

GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE ORAL LITERATURE OF TWO UGANDAN COMMUNITIES

**Prof. Abasi Kiyimba
Department of Literature
Makerere University**

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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**

Background to the Project:

Research has benefitted from various grants

- The work on the Caprex research project is partly a continuation of work that has been on-going for the past thirty years or so, and has benefitted from funding by Makerere, UNESCO and NUFU.
- Over the years, folklore material has been gathered from several Ugandan communities by the present researcher as well as others within the Department of Literature at Makerere University, and has formed the basis for several PhD theses.

The Earliest Research involved straight forward collections without analysis

- The general collection, recording, documentation and study of the oral literature forms of the various Ugandan communities has been going on for more than one hundred years; first by European scholars under the patronage of the colonial regime, and by local scholars.
- Publications containing recordings of oral literature from various Ugandan communities include: Ruth Fisher Twilight Tales of the Black Baganda (1923), Ferdinand Walser Luganda proverbs (1982), Grace Akello's Itesot Thought Patterns in Tales (1981), Musa Mushanga's Folktales From Ankole (1969) Lyavala Lwanga's Kiyini Kibi (1969), Okot P'Bitek's Horn of My Love (1974), Acholi Proverbs (1989) and Hare and Hornbill (1972).

Specific Focus of Research under the Caprex Programme

- This fellowship involves the collection of additional and focused data from two Ugandan communities, and preparing it for publication under the title: **“Gender Stereotypes in the Oral Literature of two Ugandan Communities.”**

Overview of the current work

- Earlier studies stressed the nature of oral literature as a source of traditional wisdom.
- However, it is now increasingly being examined for the meanings and attitudes it transmits, and for its importance in determining the socio-cultural and psychological shape of the communities from which it originates.

Methodology

- Qualitative, naturalistic and ethnographic, using a variety of qualitative strategies eg personal interviews and Focus Group Discussions.
- Participants included elders, opinion leaders and community leaders such as chiefs from selected districts in Buganda and Ankole.

Methodology Cont'd: Sample size

- The sample size was generated from six districts, three from each of the language areas of the study universe (Kampala, Masaka and Butambala for Buganda; and Mbarara, Bushenyi and Shema in Ankole).
- The respondents included both men and women, of varied age groups.

Study limited to Folktales and Proverbs

- Oral literature is a very broad area of study. It includes *oral narratives* like: myths, legends, folktales and fables; *short formulaic forms* like: proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters, and similes; *poetic forms* like: epics, lullabies, children's rhymes, recitations, popular poetry, festive songs, popular songs and several other forms. All these forms are part of a comprehensive body of literature that operates together to communicate meaning, record social and historical developments, and impart attitudes.
- This study focused specifically on **folktales** (from among the oral narratives) and **proverbs** (from among the *short formulaic forms*). Folktales and proverbs are very central forms of oral literature, and they interact directly with the presentation of people's philosophies.

Oral Literature has positive values, but also transmits social prejudices

- Oral literary forms are the bedrocks of traditional education, secure the historical and cultural continuity of their communities, and provide and transmit positive social values such as good neighbourliness, respect for elders, moral uprightness, etc.
- However, they are also being increasingly indicted for transmitting social prejudices and negative stereotypes. These stereotypes in turn sustain and transmit biases that relate to: sex, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, etc.

The working of gender stereotypes in literature

- This study examines the way the oral literature of two Ugandan people's works to reflect and sustain gender stereotypes, including those of marriage, parenthood, power (both social and political) and resource control, as they originate from and relate to culture and tradition.
- It examines the way the literature that young children consume presents images of boys and girls, work, beauty, marriage, parenthood, barrenness, impotence and political leadership.

The working of Stereotypes cont'd

- The literature projects the young boy as destined to be “tough” if he is to succeed in life (Natuukirira) while the girl is cultured to be dependant (Gannemerredde);
- the man is depicted as the (dictatorial) head of the home, while the wife is the submissive and suffering wife;

The father is greedy and insensitive to the plight of the children, while the mother is responsible and self sacrificing;

The man is depicted as destined to be the political head of society, while the woman can only play supporting roles, and the closest she can come to political power is by marrying one of those that hold it.

The difference: this study examines male stereotypes as well

- Analyses of the working of gender stereotypes in oral literature, both Ugandan and other, have been attempted before.
- The major difference: earlier studies almost exclusively focussed on the stereotyping of women, this work examines male stereotypes as well.

Examples of studies that focus on stereotyping of women

- Beidelman, T. *The Kaguru: A Matrilineal People of East Africa* (1983).
- Brinkman, Inge. *Kikuyu Gender Norms and Narratives* (1996).
- Chesaina, Ciarunji *Images of Women in African Oral Literature: A case Study of Kalenjin and Maasai Oral Literature* (1991)
- Kabaji, Egara. *The Maragoli Folktale: Its Meaning and Aesthetics* (1991).
- Kabira, W. *Gender and Politics of Control* (1994).
- Mineke, Schipper. *Source of All Evil: African Proverbs on Women* (1991).
- Mugambi, N. Helen. *Intersections: Gender, Orality, Text and Female Space in Contemporary Kiganda Radio Songs* (1999).
- Nandwa, J. *Oral Literature Among the Abaluyia* (1976).
- Nannyongo-Tamusuza, Sylvia Baakisimba: *Music, Dance, and Gender of the Baganda People of Uganda* (2002).
- Ogunsina, Bisi. *Gender Ideology: Portrayal of Women in Yoruba Ijala* (1996).
- Opoku-Agyemang, K *Gender-Role Perceptions in Akan Folktale* (1999).

Examples of Negative Male Stereotypes

(n previous presentations, colleagues have complained about the dominance of female stereotypes)

- B1-7: Abasajja nsolo, zirya zinnaazo.
Men are animals, they eat their own species.
- B1-53: Omusajja nkoko mpanga, tetakulira baana baayo.
The man is a cock, it does not fend for its children.
- B1-51: Ow'omululu mwami, bwakkuta n'agaba.
The glutton is a chief (husband?), when he gets satisfied, that is when he practices generosity.
- “Our daughter, the man is the one you should always give the bigger part of everything, and everything good is for the man. If you get potatoes, it is the man you should give the big ones, and you eat the small ones.” (Extract from a folktale code named AE33)
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- “My daughter, go back to your husband. The greed of a man is not a reason for a woman to abandon a marriage. If it was, there would be no married women at all. When a woman stays long enough with her husband, she finds a way of handling the problem” (Extract from a folktale code named AE36).
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- B5-21: Nnaku z'ekirevu, n'eyatomerwa yetikka.
The beard is truly unfortunate, even the impotent man carries it.
- B5-22: Byamufiirwa, Walumbe y'agaba
The property of the impotent is distributed by Death.
- B5-24: Sirina gwemmanja, ng'omufiirwa ali emagombe
“Nobody owes me anything,” so says the impotent man who is in the world of the dead.

Projected Outcome of the Research

- The projected outcome of the present research is a book highlighting the way oral literature depicts social power relations, and the way gender stereotypes work within the socio-cultural institutions that this literature helps to sustain.

The tentative chapter outline

Book Title: **GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE ORAL LITERATURE OF TWO UGANDAN COMMUNITIES**

- **Chapter 1: The Problem, Research Goals and Conceptual Foundations of the work**
- **Chapter 2: The Gendered Social, Historical and Cultural Contexts of the Baganda and the Banyankore**
- **Chapter 3: Oral Literature of the Baganda and the Banyankore: A general Overview**
- **Chapter 4: Gendering the Child – Stereotypes of the boy and the girl in the Oral Literature of the Baganda and the Banyankore.**
- **Chapter 5: Stereotypes of Work in the Domestic and general Social set up of the Baganda and the Banyankore**
- **Chapter 6: Marriage and the Gendered realities in the Oral Literature of the Baganda and the Banyankore**
- **Chapter 7: Parenthood in the oral Literature of the Baganda and the Banyankore**
- **Chapter 8: Stereotypes of Socio-Political Power in the Oral Literature of the Baganda and the Banyankore**
- **Chapter 9: Language and Gender Projections in the Oral Literature of the Baganda and the Banyankore**
- **Chapter 10: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Future Research Prospects : the broader Departmental strategy

- The area of research is broad and the demand is great. This publication, while a step in the right direction, it is a drop in the ocean.
- *As a Department of Literature, we are a team of researchers with big plans and have a record for achievement.*
- We started small with funding from Makerere University in the early 1980s; at that time our focus was on establishing Oral Literature *as a University subject.*

A history of Grant aid

- Then UNESCO-funded Orature project, and we went into the next phase of using it to preserve national heritage and community wisdom. Under this phase, we have produced several PhDs.
- Then we went into the phase of using oral literature to address contemporary realities. For this phase, we won a grant from NUFU, and have used it to produce three major publications.

New Work Strategies

- Alongside this we have also ventured into the area of *Oral literature in creative writing*. My own translation of Song of Lawino, a leading African work of art by Okot p'Bitek, produced with support from the Carnegie Corporation, is part of this phase in our research/scholarly development.
- We are now moving into another phase of firmly establishing the *relevance of Literature (especially Oral Literature) to national development*. This is the major focus of our on-going grant application for SIDA funding.
- Finally, I am using part of my time in Cambridge to develop a curriculum for a *PhD in Cultural Studies by coursework and research*, with the aim of producing a versatile PhD graduate, with core knowledge in Cultural Studies, language theory, literature, anthropology, philosophy, communication studies, religion, Women and Gender Studies etc.

Broader prospects for International collaboration

- My Cambridge collaborator, Dr. Chris Warnes, who is also collaborator for another Makerere colleague, has introduced me to two of his students. And in my discussions with them, I have seen opportunities for further broadening our research collaboration beyond national and continental confines.
- In our plans for his visit to Uganda, we hope to broaden this research vision to maximise the opportunities offered by language, literature and anthropology; and to explore new strategies for research results dissemination at workshops and conferences – both local and international.