



INDIGENOUS ORAL POETRY FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND (INTER) NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT

Human conflicts are offshoots of multiple interests such as sectarian jingoism, xenophobic sentiments, ethnic bigotry and other reasons. These are secondary causes. The deeper cause is the scramble for biodiversity related resources and is worrying. The horrendous results of these conflicts are maimed, displaced and dispossessed populations round the globe. This tragic scenario has further resulted in sordid banditry of fauna and flora, leading to global warming together with its chilling and mind boggling effects. Efforts fronted by the United Nations Environmental Programmes for environmental conservation to try and ameliorate biodiversity degradation have resulted in average success. Still, global losses of biodiversity are undeniably high. The losses are directly linked to the escalation of human conflicts and polarization of societies. Saving the remaining world's biodiversity is therefore an important policy issue in the international stage. The intent of this study is therefore to explore the possibility of the contribution of indigenous oral poetry in aiding the already existing efforts of biodiversity conservation and how the conservation can lead to the fostering of social and national integration/unity. The study limited itself to analyzing indigenous oral texts obtained from Kenyan communities. Practical Criticism of the texts alongside Louis Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses theories were used to demonstrate that meanings elucidated by the studied oral texts can foster inter-communal integration by encouraging global populations to conserve biodiversity. The significance of this study is to contribute towards the efforts of biodiversity conservation and promoting global unity.

Key words: Indigenous Oral Poetry, National Integration, Biodiversity Conservation, Practical Criticism, Ideological State Apparatuses

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous oral song texts which are at times referred to as folk songs are a part of the body of verbal arts. They form part of the oral repertoire of various global communities. As distinct communities perform and listen to their verbal art, they are bound to engage in a process of perceiving themselves as acceptable subjects of their cosmos and at the same time appreciating their neighbourhood. Subsequently, they are "interpellated" into aligning their perceptions, actions and stances according to the dictates of their societies. At the end of the day, they become better and useful members of their societies; decorous people who cherish cordial human relations and are willing to enhance the harmony with their environment.

In qualifying the pieces under investigation as art, this study profited from Finnegan (1970) *Oral Literature in Africa* whose study was based on the collecting and classifying of various forms of oral arts around Africa. She analyzed the literariness and social functions of various genres of verbal art. Among the genres analysed by her study are Indigenous African songs. While taking cognisance of her classic analysis of verbal art, this study reflected on the aesthetics and content of purposively sampled indigenous oral song texts. Of precise significance is Finnegan's affirmation that oral texts carry the plain structures of literariness and can therefore be analyzed as literary texts. This study thus singled out the literariness of the sampled texts, their meanings to demonstrate that their effects can be instrumental in hailing humanity to

conserve biodiversity, limit areas and reasons of conflict hence foster national and (inter) national integration.

Bukenya, Gachanja and Nandwa (1997) in *Oral Literature, A Senior Course* have followed a similar approach to that of Finnegan. Their approach celebrates literariness of indigenous song texts and their functions. They celebrate mnemonic effects of verbal arts and their power in elucidating diverse meanings. Borrowing a leaf from Bukenya et al study, this study analyzed the aesthetics in sampled oral texts and accounted for their effectiveness in contributing towards biodiversity conservation and the resultant effect of promoting global integration.

Kichamu and Odaga (1982) in *Oral Literature: A School Certificate Course* surveyed the nature and functions of song texts from different Kenyan ethnic communities. Firstly, they noted that many communities round Africa have song texts which grace various social practices. Many of these song texts influence deeply the thinking of their composers and consumers. They further noted that oral poetry is about people's conditions of life hence, they embody the philosophy, beliefs and wisdom of the people. While borrowing from their standpoint, this study analysed and hereby demonstrates that indigenous oral texts can hail multitudes to re-dedicate their energies towards conservation of bio – diversity, hence limiting areas of conflicts.

Nandwa and Bukenya's (1983:85) in *African Oral Literature for Schools* have strongly averred that song and dance pervade the entire spectrum of African traditional life. This is a reflection of their importance in informing the worldview of a people. For instance, songs help children learn how to play on their own. While playing, these indigenous songs transmit meanings that inform their perception of their cosmos. There is likelihood that these song texts elucidate meanings which transcend the intents of occasions and proceed to espouse meanings which 'hail' them to acquire personality traits geared towards fostering inter – regional harmony as well as appreciating their environment.

Wellek and Warren (1949) in *Literary Theory* have argued that in some ways, literary language is deficient and bound in ambiguities, and it is like every other historical language- full of homonyms, arbitrary or irrational categories such as grammatical gender and it is permeated with historical accidents, memories and associates (allusions) hence it is best understood when texts are read closely. In a word, literary language is highly connotative. One feature of style, say a metaphor, can convey more than one meaning. Secondly, according to Wellek and Warren, the language of literature aims at influencing (interpellating) the character of the reader and persuades him and ultimately changes him. This is the object of this study when it espouses the idea that indigenous oral poetry can shape the minds of human populations into turning their backs to anti-social and combative tendencies whenever solving the lightest of imbroglios

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Practical critics, chiefly Wellek Rene and Warren Austin have advanced the argument that any discourse illuminates multiple meanings hence the need for close reading. This is in agreement with deconstructionists who have espoused the opinion that discourses prompted by texts of art are devoid of ultimate or fixed centres of meaning instead; there is interplay of meanings which result in the deferring of the intended absolute meaning. From the two theorists, it can be deduced that in any text, there is a range of meanings. Therefore, this study borrows the deconstructionists approach together with the new critics in determining the multiple meanings constructed by the indigenous oral texts and how the meanings have the potential to "hail" people's mindsets towards conserving biodiversity as well as fostering national integration. Althusser, a Marxist (1969:101) has postulated that a person's desires, choices, intentions and preferences are constructs of social practices. In African contexts, virtually all social practices are graced by songs, especially folksongs which are believed to be accurate in conveying desirable ideologies and worldviews. The world is tired with conflicts resulting from scramble for biodiversity resources. The concern then is whether indigenous oral texts are vividly addressing these social and climatic concerns. It is on the basis of these realities that this study analyzed indigenous oral texts with a view to illuminating meanings and discourses whose intent is to demonstrate the enormous power of indigenous oral poetry in conserving biodiversity as well as fostering inter-communal integration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study focused on indigenous song texts collected during a field research in the Kisii and Luo regions of Western Kenya. Various contemporary performers and resource persons were interviewed and recorded. Observing and listening to the discourses of those engaged in the performance of the texts equally helped the study to infer some of the meanings constructed and conveyed by the song texts. Lastly, library research and online accessing of information was handy. The focus of this study was anchored on the fact that all the song texts sampled are a microcosm of African indigenous oral texts.

VIBRANT BIO – DIVERSITY FOR CORDIAL HUMAN RELATIONS

Vansina (1985) has theorized that all literature is metaphorical. This postulation is significant as far as the study of verbal arts is concerned as it prepares any study to engage in extrapolating the intents of the multiple meanings in texts. This entails disambiguating literary tropes which underlie any literary song texts. Equally, the tropes available in the conveying of numerous associations in literary works spring out of the society which composes the art. They mirror the social-political and cultural circumstances of a society from which the art springs out. Meanwhile, when literary texts are sung repeatedly by groups, they become an *Ideological State Apparatuses* which in turn “interpellates” them into being subjects of their own cosmos hence their ability to perceive themselves in particular way. Borrowing from Vansina’s hypothesis, this study therefore begins its discussion from the point that the song texts sampled herein are allegories with never ending connotations which can invariably be used to edify any society.

The first song text in the appendix below: “*Beng’ Chugucha*” is a play song for children though invariably, it can be performed by all social groupings in Gusiland during happy moments. “*Beng’ Chugucha*” illuminates generosity as its central theme. As Gusii populations perform the song text, the refrain; *amache kayiare?* – Where is water? - is a pointer to generosity. The song text is an encouragement to children to offer drinking water to foreigners, based on the context of the song.

The historical context of this text is the barter trade between the Gusii and the Luo communities of Western Kenya. It urges members of the Gusii community to generously supply drinking water to the Luo tradesmen who had trekked for long distances to sell their pottery, mats and cattle salt to members of the Gusii community. Generosity is a brother of selflessness. A generous person must first be selfless to deny himself or herself valuables and comforts of life so as to benefit strangers. Well, when song texts designed to entertain children in society proceed to inculcate values and attitudes which hail them to accommodate neighbouring communities, harmony and integration in society are realized.

In the African context, generosity and communal collectiveness are revered. The term generosity transcends the mere act of sharing material wealth and possessions. Perhaps generosity is at its best when ideas are shared out. When ideas are shared out, they are recast so as to realize superior outcomes. *Beng’ Chugucha* espouses a chain of values vital for (Inter) national integration. There must be generosity, selflessness and respect when embracing that which is new to an individual. Thus, the text’s use of Luo lexicology in a way ‘hails’ is a signifier that different communities are obliged to share out their best and live peacefully side by side. Therefore, such like texts are vital in enhancing cordial human relations through social and inter-ethnic cohesion.

It is worth noting that in *Beng’ chugucha*, the item given to strangers is strictly water. Why then should children give out water to strangers and not anything else like say, foodstuffs? Water is a trope whose meanings are multiple. Water is a life giving substance. In Christendom, water baptism is symbolic of washing the past (animosity and related corrosive behaviours) and a new life full of cordial relations even with the supernatural. Life in its entirety depends on water. To give water to a stranger is to give love and love is giving life. When ability to extend boundless love is enshrined in the heart of a child, so theorizes psychoanalysis, goodness will not part from that child even in his adulthood. Love; in this case love for humanity is the highest gift required for biodiversity conservation and cordial human relations.

Throughout the song text, various animals are mentioned. It is crucial that the mentioning of the animals is a celebration of their existence and their environment. The mentioning of the hare, antelope and a leopard in a song text is a celebration of a balanced biodiversity. Wildlife feeds on vegetation and depends on rivers, lakes and other water bodies for water and foodstuffs. Their existence is testimony of a balanced ecosystem.

<i>Oite buna onsusu !</i>	Dance like the hare!]	
<i>Minyoka buna onsusu!</i>	Run like the hare!]	
<i>Tuma buna onsusu</i>	Jump like the hare!]	
<i>Minyoka buna engabi !</i>	Run like an antelope!]	REFRAIN
<i>Tuma buna engabi!</i>	Jump like an antelope!]	
<i>Minyoka buna egwachi!</i>	Run like the leopard!]	

It is apparent that this song text is a celebration of biodiversity. A well conserved biodiversity cannot permit people to scramble for scarce resources and ignite fatal conflicts. Therefore, should such indigenous oral text embellished with traditional tropes and symbols be integrated in education systems at all levels, humans will appreciate the beauty and importance of a conserved biodiversity and bloody conflicts will be replaced with harmonious co - existence between humans and nature, predictable climatic patterns, promotion of tourism and creation of job opportunities.

The text *Amache Nyambiriato* has its historical grounding along Kisii – Kipsigis common boarder, a boarder which has to date witnessed ugly confrontations which have at times left trails of destruction and maimed individuals whimpering for life. The literal meaning of the song is the need for people to protect their natural resources – water. Though the oral text has multiple connotative meanings, it is the socio – historical realities of its composition and its explicit refrain that the water source/will be protected from strangers form the core of this discussion. It is apparent that when water – and to a larger level biodiversity is not conserved, human to human conflicts are imminent. Therefore, for cordial human relations, conservation of biodiversity is obligatory.

ENHANCED BIODIVERSITY AND INTER – ETHNIC TRANQUILITY

Biodiversity denotes all species of plants, animals and micro-organisms living and interacting within an ecosystem (Upreti and Ghale, 2002; Vander Meer and Perfecto, 1995; Pimentel et al., 1992). Biodiversity performs balances ecosystems when correctly assembled in time and space. It can lead to agro ecosystems capable of supporting their own soil fertility, crop protection and productivity (Altieri, 1994). Ecosystem services are the resources and benefits that we get from the environment. They include clean water, honey, medicinal, aesthetic, cultural and ritual values, timber, and pollination of native and agricultural plants. Biodiversity underpins all ecosystem processes and is the foundation of Kenya's rich natural heritage.

An enlightened and cultured society which lives in harmony with its neighbourhood exhibits tremendous respect for biodiversity. Human relations are best refined in an environment in which humans are not at war over natural resources. This then means that the indigenous oral art which helps in inculcating refined personality traits should be part the lifestyle of all communities. Given that hostilities often arise from competition for the available resources, means of ameliorations such as savagery relations have to be put in place. This is the reason why this discussion is rooting for enhanced use of indigenous oral poetry in social practices and in school systems because its traditional idiom, imagery and folk wisdom is compelling and interpellating.

Once again, consider the refrain below. This is an aesthetic masterpiece and ingenious use poetic devices, folk idiom and biodiversity imagery in indigenous oral poetry. Such indigenous oral poetry is sentimental and nostalgic; a cryptic transmitter of ideologies whose force of interpellation is sure through the sheer force of poetic device which enhance the musicality, memorability and the auditory perception of the text.

<i>Oite buna onsusu !</i>	Dance like the hare!]	
<i>Minyoka buna onsusu!</i>	Run like the hare!]	
<i>Tuma buna onsusu</i>	Jump like the hare!]	
<i>Minyoka buna engabi !</i>	Run like an antelope!]	REFRAIN
<i>Tuma buna engabi</i>	Jump like an antelope!]	
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Consider that at a tender age, children are exposed to such traditional classics, be sure that they will be 'hailed' to acquire personality traits aligned with appreciation and conservation of biodiversity. In the process of their being entertained, they are inadvertently being 'shouted' at and being made of subjects of an ideology of celebrating cordial neighbour relations courtesy of flourishing biodiversity ecosystems.

Animals cannot live in isolation. There are herbivores such as the hare and antelope mentioned in the excerpt above. Their existence is a signifier. The signified are other herbivores of the same size or bigger. They can be squirrels, zebras, impalas, or even rodents. When they are praised in a song text, the implication is that human minds conjure up images of many other herbivores. Where herbivores live, carnivorous animals are not far. When they are aesthetically praised, the implication is that composers and consumers of such art are "interpellated" to preserve them. Where animals live, there is sufficient supply of vegetation which in turn forms water catchment towers. Therefore, integration of indigenous oral poetry into school curricula and social functions is a promising way of killing two birds with one stone – conserving bio-diversity and promoting global peace.

Vegetation has other functions apart from being providers of food to wildlife. They are wind breakers. They prevent soil erosion and desertification. They have a medicinal value. They provide abodes for birds of the air and other arboreal creatures. Best of their uses is the enormity of their power to attract rain. Rain is what sustains life, both on land and aquatic life. When these issues of conservation are hinged to the psyche of humans when they are still young, their psyches are embedded with positive worldview in regard enhanced human relations in a globe flourishing with balanced ecosystems.

When looking at the texts sampled in this short study, there is use of words from different communities. Song text one has Luo and Gusii words while text three is of Luo origin but the persona has keen interest on a Maasai bride. Obviously, they are identifying inter-ethnic points of beauty hence encouraging peaceful co-existence. Therefore, when sampling some of the discourses generated by these indigenous oral texts and similar ones, it is worthy concluding that this avenue is an effective machinery for constructing and shaping worthy ideologies and worldviews in issues relation to serene coexistence of humans and their environment. The texts sampled by this discussion are beautiful aesthetic pieces of art embellished with subtle images together with beautiful mnemonic effects such as alliteration, rhyme, refrain, repetition, consonance and assonance. This is a show that they can easily be memorized even by children because their auditory perception and memorability is enhanced by these musical sounds. When the essence and intents of these texts are imbedded in the psyche of children when they are pretty young they will have to tow that line for the rest of their lives. Through this, the world will be a heaven on earth; humans will live in harmony with one another in a very attractive biodiversity.

CONCLUSION

Losses in biodiversity have caused the global society sufferings of immense proportions. They are the causes of the escalated human conflicts in almost all corners of the globe. These losses require counter measures such as increased efforts towards biodiversity conservation by all and sundry. Thus, in order to conserve biodiversity, the character and condition of the remaining natural and semi-natural ecosystems and how vulnerable these ecosystems are to deterioration and destruction should be identified. It is obvious that, if biodiversity conservation is embraced and be part of everybody's duty, issues related to food insecurity and cool human relations will be addressed.

Proponents of Psychoanalysis have affirmed that the personality of an individual is a construction and constitution of childhood experiences as well as the hereditary components. All the texts sampled and analyzed by this study can be enjoyed by people of all ages. When texts of similar nature are availed to children at an opportune time, great achievements can be realized in terms of experiencing global accord and biodiversity stability given the nature of their brains to absorb a lot. Such texts have the ability to construct mindsets that can forever be dedicated towards betterment of various spheres of life in society. If one is hailed early enough in his or her life to begin appreciating the right attitudes and acquire the acceptable personality traits, then this will be part of that individual's personality up to old age. With such progressive minds taking charge of societies' affairs, achieving objectives of making this world a better place to live in can be accomplished with tremendous ease.

Habits form experiences. Children and adults love music. Children love it when it accompanies and compliments their childhood games and learning experiences. If indigenous oral poetry for children can be composed in a sense that it foregrounds the advantages and essence of looking at the biodiversity world positively, then efforts of curtailing human conflicts will be brought to fruition. These efforts will go a long way in sustaining this somehow ailing world in rediscovering the quintessential facets in many areas which directly affect daily lives of man and his biodiversity. On these grounds, it is the conclusion of this study that indigenous oral forms should be harnessed and be propagated as vehicles for enhancing the realization of various millennium goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More indigenous song texts from various regions and communities be collected and studies extensively.
2. Wild plants and animals that are in existence in any part of the globe be preserved and be documented together with the ecosystem services they provide.
3. Conservation measures to be put in place for indigenous plants and animals which are threatened with extinction in order to safeguard their genetic potential.
4. Investigate the relationship between other forms oral literature and how they contribute to conservation wild animals, plant species diversity and improved inter – communal relations.
5. Indigenous oral poetry be collected and be preserved for enlightenment of future generations as well as preventing their adulteration from mushrooming popular cultures.

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APPENDIX – SAMPLED SONGS

SONG ONE

BENG'I CHUGUCHA

Beng'i, beng' chugucha ero biroo!
Beng'i gwaya –
Ero biro-o
Beng'i gwaya amache kayiare?

Oite buna onsusu !
Minyoka buna onsusu!
Tuma buna onsusu
Minyoka buna engabi !
Tuma buna engabi
Minyoka buna egwachi!
Tuma buna egwachi!

Oite buna onsusu, beng'i chugucha ero biro
Beng'i gwaya
Ero biro-o!
Ben'gi gwaya amache kayiare?

Genda ng'ora mbeng' chugucha ero biro-o
Mbeng' gwaya
Ero biroo--
Beng, gwaya amache kayiare.

Bagaka kimbaroche,
Bang'ina kimbaroche,
Tenga torore ero biro-o-o!
Beng' gwaya
Ero biro-o-o
Beng' gwaya amache kayiare?
Abana baito tenga torore ero biro-o
Beng' gwaya
Ero biroo-o-o
Beng' gwaya amache kayiare?

Abana baito tuma torore,
Tuma torore, tuma torore, ero biro-o-o!
Beng' gwaya
Ero biro-o-o
Beng' gwaya amache kayiare?

SOLO: *Abasae kimbaroche*
Mogende ng'ora ng'ora
Buna amache ekaraya
Nyambane kayiare
Agende ng'ora ng'ora
Omomura omongwana
Akwanie abaibori
Ombeng'' chugucha erobiro-o-

HIT THE FOOT DOWN AND DANCE

Dance, there they come
 Hit your foot down
 Behold there they come
 Dance, where is the water?

Dance like the hare!]
 Run like the hare!]
 Jump like the hare!]
 Run like an antelope!]
 Jump like an antelope!]
 Run like the leopard!]
 Jump like the leopard!]

REFRAIN

Like the hare, behold they come
 Dance as you hit your foot down
 There they come
 Dance, where is the water

Slow as you dance
 Dance as you hit the ground
 Behold, there they come
 Dance, where is the water?

Old men, I can see you
 Elderly ladies, I can see you,
 Dance well, behold there they come
 Dance as you hit the ground
 Behold there they come
 Dance, where is the water?
 Our children let's see you dance
 As you hit your feet on the ground
 Behold there they come
 Dance, where is the water?

Our children, jump let's see you
 Jump, let's see, there they come
 Dance as you hit the ground
 There they come
 Dance, where is the water?

Young men, when I see you
 Go slow, slow
 Like water in a trough
 Where is Nyambane?
 He should go slow
 A polite young man
 May he greet his parents
 Dance, dance, there they come

SONG TWO

AMACHE NYAMBIRIATO

*Amache Nyabiriatto ee baba
Amache nyabiriatto amache nobochege agiteirwe
Nobochege agiteirwe ee baba, nobochege
Agiteirwe amache nyamatika egocha enywe,*

*Oyotagete emeirio ee ee baba-
Oyotagete emeino agende Nyamataro obitogia
Nyamataro obitogia ee baba,
Nyamataro obitogia ase emeirio ekoiywa nebitonga*

*Borangi yoka ngumbuu ee borangi
Yakang 'umbu moroche chinguba nchiana kuoma
Chinguba nchiana kwomaa ee baba
Chinguba nchianakwoma rogoro boisanga renga mache*

*Nche timbwati ng'ombe
Amache nobochege agiteirwe
Nobochege agiteirwe*

SONG THREE

HEPI NYA-LANG'O (Luo)

*Isanda nang'o?
Akuayi hera atoti yuora lera
Nyathi maasai Mily nya maasai rapudho
Rapudho ni nya- Jalang'o mama Tony Jaber
Ni wololo ja-suba
Ni wololo papa-aa
Onyango wuod Adhiambo
Paro chanda jawer
Paro chando jakwaya
Paro chando jakwaya
Ni nya-jalango mily nya- maasai-lera
Naomba Mungu shetani isiingilie kati yetu
Waremba ni wengi Kenya waremba ni wengi*

WATER AT NYAMBIRIATO

The well at Nyabiriatto
Fenced to keep off intruders
Fenced off to keep away ill – intentioned ones
Guarded to keep off cows from neighbours.

One keen on knowing our ways
Go ye to Nyamataro
And praise our ways.
Nyamataro is rich in our ways

On the yonder ridge - *Borangi*
Shields are many and available
Shields are never missing.
Shields are available; protect the well.

I have no cows
For water is shielded from intruders
Shielded from intruders

Why are you punishing me?
Am only asking for your love the decent one
Mily my Maasai darling
Listen to the cry of mama Tony's son
Poor me son of Suba land
Poor me 'papa' am only asking for love.
Onyango son of Adhiambo is asking for.
Deep in thoughts about love
For you Mily my one and only who I consider
The cleanest lady I have ever had
My Maasai darling,
I pray to God that nothing should come between us.
Kenya has many beautiful women, but only few can
withstand