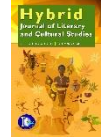# Construction of AbaGusii cultural image and identity in Christopher Monyoncho's Popular Poetry: The *Prevalent Theme of Marriage Blues*

Review article

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Abstract

Construction of cultural image and identity in society has been a major focus in academia in recent times. However, most of the studies done in the area target stylistics, imagery, and group artists as opposed to individual artists. The objective of this study was to critically uncover how cultural image and identity in prevalent themes are constructed through the oral and popular poetry of Monyoncho. This iconic AbaGusii Benga music artist plied his trade among the AbaGusii, a Western Kenya Bantu community for over four decades. The AbaGusii like all African communities had suffered colonial disruptions and Westernization that upset their social cultural systems. The study employed two theories, namely, the ethnopoetics theory to account for step-by-step translations from EkeGusii to English and dialogism to interrogate the several voices from the dynamic to conservative within the spectrum of patriarchal, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods and the thematic concerns of that given era. A descriptive research design was employed, and in terms of their theoretical implications. The study would be of interest to a wide range of researchers, linguists, anthropologists, and students concerned with theory, practice, and development of language, social, political, historical, literature and cultural studies.

Keywords: construction, cultural image, cultural identity, prevalent themes, ethnopoetics and dialogism

Public Interest Statement

Just as in marketing and social cycles, image and identity are everything in cooperate and product branding. Cultural image and identity are major aspects of popular art encompassing orature of any African community. This largely accounts for the core of their individual or communal existence. With renewed interest in Cultural studies and a people's roots, this study has serious implications in the academia.

1.1 Introduction

Cultural image and identity have been points of focus both globally and region specific. They are largely a construct of a people's orature, way of life, belief systems, their history and language. These concepts are transferrable in every community through socializing vehicles such as schools, family, work, peer group (Lacan, 1991; Beller, 2003; Egara, 2005). It was within this milieu that this study of Christopher Monyoncho's music also popular poetry and its reflection of Gusii cultural values was premised. Monyoncho's discography is rich, traversing over four decades that inform phases of the AbaGusii historical and intercultural factors.

Inkeles & Levinson (1969) when describing cultural image(s) refers to two areas, namely: national characteristics such as mannerisms, customs, traditions, cultural norms and superficial traits such as enduring constellations of psychological dispositions and values of members of society-which they share by virtue of their common historical experience, culture and institutionalized patterns of their social existence. On the other hand, Skulj (2000) argues that cultural identity cannot be used as a measure of originality of an inherent national subjectivity. According to him, cultural identity is deconstruction and multiplication of several cultural relations. In this regard, cultural identity becomes a meeting point, or perhaps, a melting point with cross-cultural implications.

Further, according to Khalip & Mitchell (2011), cultural image is something beyond the representation of things. The cultural image plays a self-referential and self-generative function and is capable of producing forms of engagement beyond spectatorship and subjectivity. According to them, the aesthetic, ethical and political new ways of engaging with embodiment, agency, history, and technology are worth studying. This proves that the study of African artists' work has no limit and can take any angle so long as the correct procedures are observed. The study of popular poetry does transcend mere spectatorship and subjectivity and indeed, it has been demonstrated before (Khalip & Mitchell, 2011).

Brubaker & Cooper (2000) view cultural identity as particularistic, categorical attribute that includes race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation position in a

universalistically conceived social structure. From the Foucault Post-structuralist and Post-modernist approach, they look at cultural identity as fundamental sameness among members of a group or category manifest in solidarity, in shared dispositions, collective 'selfhood', a condition of social being, something valued, supported or recognized and preserved.

Furthermore, Skulj (2000) sees cultural identity as a historical process that cannot remain the same in nature and is never a perpetuation of itself. Brubaker & Cooper (2000) and Skujl (2000) agree that cultural identity is continuously being re-established through constant dialogue with other cultures and socio-cultural dynamics. Therefore, cultural image and cultural identity are a construct of a people's orature, way of life, belief systems, their history and language. Quoting UNESCO (1983), Moraova (2013) asserts that only the study of images will enable us to break with the past and set out resolutely to change the society. Things regarded as natural such as it's a woman destined to have children and cook in the kitchen e.g. a Gusii wife (*omorugi- the one who cooks*) takes care of the home, while the husband's (*omosacha- the one who seeks*) role is to win bread. These cultural image and identity aspects can be manifested in the use of classic AbaGusii names, original typical Gusii words and phrases, references to cultural stereotypes and embodiment of the cultural narratives of kinship.

AbaGusii besides interacting with their neighbours such as the Luo to the South, the Maasai and Kipsigis to the East the European colonization, Westernization and Christianity greatly impacted their worldview. It is on this ground we view AbaGusii cultural identity as a multiplicity of cultural mergers, adaptations, blends and a continuous process subject to historical dynamics of the time. It was on the same ground I wanted to question whether with these processes, employing Monyoncho's popular poetry, in a way impacted or changed their cultural values or image and affected their identity.

Ochieng (1974) observes that the Gusii people speak a common language, share a common and continuous territory, have common customs and traditions including belief in common descent and institutionalized forms of cooperation and interdependences. The Gusii equally value working together in many aspects that involved rituals, initiations, ceremonies, sacrifices, celebrations such as death and marriage. The common taboos, dos and don'ts guarded their respectful cultural image and identity and imposed sanctions on those who violated them as they risked extraction, condemnation, being ostracized or even lynching. A man had a communal responsibility to behave like one that has to lead lest he would be equated to a child or woman. Family tree or continuity was of capital importance more so a male child. It

ensured security of posterity. That gave the Gusii an inviolable cultural image and identity.

I found the two approaches of ethnopoetics and dialogism powerful in helping to interpret African literature and heritage through African lenses (Alembi, 2005; Fayola & Agwuele, 2009). Alembi argues that for so long orature has been subjected to Eurocentric approaches hence denying it deeper insights and balanced presentation. The employment of ethnopoetics, allowed the richness of the poems to come out. Dialogism, on the other hand, allowed the poems to speak out in several nuances of own voices in an unhindered and plain manner. Therefore, ethnopoetics and dialogism became viable vehicles to examine these nuances, in the language, social changes brought about by historical factors and probably captured by the artist in his popular poetry.

2.1 The AbaGusii community

The Gusii traditionally attribute their origins to a mystical Misiri or Egypt, which also affiliates them to other Bantu sub-tribes like the Baganda, Kuria, Logoli, Suba, Agikuyu and Meru. Formerly known as the Kosovo, the AbaGusii language belongs to the Niger-Congo family. By aligning their origins to Egypt, the Gusii in a way affiliate their national identity to a glorious past anchoring to *Monto* or *mtu* and *abanto* (as other Bantu groups), that is the concept of person(s) or many numbers, and image of belongingness or largeness (Ochieng, 1974; Bosire & Machogu, 2013). The colonization of the AbaGusii was a product of the 1890 Anglo-German Treaty that enhanced the British and Germany activities in the Kavirondo section of East Africa (Ochieng, 1974). This offered a direct threat to their cultural image and identity. The aggression was experienced when the British established a small administrative outpost at Karungu with the objective of bringing under their control the various Bantu and Nilotic communities here. Like other African groups, the AbaGusii through their diviners such as Sakawa and Moraa o'Ngiti had known that "strangers with white skins" would visit and strongly advised against hostilities.

However, the Bogetutu and Nyaribari clans resisted while the Abagesero and Bagirango welcomed them. According to Ochieng (1974), in 1904, a police detachment and KAR (Kenya African Rifles) army under the command of Jenkins entered Gusii country by way of South Mogirango with indiscriminate shooting, burning of huts and granaries and seizure of cattle. The Gusii killed in that expedition, men, women, and children were about 100 and 3000 heads of cattle seized. By 1907, the British had established an administrative post in Getembe that they named Kisii Boma with Northcote as the in-charge.

2.2 AbaGusii Culture

The Gusii believed in a supreme God known as *Engoro* who was the creator of the universe and source of life. The Gusii believed that the ancestral spirits, *ebirecha* once displeased would afflict people with disease, death of people and animals, crops failure, barrenness, and other natural calamities such as *endwari* (plague), lightening, suicides or mental illness. Some causes of problems included the ignoring of the ancestral spirits, not welcoming their souls into the homestead through special sacrifices; extinguishing the circumcision fire lit during the seclusion sessions when initiates awaited healing; encountering 'wrong animals' like a python crossing your path or certain birds giving you their back. An afflicted person visited *omoragori* (seer) who prescribed a solution involving some specially skinned animals' sacrifices under certain conditions to placate the evil spirits. In case someone got bewitched through the burying of magic in their compound, they involved *omoriori* (a smeller) to detonate it or dig it out (Bosire & Machogu, 2013; Mayer, 1950; Levine 1932, 1966, 1982; Ochieng, 1974; Nerlove, 1969). The Gusii valued team work and in many aspects involving rituals such as initiations, ceremonies, sacrifices, celebrations such as death and marriage. These things bonded individuals into a common recognizable entity. For example, their worship rituals revolved around a common deity, *Engoro*, to whom they held allegiance, paid obeisance and sacrificed animals to. They were equally affected by the bane and boom of *ebirecha* (spirits) that begat both evil and good deeds.

2.3 Christopher Monyoncho Araka

Monyoncho was born in 1948, when Kenya was still a British colony, in Kitutu Chache (Nyamwaka, 2012; Orina, 2014 & Bironga, 2014). He therefore experienced life through the colonial era and post-colonial after Kenya's independence in 1963, under Moi's regime that followed Kenyatta's rule. Monyoncho passed on during president Kibaki reign and the multiparty era. Monyoncho began his primary education at the age of 14 (he is said to have played his music in his Kegogi primary days) after a stint at Arusha Tanzania as a lumberjack. However, due to lack of secondary school fees, he went back to his old job of felling trees. Around that moment, he started to compose and sing. His music moved listeners to tears while performing at pre-wedding parties and weddings. The local administration stamped its foot when they accused him of corrupting young minds with romantic music and imposed a heavy levy on him to literary put him out of business. He moved out of the village to Kericho where he began his music career officially, as he worked in the tea estates when he joined hands with John Sitora and they founded Nyamwari band (Nyakina, The Standard of 7th December 2008; Maina, Daily Nation of October 4 2013; Mogire, Daily Nation of October 26 2013).

He married his first wife Zipporah Gesare in the 1960s and the second one, Jane Gesare, in 1976. Some of his earlier band members from whom others later pursued own careers included John Sitora, Samuel Bokaya, one Nyandika, Omweri Omambe and Osiemo Bw'Ayunga among others. The form of music that he started experimenting on was known as Benga. This was a new way of entertainment that originated from a pattern of the Luo *nyatiti* or Gusii *obokano* strumming; employing pluck and pick single notes on the electric guitar rapidly in a fashion akin to playing the lyre (Music, 2015). He was filling a void left by obokano musicians who through influence permeated all sectors of OmoGusii social life involving ritual and entertainment but now were no longer active in the new world and economy of money (Finke, 2013).

2.4 Orature

Ngugi (2007) calls the study of oral literature orature, a term he attributes to Pio Zirimu who coined it in the 1970s to mean those utterances including the written classical epics in all cultures realizable only in oration and oral narration. The key components of orature's definition are spoken arts, performed and in case of a creative artist dramatized. Orature comprises the study of oral narratives, songs or oral poetry as long forms and proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters or jokes among others as short forms (Finnegan, 2012; Ziriwa, 2014).

For Ngugi (2007) song, poetry, and dance are man's imaginative attempts to explain the universe. Through music and dance, sound and motion, a man not only grapples with space and distance but also equally struggles with nature and exemplifies nurture. Ngugi opines that orature depends on a participatory audience and is possible in every other culture. Kabore (2014) sees orature as hybridity and performance, where the literary work can be poetry, sung music, story and drama at the same time. He asserts that a mixture of genres both oral and written forms and performance are identifying features of works of orature. It was within this scope that Monyoncho's popular poetry fell.

Livan (2004) believes that the oral character of oral literature manifested in songs and poems accomplishes creativity in a verbalized message far from what written literature can do. The backbone of these performances is a people's oral tradition. This is what Ziriwa (2014) in view of aesthetics of African literature calls cultural truths and aspirations cherished by the community. These truths include morality, honesty, hard work, chastity, and unity, some of the positive virtues, in fact, the true ingredients of societal cohesion. They are represented through language in certain words or phrasing, coded in names and deep expressions that mirror the societal worldview and belief system. A people's culture, like AbaGusii, reflects similar

values with verbal arts creatively spun by its artists. Monyoncho was a pioneer Gusii artist who first embraced the guitar playing and endured over four decades of creative production of popular poetry, hence, attention by this study.

2.7 Popular poetry and themes

Popular poetry in this context refers to the music that Monyoncho created. As an artist and entertainer, Christopher Monyoncho Araka's work (based on Benga genre, a mixture of Luo music traditional style with some rumba (Makokha, Egara & Dipio, 2011) was purely performance based and falls under the popular culture studies of orature. In the study of orature, the genre of songs (music) and oral poetry are so closely interrelated and even when you look at their characteristics, it is not easy to draw distinct boundaries. To affirm this, examples from Finnegan's (2012: 99) description of music in Africa do not distinguish between poets and singers, songs or music and poetry. She avers that "certain kinds of poetry are typically delivered or sung by women particularly dirges, lullabies mocking verses and songs to accompany women's ceremonies or work." Referring to the Luo *nyatiti* (an instrument same as the AbaGusii eight stringed lyre (*obokano*), an artist gains fame depended on exposition of a single genre sung or spoken or a particular occasion when the poet or singer comes forward to exhibit his art. Finnegan continues to use the words songs and poetry interchangeably when giving various examples across Africa.

It was in this sense Monyoncho was viewed as not only a musician but also a poet, a social commentator, a storyteller and a performer aka dramatist at the same time, through his recorded music. The assumption was that Monyoncho's art may disclose in its core the cultural values that unified the Gusii nation around a common identity. On the other hand, popular means it has a larger and universal appeal to the majority of the members in that community; it informs their viewpoints, characterizes their responses and gives them a sense of belongingness (Frith, 1996). Therefore, to study Monyoncho's orature, a pioneer modern musician was one way to determine how the AbaGusii draw distinct dichotomies between the positive and the negative aspects of their society and how these helped them negotiate their everyday life. A people express their cultural image and identity through art. A number of studies (Jason, 1968; Livan, 2004; Ngugi, 2007; Goddard, 2006; Finnegan, 2012; Ziriwa, 2014 and Orina, 2014) confirm that this is achieved through performance of oral literature or orature in spite of existing variations. The variations reflect on contact situation and culture of contact.

The AbaGusii community art celebrated communal events such as birth, circumcision, marriage, work, beer parties, war, funeral, religion and even when

ushering in storytelling sessions (Nyamwaka, 2012). Monyoncho's debut into music in 1970 was 66 years after the forceful entry of colonialism in Gusii land and precincts in 1904. There was therefore a need to interrogate the kind of themes Monyoncho chose to bring up in his popular art and whether they matched, the community's binding values and ties. The themes were assumed carriers of the values and beliefs that united the AbaGusii as a community and created their desired cultural image.

Adetunji's (2011) study of language and identity in popular music in Nigeria observes that themes within the African space and preoccupations are ever unfolding. In reference to Fela Kuti's music, a modern artist is wont to decry bad leadership, illiteracy, youth unrest, high unemployment rates, lack of infrastructure, money politics, wars, communal crises etc. My study examined the contents of the popular poems and what they reveal about the predominant concerns in the AbaGusii community. It sought to establish how cultural values and capital social goods that inform this serious AbaGusii pioneer and iconic Benga artist's popular poetry of over four decades' creativity construct the AbaGusii cultural image and identity. For the sake of this paper the theme of marriage under the subtopic of marriage blues was analysed. It was hoped that the challenges associated with modern marriages would be portrayed under this topic and highlights of possible solutions and how these are reflective of the AbaGusii cultural image and identity.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The study employed two theories, namely ethnopoetics and dialogism in step-by-step analysis of Monyoncho's popular poems. Ethnopoetics was coined in the late 1960s by Jerome Rothenberg (1970), when seeking for better means of translating and transcribing oral poetries (Quick, 1999). Ethnopoetics works on the premise that poems, songs among others are units structured in lines and verses. The approach emphasizes translation on basis of lines in order to capture rhythm, nuance, phrasing, metaphors, and groupings of these lines to embody experience and cultural schema. The major proponents of the theory include Tedlock (1972, 1985) Rothernberg (1970), Hymes (1986), and Mendoza (1993) who have carried out extensive translations of ancient texts from various communities of the world. According to Quick (1999), these special translations capture the power and beauty of oral performances on the written pages. The key tenets of ethnopoetics include:

- Employment of the verse form and line unit.
- The performer and audience's evaluation of text.
- The division of text into episodes, themes and functions.

- There is separation of content from form. It encourages the study of both content and their linguistic forms.
- A multiplicity of different patterning to reflect change in the culture's aesthetic system due to change and borrowing.
- Elevation of how a given text or performer handles the expectations of the audience.

Ethnopoetics was used to translate all items of Monyoncho's popular poetry from EkeGusii to Ethnopoetics was used a) to unravel the situational context b) Examine thematic developments in the poem c) Study grammatical and stylistic features at use d) Appreciate the structure of the story in the popular poem e) Account for the repetitions and pattern changes. The other theory used in the study was dialogism. The concept of Dialogism was conceived by Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher, in 1929, based on the concept of musical polyphony while dealing with main characters of Dostoevsky's writing. According to Mokabadze (2013), Bakhtin had discovered that pluralism and diversity were a way of life in Dostoevsky's poetics- where voices co-exist, without domination by one side, many voices unmerged into single perspective not subordinate to the voice of the author, making a real world where contradictions and differences co-exist.

According to Holquist (2011) Bakthin advocated that a text should be read through its context, where the themes are never separated from the place- genres. He argues that we are always in dialogue, not only with other people, but also with everything in the world. The Bakhtin concept of polyphony which literary means multiple voices, will later be adopted and it would rule out monological view where characters solely existed to transmit the author's ideology- making art work featureless, flat and single tuned. Instead, dialogism makes the work double voiced or multi-voiced, making a work more objective and realistic. Such a work draws on the history of past use and meaning associated with each word, phrase or genre. In extreme context even a single word is always in intense relationship with another word- being addressed to a listener, and anticipating a response. People are still in a dialogue with their ecological surroundings, with nature, with multiple inner voices.

Bakhtin might have initially dismissed poetry, especially the European epics as lacking dialogue- as narrowly confined to a single authorial, impersonal and sacrosanct tradition. However, studies by Ojaide (1996); Wesling (2008); Njogu (2004); Blevins (2008) and Egya (2011) have proven otherwise. Premised on the argument that a mere word or literary utterance exists in a dialogical relationship or condition –then it goes without saying that, every literary text, including poetry of all types, can also contain

polyphony and other languagedness. The following are the distinct claims of dialogism as a theory:

- A text carries an identity of many voices.
- A text should be read through context without separation of themes from the context.
- Dialogue is a continuous exercise, not fully revealed or known because of constant change and 'unfinisability'.
- Dialogue does not happen only with other people but also with everything in the world.
- Each work draws on the history of past use and meaning.
- Words are interrelated in meaning; hence, a word has many meanings than one.
- When dealing with alien values the 'others' perspective gets incorporated hence offering new inflections and nuances.
- Voices only respond to former utterances and anticipate future utterances.
- An artist assumes the role of the conscience of the society reminding the society of high cultural ethos that must be upheld (Ojaide, 1996).
- It allows the unofficial viewpoint, the marginalized, the oppressed, the periphalized (Stam, 1991).

Njogu (2004) links dialogism to orature when he views every given performance in orature as a re-telling of a previous performance, a response to possible performances within a polyphonic text. Egya (2011) notes that, a performance of African orature is polyphonic. Ojaide (1996) observes that piece of art performed definitely orients itself towards dialogism, bringing together voices that may agree or disagree, voices that vocalize the pressing contradictions of the society. Dialogism was used to identify the type of voices raised; unmerged, submerged, conservative b) concerned with questions whether the artist's voice was situated amidst others? Is there a voice of conscience in the text? c) The form of register depicting existing sensibilities? d) Relate identifiable voices to former utterances and recurring responses and finally, identify the side taken by the artist.

3.2 Geographical description of the study area

According to Bosire & Machogu (2013), Gusii land is located in Western Kenya, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) east of Lake Victoria. Over 70 percent of the land is cultivable. This study purposively identified Kisii and Nyamira Counties of Kenya that make what is called Gusii land, a region generally inhabited by the AbaGusii community who

besides a large diaspora population make Monyoncho's audience. These counties are part of the forty-seven counties in Kenya. Gusii land is naturally hilly and largely green, densely populated and a rich agricultural region situated in the defunct Nyanza Province bordered by Bomet and Kericho counties to the East and Narok and Homa Bay counties to the South with a population of 2, 703,235 people (Population Census August, 2019). This study employed a qualitative study design. It targeted purposively selected available music that had the imprint of Monyoncho's artistry presented by the three bands associated with him, namely, Nyamwari, Kegogi Jazz and New Kegogi Jazz band. The records were coded and archived.

There was an attempt to cover a reasonably representative number of his music as much as possible owing that his over 4 decade's music represented different dynamics of time, personas and nuances. Hence, an appropriate representative percentage of 15 % that is 43 items, in line with the 10-30 percent requirement on sampling (Creswell, 2012; Ngechu, 2009; Kerlinger, 1986) were selected from the 290 poems in my personal library. 11 songs were discussed under the prevalent themes in Monyoncho's popular poetry. I used an Mp3 player, a notebook and a pen. I relied on keen listening to jot down the lyrics of each song. The song lyrics were translated from EkeGusii into English line by line each word and phrase given due consideration. There was need to ensure that the recording of the information was accurately captured on paper to avoid prejudiced misinterpretation. I made short notes organized around the study topic and objective. The objective of the study was to critically uncover prevalent themes in Monyoncho's popular poetry and how he constructs AbaGusii cultural image and identity.

4.1 Marriage Blues

Among the Gusii, marriage institution marked the beginning of promising things for a family, continuity of the family tree, demarcation between childhood and adulthood. Those who crossed over were expected to change associates and conduct. So much was expected of the married couple from society such that lots of tensions and pressure dogged one's marriage. The elaborate rituals and ceremonies that were publicly and communally engaged ensured this permanent union outlived those challenges. Polygamy was a badge of honour until Christianity and demands of modernity toppled this culturally endorsed practice. One poem, namely, *Mogisankio* was analysed under this sub topic.

4.2   Mogisankio   Age mate

1. *Aye mogisankio gitogotara komo:*   You, my age mate, whom I walk with

2. *Amarwa twanywa naye endagera twaria komo:* One we drink beer and eat together

3. *Gwantiga ase amarwa kwagenda baka bwone:* Why leave me clubbing and go home

4. *Gwatebia omorugi one natebereire amarwa:* To tell my wife I am a drunkard

5. *Nkogenga ore bono?*   Are you out to scandalize me?

6. *Naende kwamotebia chibesa nche nabwate:*   Telling her how much I have spent.

7. *Nabageire abanto chionsi chiaerire:*   Been distributing among the people

8. *Naende naye nare kogorera amarwa ndugu!* Despite the beer I bought you, brother.

9. *Ngochia goika bwone omorugi:*   The moment I arrive home, my wife

10. *Onchaka chisegi:*   Starts fighting me.

11. *Otama ogenda sobo ontigera:*   Then she runs to her home leaving me

12. *Abana nyomba:*   With the kids.

13. *Naki rendi ngocha gokora?*   What do you expect me to do next?

14. *Rende nindwe isiko aa gose?*   Can I even move from my home?

15. *Nabuo korenda:*   I am now the one babysitting.

16. *Mambia ekero ngotara abanto:*   In the morning when strolling about

17. *Bachia amaseko:*   I am laughed at

18. *Naseririe omorugi timanyeti kogamba:*   I chased my wife because I am thick.

19. *Aiga nao amangana akaremogisangio one:* Here is the problem my age mate

20. *Bono abana bakantigarera isiko:*   I am nursing the children at home.

21. **Solo:** *Oyondi orenge buna omwana:*   Oyondi, one like a child

22. *Obaba tokonyorana:*   Of my mother, whenever we met.

23. **Chorus:** *Gose chibesa chikoera ogachaka:* When my money was gone

24. *Koondoka richara:*   You called me a fool.

25. *Akagera omorugi agatama:*   You made my wife run away.

26. *Nabanto banyangire:*   The people hate me.

27. *Goseka:*   They laugh at me too!

4. 3 The cultural context

The poem showcases what happens when close friends act treacherously by spilling masculine world secrets to one's wife. If the wife acts rashly nothing of the marriage

would be salvaged as she would vindictively act, throw tantrums and desert her home (L.11). The family's peace is at stake with full-blown blame game being traded around. The children are subjected to slow suffering (L.20). The setting is possibly a typical village where fellow villagers and members are close and keep tabs on one another.

Theme Development

The business of treachery begins in a bar, shifts to the home, the village gossip spots and arena of public opinion. The persona finds the going really tough and odds turned against him. He discovers that an intimate friend (L.21) is the one who poisoned his wife's mind on how he extravagantly spends money buying beer (LL.6-7). The wife attacks the persona once he reports home that evening (LL.9-10) and runs away leaving the children under his care. This disrupts his manly roles since he cannot leave home to work or walk freely as he has to nurse the children. All blame is heaped on him as everybody says how foolish he is in managing his home and even in misusing money. In the solo and chorus exchanges, the name of the bad friend is given as Oyondi by the persona. He in unexaggerated terms reckons him as one who was close to him more than a sibling (L.21), the one he equates to a blood brother. These others, *abanto* (LL.16, 26-27) could be the family of the wife, fellow villagers, his children or even members of his family as they can't understand his wasteful nature. The word out there is coming from an intimate friend, therefore, nobody has reasons to doubt it. The poem narrates the marriage blues that originate from treacherous friends and workmates and its destructive consequences.

The voices

The persona voices friendly intimacy between friends to the extent of sharing food, in terms of eating and drinking together. (LL.1-2). The drinking involves alcoholic stuff which is normally expensive. The question is why should such mutual sharing cause any problem? Line 4 raises a provocation caused by the treachery of a friend (L.4) that the persona is only good at drinking. Note the voice of concern that points at the scandalizing motive of the colleague. In old days scandalizing, gossip and cheap talk were attributed to idle women, reason why the Gusii had proverbs castigating this tendency i.e. *abakungu nabaya nemenwa nyabasariri* (women are good but are spoiled by their gossip). To have a man do exactly this is a sign of broken values such that we have men who gossip, men who live on others and who are anti-peace. The question rhetorically poised in line 5, summarizes the real plan of such traitorous conduct.

The most interesting thing is the reaction of other people whom the persona claims laugh at him (LL.16-17). They present a voice of contrast. Whether they do it

overtly it is a matter of conjecture but he can feel their accusing eyes on himself. A voice of mockery is realized in lines 18-19 when the persona singles out some of his misdemeanours as being foolish spending, accusations levelled at him by friends like Oyondi. It expresses the ironical aspects of this friendship, in that the 'friend' is the one destroying his marriage and social rating. Is this what best friends and community can do?

The voice of friendship based on the material gain is addressed in line 23 where they laugh in mockery at his penury. A state of contradicting voices is realized from intimate friend's mocking and condemning, and the one of the public gallery unquestioningly perceiving him as guilty as condemned. His is a submerged and lone voice that knows the truth but would be silently suffering inwardly. In lines 26 and 27, the unforgiving voice of judgment and condemnation without addressing underlying issues affecting his marriage continues to torture him in the public gallery. He knows no respite, and it's like the poem ends on a desperate note without offering any solution.

The cultural image and identity

The cultural image seems to question the role of intimate friend's vis-à-vis one's marriage. It is they who should do all they can to support and build its broken walls. Differently, they are the ones regaling the wife with accusations that lead to marriage conflicts (LL.6-11). The persona is going to be literally a home caretaker, hence, inhibiting his moving out of the homestead (LL.12-15). Husbands were culturally known as *abasacha,* those who moved out to search for food for the family. The wife, *omokungu,* took care of chores at home and children. Reversing these roles at this stage is both difficult and curious. A wife can question a husband's behaviour (L.10) but not fighting him. The worst blow is her running away and forcing him into her duties (L.15). The ambivalence of the roles is culturally demeaning to a man who is associated with breadwinning but now paralyzed by her conduct. His love for his children comes out when he absconds other duties to stay with them but then he is accused as reckless, thick and foolish (LL.16, 18, 25).

The hatred subjected to him by the others, *abanto* (LL. 19 & 26) appears fuelled by things beyond his control (Skulj, 2000) for marriages have their usual ups and downs. Proper cultural image demanded that one wisely made his marriage success despite its struggles and anything else was abhorred. The mocking that went on was perhaps supposed to beat one into a line of responsibility (L.27) which required that one mends bridges with his wife. This was to bring her back to her home to take care of her business.

The poem seems to raise the question of the value of intimate friends in one's family. They can be tempted to exaggerate one's times together as if that was one of their noble duties. The sharing with someone's spouse should have limits for anything on finance matters might erupt into a serious act of betrayal. These acts can cause irreparable damage to a marriage and general condemnation. Line 14 hints at difficult reversed roles and line 25 and 26, questions the role of condemning one unheard. A bad marriage seems to attract titles like *a fool* (L.24) and the persona desires that his marriage survives attacks from friends, otherwise, any brokenness is generally doomed. The poem proposes that one should be very cautious to safeguard threats from their confidantes in the institution of marriage, hence promote an appropriate AbaGusii cultural image ad identity.

5. 1 Conclusion

This paper has delved into one of the popular themes manifested in Monyoncho's popular poetry. The purpose was to reveal how AbaGusii cultural image and identity are constructed in Monyoncho's popular poetry by exploring its language and content. On how the prevalent themes in Monyoncho's poetry construct the AbaGusii cultural image and identity, the following conclusions were arrived at. A marriage is a noble institution that needs protection from everyone, the couples and their friends. The issues of money and expenditure can be a threat and if engineered by outside forces they can destroy a family peace and plans. When a couple quarrels the children suffer and the community who normally don't understand the full story laugh and mock the husband as a failure since he should be the uniting force which are valuable cultural AbaGusii images and identity. Marriage for continuity and prosperity is a fulcrum to community existence and therefore should have all its rituals fulfilled for its honour which is the desirable cultural image and identity. The values fronted in the popular poetry stand out as voices of reason in a Bakhtin dialogic sense were a multiplicity of voices are distinctly raised including the silent one's that represent protest and demarcate the serious position of the community.

The Gusii cultural image and identity would always remain under threat and would keep mutating with time. A society's image and identity are never static entities. Each era would develop its own values, through core social capital goods that are imperishable. As Nyandoro (2020) argues that literature studies enable 'thinkers and practitioners of Africa's modern day's socio-cultural spaces engage in the process of (re)production, circulation, consumption, archiving and retrieval of past African pieces of knowledge and cultural spaces in view of their significance in the modern world.' I vouch for, a multidisciplinary approach to Monyoncho's work with exploration

through different angles and theories. A study that encompasses Monyoncho's personality development and historical production of his poetry is equally overdue. The Kisii and Nyamira or national governments should think of setting up of a Gusii Cultural and Arts Centre for the Gusii opinion-shapers of the past. The legacies of creative arts, materials associated with artists and their ideas would be enshrined as a fountain for language, references for cultural, social, religious, economic solutions.

Disclaimer Statement: The work is part of my thesis entitled: **Construction of AbaGusii Cultural image and identity in Christopher Monyoncho's Popular Poetry,** submitted to Department of English, Linguistics and Literature, School of Arts and Social Studies, Kisii University for the award of PhD Literature. The work represents one of the study objectives, namely prevalent themes in Christopher Monyoncho's songs which on Marriage blues. The work supervisors are Dr. Evans Nyamwaka, Dr. Eucabeth Mongare (both of Kisii University) and Professor Augustine Agwuele of Texas State University.

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