



Effectiveness of character and style in communicating myths of origin: A critical analysis of Tigania Community of Kenya



Review article



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Abstract

Characterization in a work of art comprises the persons through whom the writer speaks to his audience. Characters play a vital role in literature as they control the plot of the story, bring out themes and arouse and sustain interest. Forster (1972) asserts that the importance of characterization is anchored on the fact that a writer is able to appeal to the intelligence and imagination of the reader. This paper examines six myths of origin from the Tigania Community. These myths are: *The Origin of Death*, *Red-Thigh Woman*, (*Ngirani*), *Domestication of Animals*, 'Gichiaro', *Naming Patterns* and *Rain and Thunderstorms*. These reveal the deep-rooted cultural subversion of the female gender and there seems no hope of unwarping the woman from the intricate web that culture has constructed for her. Characterization and style have been artistically interwoven in the creation of the myths. Chapman (1973) stipulates that in a literary work, language is conscious in formation and that it is a medium not only for communication or expression but for effect. This paper exposes a myriad of challenges assailing the female gender in the Tigania Community, whose patrilineal set up is deeply entrenched, this woman had desperately resigned to her fate.

Keywords: Cultural construct, convention, gender, patriarchy stereotype, subordinate

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Public Interest Statement

Myths of Origin from the Tigania Community are complex and little appreciated today especially because they make reference to a remote past. This paper is important because literature has enabled the mythmaker to create characters, who have successfully been instrumental in the effective construction and communication of myths. Through literature myths can be retrieved from the archives of history and availed to the contemporary society. This in turn preserves the culture of the Meru community in general.

1.0.1 Introduction

This paper deals with character and stylistic aspects and their effectiveness in communication of myths. Characterization in a work of art comprises the persons through whom the writer speaks to his audience. It forms a major part of a work of art. Forster (1927) hints on the importance of characterization when he says that it is through characterization that the writer is able to appeal to the intelligence and imagination of the reader. Hawthorne (1985, p.40), observes that "...characters can be used to tell a story, to exemplify a belief, to contribute to a symbolic pattern in a work of art. Readers like heroes or heroines who have problems to solve and this is a confirmation of human potential and possibility of success even in a difficult situation. This could model them to conform to the qualities exhibited by their heroes or heroines. Characters play a very vital role in literature as they control the plot of the story, bring out themes and arouse and sustain interest since a story is normally told through the characters. Literature places characterization at the center of storytelling.

A close scrutiny of the myths of origin from the Tigania community shows that the society is purely patriarchal. Patriarchy refers to (system of) societal structures that are male centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in cultural domains – familial, religious, political, economic social, legal and artistic. Hegemonic masculinity is about "maintenance of practices that institutionalize men's dominance over women" (Chiari 28). Were asserts that patriarchy tends to go hand in hand with male domination of women in most spheres of life (62). He continues to posit that patriarchy socializes men to consider themselves superior to women and advocates for the dominance of men by women (Were 62-63). Indeed, while African women have made considerable gains in political, economic and social development of the continent, they are still widely marginalized within the corridors of power, with stereotypes and male chauvinism manifesting.

One's gender is an ideological construct which society applies to draw differentiations between the qualities it considers appropriate for a man or for a woman. Based on this standpoint, society spells out roles which are termed as duties for men or duties for women, because as Were further argues, despite patriarchy conferring upon men numerous privileges and advantages, these are tied to other responsibilities and expectations of men which in essence is a product of

and imposed upon men by society. For instance, in many African communities, kitchen work is for women while hunting and looking after livestock is categorized as jobs for men and boys. The examination of character portrayal through the gender perspective therefore examines them from a cultural standpoint. However, the functional integration and maintenance of society is thus a central theoretical interest at the root of functionalism. When applied to myths of origin items of cultural identity were regarded as relevant.

1.0.2 Duties and Responsibilities

Society draws on myths, beliefs, attitudes and the historical factors to define societal norms and moral obligations. It is important to note that through these considerations, society endeavors to explain, justify and enhance the existing social status, including its stand on roles for both men and women. We look at the extent to which characterization in myths of origin confirms the society's prescription of men and women's roles. However, the duties and responsibilities for both boys and girls were culturally defined. As Njau puts it in *Society and Socialization* (1994), man in a traditional patriarchal society is the head of family and a defender of the community. This notion of masculinity is often inculcated in young boys at an early age through role-playing, initiation rites and other socialization practices. His role therefore includes hunting, protecting the family, giving advice to adult boys and settling disputes in the community, while the woman is expected to stay at home and cook, fetch water and firewood and generally take care of children. Both boys and girls were socialized to behave and act as such.

Society, through myths of origin seems to lay emphasis on the presumed weakness, inferiority and negativity of women, while showcasing men's superiority, strength and intelligence. At this juncture it is worth noting that the female parents were the ones charged with the responsibility of telling the children stories as a bait for them to wait for food while male parents would be in their special huts Gaaru inducting boys on the higher order issues of the community such as land ownership, marriage issues and taboos. This, though it is a form of division of labor, implies that the less serious issues of the community were done by women as men did things that seemed to matter more. In *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5 Gaita who is portrayed as courageous, patriotic and so blameless that he is fit for sacrifice is a young male character. His portrayal together with the other three men who had lined up for sacrifice and the ultimate freedom of the Meru people from the yoke of slavery credits the male gender. In MT 5 *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, Gaita said:

"If Nguu Ntune will release us because of sacrificing a human being, Then I am the one to be sacrificed so that our people can go".

Koome Njue is another male character who is very significant in the same myth of *Origin of Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5. He is described as a wise and intelligent man who helped in the mediation role between the people and Mugaa O Ngaai on how the Meru people could break loose from the slavery of the Nguu Ntune. The origin and migration traced from the ancestry of the founding ancestors following patrilineality and the genealogies provided are those of men. This is important to perpetuate separate identities in society and to legitimize certain rights to some resources by people thus categorized. This particular myth has played a significant role in distinguishing men from women. Of particular interest here is that Koome Njue and Mugaa O Ngaai, had been elevated to the status of deities. In fact, the chain of command was from Thaaai and ancestors to Mugaa O Ngaai to Koome Njue, then to the people. The above are in line with the ideas of Durkheim who was concerned with the question of how societies maintain internal stability and survival over time through solidarity.

This demarcation of duties and responsibilities between men and women was for the purposes of social unity and solidarity and myths of origin in the Tigania community aptly captured the role of every member of the society. All the characters in *Rain and Thunderstorms*, MT 6, are boys. These are Sun, Moon and Stars. While we blame them for the sibling rivalry that erupted and culminated in a fight, we still commend them for making it possible for mankind to get rain from which all life - plants and animals thrive. The same rivalry is credited to the emergence of day and night. The mythmaker manipulates the story such that the mistakes made by the male gender are not necessarily mistakes but are construed to bring a positive effect in the society. The same fight is shown as being the cause of day and night, and the eventual distinction between light and darkness:

That is why we see the Moon at night together with the Stars but we see the sun alone during the day because he is not friendly with other siblings" (MT 6, *Rain and Thunderstorms*).

It was in line with this that the myth maker assigned duties to man such as hunting, and to the woman duties such as being at home to cook what the man brought home. In the story of *How Animals Were Domesticated*, MT 3, man went hunting with the dog while the woman did the simple jobs that required little effort and intelligence. In fact the man was thoughtful enough to have devised the strategy of luring animals to him and taming them as his property. The man visited another equally intelligent man, the herbalist, and together they lured animals into the homestead only for the woman to chase them to the forest. "The animals trooped into man's homestead in pairs, male and female of different species". But, immediately, the buffalo retreated together with the other animals that had not entered the homestead after hearing the comment

from the woman concerning the horns. They ran and disappeared into the forest and became wild animals”.

This juxtaposition of the husband and wife is in line with societal attitudes and belief in the naivety of women and the ability of men. Were (2008) asserts that the domination and controlling aspect of patriarchy is that men are expected to have everything under control” (65). When man managed to lure the wild animals into his homestead, in the story of *How Animals Were Domesticated*, MT 3, the mythmaker effortlessly shows that the woman is not supposed to comment on the nature of animals to be domesticated. This is totally against the common belief that a husband and wife must be in agreement so as to be able to build a good home. Just a brief comment is exaggerated in terms of effect - that the woman is blamed for the loss of livestock that would have been the domestic animals and by extension, a man’s property.

The animals became a man’s property because of his skill, and he was so strong that he could hunt wild game while the wife stayed at home. This is seen in the story of *How Animals Were Domesticated*. MT 3. The man acted in a dictatorial manner because he did not want the woman to speak on anything when the animals arrived. He asked her severally whether she understood the requirements or she needed further clarification. This was harassment and intimidation, her intellectual capacity being demeaned. The mythmaker succeeded in showing the audience that indeed the wife never understood because she acted contrary to what was expected, and the loss of some animal species is blamed on her. The man is heard asking the wife, “have you heard or I repeat? the man asked the wife severally”

It is important to interpret that the woman decided to comment on the horns of the buffalo in the interest of the safety of her husband and the entire family because the horns were dangerous. In the story, the woman owns only a cat to help keep children company. Her other legal property is grains which unless the cat helps to protect, the rats will destroy completely. The man’s property was more valuable than that of a woman. This is in line with the story of *How Animals Were Domesticated*, MT 3. The woman told the cat, “...on condition that you will kill all the rats that are destroying my grains”. That is all she owned as a woman. Since social institutions are functionally integrated to form a stable system, a change in one institution is likely to precipitate a change in other institutions. The family institution is very important in the Tigania community and Africa in general. What we experience in this particular myth is necessary to avoid producing dysfunctional families that may soon cease to exist. In an Article appearing in the Standard Newspaper of 3rd March 2016, titled “Stop this Discrimination against Women,” Debora Houlka cautions the entire African Continent:

Male dominated leadership teams set the tone for talent management norms where masculine stereotypes can influence promotion and development opportunities.

While African women have made considerable gains in the political, economic and

social development of the continent, they are still widely marginalized within the corridors of power. Stereotypes and male chauvinism have continued to manifest in employment. (The Standard, p. 22).

1.0.3 Stereotypes, Vocatives and conventions

Stereotypes are expressed through characterization in myths. Allport (1954, p.186) says "... a stereotype acts both as a justificatory (sic) device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group and that these stereotypes form a picture in the mind of both the instigator of the stereotype and its recipient." These have also been used extensively to advance and promote patriarchy in the Tigania community. A stereotype is an idea about a particular type of a person that has become fixed because it has been widely held for a long time. Stereotypes may be positive or negative. In a patriarchal set up, stereotypes are aimed at inculcating specific beliefs and attitudes in the minds of women and the audience so as to pattern their behavior in a "particular way." (Chabari, p. 62).

When a society perpetuates a particular stereotype about males or females, the society is training women and girls in general to feel and act in an inferior way towards their male counterparts, and males to feel and act with superiority. This in turn is aimed at building self-esteem and boosting male psyche while making females feel inadequate, naive and intellectually challenged. This construction of male superiority and female inferiority finds its way in myth through characterization. This presumed weakness is a myth meant to wage psychological war on women, a war of subjugation aimed at compelling women and girls to be subservient, and training future women to feel guilty of insubordination if they challenge the men- folk.

When the planned escape was being organized in *Origin of Family and Clan Naming Patterns* MT 5, women were to escape in the first cohort together with children so that in the event that the Nguu Ntune pursued after them, they would not catch up with them. An important reminder is that in the traditional African society and Meru in particular, the term 'warrior' had no female equivalent and women who did heroic exploits were the subject of negativity, and they would be castigated in the community. This vulnerability of the female is perhaps what is often used to justify the societal view that women and girls always need the physical protection of the men or boys. Much as it is in good faith to be mindful of one another specially to foster team spirit, it is painting a weak picture of the women, as perpetually reliant upon men just like children. Imbuga writes, "Characters should not be contrived to cause convenience. I prefer that the girl remains true to the prevailing reality." In other words, the writer would rather reflect the girl child in real life, but Alembi says, "I write to communicate to the audience. What the girl character becomes during my writing is an unconscious process." Whether the portrayal of the male and female characters in the myths of origin under study is conscious or unconscious, it is a cultural construct.

The pregnant woman in *Perceived Relatives (Gichiaro)*, MT 4, was in such danger that she had to be helped in delivering by young men who were passing by. Indeed, she had to plead with them to help her lest she died together with the unborn baby: She says, "If you don't help, I and the unborn child will die." Her life and that of the child were in the hands of the three young men. In the same story, when the punishment was meted out against the evil doer, it is reported that a voice emerged from the cloud of fire that the orphan and one who had just had a wife should come out of the Gaaru. The one who had just married was to be spared specifically so that he can take care of the wife since traditionally a widow was the object of scorn, pity, exploitation and general vulnerability. This is to further stress on the utilitarian aspect of myths. These aspects are to uphold what society values.

There are a number of reasons advanced to explain why women have not excelled in written literature as opposed to their male counterparts. Among them are socio-cultural roles. It is within such a backdrop that Virginia Wolf (1929) notes how women are supposed to stay 'in the background' (emphasis mine) or else face condemnation or laughter if they seek to do more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (89). Inasmuch as it is the women who used to story tell, mythmaking itself was done by men and women were only to communicate the myths, a duty prescribed by men and which women were quite willing to oblige.

According to Oakley D (1972), sex refers to the state, the quality of being male or female and to the biological features that accompany male or female sex. This implies a natural division between the most basic physiological differences of males and females, their differences being genetically determined; largely universal, and genetically constant. This view considers sex a category distinguishing males from females in terms of biological characteristics. Masinjila (1994, p.11) gives us an insight into how men and women are viewed in a patriarchal society.

Men are regarded, within the patriarchal traditional society as possessing reason, logic, intellect, egos, souls and strong wills. Women on the other hand are, emotional, given to capricious anger, chaotic and generally suffer from unbridled sexuality. (Masinjila, p. 11).

In a patriarchal society like Kenya, male physique is exclusively big, strong and unconquerable, while the female is invariably frail and vulnerable. The main male characters in *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5, are portrayed as courageous and unconquerable. These are Gaita, Nthanju, Muthetu and Kiuna who are actually ready to be sacrificed to buy the release of their people. J.H Goldstein in *Aggression and Crimes of Violence* (1984) describes aggression as "behavior whose intent is the physical or psychological injury to another person" (viii). However, he continues to say that it not limited to "only hitting someone but also embarrassing another person" (viii). In *Rain and Thunderstorms*, MT 6, there is not a single girl or woman character. The

siblings are only brothers, sun, moon and the stars and their rivalry is presented as violent and titanic such that when the war broke out between them, none could overpower the other.

Scholars Rowan (60) and Hoch (18) state that aggression is one of the qualities of being masculine and according the cultural set up this misunderstanding between the siblings is presented so positively as giving rise to rain, night and day. These three entities are very important aspects of determining seasons. This is in accordance to the story of *Rain and Thunderstorms*, MT 6. In the traditional Tigania community, activities were determined by seasons such as harvesting, planting, weeding etc. An important reminder is that in the traditional African society, the term warrior had no female equivalent and women who did heroic exploits were subject of negativity and would be castigated by the community. Their exploits were not celebrated as much as those of men. This assumed vulnerability of the female is perhaps what is often used to justify the societal view that women or girls always need the physical protection of the men or boys.

Benjamin Odhoni (1994:56) observes that among the Luo women and girls are "...regarded as frail and weak parties who need constant masculine care and protection." Women's character and roles in society are thus greatly dictated by these associations, as they strive to live up to the societal expectations. Gender plays a decisive role in the construction of the family, lineages, clans, tribes and ethnic groups. Women do not culturally pass their identity to offspring, don't originate clans and their names are rarely used for conventions. The use of etymological terms such as 'elders', or the Kiswahili 'mzee,' 'spear' which is a purely male weapon, 'Nthaka' whose English equivalent is young men and 'Gaaru' (a house for young men), further denote bias against females. It is important at this point to note that the term 'elders' refers to people (men) whom the society has given the mandate to be the custodians of community wisdom. Therefore, reference to any man as an elder accord him that respect yet not all men have this wisdom.

This is also evidence in the extensive use of vocatives such as husband and wife, father and mother, boys and girls, men and women, cioithe and ciong'ina, wife of, and medicine man. There is also the portrayal of men as having special almost deity-like abilities to solve mankind's problems and not women. Roles such as seers, mediums, rainmakers, diviners, elders and herbalists have all been assigned to male characters in the myths of origin from the Tigania community. Further analysis of the myths reveals that the male gender comes first in situations where both genders are referred to: In MT 2, *Red-Thigh Woman*, (Ngirani) we read, "a father sired." The mother is mentioned much later when she had gone to the farm and when Ndiindi slept with the father. In MT 5, *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, we are told that the Meru had one parentage: "The father was called Mukunga and the mother was called Ngaa." MT 3, *How Animals Were Domesticated*, begins with, "there was a nearby homestead belonging to a couple, Muriiru, the husband and Nkimaa the wife" and in MT 6, *Rain and Thunderstorms* the myth starts with, "Long, long time ago, there lived a husband and wife."

In the story of the *Perceived Relatives (Gichiario)*, MT 4, when the punishment was meted out against the doers, it is reported that a voice emerged from the cloud of fire that the orphan and the one who had just married should come out to be spared from the fire. These two categories had to enjoy the cultural immunity. This should be understood in the light of the notion that in the Tigania community and most other patriarchal societies, men are the heads of the family, custodians of societal values and law givers and that if the newly married man died in the inferno, the widow would be of no consequence in the community.

It is noted that in *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5, the first born child was usually named after the family members of the husband. If it was a baby boy, he was named after the father of the husband and if it was a girl, she was named after the mother of the husband. Those who come later were named after the parents and relatives of the mother's side. In the same story, it is the creation of the mythmaker that the mother should love the second born and not the first as is expected while the father loved the first born. This further takes us to patriarchal privileges. This is contrary to the natural inclination where mothers love all their children equally. Mothers, sisters, aunts and grandmothers must always come second. Women's position and status by subversion is a historical truth but a mirror that is biased against the female gender. In the Meru community, marriage and motherhood was almost a religious duty that was carried out with awe and reverence.

Women were mothers, wives and concubines in patriarchal society acting within a framework designed and executed by men. Ndiindi, in the story *Red-Thigh Woman (Ngirani)*, MT 2, had to be married, her single motherhood status notwithstanding, if only to fulfill this vow-like obligation. Indeed, her out-of-wedlock-child status was frowned upon but the status quo had to be maintained, by ensuring that she got married. According to *Red-Thigh Woman (Ngirani)*, MT 2, when the father impregnated his biological daughter, the object of pathos should have been the victim. However, the man's inflated ego is further massaged by being given the daughter as a second wife and nobody raised a voice against this because the judges who meet to deliberate the issue are fellow men intent on maneuvering through a way of getting young beautiful girls as second wives when their old women, seemed to them sexually unattractive. It is apparent that these myths discriminate against women and girls in favor of men in this society because as the female offspring of this union eternally suffer the consequences of the act, the male offspring are free to marry as they wish.

The council of elders agreed: "...that all daughters from this illegitimate union shall never secure marriage by young men but would always be married as second wives or by old men who have lost or divorced their first wives." (MT 2, *Red-Thigh Woman*) In other words, the mother's negative status only applies to the girl child. Incidentally, the girls whose fate was to be married as second wives (Ngirani) are extraordinarily beautiful. It becomes ugly to be beautiful in this male dominated society. It is well noted that the council of elders' verdict is undisputable and was made

up of men only and in a case involving a man and a woman, chances of bias abound. Women are not members of clan councils and do not participate in decision making. Marie (1993 p.47), Gordon (1996), and Kanogo (2005), advance that power relations in marital, kinship and ethnic cohesiveness in patrilineal and patrilocal communities favors the male gender. The sin of one wayward father consigned his daughter and the female progeny to a life of stigma and psychological torture. The mythmaker gives patriarchy another boost by creating a common abode, 'Gaaru' a special place where young men of the same age stay together for a specified period of time being initiated in adulthood by older men. In fact, when the young men perished in the inferno inside the Gaaru, the mourning is described as 'generous,' the death of a circumcised man being such an immense loss to the entire society not just to the parents.

This is seen in *Perceived Relatives (Gichiaro)*, MT 4. In the Gaaru boys are inducted and trained on the practices, beliefs and attitudes that further push women into negative cocoons. All this time, women and girls are indoors, which is metaphorical of subjugation and subservience to their outgoing male counterparts. It is worth noting that myths are charters for proper conduct because they preserve the ways in which the society has always behaved since time immemorial. These myths of origin are as old as the history of the community and are integrated in the history of the same community.

The unquestionable obedience of the wife to the husband when handling the meat brought home may be construed negatively according to MT 3, *How Animals Were Domesticated*. The ability to outwit the Nguu Ntune was also through the effort of men according *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5. However, this functioned to educate and socialize children while drawing a moral to warn people not to break the norms of the society such as unity. Njoroge (1978) asserts that literature can be manipulated either to boost or destroy the image or dignity of a people.

1.0.4 Language and Style

In this section, we discuss language and style and how they have been employed effectively in the communication of mythology. Raymond Chapman (1973, p.13) notes that literature uses language as an artistic medium, not simply for communication or expression but for effect. Charles Chadwick (1971) postulates that in literary work, symbolism refers to the use of a word, a phrase or a description, or even a character to represent deeper meaning than the words themselves. He further says that symbolism is "the art of expressing ideas and emotions not by describing them directly, nor by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting what these ideas and emotions are by recreating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplainable symbols." (32) Robert further enhances the understanding of a symbol when he explains that a symbol is an object that signifies something else by association or by semblance. It can be a material object or a written sign used to epitomize something invisible.

Mugubi (2017) defines a symbol as "a perceptible object used in reflecting or representing an abstract idea or less perceptible object." (2005) Literature uses symbols as a stylistic device to effectively communicate. An oral artist will prefer to use symbolism to avoid direct reference which can be a basis for accusations by those whom the message is intended. An oral artist will use symbolism to praise virtues in a society or castigate vices indirectly. Culture, it is argued, is coded wisdom. This coding through symbols gives the audience the challenge of deciphering the message being put across and symbols are the nucleus of all cultures. Symbolization illustrates a community's values in a variety of ways and provides visible, audible and tangible evidence of the beliefs and values which cannot be readily perceived. The totality of perspectives based on the social and cultural values of the group is the essence of African aesthetics. We use symbolism to refer to the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from the literal sense. Symbols are used to create meaning and emotions in a story and to represent abstract ideas. It is not just the presence or availability of myths that is important but also their symbolic function as literary tropes that provide real meaning. Indeed, myths just like other tales thrive on symbols. In this particular study we restrict ourselves to how symbolism manifests itself:

1. (A) Character symbolism

Character symbolism occurs when characters are used to represent some ideas or ideals. In this paper the following characters have been used symbolically.

(i) Ndiindi

Ndiindi in *Red-Thigh Woman (Ngirani)* MT 2, is a female character who has been used symbolically to represent a victim(s) of oppression and male chauvinism. She is the face of despondency, disillusionment and social injustice among the Tigania community. She is a young beautiful girl who falls in the hands of her immoral father and conceives out of wedlock. She cannot secure the customary marriage which was culturally valued, but becomes a second wife of her father and a co-wife to her biological mother. Ndiindi is completely helpless because the decision is arrived at by the elders. These elders were the custodians of the judicial system in the community and so their ruling cannot be questioned.

The *Red-Thigh Woman (Ngirani)* scenario demonstrates that the Tigania community is a patriarchal society that elevates men and mistreats women and girls in general just because they are females. The notion of red-thigh woman (Ngirani) seems to offer no hope of freedom from the inhuman and unjust society. The fact that Ndiindi was never heard in the judicial process shows how the arbitration of social issues was plagued with inconsistencies and malpractices. Of particular interest here is that the elders did not rule before the girl gave birth. They waited until an extra-ordinarily beautiful girl was born. That is when they said that the girl should be married

by the father and that all the daughters descending from this union will always be married by old men as second wives. We can deduce that this was selfishly motivated because the council of elders in the Meru community were all old men, keen on securing young beautiful girls for wives.

(ii) Nguu Ntune

NguuNtune was the slave driver of the Meru people in Mbwaa and is first used as a symbol of oppressive dictatorial rule in MT 5, *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*: "...Meru were working as slaves of a red-skinned people called Nguu Ntune....and were mistreating them." The symbolism that underlies this is similar to the biblical story of Pharaoh and the Israelites. Tired of oppression and dictatorship, they enlisted the help of their god Thaa (God) through their mediators. Through the divine council of Mugaa O Ngai, Gaita and Koome Njue freedom for the Meru people was realized. This brought hope and inspiration for a new dawn. Nguu Ntune who were believed to be Arabs or 'Red Skinned' are known to be very enterprising although they mistreat their labor force. For instance, they made several unreasonable demands from the Meru people whenever they sought to be released. This was in the hope that it would be impossible for the Meru to meet those demands giving them a leeway to continue mistreating them. Nguu Ntune finally lost his source of cheap labor through the leadership of Koome Njue and the unity of the entire community which ultimately redeemed the people of Meru from suffering and oppression. This triumph offers hope for mankind that it is possible to succeed even in hard situations.

(iii) Gaita and Koome Njue

The two people feature very prominently in *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5. The two are symbolically used to stand for servant leadership and advocacy. These can be regarded as traditional rulers and traditionally, a lot of religious ideals surrounded the person and office of traditional rulers-their positions being linked by myth and legend with Thaa (God). The final triumph and freedom of the Meru people was through a process of genuine leadership whose hallmark was the selflessness and persistence of the duo. These are seen as earthly representatives of Thaa (God). Character symbolism is very evident in these myths and the mythmaker has used their names symbolically. For instance, Koome Njue is a Kimeru name for 'wise' and he is portrayed as so since he helped the Meru people to escape from slavery in Mbwaa. He consults all the time and finally outwits the Nguu Ntune and finally achieves the freedom of his people.

Koome Njue has demonstrated that wisdom and peaceful mediation can rescue a community that is on the brink of collapse. Gaita is the name of the other spiritual leader mentioned in MT 5, *Clan and Family Naming Patterns*. Gaita is a Tigania word which means 'selfless.' Although human sacrifice was a ritual and a practice that was uncommon within the Meru community, Gaita gave himself to die for others, a public demonstration of courage and patriotism. The many ordeals that Gaita and Koome Njue went through in their quest for freedom

emphatically brought the question of leadership in the face of imminent defeat, even in the present society. Koome Njue was initially named Mwithe (hidden) but people later renamed him Koome Njue. It can be argued that the maternal instinct had hinted to the parents of the agonies their son would go through and so hiding him was meant to save him from this situation. However, he was not hidden but worked closely with the Meru people and wrought their freedom. We are told that, Nguu Ntune came to see the spear that his slaves were making, but he got a rude shock for surely they had gone!

(v) Elders

In the Tigania community in the olden days and even today, the council of elders was the only group that was legally mandated to arbitrate on matters of the community such as land issues, extreme moral inappropriateness, and general misconduct. Their verdict was final and nobody would question it. The council was therefore a symbol of political judicial system. It was also made of people whom the community looked upon in terms of moral forthrightness beyond compromise. According to MT 2, *Red-Thigh Woman (Ngirani)* The decision of the council of elders was never discussed further. The present day famed Njuri Ncheke is held in high esteem in the Tigania community. They arbitrate on all manner of local issues in the community and settle disputes. Indeed, just as it was in the olden days, their ruling is final and the community has to adhere to this.

(iv) Muriiru

In MT 3, *How Animals Were Domesticated*, Muriiru is a symbolic character that the mythmaker has used to represent the male gender and the head of the family institution. This should be understood against the backdrop of the Meru community wherethe male gender is portrayed as wise, intelligent, strong and unconquerable. Muriiru is depicted as having the unparalleled skill to lure wild animals and to domesticate them and, having the physical strength to hunt wild game and being able to provide food for his family. Indeed, Muriiru used to hunt wild game to supplement the daily diet. Hunting was a dangerous activity that demanded skill, strength, wit and courage, which is why it was a preserve of men. The dog is said to have thought, "If I become a friend of man he will protect me from stronger animals like elephants because he has the ability to kill them."

The laborious work of constructing a Nkanatha (traditional Tigania wooden structure for animals) and provision for the needs of the family in the Tigania community was done by men and that was why Muriiru built a Nkanatha large enough to accommodate as many animals as he desired. This is because a large herd was a measure of wealth in the community. The wife was expected to silently follow her husband's instructions. This is seen when she carries the meat into the house quietly as the husband gave her, an episode that even the cat took note of.

(b) Animal/Object Symbolism

Animal or object symbolism happens when animals or objects are used to represent something other than what they actually are. The symbols in this study have function to unravel what the society cherishes or detests according to the dictates of social usefulness. Radcliff was interested in local narratives which had a 'social function' in the society. The following objects and animals have been used symbolically:

(i) Mole

The mole is a common bush rodent in the Tigania community that is known for hiding from the sun and is normally destructive to the roots and tubers of the crops which it feeds on. Mole as a character in the myth of *The Origin of Death*, MT 1, is not only used as a symbol but a metaphor of a degenerate community, and general the most well-crafted traps that farmers set up by moving underground and shifting locations. The mole is a commonly used term in political rhetoric referring to a person who works within an organization but secretly passes on information to another rival organization. It is the equivalent of a traitor or a saboteur. In *Origin of Death*, MT 1, Mole said to Thaa, "I met a sweet potato and started eating. Then I met another one that was bigger and sweeter and decided to eat it also. Then I decided to terminate the mission."

The responsibility that was vested upon Mole was a unique responsibility because the destiny of mankind rested solely upon the actions and behavior of Mole, and in response to his obedience to an authority higher than him. When he is sent to deliver the message of death and resurrection, he does not refuse the onus but sets on the journey willingly. However, Mole not only delayed with the message but he actually never delivered it and that is why Thaa cursed him for disobedience. In this particular case, the messenger required to have been one of a higher moral standing. Human beings are normally tempted by what they value most. The failure by the mole to deliver the message of hope to mankind is seen as the triumph of evil forces against good, and so a wakeup- call for humanity to work hard and defeat the evil forces that always plague humanity.

(ii) Fire

In many societies of the world, fire has the symbolic value of removing or taking away impurities and in most cases, it is personified. When the gods decided to punish the young men who had killed Maruba and Kang"ira in *Perceived Relatives (Gichiaro)*, MT 4, he sent a cloud of fire. This fire has been used as a metaphor of vengeance and symbolically to represent divine retributive justice. It is also a refiner's fire meant to rid the society of the scum. It is clear that the gentlemen, who had helped the pregnant mother with delivery and the eventual relationship that was forged, deserved a better treatment. Instead, they were followed and killed. While it is important to treat all humanity with a measure of fairness, one is expected to do better to those that are related to

one by blood. The death of Nthaka (young men) tends to enhance the mythmakers' view that perpetrators of evil and human suffering deserve punishment as well as to indicate that forces of evil are bound to be defeated. Fire is still mentioned in MT 3, *How Animals Were Domesticated* where Muriiru was instructed by the medicine man, Mbalanchu to burn the herbs severally. These were the herbs that ultimately lured the animals into Muriiru's homestead. The burning was meant to remove any impurities or any unwanted material that could have stifled the potency of the herbs.

(iii) Spear and Sandals (Material Culture Objects)

The spear and the sandals are very important artifacts in the Meru community especially because they are phallic symbols. After circumcision, a Tigania initiate would be given a spear and sandals by the male parent. This was to inform the young man that the mantle to protect the clan was upon him and he had no reason to fear anything. The sandals were also symbolic because they were a preparation for long distance treks in search of wealth so that the community does not die of starvation. It is important to note that these items were not given to uncircumcised boys (biji) because they were still considered to be children to be protected together with women. The need for Nguu Ntune in *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5, that the Tigania people make sandals and spears may have been a mistake but in all its interpretation, Tigania men were indeed warriors because a warrior in the Tigania context is normally given a spear for protection and sandals to traverse the vast land in search of food to sustain the family and the clan at large. This is done ceremoniously after a boy has been circumcised.

(c) Land

Land is a symbol of family roots and their rootedness in a particular territory, not just a mere material possession. Land may not necessarily mean soil but a place of settlement. It confers to the owner both economic and social status. It is the place of ancestors who died and are buried there. This should be understood in the context of Tigania culture who in the traditional set up consulted the spirits of their long dead ancestors by pouring drink offerings on the ground. In a patriarchal community, descent coincides with patrilocal settlement.

Mbwaa is a Meru name given to a place at the Coast, where the Meru people are believed to have originally come from. This place is first used as a symbol and secondly as negative metaphor of slavery in *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5. Mbwaa is used to symbolize the deed of oppression and servitude. The Nguu Ntune or the slave master is believed to have been an astute businessman who was only interested in enriching himself and his ilk at the expense of the Meru people while the place itself was a beehive of activity. This meant that the Meru people worked round the clock. Geographically, Mbwaa is hundreds of kilometers from the present day

Meru land. It can be inferred that the Nguu Ntune was able to dominate the Meru people because he felt that Mbwaa was his home and that the Meru were foreigners.

Muriiru, in *How Animals Were Domesticated*, MT 3, had a large homestead and built a large (Nkanatha) for animals that was able to accommodate 'as many animals as he desired'. This is because he considered that place his home. The animals that returned to the forest considered the forest their place of abode and in the forest there were no negative comments like those from Muriiru's wife. Whenever Muriiru went hunting he, had to use a lot of skill and manipulation because the wild animals were in their territory and not his.

In *Rain and Thunderstorms*, MT 6, when the sibling rivalry became too much, the children decided to part so that each may establish dominion and control in their separate territories. We see the Sun in his territory and domain during the day and the moon at night and there was peace. The Mole was designated to live under the ground as a curse in *Origin of Death*, MT 1. Indeed, Mole even today lives under the ground and cannot come out unless under the cover of darkness and retreats immediately he hears someone approaching because he considers this as trespass.

(d) Language

Language is symbolic because it constitutes the substitution of words for objects and incorporates audible symbols that people use to communicate and organize their experiences. It is central to the formation of social identity. Names, status etc. are marked linguistically by gender. In gender specific language, scholars emphasize the role of language in the construction of identity and in tracing the history of a community. Group names and totems symbolize identifiability of specific groups in relation to other groups. In the Tigania Community, names whether individual or group were representative of virtues and values that enhance social equilibrium. The following group names are used to identify groups of people in the Tigania people.

(a) Njiru

Njiru is the group that departed from Mbwaa while it was still dark. Njiru means 'dark' This is according to *Family and Clan Naming Patterns* MT 5. Black color can be construed to mean power. Today the clan of Njiru is highly valued as people who are daring and fearless because they walked at night without fearing even the wild animals. Men from this clan are sought after by would be fathers-in law to marry their daughters because they offer protection to their wives and children.

(b) Njeru

This is the group that left Mbwaa when the sun was up in the sky. The English name for Njeru is 'white' or 'whiteness.' They are referred to as cowards because they slept until day break. MT 5, *Family and Clan Naming Pattern* explain that they would keep peeping outside to see whether it

was still dark. The Njeru clan is despised because they are lazy cowards who slept while others were escaping, and they are castigated because warriorship is a highly priced virtue in the Tigania community.

(c) Ngirani

Ngirani is a group name in the Tigania community which is almost a taboo name and whose mention ushers an aura of fear. It refers to women whose lineage is from Ndiindi, the girl who got married to her father. Among the families from where a young man aspiring to have a wife should not go is to a Ngirani or Red-Thigh woman. The myth of origin of *Red-thigh Woman (Ngirani)*, MT 2, explains this scenario.

2. Allusions

Allusion is a literary device which refers to making references or quotations from known authorities, journals or books (Mugubi 2005). It also includes making reference for familiar objects, places or events or persons known to the audience as well as to the reader. Biblical allusion is one of the most commonly used devices that are employed in literary work and it refers to making references to or analogies from the bible text. The six myths of origin from the Tigania community do not directly refer to bible verses but uses analogies derived from the bible. For example, in the myth of *Perceived Relative (Gichiaro)*, MT 4, we see that there was divine punishment for the young men (Nthanka) who had killed Maruba and Kangi'ra. These two young men had helped the pregnant woman to give birth on her way home and they deserved to be treated well. However, the perpetrators of this heinous act were not spared the wrath of Thaa. He sent a cloud of fire that devoured all of them while they were in the (Gaaru). However, some people were spared whom Thaa considered 'worthy.' In the bible we see God destroying Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. He rained fire there and spared only Lot and his family because of their piety.

In *How Animals Were Domesticated*, MT 3, when Muriiru burnt the herbs to lure the animals into the homestead, they came in pairs, male and female, and entered into the Nkanatha. Traditionally, Tigania people keep their animals in the (Nkanatha) and they consider it safe for the animals. Indeed, the animals that went back into the forest are always under threat from hunters and other dangers in the forest because they are unprotected. In the bible, we read that Noah built an ark and the animals went into the ark, animals of all species, male and female, and once in the ark they were safe from the raging waters outside.

The name Mbwaa is synonymous to suffering among the Meru community even to date and is also equated to the biblical Egypt where the Israelites were enslaved by the King of Egypt known as Pharaoh. The same conditions that the biblical Israelites were exposed to are seen in the *Myth of Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5, including escaping at night. Just as the Israelites

prayed earnestly to their God for intervention, the Meru people also prayed and consulted Thaaai to intervene on their behalf. Nguu Ntune is the equivalent of Pharaoh while Egypt is Mbwaa.

In MT 1, *Origin of Death*, the mole is given the responsibility of taking the message of death and resurrection to mankind. He is warned not to talk to anybody and not to delay. He is however tempted on his way by a sweet potato which delays him, and he eventually fails to accomplish the mission. Man continued to die and the mole was cursed. The mole has the biblical allusion of the serpent that brought the ultimate fall and banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 3:6 NKJV). When these two ate the forbidden fruit, they were punished by God and the serpent was cursed.

Gaita in *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5, offered himself to be sacrificed (Kurorwa) so that his people could be set free from slavery in Mbwaa. This is similar to the biblical Jesus who was a ransom sacrifice for humanity to be delivered from the power of sin and death. (Sin is construed to be a form of slavery) while in *Family and Clan Naming Patterns*, MT 5, we encounter a significant character called Koome Njue. Koome Njue was initially named Mwithe by the mother which is a Kimeeru name for 'hidden.' He was later renamed Koome Njue meaning 'wise.' This is the man who ensured the deliverance of the Meru people from Mbwaa to their present day homeland of Meru. Similar to this is the story of Moses in the Old Testament who was also hidden by the mother so that he could not be killed. He grew up to be the deliverer of the Israelites and their eventual habitation of the promised land of Canaan. (Exodus Chapters 2-3 NKJV).

Conclusion

This paper has established that characters are very important in a work of art because it is through them that the audience or the reader gets to know the mind of the oral artist or what message he is passing across. We have endeavored to analyze characters either depending on the roles conferred upon them by the society or on the basis of names and conventions of the society. This paper has also delved into style in the interpretation and understanding of myths of origin from the Tigania community. What is clear in the six myths of origin is that the male character is the most important player in the tales and that patriarchy is deeply entrenched in the Meru community. The male gender has been assigned roles that endear them to the audience especially in terms of heroism, intelligence and tact; they are winners rather than losers. We have also noted that the female gender is secondary, playing second fiddle to man. The women have been marginalized, are few, and have been assigned the darker side of the roles, while being portrayed as weaklings, pitiful, intellectually challenged and deserving the pathos of the reader. They are the vulnerable characters in the six myths of origin from the Meru community from which the myths have been drawn from.

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Glossary of Terms

The following terms were borrowed from 'Kimeru'

'Gichiaro' - perceived relative

'Ngirani' - Red-thigh woman

'Nguu Ntune' - Indians

'Nthaka' - Male adult

'Nkanath' - traditional wooden structure for domestic animals

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