



Applied Theatre as A Social and Economic agency In Deconstructing Gender Myths

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Abstract

Patriarchal structures (social, political, and economic) in the community are entrenched and sustained by, among other things, the oral literature. Oral literature, like a mirror, reflects both the values that the community espouses as well as the hegemonic ideology of the time. In patriarchal communities, myths and other forms of narratives seek to establish and maintain hegemonic masculinity and sustain economic dominance of male over female. To change this state of affairs artists, through their works, seek for advocacy-oriented performance to create and initiate agency for social and economic change. Through applied theatre, the arts endeavour to give a reflective and deconstructive view of what is otherwise seen as normal. This paper aims to demonstrate how some of the very well-known Kenyan oral narrative myths and legends were used to present a counter narrative, challenging the gender (social and economic) hierarchies and dimensions in different communities through applied theatre. It will reflect on three common narratives in Kenya namely: the Lwanda Magere story from Luo culture, the Wangu wa Makeri legend from the Kikuyu community and a Maasai myth on women and cattle ownership, in so far as they portray the place of a woman in social and economic activities in those communities. The Lwanda Magere narrative is a mythical legend which by nature falls outside the memorable historical time but falls within a genre that allows the narrator to aesthetically embellish it and control its vision. Wangu wa Makeri is a historical legend which, however, has been embedded with mythical elements to make it appear sacred in the eyes of the Kikuyu

community. While the Maasai myth of Why Women Do Not Own Cattle share attributes of both aetiological (why stories) elements and myth.

Key words: activism, applied theatre, economy, feminism, gender, myths, oral literature

1.0 Introduction

The study focuses on the activities of the People's Poplar Theatre (PPT) group, who together with the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD), the Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA) and in conjunction with other like-minded gender-based organizations were involved in a campaign for gender awareness. The activities were organized around the National Civic Education Programme (NCEP) that ran between 2000 and 2002. As part of the awareness project geared towards constitution reforms, the gender consortium brought together organizations focused on ensuring that gender equity was enshrined in the Constitution. Though the overall programme with a slogan '*making an informed choice*' was geared towards citizens making meaningful contribution from a knowledgeable position, the gender consortium, as a subset of the program, sought to ensure that all aspects of the Constitution were gender inclusive. The Paper examines narratives performed during those civic education activities by the People's Popular Theatre (PPT) while also reflecting on their role within traditional setting.

The organizations in gender movements, who worked alongside the People's Popular Theatre (PPT) group, sought to correct historical, social, economic, and cultural injustices by using popular theatre as a tool to ignite debate on gender issues in Kenya. The injustices of social and economic gender inequalities, brought about by the patriarchal systems within many Kenyan communities, have been to a certain extent perpetuated through oral narratives. The Paper echoes Harold Laswell's (1936) title: *Politics Is Who Gets What, When and How*, arguing that those with political powers in a patriarchal society allocate resources to the male gender to the detriment to the female gender. Women, as victims of patriarchy, needed a form of agency to liberate themselves alongside the struggle for the second liberation in Kenya. Freire (1970) argues that popular education is aimed at empowering traditionally excluded, marginalized, or subordinated sectors of society. With political intention of collective social change towards a more equitable and democratic society, through raised awareness and collaborative actions and popular education practices the learner

lived experiences in both humanizing and oppressive dimensions women will finally liberate themselves from oppressive patriarchal practices.

The People's Popular Theatre (PPT) utilized theatre to deal with a societal injustice that had been ingrained in the community through the socialization process. The appropriateness of theatre as a tool for social change in the context of human rights is central to our discussion. As Nicholson, referencing Richard Wilson, has suggested that theatre offers the potential to turn the idealistic intentions of an international human rights framework to social action by recognising the cultural contradictions inherent in particular local contexts. Cultures are continually reformulated through creative practice, leading to optimistic encounters between the specificity of local cultures and normative vocabulary of human rights. Drama has the potential to trouble absolutes, and, at best, the aesthetics of production can encourage a reflexivity and a sharing of experience that can contribute to the process of unfixing habitual patterns of thought and behaviour (148).

Theatre offers a creative critique of the society by casting a reflective mirror upon it. It allows the community to see the performances anew and provokes a self-reflection on basis characters so like them. Dobie (2011) argues that,

The belief that the social organisation has denied equal treatment to all its segments, and that literature is a means of revealing and resisting that social order....art and life are fused entities, making the duty of the critique to work against stereotyping in literature, media, and public awareness, to raise the consciousness of those who are oppressed and to bring about radical changes in the power balance between the oppressors and the oppressed. (p. 117)

The Paper engages in a feminist deconstruction which criticizes the purity of gender as hierarchy of gender stratification. Eagleton (2011) argues that in a patriarchal society, men as the owners of the economic base ensure that the literature of the community supports their very continued role as the controllers of the economic resources. She asserts that “... for male dominated society, man is the founding principle and the excluded opposite. This, as long as such a distinction tightly held in place the whole system can function effectively.”

The Paper engages in revisionist approach in countering the normative history that defines economic ownership in the communities. Using narratives that define social and economic structure in some Kenyan communities, it seeks

to illustrate how the very same narrative may carry a counter argument. McPherson (2003) notes that,

History is a continuing dialogue between the present and the past. Interpretations of the past are subject to change in response to new evidence. New questions asked of the evidence, new perspective gained by the passage of time. There is no single eternal or immutable 'truth' about the past events and their meaning. The unending quest of historians for understanding the past i.e., revisionism is what makes history vital and meaningful.

2.0 The Narratives and Traditional Context

Each of the three narratives, *Lwanda Magere*, *Wangu wa Makeri*, and *Why Women Do Not Own Cattle*, partly account for the patriarchal structures within the Luo, Kikuyu and Maasai communities, respectively. As Roland Barthes argues "...Myth has in fact a double function; it points out and it notifies, and it makes us understand something and it imposes on us" (117). Oral literature, as the main tool of socialization, drills and brainwashes the young into accepting the social, economic, and political status as given, unchangeable and ordained. For those growing up in the community, once they hear the story, it becomes a confirmation and reinforcement of what they have seen. In Marxism terms those who control the economic base manipulate all other elements of the super structure to sustain and maintain the status quo.

The *Lwanda Magere* narrative, is named after the hero who was sent by the gods to save the Luo community from the rampant raids of the Kalenjin (referred to as Lang'o in the narrative). With his arrival, as a warrior whose body cannot be pierced by a spear, (because his name translated literally means built of stone), the Kalenjin's lost the upper hand in the war. They were defeated many times by the Luo and they had to resort to offering Lwanda Magere a wife who eventually discovered the secret of the great warrior's weakness: that if you wanted to kill him, you had to strike his shadow. Thus, through the Lang'o queen, the Kalenjins managed to defeat the Luos. The story, like the biblical Samson story, warns men to be wary of women because women have always been a source of their downfall. This story is used to deny women a chance to participate in important decision-making processes in social, political, and economic matters. They are not elected in the Council of Elders or advisers. The general community narrative goes that if a leader is surrounded by women, it will be detrimental to the progress

of that community. The same applies to when a woman is a leader, that such leadership will bring calamity to the communities.

In the two narratives, Lwanda Magere and Samson and Delilah, the loss of one community is a win for another community. The communities that chose to use women as frontline soldiers to gather intelligence reports, won. The Philistines, through Delilah, brought down the great warrior Samson. The Kalenjin, through Nyalang'o, brought down the Luo. Again, in each of the defeated community, there was a legendary warrior with supernatural powers. A warrior, who by conventional means could not be defeated, yet despite the great strengths of the great warriors, they were brought down by a woman. The women did not use brutal force to fight their enemies. The men with supernatural powers were brought down by ordinary intelligent women. The women did not need supernatural powers to defeat the men.

The Biblical narrative and the Luo legend promote the traditionally held view that women are sacrificial lambs. In many Kenyan narratives, when the community faces great danger, it is quite common to sacrifice a woman, as a symbol of purity, to save the community. In this case, women are not viewed as brave warriors, but as humble symbol of purity that can appease the Gods. They are also given to the victorious communities or, in the event of peace negotiation when any member of the community is killed outside the battle front. This role carries ambiguity in interpretation. Women are portrayed not as the movers of action or decision makers. They only come into action not out of their own volition but at the behest of the community. They are then thrown out to be at the mercy of the rival community. They are characters that can be dispensed with. This is in contrast to the positive image of women as cementers of peace or being symbols of peace since they restore love and harmony when there is war. It is on this basis that many Kenyan communities are not allowed to kill women during war. They would harm any male members but spare all the female members of the enemy community. This tradition accounts for forced cross cultural marriages and naming. One would find among the Kikuyus someone named Maathai or Nyokabi meaning they are of Maasai origin. So once warriors conquered a community, they would kill the male members since they are a potential threat. They would spare women and leave the aged ones behind with young girls. The young girls would be '*trophies*' for the warriors but they would not be swallowed by the community without a reminder of where they came from. There was humanism in all by ensuring the whole community is not annihilated.

The second story is from the Maasai community explaining *Why Women do not Own Cattle*. The women are said to have gone to look after cattle, and while at it, they slaughtered a cow for meat. Treasured in the cow is the kidney which is eaten even before an animal is fully skinned. As it was the tradition, women looked after the cattle with their children. On this day, while herding the cattle and skinning a cow, only the children were taking turns to bring back the cattle any time they strayed. However, when they were just about to take out the kidney, none of the mothers would allow their children to bring back the straying cattle. They all surrounded the cow for the kidney. When the eating of meat was over, the cattle had strayed so far and disappeared in the wilderness. The narrative concludes by saying that all the zebras you see in the wilderness were women's donkeys, all the antelopes were women's goats, and all the buffaloes were the women's cows and that is why women do not own any cattle.

The Maasai are a pastoralist community whose social and economic survival relies on cattle. Their whole definition of what counts as wealth and value is interpreted in terms of cattle. The number of cattle one owns determines the political and economic influence in the Maasai community. It also determines how large your family can be. The Maasai practise polygamy and ones' ability to marry is determined by the ability to pay bride price. Those who own a big herd of cattle have big families. The bigger the family, as warrior community, the more security it enjoys. Given the central importance of cattle, the patriarchal system has placed it within the purview of men. The narrative of *Why Women do not Own Cattle* is a classic example of how patriarchy has manipulated the literature of the community to achieve male economic control. As demonstrated by deconstructionists, “... out of this play of signifiers, certain meanings are elevated by social ideologies to a privileged position or made the centre around which other meanings are forced to turn.”

From our field research in Maasai community, they value cattle highly. The herds boy must report to the ‘man of the homestead’ every morning and every evening on the status of the cattle. Once a man wakes up, he sits at the entrance of his homestead where he is served and receives reports. Upon finishing this exercise, he can go and meet fellow elders. In the evening when all the cattle have been taken back into the kraal, he again sits in the same sport to receive reports while enjoying his evening meal. These structures define who the worker is and who the boss is. The man's work is seen as supervisory. He makes decisions as to which cattle should be sold, slaughtered, exchanged, or given out. However, the daily care of these animals is left to the woman.

When a newly married wife comes into a home, she is assigned (not given) the animal that would be under her watch. A polygamous Maasai man with five wives will divide all his cattle among them. The role of his wives would be to take good care of the cattle under their watch. They would not physically go to the grazing field, work left to young men, but ensure the Kraal, and heifers are taken care of. When the cattle come back from the field, the wives go out to confirm that all cattle under their care are safe and then duly report to the man of the compound. However, when a man decides to sell any of the cattle, regardless of how many years the woman has taken care of them, he has the sole prerogative to make the decision. He has a basis in the narrative *Why Women do not Own Cattle*. Because women lost all their cattle into the wilderness, they do not have any say on the domesticated ones whose true owners are men. The dominant narrative is that women were careless to have lost their cattle and cannot be trusted anymore with the same responsibility. This is so even though they are the ones to ensure the daily wellbeing of the said animals. Furthermore, even if a woman was to acquire cattle through her own efforts, she would only be a nominal owner, but the substantive owner remains the man. Outside the modern influence, Maasai land is communally owned. Even up to now, a substantial amount of land is communally owned. It is only the cattle that is said to be individually owned. Thus, this leaves women without any major resource under their control.

The Kikuyu myth of creation is centred on Gikuyu and Mumbi and their nine daughters. The Kikuyu tribes are named after their nine daughters. The union that created tribes was defined around women while the men remained anonymous. The myth only explains that Gikuyu and Mumbi found nine men to marry their daughters and the daughters became founders of the Kikuyu clans. This myth marks out the Gikuyu community as a matriarchal society with women being the heads of the clans. Little is said of this authority bestowed on women in subsequent narratives but the meaning of the name Mumbi - the creator or moulder - seems to suggest that human life is ascribed to women -the creators. They are menders of the family and the clan. In the name Mumbi lay the creativeness. She is Mumbi, who out of nothing, creates life. The major story that follows the myth, is *Wangu Wa Makeri*, a historical legend.

In the story of *Wangu wa Makeri*, a female ruler and the main character in the story, she is portrayed as a ruthless leader. It is said during her reign, women determined the economic activities that were carried by the community and which member of the community would exercise the different duties. *Wangu wa Makeri*, the story says, terrorized men by sitting on their backs and eating food from their

backs. She was the one who allocated duties to men and it is alleged gave all the hard work to men while women had very little to do. To deal with her, men conspired and made all the women pregnant and during this moment of weakness, they overthrew them and took over the leadership. The story would then conclude by saying, “*Since then, the Kikuyu community has lived happily thereafter*”. The story implies that there is an underlying danger in entrusting power with women and they use this as an excuse to exclude women from leadership position. Equally, the story is used as a scare and as an anti-women campaign tool, always reminding people to never go back to “*the tough times under another Wangu Wa Makeri*” and that good leadership is only provided by men.

3.0 The Deconstructive Nature of Oral Performances

Nicholson (2014) provides an interesting perspective on the deconstructive nature of drama/theatre by arguing that,

Applied drama/drama is concerned with how narratives are constructed and how they might be deconstructed or challenged. Drama as narrative is good place to explore selfhood, culture, and community and that many practitioners in applied drama have a particular commitment to ensure that dominant social narratives are disrupted. Thus, drama provides a powerful opportunity to ask questions about whose stories have been customarily told, whose have been accepted as truth, and to redress the balance by telling alternative stories or stories from different perspectives. It is this understanding that narratives can be changed that lies at the heart of practice in applied drama.

The oral performances are open to deconstruction because of their very nature. Eagleton, citing Derrida, points out that,

There is a sense in which we can never quite close our fists over meaning which arises from the fact that language is a temporal process.... The meaning is always somehow suspended something deferred or still to come; one signifier relays meaning to another and that to another, earlier meanings are modified by later ones.... (p. 128)

One defining element of oral performance is verbal variability. The reliance on oral text and the ability of the narrator to remember the exact oral text in every

performance is not guaranteed. Further, since there is no original text for reference to show how far one has veered off, makes the variability acceptable. Each performance comes with different wording and phrasing. The story relies on the memory of the narrator to be brought to life. Human beings' memory can be very selective, and the narrator ends up selecting only those parts that excite them. The verbal variability gives the performers the freedom of choosing the words and phrases that suit their purpose in every performance. They retain the basic structure of the narrative but infuse the idiosyncratic elements that define them as performers.

The second attribute of the oral performance is that it is directly dependent on the performer. The text relies on the performer to be available. Without the performer, there is no text. It defies Barthes' (1968) assertion of '*death of the author*' as it applies to no written text. Barthes claims that once writers put down their texts, they are no longer needed, the text acquires autonomy, and thus they (authors) die because the text acquires its own life and is open to different interpretation by readers, without reference to the author. In oral narration, one cannot separate the text from the performer, they are ever intertwined. Each performer produces a text as an event, defined by the setting in which it is performed and with no guarantee of reproduction. Unlike the novelists, the performers can change the text to suit the different audiences depending on the circumstances. They can play to the whims of the audiences or propagate new ideas. The text, to a large extent is at the mercy of the performer. The performer is the text and the text - the performer. They are Siamese twins joined at the hip and wherever one goes, the other one follows. This gives the oral narrator a greater role in the control of messaging under different conditions. Perhaps Okot P'Bitek (1968) recognized this when he said the artist is the ruler because of his or her power and ability to control events during a performance.

The oral performances as events carry another attribute of having both the performer and the audience in the same space. It is a live event that is witnessed as it happens. It lives in the now, in the ever-present tense. This means that the performers interact directly with their audiences and thereby receive feedback immediately. The feedback can determine the direction of the performance. These reactions can be both positive and negative. The performer and the audience feed on each other. The audience cheers and applauds all that they like and jeer and boo what they disagree with. They can, therefore, push the narrator to have certain biases in the narration going by the general mood and response by the audience.

The narrators, in different contexts and settings, will anchor their narratives relative to the kind of audience they are performing to.

Messages mean different things to people relative to their social and cultural upbringing. Therefore, narrators create, reinforce, or portray characters in conformity with the goals of a narration which sometimes are not individual but communal. Nicholson (2014) asserts,

All stories are read and created through the lens of social and cultural experience, and this means that narratives are inevitable interpreted in many different ways. Recognising that stories have multiple interpretations involves identifying the limits of one's own horizons, and an interest in seeing alternative perspectives. However, alongside the official community narrative, there lies a parallel narrative that challenges it depending on the lenses through which ones views the narrative (p. 65)

The Paper engages with the process of deconstructing communal myths and legends from a feminist revisionist perspective. The reflections emanate from data collected from civic education performances by the People's Popular Theatre (PPT) and personal participation in Civic Education in Kenya through local theatre groups.

4.0 Performing Oral Narratives in Civic Education

The National Civic Education Program (NCEP) Project, organized around the Gender Consortium, had individual organizations, each one of which was running the civic education program with unique methodologies of delivery. In addition to other tools used, the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD) employed the Participatory Educational Theatre (PET) methodology for the delivery of their civic education messages. Working in different locations in the then Nairobi Province (renamed Nairobi County under the new Constitution) and mainly focusing on the low income and informal sectors, they had three community mobilizers for different regions. Each of the community mobilizers worked with different women groups in their respective areas to organize a variety of civic education activities. Occasionally, the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development would organize a leaders' meeting with women organizations to chart out the way forward for women movements and the constitutional review process. During all these sessions, the People's Popular Theatre would work together with community mobilizers and the Collaborative

Centre for Gender and Development to identify specific issues associated with the particular area, map out themes and come up with skits for performance (mainly oral narratives) for performance. The performances would start with the People's Popular Theatre explaining the format of the meeting, setting the rules for the participants. This would then be followed by the performances which would be stopped at crucial points to facilitate discussion. Nicholson notes,

In places where human rights are violated, forms of popular theatre that bring together information and entertainment are seen as effective ways of reaching large audiences, particularly where performances are accompanied by discussion or other forms of community participation. (p. 131)

The project was meant to create an enabling and provocative atmosphere that would allow for discussion among participants through participatory theatre. Fischer-lichte (2008) defines participatory performance as “a form where the audience is able to affect material change in the work in a way that goes beyond the inherent interactivity in all live performances”. And as White (2013) intones,

this form of performance (participatory) offers a level of agency through the opportunity to creatively contribute the work, meaning that the experience of making choices, whether they lead to directly desired outcome or not, or having choices taken away, makes one part of the aesthetic participation. (p. 64)

The role of theatre is to “make social structures, power relations, and individual habitus visible, and at the same time provide tools to facilitate change” (Österlind 2008: 71). Snyder-Young (2013) views applied theatre as,

referring to a wide range of practices in which participatory dramatic activities and/or theatre performances are used for a broad set of purposes, including education, community building, rehabilitation, conflict resolution, and advocacy... for its focus on collaborative, artistic intervention. Theatre is live, performative, collaborative storytelling. It requires that participants work together to find aesthetic solutions to creative problems emerging in the production process.

Applied theatre orients this process towards a particular goal or set of goals. It operates as dialogue – an artist or team of artists with expertise in theatre-making collaborate with participants and/or audiences with expertise in their own experiences, lives, and concerns to create theatrical events. (p. 4)

This Paper highlights the peak moments during performance and the audience reactions to the narrative. After the performance of the *Lwanda Magere* narrative, the audience were always asked what they thought would be the most appropriate title to the narrative. The reactions varied depending on who was watching. At the women fora where they were to present views to the Constitutions Review Commission, the attention of the participants was focused on the need to consult women on all matters of society. The story was seen to be strongly linked to the Constitution review agenda and the need to engage women in the process and ensure that the Constitution reflected a diverse cultural base but was gender inclusive for it to be successful. The participants noted that the defeat of the Lang’o people arose from the fact that they did not involve women in any of their war strategies. The Council of Elders did not consider the participation of women crucial, and therefore, neglected a large section of their population. As a result, they were consequently beaten by their foes. Those who involved women were the ones to win the war.

The spirit of the forum was that women views should be strongly taken into consideration in reviewing the Kenyan Constitution. Many of the participants settled on either ‘*why women should always be consulted*’ or ‘*without women involvement, any community initiative will fail*’ as appropriate title of the *Lwanda Magere* story. They argued that the original story had been skewed against women despite the prominent role played by women. This bias was traced to the fact the legends are told by men and not women and equally, since the origin of the story was Luo, they were concerned more with presentation of their pride and identity as opposed to the facts presented in the story. The more radical participants suggested that the most appropriate title for the story should be ‘*how one woman brought down the whole army*’.

Breel (2015) argues that the “*participants’ action and their agency directly impact on the performance*” (371) meaning that a better understanding of the participants experience is vital to understanding how the performance operates. And since, as she adds,

agency is concerned with intention and choice, for the participants to have agency, they should intentionally perform an action (however small) that causes something to happen or change within the performance as a result (p. 375)

Whereas the narrative is framed as anti-women, the participants sought to locate a fresh way of looking at it as a feminist story.

Whilst the Maasai narrative always ends with *'that is why women do not own any cattle,'* the preceding statement says that the wild animals that you see today, were cattle that belonged to women. Thus, the dominant narrative is that because of carelessness of women, they lost their cattle to the wilderness. When this story was performed without the last statement many of those in the audience assumed that it is a story that explains why the Maasai live/stay in the same environment with wild animals. They argued that any environment, natural or artificial, is fit for women who by nature are 'free spirits'. They leave their homes and they fit anywhere in society. The general idea from the debate was that women felt that domesticating animals was a form of imprisonment and they let them into the wilderness to free them and offer the rest of the world a chance to view them. Therefore, one of titles suggested was, *'why there are so many wild animals in Kenya'*. Thus, the presence of wild animals in Kenya was credited to women.

There was a clear discernible irony in the performance of Wangu wa Makeri story given the context of the performance. This story was performed during the clamour for what is known in Kenya as the second liberation. The proponents of the second liberation argued that, although we achieved independence from the colonizers, the leadership inherited all the oppressive structures. The leadership found it safe to enforce the colonial laws for their own benefit. There was need, therefore, to overhaul the whole system through new Constitution dispensation. Coincidentally, Kenya as a country had three male presidents in that whole period. So, every time PPT would end the narrative by saying that *"women were overthrown and the men took over and since then people have lived in peace and harmony thereafter"*, everyone would burst out and laugh. Our first question to the audience was *"why are laughing?"* They were all in agreement that the Constitution outcry arose from the bad male leadership. That the said peace and harmony was a far cry from the reality on the ground. This was strictly when the original story was performed. The variant of the story would end with; *'since*

women were removed from the throne, the world has never known peace'. When it came to choosing the title, the audience thought the appropriate title should be *'why there is so much suffering in world'* or *'how men robbed women of leadership'*.

The Lwanda Magere narrative raises questions as to who a hero is. Traditional tragedies demand that the hero has to be of royal lineage or of high standing in the community. Both Nyar Lang'o and Lwanda Magere qualify in this respect. Lwanda Magere is sent by the gods to defend the Luo community which eventually relies on him for their survival. His life and survival make him central to the Luo community. Nyar Lang'o, on the other hand, is a princess, therefore, of the royal blood. The traditional tragedy also presumes that the loss of such individual is of dire consequences to the whole community. The death of Lwanda Magere would mean collapse of the security systems in the Luo community. Their first defence is Lwanda Magere as a warrior whose body cannot be pierced. The loss of the princess is a direct challenge to the leader and, if there is no appropriate action in retaliation, then the king's authority is eroded. They both risk their lives in defence of their community. Unlike the antagonist that we are used to in other narratives, Nyar Lang'o, as depicted in the story takes greater risk and invites more sympathy and support. Lwanda Magere has missing attributes that distance him as an object of sympathy. His arrogance, though seen as hamartia in the context of tragedy, projects him as someone more concerned about self-importance than the community welfare. Ursulla LeGuin (1993) notes that heroes are traditionally male and the hero myth inscribes male dominance and the primacy of male enterprises.

The hero typically makes any significant sexual involvement for such a relationship would compromise his dedication to his mission, and one of the attributes of maleness....(p. 67)

In so far as their narrative structure implies that the actions of real consequence and those understated by men, hero stories resemble the historical record from which women are also obliterated.

The narrative denies a woman a special mention by only referring to her via her community of origin. Nyar Lang'o is not a real name but instead, she is referred to as the one who came from the Lang'o. Within the patriarchal societies such naming is meant to deny one the opportunity for inheritance or ownership of family property. The name alone denies you identity of belonging to the

community since it marks you out as a foreigner. Worse still, Kalenjins as enemies of the Luo, such naming is to alert everybody of the foe within who should be treated with suspicion. Thus, the woman carries the title of a foreigner no matter how long she has been among the communities in which she is married. The naming is a constant reminder of the lack of acceptance into the fold of the community. Whereas everyone is identified by titles that indicate one belongs to the community, branding one as a foreigner is a form of disenfranchising her of her rights. Branding brainwashes people into stripping others off their rightful position. In the mind of the population, such a person loses the right to own property since they are foreigners.

The woman, therefore, has a right only by association because she doesn't have a name of her own. She is defined by association. In this case defined first by where she comes from – Lang'o and secondly to whom she is married to, Lwanda Magere. She is either wife of Lwanda Magere and in this case not the only one, and therefore, one has to say second wife of Lwanda Magere or the one who comes from the land of Lang'o. Personal identity which is important in defining one is lost. She is only known or identified in reference to others. Perhaps we should ask the old Shakespearean question, "*What is in a name?*" This is what one is confronted with '*when you are, only because of others*' and defined only by relationship without a personal tag on your individuality.

In the actual performance, however, the name acquired extra value. Participants argued that whereas other characters have names that define their individualism, Nyar Lang'o's name defines communal representation. It implied she carries the weight of the whole community. To the audience, her name alone suggests that she was the central character in the story. They argued that right from the beginning, they expected that all her actions would be in the interest of the community and that they would be selfless actions meant to protect the community. They noted that she was a hero right from the onset; her decision to go to the enemy land and live with their greatest foe - the Luo, knowing she was under scrutiny every night and day and away from the protection of her community. Her sacrifice in carrying the safety of the whole community on her shoulders makes her the hero of the community and deserving the name Nyarlang'o. In discussing Bhabha, Nicolson points out,

emphasis on narrative and contextuality is important here, as it shows that human rights are not experienced solely as social 'issues' but are played out

played out in the dialogic space of everyday existence. That the practice of the arts enables experiences to be framed and, that practicing Drama has the potential to bring life into sharp relief by inviting participants to step outside themselves, to embody the narratives of others. (p. 510)

5.0 Conclusion

This Paper has examined three oral narratives that range from historical and mythical legends to etiological myths that set to establish patriarchal social and economic hegemony in selected Kenyan communities: Luo, Kalenjin Kikuyu and Maasai. The Paper has demonstrated the traditional contextual interpretation of the narratives (in which men are heroes and the protagonist of the story) as seen from the perspective of a patriarchal society that projected men as owners of the economic base and thus controlling the social and political spheres. Based on the applied theatre project done by the People's Popular Theatre, in collaboration with other like-minded organizations, the Paper has illustrated how the very same oral narratives deconstruct the traditional held views by providing an alternative interpretation through participatory engagement with the community. The Paper is in line with what Nicholson refers to as Derrida's concept of a poetics of human rights that recognizes that there is an aesthetic dimension to ethical social interactions, and that human rights are practised only when the dialectic between self and the other is troubled, and the fixed polarity is challenged. A poetics of human rights is, as he points out, about taking collective responsibility for the performance of rights, and recognizing the creative opportunities afforded by envisioning social change. Through the applied theatre, therefore, the Paper demonstrates and recommends theatre as an advocacy tool and a human rights agency in transforming the ways of thinking and re-evaluating narratives that have served to entrench patriarchy and male economic domination in our society by re-looking at the role of women through a feminist lens.

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