not at all. Women were not appointed into the critical areas of decision-making like the NLC synod and other gatherings of leaders. To date, the church structure has not allowed women entry into these roles. They have also been excluded from the leadership role in all public rituals, for example, no woman officiates as an elder during ordination and baptismal ceremonies and there is no female *sharriff* (or circumciser).

However, women played the same domestic roles that they fill in other areas of life such as cleaning the church, cooking and serving during their ceremonial functions. Women also lead in the church singing on Sundays and other occasions and organise prayers for the sick. They continue to be in charge of women's meetings and the cleanliness parades conducted during one of their annual celebrations. Perhaps, they also exercised considerable informal authority through their husbands or their fathers. Currently some

may preach during *mony* (all night vigils) which emerged after the demise of the founder.

Female religious participation, religious metaphors and beliefs concerning female sexuality are all evidences of the existing subordination. Female religious metaphors, for example, derived from their sexual and reproductive status. There is also the age held belief that female sexuality is polluting and contaminating to all things. Hence a woman would not lead worship service or the singing while menstruating. Her sexuality was also seen as needing periodical purification, for example, after birth of a child the woman was confined for a period of either thirty-three days or sixty-six days depending on the sex of the child. This period ended with a feast (*Sawo*) in which chicken and or other animals were slaughtered to mark the end of the period of confinement and her purification. During confinement, the woman was under the care of an elderly woman. She ate specially prepared food, was confined to specified section of the house, was not to be seen outside their house, was not to touch her husband, church clothes, bible and prayer book. Neither did she have sexual relations with her husband during this period. In other words she was in a state of sexual taboo. In fact, independent churches that involve women in ministry still evoke the inauspicious the energy that emanates from female sexuality, using it to curtail women's involvement e.g. a menstruating woman, or one who has just delivered, or unwashed after sexual intercourse or women with uncovered hair (Oduyoye 1992:20). Women are keen observers of these taboos against pollution particularly in the case of menses, which is believed to defile a woman and all that she touches.

Most ritual obligations for adult women were related to their roles as mothers and took place in the private family setting, or private domain of the household, for example, during the sawo (Celebrations after period of confinement). It is the women who directly helped their fellow women throughout the period of confinement. But at the end of the period, the church's male leaders officiated in the purification ceremony and ate the juicy sections of the meal as specified by the religious movement, for instance, the roasted chicken and the kidneys and livers of the animal. AS well, males perform rituals that are considered beneficial to the whole group, for example, baptism and circumcision.

Why are women subordinate? Paradoxically women attended and attend church in greater numbers than men. This largely concords with the commonly held view that women were intuitive, receptive to religious experience, and by nature, more devout than men. Yet women are often confined to the domestic sphere in some form of seclusion or constrained by numerous social conventions when they are allowed to move in public spaces. Secondarily, they are excluded from formal religion and from participating in important public rituals. They may be important in possession cults and healing rites but

these are extensions of traditional female roles. On the other hand the few men who attend the church hold prominent roles, perform religious rituals, formulate dogma, provide those divinely inspired ideas, control the powers of female reproductivity while dictating social and cultural roles for women.

Women have been also exploited by male adherents in these churches. In 1930, Elisha Ade, a recalcitrant member of NLC, took about 12 married women to Chula Ndere against the mandate of colonial government and the advice of NLC leadership, because he received a fresh vision from God. When they returned six months later, the majority of the women were not only pregnant but also sick. Similarly, in 1961, when James Owigo Pesa emerged among these NLCs with new powers of preaching, healing and exorcism, he took a group of women (married and unmarried) as helpers and doctors with him when he travelled from Oboch to South Nyanza. The end result was mass pregnancy. In 196, he had to quit and form his Holy Ghost Coptic Church, supported mostly by women who had received Muya (Holy Spirit-the ability to operate in the Spirit and perform miracles of all sorts.) The NLC and its splinters have somehow managed to control the churches' affairs in spite of the women who claim to have received the Holy Spirit.

Whereas women were freed from their political responsibilities they had expressive powers that operated chiefly in ceremonies and settings managed by female elders. Since they lacked legitimate authority women based their leadership upon two forms of power. One was the mystical power based upon spiritual gifts, which operated like *Muya* (Holy Spirit) and have been used since the 1960s. The other was through direct control of situated interaction. Like Jules Rosette (1979), we learn that this limited exercise of power was ceremonial leadership. The concept of Christian equality, with the expectation that men and women enter heaven side by side is basic to the NLC doctrine. However, the expression of equality in political leadership is denied women. Whenever men are present at a ritual, Luo women show the respect and express their viewsl through their formal leadership. Through this interaction, women can control and direct the sense of ceremonies and other ritualised behaviour without formally acknowledged leadership roles. This is evident in the participation in song (Opwapo 1981). The woman would be reprimanded when their participation transgressed the boundaries of sin, healing and medium-ship. However, during ritual the routine exercise of power occurs through song intervention. Intervention with song allows the woman to redirect sermon topics to present moral lessons that criticise the types of wrong doings they associate with men.

For men, preaching is a routine aspect of ritual leadership. The sermons are performed in concert with a reader who presents a passage, which is elaborated upon by a speaker in antiphonal fashion. Women remain seated and initiate songs from this position. The women's interruption is a controlled

contribution from this restrained position. This ritual participation could be viewed from the large Luo concept of wich kuot or shame. In the Sunday ceremony, the women's song participation is complementary to that of men. In the healing ceremony, women play an active and instrumental role. Healing would be like an extension of normal routine domestic activity. Midwifery (nyamrerwa) is confined to the older women.

Based on these, the words of E. Sullerot aptly forms a conclusion for this paper:

> A visitor from another planet would find it paradoxical that while the majority of the Churchgoers are women, religious doctrines certainly do not value the female sex very highly, or at least have been misinterpreted over the centuries to give women a subordinate role in religious practices. They have been debarred from conducting religious services and administering sacraments. In the main line churches currently a number of women are now rejecting the self-effacement involved in this definition of their religious roles (1971: 233).

The NLC has survived in a world that has experienced several changes. It is a world where both women are speaking with a new voice and a new urgency, in and out of the church. In conferences, seminars, and discussion groups - of various kinds - the issue of women's roles is addressed. It is amazing that in spite of political independence, the Women's Decade of 1975-1985, post-Nairobi and now Beijing, this church has, despite these changed circumstances, not considered ordaining women as priests or changing the rules concerning women's participation.

As life transmitters, effective agents of communication and fervent religious adherents, women in the NLC should be empowered to advance to all positions of church leadership. Empowerment would also mean providing education for the majority of the women who are either illiterate or semiliterate and are therefore incapable of participating in certain deliberations requiring literacy. Yet, they are the part of the church population that has distinguished itself for its love of the church, willingness to commit itself to work in the church. These women are actually the pillars of the church, always active, strong and ready to carry forth the mission of the church. With these in mind it is also necessary for the church to authenticate the ministry of women. Women must be given roles in decision-making in the walk towards equity. The church should also come to grips with its own concept of vocation and perhaps develop a new theology of family life.

Conclusion

What is the future of this religious movement? Would it fall prey to the secularisation process? Sociologists predicted that by the year 2000 religion would be much less relevant than it was in 1970. However, in 1990, a sociological census emerged suggesting that the secularisation idea was wrong

and a parochial European error made using the public choice theory. In fact, the census found that religion was more prevalent in 2000 than it was in 1970. The number of those calling themselves religious is on the rise in almost all countries of the world. Religion has become more prominent and widespread yet less relevant. There is no reason to imagine that this trend will be reversed within the next decades. Possibilities are that by 2010 religion will remain important in society even if the most crucial cultural and political decisions will not be made by it.

This means that NLC will survive in spite of the pejorative flavour it has maintained throughout time. This is especially because, as David Barret says, this movement's message shows God reflected in their own language and culture, making it easy for the marginalised to hear the word of God relevant to their own needs and expressed through their traditions. Thus, within these religious movements equality of the sexes in relationship to God will continue to co-exist with complete male monopolisation of leadership roles, religious laws and authority in community affairs since in religious frameworks that exclude women from authority, women may be active participants.

Women's religious lives are often closely linked to their interpersonal concerns. The network of relationships most relevant to the understanding of women's religiosity is the family. An intense concern with the well being of their extended family characterises the religious life of many women. Even within the male dominated religious contexts, women domesticate religion by emphasising ritual and symbols that give spiritual meaning to their everyday lives (e.g. Observing food taboos, sacramental foods). Studies of women and religion are notable for emphasising ritual instead of theology. Consequently we know more about what women do than what they believe in. Perhaps women invest more time into ritual than into theological speculations.

Nevertheless, for its own survival and future effectiveness, the NLCs needs to address the issue of the liberation of women. How can women be liberated from this? There is need for analysis of the individuals and the society. Both men and women need to develop a consciousness of gender related issues. Both long term and historical effects and present day realities need to be understood and evaluated, as far as this is possible. The issues causing oppression be dealt with. Finally there is need for increased education for women. Men also need to be liberated from the attitudes and structures that bind them. This implies that male and female liberation are two sides of the same coin; both are necessary for liberation and wholeness in the church.

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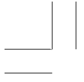
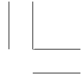
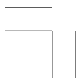

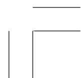

5

Elechi Amadi's Women: Voices of Reason

George Nyamndi

Introduction

> A stupid Arab woman, a mere woman has caused us irreparable damage and you sit here and talk of superpower.

The history of thought is also that of mankind. Thinking is that particular idiosyncratic strand that sets man apart from, and above, the other species. It is this evolutionary ascendancy that Descartes celebrated in his hurrah: Je pense donc je suis! To say man is alive is to acknowledge his thinking activity, and thinking is the motor of volition, of reason. It is for this reason that the war of the races has centred round the prerogative of thought. Each race arrogates unto itself the exclusiveness of that faculty, and views the other races in a downward relationship with itself.

The opening citation from Stanley-Pierre Ngeyi's *I see War, War; Real War Everywhere* (Ngeyi 1993) signals the rung occupied by women on the ladder of thought. To the speaker as gender representative, women are nothing but a pack of stupid beings; and the derogatory intensity of the qualifier leaves one in little doubt that the masculine spite of yesteryears for the womenfolk is still entrenched.

In traditional African society, more perhaps than anywhere else, this condescension continues to manifest itself with ferocious actuality, the inroads made by globalising modernism notwithstanding. This intemperate feeling of superiority by men is captured most graphically—and most paradoxically—by Calixthe Beyala, the talented Cameroonian female novelist in her 1996 work *Les honneurs perdus*, in which Bénérafa, the protagonist Saîda's father, breaks down when the midwife announces to him that the boy he is expecting

is actually a girl (Beyala 1996:24). The expectant father would have preferred a dead boy to a live girl (J'aurais préféré que mon fils soit mort au lieu d'être transformé en fille) (ibid. p. 25). The idea of a girl child is so unacceptable to him, so utterly despicable, that he employs the magic powers of a local healer to reverse the sex of the child. Predictably, he fails. Similarly, in Amin Zaoui's *The Inordinate Passions of the Body* (1985), the hero Amin's father bars women from reading and writing, and sends his wife away to her family in anger each time she delivers a daughter.

The further back one goes in West African fiction as a whole and in Nigerian writing in particular, the more pronounced is society's gender bias in favour of masculinity. This trend is in keeping with the return to the mainspring of traditional culture and ultimately to its patriarchal beginnings. Chinua Achebe's epochal novel *Things Fall Apart*, for example, is built around the central trope of gender stereotypes: Okonkwo is driven to a morbid show of strength in order to ascertain his difference, in gender terms, from his father regarded by society as an agbala; that is to say a woman or a man who has not taken a title (Achebe 1958:13).

These few instances of pronounced social preference for masculinity, here captured in fiction, set the stage for Ahmadi's dissonant voice through his own depiction of women in largely positive terms.

Women in Amadi's Fiction

Elechi Amadi has often been read as if he was just another spineless conformist to the patriarchal order. Naana Bangiwa Horne, for one, indicts him for providing in *The Concubine* a perspective that is male and limiting. Interestingly enough, Horne authored this critique in 1986, quite a few years after Amadi's other publications, notably *The Great Ponds* (1969), his autobiography *Sunset in Biafra* (1973), and *The Slave* (1978). All these works provide ample disclaimers to Horne's expressed views. For sure, there are men and women in Amadi's fictional universe, men and women caught in the intricate web of crises and events. But a closer reading of the different fictional situations reveals a strongly iconoclastic, even revolutionary temperament that shakes the received assumptions at their very roots.

Amadi's views on the woman, the traditional African woman in particular, are evidence that he championed the cause of gender equality and female empowerment long before the bandwagon of the late 1980s and early 1990s started clamouring for these attributes. Amadi wrote mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, at a time when, according to Horne, 'men writers (tended) to overplay the sexuality of their female characters, creating the impression that women (had) no identity outside their sexual roles' (Horne 1986:120). But at that time already he produced works that qualified as feminist novels, that is to say 'black male's fiction which manifests a critical awareness of women's struggle to overturn patriarchy' (Mainimo 2001:38-39).

This paper stakes a simple claim; namely that women in Amadi's early novels are neither passive spectators of village life nor resigned victims of male domination. Instead, they are characters who win admiration by their independence and sense of purpose. Such portraiture is all the more striking because it comes at a time when the dominant novelistic attitude in Nigeria was to present the woman as an insignificant figure in the daily politics of village life, unearthing in the process what Lloyd Brown has called 'the palpable disadvantages of her day-to-day existence' (Brown 1981:7).

Our critical endeavour in this paper is not subsumed in any of the distinct gender theories or perspectives that attempt to describe women's oppression, to explain its causes and consequences, and to prescribe strategies for women's liberation. It is rather intended to capture and foreground Amadi's artistic resources and in so doing, vindicate him as a writer with a balanced insight into the social issues of his time. Which does not mean, though, that feminist discourse is totally absent from our preoccupation. It cannot be. Amadi's writing lends itself too readily to that specific body of critical theory for us not to be alert to the ensuing potentialities of theoretical application. Wherever necessary, one or several of the brands—liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, postmodernist—will be enlisted. But since the traditional homogeneity of the universe of action in the novels under study dispenses the women in those novels of the other burdens of gender discrimination such as race and class, the women will be scrutinized as products of a cultural environment and assessed in terms of how the nurturing process affects their place in their given society; but more especially how they grapple with their condition or even supersede it.

Amadi's first novel, *The Concubine*, is steeped in the mythical aura of a traditional society in its pristine beginnings. The mythical feel of life in Omokachi and the adjoining villages issues from the Sea King, an anthropomorphic force who contests a woman with the villagers and visits all her human suitors with a mysterious death. We are just a step away here from the Greek world of the *Oresteia and Prometheus Bound* where divine jealousy empties a fearsome anger on the human causes, real or suspected, of such anger. *The Great Ponds*, on the other hand, is a transitional novel in which myth and the supernatural are receding and human will is affirming itself more and more perceptibly. The gods in this work, the second in the oeuvre, have shed much of their omnipotence and become for most of them only names whose importance is dwindling by every passing day. Although the dibias, traditional fortune-tellers and psychiatrists, are still a dominant feature of the social fabric, they are no longer quite as influential as they are in the world of *The Concubine*. In *The Great Ponds* men have stirred into action and causality is more ostensibly human. The basic communal strands are still alive, but their strength and relevance are beginning to be seriously undermined by rising individual interests. For example, Wago the leopard killer is noted more for his egoism

than for his communal spirit. It is also through him that the disintegrative forces exercise their nefarious grip on the community. *The Slave* completes the progression towards individualism. In the universe of this third book, the gods no longer hold exclusive sway. Villagers have evolved from just acquiescent components of a group into individuals with choices and preferences. The emergence of an individualistic society also provides the appropriate framework for the analysis of character and for a more comprehensive appreciation of gender roles.

The Concubine portrays a society in which the woman's image conforms to the stiff dictates of tradition. Cast in a strait jacket, the woman in Omokachi village cannot venture one step outside the social path traced for her. All attempts at self-expression by women are checked by the overriding interests of the masculine gilds and ritual castes. It is for this reason that when Ihuoma dares to harvest plantains on the disputed piece of land, she is confronted by Madume who brashly orders her to surrender her harvest. Her spirited resistance is admirable but ultimately futile as she finally relinquishes the plantains to a triumphant Madume. One can almost feel the how-dare-you sense of effrontery in Madume's attitude. The incident ends in a chauvinistic stroke: 'Ihuoma put down the basket quietly, removed the plantain and began to move away. Only a very foolish woman would try to struggle with a man' (Amadi 1966:68). Later in a conversation with Ekwueme, Ihuoma herself underscores the discrimination suffered by woman:

> 'I cannot speak in proverbs'.
> 'You don't need to.
> 'Why not?'
> 'You are a woman'.
> 'Women are unlucky. They are denied many things'.
> 'List them'.
> 'They are uncountable. Look, we are not allowed to climb trees, we may not eat the meat of a kite, the gizzard of a bird is also forbidden, we…' (ibid., p. 84).

The suspension marks are indicative of the unnamed deprivations endured by women. These deprivations are not sex- but rather gender-motivated, as they are founded on 'attributes that are culturally associated with being female and male' (Jacobsen 1998:5). Whether as a person Ihuoma can fight her male opponent and win is immaterial under the circumstances. She is a woman and must conform to the expectations of society when it comes to behaviour. Radical feminism will condemn this incident as an embodiment of the patriarchal system that oppresses women; a system characterised by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition.

In referring to women as unlucky, Ihuoma is establishing a euphemistic identity with what Josephine Donovan terms the Aristotelian notion of inappro-priateness or valour in a woman (Donovan 1989:xv). To Aristotle, it

was not appropriate for a woman to be clever or courageous; in other words, there was a *manly* behaviour not befitting of a woman. This Greco-African arrogance of man is a dominant feature of *The Concubine* and one of its strongest supports of Horne's argument that 'the world (Amadi) projects … is a male world, and the voices heard are mainly male voices' (Horne 1986:120). This is all the more true because, as she said earlier, 'the statements made by these voices and even by the authorial voice reflect not just a masculine attitude to women but a chauvinistic one' (ibid.).

Chauvinism is in itself a sufficiently grave psychic ailment. Exacerbated by phallic tyranny, it results in total loss of reason. Female victims of such male disorders are the elected protagonists of fiction by some male conservative African writers. In *A Grain of Wheat*, for instance, when the white man tells the Gikuyu that a powerful woman sat on the throne in his country, they laugh at this eccentric man 'whose skin had been so scalded that the black outside had peeled off'. And then conclude that 'the hot water must have gone into his head' (Ngugi 1967:11). The collective unconscious of the patriarchal Gikuyu cannot yield to the fallacy of a woman potentate. Even reminiscences of the Gikuyu people's last rule by a woman are couched in sensual imagery. The monarch Wangu Makeri is remembered not so much for her leadership qualities as for her attractiveness as a woman (ibid., pp. 11-12). She stirs a lascivious urge in the men, an urge that is a male sentimental stereotype at variance with the staid regard for leadership. Like Ngugi's Makeri, Ngeyi's female protagonist, too, comes under the cutting edge of male arrogance. She is in actual fact a young educationist and scientist who had found out that a computer could be programmed to make a nuclear bomb in flight (Ngeyi 1993:122-123). Her invention is used by her country Libya to annihilate the American fleet in the Mediterranean and to move the entire world to the brink of war. But the stunned and humiliated American President stubbornly insists on seeing in this nuclear genius nothing but a stupid Arab woman, a mere woman. This is fiction quite all right, but as Edward Said says, 'You have to step outside the novel, the play, for the larger truths' (Said 1975:25). And following in his wake Frederic Jameson posits:

> the novel is always an attempt to reconcile the consciousness of writer and reader with the objective world at large; so it is that the judgements we make on the great novelists fall not on them, but on the moment of history which they reflect and on which their structures pass sentence (Jameson 1974:42).

When we step outside the fictional world of Ngeyi's novel and seek to reconcile our consciousness as readers with the objective society at large, we are faced with the plight of women in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, in Northern Nigeria under the Sharia law, in South Africa in the apartheid days, and in several other corners of the earth where human solidarity is fractured by male greed.

In West Africa this point of fracture in gender balance has occasioned quite some incisive female statement of protest and indictment known epistemologically as feminist thought. But that is another matter all together. Besides, there continues to exist a yet unabridged frontier between urban feminist intellectualism and the lived realities of the rural woman; the latter being the province of focus of Amadi's creative searchlight and of our critical endeavour.

The rural woman as active conscience

Social evolution has demonstrated that human societies shed their rigidity as they progress into cultural enlightenment. Chronologically, *The Concubine* initiates a trilogy that also comprises *The Great Ponds* and *The Slave* in that order.

Set in the pre-dawn twilight of Ibo cultural evolution, action in *The Concubine* is ordered by the crystalline rigour emblematic of untouched human groupings. In Omokachi and the adjoining villages, that rigour translates into a patriarchal superintendence that suffocates the women out of any meaningful existence. To this extent, we are in total accordance with Horne when she says:

> Amadi's depiction of Ihuoma is dehumanising. She is more like a piece of land, or a horse, or some form of property that is there to be grabbed. Clearly, the only significance that women have in Amadi's novel is sexual. All exist in a man's world, to be used by the men as sexual vehicles (Horne 1986:123).

So far, so good. It is here, though, that Amadi's fiction parts ways with Horne, the better to quell her outrage. It is true that, outside Ihuoma, none of Amadi's female characters is fleshed out to any appreciable degree. They are for the most part minor characters expelled to the fringes of village life. However, their roles swell to greatness when looked at in terms of what effect their little actions have on the fortunes of their society. *The Great Ponds* and *The Slave* together provide a convincing picture of women in action in a time and place not very much given to recognising and promoting female strengths.

The Great Ponds is a novel about war, 'that particular moment of hatreds and sufferings, a man's world—where gunpowder is in the air and where the combatant's weaknesses and heroism are revealed' (Stora 1999:80). In this war-torn environment, the positive role of women is emphasised through the participation of first wives in the process of decision-making and execution. First wives are their men's right hand. It is to them that important family matters are handed for management. When Olumba's wife Oda is taken into captivity during one of Aliakoro's night raids on Chiolu, she leaves behind a son. Olumba hands the son over to his first wife Ngoma for care. This may look like one of the routine chores of the traditional wife, but the fact that the decision conforms to an established hierarchical order is a demonstration of the regard men have for their wives. Eze Okehi, the chief of Chiolu, also

sends his first wife to the dibia for clarification on the fate of the pregnant woman sold off into slavery by Isiali village. Even more revealingly, it is the same (unnamed) woman who pronounces the first condemnation of the war:

> 'Why can't men take advice?' she moaned. 'They think they are wise but they are foolish as a baby in arms. Look at all the sufferings of the past month. What good will that pond do us? Who has ever grown rich from the proceeds of the cursed Pond of Wagaba?' (ibid., p. 72).

The pun on 'arms' is an incisive indictment both of bloodshed and of the childish follies of men. To paraphrase Stora, 'amid a deluge of blood, hate, and barbarism, women alone appear capable of lucid and despairing speech' (ibid., p.81). Like Eze Okehi's woman here. Again it is she who reveals the ominous secret about the Pond of Wagaba: it is cursed. No man before her had discovered the secret or cared to find out.

Alison Jagger in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* observed that liberal political thought holds a conception of human nature that locates our uniqueness as human persons in our capacity for rationality. Reason itself being uninformative, liberals have attempted to define it in various ways, stressing either its moral or its prudential aspects. By moral aspects they mean the ability to comprehend the rational principles of morality. In the above citation Amadi does not stress emotion but reason as the capacity that distinguishes the women from the men; human beings from brutes, to use Wollstonecraft's distinction (Jagger 1983:14). Rousseau's principle of sexual dimorphism is more akin to the accepted African view of the woman as it credits her with emotion and man with rationality: a rational man is the perfect complement for emotional woman and vice versa. But Amadi departs from this acceptation in ways that stress not only his originality but his bias in favour of women and their strengths.

In the world of Amadi's fiction old women are a lot more than just spent reproductive organs. They are matriarchal figures with a firmer hold on reason than the men. In *The Slave* Nyege, the fiery octogenarian, holds her own against the village's decision to expel her grandson Olumati from their midst on the (false) grounds that he is an Osu, an outcast. In *The Great Ponds*, the widow Ochoma, the oldest woman in the village, is possessed by one passion: see her grandson Okatu come to fame by killing an enemy. The raid on Chiolu by Aliakoro poachers sets the stage for the fulfilment of this dream. Okatu kills one of the marauders and at thirteen becomes the youngest villager entitled to the ritual wine with the eagle feathers. We are a far remove here from the time when women peeped in awe from their barricaded mud huts as men sunned their vanity. Ochoma has summoned youth and masculinity into the service of age and womanhood.

The neat pattern of female life in Amadi's novels is further underscored

by the relationship between mates in polygamous homes. The prototype co-wives are known to be fractious, and the beleaguered husband to forever be holding court and brokering peace. Amadi's co-wives are a different breed altogether: sedate, supportive, compassionate. All along they display a depth of mutual love which puts to thorough shame the mayhem among men. When Eze Okehi (*The Great Ponds*) dispatches his first wife to the dibia, she obliges readily even though the object of the errand is her mate who has been sold into slavery. This is the kind of attitude to make the Judge's jealous wife in Malum Amadu's *Amadu's Bundle* (1972) shriek. Eze Okehi's errand woman actually sheds tears when the dibia reveals to her that the earth goddess is angered beyond all entreaty (Amadu 1972:71-72). In a similar show of gender solidarity, Wogari, one of Olumati's wives, also refuses to plait her hair while her mate Nyoma lies ill. Although the women in polygamous situations are bonded together by the rabid wants of men, they explore the goldmine of gender identity for new strengths and a new image.

Nowhere perhaps than in Bole Butake's *Lake God*, his dramatisation of the 1986 Lake Nyos disaster in Cameroon, do women utilise these new strengths more trenchantly. In that historical play the women position themselves in the centre of action and at the forefront of the decision-making process. As we have observed elsewhere, 'The women have now become the real men. While the men burn their lives away in drink, idle talk and carnal speculations, the women, endowed with a nobler sense of mission, start and sustain the ultimate battle for survival' (Mainimo 2001:231).

In Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, Daba, Moudou's daughter, brings home her friend Binetou. Moudou falls in love with her and finally marries her. In spite of the affront, Daba's mother stays on in the marriage, faithful to the ideal and promise of marriage. When Moudou dies, his elder brother Tamsi expresses his wish to inherit her, to which she answers: 'You forget that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand'. As Amba Oduyoye observes, 'it is the woman who sleeps by the fire of discrimination on the basis of sex (…) who knows how hot that fire is'. This knowledge challenges the victim to positive action: 'If she is prepared to articulate her vision for a more just and participatory society then maybe we can begin to reshape the attitudes of society as a whole. It is not a situation of being liberated by men for never in history has a privileged group of its own accord given up power and privilege in order to bring about equality' (Oduyoye 1979:10-11). We see that Tamsi, like any conservative traditionalist, forgets that his late brother's widow is a human being who reasons, feels and sees. His physiological amnesia reflects the rigid tradition in which Amadi's male villagers are enchained, just as the widow's emphatic declaration of her humanity echoes the victorious wisdom of Amadi's female vanguard.

The matron of this vanguard is undoubtedly Nyege in *The Slave*. To my

mind, she is one of the most exciting female characters in African fiction. It is no accident that she appears in a novel that extols the power of individual determination. Her physical portrait emphasises her extraordinary stature:

> Nyege was short. The stoop which the years lent her made her shorter still. Her skin was red and firm, her hair white, her torso bare with flapping breasts; a double navel (the larger of them had grown out after a serious illness) and a deeply wrinkled face lit by greyish-green eyes rare in her race, all gave her an unusual personality. Even elders felt uneasy in her presence (Amadi 1978:21).

This unusual stature is reflected in her equally unusual standing in the village. Having killed her husband's assailant in the early days of her marriage, she is now one of those rare women entitled to drink the wine-with-the-eagle-feathers (ibid., p. 22). She also speaks in proverbs (ibid., p 16), a privilege set aside only for the aged, male wise.

Nyege's portraiture underlines Amadi's liberal feminist sympathies, for he makes the playing field level for everybody irrespective of sex and provides in that manner the appropriate avenue for self-realisation. Even though Nyege is a woman, she overcomes her husband's assailant, a man, and gains entry into the secluded group of men with social distinction. The underlying message here, and one which vindicates both the liberal and radical feminist pretensions, is that given the same opportunity, women can perform just as well as men.

Amadi employs an apposite narrative incident in *The Slave* to articulate his regard for women in traditional society. This incident is triggered by the secular interpretation of sacred acts. At Wakwakata's death, his son Osimini seeks refuge in the shrine of Amadioha at Isiali. By this act he forfeits his freedom and becomes an Osu, an outcast. Tradition says all children born to an outcast are themselves outcasts. Olumati is born in the shrine and in the eyes of the village he is an outcast. Everybody is agreed; everybody, except Nyege. She mans the field of strategic possibilities offered her by this case. At Osimini's flight to the shrine his wife is already three months heavy with child. Where then is the osu-status to apply? At birth irrespective of the fact that when the child was conceived his parents were still free people, or at birth on condition that the child was also conceived by Osu parents? The villagers say at birth irrespective of the status of the parents at the time of conception. Nyege heaves conception clear of the curse by maintaining that a child conceived by free parents is a free child whatever the subsequent status of its parents. She stands her ground so steadfastly that the matter is referred to the god Amadioha for adjudication. The sacred judgement vindicates Nyege as we learn that Amadioha does not take what does not belong to him (Amadi 1978:27).

Nyege's victory over the elders of Aliji carries with it important overtones. *The Slave* is an extended allegorical criticism of the slave trade. The elders, in their blind conformism, tend the status quo. Only Nyege sees the thing clearly. She is alone to deliver the message of hope and human dignity. Whereas the

elders think that Olumati is an outcast and should therefore leave the village since his stay in it would imperil collective safety, Nyege feels and maintains that the young man is a free villager and should therefore be allowed to live in the village and inherit his father's property. Slavery, exile and poverty are here locked in symbolic combat with freedom, roots and prosperity. Amadi hands the flag of victory to a woman, and through her to women.

Through Nyege we discover that Amadi's women have purpose, taste, and will; in fine, that they are human beings endowed with the same faculties as men. We discover with admiration that they are resolved to enjoy the full prerogatives of their human endowments. And so Enaa, Bekweri's beautiful daughter, proudly rejects all the suitors who approach her. She even says at one point: 'Liking a man does not mean wanting to marry him' (ibid., p. 39).

This show of aesthetic independence is symptomatic of the changing times. As Nyeche, one of her dispirited suitors remarks, 'These days were not like his father's days when girls were shy and easier to talk to' (ibid., p. 72). Enaa incarnates this change: 'She was not shy. She conversed easily and always had one on the defensive' (ibid., p. 79). The changing image of the woman comes across boldly in this statement. The narrative progression in Amadi's dialectical intent reaches its summit in the following reported internal monologue by Nyeche:

> Nyeche looked around the room again and compared it with his. This was a very different world. A world of camwood, chalk and yellow dye, a world of decorations, of soft mats, of edeali and indigo designs, of beads and corals and soft shiny skin. It was the mysterious world of womanhood—warm and tender, alluring and compelling. Women were the real rulers of the earth, Nyeche thought; men were merely accidents in their lives (ibid., p. 79).

Amadi here makes an interesting revelation—or is it a belated acknowledgement? Women are the real masters of the world, men only accidents in it.
Most of Amadi's contemporaries and even a few other male novelists before him, drawing their inspiration from African thought and philosophy, have presented African society from a male-dominated standpoint. In *A Grain of Wheat* Gikonyo's father sends away his wife Wangari with whom he is disgusted. On departing with little Gikonyo strapped to her back she declares: 'But there is no home with a boy-child where the head of a he-goat shall not be cooked' (Ngugi 1967:64). In other words, a boy-child is a sure key to success and respect. Gikonyo vindicates his mother's proverbial wisdom by growing into a successful businessman in Thung'ai where she migrates to. The statement implicit in this praise of male children is that female children are no good and are therefore not to be sought.

Amadi's is a fresh, indeed revolutionary departure from this tradition, especially in *The Great Ponds* and *The Slave*. In these two works, women are the

prime movers of action. Even when they are not presented as originators of conflict, they are nevertheless at its centre. Their attitude towards male assumptions is critical, at times even aggressively so. Amadi positions his texts against the dominant ideological context of their production: the patriarchal system of Ibo culture. As we said earlier, the women in Amadi's novels respond more to their gender than to their sex roles. It is for this reason that the practice of polygamy is challenged by the girls. Adiba the slave for one reacts very sharply when Oriji teases her with marriage. He is already married and in her opinion he should busy himself with the woman already under his roof rather than seek to pack women in his compound like cattle in a pen.

Both of Amadi's novels are existentialist in emphasis, and in many ways parallel Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Jean Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* before it, especially in the women's refusal to buy their future at the cost of their past or for that matter their present. They have moved away from the god-will-provide-it situation of *The Concubine* to one in which you live by the sweat of your toil. The basic feature of existentialism is the exercise of free will. And we see the women doing just this. Whether in *The Slave* or in *The Great Ponds*, reason and passion, not tradition and uncritical compliance, are the hallmarks of action. Adiba can flout public opinion. Enaa can turn away suitors. Nyege can dwell on the men to let Olumati occupy his father's land because it is right for a child to inherit his father's property. The female characters in these novels make a more lasting impression than their male counterparts. They have a greater sense of purpose and show greater determination and critical judgement in whatever they do. For instance, Olumati's exaggerated concern for his enemy Aso's condition after their wrestling bout in which the latter sustains a back sprain so offends Aleru that she exclaims: 'he (Aso) can develop a hunchback if he wants to' (Amadi 1978:115). This reaction is more convincing especially when viewed against Aso's own impenitent arrogance. In fact he eventually develops a hunchback!

Revealingly, Enaa, the coveted diamond in *The Slave* falls in love with Wizo, the village artist. Wizo is a likeable character, a talented artist and a hardworking farmer. Above all, he is altruistic. Enaa's choice of him as partner is in many ways a recognition of those values for which he is so admired in the village.

Amadi's women definitely have a good sense of judgement and in any case good taste. Besides, they know what is good for their own well-being. For example, Olumati goes to Isiali to convince his mother Ndem to return to Aliji but she would not hear of it. The apparent reasons for the refusal have to do with lingering feuds: Kwele, Aso's father, was her suitor and when she jilted him for Osimini he took it very badly and has since then been a threat to her life. She therefore knows that Aliji is no safe haven for her. For sure, custom demands that she remain in her husband's compound and take

care of his children, but she maintains that for her to do this, the society in question must guarantee her the fundamental prerequisites for a peaceful and harmonious life. Aliji does not provide such prerequisites. And she is not the kind to sacrifice her well-being on the altar of a reprehensible tradition. However, all these reflections of a normative order are fuelled by a deep-seated urge for self-actualisation: she keeps a lover in Isiali whom she is too busy loving to be ruffled by accusations of child-neglect.

In traditional society children take precedence over all other pursuits. But here is Ndem telling us that if she is a mother, she is above all a woman, and if her motherhood is an impediment to her womanhood then she has to choose. And under the circumstances she chooses her womanhood. Adrian Roscoe said Mother is Gold. Elechi Amadi refines the hortatory analogy further into Woman is Diamond.

The tension Oduyoye establishes between womanhood and personhood is here given full illustration. To Oduyoye, 'it is mainly as a mother that a woman is indispensable to her clan' (Oduyoye 1979:11). But Ndem for her part vindicates her personhood not through her motherhood but in her womanhood. To Amadi, the essence, that is to say the state of being, womanhood, transcends, precedes, motherhood, an ancillary function whose scope remains synecdochically limiting. This explosive arrival of woman as a totality intones a paean to Amadi's innovative temper. He is by training a mathematician, by profession a soldier and by temperament a pacesetter. His autobiographical work Sunset in Biafra articulates his militant avant-gardism with bold conviction:

> I sometimes think that it is this lack of courage, this reluctance to break new ground, and not a lack of intellect, that has kept us far behind the developed nations in government, in technology and even in the arts. Again there is the belief that we need not, indeed dare not, exercise initiative in these things until we have caught up with the advanced nations by copying every single achievement of theirs. Well, we will never catch up that way. We too must contribute original ideas and earn the respect and gratitude of the world (Amadi 1973:3).

Amadi's portraiture of women opens new vistas for their gender, breaks new ground, to cite him. He does not abandon his womenfolk to be tossed about by ugly traditions. He is all too aware that society cannot earn the respect and gratitude of the world in the midst of gender discrimination and exploitation. And so he takes the initiative, sets the pace, throws the prison doors open so that consciences can be freed, and through them energies, irrespective of sex. Amadi definitely questions the consensual discourse of male omniscience and omnipotence, the kind of discourse that excludes women from effective decision-making. His female characters blow open the lid of inferiorization and cause their pent-up moral insight to superannuate male tyranny. There is, in the prototype Amadian woman, a visible mutation from submissiveness to

determined action. She dreams an equitable new world and projects her image on the village square of traditional contradictions.

Conclusion

We have endeavoured in this study to present Elechi Amadi as an original artist whose views of women differ considerably—not to say drastically—from those of his other male contemporaries. Amadi does not believe in maintaining the debilitating hold of retrograde customs on the creative genius of women simply because they are women. Without overtly taking a stand in favour of this or that feminist ideology, he nevertheless handles the women's question in such a way as to demonstrate his sympathy for and understanding of women's struggle the world over for a greater hearing. This he does not through the usual paternalism of most male characters in West African and more particularly in Nigerian fiction but through apposite narrative incidents in which the women are seen validating their claim to greater consideration from men.

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