

Defining Oneself in the Eyes of the Other: Identity and Othering in Bukusu Oral Literature

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Abstract

This paper examines how the Babukusu community, through its oral literature (oral narratives, songs-especially circumcision songs, and proverbs) has defined and located itself through encounters with other communities, both local and foreign. Using New Historicism theory, it explores images and symbols of the “other” and the community's construction of the resistance strategies to deal with the encounters. Literature as the soul of a community captures the intense emotions of its people as an expression of their community's fears, anxieties, dreams, and aspirations. These emotions are generated through the community's interactions with both the physical and social environment. As a way of coping with and comprehending their social and economic environment, the community creates oral literature not only as a creative way of understanding phenomena but also as a means of historically capturing and imprinting important events in the life of the community. Comprehending reality through creative means enables the community to imagine the ideal and open up possibilities of alternative views.

Keys terms: identity construction, othering, oral literature, Bukusu

INTRODUCTION

The paper demonstrates how the Babukusu community, through the performance of their oral literature, seeks to maintain its identity by demonizing the ‘other’ and sustaining a covert and suppressed conflict with their neighbours. History has to be understood from the perspective of those who narrate it. Each story is constructed in a manner that conveys not only the message but also the ideology and goals of the community. The community, therefore, allows stories and myths that convey its beliefs, values, and aspirations to flourish, as they strengthen and enhance the structures that hold the community together. Each myth and story can be linked to certain fundamental structures in the community. Thomas Spears reevaluates both historians’ and anthropologists’ strategies of examining oral history, noting that “. . . they have recently begun to discuss ways that we think might unlock the meanings oral traditions convey to the traditional historians who relate them and to the people who listen to them within the context of their own structures of thought and of the ways in which oral traditions develop” (293). The stories reaffirm fundamental truths in how the community interpreted the events. Equal weight should be given to the idealization and aspirational elements of the community injected in the narrative to affirm and ensure a solid foundation and continuity of the people it serves. The story so constructed explains and forecasts the intercommunal relationships, firmly laying the basis for future engagements. One is therefore socialized to have certain views and beliefs about neighbouring communities; some emanating from actual encounters, while others out of the imaginary construction of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ as a way of building fortresses around the community’s being.

This study applies the idea of New Historicism and examines oral texts collected from the Bukusu community, spanning across different genres of literature. As Jane Tompkins argues “a work of art is itself a product of a set of manipulations – some of them one's own. . . many others undertaken in the construction of the original work.” That is, the work of art is a product of a negotiation between a creator or a class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society . . . the process is not simply appropriation but exchange, since the existence of art always implies a return, a return normally measured in pleasure and interest” (12). We view history not just as an event of the past but also as stories telling about the events of the past. From this perspective, the past can never be available to us in pure form, but always in the form of representation; that is, history becomes textualized. New Historicism seeks the revaluation of the relationship between literature and history. Literature focuses not only on the events but also on the telling of the events. The relationship between communities is defined by how they interact socially and economically, as well as how their relationship has been narrated (Spear 1984). When communities retain stories about memorable (whether good or bad) events, it is meant to emphasize how those events shaped and influenced the trajectory of the said community.

Circumcision and the Babukusu Interaction with the “Other”

The Babukusu community inhabits the Bungoma County of Western Kenya with remnants found in Trans Nzoia County. They are the most populous of the seventeen sub-nations of the Luhya community (Bulimo 2013). Though categorized as Luhya in Kenya, their oral history places them as close relations of the Bagisu of Uganda, and indeed they share many cultural practices, the notable one being the circumcision ritual – *embalu*. They (the Babukusu and the Bagisu) are said to share the same father, Masaaba, who sired Mukisu and Mubukusu, a fact backed by the Khuswala Kumuse performer, Manguliche Wanyonyi (2008). Spear further notes that myth assumes its own reality as an ideology guiding future action. We face the problems of the present with the ideology of the past. Myths then represent the lessons of the past, and can therefore be used to help understand the institutions of the past to which they are related (293). Regarding whether a work of art can be interpreted outside the historical period in which it was produced, new historicism holds the view that we cannot transcend our own historical situation. It is something we construct from the written texts of all kinds which we construe in line with our particular historical concerns.

The Babukusu are known for their adherence to their cultural practices, with elaborate ceremonies for both circumcision and burial ceremonies, and a strong oral tradition. Circumcision rituals in many ways capture the Babukusu community's spirit, their fears, and aspirations. In this paper, I assess the different facets of this ritual to bring out representations of the emotional and psychological being of the community. The social control system within the Babukusu community uses circumcision ceremonies to rally the people behind the community's ideals while discouraging misdemeanors. There are new compositions of songs every year capturing the notable events in the society. These events or happenings may vary from heroic deeds to social digressions. The songs that touch on misdemeanors tend to last for a short period of time, on average for three circumcision seasons. Those that touch on heinous crimes like murder last longer, sometimes two generations or beyond. Given the importance of the message or the magnitude of the crime, the song may last for a long time not only to warn the community of the gravity of the matter but also to expose the culprits throughout their lifetime. The song, therefore, becomes a constant reminder, not just of the weight of the atrocity but also as a strong warning to the rest of the community.

Over time, the words in the song are switched to accommodate new occurrences, thus retaining the tune but altering part of the lyrics.

Any events that have shaken the very core of the community and shattered the very existence and continuity of the Babukusu are entrenched in songs. Two historical events come into the picture, the Second World War and colonialism. One song that has been around over generations is *Amba Mutalia* (catch the Italian).

Soloist: <i>Amba mutalia</i>	catch the Italian
Response: <i>Hooo</i>	hooo
Soloist: Basaani <i>amba mutalia</i>	boys catch the Italian.
Response: <i>amba mutalia</i>	catch the Italian
Soloist: <i>Sukuma khukende</i>	let's march forward
Response: <i>Hoo</i>	hoo
Soloist: Basaani <i>sukuma khukende</i>	boys let's march forward
Response: <i>Amba mutalia</i>	catch the Italian

During the Second World War, the Babukusu were recruited in the Abyssinian campaign which was fought by allied forces, mainly the British Empire, against the axis forces primarily from Italy, between June 1940 and November 1941. Whenever there was war during the circumcision period, it greatly interfered with the rituals to the extent of postponement. It forced the community to circumcise in an odd year, which is considered a bad omen. Since circumcision prepares initiates to enter adult life as pro-creators, the war was seen as a hindrance to the growth of the community. The Babukusu abhor the shedding of blood from war during circumcision. *Amba Mutalia*, which was a rallying call to catch and defeat the Italians, has survived as a circumcision song to mark this catastrophic event that interfered with this revered ritual. Whereas mainstream history captures it as a British Empire endeavor, scantily mentioning the participation of the East African natives, the Babukusu, through the song have entrenched – albeit orally – their historical participation in World War II. As new historicism elucidates; “traditionally history is told by the winners. (But) The losers or those who lack political or social powers have their story to tell as well” (176). The phrasing of the song 'Catch the Italian' seemed infused with a sense of impatience because of participating in a war that was not of their making but that greatly interfered with their normal routine cultural activities. It also gives an indication of the propaganda that had been done by the colonial master, the British, of turning all the colonies to look at the Italians as enemies. Thus, this forcefully delivered phrase indicates the level to which the colonized had embraced the colonizers' ideology to the point of looking at the enemy of their master as their own enemy and the attack on their master as an attack on themselves.

In the subsequent years, the song incorporated new events. When the Babukusu suffered the post-independence tribal clashes for being in the opposition, the soloists captured the suffering of the Babukusu under the then KANU government. The Kalenjins who then dominated the KANU government set fire to houses owned by the Babukusu, earning themselves the name *Wosiaanju* – the arsonists.

Soloist:	<i>Enje chelechenjenje</i>	in a clear daylight
	<i>Kumumu kufwa,</i>	with the sun shinning
	<i>Kumumu kufwa</i>	with the sun shining.
	<i>Wosianju kecha ne buyingo,</i>	<i>the arsonist came with arrows.</i>
Response:	<i>Amba mutalia,</i>	catch the Italian.

The same song that had been used during World War II to refer to the Italians, their enemy, became symbolic of any other enemy. It was now symbolically used in the song to represent the Kalenjins as enemies of the Babukusu. Again, as it was under colonialism, the community was under a repressive government. The dominant narrative was the narrative of the rulers “making history a narration, not a pure, unadulterated set of precise observations. Thus all histories are subjectively known and set down, colored by the cultural text of the recorder, usually the person of power, thus leaving untold the stories of those who were powerless” (176). The Babukus could only capture their history in song as both the official channels and the entire media were government-owned. However, the relationship between the two communities is not limited to the above incident. As the new historicism states, “. . . any culture is made up of many disparate and conflicting strands, there is never a single unified view operating at a given period . . . At any given period, many discourses, or ways of seeing and thinking about the world, operate simultaneously. These discourses clash and overlap and repeat, shaping and being shaped by one another (177). The story locates the origin of circumcision among the Omubukusua tradition, borrowed from the Kalenjins through the legend known as Mango Omukhurarwa. It says that the first Omubukusu to be circumcised was called Mango. In Mango’s time, there was a big snake (probably a python), Yabebe, which invaded their territory and started terrorizing people, swallowing animals and children. One day, it swallowed Mango’s child, and he swore to kill it. Hiding at the entrance of the cave, he cut off the snake’s head, which slithered and bit a tree that dried immediately. Meanwhile, the rest of the snake coiled around Mango, and with his sharp sword (*Embalu*) he cut it into pieces, leaving him dripping with blood. In the tradition of the community, if you kill a human being, you cannot interact with people until you were cleansed. Since the snake had killed many people, killing the snake was tantamount to killing a human being. He was thus told to stay out for three days and later taken to the river, smeared with mud and circumcised, and this marked the beginning of circumcision among the Babukusu (Manguliche 2008). This legend/myth defines their identity in so far as many Kenyans associate circumcision, due to its elaborate public display, with the Bukusu. Mango was not circumcised by the Kalenjins, who despite being enemies of the Babukusu, bequeathed them the circumcision ritual, including the naming of age sets. This strange relationship defines the tensions that exist between the two communities. Among the Nandi, the eight age-sets include *mainek*, *sawe*, *chumo*, *korongoro*, *kipkoimet*, *kaplelach*, *kimnyige*, and *nyongi* (KNA, DC/EN/3/2/4: 1929-1935).

The Kalenjins, who are Nilotes and linguistically far removed from the Babukusu, have shared borders with the Babukusu community for many years. Arising out of this has been constant hostility and mistrust. While the Babukusu practiced mixed farming, keeping both animals and growing crops, the Kalenjins were pastoralists. The Babukusu would therefore stay in one place for a long period of time, while the Kalenjins were always on the move. Their movement caused friction and tension between the two communities. A story, as told by Juliana Khakusuma (2008) goes that there lived a famous blacksmith, whose son wanted to be independent of his father. The son, seeking to be far away from his father, a rival blacksmith, set up business where the Kalenjin frequently passed. His father strongly opposed this idea and warned him of dangers that might come his way. Being an arrogant young man, he disobeyed his father and set up the business. Soon the Kalenjins came, and they had a strange request: that he produce a sword and a spear from human and elephant skulls. Faced with this practical impossibility, he goes to his father for advice. Reminding him of his earlier warning, the father still went ahead and asked him to fill the skulls with iron filings and seal the holes. The following day, in the presence of the Kalenjins, he molded a sword and spear from the skulls. From this experience, the Babukusu coined the proverbs,

"Nandakambila *kakona khu mwanda kwe enjoli*" (He who does not listen to advice slept on the path of the elephant). Despite the fact that the Babukusu praise themselves as "*Rirango lie enjofu*" (the thigh of the elephant) they equate their greatest enemy to the elephant. Perhaps as a show of military respect, they refer to the Kalenjins as the elephant. This is as if to remind themselves of this animal that they so much treasure for its power, but can easily turn destructive. They say in jest that they are the ones who slept on the path of the elephant in spite of the danger. In so saying, they mean that the clan is brave and is not afraid of any dangers that may come their way. Defeating the Kalenjin, who seem to be their main enemy, appears an overriding thought to the extent that some clans (considered the original Bukusuu) celebrate the show of bravery to withstand the pain of the circumcision knife by singing, "*Khwere Omurwa*" (we have killed a Kalenjin) just like the *Sioyayo* compares to facing the knife to a leopard attack, this in a way equates ability to withstand the knife as capacity to kill a Kalenjin in war. Indeed, it may imply one more warrior (since circumcision meant qualification to adulthood and joining in the ranks of warriors defending the community) to fight the Kalenjins.

The ambivalence in the expression of the relationship between the Kalenjins and the Bukusu illustrates the ever-changing, fluid, and complex forms of interactions. Spear, examining structural analysis of myths, offers us these insights: ". . . the symbolic content of the myth seeks to uncover deeper, often hidden, structures of society and thought. This is a valuable exercise when the analysis concerns a particular society at a given historical moment and explores the multi-vocality and rich ambiguity of the symbols . . . The lessons of the past are progressively reduced to elegant symbols expressing fundamental historical truths" (293). By referring to the Kalenjins using the revered animal on whose basis their own praise and pride is derived, this speaks a lot to this relationship. The power and strength of the Bukusu is equated to the thigh of the elephant, so strong that it picks up things (or things get attached to it) along its path without wearing it down. Yet their greatest enemy is referred to in the proverb as the elephant and raises the question of whether the part is equal to the whole or that the Bukusu were acknowledging the military strength of the Kalenjins. This idea of recognizing the strength of one's enemy is further seen in how the Bukusu have borrowed both the circumcision tradition and the organizational structure of age sets based on the Kalenjin community. Some of the songs used by the Bukusuu in the circumcision ceremony still retain the Kalenjin beat, and some do have words that cannot be understood within the context of the Bukusu dialect, such as *Chabukeya*, *haho*, and *hohe*. The reference to Kalenjins using an animal symbol rather than their actual name may suggest the stark difference between the two communities, which, unlike most of the neighbours mentioned, is linguistically far removed from the Bukusu language. It implies: 'the Kalenjins, the ones who are as powerful as us (Bukusu) but so far removed that they cannot be called by name'. Even the reference to Kalenjin does not use the ordinary Bukusu name for the elephant, *Enjofu*, but rather employs the older and uncommon form *Enjoli*. This symbolic language also ensured secrecy during communication even in the presence of the enemy.

Whereas the Bukusu and Kalenjin carry their battles within the spheres of circumcision, since they both practice it, the same cannot be said of the battles between the Bukusu and the Luo community. Separated by both culture and distance, the Luo community stands apart as one that generates emotional debates in relation to the Bukusu community and the Luhya nation at large. The Luhya and the Luo fondly refer to each other as *Mashemeji* (in laws) arising out of the many marriages between the two communities and also indicative of tension and suspicions apparent in relationships based on marriage. The Bukusu have a saying, 'omukhasi omurende,' meaning 'your wife is not your relative,' which in many senses alerts people to the idea that you always have to

treat your wife with suspicion and by extension the in-laws. This suspicion and love/hate relationship has been played out in both politics and football. In football, Gor Mahia FC (associated with Luos) and AFC Leopards (associated with Luhya) in their electric encounters dubbed “Masheji Debbie”, always have cultural and political undertones played out. While in politics, the two communities in most cases fall in the same camp, whenever they don’t, it attracts protracted ethnic vitriol. The Luos and the Bukusu do not share a common border, and one would have to travel a great distance to get to Luoland. However, bearing in mind that the Bukusu have a name for Lake Victoria, *Enyanja ya Walule* (Lake Walule), a name that bears a close resemblance to the Luo equivalent *Nam Lolwe* (Lake Lolwe) is a sharp pointer to their close interactions and encounters. However, to indicate that it takes a long time for one to travel from Bukusuland to Luoland, they have a proverb that says: *Mkenda mbola kola emunyolo* (The one who walked slowly or took breaks in his journey, walked up to the land of the Banyolo) – Luos are referred to as Banyolo). Though the English equivalent is ‘Hurry-hurry has no blessings’, in the Bukusu idiom, the emphasis is on the patience one has in travelling such a long distance to get to the land of the Luo. One would expect that, given the distance or the reference to the far-away neighbours, there would not be significant mention of the Luos in Bukusu oral literature. The Luos, unlike the Bukusu, do not circumcise and neither do they have a specific ritual marking the transition to adulthood (originally they had the removal of the six front lower teeth). Therefore, the Bukusu regard the Luos as their opposites or the antithesis of their culture. Thus, everything that circumcision represents, such as bravery, transition to adulthood, and commitment to protecting the community, is assumed not to exist in Luoland. The song goes as follows:

Solo: <i>Wangwe wa maalule wakonile x3</i>	the leopard that mauls is lying low x3
Reponse: <i>haho</i>	
Solo: <i>Omusinde olinda embalu</i>	the initiate who can withstand the knife
<i>alinda engwe</i>	can face a leopard
Response: <i>haho x3</i>	haho
Solo: <i>nakhalimo khautu wimele x3</i>	if you are doubtful, keep off x3
Response: <i>haho x3</i>	haho
Solo: <i>Omusinde oteremaka ache</i>	if an initiate is shaky, he should go to
<i>Ebunyolo x3</i>	luoland (ebunyolo)
Reponse: <i>haho</i>	haho

In the song, it is said that whoever can withstand the pain of the circumcision knife (without wincing or making any movement while being cut in front of the community), such a person is capable of fighting with a leopard, in case of an attack. The leopard is revered in Luhya land, which is why it is the name given to their favourite football team. The leopard is a guileful and dangerous hunter, master of stealth and camouflage. Referring to the leopard as *Maalule*, meaning “the one that mauls,” shows how dangerous it is and the need for bravery from one who faces it. They contrast this praise of bravery with the one who shivers at the sight of the knife – that such a person should move to Luoland. In this worldview, bravery and the ability to withstand the pain of the knife are equated to being a ‘real’ Bukusu, and the lack of it, a sign of cowardice, is equated to being a Luo. It is not uncommon to see uninitiated persons referred to as *umunyolo* (Luo) and as it were, in the Bukusu community, one cannot marry until they are circumcised, but strange as it may be, there are many marriages between the Bukusu and the Luo community – the above notwithstanding.

Among all Babukusu neighbours, the Teso community is the one that is culturally significantly different. While all the Babukusu neighbours carry out circumcision or share a language, albeit of a different dialect, the Teso community neither practices circumcision nor shares a language with the Babukusu. The cultural orientation of the Babukusu is such that they tend to despise communities that do not carry out circumcision. Since circumcision is a stage that marks one's entry into adulthood, they derogatorily refer to those who have not undergone the ritual as children who have not transitioned into adulthood. Despite looking down upon them, they were the most stubborn of their enemies. Unique in their fighting style was the special whip made from animal skin. This was not a common weapon of war. Fighting with whips was considered child's play; however, this weapon delivered many humiliating blows on the Babukusu. In return, whenever a Teso warrior was captured by the Babukusu, they would publicly whip the warrior and command them to carry out chores associated with children, such as putting out yeast to dry. Historically, however, the Babukusu and Teso reconciled and swore never to fight in a ceremony known as *Khulia embwa* (eating a dog). It is a ceremony that binds the two communities never to go to war again, but the proverb still lives on as a reminder of the animosity that had separated the two communities. The Babukusu consider the Tesos as the best in-laws. This is captured in the proverb "*Omumia kasima mukhwewe*" (The Tesos love their in-laws) emanating from how the Teso community lavishly treats their in-laws anytime they visit them. When you visit as an in-law, you are served not with chicken pieces but a whole chicken. For a community that views chicken as a special and honorary meal, this counts as a special treat, hence the proverb.

The Siblings' Quarrels.

The Babukusu community and Baluhyas in general are referred to as "*Mulembe*" people, meaning those who love peace or are peaceful. The idea of peace is highly valued, as greetings come in the form of a peace salutation. The most popular form of greeting is *mulembe*, and the respondent replies *mulembe muno*, loosely translated as 'Peace,' as the respondent says 'Peace in abundance.' The lack of it means the destruction of the family structure and the community calendar. Those who have come to Babukusu land to seek refuge are accommodated and taken good care of. This love for foreigners earned the Babukusu the name *siyanja barende* (those who love foreigners). The philosophy and doctrine of the community is to take care of those seeking refuge in Babukusu land, and this accounts for their growth through integrating new clans from neighboring communities. This section examines the rivalry and disputes within Luhya communities, focusing on the Banyala, Bawanga, and the Batachoni, and how historical events have shaped their relationship with the Bukusu community.

In history, when the Babukusu ran for safety to the land of Banyala, their neighbor, they were mistreated. While those who said they came accompanied by their sisters were spared, they had to surrender their wives to Banyala men. The men who declared they had come with their wives were immediately killed, as a result they either suffered death or the humiliation of seeing their wives forcefully taken. Since then the Babukusu community has harbored anger and hatred towards the Banyala for what they underwent while in exile. Despite the two communities being neighbours, there were very few intermarriages because out of all these experiences arose a proverb: *Watikha emoni okhaba munyala*, or *otima okhabeye omunyala*, meaning (Better your eyes be gouged out than be an Omunyala) or "Better your eyes were gouged out than marry an Omunyala). Such strong language captured the fears of the Babukusu community arising from the historical encounter with their neighbours. The eventuality of marriage between members of the two communities is imagined in a catastrophic way. The part of the body singled out, the eyes,

represent sight – emphasizing what they witnessed in exile while in the land of Banyala. A big section of the border between Babukusu and Banyala is a river, and they would look across at each other with minimal interaction. The Banyala in response have a proverb that says of the Babukusu: *Abakitosi bakhusia busa makesimo ta* (The Bukusu are only good at parenting but they have no brains). The Banyala always refer to the Bukusu in a diminutive way as *Bikitosi*. The proverb earlier quoted is in reference to the fact that the Bukusu allowed them to take over their wives, despite how such an act is inconceivable within the Luhya tradition, especially when done right ‘before the eyes’ of the husband. This proverb is intended to mock and ridicule the Bukusu, in addition to the humiliation they suffered while in Banyala land. This belief stems from the perception that the Babukusu are lazy, and when cutting a tree with an axe for instance, they use it sparingly. After using the axe to cut the tree for a short time, they will resort to pushing it, therefore the axe will be returned to you in good condition, and they are the safest to lend.

The strained relationship between the Banyala and the Bukusu appears to have occurred during the pre-colonial period, unlike their interaction with both the Wanga and the Tachoni. During the colonization of Kenya, the British sought to incorporate communities that were more amenable to their rule and had political systems similar to their own. Therefore, communities with kingdoms and chiefdoms could easily fit into British structures, in contrast to communities with decentralized structures involving councils of elders. One such community with a centralized political structure from western Kenya was the Wanga Kingdom, under King Mumia. As collaborators, the Wanga, under their king, acted as agents of British rule, dominating over other Luhya communities. The Bible and mass were conducted in Wanga, which may not have been fully comprehensible to other Luhya subgroups. Education in schools was also delivered in Kiwanga, making it a symbol of British rule and oppression. Due to the powers and privileges granted to them, they took advantage not only of attending school but also of acquiring material property associated with the colonizers. They used these acquisitions to torment those who were not well-versed in their operations. A well-known tale is told within the Bukusu community of how a Muwanga man would come with a bicycle to a Bukusu home, and then, unknown to the locals, deflate its tires. At the end of the visit, pointing at the flat tires, he would complain of the damage done to his bicycle (given that children would naturally gather to look at the strange contraption). He would then loudly and threateningly state how expensive it was to carry out repairs and how failure to compensate would lead to dire consequences. Furthermore, it is alleged that they would sell strange breeds of dogs as goats only for the dogs to follow their master after he had been paid.

These experiences bred bitterness among the Bukusu community, who viewed the Wanga as cunning, thieving, and the embodiment of evil. In essence, the Wanga are taken as people whose words cannot be trusted, and thus, whenever someone says “If only we had met yesterday,” the Bukusu would term him/her a Wanga. This is on the basis that the Wanga will never admit having money or anything you are asking for, only claiming they consumed the whole of it the previous day, hence the saying. Rather than addressing the Wanga with respect, by calling them by their name, the Bawanga, the Bukusu refer to them as *Wangasieki*. This diminutive form is common in trickster narratives involving the hare or the squirrel, therefore the Wanga are similar to these trickster characters. The proverb is meant to capture the Wanga's total disregard for a shared past, meaning they are capable of betraying even those who look like them. The ogre represents the ‘other’, the one who is not like us. In all senses, human beings share many attributes – both physical and psychological – with ogres. Among the Babukusu, and consistent with all the narrators, the ogres use a different accent or talk in the language of their neighbours, mostly that of those they have had feuds with. In the instances where they speak Lubukusu, their tone sounds unusual or

extraordinary. The ogre is therefore from the enemy tribe or clan, the one with whom we cannot agree because they are different, the enemy who disguises himself and wishes to destroy us but who will eventually be defeated. The audience/community aims to affirm that their enemies cannot be like them, they have to be different, with undesirable physical characteristics. Any confrontation between them will lead to the community's defeat of the enemy to ensure its own survival and continuity.

The strained relationship between the Bukusu and the Tachoni can be traced to colonialism. The Tachoni and the Babukusu both belong to the larger Luhya sub-nation, and the above can be thought of as sibling rivalry. The Babukusu had encountered the white people in war before they were enlisted to fight in the Second World War. The war that left a scar on the Babukusu community was the Chetambe war. Following a deal gone sour in 1894 in Lumboka, where upon buying guns from the whites and King Nabongo Mumia agents, the Babukusu reneged on the agreement (Simiyu1991; Wandiba 1990). Each gun was sold at the cost of four cows, but the Babukusu, feeling conned, followed Nabongo's agents, killed them, and recovered their cattle. The whites, with the help of Nabongo and Sudanese immigrant soldiers, came back for revenge. The Babukusu anticipated revenge and sought refuge from their cousins, the Tachoni, in the Chetambe Fort. The Tachoni readily welcomed the Babukusu in their fort, but fearing the powerful whites supported by their local allies, fled, leaving only a few soldiers behind. Despite their plea to the Babukusu to abandon the fort and retreat, the Babukusu refused, and the Tachoni leader 'whistled' his people away. It is this special whistle of summoning Tachoni that earned them the praise name *Bana be Likhanga* (the children of the guinea fowl), because the whistle imitates the sound produced by the guinea fowl. Left behind, faced with a powerful foe, the Babukusu were mowed down with machine guns, as captured in the song *chetambe*:

<i>Kumunyalasia kwakwa mulukoba</i>	there was a machine gun in the Fort
<i>Abantu bosi bona khwabuna</i>	that took everyone down
<i>Khwakhaba khufwa,</i>	what a way to die
<i>Khwakhaba khufwa nga bulolo</i>	dying like fleas

In the view of the Babukusu's, the Tachoni's abandoned them and they therefore mistrust them very much. When Babukusu use the phrase 'children of the guinea fowl', they use it in a derogatory way. Babukusu's praise name is *lirango lie enjofu* (the thigh of the elephant), in which the fowl's weight against the elephant is no match. In subsequent years, the Babukusu have narrated the story as if Chetambe was their fort and the Chetambe war, solely their war. Being the more powerful of the two ethnic groups, they retained the land around Chetambe, tying the battle ground on which their blood was shed to ownership. They have evidently suppressed the Tachoni ownership of Chetambe. New historicism asserts that:

Power is generated by shared discourses and wielded by those groups and institutions that are participants. These groups establish norms and define what is deemed acceptable. Discourses that differ from the norms and digress from what is acceptable are likely to be suppressed, or at least go unrecognized, for they threaten the values generally espoused by a culture and the dominance of the powerful (178).

Thus, the very people who taught the Babukusu the art of building forts and allowed them to take refuge in their own forts are denied space in the narrative; however, they are immortalized in the famous Babukusu story of Kitimule. This story is surrounded with mysteries constructed around the unknown. Kitimule travelled beyond Babukusu land and came back to report his new

discoveries. The Babukusu would pick and adapt some foreign elements, but others that were seen as strange and out of line with their culture would be rejected. There, he found a very organized community in terms of security and defense. They had advanced in the construction of forts and fortresses. Kitimule observed and learned a lot from the Bayumbu, and on his return, set out to impart this knowledge to his people, the Babukusu. The Babukusu found the knowledge informative and intriguing. They set out to build their own forts using the newly found technology. The people found every aspect strange and mysterious, and they could only trust the very person who had seen it with his own eyes. Whenever there was a dispute on the construction or a lack of knowledge on how it was to be carried out, the elders would say: "Ask Kitimule". This became an everyday occurrence until it turned into a proverb: *Rebanga Kitimule, wanyowe Obuyumbu* (Ask Kitimule, the first one to have traveled to the land of the Bayumbu). In the proverb, they capture an important historical moment with the hero of the story being at the center of it. It is one of the Babukusu proverbs whose meaning is not easily discernible unless one has knowledge of its origin. It is used to tell the young people that if you don't know, please ask those who were born before you or those who have experienced what you have only heard of. Kitimule therefore became the bridge to the unknown and the mysterious because, beyond building forts, he is said to have experienced a ritual that was unknown to the Babukusu which truly traumatized him. The proverb also means one does not have to experience what they do not know, for the dangers are known – let those who have been there narrate what they have been through.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined different texts that capture the relationship between the Babukusu and any other foreigners they have encountered. It has explored how different texts talk to each other, sometimes contradicting and sometimes agreeing but often exposing the tensions, fears, and anxieties among the Babukusu. The apparent contradictions in different oral genres dealing with the same community may reveal the covert and overt tensions of interacting with neighbours, who both need each other but must be cautious of how quickly they can turn against one another. The long historical interactions have meant that neighbouring communities have enjoyed peaceful co-existence at one time but were also at open war in earlier times. Each of these moments has retained a mark through oral literature. As it were, literature, both particular and universal, captures contextual moments in space and time but continually acquires and expands in meaning over time as new conditions arise.

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