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The Poetics of Resistance: Christopher Monyoncho's Fight against Corruption and Abuse of Power

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In primordial Gusii cultural identity, the ills of corruption and abuse of power were unheard of. Value for life, a keen sense of justice, respect, mutual goodness with collective responsibility took centre-stage. Then came colonialism and westernisation in the first half of the twentieth century and the communal good and societal values were replaced with self-seeking individualism. Aside from the influence of westernisation and globalisation, capitalistic and paternalistic tendencies by both the so-called former colonial masters and their African successors gave birth to the monsters of corruption and abuse of power. These pushed the Ubuntu spirit into the periphery. This article uses the Benga music of Christopher Monyoncho to analyse the evident cultural identity shifts from the primordial collective societal support to a selfish and self-seeking hybrid identity. The analysis of the literariness of these poetic texts revealed the extent to which prized values of life such as mutual respect and common good which were centred on collective responsibility were watered down and metastasised into scary dragons worth slaying. Indeed, evils such as corruption, grabbing and abuse of power have spawned all over the country and Monyoncho decries such selfish endeavours in several of his popular poetry. This article therefore reads such poetry expositions as a way of laying them bare to the reading public.

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INTRODUCTION

It is essential that every community does not lose their roots in the face of the influx of westernisation and alien cultures that eclipse their identity. This quest for self-determination makes us figure out a people's identity. According to Hall (2023), cultural identity is that collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Indeed, cultural identities are never unified and, in modern times, are increasingly fragmented and fractured. They are multiple constructions across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. The modern Gusii people of western Kenya experienced a radical historicisation that birthed several competing and shifting identities. These identities feature prominently in Monyoncho's popular poetry in a constantly evolving and transient nature.

Therefore, people do not often understand their own identity since they have been affected by historical processes through colonisation and globalisation. Their primordial way of life, belief systems, history, and language was affected hence a search for self-identity occurs. Jones (2003) described the quest for identity as a searching journey that can lead to a healing process. It involves establishing existing historical and cultural values that may be eroding, preserving the once valued, protecting those at the risk of elimination, and considering those likely to survive or alienated. Leavis (2009) referred to this search as a longing for a cultural golden age, a mythic rural past that was shared and uncorrupted before commercial interests intervened.

Tomlinson (2008) viewed globalisation not as a destructive force erasing cultural identities, but rather as an acceleration of homogenised Western consumer culture, often associated with Western cultural imperialism. In the context of

Monyoncho's creative work, his poetry explores the British colonisation, the effect on the primordial cultural identity, and evolution into hybrid identities that emerge in the cultural contact. Monyoncho's poetry showcased complex shifting themes shaping corruption and abuse of power, identities emerging and continually evolving.

Monyoncho's poetry represents a fusion of Luo traditional style music with some rumba, representing the Benga genre (Makokha et al., 2011). He pioneered Gusii Benga music being among the first guitar entertainers. His poetry sometimes embodies an unadulterated EkeGusii language, rich traditional folk and imagery. By designating it as popular poetry means it appeals to the majority in the community, informs their viewpoints, characterises their responses, and gives them a sense of belonging (Frith, 1996).

The poems are primarily in EkeGusii, Monyoncho's native language, with occasional Kiswahili and English words. Its setting is in various locations within Kenya, Gusii, and imagined places created by Monyoncho. According to Barber (2018), analysing creative works involves considering ambiguities, exaggerations, ironies, allusions, and silences. The study delved into these aspects and gave them meaningful interpretations against the background of shifting, evolving, transient and hybrid identities.

Christopher Monyoncho, who praised himself as *Omwana bw'Araka Riyo ri'Ebasweti*, (the son of Araka, the python's skin) was born in 1945 in Kitutu Chache, during the British colonial period (Nyamwaka, 2012; Orina, 2014; Bironga, 2013). His career journey was riddled with controversy due to political interference from the powers that ruled this country in the 1970s and 1980s. He started composing and singing music while in school. He relocated to Kericho where with John Sitara they established the Nyamwari Band. In

1975, he formed the Kegogi Jazz Band with Charles Omweri, Andrew Gitenyi, and Moses Oyaro Memba. Christopher Monyoncho passed away in 2013 at the age of 68 (Bironga, 2013; Enock, 2023).

Primordial Identities

In order to understand Monyoncho's position on the transient identities that spark controversy, it is good to look at the nature of primordial identities at play and under threat. Bellamy (2013) related the significance of the primordial ties of kinship, religion, blood, race, language, locality and the like for ordinary people as central aspects of primordialism. These aspects formed deeply-rooted bonds and that were emotionally-charged on basis of ethnic and national identification. On the other hand, Allahar (1996) held that primordialism was a group attachment and identity especially in pre-modern societies, with natural, perhaps even biological ties. He claimed that class situations in society were ethnically or racially conditioned. "Human beings are attached to one another (and their communities of origin) virtually by mutual ties of blood that somehow condition reciprocal feelings of trust and acceptance, p.7). This means that members of the same group experienced a distinct form of profound connection, sensed a spiritual communication and an additional sense of collective consciousness with their fellow members, even in the absence of direct acquaintance or personal affinity, emphasising the notion that "Blood is thicker than water." Monyoncho's poetry situates his work in the Gusii community where kinship, blood, language, locality and sense of collective consciousness are major considerations.

Kinship and essentialising a sense of security

Mayer's (1950) work was among the oldest studies on Gusii community social life and culture. He presented a detailed study of the role and function of the lineage or *egesaku* that he observed in the Gusii society in the 1940s. He provided information on the relationship of the lineage to the clan, *abaamate*, to the mourning group called the 'people of shaving',

abanyamatati, and to the tribal group as a whole. He also brought out regulations and modes that governed marriage, households, lineages and clan systems. His anthropological approach did not essentialise the importance of these factors in placing an individual in the cosmos and his worldview but helped one understand that the Gusii had an elaborate and established kinship structure and strong blood bonds. Mayer's (1965) interrogation of Gusii kinship presents the domestic relations between the generations and sexes using a theoretical model of relations by kinship categories and classification. The study proffered ethnographic information on Gusii society and culture, traditional homestead and physical context of domestic life, men's and women's different interests or expectations in regard to marriage.

Explanation on how the restraint etiquette (*nsoni*) applied among proximate generations influencing the localised and elaborate patrilineal descent groups was made. It was important to trace how these existing relationships implicate the sense of identity, whether the Gusii culture governs the people's conduct and collective consciousness in face of external threats brought by change. Levine (1964) interrogated the traditional Gusii sociopolitical organisation that consisted of localised, exogamous, patrilineal clans which were militarily autonomous but loosely integrated with a number of surrounding clans in seven territorially distinct regions. The Gusii had no class structure, central political authority, and specialised political roles. Each clan was divided and subdivided into segmentary lineages which were, for the most part, highly localised and governed by informal councils of elders. Men of wealth had greater influence in such councils and sometimes achieved an independent judicial status, but only Bogetutu of the seven Gusii clans had positions approximating hereditary chieftainship while the rest were loosely organised around some family heads or some famous warriors. In the new power shift, there is prevalence of the monied and those in government employment to transcend age, gender, and authority and emerging centres of power. We

would later discover that in *Omong'ina Saddam* and *Keemba* poems.

The above information added value to the fact that the Gusii's political organisation was an alien thing since kinship had been basis under which Gusii community survival and distribution of resources depended. These researchers, cognizant of the group political leadership that was characteristic of Gusii decision-making process, have gone ahead to demonstrate that the power that revolved around the head of the family and communal elders is transient. For example, in *Eguto*, the ant bear, the head of the family is confronted with guilty of the loss of the family sheep through his mistake of bringing an ant bear to his home and keeping it with his flock. The man melts as he cannot withstand the wife's wrath and the result is the shift of power where the man is domiciled and hands over, at the end, the cooking stick to the wife, a feminine symbol. This echoes Silberschmidt's (1999) observation on the perennial gender wars that exist in the Gusii space.

Arungo (2016) opined that Gusii kinship terminologies which denoted relationships between groups and individuals were mainly based on genealogical relationships. This included the biological relationship between children and parents, and between marital partners or spouses and between siblings. While conventionally kinship terminologies were universally similar, each community had a unique way of crafting kinship terms and systems of these relationships depending on its culture. The study focused on the AbaGusii people and particularly the *Maate* (also referred to as *Ekemaate*) dialect spoken by AbaGirango where the data for this study was collected. While the kinship relationships were manifested in the poetic stories Monyoncho sings, the effects brought about by colonisation indicate serious erosion and weakening of closer affinity to the community or family.

Further there was need to explore how changes like collapsed traditional structures, new social roles and values affect male and female gender identity and the relations between sexes. Some stereotypes had to be conceptualised within the

patriarchal ideology embodied in dominant men and submissive women. In cases where men were not successful patriarchs or women were passive victims paradoxes on family relationships, changing roles, over-independent womenfolk reflect on the AbaGusii cultural identity before 1950s and the transient and evolving postcolonial Gusii hybrid identities. This concurs with Orina's (2014), observation that AbaGusii were a peace-loving community that believed in justice, togetherness, equality and democracy and who were ever keen to celebrate and preserve their unique existence and identity. However, an interpretation of Monyoncho poems revealed that when confronted with a situation in which they had to choose between peace and justice, AbaGusii chose one. They were thus an intrepid people.

One of the methods that the Gusii people employed to enhance their sense of security was how the elderly and the experienced councils of elders (*chitureti*) or *abagambi*, (administrative leaders) handled disputes.

Gumo et al. (2012) averred that clans were responsible for taking care of and protecting their land, sacred sites and their members' welfare. Concurring with Gumo, Omosa (2014) added that rights to land were protected and acknowledged by all in the community through prudent utilisation. Adding to Gumo's and Omosa's ideas on utilisation of land by the Gusii people, Onyambu (2019) noted that to provide for oneself and one's dependents was a basic responsibility among the Gusii people. And land, which was their main means of upkeep, was either acquired through inheritance or capture. The communal system also provided mechanisms for the protection of the weak, poor, widows and orphans. Even strangers had their rights and children and women captured as war bounty were protected and brought up and given rights such that there were sub clans in Gusii with alien origins (Ochieng, 1974). Monyoncho's poetry set in postcolonial Kenya would showcase different social, economic and political scenarios that should be analysed on how they affect the

primordial values and identities and whether the shifts celebrate typical Gusii character.

Primordial identity as a social construct and the Othering factor

Shahabbuddin (2000) discussed the origins of ethnicity whose original meaning referred to therness unlike the current usage. The term ethnicity was derived from the Greek word *ethnos*, and exists in modern French as *ethnie*, with the associated adjective *ethnique*. The adjective appears in modern English as *ethnic*, with a suffix added to give ethnicity. In ancient Greek, *genos* was generally used by Greeks in a restricted kinship sense while *ethnos* was the term for the others. Homer used *ethnos* to describe large, undifferentiated groups of either animals or warriors. Tonkin et al. (1989) traced similar uses of *ethnos* in other Greek classics for example, Aeschylus used *ethnos* to describe the Furies and the Persians; Sophocles used it for wild animals.

Pindar employed the term to describe groups of like people, but again people whose location or conduct put them in some way outside the sphere of Greek social normality, for instance, the husband-killing women of Lemnos. Aristotle applied it for foreign or barbarous nations. The Romans' writing in Greek under the Empire, used the term to describe a province or the provinces in general referring to areas that were not Rome. During the Middle Ages, the Church that dominated literacy in Europe, came up with the term *gentile*, a grouping for religious Otherness. The relevance of biological features in the depiction of the derogatory other in relation to the superior self, gained impetus with the emergence of social Darwinism in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Similarly, Monyoncho's poetry would vindicate the same human nature to Otherise those who do not suit what the Gusii ascribe to.

On his part, Van Evera (2001) argued that the ethnic ties were inherent in humans and there was deep natural connection among people of the same ethnic identity, and this, in turn, produced natural distancing from other groups. Primordialism advanced that the *ethno* was an

ascriptive primordial attribute in humans, and that the emotions of fear, hatred or anger could stem from the groups' differences. These differences appeared commonly in language, territory, race, ethnicity, religion and so on. Those ethnic differences were perceived as ancestral, deep and irreconcilable hence the urge to define and reject the other went back to our remotest human ancestors and indeed beyond them to our animal predecessors. There has been a binding set of beliefs that evoke strong and often negative emotions such as hate, anger, fear, all which could be claimed as culprits in the most violent atrocities. Emotions are primordial, a socially and politically constructed reality, drawn from the historical memories of past injustices and grievances created through teaching, repetition and daily reproduction until they become common sense. These tropes: betrayals, treacheries, threats from the others and survival are embedded in the familiar emotions of anxiety, fear, insecurity and pride, p.1 (Van Evera, 2001).

Monyoncho's poetry offers an opportunity to analyse how the socially and politically constructed realities manifested themselves. How are tropes such as treacheries, anger, hatred, violence, anxieties and pride portrayed in the poems primordially ascribed? Are the abounding examples in Monyoncho's *Emeremo y'Amasamba*, *Eguto*, *Omong'ina Saddam* and so forth clues of some sense of Otherising? Against the construct of the primordial character and the shifting AbaGusii cultural identities which are direct results of colonisation and globalisation given that as the Gusii share a background, culture, land and language? The shifting identities are evidence of the impact of modernity on the existing primordial Gusii and Monyoncho's creativity offers a chance to analyse and offer solutions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research design. Saunders et al. (2015) observed that such a design is instrumental in studying problems that have not been carefully understood and keep on metastasising into new variants.

Exploratory research design is well-suited for cultural identity studies because it allows researchers to gather information and insights about the topic in an open-ended, flexible, and iterative way.

The target population for this study was the popular poetry of Monyoncho with over 500 poems. This large discography covers the period between 1970 and 2013, a period of active production. Specifically, the study focused on the shifting cultural identities portrayed in the popular poetry of Monyoncho, which is popular among the Gusii community. The study targeted the selected recordings of Monyoncho to answer the questions of the study through application of exclusive (elimination of genres not popular poetry) and inclusive criteria, (the creative idiom of the artiste with Gusii cultural values of industry, honesty, hospitality and so forth through purposive sampling). The available poetry with the imprint of Monyoncho's artistry is found in three bands associated with him, namely, Nyamwari, Kegogi Jazz and New Kegogi Jazz band.

The tenets of cultural identity theory (CIT) which emphasised the importance of the cultural context in shaping an individual and a poet's background were employed. It factored the historical, social, and political factors and their influence on the themes, language, and style of poetry. Literary stylistics theory was co-opted to analyse the language and communication styles used by the poet, including the use of metaphors, symbolism, and other literary devices.

FINDINGS DISCUSSIONS

Imperialism versus primordialism

The sources of all the effects eroding the Gusii primordial cultural identity accrue from imperialism and its influence. Monyoncho creatively weaves how colonialism penetrated Africa from a simple act of an ant bear in his poem *Eguto*. There are various versions of the onset of colonisation in the African continent. Monyoncho's employment of an ant bear that is mistaken for a sheep by drunken old men walking

home at dusk represent the coloniser who brings to the fore several symbolic possibilities. The old men on a journey home encounter an ant bear and rope it thinking it is a sheep. They keep it with their flock waiting dawn in a manner colonial values were welcomed by Africans. This marks erosion of ethical values and Africa's degeneration to things that eroded collective social capital. Was colonialism a deserved antidote to a primitive Africa? Who decided that antidote and to what extent has it been useful? Could we say Africa is in a better place due to colonialism? In the poetic narrative several firsts happen contrary to the Gusii cultural identity.

Bagaka bande bare korwa esabari

Some old men coming from a journey

Bakaumera eguto bagakaga neng' ondi

They mistook an ant bear for a sheep

Bakanyebeka engori bagatema gochia inka

They tied it and led it home

Akanyebeka ase ching' ondi akagenda mwaye

korari Kept it with sheep and went to sleep.

First, how does one mistake an ant bear for sheep and at what point of inebriation? Second, how does one rope any animal and take it home and keep it with own flock intending to sell it? This later act demonstrates outright theft for lost goods once recovered in the primordial Gusii were put in safe hands until the owner found them.

Mbwakiete anyore ching' ondi nebinto bosa!

Did he in the morning get his sheep?

Eguto eria ekarema enyomba egasoka

The ant bear dug and escaped

Ekarema enyomba egasoka amo

It dug through and escaped with

Neching' ondi chiaye, ee chigasira ee

His sheep that got lost.

Omonto omanyete n' eguto eyio

The person aware is that ant bear!

Omanyete ese ekairete ching'ondi echio
(*Sotto voce*) He knows where the sheep are.

One's neighbours in the locality were a safe pair of hands. The story smacks of the inception of the capitalistic and self-serving spirit that ironically assails Africa at the advent of colonialism. In literary terms, the foreshadowing introduced in the poem through sotto voice or quick quips unfolds the drama more clearly. The personification of the ant bear as *omonto*, person, indicates abilities of the ant bear to consciously scatter the host's sheep which is a pointer to the plunder visited on African states by imperial demands. The next words dramatically show the digging and damage done by *eguto* and how the neighbours are informed of the incident.

This mother at hearing the child's report that all animals are gone sweeps the stage with an avalanche of rhetorical questions that throw us into a whirl of inspection. At close investigation, she is shocked by the incident of a pile of earth. The discovery that the family sheep (which she calls her own since in a Gusii polygamous marriage arrangement, property ownership was on basis of wife and her household, Ndeda, 2019) are gone and probably through the hole on the wall inspires anger and anxiety. In accordance with traditional sanctions, she screams to alert the neighbourhood to the crisis hence activates collective responsibility.

Inee? Amaroba aya nayaki ang'ana aiga?
What? Is this soil for?

Amaroba n'ayaki aremire nyomba aiga?
What dug all this earth in the house?

'Nki gose kiaremete nyomba aiga?

What did this inside the house?

Nao ching' ondi chiane chiasokerete?

Did my sheep get out the hole?

Uiiiiuuuuuu. Motagocha morore

Alas! Alas! Come and be witness!

Inki eke? Bakari uuuuu!

What is this? Please, come, alas!

The character of divisionism, conflict, self-isolation and war was an anti Gusii cultural identity and directly opposed to the primordial spirit of brotherhood and team work. The new status and pride are inhibitors to capital goods and Gusii *nsoni* as portrayed in this song, *Tindeka Oyomino*. The persona makes a general admission that the world inhabited by humans showcases all sorts of challenges that bring one sadness, laughter and at times embarrassments. Monyoncho vouches for unity during times of tragedy especially bereavement. The separatist spirit is not primordial and benefits nobody.

The person of concern is determined to run away from collective communal responsibility by inventing a sudden journey. Should someone go visiting relatives when the same are required to come and comfort him and family? Mourning was a communal collective responsibility dictated by kinship ties and involved the mourning group usually relatives united by common givens like land, language and locality.

Omonkwana nigo akoimoka orosia

The gentleman has a sudden journey

Esabari gochia gokwania abairi

To greet relatives

Erio tamo tindeka

To avoid burying the one dead

Ekeri akoirana bwairire

When he comes back at night

Nigo atindete Nario

He is quite drunk then.

The man conscientiously is aware of his acts of commission and omission breaks the news of the on-going burial to his host. His drinks to fortify himself for the embarrassing moves he executes later. The narrator in his omniscient perspective wraps it out that whatever you do your neighbour is what should be done you. Maybe this has

undertones of the unwritten golden rule in various civilisations, including Christian teachings. This mantra was always a hallmark of good character and *chinsoni* among Gusii society. While you could miss a party, a rite such as burial, wedding and circumcision demanded *egeiseri*, a hand; due to the fact that tomorrow, it could be your turn. This kept everybody in check and was a self-driven asset that required no reminder.

The poem, *Emeremo y' Amasamba* (Tea Estate Work) though simply worded depicts the impact of colonialism on socio-cultural and economic dynamics of an African society. Set in a postcolonial society the colonial evils of racism, repression, nepotism and exploitation have not been laid to rest. Yet in the independent Kenya, discrimination, nepotism and corruption are underscored in the last two lines. Those close to the independent government powerful forces feel entitlement to the throne and award their cronies, henchmen and relatives with positions. When you interrogate historical facts of 1973, 9 years into Kenya's independence, most senior management positions in the country, more so in tea estates, had been vacated by whites who were replaced by favoured Africans. In these power dynamics there are obvious evolving and transient identities reigning on created vacuums.

Minto mwensi tegerera:

All my kinsmen listen

Monyoncho inche nkobatebia

What I Monyoncho has to say.

Tarehe ishirini na nne:

On the date of twenty fourth

Okutoba sabini na tatu

On the month of October 1973

Christopher Monyoncho bw'Araka:

Christopher Monyoncho son of Araka

Nkamachia goiterwa inse:

Was nearly killed for no reason.

Banto baito ba Nyanza:

people from Nyanza

Goika moinyore:

You should remember this

Banto baito ba Nyanza

All our people from Nyanza

Goika moinyore

You should remember this

Emeremo ya Masamba

All the jobs in the farms

Rift Valley yabeire eyabo yoka

In the Rift Valley are occupied by them.

The Gusii voice leaps into play with *minto tegerera*, my kinsmen listen. This introduces the AbaGusii and Monyoncho as part of the nation building efforts in the new Kenya. The voice revolutionises into one of the Nyanza communities of Luo, Kuria and AbaGusii, hence, a regional voice; seemingly the ones whom the discriminative forces had locked from their sphere of influence, the Rift Valley national largesse fronted by largely multinational tea planting firms like Williamson Fine Tea and James Finley (Muma, 2014). The independence promises by the leadership to eradicate poverty, disease and illiteracy as soon as possible as is a mirage. This justifies Berman's (1998) argument that colonialism in Africa did not reproduce the full range of European institutions and culture for the good of common citizenry. It instead produced a bureaucracy geared at chaining the African psyche and production to the European and American leadership and financial institutions. This is the permanent and enervating chain and bondage to which Africa unfortunately pays homage of tagging along some miserable and disillusioned citizens. Perhaps reassessment and severing links from this hegemony in order to deliver Africa from the imperial chains of bondage could be the way out.

The next poem from the literary stylistics involves workings of power dynamics and shifts in a transient and evolving manner. The poem *Omong'ina Saddam*, Lady Saddam (a reference to the former Iraq strongman) the name of the main character in this poem is paradoxically grounded on masculine tendencies. Instead, Saddam is a lady whose actions seem to get in the way of her village and because of that she is lynched. Her selfish actions are summarised by the rider, *akabeka monwa chionsi*, she consumed whole amount from a loan secured using the family land as collateral. This selfish spirit was unknown in the old Gusii set up and smacks of an emerging ideology that glorifies money. A new god that overrides the communal good was indeed born. The poem starts with a chorus that summarises Saddam's character and fate.

Chorus: *Abana ba Kegogi rero nigo togotera*
Kegogi's children, today we are singing

Omong'ina Saddam korwa nsemo ya Bobasi

A woman named Saddam from Bobasi

Akaeroka ekerage nere erwoti ya Mosora

She called herself great, the king of Mosora

Akanya gochanda abanto agakaga tagokwa

She messed people believing herself immortal

Solo: *Akaimokia amaremo agasabera*
chironi. She took loans using others land

Akanyora chibesa agachakera ebiasara

She got money and began businesses

The chorus similarly foreshadows how arrogance and terrorist like activities on her people, using other alien powers and antagonising everybody else cause Saddam's violent death. In a patriarchy, an enterprising female soul that secures loans using family land to get money and establish businesses should be lauded. Her symbolisation of emancipation instead elicits all sorts of opposition, condemnation and eventually death. This would be an ordinary woman in ordinary circumstances making economic strides in a local village and this obviously attracts all

forms of opposition and nicknames from the likely uncreative and lazy members of society. The chorus affirms and repeats the sad message of Saddam's cruel death. Were her actions justified in place of manipulative capitalistic business competition? A woman's status as the persona's chauvinistic voice describes this starring woman awakens the debate of gender wars among the Gusii (Silberschmidt, 1999).

The next section below is presented as a speech in order to clarify some aspects presented in song above. It offers graphic details of Saddam's conduct: *konya obeire omotindi*, she was too aggressive. However, enterprising and well-meaning Saddam could have been the voice of disapproval and condemnation of her actions overrides her enterprise. It also remonstrates on the fact that she grabbed everything for herself ignoring other family members. It voices concern on the damage done to the marginalised lot because of her selfishness and smacks of exploitation and highhandedness exhibited by her progressive growth. The next lines voice the oppression meted at those who were questioning Saddam's exploitative moves followed by a voice of irritation by the community, at the harassment most of them are subjected to.

It can be pointed out that the secretive nature of Saddam's actions helps fuel suspicion against her. The voice of corruption crops up when Saddam's actions involve the compromising of all the police to remain voiceless. Her aggression and oppression subjected to the community arouse a voice of provocation and accumulated anger. It is this anger and hostility that bursts out later in a deadly revenge. The voice of God's law and love for all resonates in with a characteristic AbaGusii tenet of peaceful living and cordial neighbourliness. Literary, there is a lot of correlation between circumstances that define *Omong'ina Saddam* and the new crop of Kenyan politician in terms of selfishness, insatiable appetite for land, money and abuse of power when these leaders turn instruments of justice to their favour. The public opinion lynch on these politicians is exhibited by the angry protest of ejection during national polls where the majority

face the wrath of the electorate by failing re-election. Further, the persona advises on interpersonal coexistence as a form of survival amidst hostility. Hence, the death of Saddam, shocking as Monyoncho and Kegogi band reveal was a matter of time and probably inspired by mob psychology.

Omong'ina oyio konya obeire omotindi abuo This woman was very arrogant

Ekeru omogaka asira omochi

When the husband died

Omongina takoimokia amaremo onsi

This woman used the whole land

Abwatere eroni

To secure loans

Ere akabeka monwa chionsi

She consumed whole amount, alone

Akamanya kobwata abasigari boni pii She compromised all the police

Akabakora nabuo abanto bamorendete She made them part of her security

Onde ogochia koboria omobwata

Whoever questioned was arrested

Omoruta ime

And locked in the cells

Abanto kobacha korosa na mang'ana aye

People really got tired with her

Abanto bakarwara ekenyoro

Everyone got sick of her

Tema oebereirie abanto moigwane

Live peacefully with people.

Thus, Saddam assumes powers of a despot, no wonder she gains the nickname of the King of Mosora, in mockery and fear of her. She is a victim of her own actions in her iconoclastic relating. Her refusal to support her family

members is not because of their inability to be enterprising but a personal choice. Her actions somehow desecrate the AbaGusii primordial identity associated with collective and communal support. By also calling her Saddam, she assumes an alien entity, unknown by her Gusii name with alien values that do not fit into the AbaGusii cultural identity.

The most flexible and adaptable poem is *Keemba*, and from all angles it fits the political unrest common in Africa. The persona who presents himself as Monyoncho reveals in this poem that he had invited guests who were his band men to his Kegogi home, namely, Sitora, Otworu and Bokaya. This is a list of Gusii pioneer Benga musicians. AbaGusii had a tendency of visiting relatives and friends which was accomplished with a good cheer of drinking, eating, dancing to *chingero* and exchange of banter. This is expressed in the sayings: *ekiomogoko nomwana ogatoire*, a stingy person opens his hand when visitors come to see a new born or *omogeni nyabiagoro*, a visitor opens the host's hands, meaning a host's generosity is only experienced during a visiting occasion. Culturally, visitation invoked advance thorough cleaning, trimming of hedges, slashing of grass, house plastering, readying of certain types of foods, water and firewood. Monyoncho's self-reference was to avoid confrontation (it is rumoured the authorities arrested him over this poem) with the characters who espouse Keemba kind of behaviour. He adapts the observer's voice in narrating Keemba's actions.

Through the poem he decries the embarrassment occasioned by one Keemba who was part of the team preparing lunch for his guests. In the pretext of helping his wife Jane, she stole the delicious parts of the chicken being cooked and vanished causing unimaginable embarrassment.

Ngachika abageni bane bachiche

I invited my guests to come

Gonkwania aria bwone Kegogi

To come greet me at my Kegogi home

Nigo barenge John Sitora, Isaac Otwor

They were John Sitora, Isaac Otwor

Sammy Bokaya nainch Monyoncho naonde

Sammy Bokaya and myself Monyoncho.

Obosoku obonene rituko erio

A lot of embarrassment on that day

Keemba kwang' ete ekero abageni bachete

Keemba caused when the guests visited

Omorugi one Jane akagenda rooche

My wife Jane went to the river

Koreta amache arugere abageni

To fetch water to cook for guests

Baito baragere ranchi

So that our guests have their lunch

Through the literary stylistic analysis, the stealing done by Keemba is described as *okanyesorora*, selected special chicken pieces before it would cook. The mode of carrying these food items is ignominious, by use of a head scarf whose colour is pronouncedly, *machani kabichi*, *kale* vegetables green colour, before running away. For emphasis of her crime, the persona bemoans the fact that Keemba's theft was directed at the best chicken parts reserved for honourable guests. There is a cultural significance attached to these parts that are only consumed by men, in a patriarchal pecking order and not women or children.

Keemba akagenda echikoni

Keemba went to the kitchen

Ochi koigereria engoko eyie bwango

To fan the fire for the chicken cook fast

Abageni bane baragere

So that my guests eat

Okanyeserora okaboa ekerebi

You selected pieces and wrapped in a shawl

Kwabwate machani kabichi

The colour of green cabbage/kale

Keemba ogatama okagenda

Then Keemba you sneaked away.

Ogachora chinyama chiria

You picked the pieces of meat that

Abageni baanchete

Are most loved by guests

Okaira omotwe, okaira omogongo

You took the head and the back

Amo nechimbamba ogasang' ania emondo

The breast and wings plus the gizzard

Keemba ogatama okagenda

Keemba you ran away with them.

The violation of this special cultural mark by Keemba's conduct is unforgivable, regrettable and cause of embarrassment to the host. She ceases to fit into the cultural continuum and becomes an enemy of good intentions and posterity's celebration. Interestingly, this hybrid tensions are more pronounced in the contemporary Gusii and the symbolic political front. The repeat of her running away pronounces the persona's embarrassment and helplessness that makes him plead with the Gusii music maestros to spare singing about this incident. To make her horrific crime look lighter and distant the persona disowns her, *nomosubati osogete abwo seito*, she is a woman merely married in our village. Perhaps no blood relation could have brought such an embarrassment! He owns up that he had been suspecting Keemba without sufficient proof until now.

Omusubati oyio nomosubati

This is a lady merely

Osogete abwo seito abwo

Married around my home

Omusubati oyio nabo nkomoraga

This woman I've been suspecting that

Buna kaa naansoki ase abageni bane

She'd once embarrass me before guests

Nabo are omoibi, omoibi bweching'eni amo

She steals vegetables and also

N'echinyama chianga tari koiba

Meat meals but doesn't steal clothes

Nebiriero bioka akoiba

She only steals meal accompaniments

There is creative suspense as the guests are waiting for lunch (a typical pointer at citizens' waiting for development) whose special parts are already stolen, hence an element of dramatic irony. At the end the embarrassing lunch is lots of soup that is taken as if it was tea. The burst of mocking laughter and pleading with the artistes to ignore this incident and readiness to make amends, through the slaughter of the second chicken signify the generosity of the host and exoneration from the blame and embarrassment.

Bono Sitora bakaganya endagera

Sitora and team waited for food

Eche emesa bakarosa

To be served at the table in vain

Yabo Otworì barenge abwo goika

The likes of Otworì equally waited

Banchaete, tata imontera

You'd despise me; but don't sing

Omosori bwoka otogete

We only had chicken soup

Oichire esuguri igoro

That was full in a sufuria

Noro orententwe emesa

Brought over the table

Tokanywa buna echae

We took it as if it was some tea

Hehehehee

Hehehehee

The persona seems to engage the audience, society and his guests throughout the poem. He identifies and directs some of his embarrassing moments at them, appealing for their sympathy, for example, Keemba is not a blood relation but one of those colourless and ubiquitous village. Keemba's behaviour mars the centrality of kinship spirit and spirit of common good. It questions her intentions in a classic example that parallels the political systems existing in African space. Most politicians normally warm the hearts of the citizens by being closer to them, a sign of accessibility, generosity and flexibility until they get the lofty representative seat through a competitive elective process. This gets them into the privileged position of being near the national cake and accompanying largesse. Like Keemba by being around and about, accessible and flexible to go for errands, *nao akorabuuta ase abwo nonya konya gotomwatomwa*, they are privileged with the people's trust. That is when their true colours come out. The Moses of yesterday is today's tyrant and thief of a people's social support systems through corrupt means. They are the reasons Africa remains backward and underdeveloped (Berman, 1998). Nyagemi (2019) points at the shamelessness with which elected *Mpigs*, members of parliament have gluttonously robbed the exchequer as the second highest remunerated in the world with an economy ranked as 163 in the world in the 2016 ranking. This explains why a countries such as India, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand to name a few, once at par with Kenya in terms of economic progress have made tremendous leaps towards economic development and attained so-called developed world status while Kenya remains a den of avaricious and ruthless political operatives.

To authorise Keemba is one way of shifting blame. The persona at times resonates with regrets and remorse for not preventing what had been suspected earlier; a voice of concern over the image Keemba's actions leave in the minds of the venerable guests and that of self-praise and in the face of embarrassment, perhaps it is one way through pain of self-discovery. Keemba's destructive and parasitic behaviour does not fit the golden AbaGusii cultural identity that advocated for the common societal good above selfish tendencies. The story signifies existing hybrid dichotomies between those in leadership positions and the electorate where one needs the other and the five-year elections circle showcases the scorecard the voters painfully dish out. In most cases the electorate are short-changed and have their votes bought, misrepresented and perpetually armed with the hope things would change for the better.

Funds for several projects are diverted hence denying the locals the necessary services. Some of these monies are donations from friends abroad. Some are development loans extended to the country. The theft or misappropriation spikes the cost of living beyond the citizenry's means due to inflation, lack of vital services, unemployment and wins a negative image for the government. The thieves shamelessly flaunt their ill-gotten wealth and seek for political positions which they corruptly buy. This hybrid identity of Africa where the black saviour or Moses is the thief of yesterday and elevated as he is likely to be through buying and rigging votes, he will continue with his stealing spree. How can a hyena be in charge of goats? Berman (1998) called it pervasive patron-client relations and a complex ethnic dialectic of assimilation, fragmentation and competition has persisted in post-colonial societies. These fraudulent relationships define materialistic and opportunistic character of African politics and drive a fragmented nationhood, the civil society and liberal democracy, undermining programmes of socioeconomic and political reform. The exploration of Monyoncho's popular poetry vindicates us and makes us discover the pitfalls we should avoid in order to liberate ourselves and

a lucid cultural identity. A self-discovery journey is vital for our future development and a focused vision as a people

CONCLUSION.

Christopher Monyoncho's popular poetry constructs the primordial identity as the primary cultural identity among the Gusii people. His popular poetry foregrounds the cultures as transiting from one cultural space to another as a result of evolving modernity. It canvasses hybrid cultural identities as retaining high sense of primordialism at the same time reflecting modernity. In conclusion, his poetry has successfully demonstrated that the Gusii culture is a hybrid identity which on one hand retains a very strong primordial identity irrespective of the onslaught of modernity which demonstrates sufficient change and evolution. A study of which identity between primordial, colonisation, hybridity and globalisation has more impact on societal conduct is recommended. There is a need for continued efforts towards the preservation and promotion of Gusii cultural heritage through the education of the younger generation on the significance of cultural practices, values, and beliefs.

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