Construction of Feminine Ideology in Gusii Oral Poetry

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Abstract
Abagusii females of the Kisii community of Western Kenya are largely socialized through the community’s oral poetry to operate within the limits of a feminine ideology. The choice of Gusii oral poetry as a vehicle for studying feminine ideology of Abagusii is informed by the fact that this genre of Gusii verbal arts is the oldest and most versatile genres of Gusii orature. Equally, it has had a long and intimate relationship with human communities globally. This paper thus examines the Gusii oral poems as a semiotic system with encoded signs which embody the Gusii feminine ideology. The objective of the paper is to establish the construction and nature of the Gusii feminine ideology and its efficacy in shaping social relationships within Abagusii as a social entity. In the analysis of the purposively sampled oral poems, this paper uses a conceptual framework developed from the Chandler (1995) strands of semiotics in which he argues that a culture produces signs and attributes meanings to them. The tenets of semiosis are then linked to the sociological literary theory strands of Rosenblatt (1978) in which he argues that literature mirrors protocols of the society which produces it and serves given social purposes. Finally, strands from the two literary theories of semiotics and sociological are further interlinked with the Althusserian (1989) and Eagleton (1976)’s tenets of Marxism in which they argue that art is a product of a specific historical epoch and its purpose is to be an Ideological State Apparatuses which interpellates people into becoming subjects of specific ideologies. This paper has adopted the analytical study design. Secondary data was obtained from a review of published works and primary data was the textual analysis of Gusii oral poems collected from the Abagusii resource persons, copyrighted music stores and libraries. The sampling of data and resource persons was both purposive and through snowballing. The study is significant in the sense that it contributes towards celebrating the role of oral poetry as a vehicle for enabling humans to perceive themselves, their environment and their world in ways unique to them and enhancing of intercultural relations as well as forms a basis for related studies.

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Introduction
From a historical perspective, Ochieng’s (1974), has postulated that Abagusii also known as the Kisii are a Bantu speaking community currently occupying the South West portions of the Kenyan highlands; in the administrative twin counties of Nyamira and Kisii. Abagusii speak Ekegusii language. They recognize a common ancestor named Mogusii, hence a common ancestry and a common ideological heritage. The community is divided into seven clans and are neighbours to communities of unrelated language families except the Abakuria. These communities are the Nilotic-speaking Luo to the North, West, and to the South West; the Nilo-Hamitic Kipsigis to the East, and the Nilo-Hamitic Maasai to the South East. Finally, to the South, are the Kuria (Abatende), whose language is mutually intelligible with Ekegusii.

Abagusii, just like any human community world over, operate within the confines of specified ideologies. These ideologies are inculcated into their mindsets through various avenues and more often than not, through their oral poetry, the oldest of the genres studied in literature (Habib 2005) and one which has had an intimate relationship with the human societies for eternities. Abagusii as a distinct community perform and listen to their verbal arts and in the process, they engage in the process of perceiving themselves and their cosmos in a way that is unique to them. In the process of performing and consuming their oral poetry, they construct an ideological cosmos which defines their socio-cultural identities and limits. Equally, as they perform, they get “interpellated” into aligning their thinking and manners according to the dictates of their own society, hence, the intention of this study to investigate the Gusii Feminine Ideology as constructed by the community’s oral poetry.

Reviewed Works
The grounding of this study has starts with the reviewing of classical theoreticians such as Plato and Aristotle before engaging more recent critical works. The classical thinkers have averred that the relationship between oral poetry and ideology has provided ground for intellectually protracted discourses and has remained at the heart of many societies. In this regard, oral poetry was and still is at the centre of people’s lives and through it, communities have continued to construct and review their worlds in regard to changing times. For this reason, this analysis anchors itself on the premise that the Gusii feminine ideology is a conscious social construct of their
conscious actions and it is a reflection of their wishes as is artistically embodied in their oral poetry.

Plato (in Habib 2005), postulated that literary works expose images and that through those images, man is cast as chained deep within the recess of a cave. According to him, humans are bound, so their vision is restricted. This study intimates that what binds people and restricts their vision are the various ideologies which are constructed and inculcated into their mindsets through literary works. Ultimately, people’s perceptions of their world are conditioned (bound) to subscribe to the specific ideologies as they are constructed through their various forms of art - oral poetry being one of them. One of the ideologies that can bind people is the feminine ideology, the one which this paper examines in relation to Abagusii. Plato (in Habib 2005) further avers that education through oral poetry is most sovereign. This is because more than anything else, rhythm and harmony when combined as it is the case with oral poetry, they find their way to the innermost soul of an individual and take strongest hold upon it. He further says that ideology operates and continues to operate by its formal expression rather than by its explicit content; thus, making oral poetry a powerful force in moulding public opinion. This is because oral poetry has got inbuilt ability to present arguments coherently and persuasively. These are profound insights to the study of poetry, hence, this study’s analysis of Gusii oral poetry and documentation of the community’s feminine ideology.

The Pan-Hellenist movement (Habib 2005) suggested that truths such as myths are social constructs enacted through oral poetry. Soyinka (1976) posits that a myth is a primal phenomenon which is an embodiment of nature and cosmic principles. In the Gusii orature context, this study points out that Gusii oral poetry embodies mythical standpoints which are instituted to explain the relevance of Abagusii’s customs, to control and regulate their moral and social behaviour as well as protect and enhance their traditions and beliefs and in particular to the Gusii feminine ideology.

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

Finnegan (1970) has analyzed the literariness and social functions of various genres of verbal arts. Among the genres analyzed by her study are songs sung by and for children. While taking cognizance of her classification of various sub-genres of African oral poetry, this study has considered the content and specific characteristics of Gusii oral poetry. Of particular significance is Finnegan’s assertion that oral texts carry the basic features of literariness and can therefore be analyzed as literary texts. This study has borrowed these general views and henceforth directed them towards the analysis of oral poems of Abagusii as semiotic signs which construct their feminine ideology.

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

Alembi (1991) has stated that various communities adhere to their specific norms and cultural values which are preserved and conveyed by their oral poetry. This, he says, is a utilitarian dimension of oral poetry. This view echoes Ngugi’s (1978) assertion in regard to the sociological significance of literature. This means that oral poetry shapes and directs people’s attitudes to their daily struggles with nature, daily struggles with the community and the daily struggles with their souls and selves. In this respect, this study has grounded its choice of oral poetry of Abagusii as a vehicle for studying the feminine ideology of the Gusii community. The effects of this genre are enormous since these oral poems are prescriptive products of the Gusii community whose intentions are to produce grounded and or specific responses from Abagusii people who compose, perform and consume them.

Kichamu and Odaga (1982) have noted that many communities throughout Africa have oral poems which form important parts in the lives and thinking of people. The two have further celebrated that oral poetry is about people’s conditions of life hence, they embody the history, philosophy, beliefs and wisdom of the people who produce it. Whereas these views are plausible, they are general to the analysis of oral poetry. This study has borrowed from their approach to move further and demonstrate that the oral poetry of the Gusii community generates ideas whose tenacity is to direct the relationships of Abagusii in their world.
In the foregoing, borrowing a leaf from the classical studies through to the recent ones, this study has analysed Gusii oral poems bearing that they are culture based, they are bearers of cultural signs and artefacts which in turn embody different aspects of the Gusii ideology, feminine ideology being one of them.

Statement of the Problem
The timelessness and versatility of oral poetry makes it a powerful vehicle for human socialization. It greatly influences people’s perceptions of realities of life. It is therefore this inbuilt ability of oral poetry to construct and influence perceptions of reality that has compelled this study’s choice of it to study the nature of the Gusii feminine ideology. The question then is: to what extent then is the oral poetry of Abagusii shaping the community’s feminine ideology? Secondly, Alabi (1998) has expounded that literatures with patriarchal orientation cryptically hail women into being “virtuous women”, while men are abrasive in character. The next question this study tackles is: could the oral poetry of Abagusii, the poetry they so much enjoy be training Gusii women into being subjects of feelings of inadequacy, feelings of silent frustration and low self-esteem? The observation that a community could inadvertently be celebrating a gender biasness forms the basis upon which this study was undertaken.

Research Methodology
This study has adopted an analytical research design. It has limited itself to a textual analysis of ten oral poems, this being the thirty percent of Gusii oral poems purposively collected and sampled from a large population of Gusii oral poems bearing the Gusii feminine ideology. They were purposively collected during a field research in the Kisii and Nyamira Counties of Western Kenya. In addition, various contemporary and seasoned oral poets and resource persons were through purposive and snowball methods contacted and interviewed and recorded. Observing and listening to the discourses of those engaged in the performances of the texts equally helped the study to infer some of the feminine constructs conveyed by the sampled oral poems. Lastly, library research and online accessing of information was handy.

Femininity in Gusii oral Poetry
Femininity has variously been viewed as a set of attributes, behaviours and roles generally associated with girls and women. Femininity as a social ideology is socially constructed. The overall characteristics of femininity are not universally identical but to some extent, patterns such as gentleness, empathy, sensitivity, caring, sweetness, compassion, tolerance, nurturance, deference and humility are foregrounded in regard to femininity. Goffman (1959) has argued that women are socialized to present themselves as precious, ornamental and fragile, un instructed in and ill-suited for anything requiring muscular exertion and to project shyness, reserve and a display of frailty, fear and incompetence. These traits vary depending on location and context, and are influenced by a variety of social and cultural factors. Butler (1990) has echoed these sentiments by theorizing that gender is not fixed or inherent but is rather a socially defined set of practices and traits that have, over time, grown to become labelled as feminine or masculine.

Feminine Demeanour in Gusii Oral Poetry
This discussion starts off with analysis of parts of a Gusii oral poem below:

Ekode seito nkaigwa nyancha aberegete  While at home I heard
Onchong’a ominto nkaigwa nyancha aberegete’  Onchong’a has drowned in the lake
Nyagetwoni akabutora egetinge  Nyagetwoni has cut a leg ring
Kabutora egetinge Onchong’a kare moyo  Cut leg ring yet Onchong’a is alive

In a synopsis, the conflict in the verse above rests on the basis that a woman; Nyagetwoni- (stereotype) has initiated a divorce process (cutting off her leg ring) in a Gusii patriarchal culture. Such a process, (divorce) the study infers, can only be initiated by men. Her “shameful, nefarious and rebellious” action has driven her husband – Onchong’a into committing suicide. Nyagetwoni is a Gusii cultural sign of feminine contestation of patriarchy while Onchong’a is a Gusii cultural sign which signify the Gusii masculinity - The proud and imperious emissary of Gusii’s patriarchal culture. The stereotyping of the biological female in the above oral poem is to construct and interpellate the sociological female into becoming coy and silent, one without a mind and feelings of her own.

In the context of this study, stereotyping is a form of discrimination of the female gender deployed by their male counterparts to maintain their social control over them. Stereotyping is a form of labeling whose aim is to stigmatize the targeted group and finally dissuade and derail it from achieving its objectives in life. The stereotyping of the female gender (Nyagetwoni) in Gusii oral poetry is a harsh verdict of having been found guilty of driving Onchong’a into his premature death. There is no hearing of her side of the story as to what compels her to initiate a divorce process. This appears to be a form of intimidation towards the female gender and its projected result is to maim abrasiveness in females hence, construct a tolerant female who cannot
question the largesse accorded to the male gender in the Gusii patriarchal culture.

Still in the verse above, the woman commits a sacrilege when she openly expresses her dissatisfaction in a marriage and opts to bolt out. Therefore, Nyagetwoni (the independent minded females in Gusii world) is the embodiment of the condemnation directed towards females with similar thinking among the Gusii community. The purpose is to construct social females who are mellow and humans who should dare not question even that which offends their emotions directly. In this regard, the Gusii female should be gentle and tolerant even in the face of what hurts her most.

The above postulations are further amplified when the semiotic signs in the oral poem below (Egetinkinye Ekeng‘aini – Clever Egetinkinye) are interpreted within the Gusii cultural context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egetinkinye ekeng‘aini</td>
<td>Little clever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerigia Oboundi kiagache</td>
<td>Finds a safe place to build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embura egotwa gesoe!</td>
<td>When it rains, it enters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesoe mwaye</td>
<td>To shelter in its own home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbura egotwa gesoe mwaye!</td>
<td>When it rains, it shelters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ching‘ende chikarangwe</td>
<td>To enjoy fried beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korwa Nyakongo</td>
<td>From Nyakongo market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omwana bw’omonda tagochiria</td>
<td>A rich person’s child cannot enjoy them!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagochiria mwana bw’omonda tagochiria</td>
<td>Beans not enjoyed by the rich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ing’ererie orotambe  Get me a long fishing line
ong’e nduserie abanto roche For fishing humans
Orweng’e ne engegu rwaereire! The shorter one ends at the bank
Ing’ende Kwabusera omogondo, To clean up the garden
Omogondo nyakieni kebariri A garden with red soils
Omoiseke omomwamu nyakebwato ogotira Dark lady with big thigh
Komonyene chimori namoroche He has spotted her
Namoroche baba- monyene chimori Hand me cows to prevent her
Ing’ererie chimori ntangere nyakebwato From roaming at the Manga Escarpment
Tanya kona gotira emanga.
Omoiseke omomwamu nyakebwato The dark lady with heavy thigh
Okonya gotira Restlessly walking up
Komonyene chimori namoroche The calves’ owner has seen her
Monyene chimorriri The owner of calves has seen her
Ing’ererie chimori Give me cows
Ntangere nyakebwato baba To prevent Nyakebwato
Tanya kona gotira emanga. From moving aimlessly on Manga

The subject matter of the oral poem above, Nyakebwato – a Gusii cultural sign for a mature woman and ripe for marriage, has a social need. Her restlessness - Kona gotira emanga - wandering up and down the Manga Escarpment is the need – the need to get engaged in a heterosexual relationship that can lead into a marriage. Curiously, her socio – cultural ability to eloquently voice her intentions have been muted in the poem. From the onset of the poem, she is socialized to take up a mellow and passive trait in regard to the initiating of heterosexual relations. This should be understood from the perspective that humans have the power of the word to state and express their emotions state their intentions. She is made an object – coy and her movements up and down the Manga escarpment are signs of emotional restlessness but she cannot voice her concerns. Apparently, the poem intimates that she is in need of a male companion for a relationship but her voice is muted by the oral poem. She is constructed to exhibit traits of gentleness and silence as she awaits to be told to do what she already plans to execute but cannot. In essence, the female gender is being interpellated into passivity in the whole process of forming heterosexual relations, and to a larger extent, in taking up the lead role in anything.

The patriarchal ideology which is cryptically responsible for constructing femininity in the Gusii cosmos is amplified in the oral poem above when it projects the male as the one to initiate the heterosexual relationship that the female is so much in need of. Komonyene chimori namoroche – The owner of cows (a man) is has seen her.

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<td>Ing’ererie orotambe</td>
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<td>The shorter one ends at the bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ing’ende Kwabusera omogondo,</td>
<td>To clean up the garden</td>
</tr>
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</table>

In the four lines above, the persona, obviously a man, is using dowry (Chimori) to fish out Nyakebwato from her maiden home. The image of a fish being pulled out of water constructs images of coercion. The female is projected as “not willing” but one who is forced not to openly show and talk about her intentions. It thus can be deduced that the oral poem here constructs a coy female, one with a lackadasical demeanour even in issues
that directly affect her life.

Further into the construction of a subdued femininity in the Gusii world in the verse below, from an oral poem whose subject matter is: *Amache Nyambiriato – Water at a stream called Nyambiriato.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omokungu siomia siomia ee ee ee baba</td>
<td>A vagrant woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omokungu siomia siomia</td>
<td>A vagrant woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayi akomanya bwarugeirwe</td>
<td>She tells where food is ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komanya bwarugeirwe ee ee baba</td>
<td>Where food is ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kai’komanya bwarugeirwe</td>
<td>She knows where food is ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gose mboke gose mbwa mwana.</td>
<td>Whether little or for child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The verse above is kind of sarcastic. It mocks the careless and aimless movements of a woman just like it is the case with *Nyakebwato* in the poem *Egetinkinye Ekeng’aini* whose sections have been analyzed in the section above. In these two oral poems, there is the portrayal of a gender that requires to be contained in the Gusii cosmos. Visiting friends and relations isn’t bad but the going from one homestead to another within the same locality (*siomia siomia*) is injurious to good neighbourliness. It is undignified and nefarious more so given that her mission is to find out what types of foodstuffs have been prepared. These two signs are further amplified in the verse below; equally extracted from the oral poem titled *Egetinkinye Ekeng’aini.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omoiseke Gechemba kore omogenki</td>
<td>Gechemba the gossiper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obere mino tocha kongenkerara Sarange</td>
<td>Stay away from inciting Sarange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ing’ererie ekerori nyakohugeria ---</td>
<td>Hand me a flute to play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nario Sarange atachi ande!</td>
<td>So, that Sarange doesn’t leave</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This sign of a vagrant woman in the oral poem titled *Amache Nyambiriato,* just like the sign of *Gechemba* in the verse above is to construct a social–culturally soft (confined) woman who is interpellated to be reserved and occupy the innermost orbit of the Gusii physical world. In the two verses above, it is stereotyped that the female gender possesses an innate instinct to cause discomfort in the Gusii world. *Gechemba* is a threat to Sarange’s marriage just like *Omokungu Siomia Siomia* – vagrant woman is projected to be a threat to the spirit of good and tranquil neighbourliness. As intimated earlier in this discussion, stereotyping is a form of labeling whose target is to stigmatize an individual or a targeted group and finally dissuade and derail them from self-confidence. When the oral poems discussed in this part of this study grace Gusii social functions and practices, the recipients – women are socially interpellated into becoming subjects of a Gusii feminine ideology which stipulates that they should remain humble, mellow, passive and sensitive lest derogatory epithets like *siomia siomia,* *Nyakebwato,* *Nyagatewoni* and others be tagged on them.

Still on the same argument, it is worth noting that gossip, a negative tag and for this matter a stereotype, has been attributed to *Gechemba.* *Gechemba* is a cultural sign for a constructed female character which signifies limited intelligence and the destructive nature of the mature but unmarried women in the Gusii world. Whereas the sign *Omoiseke Gechemba kore omogenki* - Gechemba the lady gossiper, *Obere mino tocha kongenkerara Sarange* – Stay at your home and avoid coming to my place to negatively influence (Swahili – *Kuchochea* Sarange), it conversely constructs the man in the Gusii environment as a wise person. Such are the stereotypes that the same feminine ideology deploys in assigning feminine gender passive roles, roles that dissuade them from any form of social, economic and political independence.

If the female gender is socialized to stay at home, it is a social construction geared towards constructing a coy and mellow female. In the case of the poem quoted above, marriages are threatened in case the female is allowed to have a voice. It is the position of this discussion that marriage is a microcosm for the socio-cultural harmony. Therefore, if *Gechemba’s* freedom of expression is a threat to marriage, on a wider scale the implication is that if the feminine gender is granted freedom of expression and association, then the social harmony and integration of the Gusii community is in jeopardy. Consequently, it is thus clear that the oral poetry of the Abagusii constructs a feminine ideology which silences its girl–child, hence, a gender that is forever to remain tender.

**Feminine Roles in Gusii Oral Poetry**

Femininity in Gusii cosmos goes beyond character traits and emerges strongly in the area of gender roles assigned to the female gender. These gender roles are designed and assigned to justify the gender stereotypes, some of which have been discussed above. Gender stereotypes influence traditional feminine occupations, resulting in microaggression toward women who break traditional gender roles like is the case with *Nyagatewoni* above. In regard to the roles of the female gender, this study starts off its discussion with the analysis of a section of one of the Gusii initiation oral poems locally known as *Esimbore.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tamotoma roche.</td>
<td>Should not send him to fetch water!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamotoma rocheee!</td>
<td>Should not send him to fetch water!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taa nyeni taa nyeniiii!</td>
<td>Should not send him to pluck vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tachia koruga tachia korugaaa!</td>
<td>Should not cook meals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initiation marks a transition from childhood to adulthood. Consequently, this study takes the position that oral poems performed during such cultural festivals are laden with strictness of meanings in regard to what is expected of one in the life of adulthood. The verse above from an initiation oral poem of Abagusii a semiemic command to women (mothers of initiates) not to ask their sons; now men, to perform certain tasks such as fetching water from streams and plucking vegetable leaves. The sociological implication here is that these are household – related jobs which in this case should be undertaken by the females. This is a reinforcement of the stereotype that women are frail, fragile and tender and therefore should be restricted into performing household chores duties of fetching water, plucking vegetable leaves and cooking. Definitely, this is a domineering and subjugating construction of patriarchy which is keen on restricting women to domestic works as the male gender explores the world yonder where new ideals emanate.

Further into the construction and portraiture of feminine roles as part of the feminine ideology of Abagusii is the verse below from an oral poem titled: *Obori bwa Baba* – Mama’s Finer Millet

- **Obe e-e-e sabiri kumba!** Kindly Sabiri, bend
- **Kumbata mogondo are!** She is tilling the farm
- **Obre e-e-e huna abakoro!** Like women of the old
- **Kumbata mogondo are** Tilling like women of the old
- **Obe e-e-e Choisi bwari!** Joyce Bwari
- **Kumbata mogondo are** She is tilling the farm
- **Obe e-e-e Choisi Nyairo!** Hail Joyce Nyairo
- **Kumbata mogondo are** She is tilling the land

Just like the verses analyzed above, the content in the verse above is grounded on stereotypes meant to subjugate the female gender. The names of the individuals being praised for being hard working – Sabiri, Joyce Bwari, Joyce Nyairo are all feminine names. The part of interest for this study is the kind of job they are being praised for having accomplished. It is the tilling of land. This is great contrast to the ownership of livestock which has been assigned to the male gender in the oral poem titled *Egetinkyene Ekeng’ain*, whose parts have been foregrounded in the discussion above. The stereotype here is that members of the female gender have greater manual dexterity hence they have been socialized into being subjects of a feminine ideology to which they have to be active in their role of tilling the land.

Other than the roles of being domestic workers and farm tillers, the feminine ideology of Abagusii has been constructed by the community’s oral poetry to see to it that the female are happy as wives, midwives, and child bearers. This is amplified the lines below taken from an oral poem celebrated by Abagusii:

- **Goko okorire buya** Granny has done well,
- **Abarete egeita** She is going to pass through the cattle pen!
- **Orenge moka abaisia** She was a wife to uninitiated boys,
- **Obere moka abamura** Now she is a wife for initiated men

In the above lines, a young lady is being praised, definitely after initiation, to become a wife of initiated men. Equally, in the poem *Egetinkyene Ekeng’ain*, see below:

- **Omoiseke Gechemba kore omogenki** Gechemba the gossiper
- **Obere mino tocha kongenker Sarange –** Stay away from inciting Sarange
- **Ing’ererie ekerori nyakobugeria ---** Hand me a flute to play
- **Nario Sarange atachi ande!** So, that Sarange doesn’t leave

there is Sarange, a wife who is praised for being dormant and contented with her social position as a wife. In these two cases, it is evident that the Gusii oral poetry constructs a feminine ideology in which social patterns create domination and suppression. In this regard, femininity as an ideology of Abagusii is constructed in such a manner that the females are relegated into the roles motherhood because they are caring and can nurture lives.

The other prominent role that is constructed and assigned to the female gender according to the oral poetry of Abagusii is the role of the female being social workers. The oral poem whose parts are quoted below is performed alongside other praise poems in weddings and or in related occasions. Studying the verse below will reveal a concerted effort to mute the feminine voice and construct a mellow female who is subjugated into the subordinate role of entertainment and therefore being socialized into becoming a social worker.

- **Moite buya konyatundo Nyarisinange** Dance like Nyadundo of Sinange
- **Nyieria buya konyatundo Nyarisinange –** Smile like Nyadundo of Sinange
- **Tuma buya konyatundo Nyarisinangee** Jump like Nyadundo of Sinange
- **Suna buya konyatundo Nyarisinangee –** Pinch like Nyadundo of Sinange
- **Chenchia buya konyatundo Nyarisinangee –** Dance like Nyadundo of Sinange
- **Eee! Nyatundo Nyarisinange Kwani Onchuru** Nyadundo of Sinange greet Onchuru

*Nyadundo* stands for short and beautiful woman who hails from a region called Sinange. This oral poem constructs a scenario in which it is the womenfolk who should be at the forefront in the entertainment of those attending social functions. The refrain above, interrogated with keenness, reveals a construction of a social
environment in which a gender which celebrates an oral poem which curtails its freedom of expression. The point is; the refrain directs them into dancing, smiling and jumping; mere physical actions which are meant for the entertainment and gratification of the eyes of the spectators, in this case, most probably men.

As the poem instructs the woman to jump, dance and smile, it is the postulation of this study that the intent of this poem together with other is to construct a feminine ideology which socializes the female gender into taking up the roles receptionists, housekeeping, salespersons and such like gender roles which demand that one should either be dancing, smiling or jumping up to please others. In reality, in more than one respect, these feminine roles are subordinate to those assigned to the male gender. In essence, these social femininities slowly glorify the retributive macho position of men and slowly but steadily, it stereotypes and stigmatizes the trickery and any sense of brainwork which can aid the female gender in working out their own emancipation. Ultimately, the image of the female gender as constructed is that of a feminine entity that is coy, whose voice is mudded but her actions are quite visible.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Femininity as a part of a community’s social ideology is an elaborate subject that cannot be fully covered in such a brief discussion. This paper covers just a section of the Gusii feminine ideology. This study has examined Gusii oral poetry and has documented here in some of the traits and stereotypes that are cryptically embedded in these poems. Equally, while establishing the construction of femininity in Gusii oral poetry, this study has established some of the roles which these poems have assigned the female gender. They are roles derived largely from feminine stereotypes. They include household chores, manual works, social works among others. Therefore, it is the submission of this paper that not all has been covered in regard to the portraiture of femininity in Gusii oral poetry. Therefore, further investigation into this rich area of the Gusii oral poetry is recommended.

REFERENCES


http://jeteraps.scholarlinkresearch.com/listofissues.php


APPENDIX – GUSII ORAL POEMS

WHILE AT HOME

**KONDE SEITO**

Ekonde seito nkaigwa nyancha abenegete
Onchong’a ominto nkaigwa nyancha abenegete
Nyagetwoni akabutora egetinge
Kabutora egetinge Onchong’a kare moyo
Bwabokire! Bwabokire obwanchani
Bori bwa kare, hori bvakare obwanchani
Bwabokire, bwabokire obwanchani
Tema naende, tema naende torore
Yaye abana baioe – ee kwania Obino
Ase rituko huna riarero!! Ooh!
Aye Onchong’a agatanga ekworo
Eee kwani Obino

**KONYATUNDO NYAR’SINANGE**

Moite buya konyatundo Nyarisinange
Nyieria buya konyatundo Nyarisinange –
Tuma buya konyatundo Nyarisinangee –
Suna buya konyatundo Nyarisinangee –
Chenchia buya konyatundo Nyarisinangee –
Eee! Nyatundo Nyarisinange Kwani Onchuru

**ESIMBORE**

Baisia bake bororo bwabarire!
Isemokami oirire mboro chiaito;
Batureirwe itimo na nguba mbibo.
Barwane Sigisi, barwane Sigisi!
Barwane bosoba, barwane Bosoba!
Baisia bake e-e-e, bororo bwabarire
Isono ria ng’ina, isono ria ng’ina,
Oboya bwa ng’ina, oboya bwa ng’ina,
Baisia bake teta ng’ina, teta ng’ina!
Baisia bake bororo bwabarire

**ESIMBORE -**

Goko okorire buya
Abarete egeita
Orenge moka abaisia
Obeire moka abamura
Igesora na igesora,
Totegorere amaboba
Simbo re yaito yarure rogoro
Nyambegera moka Asago
Oirire ehisoko hiaito
Ochire kogekera!

LIKE THE BEAUTY OF SINANGE

**ESIMBORE**

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

SSIMBORE

Uncircumcised little boys have felt pain!
The circumciser has taken our penis;
He has made them a spear and a hard shield.
Fight the Kipsigis! Fight the kipsigis!
Fight the Abasuba, fight the Abasuba!
Uncircumcised little boys have had pain!
Mother’s clitoris, mother’s clitoris,
Mother’s pubic hair, mother’s pubic hair,
Uncircumcised little boys, copulate with mother!
Uncircumcised little boys have had pain!

**FEMALE CIRCUMCISION SONG.**

Granny has done well,
She is going to pass through the cattle pen!
She was a wife to uninitiated boys,
Now she is a wife for initiated boys,
After harvest, after harvest,
We shall cultivate our second crops
Our esimbore song has come from up yonder,
Nyambegera, the wife of Asago,
Has taken our clitoris
And has gone to roast them!

20
EGETINKINYE EKENG’AINI

Egetinkinye ekeng’aini
Kerigia Oboundi kiaqache
Embura egotwa gesoe!
Gesoew mwaye
Mbura egotwa gesoe mwaye!
Ching’ende chikarangwe
Korwa Nyakongo
Omwana bw’omonda tagochiria
Tagochiria mwana bw’omonda tagochiria

Egetinkinye ekeng’aini
Kerigia Oboundi kiaqache
Embura egotwa gesoe!
Gesoew mwaye
Mbura egotwa gesoe mwaye!
Ching’ende chikarangwe
Korwa Nyakongo
Omwana bw’omonda tagochiria
Tagochiria mwana bw’omonda tagochiria

ING’ERERIE OROTAMBE
ong’e nduserie abanto roche
Orweng’e ne engegu waereire!
Ing’ende Kwabusera omogondo,
Omobondo nyakieni kebariri

ING’ERERIE OROTAMBE
ong’e nduserie abanto roche
Orweng’e ne engegu waereire!
Ing’ende Kwabusera omogondo,
Omobondo nyakieni kebariri

OMOISEKE OMOWAMU NYAKEBWATO OGORITA
Omoiseke omowamu nyakebwato ogotira
Komonanye chimori namoranche
Namoranche baba-monoyene chimori
Ing’ererie chimori ntangere nyakebwato
Tanya kona gotira emanga.
Omoiseke omowamu nyakebwato
Okonya gotira
Komonanye chimori namoranche
Monyene chimorii
Ing’ererie chimori
Ntangere nyakebwato baba
Tanya kona gotira emanga.

OMOISEKE OMOWAMU NYAKEBWATO OGORITA
Omoiseke omowamu nyakebwato ogotira
Komonanye chimori namoranche
Namoranche baba-monoyene chimori
Ing’ererie chimori ntangere nyakebwato
Tanya kona gotira emanga.
Omoiseke omowamu nyakebwato
Okonya gotira
Komonanye chimori namoranche
Monyene chimorii
Ing’ererie chimori
Ntangere nyakebwato baba
Tanya kona gotira emanga.

OMOISEKE Gechemba kore omogenki
Obere mino tocha kongenkera Sarange –
Ing’ererie ekerori nyakobugeria ---
Nario Sarange atachi ande!

OMOISEKE Gechemba kore omogenki
Obere mino tocha kongenkera Sarange –
Ing’ererie ekerori nyakobugeria ---
Nario Sarange atachi ande!

EKERANDI KIO OMONG’INA
Ekerandi kiomong’ina
Egesero-a, egeseraa aigwanane
Egesero kimwana,
Egeseraa, aigwanane
Egeteni kiomogaka ---
Okirigiti osangara,
Ooo yaye!
Onsinsi nakana ensarera nse,
Onsinsi akarera
Nyakieni tonkeria
Niaba Mogirango ’Ndindindi!
Eero ondire tonkereria
Ondire Orogendo.

EKERANDI KIO OMONG’INA
Ekerandi kiomong’ina
Egesero-a, egeseraa aigwanane
Egesero kimwana,
Egeseraa, aigwanane
Egeteni kiomogaka ---
Okirigiti osangara,
Ooo yaye!
Onsinsi nakana ensarera nse,
Onsinsi akarera
Nyakieni tonkeria
Niaba Mogirango ’Ndindindi!
Eero ondire tonkereria
Ondire Orogendo.

CLEVER BIRD

Little clever bird
Finds a safe place to build
When it rains, it enters
To shelter in its own home
When it rains, it shelters
To enjoy fried beans
From Nyakongo market
A rich person’s child cannot enjoy them!
Beans not enjoyed by the rich

GET ME A LONG FISHING LINE
For fishing humans
The shorter one ends at the bank
To clean up the garden
A garden with red soils

Dark lady with big thigh
Owner of cattle has noticed her
He has spotted her
Hand me cows to prevent her
From roaming at the Manga Escarpment
The dark lady with heavy thigh
Restlessly walking up
The calves’ owner has seen her
The owner of calves has seen her
Give me cows
To prevent Nyakebwato
From moving aimlessly on Manga

Gechemba the gossip
Stay away from inciting Sarange
Hand me a flute to play
So, that Sarange doesn’t leave

EKERANDI KIO OMONG’INA
Ekerandi kiomong’ina
Egesero-a, egeseraa aigwanane
Egesero kimwana,
Egeseraa, aigwanane
Egeteni kiomogaka ---
Okirigiti osangara,
Ooo yaye!
Onsinsi nakana ensarera nse,
Onsinsi akarera
Nyakieni tonkeria
Niaba Mogirango ’Ndindindi!
Eero ondire tonkereria
Ondire Orogendo.

EKERANDI KIO OMONG’INA
Ekerandi kiomong’ina
Egesero-a, egeseraa aigwanane
Egesero kimwana,
Egeseraa, aigwanane
Egeteni kiomogaka ---
Okirigiti osangara,
Ooo yaye!
Onsinsi nakana ensarera nse,
Onsinsi akarera
Nyakieni tonkeria
Niaba Mogirango ’Ndindindi!
Eero ondire tonkereria
Ondire Orogendo.

MOTHER’S GUARD

The grandmother’s guard
Let all be at peace
The hide meant for the baby
Let all live together in peace
Father’s three-legged stool
Okirigiti the son of Onsangare
Ohh yes
Onsinsi I refuse the line of gossipers
Onsinsi wept
The beautiful one do not refuse
I’m not from Mugirango
Oh yes, you’ve cost me, let me down not
Has cost me a long journey
OMOISEKE NYAKIENI KEBARIRI

Kerama ngweta
Mwaira engero geita
Kerama aero Nyando
Bengi tene Nyarere
Mwaira engero geita
Kirima oero nyando.
Noraire?
E-baba omwana atacha
Antebia ebaba rigereria
Irongo tuki chinge kiomonyoncho,
Kunya! Kerebi
Moka masuti ogocha
Gotorigia engangangarayo.
Ebinde bia amagoro, engangarayo
Tee engangangarayo
Mokamosomba korera mariga
Omoseke nyakieni keberiri
Otitigire ekieni Bobaracho
Otitigire ekieni Kebarache,
Nga’i abamura baratar
Eee ng’ai torachie, ee ng’ai torarare
Abang’ina baboria boira
Abamura gali takona korera
Korera nyoko na iso,
Moiseke nyoko bisira,

THE BROWN GIRL

Passing near Kerama
You’ve taken the dance at the gate
Kerama near Nyando
Bengi tena Nyarere
You’ve taken the dance to the gate
Kirima oero Nyando
Are you asleep?
Hey mum, the child hasn’t come
Tells me mammy, just have a look
Inside the ceiling,
Kunya, Kerebi
When Masuti’s wife comes,
To look for us
And foot steps engangarayo
Tee engangarayo
The wife of Mosomba weeps
The girl with the brown complexion
Has left the complexion at Bobaracho
Has left her complexion at Kebarate
Where will men take their walk to?
Where shall we go to?
Old women are asking daily
Young men stop weeping
Stop crying for mother and father’s help
The girl, the mother to Bisira

OBORI BWA BABA

Obori bwa baba ekeande
Ee ekeande obori bwa baba,
Obori bwa baba ekeande,
Ekeande baba omotengera nyangueso
Ndindindi! Ndindindi ndindindi!
Amaembe a baba amatogoro
Ee amatogoro amemba a baba!
Aamaembe a baba amatogoro,
Amatogoro baba omotengera nyangueso
Ndindindi! Ndindindi ndindindi.

MOTHER’S FINGER MILLET

Grandmother’s finger millet has done well
Grandmother’s millet has yielded well
Great harvest as grandma dances to locusts
Ndindindi! Ndindindindi ndindindi!
Grandmother’s sorghum has yielded well
The sorghum has yielded well
The sorghum has yielded well
Great harvest as grandma dances to locusts
Ndindindi! Ndindindindi ndindindi

Enyangweso yacha yaboria
Eeh yaboria, Enyangweso yacha
Enyangweso yacha yaboria,
E yaboria baba omotengera
Nyangweso Ndindindindi

The swam of locusts come
A swarm of locusts comes and consumes
The swam of locusts comes
As granny dances for the locusts
Dances ndindindi
AMACHE NYABIRIATO
Amache Nyambiriato ee baba
Amache nyambiriato amache nobochege agiteirwe
Nobochege ee baba, nobochege
Agiteirwe amache nyamotika egocha enywe,
Oyotagete emeino ee ee baba-
Oyotagete emeino agende Nyamataro obitogia
Nyamataro obitogia ee baba,
Nyamataro obitogia ase emeino ekoiywa nebitonga
Borangi yoka ngumbuu ee baba
Yakang’umbu Mogonche chinguba chiana kuoma
Chinguba nchiana kwoma ee baba
Nguba nchiana kwoma rogoro boisanga renda mache
Nche timbwati ng’ombe-ee -- ee baba
Nche timbwati ng’ombe, amache nobochege agiteirwe
E nobochege agiteirwe – ee baba, e nobochege agiteirwe
Agiteirwe ee baba e amache nobochege agiteirwe.
Amache Nyambiriato ee ee ee baba

WATERS AT NYAMBIRIATO
The water at Nyambiriato
Is fenced off---
to keep intruders
So that Nyamotika drinks it
One who knows our ways,
He should go to Nyamataro
Nyamataro praises our ways
Nyamataro, praises our ways
At Borangi side of the ridge,
Shields are in plenty
They are so many of them
shields are never scarce
I’ve got no cows
I’ve no cows, well is fenced
To keep off intruders
Fenced, to keep away thieves
The waters at Nyambiriato

MOGOTU MOGA TEBITI – MOGOTU- DAVID’S WIFE
Moga tebiti, Mogotu mogatebiti ee!
Moga tebiti mokungu akaimokia omoro ee!
Akaimokia omoro agende goita tebeti
Bikundo okorera, kogicha ntayiete omonwa,
Ntayiete omonwa nka monwa chibesa.
Mokanyandondi, Moraa mokanyandondi ee!
Mokanyandondi mokungu akaimokia omoro- ee!
Akaimokia omoro agende goita Nyandondi
Bikundo okorera kogicha ntayiete omonwa

Mogotu, David’s Wife
Mogotu took a machette
To murder David
Bikundo is weeping
Bikundo regrets having been born
Moraa, Nyandondi’s wife
A woman took a machette
Took a machette to murder Nyandondi
Bikundo weeps, I never burnt my mouth