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Sexism and misogyny in selected proverbs of the Chaga of Machame

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Abstract
This work employs a feminist perspective to examine how some proverbs of the Chaga of Machame portray a sexist ideology that *supports* patriarchal relations as well as social systems or environments in which women face cultural stereotyping. It discusses the impressions that some proverbs create and how such impressions set rules which govern how women are, should be treated and how they are expected to behave. It has been argued that some life-long gendered attitudes towards women are evident in the selected proverbs and that they take part in the creation of a social system which explains how women are seen, represented and how gender relations are organized, promoted, and shaped. The paper shows that proverbs constitute a powerful rhetorical device for the shaping of moral consciousness, opinions, and beliefs.

Key words:
Oral literature, Sexism, Gender studies, Chaga oral art, Proverbs

Introduction

Chaga, like other ethnic groups in Africa are rich in oral art and that they have had that culture developed over centuries in a stable environment whereby, proverbs being part of that culture are highly valued and part of Chaga's lives (Finnegan, 1970).[1] Such a situation has tempted scholars such as (Marealle, 1997) to argue that Chaga were since colonial time rich in four things: land, cattle, water and proverbs. Proverbs among the Chaga of Machame are rich with women and animals images which are used to comment on various issues pertaining to different social institutions including marriage, parenthood, work and leadership. It has also been observed that among the Chaga of Machame, proverbs are a colorful imagery used as an important ingredient for performing valuable roles in both formal and informal communication (Kweka, 2006).

[1] This view by Finnegan is strengthened by (Ephraim, 2003) who reports to have been told during interviews that before the coming of colonialists in Tanzania proverbs were taught as part of lessons on traditions during initiation ceremonies. Such lessons warned and instructed youths to become good citizens and responsible family and community members.

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Studies conducted on the proverbs of the Chaga of Machame (Lema, 2005; Kweka, 2006) have cautioned that although the proverbs are observed to carry colorful imagery and perform valuable roles we need not to ignore their sexist tone. It has been reported that when they are used, they tend to create sexist attitudes or perceptions which eventually set rules which govern among other things relationships, ownership of means of production and responsibilities.

The main argument of this paper is to examine how some proverbs of the Chaga of Machame depict sexism and misogyny and how that naturalizes women's position, status and roles within a society by setting rules which govern how women are, how they should be treated and how they are expected to behave. In this paper sexism is looked at as a general attitude which relegates women to a secondary and inferior status in a society (Pyle, 1976) whereas misogyny refers to practices and perceptions resulting from sexist ideology which occur frequently and sometimes unconsciously and they diminish women to expendable beings (Smith, 1991). Smith further argues that misogyny wears many appearances and reveals itself in different forms such as class, wealth, education, race, religion and other factors, but its chief characteristic is frequency and popularity. It further manifests in numerous ways including hostility, androcentricism, patriarchy, male privilege, violence against women and sexual objectification.

It is well understood that the radical feminist's agenda has been to overthrow patriarchy and create awareness about gender inequalities which disadvantage women. Furthermore, the agenda is to bring down structures that maintain male superiority and construct positively the image of women to raise their status socially, economically and politically (Santiago-Uindoza, 1996; Nino, 2006). However, the feminist literary theory is multifaceted as it has been associated with 'otherness,' gender identity and political identity (Kemp and Squires, 1997). This paper is in line with (Flex, 1987:622-623) view that "a fundamental goal of feminist theory is to analyse gender relations by looking at how gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think or, equally important, do not think about them."

Background on the Chaga of Machame

The Chaga people of Tanzania inhabit most of the land around the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro (Nurse, 1979), a fertile and well-watered land which has for millennia been home to various societies (Bender, 2013). Ancestors of the present Bantu-speaking populations began to settle at the lower slopes of the mountain in successive waves beginning more than 1500 years ago as they migrated from nearby highland areas. They developed an agrarian economy based upon

intensive cultivation of yams, bananas, finger millet, and other crops in small homesteads called *kihamba*[2].

Over several centuries, each ridge of the mountain developed into an autonomous political space comprised of several different clans or chiefdoms, each led by ranking headmen and rituals (Moore and Puritt, 1977; Nurse 1979). According to early accounts, these chiefdoms were identified as separate tribes but today, chieftainship no longer exist but still the Chaga are well known and identified in terms of eight sub-groups which are wa-Rombo, wa-Marangu, wa-Kilema, wa-Old Moshi, wa-Uru, wa-Siha, wa-kibosho and wa-Machame.

Wa-Machame or Chaga of Machame as they are named here formulates a section of the large Chaga tribe occupying an area which lies at the north end of Chaga land in Hai district facing Mt. Kilimanjaro (Marealle, 1970). Their name was derived from the name of their place of origin called Machame. They are believed to have originated from Ushambala area and they arrived at the place they currently inhabit after they were defeated in war (Dundas, 1932). Their leader was called Nyari whose son, Mashami took over his place after his death and successfully led his people to drive Tarimba people away from the area they currently occupy. These people named the area they secured after their leader Mashami. Available and undocumented stories existing in the area inform that when Germans arrived at Mashami they could not correctly pronounce the name of the place, instead they pronounced Machame and that has been the name of the place ever since.[3]

African proverbs and gender relations

There is a large corpus of studies on African proverbs and generally these studies have acknowledged that proverbs are a common type of human communication and they seem to occur everywhere in the continent. Proverbs in Africa are also acknowledged to have a vital role in each society they are used. It is acknowledged that transmission of complex experiences in Africa has been largely rooted in the continent's oral artistry culture and proverbs are among the most widely used works of oral artistry which are used as a mode of speech to express abstract ideas (Finnegan, 1970; Mbiti, 1998; Udoidem, 1984).

[2] This term literally means a piece of farm or a garden owned by a single family or a man. The idea of a garden resulted from the fact that land is scarce in Chaga land, thus family land is apportioned into small pieces to be allocated to each male child. This land is inherited and it is never sold.

[3] This information could easily be obtained due to long-term encounters by the author in Machame area. The author was raised at Nronga village situated in Machame between 1984-1994 and he has conducted research in the area in 2005 and 2018.

Furthermore, proverbs serve as a means of embellishing speech and performance, projecting business sense of people, portraying the image of a community and preserving the history and culture of a people (Omoera, 2013). This view suggests that proverbs bring people together by instilling into them beliefs, morals, concerns and aspirations of the society.
Writing on the significance of proverbs in Africa it has been noted that, "the man who proverbalizes puts his individual speech in the cosmic perception of his society and in doing so reinforces his point of view, pays tribute to himself as a possessor of wisdom common to all and whose perception shifts not only from one domain to another but also from one period to another" (Udoidem, 1984: 132). This view suggests that although a proverb owes its birth to the people and that it is accepted for expressing truism, the truthfulness of proverbs is quite challenging because it is not absolute truth rather societal interpretation of the truth (Mieder, 2008).[4] Proverbs are, therefore believed to be true and important in the society and in this case whatever is said about a woman in the society is believed and practiced by the society concerned.

This common view about proverbs expressing truism has attracted questions such as how can one tell for sure that what a particular proverb communicates is a collectively accepted truth and not a personal view or utterance which appeals only to the utterer? Even further, one is forced to ask: To what extent is what is general truth (wisdom) true? Such questions seem to echo (Yusuph, 1998) concern that associating proverbs with wisdom and truth would mean to believe that misogyny is wisdom and sexism is a truth.

There are studies, recent and old that have revealed a different picture about proverbs and in that way respond to the questions posed above. It is a picture about proverbs being used to maintain gender stereotyping, whereby women's status, roles and position are institutionalized, rationalized, formalized or naturalized by impressions created by some of the proverbs. Some studies which have examined the representation of women have particularly observed that some African proverbs are "obviously discursive habits in the patriarchal system which is created and recreated to reinforce the myth of male superiority" (Hussein, 2009: 97-98).

Furthermore, proverbs have been acknowledged to contribute in the gendering of social destiny for children, whereby lifelong attitudes such as those undermining girls are constructed through proverbs in early childhood and infancy, thus

[4] Nwoga "Igbo Language and Culture", 1975 cited in (Duru and Penfield, 1988) elaborates the idea of truthfulness in proverbs very well by suggesting three levels of meaning with which proverbs generally operate: the text (literal meaning); the generalized moral and cultural principles (philosophical meaning); and the meaning defined by the specific interactional context (contextual meaning).

creating unequally gendered relationships among men and women (Kiyimba, 2005). Some proverbs in some communities are also observed to reiterate stereotypical beliefs about women and sex such as the belief that a woman's lust is greater than that of a man (Webster, 1982), a cultural belief that has taught girls to believe from their childhood that the mere sight of a woman is sufficient to arouse a man sexually, and only external circumstances can prevent him from having his will on her. Among the people of Kasena in Ghana for example, there is a proverbial revolt, a phenomenon through which women take advantage of a socially sanctioned joking relationship that pertains between a Kasena woman and her symbolic husband (his siblings or his kin) to subvert, contradict and deconstruct the sexist ideology in Kasena proverbs which are believed by Kasena people to be wisdom from their ancestors and establish their own signifying terms (Yitah, 2009). For example, Yitah, demonstrate how women engage in a proverbial revolt in the following performance:

> Symbolic husband: So you think that you are brave? *Just keep in mind that the whip that lashes the senior wife, lashes the junior wife too*.
> Wife: *The whip that lashes the first wife must not be allowed to see the light of day*.

In this example, the wife seems to be deconstructing a proverb spoken by her 'husband' that portrays her as an object to be whipped and brought to line.

Generally, studies on the representation of women or gender in African proverbs have discouraged any appreciation of proverbs which simply views proverbs to be value - carrying instruments without looking into the ideological tones they carry. A critical appreciation of proverbs is, therefore, crucial since it permits for an intervention into cultural practices to produce an alternative and socially transformative understanding of proverbs (Hussein, 2005).

Sexism and misogyny in proverbs among the Chaga of Machame

Like in many parts of Africa, among the Chaga the term proverb is mostly taken as a whole mode of speech. In Machame, the term *fyaaso*[5] is not only used to refer to proverbs but also to sayings and idiomatic expressions which are used with some deep hidden meaning. Proverbs of the Chaga of Machame have also been studied for varying scholarly intentions and the studies have yielded certain results. For example, the aspect of truth which is said to exist in the proverbs has been observed to affect the struggle of women to come out of subordination because the whole society is convinced that what proverbs are saying about women is true and unchangeable (Kweka, 2006). Some other studies examined the

[5] *Fyaaso* is plural while the singular is ***K****yaaso*. This term literally means teachings and it would be used to refer to any expression meant to instill certain teachings to people. It was not easy, therefore to collect proverbs alone during data collection because native speakers do not differentiate a proverb from what is not and they hardly know their differences.

social significance of proverbs among the Chaga of Machame and recommended that since a good number of proverbs collected and examined exhibited among other things their role in shaping community's attitude towards women and men and how they fit into and sustain a socially prescribed pattern of relationship a further study is needed to examine gendered attitudes in the proverbs (Lema, 2005).

This paper, therefore, has been inspired by Madumulla (1995), who contended that gendered impressions are not easily evident in some proverbs as proverbs sometimes do not portray open gender discrimination but the truth remains that in the creation and use of proverbs a man happens to favour himself above a woman. This view suggests that some proverbs do not explicitly present women in a negative light or explicitly talk about them, rather implicitly through imagery and metaphors employed women are placed in a negative association (Hussein, 2009). It is, therefore observed that, "In Africa, proverbs about men and women have long been reproduced irrespective of the potential psychological and political battering which their utterances cause to the recipients" (Hussein, 2005: 61).

Discussion in this paper is carried out while accentuating the vital role played by proverbs in the social and psychological construction of communities. Proverbs analysed in this paper were collected from published and unpublished works on proverbs of Chaga of Machame. Proverbs involved include even some which are about men. This is so because in some cases the portrayal of women is implicated in the portrayal of men and as Hussein (2005: 99) points out, "One of the complex matrixes of gender is that the construction of femininity and masculinity is interlocked."

The analysis takes into consideration historical, cultural and social contexts in which the proverbs are generated and used as well as the intention of the users.[6] The context is crucial in the analysis because proverbs are known to derive from contexts of life and that a large part of their communicative meaning resides in the interactional context in which they are used rather than in the proverb itself (Duru and Penfield, 1988: 121).

An unmarried woman is homeless and lonely

Among the Chaga of Machame, like in many African communities, marriage is a crucial communal event. It is not something to do with one's experience but an established institution. Furthermore, marriage is a transforming ceremony through which an individual gains status or identity (Mbiti, 1998). A woman is

[6] (Kiyimba, 2005: 254) makes it clear that "Oral literature creates almost ineffaceable impressions in matters of social organization, political power relations, resource management and sharing, and gender relations" and that "these impressions in turn lay down rules of the future social behavior."

changed from a girl to a woman through giving birth but marriage is what makes the transformation culturally meaningful as it involves all members of a community; currently physically living, ancestors and the inborn. Among the Chaga of Machame, there are proverbs which tend to picture this philosophy but the picture drawn may also suggest limitation of women's sphere of influence by showing that it is a woman who benefits from marriage for she cannot survive independent of a man. The following proverb boldly suggests that among other:

1. *Nka nalakee mwoore nyafwaa erarakaa*
   [Unmarried woman dies wandering]

The social meaning of this proverb goes beyond the physical act of roving, for it also registers the perception existing about the relationship existing between a woman and a man in marriage. It attaches the life of a woman to marriage. In fact, marriage here implies a husband (man) therefore; this proverb reinforces the view that getting married for a woman is obligatory otherwise a woman will not have a home.[7] This perception is suggesting that a woman does not choose to be married out of experience or feeling rather she is obliged to enter that institution to qualify. This proverb, therefore, implicates a woman's subordinate position by suggesting that it is a man who provides a woman through marriage with home, life and respect. Gender relations existing here "have been (more) defined and (imperfectly) controlled by one of their [relations] interrelated aspects-the man (Flax, 1987:629).

This proverb, on the other hand, may be reflecting Chaga's popular land inheritance tradition which does not give a woman the right to inherit her father's land. Land is what gives one a home and a family and a woman who traditionally does not inherit her father's land is considered to have a home and a family to depend on once she gets a man to marry her. The perception given by this proverb is also seen in the event of the death of an unmarried or a divorced woman who dies while living in her father's house or living independently but not with a husband. Such a woman will have no land to be buried on and if circumstances – such as being ex-communicated by the church - will not allow her remains to be buried on the church graveyard, this woman will be considered to have been wandering till death.

Under such a situation only her father or brothers' mercy will allow her remains to be buried at one far corner of the family land. Since the arrangement is a favour to the woman, a piece of the land or a corner of the land at which to bury her remains must be less fertile or less cultivated.

[7] Flax (1987) make a point as saying that from the perspective of social relations, men and women are both prisoners of gender relations although in highly differentiated but interrelated ways but the social perception existing suggest that men appear to be the wardens, or at least the, trustees within a social whole.

The following proverb also talks about women in the context of marriage:

2. *Nka muumuu nyalyiywaa ufeny*

   [A selfish woman will have her food shared by others when she is breast feeding]

This proverb has more than one meaning when used among the Chaga of Machame. On the surface it warns women not to be selfish because when they give birth they cannot stop people from visiting and eating at their (women) houses. However, there is an underlying meaning which is always associated with a woman being married. The thinking which leads to the underlying meaning is that when a woman is not married no one will know her habits like whether she is selfish or not because she is rarely visited and this also means her value in a community is low. This being the case, a woman who is referred to in this proverb is a married one because it is marriage that gives a woman a name and when she gets a child that opens a door for other women to visit her. It is a common thing among the Chaga of Machame to hear claims such as, a house (home) of a woman cannot be visited, which means it is the man through marriage who gives a home to a woman, hence visitors. Along this cultural thinking, the Chaga of Machame have a common practice of visiting a woman who has just given birth, a cultural task which entails among other practices, cooking and eating at her home.

It is this cultural context that associates this cultural practice with marriage by insisting that getting married for a woman is culturally important since a woman will be entitled to cultural benefits and it is through such benefits that people will also know of their habits. Looking at these two proverbs, one sees how this patriarchal thinking reduces a woman to a dependent and a homeless being whose life is thought to be meaningful only if she gets married. It reinforces and keeps women under the masculinized power and explicitly depicts men's jagged individualism to be at the crux on men's feelings and which hinders them from taking others' feelings into account (Hawley, 1970).

A woman is an agent of destruction and symbol of negativity.

Some proverbs among the Chaga of Machame create a perception that women are a source of misfortune, failure and this perception cuts across girls and married women. The following proverb projects a married woman being as a social threat:

3. *Vaka mmbo vananata muri*

   [Women are the ones who destroy familial relationships]

The words *vaka* and *muri* may have multiple meanings depending on the contexts they are used. *Vaka* can mean women or married women while *muri* can mean home or community/clan. In the social context where this proverb is mostly applied *vaka,* means married women and *muri* means both home and clan. The proverb is trying to suggest that familial problems are caused by women, a perception seemingly outlining that a woman cannot look after her family or people of her community. This view is contrary to a common African understanding that a woman is a comforter, caretaker whose role as a mother is God-given thus sacred (Akujobi, 2011: 2). The view cast by this proverb perpetuate a patriarchal thinking that a woman has an inborn inability to take care of family and to live with others which means she can destroy her father's family, the family she gets married to as well as her own family. [8]

The proverb further reinforces society's assumed moral, intellectual and mental fragility of women while reinforcing the hegemonic model of masculinity, something which can be seen in the following proverb:

4. *Nka umwi nyekora mona kalosha vengi*
   [A woman burnt her child and taught others]

Among the Chaga of Machame this proverb generally serves a function of instilling a lesson on recklessness. What is striking in this proverb is not the lesson exposed, rather the image of a woman used in teaching. The proverb uses a woman to teach the community that when one woman becomes reckless she teaches others not to be. It may be asked: Why not a man to be used in this proverb? The answer can be drawn from a patriarchal thinking framework which usually divides men and women based on the binary oppositions such as good vs. evil, right vs. wrong and here insisting that women are morally and intellectually incapable of living with other people and incapable of being right which is equal to saying they are irrational dissolute. The perception created by this poem reverberate (Ayiba and Efem, 2014) argument that women are oppressed and disadvantaged by comparison with men without justification.

The following proverb is also used by the Chaga of Machame to instill the same lesson just like the third proverb examined above:

5. *Ufini lwa nka nfii lwitiwa fo*
   [The drumming/dancing of a short woman is not heard/seen]

This proverb literally explains about singing in Chaga traditional dance. In this dance, men and women form a cycle and as they move by rotating they hold each other's hands. Drummers who must be men and a lead singer who must be a

[8] There is a common view among the Chaga of Machame like it is in many other African societies that when things don't go the right way at a family level a woman will be the one to be blamed. This view, however, contradicts a common perception that what makes a good home is a wife (woman).

woman stand at the middle of the cycle formed by dancers. There is a notion among the Chaga that a lead singer must be tall so that she can be heard when singing and seen as she leads in dancing. In a circumstance where she is short, she will have to stand on a chair, a traditional stool or even unused drum. This notion of a lead singer not to be short is used especially by elders in the normal business of life to teach young ones not to be (short) selfish because it will earn them disrespect and a bad name. As it has been noted in proverb (3) the use of a woman to represent unwanted behaviours perpetuates a patriarchal thinking which sees a woman to be representing evil, failure and misfortune while a man represents goodness, success and good luck.

Leadership is not for women

There are some proverbs which represent patriarchal desire to limit power, knowledge and freedom to the sphere of men. Such proverbs delineate power to befit men and not women and that is one among many circumstances, whereby women fall victims of men's sexist perceptions and misogyny. Men forge femininity in women which eventually "becomes a necessary evil" (Hawley, 1970: 146) and they (men) forge that evil "so that they continue to suppress women" (Mwaifuge, 2017: 79). The following proverb cautions:

6. *Kulaniinge nka ushili fo mashika nduma nyashekushilya*
   [Do not give power to a woman because she will eventually rule over you]

Earlier, I discussed a proverb which suggests that women are a source of misfortune at family or community level. Such a view can be seen to be extended here with this perception that a woman cannot be trusted, therefore should not be allowed to rule;[9] such a view denies women access to power or to any move which is meant to give them control or authority including decision making. This sexist perception is not farfetched for (Duru and Penfield, 1988: 120) opines that, "[Proverbs'] philosophical meanings make statements about […] the rules of a peaceful order." This perception creates an attitude which suggests women having power to mean not just the control they can have over men, but failure of the men to adhere to ancestors' word of wisdom. This proverb also invites deeper scrutiny of the cultural context in which it is used and there is an explosion of patriarchal fear against construction and eventual co-existence of femininity and masculinity.

Men, who are supposedly custodians and owners of power among the Chaga of Machame, are the ones who are being addressed and cautioned not to allow women under any circumstance to take charge of anything for fear of disrupting

[9] Chaga of Machame have a common saying especially among men which is used to refer to all insensible acts as *efyo ufindo fya vaka* in English meaning 'those are women acts'. This common belief tends to suggest thatwomen cannot be trusted to deliver positively.

rules of a peace order. Looking further into this perception, the following two proverbs are worthy looking at:

7. *Yaalika nka nshi ishora/kasi fo, ishora/kasi nyikaa nawe*
   [Marrying a woman is not difficult, living with her is]

8. *Elyo kasha vaka mbevikaa mura kanin.*
   [In the past, women used to put water in their mouths]

The former proverb generally serves as a caution to unmarried men that it is crucial to plan way ahead and prepare before entering marriage life. When this proverb is in use, it is mostly used by men, especially married ones to warn young men who are about to get married that it is not difficult for a man to get a woman to marry but it is difficult to live with a woman. Whenever this proverb is used, the perception is that a woman is problematic, she cannot be trusted, and thus, a man ought to be careful. The latter proverb is even harsher because of the nuisance it creates about women. It suggests that women are supposed to behave well due to lack of trust by men. Metaphorically, putting water in the mouth means keeping quiet which has been one of the weapons to silence women. This proverbial teaching exposes what is argued to be masculinity's emphasis on man's pride, power, strength and control which makes men become aggressive to women (Mwaifuge, 2017).

Women are, therefore, not welcome to advise, share knowledge and demonstrate their skills and abilities as free human beings. Such a view is common in patriarchal societies where women are expected to be silent and receptive and this is well expressed in the next proverb:

9. *Usha lwa ndu nka maarwi akwe.*
   [The beauty of a woman is her ears]

This proverb does not acknowledge the beauty of a woman's ears, rather it extends a common belief among the Chaga of Machame that a beautiful woman can be betrayed by her mouth. This background shows that the mentioning of ears in the above proverb does not only mean hearing, but it also creates an impression to both men and women that a woman is to be loved and probably respected for her compliance with orders or for her unconditional submission to man's authority. This perception matches (LaGuardia, 2013:228) view that men "are almost always directed towards a manipulation of the visual domain" meaning that men are attracted by the female body for the purpose of controlling and using it. This proverb, therefore, suggests that a woman's ear is admired for her readiness to adhere to whatever a male person including her son decrees.

Women are naturally weak and wicked

Judging from what has so far been discussed about other proverbs, it can be said that the Chaga of Machame consider men to be superior to women. Some proverbs tend to codify some differences as gender based. The following proverb exposes this codification forcefully and brutally:

10. *Ng'waana ukasha lwa ndu ndumi ngota usha lwa ndu nka]*
    [Better the wickedness of a man than the kindness of a woman.

This proverb exemplifies a discourse tied to general society's stereotypical belief that women are naturally inferior, wicked and lazy. The comparison in this proverb gives a chauvinistic impression about women as it allots goodness to a man and wickedness to a woman to be natural attributes. The proverb, thus, suggests that whatever negative or wrong about a man is far better than what one would claim to be positive or right about or from a woman. This perception extends many others which tend to describe women as naturally weak and unfit in a society. The following proverb also suggests this perception as it says:

11. *Kulalye mma na nndu nka-fo*
    [Don't take an oath with a woman/don't share a secret with a woman]

Looking at this proverb one can see it extending the perception that women are naturally weak. It points to a delicate and sensitive issue which is taking an oath or sharing a secret which is associated with trustworthy, maturity and respect to suggest to men that women cannot be trusted on the ground that they are weak. As it has been discussed earlier, some proverbs of the Chaga of Machame create a perception that a woman is weak, which suggests superiority of a man by nature. Impliedly, a woman is naturally incapable and immature among the Chaga of Machame, and thus she is a person who cannot earn men's respect and trust. The following proverb further illuminates on this issue:

12. *Irwa-rwa ni ndoo na ikaa rembo/mmba ni mau*
    [Going out/moving around is father and sitting idle/indoor is mother]

The Chaga women in general are known for their hard-working spirit. Nevertheless, that spirit is rarely acknowledged positively by the majority in the society. There is a common perception towards Chaga women that they love money and they are after it more than anything else. The above proverb which is commonly used by men does not consider the hard work spirit possessed by women positively, when used it "reject[s] the characteristics of femininity and prefer[s] masculinity…"(Keating et al, 170) which goes together with believing that they have a stranglehold over women.

The proverbs provide an impression that manhood defines hard work while womanhood defines idleness. This proverb when applied among the Chaga of Machame is meant to instil in boys the working spirit and to make them grow up

believing that hard work and success are what will earn them respect[10]. Such a lesson is perfect on one hand but the fact that it uses an image of a woman to represent idleness/laziness, the proverb seems to build on a traditionally common belief and practice among the Chaga of Machame of praising a man (husband) even in a situation where it is the woman (wife) who works the land and takes care of family. Praises are given to a man based on the patriarchal assumption that when a man marries, he gets a helping and a working hand thus; he is praised for choosing the right hand.

Even in a situation where a woman raises a child single-handedly, society members will judge based on success or failure, whereby success in raising children will be associated with presence of a male lover or support from male members of extended family such as uncles while failure will be considered to have resulted from the failure of a woman to give her child(ren) a man to take care of them. The two proverbs, therefore, remorselessly downplay the value of women irrespective of their intellectual and social positions and in this way show patriarchal society's desire to express men's ownership of regime of knowledge and goodness and associate women with ugliness, failure and misfortune.

A woman cannot look after her household

Among the Chaga of Machame, there are proverbs which portray women to be weak and insignificant creatures. Weakness here does not mean lack of strength rather inability to face difficulties and to make sound decisions. The following proverb can be used to display that:

13. *Kyoowe kya ndu nka nkikaa nkushen mbwakwe*
    [A woman's rope is always in her porch]

This proverb emerged from the culture of cattle-rearing which is common among the Chaga of Machame. Since the Chaga of Machame practice enclosed grazing a woman who is traditionally in charge of that as well as of all other house chores is supposed to have a rope nearby every time in case a cow cuts free. However, the Chaga of Machame extends the meaning of this proverb and uses it to describe what is considered by men to be women's behaviour. Unlike a man, this proverb demonstrates sexiest perceptions that a woman is naturally weak and vulnerable, thus she always threatens to commit suicide as her way of responding to

[10] Instilling such a teaching is not wrong but (Kiyimba, 2005) makes a point that when Baganda boys and girls enjoy hearing proverbs and other folkloric materials they are at the same time undergoing a formative psychological socialization process, this socialization creates a society, whereby general perception about a woman will always be negative.

problems.[11] The following proverb can also insinuate the same perception evident in proverb (11) when it says:

14. *Ng'umbe ya malela/manla nyifingwaa ngon/mongon fo*
    [A cow is not tied to the main pillar/entrance (of cattle's shelter)]

To understand this proverb, one ought to understand the context of its production and utilisation. I have discussed above about proverb (11) that the Chaga of Machame and Chaga in general practice enclosed grazing. Cattle shelters are well built and a hedge is built to divide the shelter into two, one section for keeping cattle and the other for keeping their food. The division is done by timber and on one side an opening is left between the hedge and the wall which allows a person to move between the sections. Normally, where the hedge ends and before the opening a pillar of timber is put up and it is that pillar which holds the entire hedge to the roof of the shelter. It is a custom that a bull is tied to this main pillar and the assumption is that it protects the cows since a bull can scare off an intruder. Proverb (12) was created from this practice but whenever it is applied, it does not refer to the cow but to women suggesting that a woman cannot look after her household. It is a continuation of the perception which consciously or unconsciously undermines women's vital roles as active and important participant in familial and communal affairs.

There are also proverbs which appear to have two sharp edges. One edge showing that there are situations where a patriarchal society shares positive truths about women but the other edge showing how the society's operation and response to such truths may end up being sexist. Like the following proverb:

15. *Nka nshoonga*
    [A woman is food]

This common proverb among the Chaga of Machame reminds a husband that when his wife gives birth, she must be fed well because it is prestigious to a husband and his family. Thus, a breast-feeding wife fattens. While encouraging husbands to feed their wives well, this proverb has potentially been used by Chaga men in general to suggest a patriarchal perception about marriage life which considers food to be the only thing a wife would need from her husband. It systematically reinforces a view that men must work and meet highly institutionalized gendered conventions which include feeding a wife and children. This view has created a common perception existing among many people about the Chaga men of Machame and Chaga men in general that they are not as romantic as they are good family care takers.

[11] Kiyimba (2005) reports about a similar Baganda proverb, *Omuguwa gw'omwana ow'obuwala, gubeera mu kisasi* (he rope of a female child is always in the porch). This proverb expresses a common view that the girl is the weak one that cannot persevere.

Looking further into this proverb, one sees it to have hatched a historically common way of life among the Chaga, whereby a married man would leave his wife and children in the village and move to urban centres to seek employment or for business. Wives were left in villages to take care of children, domestic animals and do farming and they would be visited by their husbands only once in a year and most of the time at the end of the year. The excuse for doing this was that a man is supposed to work to feed a wife and children. It is this kind of mentality that is reported by some scholars to be causing children to begin in early stages of life, to develop life-long attitudes towards themselves and each other which attach socially ascribed - and prejudicial - meaning to gender (Kiyimba, 2005). Such a mentality and practice care less about a woman and her other needs in an emotional and psychological state, thus making her what Great Aunt Mai, a character in Elieshi Lema's *Parched Earth* describes as "a social orphan indeed, just by being" (2006: 158). It is this perception also that can been seen to have given a Machame married woman strong attachment to her husband's Kihamba[12] and livestock than to her husband.

Conclusion

Those who proverbilises are competing for attention and that the use of proverbs as (Yankah, 1989: 328) says, "…is part of the persuasive process." It is, therefore, possible that the audience focuses its attention to what such proverbs are sharing and in doing so end up passing the information into the central nervous system where a perception is formed both negative and positive and it eventually becomes a basis on which gender relations are determined. In this regard, the paper has examined some proverbs created and used by the Chaga of Machame, which like in many parts of Africa are integrated into daily conversation and speech making and used as a social mode of communication which has a dominant role. The analysis and discussion of the selected proverbs has demonstrated that the proverbs are consciously and unconsciously used to perpetuate injustices against women through an existence of a sexist ideology which has been shown to be portrayed by the selected proverbs.

This ideology and the frequently practised misogyny perceptions and practices have been identified to exist in the contexts such as marriage, death, procreation, work, leadership as well as familial and social relationships and they have naturalized women position, status and roles by portraying women to be irrational, dependent of men, powerless, objects of pleasure and mockery, weak, untrustworthy and an image of failure and badness. Generally, it has been shown that some proverbs of the Chaga of Machame expose how women should be

[12] Refer to note 2. Woman's attachment to this piece of land metaphorically signifies her search for and communal assurance for her lifetime 'home' and her 'death bed'.

treated and how they are expected to behave in a manner that addresses man's superiority and dominion against women's socially constructed second position.

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