

Masculinity and Ritual Violence: A Study of Bullfighting Among the Kakamega Luyia, Western Kenya

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Abstract

Gender research in Africa has tended to focus on mostly women. This skewed attention has given rise to the popular but fallacious attitude that gender issues are synonymous with women issues. This paper demonstrates a shift in focus and discusses the images and symbols of masculinity in bullfighting contests among the Luyia of Western Kenya. The gendered structure of bullfighting and the misogynistic frames of masculine hegemony show a kind of violence approved and appropriated as manly in this society.

Key words: Masculinity, Ritual Violence, Bullfighting, Luyia, Kenya
Mila (N.S.), Vol. 9 (2008), pp. 33 – 46, © 2008 Institute of Anthropology, Gender and African Studies

Introduction

Though gender relations are constructed in terms of the relations of power and dominance between women and men, gender research in Africa has tended to focus more on women only. This skewed attention has given rise to the popular but fallacious attitude that gender issues are synonymous with women issues. This paper demonstrates a shift in focus and discusses the images and symbols of masculinity in bullfighting contests among the Abaluyia of Western Kenya. It seeks to present a critical analysis of the game in order to uncover its overt and covert features that point to the hidden masculine desires, values, ideals and aspirations of the Luyia. This paper further directs inquiry into the construction of masculine metaphors that define standards of masculinity and maleness in Luyia society.

The Luyia type of bullfighting is different from the kind of bullfighting exhibited in other parts of the world especially in terms of its

structure and form and the personae involved. In other parts of the world especially in Spain, Portugal and Mexico, protagonists in bullfighting are human beings and bulls. The Spanish version for instance pair off the bull and the matador with the matador obliged to demonstrate his bravery in risky and daring acts. The Luyia bullfighting is a matter of animal-to-animal fight. I argue here that the bulls are symbolic male proxies that outdo one another in a violent contest as the owners watch in self-fulfilling gratification.

The bullfighting contests are very popular among some Luyia communities of Western Kenya. They are performed on Saturdays to the excitement of multitudes of spectators from within and outside the community. As early as 5am in the morning, spectators begin to pour into the village arenas and stadiums to participate in this popular game. Many men in these communities breed prized bulls that they present during these contests. My respondents revealed that lack of a bull is a mark of extreme poverty and unmanliness only expected perhaps from men 'castrated' and feminized by the teachings of some Christian

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sects. In fact, it signals some degree of social and sexual redundancy (Beynon 2002:79).

The bulls are nourished both physically and psychologically in preparation for the contests. Undue excitement and a sense of expectation grip the audience on these occasions. Traffic on the major roads leading to the venue of the contests is temporarily interrupted as the animals led by their owners and fans dance to the venue. The celebration continues into the evening when a drinking spree ensues in specific homesteads; the famed drink being the locally brewed beer. Bullfighting contests are also staged on burial occasions of warriors to celebrate their lives.

This discussion is focused on bullfighting contests that are staged during weekends for pure entertainment. I examine bullfighting in terms of its structural and psychological significance within the Luyia culture by first offering empirical ethnographic description of the game and secondly presenting a psychoanalytic reading of the game as a signifying cultural text. I direct inquiry into the salient features of the contests and motives they seek to fulfill among the participants. Central to this study is the folklore generated and performed during bullfights and how this defines masculinity and gender relations in this society. I argue that this society has basic benchmarks within which the masculinities of its male members function. Failure to fall within these defined parameters makes one un-masculine. Through bullfighting, these masculine values are generated and disseminated to community members. The folklore produced is largely misogynistic and seems to suggest that being peaceable and uninterested in sexual conquest is a demonstration of un-masculine behavior. Masculinity does not, however, exist except in contrast to femininity (Connel 2004). I therefore find it necessary to also direct inquiry into images of femininity.

The Luyia, through bullfighting rituals, set standards, a marking scheme of sorts, on which Luyia men aspire to score highest. At the bottom of this structure is femininity and at the apex is ideal masculinity. In an attempt to reach these standards, men arrive at various degrees of masculinity and this is what convinces me that even within a neat cultural entity it is safe and in order to only talk about masculinities. Bullfighting is therefore a male contest that tests the degree to which one has achieved the masculine ideal. This is appreciated through examination of symbolic frames of masculine qualities exhibited within the polarity of ideal masculinity and femininity. In this semiotic opposition of masculinity and femininity, the phallus appears to be the master signifier, and femininity is symbolically defined by lack of a phallus (Connel 2004). Though indulged in by adults, the bullfighting game is a psychological replay of the childhood boys' contests. It offers nothing but imperatives dictated by male rivalry: the 'strongest' being the one who has the best 'hard-on' the longest, the biggest, the stiffest penis or even the one who pees the farthest (Irigaray 1985:121).

This cultural ritual game is characterized by violence, which is apparently a masculine virtue associated with the ideal masculine man. It manifests itself in two ways: physical and verbal. This public display of violence can best be understood in the Freudian perspective that sees cultural practices, as a form of expressing what cannot be articulated in direct ways. Bullfighting as a cultural ritual game is partly a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of taboo and anxiety-provoking behavior (Dundes 1997). There are very many icons that disguise the seriousness of this theme. Luyia men for instance sing the following song:

Haa hooyi
Haa hooyi
Haa haa hoyo
Sere vuzwa

English translation

Haa hooyi
Haa hooyi
Haa hoyo
It is just a game

In psychoanalytic terms disguising it as a harmless game makes it easy to explore anxieties without feeling a sense of guilt. We may say that through this game, the community indulges in things otherwise proscribed in everyday life. Thus, bullfighting is a projection of what is actually within the minds of participants—their obsession with sex. The theoretical postulations in this inquiry pay attention to various frames of signification within the Luyia cultural imperatives. The contest is visualized as a text. As a literary and cultural text, bullfighting is interrogated to reveal the micro-structures of power in the society and their intersection with ideology. The gendered structure of bullfighting and the misogynistic frames of masculine hegemony show a kind of violence approved and appropriated as manly in this society.

The primary data for this research was collected from Western Province of Kenya. This is the traditional Luyia country. The data was collected through oral interviews, observation and participation in bullfighting.

Men, their Bulls, Cows and Women

The intimate relationship between bulls and their male owners in Luyialand is unmistakable. This is discernible not only in the Luyia idioms and proverbs but also in all that the bull symbolizes. In reference to live earthly possessions, the Luyia men use the word *imirugo*. These include cows, chicken, wives and children, which symbolize ones wealth.

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But Luyia men demonstrate a deep psychological identification with bulls, which define their sense of masculinity. Bulls are to a large extent symbolic of the men. It may be argued that among the Abaluyia, bulls like cocks in Balinese culture are viewed as detachable, self-operating penises, ambulant genitals with a life of their own (Geertz 2002:81).

As masculine symbols per excellence, the bulls provide the Luyia language with raw materials for metaphoric postulations on the nature of life and how it should be lived. A man who is referred to as *Ijirichi* or a bull is perceived as virile, powerful, tough and a womaniser (a highly positive virtue). Some women will be heard boasting: *Ndawahira ku Ijirichi*, I am married to a bull. A man fondly referred to as a bull is not only feared but also revered. The Abaluyia say one can only talk ill of such a man out of his earshot. Luyia politicians vying for positions of leadership struggle to get the bull or any other masculine icon as their symbol. A politician recognized as bull is accorded respect and is always given an opportunity to address people in any gathering he attends. A sick man on the verge of death will be told; 'a bull dies with grass in its mouth.' Through this statement, the sick man is asked to have sex with his wife even if he is sick in order to prove that sickness has not feminized him. If the men want to establish if the sick man will die, they ask his wife: 'does the bull ever taste porridge?' This is a euphemistic reference to sex. In this respect masculinity is therefore a function of sexual activity.

The intimacy of the men with their cows and bulls is also visible in their feeding and grooming. A Luyia man treats the bull as his pal and will spend time observing his animal eat. Even in modern times when land sizes are diminishing, majority of the homes with less than an acre of land have, at least, a cow

tethered in the homestead. Cows are a mark of wealth and affluence. A Luyia marriage is made legal through payment of cows in form of bride wealth. Many of my respondents observed that they have no marriage certificate; that they do not need them because dowry in form of cows was paid and this is a better certificate than writings on a piece of paper. Bride wealth negotiations centre on how many cows one should pay. In some Luyia communities, the number of cows to be paid is already predetermined. Thirteen cows are prescribed for a virgin but a woman with a child out of wedlock or a divorcee will attract less. This requirement of virginity does not however apply to the men in equal measure. A man with a child out of wedlock is at best praised as a bull that 'started early.' Out of all the cows paid for dowry, the most important is the last cow. This has to be a bull. The bull presented as the last installment of dowry is a symbolic prayer for the woman to produce male children who will one by one obtain bulls from their maternal uncles once they get circumcised.

There are instances when the bulls act as cleansers who fight dark forces of destruction. As noted earlier bullfights are staged for two reasons: To celebrate the life of a hero and for entertainment. Although the focus in this paper is on entertainment, it is important to note that bullfights are sometimes staged in a ceremony known as *eshiremba*, which celebrates the life of a warrior. It is held on the day of the burial of the warrior and it is done within his compound. Such a man should be one who has demonstrated his masculinity through killing another man in a war situation. To be a hero worthy the ritual of *eshiremba*, one must have fought in a war and killed a man. It is important to define a man here. A man is a mature circumcised male. Killing an uncircumcised man, woman or a child is not considered a heroic deed. In a war situation in

traditional Luyialand, this was in fact an abomination, an unmanly and cowardly act. It was a stupid act of blind rage attributed to demented males. During the *eshiremba*, bulls fight at the graveside and spread the soil from the grave all over the compound. Essentially, this is to help the spirit of the warrior fight the spirits of the men he killed in order to enter the world of ancestors. It is this power appropriated to the bull that the Luyia men aspire to possess.

Preparation for the Contests

To have full knowledge of this masculine ritual, we have to look at the etymology of the word contest itself. The Abaluyia talk of bullfight as *khurwanya tsi Jirichi*. The verb *kurwanya* is the equivalent of contest, competition or fight. 'Contest' in English means literally con (with) testis (testicle) (Ong 1989). It is therefore an activity for those with testicles and it involves male ego at its best in an attempt to conquer and subdue the opponent. This combat necessitates elaborate preparation. Events prior to the fight attest to this. Although the fight may take as little as five minutes, the highly structured and detailed pattern of events point to gendered cosmic perception of reality. The physical and psychological conditioning of the bull is extraneous to the extreme though culturally sanctioned. The bull reared specifically for fighting lives a life of isolation from childhood throughout its fighting life. It is completely separated from other cattle in the homestead. This separation serves a number of purposes. To start with, it makes it easy for the owner of the bull to condition and socialize his animal to imbibe extreme aggressiveness towards other bulls. It also does not compete for food with less prized animals. This is yet another masculine ideal that Luyia men aspire for. An ideal Luyia man does not struggle for food. A Luyia man eats all alone while his wife eats

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together with the children. This fact convinces me to look at the bull as a form of surrogate man. The bull does not get the opportunity to mate for it is believed that this would diminish its power to fight. It is a common belief among the Abaluyia that one preparing for any form of competition or contest should keep off from sex. In essence, contact with the vagina is believed to weaken a man. It is therefore no wonder that in Kenya, footballers are asked to abstain from sex when preparing for a match.

Nothing exemplifies the violent nature of this game more than the act of sharpening of the bull's horns three days to the day of the contest. The owner undertakes this exercise as he talks to the bull in an ironic monologue that goes on for a long time. If it were just a mere game as the song quoted above says, why then endanger the life of the bulls through this act? The fact that the owners find it necessary to sharpen the horns signifies a masculine virtue inspired by the sublimation of sexual desires. In this culture, what is dangerous is masculine. It also ricochets with elements of the ritual of circumcision that are meant to make a man virile, dangerous and lethal. It is my contention that the game is meant to make one male demonstrate his virility against another. The victory will entail a form of penetration. In these opposing polarities the one who penetrates feminizes the one penetrated and makes him less of a man.

Once the professional matchmakers announce the day and venue of the contest, preparations start in earnest. Matchmakers fix contests by considering the weight and experience of the contesting bulls. The main fight could just be one but other fights of lightweight bulls serve as curtain raisers. The night before the fight witnesses a celebration of songs and dances. The bull's fans arrive in the home in the evening and dance around the bull for some time before dispersing to go and sleep. They wake up very early around 3a.m.

in the morning to start dancing and psyching the bull once again. The bull responds to efforts by bellowing repeatedly. This is interpreted as a sign that it is accepting the instructions being given to it. Something has to be said about bellowing among the Abaluyia. *Khukumula* - to bellow - is a masculine activity. In official gatherings, respectable people are not asked to talk but to bellow. Bellowing is an act of authority, force, reverence and power. The bull may, however, refuse to bellow if certain imperatives are not observed. Let me explain this. The owner of the bull and all its fans are obligated to abstain from sex the night before the fight. It is believed that if the owner indulges in sex, the bull may be defeated or it might turn against the owner and kill him. Indeed my respondents cited cases where bulls turned against their owners and killed them. A case in point involved a man called Mabonga from Shikoti village in Kakamega District who was stamped to death by a bull in 2003.

Departure from the shed to the arena follows a well-defined pattern of patriarchal hegemonic values. The bull has to leave its shed to the arena amid dances and songs by its fans like a great man leaving or arriving home. Except for the bull owner's wife no other woman should cross its path at this moment. Having avoided sex that night, she is considered a step above femininity and therefore could contribute to the preparation of the bull. In this case she assumes some degree of masculinity by association. If she is the one who feeds it, then she is under obligation to wake up very early in the morning, take off her underpants and beat the back of the bull with it while urging it to be brave, saying: 'go and put up a good fight and win. I do not like being let down.' The symbolic relevance of this act can best be understood as a projective impulse. Removal of the panties is a symbolic invitation to a penetrative act. Through this act, the bull

is conditioned to go and penetrate the opponent in order to feminize it with the 'erect horns.' It is only after this that the entourage departs to the venue, which could be as far as five kilometers away. Some bull owners confessed to me that they visit the grave of a warrior with their bulls prior to the contests and give instructions to the beasts while standing on the grave. This reinforces the belief that the bulls have supernatural powers derived, not from the terrestrial, but the world beyond.

The journey to the venue is even more eventful and action packed. Whistles rend the air as enthusiastic fans release shouts reminiscent of war cries amidst vows to crush and destroy the opponents. Traffic on the main highways in this part of Kenya is considerably slowed down on these occasions. Motorists are warned not to overtake the bull and its fans lest the fans stone them. As they travel to the venue the twigs and clubs of the fans remain raised. This in Freudian terms is a phallic symbol imitating an erect penis. This reading makes sense in the Freudian perspective when we consider the assertion that anything vertical is a phallic symbol. Freud extended this contention to more mundane images like the tie. He argued that a tie, being an object, which hangs down and is not won by women is clearly a male symbol (Dundes 1997: ix). The raised sticks and clubs, it is said, make the bull fight hard and not 'withdraw.' But as the team approaches the venue, sometimes they consider it necessary to take a detour from the main entrance to avoid being tricked by opponents who may bewitch the bull through charms buried on its way.

Nature of the Bull

As a human male surrogate, the bull is conditioned to behave in a certain way throughout its life. To produce hatred towards other bulls this surrogate is isolated from other

animals. It is a fact of life that hate between men comes from cutting ourselves off from each other (Wittgenstein 1980). This conditioning can best be understood from the power relations in this society. The main axis of power in Luyia land is the subordination of what is considered feminine. Masculinity is infused within a collection of practices, symbols, discourses and ideologies associated with the category 'man.' Like what the Abaluyia expect of a 'real man,' the bull is reserved, reticent, and uncommunicative especially in regard to showing emotions unless they are emotions of anger. The fighter bull spends most of its time alone since it is separated from other animals in the homestead and it is never tethered for fear of being contaminated with femininity. It is only the owner, his wife or any other special person drawn from the same basket of taboo and imperatives of tradition that attends to it. If it is the owner's wife who feeds it, she needs to observe a wide range of taboos for instance she should not feed it during her menses. This, it is believed, would weaken the bull. The same is applicable to Luyia men who are asked to keep off from women at such periods. The bull should never be castrated. To castrate it is to weaken it and so it can never fight. These are other pointers indicating that the bull is a surrogate male human being. Luyia men look down on a castrated man and consider him a woman. The bull is bred solely for the purpose of fighting. It serves no other purpose besides that. Using it as an ox is not allowed; it would in fact be an abuse of its integrity. This range of taboos requires explanation.

Sigmund Freud once observed that whenever man sets up a taboo, he fears some danger. It cannot be disputed that a generalized dread of women is expressed in all these rules of avoidance associated with the bull. Men create taboos because they are afraid of being weakened by a woman and thereby tainted

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with femininity (Kabaji 2002). The best way man found to express his fears was through myths and rituals highly infused with rules of avoidance. I am almost certain that bullfighting rituals project psychological inner realities of the masculine mind. Myth and rituals are products of the unconscious and mysterious masculine mind. Carl Jung (1963) recognized the power of myth when he observed that myths represent fantasy of the group and this material may be interpreted psychologically to yield information related to the hidden psychological reality (Kabaji 2002). It is therefore possible to construe taboos related to women and menstruation as a twin product of dread and as a protective device to hegemonic masculinity.

The Combat as the Contest of Masculinities

Crowds of predominantly males pour into the arena, as drumbeats grow louder. Fans appropriate ownership of the bulls so it becomes 'our phalluses versus theirs.' Each owner begs the bull to 'open up'. To open up in the language of Luyia bullfighting is to urinate. A bull is only ready for combat after urinating. To urinate is to accept the challenge. The Abaluyia also observe other instances when a cow has to urinate for a ritual to be complete. In case of bride wealth, when the cows are taken to the bride's home, the ceremony can only begin after the cows urinate. This, it is believed, is a sign that the bride will be fertile and give birth to male children. It is only after a contesting bull has urinated that its owner can urge it to charge forward and fight. In response to the activities around them, the bulls snort, sway their heads from side to side and dig hooves into the ground, signs that they are spoiling for the fight. Meanwhile, the owners of the bulls tirelessly continue to praise them by reminding them of past victories and conquests.

As contesting bulls close on each other, the

spectators' clubs and twigs remain raised while they cheer their bull to victory. The clubs also protect the spectators who use them to ward off charging bulls. And indeed there are moments when the bulls charge towards the crowds before continuing with the contest. At such times the spectators are forced to scamper to safety until the beasts retreat.

Fights could last for just five minutes. Sometimes they may take up to twenty minutes. The victor is determined when the defeated bull takes to its feet, running away from the opponent. At this juncture the owners of the victorious bull guide it out of the arena with songs and dances. The defeated bull is also driven out of the arena by its fans with less fanfare as they sing to console it. The bulls are returned home where the owner and its fans celebrate the victory with eating and drinking beer. It is also important that the fans are given some little money, about ten shillings (\$ 2 cents). It is believed that the bull would know if the fans are not treated well and may not perform well in the next contest.

Naming Contests

As noted earlier, the bulls are proxy male human beings. They are further personified by being given names that describe their best qualities or at least the expectations of their owners. Every fighting bull has a name. The names given are determined by the characteristics of the bull, expectations of the owner, circumstances of its birth or they are named after a bull that won many battles. This pattern of naming is also used in naming children among the Abaluyia. I would like to look closely at the names of five bulls whose fights I witnessed. The names of the bulls are: Osama Bin Laden, Mike Tyson, NARC, *Nyati* and *Eminyi*.

From the onset I have to say that the names given epitomize what the Abaluyia consider masculine values. The fact that Osama bin

Laden's name is given to a bull signals an intimate relationship between the Luyia perception of power and Osama bin Laden's ideals and exercise of power. As al-Qaeda's chief ideologue, Osama, more than anyone is considered the most dangerous international terrorist because of his jihad strategy. Osama bin Laden is reputed to have masterminded the terrorist bombing of the twin towers in New York City, the American Embassy in Nairobi and Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya. The fact that Osama is recognized as a hero in these villages even after leaving a trail of destruction in Kenya is worth our curiosity over the sense of power and influence among the Abaluyia. Osama is lethal, unsympathetic, anti-America and committed to his course. The fact that he pulls unimaginable stunts against the mighty USA makes him an object of admiration by the poverty stricken population of the world, the, underdogs of the world whose pleasure comes through the psychological process of identification. What seems to attract these people to Osama is not the logical understanding of what he stands for but his power to destroy and to defend his position. It is with such fervor that they fight to preserve their hegemony.

Mike Tyson is considered by some to be one of the greatest heavyweight boxers of our time. Tyson's story has been heard in these villages through the radio to which the people have an almost romantic attachment as the conveyer of 'truth.' Tyson, in his prime, routinely defeated prominent opponents in a devastating manner and was once one of the most dreaded boxers. The bull owners give his name to the bulls because of the prowess that Tyson displayed during his hay days as the king of the ring. His punches were powerful and most often sent opponents out of the ring within minutes. But there is another side of Tyson which the Abaluyia identify with. Like most of them, he received very minimal formal

education. As a youth he was expelled from high school and spent some time in juvenile detention centres. Besides, he has had serious problems in his marriage and has served jail terms for rape and assault. The identification with Tyson is partly a function of these attributes, which to the Abaluyia are masculine. He is to them a hero, a man whom they would like to emulate.

Nyati is a Kiswahili word for buffalo. The admiration of the buffalo could perhaps be linked to its fearlessness and scary appearance. But even more intriguing is the name NARC, which is an acronym for National Rainbow Collision. This is the party that won elections in Kenya in 2002 and brought to an end the forty years' rule of the Kenya African National Union (KANU). KANU's defeat in the elections was brought about through a coalition of parties that fielded one presidential candidate - Mwai Kibaki. In psychoanalytic terms the coalition, in a way, gang raped KANU and feminized it, hence the admiration for it. *Eminyi* is a type of bird found in this part of Kenya. Known for its bravery and cunning nature, *Eminyi* is difficult to trap. It flies high in a zigzag way. Luyia mythology holds birds in high esteem. They are believed to serve as emissaries to the supernatural world. When they appear in folktales they have uncanny male like behavior. *Eminyi* exhibits behavior that the Abaluyia consider masculine.

The Signifying Songs and Dances

A lot of singing is done in connection with bullfighting. Most of the songs despise and feminize opponents while others are infused with sex symbols glorifying the virility of the bull and his owner. In some songs, it is difficult distinguishing references to either the bull or its owner for both are treated as one and the same. The songs reinforce idealized images of masculinity in relation to images of

femininity. They epitomize the Luyia understanding of the role of a man in the society and carries sexual innuendos. The hegemonic ideal of masculinity in Luyialand projects men as risk-takers, aggressive, heterosexual, rational and powerful personalities. The songs uphold these ideals, reminding participants of them. The songs perpetuate images of toughness and endurance of hardships. This, I should say, is not peculiar to the Abaluyia. In his study of the hegemonic masculinity of the US navy, Barrett (2004) found similar traits.

Let me direct the spotlight on some of the songs sung and the sex imagery and metaphorical insinuations of masculine attributes. The active participant is the winner who performs the 'male' role and gains prestige while the passive participant is the loser who performs the "female" role as the penetrated and loses prestige (Dundes 1997:31).

Song 1 Fala Ekondomu (Wear a Condom)

Mama Mama Mama

Fala ekondomu

Nomyola mukana fala ekondomu

Fala ekondomu

Fala ekondomu

Gushere gwu mundu fala ekondomu

Sisa sisa ku madamu

Sisa sisa ku madamu

Nonyola ling'ang'ule fala

Nonyola ling'ang'ule fala

Sisa sisa ling'ang'ule

Fala ekondomu

Fala ekondomu

English translation

Mother mother mother

Wear a condom

When you get a girl wear a condom

Wear a condom

Wear a condom

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When you get someone's wife wear a condom

Massage it on a madam

Massage it on a madam

If you get a prostitute wear a condom

If you get a prostitute wear a condom

Massage it on a prostitute

Wear a condom

Wear a condom

The song begins by invoking the title mother, which reflects what happens when one is in trouble. Usually, the natural reaction for many in such situations is to call out to their mother. 'Mother, mother, mother' in the first line suggests the seriousness of the message to come. The song then implores men to always wear a condom. This line is repeated for emphasis. This song asks men to massage it (penis) on a variety of categories of women: madam (school teacher), other people's wives and prostitutes but concludes that this has to be done while one is wearing a condom. In general, the song glorifies extra marital sexual relationships only if it is safe for the man. It should be noted that there are moments when the drums are played without the accompaniment of a song. After the singers have finished the last line, the soloist steps in front of the group, raises his hands in an apparent excited stupor, to signal to the instrumentalists to play the male drum while the playing of the female drum (small drum) is suspended. At this juncture, the soloist shouts the praises of various men amidst employing vocal gymnastics that make up the repertoire of performers' tricks. The mood of controlled frenzy is given form by the shouts loaded with phallic signals, insinuations of sexuality and the almost pervasive body jerks. This affords the soloist the opportunity to exalt men within the crowd known for their sexual prowess. By the use of sexual imagery, he likens such men to bulls that never tire among other

superlatives. He plays on the vanity and emotions of these men, indirectly castigating women, playing out men's anxieties and exalting masculinity by repeating percussive phrases.

Images abound in all songs extolling male sexuality. Let us consider the song below:

Song 2 A Club to Seduce

Mbe shikongo shanje
Vakoji mbe shikongo shange
Nzie kuserere Shinyalu
Utasera dawē
Urasira kumutego

English translation

Give me my club
My vakoji (coeval) give me my club
Give me my club
So that I go and seduce in Shinyalu
Do not get excited
You will be trapped

In this song, the soloist asks for a club (phallic symbol) from his friend with whom he was circumcised. For better understanding of this song we have noted that among the Abaluyia, circumcised boys are secluded for a month before they emerge from the seclusion area. One of the items that one is asked to make for himself is the club which he is expected to keep till old age. Elders can be seen carrying these clubs to date. This culture is not only restricted to the Abaluyia. The Maasai and Kalenjin of Kenya also carry clubs as cultural icons of masculinity and authority. In the Luyia culture it signifies virility, authority and power. The former president of Kenya, Daniel arap Moi, carried his club about while in power and still carries it anywhere he goes. The symbolic significance of the club in this song cannot be gainsaid. When the singer implores his mate to give him a club in order

to go to Shinyalu and seduce women, we realise that he is out for sexual exploits. Shinyalu is a market centre that boasts of beautiful girls in Western Province of Kenya. But the singer goes ahead to warn the men not to be excited because they can be trapped. This is a direct reference to marriage. The singer is therefore castigating men who were trapped in marriage before enjoying free sexual exploits as proof of their masculinity.

Other songs are misogynistic. They are used to despise opponents as persons not ready for sexual exploits. We see this from the following songs:

Song 3 Unanjiri shi go? (Why did you call me?)

Unangirangi kii
Unangirangi kigu
Unangirashigo kasitiri
Shinangangwa viswa
Shinanga vutswa
Unanjiri gahiri?

English translation

Why did you call me?
Why did you call me?
Why did you call me if you are not ready?
I am not called for nothing
What is the matter you called me for?

Song 4 Munyororo (Chained Males)

Yoo haa
Ve gavandu
Vasieveranga munyololo gwagumira

English translation

Yoo haa
These people
Those threatening me are chained.

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Song 5 Mbeere Ngoteve (Let Me ask you)

*Mbere ngoteve
Mbere ngoteve
Wava wadira kukindu cha mundu*

English translation

I want to ask you
I want to ask you
Have you ever trespassed unto someone's wife?

Song 6 Engo'mbe Niyananga (When a Cow Bellows)

*Eng'ombe ne niyananga
Yakwesa yakwesa
Eng'ombe ne niyananga
Yakwesa yakwesa
Yakwesa yakwesa munyororo yonyene
Eeh vane lelo luno
Saaaaaa
Eng'ombe ne niyananga
Yakwesa yakwesa
Eng'ombe ne niyananga
Yakwesa yakwesa
Yakwesa yakwesa munyororo yonyene
Waaa kutsie kutsie kutsie*

English translation

When a cow bellows
It pulls it pulls
When a cow bellows
It is pulling it is pulling
It pulls the rope alone without help
Eh my people
Today is the day
Cheers
When a cow bellows
It pulls, it pulls
When a cow bellows
It pulls the rope alone
Waaa lets go lets go

Song 7 Engo'mbe (A Cow)

*Eng'ombe mama engombe
Weeee
Eng'ombe mama eng'ombe
Eng'ombe ya mavere
Mama eng'ombe
Eng'ombe ya masingu
Mama eng'ome
Eng'ombe yo kukhywa
Mama eng'ombe
Eng'ombe ye nyama
Mama eng'ombe
Eng'ombe yo kulwana
Eng'ombe mama eng'ombe
Eng'ombe yo mubucha*

English translation

A cow mother a cow
Hey hey
A cow mother a cow
A cow for milk
Mother a cow
A cow for cow dung
Mother a cow
A cow for bride wealth
Mother a cow
A cow for meat
Mother a cow
A cow for bull fighting
A cow for the butchery

I agree with Dundes (1980) that whatever is contained in a song is meaningful even if we do not have full insight into what the meanings may be. The projective impulse, that tendency to attribute to another person or to the environment what is actually within oneself is at work in a number of the songs sung during bullfighting. What is attributed is usually some internal impulse or taboo or feeling, which may be painful, unacceptable. This ascription of feelings and qualities of one's own to an external source is accomplished without the individuals being consciously aware of that

fact. The individual perceives the external object as possessing the taboo tendencies without recognizing their source in himself.

In song 3, the singer wonders why he was called for the contest. He boasts that he is only called for a contest in which the rival is ready. Being ready in this case is having imbibed masculine qualities of toughness and aggression. He spits out at the opponent as not ready and therefore uncircumcised. The song indicates that not being tough and aggressive are reflections of femininity and therefore worthlessness. Song 4 continues with this theme and regards the opponent as chained. The metaphor draws from power relations of gender in this society. A man who is considered chained is not free from the control of his wife. He is perceived here as one who has been bewitched by his wife. Song 5 picks up the theme of adultery in an attempt to project to another person what is inherent in the singers. The song asks those who have at any time trespassed on another man's wife to come out and be cleansed. This song is in reference to a popular belief among the people that if such a person is in the crowd, the bull can turn against him and mow him to death. It is ironic that they sing this song after song 1 that glorifies adultery and fornication. In essence, the crowd achieves a psychological cleansing through this song. Song 6 exalts the virtues of autonomy and freedom. A 'cow', in this case a bull, is said to work alone and that it does not seek help in accomplishing tasks. This becomes the ideal masculine behavior. To seek help is to be feminine. Song 7 enumerates the importance and usefulness of a cow. Among other things, it provides milk, it is used for paying bridewealth, in bullfighting and for meat when sold to a butcher. All these are what a man needs to do and possesses in order to be considered masculine.

The Metaphor of the Female Underpants and the Vagina Curse

Before I end this discussion it is important to discuss, albeit briefly, the metaphor of a woman's underpants in the bullfighting ritual in relation to a dreadful curse in Luyialand, the curse of the vagina. The underpants acquire potency from what they are meant to cover, the vagina. In the first part of this discussion I noted that the woman who feeds the bull has to abstain from feeding it when in her menses. I also noted that when the bull is leaving the animal house to go and fight, the woman has to bless it by beating it with an already used underwear as she commands it to go and conquer. But there is another practice that is equally significant in understanding the symbolic nature of a woman's underpants. If a cow or bull is so tough and aggressive to members of the family the wife of the owner (women do not own cows) has a way of making it docile. It is believed that what she needs to do is to wash her panties and pour the dirty water on its face. This makes the bull docile and easy to tame.

In all these instances the panties seem to perform various functions. The panty can inspire courage and enable the bull to win a contest but it can also make cows docile and inactive. It is my stake that the underpants are symbolic of the supposed negative feminine feared by Luyia men. The power that the underpants have is through its association with the vagina whose mysteries has never failed to astound Luyia men. Just as the vagina is feared, it is also revered as a life giving organ but which can be used to destroy a man. This reminds us of Sigmund Freud's assertion on penis envy. In this sense, the men fear that the vagina can swallow the penis and these anxieties over its mysteries are discussed in symbolic terms in Luyia folklore. The meaning in this folkloristic fantasy is not very clear but it provides a socially sanctioned

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outlet for what cannot be directly articulated. It is in shouts, songs, proverbs, games gestures that these anxieties are vented.

The ritual of bullfight, therefore, mirrors the unconscious operation of the minds of Luyia men cast in an arena in which they have to aspire for a certain kind of masculinity. The folklore created like other myths, raise issues of gender and contest over power. They discuss gender in the same fashion like myths and folklore from other cultures. The most well known myths driven by misogynistic attitude are incidentally found in holy books. In the biblical story of creation, for instance, which draws from Jewish mythology and involves Adam and Eve, the gender question is raised and settled after the creation of the universe. In this myth we are told that Yahweh created woman only as an after thought because Adam could not find a suitable helpmate among animals. Yahweh decided to mould her from one of Adam's ribs. Knowledge about human anatomy reveals that a single rib is superfluous, almost unneeded. The removal of one has very little effect on the health and muscular function of the individual. Made out of an inconsequential rib, the woman's functions in society and in life are to support man (Kabaji 2002). Bullfighting folklore presents the woman in similar ways; as subordinate, an object of pleasure, dangerous and mysterious with dark powers that can either destroy or make a man.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper I stated that I was going to present a critical analysis of bullfighting to uncover the covert and overt meaning of the game. In the words of Le Roux (2005:19), I was going to study the *non-dit*, what is not said or what is said in a manner that conceals the meaning. It has become apparent that bullfighting is popular because it provides a psychological avenue through

which anxieties of violent sexual tendencies are vented. The bull as a masculine symbol is perceived as embodying the aggression and power associated with virility and conquest.

Although my respondents confided that they rear bulls for prestige, it comes out clearly from my analysis that the game is a masculine activity that reinforces what the Abaluyia consider masculine or feminine. It is also clear from the data that bullfighting is one avenue of exploring the anxieties and fears of men at a time when the very elements that made one masculine are being challenged and contested. It is also to some degree a way of connecting with the now ever dwindling ideal of masculinity. It becomes clear that male aggressiveness is learned and acquired in a context in which men learn that it is both rewarding and expected to behave in an assertive way. Boys grow up in environments that encourage certain kinds of conduct instead of others. They learn to be 'men'. Aggression from this point of view is a response to specific kinds of experience. Men will only behave aggressively if they have learned that it is appropriate to do so (Brittan 1997:114).

The Abaluyia argue that they participate in the game partly because *Misambwa*, the ancestors of the group, said they should. Again it is noticeable that there is a way in which the Abaluyia yearn for togetherness with other men, the dead and their gods. Many of my respondents argued that some churches are hostile to the game. They particularly cited the Friends Church (Quakers). Those who attend this church and many other modern churches are dissuaded from attending and participating in the ritual. The ritual, however, gives us an avenue through which we observe the Abaluyia projecting anxieties over their masculinity.

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Mila (N.S.), Vol. 9, 2008

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