



The Potential for Gender-Based Violence among the Eastern Bantu Ethnic Groups of Kenya: Evidence from Oral Literature

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Abstract: *Oral literature is a powerful tool for human socialization. It works to perpetuate social relations between men and women, parents and children, and old and young among other dichotomies. It is used to preserve and perpetuate culture hence maintain the status quo despite social costs. When reinforced by associated beliefs, it propagates such practices as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), spousal battering and forced marriages among others. That the foregoing practices are rampant among many Kenya communities cannot be gainsaid. While mainstream literature lays blame on drugs, character, economic and other drivers of gender-based violence, this paper provides an alternative to this conventional belief. Through the use of key informant interviews among five (5) community sages and documentary review, this article analyses selected songs, proverbs, oral narratives and sayings used by Eastern Bantu ethnic groups of Kenya and argue that their inter-generational transfer and associated beliefs institutionalize the potential for gender-based violence. From the foregoing, it is important to institute affirmative action measures that respond directly to the needs of the society and in particular to avail self-actualizing opportunities to women in equal measure with men.*

Key Words: *Gender, gender-based violence, oral literature, socialization, violence*

Introduction

Oral literature is seen as both a reservoir and a creative expression of cultural values, which makes a society sustainable and its culture to endure across generations. It actually propels a society along its moral path as it is recreated when

people interact with the outside world (Chesaina, 1997). On their part, Nandwa & Bukenya (1983) have looked at oral literature as those utterances, whether spoken or expressed in the form of a song with the intention of depicting people's attitudes, beliefs and practices that are societal in nature. Their composition and performance hence "exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic characteristics of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression" (ibid, 1983:1).

Oral literature as such includes folk tales, songs, poems and proverbs which are shared orally from one generation to another (Bukenya, Gachanja & Nandwa, 1997). For Chesaina (1994), oral literature is part of every society's world view and hence a guideline to their everyday interaction patterns. As such, every African society is a stockpile of oral literature including sayings, proverbs and stories that condense many expressions of the society's life (Chebet & Dietz, 2000). For example, proverbs and sayings are concerned with expressing socio-moral, political and related behaviours and are normally specific to among others age and gender. Adults are expected to master and pass them over to their children and the trend continues from generation to another. The use of these oral literature artefacts varies with time, space, community and age-groups among other criteria.

In general, proverbs are characterised by their ability to communicate effectively but in a manner that utilises minimal words (Chesaina, 1997), are used to convey information that is not meant for mass consumption and also as a way to avoid verbal pornography. In many instances, they are used as a warning against engaging in behaviour deemed offensive to the society's moral code. For example, the Akamba ethnic group used the adage *Mutindanya na mukundu akundukaa otake* to warn children against bad company. This adage is translated as *whoever befriends a bad character will eventually become bad as well*. Songs on their part could be used to praise or ridicule a person who had done proud to the community or a lazy person respectively (Mwaruvie, 2011).

Myths among many communities especially regarding community origins and ownership of property more or less worked to maintain and justify patriarchy and male supremacy. The foregoing is more so given that they embody a sacred quality that demands to be believed in and obeyed unquestioningly as though they were divine or matters of fact (Kabira, 1994). This in a way socialises men to control women while submission to men is demanded of women. Women failure to submit or an attempt to be assertive is seen as deviance and culture-destructive. As a result, it is taken as being tantamount to inviting threats and at worst physical violence. In this regard, the Aembu and the Ambeere have an adage that justifies women

battering. The adage goes, *mumbiria arume aumburagwa na njokoma*, which is translated as *whoever sulks a man has his anger released with a club*. This implies that man is assumed to be the head of the household whose word must be obeyed and whoever disobeys his words invites a beating. A wife hence should never complain to her husband despite the circumstances. However, this position may not hold much at the present given the impact of western formal education, influence and laws that have overturned the former status quo.

Oral literature is entertaining and educative in addition to expressing feelings of a people and hence playing a therapeutic and informative role (Chesaina, 1994). For example, songs may be used to satirize unacceptable behaviour and as such warn people against deviating from the accepted moral and ethical expectations of the society. Proverbs on their part convey the various elements of a society's wisdom in a manner that is brief and to the point. In addition, oral literature such as songs, riddles and folk stories sooth and entertain people in a way no other cultural artefact can do (Bukonya, Gachanja & Nandwa, 1997). In a way oral literature makes us discover who we are, our social environment and hence a form through which we get socialized into responsible beings, and the animal in us is humanized.

The Bantu Ethnic and Linguistic Groups of Kenya

The Bantu speaking communities are spread across Sub-Saharan Africa and have cultures and other artefacts that resemble in more aspects that one, although differences exist from one community to another. In East and Central Africa, they include Tutsi and Hutu of Rwanda and Burundi; Baganda, Banyoro, Banyankore, Basoga, Bagiika, Bagisu, Batooro and Bakonzo of Uganda and Agikuyu, Gusii, Abaluyha, Akamba, Ameru, Pokomo and Agirama of Kenya. Others include the Nyamwezi, Sukuma, Bena, Chagga, Kuria, Luguru and Hehe of Tanzania; Mongo, Kongo, Luba, Bwaka and Lulua of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somali Bantus. The latter trace their origin in both Tanzania and Mozambique courtesy of the 18th century slave trade.

The Bantu communities of Kenya can be divided into Western, Central, Coastal and Eastern Bantus and inhabit these respective areas of the country. The western Bantus include the Gusii, the Kuria and the Abaluyha, the central Bantus are typically the Agikuyu, the coastal Bantus include the Taita, Pokomo and the Miji Kenda sub-tribes made up of the Giriama, Digo, Duruma and the Chonyi among others (Ng'ang'a, 2006). On their part, the eastern Bantus are the Akamba, Aembu,

Ameru, Ambeere and the Atharaka (ibid, 2006). The eastern Bantus principally occupy the counties of Machakos, Makueni, Kitui, Embu, Meru and Tharaka Nithi, although they are still found settled in other parts of the country (ibid, 2006). For example, while the Akamba ethnic group are found in large numbers in Kwale County, the Aembu and the Ameru's presence is strongly felt in Kirinyaga County in Central Region. The primary data collection from sages nonetheless was concentrated in four counties namely, Meru, Embu, Kitui and Makueni that are inhabited by the Ameeru, Aembu/Ambeere and Akamba respectively.

Linguistically and other cultural practices, the eastern Bantu ethnic groups of Kenya have more similarities than differences. The foregoing has been buttressed by near identical livelihood activities and interdependence, residential proximity and intermarriage. In many instances, one ethnic community may be found in more than one county such as the Akamba in Kitui, Makueni, Machakos and Embu and the Atharaka in Kitui, Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties. As a result, their oral literature, cultural practices and beliefs tally in many ways than one and therefore differential treatment for men and women with the latter seen as more disadvantaged in matters of conjugal rights (Mwenzwa, 2011). Thus far, an examination of selected oral literature, involving both primary and secondary data from selected Eastern Bantu ethnic groups would suffice to illustrate the foregoing.

Selected Eastern Bantu Oral Literature and Gender-Based Violence

There has been increasing concern about violence against women in general and about domestic violence in particular (KNBS & IFC Macro, 2010: 245). Gender-based violence is usually defined as any physical, sexual, or psychological wrongdoing that occurs within the family or general community (Maina, 2006; Lumumba & Wanyonyi, 2010). Indeed, the 2008-2009 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) (KNBS & IFC Macro, 2010) data show that 39% of women have experienced physical violence in Kenya, with violence increasing with age. However, experiences of gender-based violence against women have been reported to be on the decline if the 2003 and 2008/09 KDHS data were compared. Gender-based violence works to perpetuate and reinforce the already existing patriarchal relations and gender-based discrimination against women in the society

To further perpetuate and reinforce this gender-based violence, albeit implicitly, discrimination against women, songs and sayings are used. These work to socialize women to be submissive and men to be authoritative, domineering and out-going (Bandura, 1977; Beal, 1994; Bem, 1981, Chimhundu, 1995, Juni, Rahamin &

Brannon, 2001). Indeed, gender-based violence includes discrimination on such lines as it denies the discriminated life opportunities for self-actualization and hence a violation of their rights. These in turn work to make women play second fiddle in decision-making in many spheres beginning at the family level (Mwenzwa, 2011). Deviance and assertiveness against these practices and beliefs on the part of women is therefore deemed anti-social and out of what is seen as normal in society. Such may be suppressed through threats to and actual violence against women.

While it may be an overstatement to say that oral literature is entirely responsible for gender-based discrimination and violence, the fact that it plays a key role in this regard cannot be gainsaid. Kabira (1994), for example, reports that among the Agikuyu oral literature, the woman is portrayed as one who does not answer back, expresses no opinion and should only be seen but not heard. In this case, oral literature is used to perpetuate a negative image of women, which in essence legitimises the need for their control by men. For the same token, they are discriminated against especially on matters of conjugal poverty ownership and in major decision-making (Mwenzwa, 2011). Proverbs and oral narratives have been used as the yardstick to measure women intelligence and acumen, on which they are found to be grossly wanting. It would seem that the manufacturers of oral literature had conspired to paint a negative picture of women. To understand the foregoing with more precision, we consider and draw from selected oral literature among the Eastern Bantu ethnic groups of Kenya.

The Akamba Ethnic Group

The Akamba are linguistically and culturally related to the other Eastern and Central Bantu ethnic groups of Kenya such as the Ambeere and the Agikuyu. They have a rich oral literature in the form of songs, idioms, saying and riddles that are being lost courtesy of formal education, urbanization and the slow breakdown of kinship ties. Whereas many proverbs for example are very educative, others border on gender discrimination. Such are a recipe for gender-based violence especially against women. For example, the Akamba ethnic group of Kitui County and the Ukambani region widely use the proverb *ngingo ndikilaa mutwe*, translated as the *neck cannot be greater than the head*. This implies that women (neck) should always be under the authority of men (head). What is the meaning of this proverb that has been passed over from generation to another through oral literature? What are the implications of this saying on violence against women in the Akamba traditional household and community in general?

The foregoing proverb provides a socio-cultural justification for the subordination and discrimination against women in the sense that anything that happens or has to be done in society; men should have the final say. This according to a community sage was used for example to ensure that whenever a goat was slaughtered, men would consume the liver and some other *good* parts of the goat, while the neck, which is bony was given to women. Indeed, the goat head, known for its soft meat when pot-boiled was a preserve of men. It was consumed at *thome*, a homestead fireplace outside the main house, where women were prohibited from sitting. Indeed, *thome* was like a modern exclusive *members-only club* for men to the exclusion of women.

In addition to such discriminatory practices drawing from proverbs, the Akamba have songs, riddles and oral narratives that depicted men as semi-gods in society, while looking at women as almost worthless. One song sung by a man in prison whose father was dead by the time he was convicted and as sang by a sage in Mwingi Central Sub-County, Kitui County goes,

Ithe wa mundu ni Ngai wa keli tavw'a! (One's father is second God be informed/warned)

Inya wa mundu ni mundu wa musyi (One's mother is just somebody at home)

Kethiwa Nau ai thayu munthi usu (If my father was alive that day-committal day),

Moko nake ndyithiwa nonie thina (I swear by him, I wouldn't have been imprisoned)

The import of this song is that a father is highly prized as a mother is devalued and degraded in society and especially in the traditional Akamba household. As such, women are not expected to contribute significantly not only in terms of rescuing their children from life challenges but also in making key decisions. This is yet another justification for gender-based discrimination and violence against women. In addition, while adultery should be abhorred by all in society, the Akamba community have a saying which is an apparent justification and glorification of male promiscuity. The age-old saying goes, *vai nzamba ya mweela umwe*, which is translated as *there is no cock that serves only one hen*. This is the Aembu/Ambeere equivalent of the proverb, *gutii njamba ya mwera umwe*. This may be used as a justification for polygamy and women battering when they resist a co-wife. On the other hand, and as may be expected, there is not such proverb as *vai mweela wa nzamba imwe* (there is no hen that is served by one cock). One may be tempted to ask, if there is no cock that services one hen, why can't the hen serve several cocks? This is apparent gender discrimination and borders on engaging in risky behaviour especially in the era of HIV/AIDS. A hen (woman) caught serving two cocks (men)

invites scorn and ridicule; while a cock (man) serving several hens (women) is largely tolerated and sometimes deemed successful. Although this does not directly encourage gender-based violence against women, it massages male egos unnecessarily, elevating men to a higher social pedestal than their women counterparts.

The Akamba also draw from the animal kingdom to degrade women by using the purring of a cat as evidence to the effect that women are uncaring and procrastinators. In this particular case, it is said that when a cat makes the sound *miaow* especially when it is hungry, the cat is simply asking *aka naaau?* This is translated as, *who are women?* As such, it is deemed as expressing its displeasure with the spiteful and procrastinating nature of women who should have given it food since this is always within their powers. Based on this saying, whenever a woman makes a mistake, it is simply dismissed as normal and expected of them given that even domestic animals such as the cat know it.

However, despite the negativity attributed to a woman and her portrayal as irrational and largely worthless member of the society, the Akamba approach it better. In this particular case, they use the adage, *mundu ndaleelaa muka nundu wa kumya itani*, which is translated as *one cannot divorce his wife simply because her underclothes are dirty*. The foregoing implies that a man should not leave his wife whatever the circumstances. The foregoing denotes importance attached to the family unit by the Akamba and particularly the indispensability of a woman in society. As a result, the adage rules out divorce, which underlines the importance of a man and woman in one another's life. The two are therefore seen as compliments rather than competitors, just like complementary goods in economics. This is why divorce in the traditional Akamba household is almost unheard of. As such, a man would rather marry a second wife without necessarily divorcing the first one even under accusations of marital infidelity and sorcery.

The Aembu and Ambeere Ethnic Groups

The Aembu and the Ambeere are socio-cultural and linguistic sisters and virtually understand one another in all aspects. Indeed, the two languages, Kiembu and Kimbeere respectively that borrow heavily from other Bantu languages such as Kikuyu, Kikamba and Kimeru are mutually intelligible (Chesaina, 1997). While the oral literature in these communities just like in many others was for the purposes of education, entertainment and repositories of wisdom, it has been used as setbacks to women involvement in decision-making at various levels including the family. In this regard, various proverbs, songs and sayings have been used not only as a

measure towards the preservation of culture but also to disadvantage women. Indeed, proverbs in particular have been used to heap praise on men to the extent of almost immortalizing them, while on the other hand, women are more or less depicted as necessary evils in society.

Chesaina (1997) has provided many proverbs from the Aembu and Ambeere communities that depict women negatively while men are symbolized as the ultimate role models. Indeed, in oral literature women are represented as the most unreliable sources of information given that they are mostly attributed to gossip and nothing more as in the following proverb from the Aembu and Ambeere communities. The proverb goes, *ndeto cia aka ciitikagua ciarara*, which is literary translated as *news from women is believed the following day*. The actual meaning and implication of this proverb is that women are believed to engage in gossip, rumour-mongering and idle talk to the extent that what they say should not be believed and hence men are advised to verify any news from a woman before taking it seriously. What does this imply regarding women position in society and by extension gender-based violence against them?

In the foregoing proverb, women are reduced to the level of non-thinkers, actually to irrational beings and rumour-mongers whose word should not be heeded without being double-checked. They are therefore represented as lesser human and incapable of logical and objective thinking, much more like young children whose thinking faculties are not fully developed. Indeed, one may think they are symbolised as if they are of unsound mind. This has far reaching implications on their decision-making at both household and community levels given their *low thinking capacities*. As such, their contribution in decision-making is deemed insignificant and any attempt to assert themselves is deemed rebellious against established societal norms. They may hence invite threats to and actual physical violence from their male counterparts to keep them at their subjugated and subordinated cultural positions.

However, sometimes the wisdom attributed to men by oral literature provide unintelligible contradictions such as to be found in the following two proverbs from the Aembu and Ambeere ethnic groups. One of the proverbs, *muka mucangacangi ndaturaga mwana*, translated as *a woman who roams around does not miss a baby*. The foregoing proverb warns women against promiscuity to avoid negative consequences such as having children out of wedlock. While this is important in as far as the moral code of any society is concerned and more so in the era of

HIV/AIDS, it also borders on gender discrimination since it only warns women and not men.

Indeed, the proverb ignores the English adage, *it takes two to tango*, that pregnancy is a function of male and female coitus and not just the latter's promiscuity. Are men not promiscuous if they can impregnate women and run away from responsibility as Nzioka (2009) found out? Are the two not responsible for the outcome of their coitus? More important and indirectly related to the foregoing, the same communities have another proverb that glorifies men promiscuity stated as follow, *gutii njamba ya mwera umwe*, translated as *there is no cock that serves one hen*. This contradicts the first proverb by lionizing men's sexual exploits and depicting their promiscuity as acceptable while the first proverb demonises women in the same regard.

Based on the two proverbs from the same communities, one would be tempted to ask: is there promiscuity that is not promiscuous? The answer is in the affirmative if we go by the foregoing two proverbs. Drawing from the two proverbs, it would seem that when two unmarried heterosexual adults engage in sexual intercourse, the man is doing the *right thing* while the woman is doing the *wrong thing*! A woman caught in an illicit sex relationship may invite gender-based violence, but not so for her male partner, who is expected to behave like a cock. In this particular issue, the Hoy Books are not spared if what is recorded in the Book of John 8 is anything to go by. In this reading, the Scribes and Pharisees had brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in adultery in order that she would be stoned. Although Jesus dismissed them by telling them that everybody was a sinner, it is expected that the woman would have been brought with her male partner given that adultery is sin for both.

Another adage from the two communities goes, *mwongia mwaro ndanunungariria*, translated as *a good wife never grumbles*. This means a good wife should be humble and never complain despite the circumstances. As such, women are expected to be polite, patient, understanding and highly tolerant whatever the state of affairs. One is compelled to ask: what if the husband becomes promiscuous in the era of HIV/AIDS? What if the husband becomes a drunkard at the expense of his family? Should the wife keep quiet when her husband decides to sell the only family farm? How should the wife behave in the case of domestic violence against her? For how long should the wife keep quiet when things go wrong in the family? Is it virtuous to remain loyal or is it a vice to *voice* and *exit* in the words of Hirschman (1970)? Why doesn't the foregoing apply to men as well? The implication is that any

complain from a woman is unwarranted and may be met by violence, not only from her male partner, but also the rest of the society as the custodian of culture.

In another example, Mwaruvie (2011) documents a hunters' song among the Ambeere ethnic group of Embu County for ridiculing men who did not participate in hunting. Part of the song goes,

Aria matigagwa mucii X 2
Whoever is left at home X 2
Twenuka tukamathicaniria na aka
When we get back home, we shall fuck them together with women
Ngurungu rega mbia, nanii nwaguo ngurera Muthwagi
Wild buck rears your horns, I am rearing a hunter
(Mwaruvie, 2011: 34-35)

The song is clearly meant to ridicule men who did not actively participate in hunting and other livelihood activities that are important for family upkeep, as a measure to demonstrate their dependability and independence. Such men are, therefore depicted as lazy and mere blood suckers. The expectation is that those who do not participate in hunting will be ashamed and to *cleanse* themselves they will follow suit and join their compatriots in subsequent hunting expeditions. However, one would be forced to ask: why bring in women when clearly, they were not expected to join in hunting as per Ambeere socio-cultural dictates? The answer lies in the societal expectations and treatment for both men and women. The foregoing song socializes men to look down on women and treat them as their subjects. Indeed, in this song women are depicted as sex objects to quench men's sexual thirst after an undertaking such as hunting. It shows the position of women in society and justifies male supremacy (Kabira, 1994). Hence, an attempt to overturn the status quo may invite violence, given men are socialized to *take charge* of women.

The Ameru and Atharaka Ethnic Groups

The Ameru and the Atharaka have a lot in common including beliefs and such harmful practices as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). FGM is a violation of women rights and hence gender-based violence, a crime according to both the Sexual Offences and Children Acts of 2006 and 2001 respectively (Republic of Kenya, 2001; 2006). However, according to the 2008-2009 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KNBS & IFC Macro, 2010:265), 39.7% of women among the Ameru and the Atharaka have undergone FGM. Such practices are perpetuated by age-old beliefs, saying proverbs and community mythology regarding women. A

sage from the Ameru community narrated the following myth regarding the domestication of animals and the behaviour of women.

Long time ago both domestic and wild animals were all wild. God decided to give all these animals to the Ameru for domestication. Man as the head of the household delegated the work and authority of welcoming animals to the homestead to his wife. As animals were coming to the homestead, the woman was particularly pleased with cattle and readily welcomed them and indeed started milking the lactating ones happily whistling. When the turn of the buffalos to enter the homestead came, the woman complained that she did not like them since their horns were too big, making them very ugly. The woman is said to have made so much noise that the buffalos were very scared and they had to run away into the bush never to be domesticated. Since then, the buffalos have always had a grudge with women for being unkind to them and whenever a buffalo comes across a man and a woman walking, it will endeavour to kill the woman first to avenge her uncouth behaviour and insults.

Based on the myth, the woman is depicted not only as inconsiderate, but also one who cannot use their thinking faculties to amass property. Her refusal to accept the *big cows* is deemed the height of irrationality because it denied the community a wide range of livestock that would even have been given to her father as bride price. In fact, according to this myth, a woman is so devilishly dreadful that even wild animals know it! If wild animals who rarely interact with human beings know that a woman is ill-mannered, what about domestic animals and human beings?

More important, the Ameru and the Atharaka would call a woman derogatively as *muta* (plural *ata*), meaning the *thrower* or the one *who is careless enough to let prosperity opportunities go unexploited*. How can she for example chase away and refuse to accept the *big cows* just because of their horns? This would have been a community gold mine towards prosperity that the woman let go due to her *childish* behaviour. As a result, a woman from these communities should not be allowed to own livestock lest she *throws* them. A variant from the pastoral-nomadic Maasai ethnic group of Kenya and Tanzania justifies why women should not own livestock whatsoever as well (Kipury, 1983).

Given a critical analysis though, the myth holds some water in the fact that a buffalo is likely to kill a woman first as opposed to a man. However, the justification is not to be found in the myth's explanation, since it is purely a gender-based stereotype, but on matters of objective observation and fact. For example, it is likely that when a man is walking with his wife, she could be walking behind him carrying a load of firewood, a calabash of water, a sick child or even all of these. If a buffalo charges

at them, it is more likely to catch up with the woman first given that she would take time to put down her load or as she tries to climb a tree with a child on her back. On the other hand, the man could be carrying a weapon, climb a tree swiftly or sprint fast leaving the woman behind. Indeed, if the buffalo or any other animal for that matter charges from behind, the woman would become the sacrificial lamb to save the life of the man. The myth therefore stands no chance in explaining the outcome and it is only used to deny women a thinking capacity and at worst, justify violence against them since they are *ata* (throwers).

In addition to myths, the Ameru and the Atharaka have proverbs that depict women negatively, sometimes reducing them to inanimate objects and overgrown babies. One proverb goes, *muka ati kuraa* meaning *a woman never grows up*. The foregoing means that according to the two communities, a woman cannot attain mental maturity and concrete adulthood. This reduces a woman to a level devoid of wisdom and hence never to be given a decision-making opportunity. Another proverb from these communities goes, *mwathwa-a ni ina ni ya mwathwa-a ni mwana*, translated as *he who seeks counsel from his mother is like he who seeks counsel from a child*. Hence seeking counsel from a woman is equated to seeking counsel where it cannot be found such as from a rock. A woman is therefore brought down to the level of a child or an inanimate object.

However, the Ameeru and the Atharaka do not just dismiss a woman, but also extend an olive branch to her and hence generally regard her as a necessary evil. In this regard, she is treated and adored as *nina wa antu* (the mother of people) or rather the origin of life. Indeed, among these two ethnic groups, like in many other communities, during periods of conflict, women should not be armed or killed *evil as they are*, for it is believed that they are the divine source of life (*nina wa antu*). Hence despite her devilish thought and behaviour, she is tolerated and seen as indispensable. Her most esteemed role is feeding and nurturing her family which the Ameru say she does jealously like the proverbial hyena. Although she is highly esteemed as the source of life, the hyena analogy negates this given its portrayal in oral narratives across many communities as the most gluttonous character of all times.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the elucidation, a woman is created through patriarchal thought and language and degraded using cultural dictates. Through such treatment she is subjected to denial of her inalienable human right to property ownership,

expression, choice and inheritance. However, these metaphysical and epistemological structures that have been institutionalised through cultural umbrella of reality need to be given a change from their negative effects towards rational thinking. This if realised is expected to achieve the desired social objectives of oral literature devoid of gender-based overtones contrary to individual acumen in terms of mental faculties and physical abilities.

The *seedbed* mentality seen in the skewed interpretation of oral literature particularly myths, sayings and proverbs cannot pass unchallenged. This is especially so in the era of formal education during which, wisdom unlike in the past, does not necessarily reside in greying hair and in men. Although these oral literature artefacts are important for upholding the moral code of the society, their biased patriarchal interpretation make them incapable of nurturing a society devoid of gender-based discrimination and violence.

In oral literature and especially narratives as literature attests, women are portrayed negatively and denied identities outside their relationships with men and male ogres. This reduces their self-worth, intelligence and put them at a most disadvantaged position in relation to men. They are therefore despised and at times dismissed as grossly unintelligent, an invitation to male control and the perpetuation of the skewed patriarchal relationship. When such is the case, men are socialised to control women and any *resistance* is likely to be countered violently, hence gender-based violence. This partly explains gender-based violence in many societies particularly at the household level.

On the other hand, oral literature recreates men who are indomitable and to whom contrary opinion especially originating from women is tantamount to rebellion. This kind of thinking and socialization culturally speaking put men at a pedestal that detests challenges from and opinion of women. On their part, men make maximum use of and misappropriate the socio-cultural protection and loopholes to not only deny women their human rights, but also abuse them. As a result, a gradual scheme needs to be put in place through affirmative action in both public and private sectors with the aim of equalizing opportunities for both men and women. The foregoing is expected to accord women the necessary resources for self-actualization to make available the opportunities that culture has consistently denied them.

A careful review and analysis of oral literature suggests that most communities, are strongly related in terms of meaning and purpose. For example, one may get a proverb, song or simile in one community that is exactly as those from other

communities. While they may not use the exact words, their import for example on men and women relationship may be just the same. This implies that there is an apparent consensus in society to look down upon, discriminate and subjugate women for the benefit of men and not necessarily for the common good of the society in general.

As literature attests, there is general consensus on the indispensability of women in society based on the belief that they are a divine gift to human race as the source of life. Indeed, oral literature in some communities acknowledges this fact despite the negative portrayal. For this reason, this is something that should be capitalized on to sensitize the society on the negative role of a gendered society. For example, decisions made without a gender lens are likely to produce fewer benefits to society. Indeed, scholars have put it that ignoring men or women leads to a lower rate of development than otherwise would be. In simple terms, despite the negative portrayal of women in many societies, there is always something positive about them although such are least emphasized in oral literature.

From the findings and with regard to the relationship between gender-based violence and oral literature of the Eastern Bantu ethnic groups, it is observed that there is high potential for gender-based violence. Indeed, gender-based discrimination as manifested in the subjugation of women among these ethnic groups, is implicitly violence and therefore partly the basis of explicit gender-based violence. From the foregoing, it is recommended that gender and oral literature scholars, need to undertake further research on the two aspects of society and come up with a theory that directly explains their relationship.

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