

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER THROUGH THE NARRATIVE PROCESS  
OF THE AFRICAN FOLKTALE: A CASE STUDY OF THE MARAGOLI  
FOLKTALE**

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I declare that ***The Construction of Gender Through the Narrative Process of The African Folktale: A Case Study of the Maragoli Folktale***, is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....  
E. S. KABAJI

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DATE

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## **Abstract**

### **The Construction of Gender Through the Narrative Process of the African Folktale: A Case Study of The Maragoli Folktale**

By

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The purpose of the study was to identify the gender-related themes from a cultural discourse in order to determine how gender is constructed in African society. The study specifically examines the Maragoli Folktale. The Maragoli people mainly inhabit the western part of Kenya and are a sub-tribe of the larger Luhya community. The Luhya community is the second largest community in Kenya.

The study attempts to uncover how gender is constructed through the examination of dominant themes, characterization, images, symbols, formulaic patterns and formalities of composition and performance in the Maragoli folktales at the time of performance.

Based on an eclectic conceptual framework, the study takes into consideration gender theories, feminist literary perspectives, psychoanalysis and discourse analysis paradigms to critically examine the tales as a semiotic system of signification grounded within an African social cultural milieu. The folktales are analysed as a symbolic and ideological discourse of signs encoded by the performer and decoded by the audience at the time of performance. The study therefore situates the tale firmly at the time of performance, taking into consideration the interaction between the performer and the audience in the dissemination and internalization of gender ideology.

While establishing that patriarchal structures and values are transmitted through the tales, the study also reveals the methods and interventions that the mainly female performers advance as active agents in their struggle for space within the culture. Women are, therefore, perceived as active agents of change and the

folktale as a site from which gender ideology is discussed, contested and subverted.

The study is based on a corpus of twenty (20) folktales collected from the Maragoli country in Western Province of Kenya (See maps, Appendix B.) The English versions of the tales appear in appendix A.

**Key Terms:**

African Marriage, Feminist Theories, Folktales, Gender Construction, Ideology, Maragoli, Masculinity, Narrative Process, Oral Performance, Patriarchy, Psychoanalysis, Sex Roles.

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## **Chapter One**

### **The Problem, Research Goals and Conceptual Foundation**

Writing about aspects of women's voices from Northern Nigeria, Margaret Hausa Kassam (1996) has pointed out that the word 'gender' signifies, first and foremost, differences in the biological make-up of human beings in general, in terms of the sex of the species as either male, female, or neuter; and in a more recent, but problematic application of the term, 'transsexual' or 'transvestite'. It is, however, notable that a number of scholars including Lise Ostergaard (1992:6) define gender in terms of relations of power. She writes:

Gender relations are constructed in terms of the relations of power and dominance that structure the life chances of women and men. In other words, gender divisions are not fixed in biology, but constitute an aspect of the wider social divisions of labour, which in turn are rooted in the conditions of production and reproduction and reinforced by the cultural, religious and ideological systems prevailing in a society.

In essence, the social construction of gender in terms of 'maleness' or 'femaleness,' 'masculinity' and 'femininity', sublimates the biological construct in the sense that the production and consumption of culture seems to be dependent upon the effective control of one social class over another or one sex over another; in this case the biological male controls the female in power relations.

It is therefore apparent that in this respect, the interpretation of the gender classifications 'masculinity' and 'femininity' seems to have more to do with the socialisation process of the individual rather than the biological endowment of nature. Many feminist scholars share this view. It was Simone de Beauvoir (1989) who argued that one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. In the same breath, we may argue, and metaphorically so, that one is not born, but becomes, a man. How does one become a man or woman? Every society has its own socialising engines that effectively transfer gender ideology. One such effective engine is the folktale-telling tradition. As Bisi Ogunsina (1996) points out, literature, whether oral or written, is a transmitter of ideology; but it does

more than transmit ideology; in many cases it creates it, since the very idea of performance involves active creation of meaning.

It is the purpose of this study to identify gender-related themes from folktales as a cultural discourse in order to determine how gender is constructed in African society. It does this through examination of images, symbols, characters and formulaic patterns in the Maragoli folktale at the time of performance. It specifically examines the Maragoli folktale as a cultural discourse in a patriarchal society. This study was, in part, inspired by an earlier study by this author (Egara Kabaji 1991). The earlier study focused on the structure and aesthetics of the Maragoli folktale and examined the various patterns that hold the tale together. It also attempted to show how the patterns are manipulated to the delight of the audience. Operating within the constraints of an M.A. thesis, the study, however, inspired me to start thinking about exploring how gender is constructed through the narrative process of the folktale.

Specific questions define the paradigm of this research: What is the underlying gender ideology in the tales, and how does it affect their execution? Do the performers and their audiences understand the constructed gender perspective advanced through the tales, and what is their attitude towards it? Do the performers link the gender perspective constructed with real life events? What primary female and male concerns are expressed? How are women and men in the tales depicted by various performers? How do the performers and audience view their various roles and statuses in social life?

Gender in this context means those categorisations of persons, artifacts, events, sequences and so on which draw upon sexual imagery; upon the way in which distinctiveness of male and female characteristics make concrete people's ideas about the nature of social relationships (Arola 1998). In this sense, this study directs attention to what constitutes female and male in the social interaction of folktale performance.

It interrogates the social interaction, which produces gender through the folktale narrative process and attempts to reveal the concepts and values they convey to the audience. The study presupposes that the folktale performance, as a system of dialogue, is part of a gender system. Gender system is here perceived as a multi-layered structure in which the perpetuation and re-creation of gender concepts, symbolic meanings, social/structural divisions and individual identity take place. This study also focuses on the gender concepts underlining the social and historical constitution of identities and relations based on sexual differences. The gender-related themes extracted represent the interpretation of the semantic patterns, symbolic structures and images gleaned from a close examination of the twenty tales analysed on several different levels.

In this study, the term 'discourse' refers to social meaning deliberately conveyed, not only through spoken utterances and language, but also through gestures and other body movements. Discourse involves both the active transmission of information and its approbation. This process implies a co-operative process of communication, co-ordination and negotiation between the performer and her audience.

Specifically, the study aims to achieve five interrelated objectives:

1. Uncover gender-related themes that the ordinary Maragoli people derive from their folktales.
2. Establish the historical background and social cultural values that shape the gender ideology perpetuated in the narratives.
3. Determine the overt and covert attitudes and ideologies which the Maragoli folktales express and promote in relation to the institution of marriage through examination of how biological differences between men and women are presented and how these empower or disempower both sexes.
4. Identify the power relations, which are promoted through gender roles, which manifest themselves in the Maragoli folktales through examination of

social roles and tensions in society and how they are contextualised through production and reproduction of the sexes in Maragoli society.

5. Identify aspects of performance, which contribute to the audiences' understanding of the meaning and concepts embedded in the folktales as they move from conflict to resolution.

Since this study aims, among other things, to identify gender related themes from a cultural discourse, an approach that directs attention to the interaction of verbal, visual, aural and rhythmic images must be employed. The approach should help us discover how these elements combine to produce a work of art and how they are selected to express the performers' wishes, beliefs and intentions. Folktales being products of the human mind, an approach dedicated to their understanding should also show the covert and overt ideas encoded in them and their mode of delivery.

To understand these dimensions of the folktale, the study utilises an eclectic approach in which three theoretical concepts are employed: the feminist theory, the psychoanalytic theory and the discourse analysis theory. The researcher has grounded this combination of approaches in modern folkloristic perspective, which include viewing oral texts as representations of collective thinking, paying attention to intertextuality and contextual information in the analysis of the texts.

The approach to gender within the feminist theory focuses on relations of dominance and subordination and all possible structures, dynamics and dialectics between male and female, men and women as gendered individuals in society. In this sense, the present study re-examines the category of 'male' and 'masculine' while acknowledging the primacy of male and female reproductive differences as the key to gender, for instance, the cultural meaning attached to sexual identity, the social and cultural processes underlying the creation of the categories 'men and 'women' through the folktale discourse. It takes cognisance of feminist concerns, which have striven to redress the deficit of information on

women's place in culture, society and history. The philosophies of Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous, and Luce Irigaray inform this study in the sense that they delight in illuminating the internal contradictions in seemingly perfect and coherent systems of thought, which serves to attack ordinary notions of authorship, identity and selfhood. Like Jacques Lacan, these scholars are interested in reinterpreting traditional Freudian psychoanalytic theory and practice. Their thoughts are tied together by an external perception with roots in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1989), which questions why women are the second sex or in postmodern terms why the woman is the 'other.' Rather than view this condition as something to be transcended, they proclaim its advantages. The condition of otherness enables them to stand back and criticise the norms, values and practices that the dominant culture (patriarchy) seeks to impose on everyone, including those who live on its periphery. This study takes cognisance of this position and information on women and men into a theoretical and conceptual framework, which interrogates the folktale texts under study as a site for contesting patriarchal social structures, relationships, identities and ideology.

Marianne Gullestand (1993) argues that the assumption that women everywhere are subordinated to men is not a useful guideline in investigations of gender. The axiom of global subordination assumes what should be examined and reduces the ability of the analyst to uncover the subtleties, complexities, contradictions and ambiguities of gender relations in different contexts (Gullestand 1993:128). A genuine and thorough examination has to take into consideration the African socio-cultural context and the values that govern the sexes. Thus, although my quest to understand gender construction in the Maragoli folktale cannot ignore Western feminist thoughts, I heed the caution given by Cecily Lockett (1990) and Spivak Guyatri (1987) to Western scholars that they should avoid impositions and refrain from speaking into the painfully stressed arena of Third World women's experience. I do this by taking into consideration all possibilities of interpretation that recognise African female performers as active agents in the struggle for space in a patriarchal society.

The study thus takes into consideration the active personhood of both men and women and the intersection of gender and other differences, such as age. Although patriarchy often evokes an overly monolithic conception of male dominance, which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders, I wish to consider how women strategise within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of what Deniz Kandiyot (1988) terms 'the patriarchal bargain'. These patriarchal bargains 'exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. They also influence both the potential for and specific forms of women's active and passive resistance in the face of their oppression' (Kandiyot 1988:275)

My investigation of the construction of gender thus proceeds on two analytical levels. The first concentrates on gendered social roles, relationships, institutions and the division of labour (that is, what men and women do socially, politically and economically) and how this is brought out in the folktales under study. The second level involves an examination of symbolic representations and cultural concepts of gender (that is, what kind of cultural meanings and values are applied to maleness and femaleness). In order to understand the ways in which persons experience gender, I pay attention to how the Maragoli empirical world is organised and filtered through an identification of cultural symbols, structural aspects and its value system. It is the assumption of this study that the social interaction, which produces gender, takes place, in part, through the folktale narrative process; that is, the conveyance of concepts and values through folktale performance and through other cultural discourses and rituals. Hence nothing is taken for granted. The study assumes no natural basis for anything, in order to enable this researcher to discern how gender is constructed through this medium. While doing this, it interrogates the inferiority and superiority of the

positions and roles assigned to both sexes and how women, who are the main performers of the tales, contest or enhance patriarchy.

Gender is the most important component of social identity and cultural classification across human cultures. Researchers have attempted to define the concept gender using a number of different perspectives but most if not all would agree that as a theoretical concept, 'gender involves relations of duality and difference. Gender is thus a 'metaphor' useful in ordering other aspects of social cultural life in the making of all kinds of cultural meanings' (Appandarai 1991:8). Some scholars, such as Rosaldo (1980), seek to develop more rigorous models of the concept of gender, which go beyond the characterisation of gender as a status or role and deal with gender as a system of meaning and representations forged in social interaction. Rosaldo (1980) for instance argues that gender should be seen as 'the product of social relationships' in concrete (and changeable) societies' rather than 'biologically based differences, which oppose women and men' (Rosaldo 1980:393)

I therefore view gender as a product of social interaction rather than a fixed bipartite division and proceed to interrogate the folktale to render recognisable those actions, images, formulaic patterns and frames within the folktale discourse that contribute to gender construction. The folktale telling tradition is thus a system of persuasive dialogue in which the audience embrace as their own, a set of socially constructed and validated gender roles and attitudes. In essence therefore, by the time a person is old enough to make choices about anything, let alone something as fundamental as gender roles, he or she has already been engendered. In other words, femininity is not a way of being that a girl deliberately decides to assume; rather it is a slow, gradual process that seizes the psyche of a girl before she is self-consciously aware of herself as a girl (Chodorow 1978). Through the folktale dialogue this perpetuation and re-creation of gender concepts, symbols, meanings, social structural divisions and individual gendered identity take place.

Yvonne Hirdman (1988) identifies two basic premises of all gender systems: difference and hierarchy. Nevertheless, the gender system obviously gives to women or promises to give to some women a certain power, status and influence; otherwise women would not participate in it. It is here that the concept of gender contract is helpful. This concept refers to those unspoken rules, reciprocal obligations and rights, which determine relations between men and women, older and younger generations and ultimately the arena of production and reproduction. It also highlights the interdependence and contractual nature of gender relations. Yet even within this system, elements of tension, contest, resistance and even rebellion abound. This resistance may not be public but masked as in folktale discourse, which correctly transforms the mainstream male point of view into the female perspective. Although gender systems are clearly based on collaboration between the genders, men and women do not always cooperate; they also withhold their secrets from each other only to express them symbolically through sub-texts in folktale telling.

The investigation thus proceeds from the premise that African societies have been characterised as being patriarchal (male dominated) and directs inquiry to social actors, especially women, to explore their inventiveness in creating and manipulating hierarchies through gender as they transgress ideological boundaries. I pay attention to gender as experienced through the folktale and this means that I need to understand socio-economic relations of power and production and how the two sexes perceive those relations consciously or unconsciously. I, nonetheless, as an important point of departure, consider women performers, not as passive and submissive conformists to patriarchal authority, but active agents of subversion.

This study employs the psychoanalytic approach, because works of art, such as folktales, were and are created from and about motives and Psychoanalysis is perhaps the most thorough-going theory of motives that humankind has devised.



I take the challenge thrown to folklorists by Alan Dundes (1997:19), who argues that folklorists, both literary and anthropological, have tended to eschew any form of psychological analysis. He notes that one reason for eschewing this area of study is that they do not want to devote their life's energy to the study of traditional fantasy. I agree with him that folklore itself often offers a form of escape for the people who tell tales, sing songs and play games. In this sense, folklore offers an outlet for the expression of taboo, anxiety-provoking behaviour and what would not be expressed in the usual direct way. One can do or say in folkloristic form things otherwise prohibited in everyday language. But even more significant, I consider folktales a psychological site for challenging and contesting patriarchy.

In his plea for a psychoanalytic semiotics in folklore study (Dundes 1980), he argues that the meaning of folkloristic fantasy is unconscious. Indeed, it would have to be unconscious, in the Freudian sense, to function as it does. Among its functions, folklore provides a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of what cannot be articulated in the more usual direct ways. It is precisely in jokes, folktales, folksongs, proverbs, children's games and gestures that anxieties can be vented. What is therefore useful to this researcher is the systematic unlocking of this art form to reveal its methods of concealment and the identity of the covert anxieties.

Through the special device of projection, that is the tendency to attribute to another person or to the environment what is actually within oneself, Dundes posits that the individual achieves a catharsis of sorts. What is attributed, is usually some internal impulse or feeling, which is painful, unacceptable, or taboo. According to Dundes (1980:37), 'the ascription of feelings and qualities of one's own to a source in the external world is accomplished without the individuals' being consciously aware of the fact. The individual perceives the external object as possessing the taboo tendencies without recognising their source in himself'. Verena Kast (1993) shares this view when she argues that fairytales often deal

with anxiety without speaking about it directly. As a matter of fact, anxiety is seldom mentioned in tales. A psychoanalytic interpretation necessitates the narrowing of perception and attempts to understand some of the basic mental operations underlying the folktale as cultural discourse. These psychological underpinnings and how they relate to gender are critical to this investigation.

The moment a work of art is perceived as expressing emotional conflict or it contains latent themes or its effect on us is largely subliminal, then we have entered the realm of interest that is uniquely occupied by Freudianism. To Freud, every work of art is a museum piece of the unconscious, an occasion to contemplate the unconscious frozen into one of its possible gestures, words or expressions. Thus, Freud was interested, not in the art, but in the latent meaning of art. Freud noted that dreams, myths and fairytales supplied useful evidence of the primordial and monotonous fantasies of humankind and of the processes of condensation, displacement and symbolism through which fantasies are both expressed and disguised. Freud's challenge to the creator and the lover of art is not contained merely in his undermining of surface effects and stated intentions. The artist, Freud tells us in an apparently phallogentric mind frame, has an introverted disposition and is very close to becoming neurotic. He is urged on by instinctual needs which are too glamorous; he longs to attain honour, power, riches, fame and the love of women, but he lacks the means of achieving these gratifications. So he turns away from reality and transfers his entire libido on to the creation of his wishes in the life of fantasy. In this study, I consider the folktales as expressing collective feelings, thoughts, hopes and fantasies.

Utz Jeggle (2003), in a rather belated realisation, points out that psychoanalytic theory is relevant to the discipline of folkloristics. The unconscious, Jeggle suggests, might help explain the content of dreams and superstitions. He notes that most of Freud's followers did apply psychoanalytic theory to folklore, notably Otto Rank, Karl Abraham, Ernest Jones and Alan Dundes. Good examples of the application of psychoanalytic theory to folklore is Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of*

*Enchantment* (1976), which successfully brought the application of psychoanalytic theory to the attention of the literate public and Dundes' own work, *From Game to War and Other Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore* (1997).

Yet Freud and his psychoanalytic methodology have their critics who vehemently dismiss the methodology. The most damning criticism of Freud's psychoanalytic method has come from Tallies (1996), Esterson (1993) and Medawar (1975), who argue that the rise of psychoanalysis to a position of prominence in the twentieth century will come to be regarded as one of the most extraordinary aberrations in the history of Western thought. They dismiss Freud's approach as the most stupendous intellectual confidence trick of the twentieth century. It is argued that systematic appraisal of Freud's contribution to the understanding of the psychobiology and organisation of the human mind has returned a negative verdict that Freud, as a scientist, meta-psychologist and diagnostician of society, was a quack who hid in marvellous prose, which gave the ideas a veneer of clarity and a feeling of inevitability.

This study draws its strength not from the criticism of psychoanalysis and Freud, but on what psychoanalysis has been able to achieve in the study of cultural phenomena. Gellner (1985) rightly posits that psychoanalysis is not only, perhaps not even primarily, a doctrine; it is also an institution, a technique, an organisation, an ethic, a theory of knowledge, an idiom and a climate of opinion. Implicitly, it contains theories of politics, history and aesthetics (Gellner 1985: 44). In the same vein, Henrietta Moore (2001) supports this position by asserting that psychoanalysis is also a reflection on humanity, but one adapted for our times. What we thought were random acts, slips of the tongue, errors and accidents turn out to be unconscious intentions. It is not easy to live a life with an effortless acceptance that there are events beyond one's control. 'Psychoanalysis is a truth for our times because paradoxically it portrays us as the kind of people we would like to be. It is an insistently individualizing theory that, in a sense, explains away our deeper natures and our darker sides. It

makes meaning out of the contingency of the world and thus reduces the world to a human scale' (Moore. 2001:89).

It is not possible to ignore psychoanalysis as a theory in gender study since gender construction is influenced by unconscious and hidden desires. Since 1966, the barriers between disciplines like psychoanalysis, philosophy, literature and linguistics have been collapsed in feminist criticism. The most dramatic reworking of the map comes in the texts of Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous, and Luce Irigaray who, as stated earlier, in one way or another invoke psychoanalysis. Dialogue between literature and psychoanalysis has 'traced psychic relation as represented in features of speech. And in discussion of a specifically feminine writing, emphasis is often put on the voice. Second, the whole idea of the powers of authors, the ownership and possession of the texts by writers or readers is thrown in doubt by the rethinking of power in psychoanalysis' (Maggie 1986:331).

Julia Kristeva uses psychoanalysis to help clarify her concept of semiotic discourse, a phase of language occurring between mothers and children before the symbolic language which society imposes. Luce Irigaray and Helen Cixous more radically use psychoanalysis to formulate a discourse that explicitly expresses women's sexuality. They reflect on women's discourse in order to change the phallogocentric order of language and culture. It is only recently that psychoanalysis has shown criticism how the feminine is consciously produced and organised in language. What Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray do in common is to oppose the phallic symbols, which have structured Western thought and writing, with women's body experiences as decoded by psychoanalysis. They read psychoanalysis in order to answer the basic question: can a woman's body be a source of her language? (Maggie 1986). In effect, they employ psychoanalysis, but at times against its 'father', the sexist Freud, in the same way Maragoli oral narrative performers and audience of women, as I will argue, subvert the sexist narratives.

It is therefore true that psychoanalytic criticism is one of the most valuable and fruitful additions to the literary theory and methods of feminism. Major post-Freudian feminist critics, such as Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray from France; Daly, Heilbrun, Gilbert, Guber and Spivak from America; Coward and Mitchel from England, are all indebted to psychoanalysis, albeit in very different ways (Humm 1986). As Goldberg (1996) argues, if it is true that as people tell stories, they express and explore their ideas about the world and their place in it, my study of folktales within the psychoanalytic methodology explores how the owners of the folktales under study express in overt and covert ways their ideas on gender.

Psychoanalysis has made an extensive contribution to folklore study. But perhaps the most important conclusion reached by psychoanalytic work is that what we consider the mind, that is, the mental processes known to consciousness, is only a transformed selection of the whole mind, derived from its deeper and absolutely unconscious layers and modified by contact with the stimuli of the outer world. The deeper unconscious layers originating in our organic instincts are mainly striving for expression. They come into conflict with opposing forces, especially those relating to fear and guilt, the nucleus of what later will become the moral conscience. What is allowed to seek expression by entering consciousness represents a compromise between the two groups. The wishes are realized only in a modified and disguised form. In our judgments and beliefs about the outer world, far more contributions from the obscure inner world of the mind are to be found than is commonly supposed, and it is particularly with these subjective and less rational contributions to thought and conduct that folklore is concerned. It is these discourses that society uses to express hidden desires and wishes, particularly those subjective and less rational contributions to thought and conduct that folklore is concerned with.

This study also employs Discourse Analysis theory within the eclectic model, which is a cross-disciplinary method of inquiry, which studies the structures of texts and considers both their linguistic and social-cultural dimensions in order to determine how meaning is constructed. Discourse analysis concentrates on various forms of oral communication from an interactional and ethno-methodological perspective and investigates how power and authority are distributed in verbal exchanges.

Discourse analysis employs methods developed in areas, such as context analysis - narratology and textual semiotics. The theory proposes that relations of power in our society affect and shape the way we both communicate with each other and create knowledge. It puts into perspective the anthropological idea of 'text' as culture to the extent that the latter allows the analysis of culture to extract a portion of ongoing social action. It draws a reifying boundary around it before inquiring into its structure and meaning: the idea that culture is embodied in a set of texts, which are handed down from generation to generation.

Although Ferdinand de Saussure's work on structural linguistics may have provoked or pre-empted interest in discourse analysis, he was more interested in structures than in systems. More recent works in discourse analysis relate studies in the structure of discourse to broader social and institutional phenomena and owe a significant debt to Foucault's work on enunciative analysis, the unities of discourse and discursive function. The work of Louis Althusser also contributes to the study of the way discourses are formed and what institutional practices contribute to them. His *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970) emphasises that consciousness is constructed through ideologies and that ideologies are systems of meaning that install in everybody imaginary relations to the real relations in which they live. Althusser mentions two major mechanisms for ensuring that people within a state behave according to the rules of that state, even when it is not in their interest to do so. The first is what he calls RSA, or Repressive State Apparatuses that can reinforce

behaviour directly, such as the police and the criminal justice and prison system. More important for literary study, and this study in particular, is the second mechanism that Althusser investigates which he calls ISAs or Ideological State Apparatuses. These are institutions, which generate ideologies, which we as individuals then internalise and act in accordance with. These ISAs include schools, religions, the family, legal system and the arts. These organisations/institutions generate systems of ideas and values, which we, as individuals, believe. It is within this context that the folktales are examined as part of the arts. Discourse analysis contextualises and formalises studies in content analysis and thus generates questions concerning the production, functions and effects of basic units of discourse within given ideological configurations and socio-historical moments.

These units are bound to their conditions of production and to the socio-historical moments from which they emerge. Thus, discourse analysis is also a study of the rules, conventions and procedures, which legitimatise and to some degree determine a particular discursive practice. A thorough analysis of these areas of study covers a broad range of issues including creative use of language and production of discourses that seem new in a performance (Roger Fowler 1996).

This study benefits from the eclectic methodology since the examination of folktales as a cultural discourse aims at revealing covert and overt social meanings and ideologies embedded within the language of the texts while at the same time paying attention to gender construction. The various forms of communicative strategies, for instance images, symbolic patterns, formulaics and disclaimers are examined from the three theoretical parameters to lay open associated culturally determined meanings.

Many scholarly works on gender and folklore inform this study. While lamenting the unchanging theoretical trends in the study of folklore in Southern Africa, Mphela Thosago (1999) argues that as an antidote to the current theoretical

paralysis which seems to have gripped folklore studies, folklorists should welcome the profound influence of contemporary cultural and literary theories into the discipline (Thosago 1999: 81). Unapologetically, Thosago deplors the repetitive nature of folkloristic studies and castigates folklorists as being averse to modern theories and unable to subject to rigorous scrutiny and criticism the large corpus of oral forms through methods and principles of textual analysis. Although redolent with a condescending attitude and almost a know-it all sense of importance, Thosago makes a significant point about the state of folkloristic studies, not only in South Africa, but in Africa generally. Folkloristic studies in Africa are underdeveloped. Scholarship in folklore has mainly involved collections of folkloristic material without equal output in meaningful literary interpretation within specified theoretical paradigms.

Among the collections by East Africans is the work of Taban Lo Liyong (1972). This is the earliest collection of oral literature material by an East African. Other collections have followed including: Ogutu and Roscoe (1975), Kavetsa Adagala and Wanjiku Mukabi (1985), Bole Odaga (1984), Ciarunji Chesaina (1991), Elegwa Mukulu (1996), Okumba Miruka (1994), Hassanali Mubina and Kirmani S. (2002). These collections contain oral literature material collected and translated into English without theoretically inspired analysis.

Other studies of oral literature materials have taken the form of surveys. Two studies of this nature stand out. Ruth Finnegan's (1970) is a comprehensive survey of oral literature in Africa. She examines various approaches to the study of folklore. The study also reviews types of folktales found in Africa. She admits, however, that her study is not exhaustive, because she does not study the contextual details of the narrative realisation during performance. Finnegan correctly notes that studies that are not based on a particular community can only provide a general picture of orality in Africa. The other study is that of Isidore Okpewho (1988) which surveys the traditional approaches to the study of folktales. He reviews the structuralist, formalistic and psychoanalytic



approaches. According to Okpewho (1988), these approaches, used singly, are inappropriate in comprehending the folktales in totality. He calls for appreciation of aesthetic principles and recognition of myth as a creative cultural resource (Okpewho 1988: 34)

It is basically because of this status quo that works on the construction of gender through the narrative process of the African folktales are rare. Besides, many studies of folkloristic material consider transcribed and translated texts without situating this material at the time of performance. In the words of Kofi Anyidoho (1983:31), attempts to evaluate the full character of oral narratives from transcripts of oral texts may be mistaking the pale negatives for the living reality of an object the complex existence of which no mechanical device has been able to capture in all its essences. A determination of realism in oral narratives must go beyond transcripts of texts into various dimensions of the performance. According to Anyidoho (1983), the common attitude among scholars of literate tradition that oral narratives lack the complexity and sophistication often found in the best of written texts is a fallacy by unreasonable exclusion.

Transcripts of oral texts are no adequate substitutes for the complex narrative in a live multi-dimensional performance. Abdul-Rasheed Na'allah (1997) underscores the richness and complexity of African oral forms when he argues that African oral forms cannot be adequately interpreted from the swinging chairs in academic offices or chalkboards in university classrooms. Rather interpretation and understanding can occur only through direct participation in the oral performance. Understanding of oral works depends upon an appreciation of the totality of their historical essence: particular details, such as spontaneous composition and performance, traditional pattern, textual content rendered in vocal utterances, communal participation, for example narrator and audience in folktale session, place and time of performance, costume as well as social and supernatural essences must be taken into consideration.

A number of relevant studies on gender in folklore have been undertaken. Hauwa Kassam (1996) attempts an appreciation of the role of women in the production of culture in the 'gendered' society of northern Nigeria. She posits that 'women and men in this society have different life experiences and so it is important to acknowledge that gender is much more than a psychological attribute. It involves a person's sexuality, which has both a private and a public dimension and must always be understood in the context of particular, and changing, social relations between men and women' (Kassam 1996:112). She argues that art or popular culture is an instrument for modifying consciousness and organising new modes of sensibility and is utilised equitably by both genders in the society. The question is: To what extent does our cultural heritage reflect only one side of the story? What role do northern Nigerian women, for example, play in the production of culture? She views the idea that women are the custodians of culture as a myth and asks: what culture and whose culture? Echoing Florence Stratton (1994) and Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie (1987), Kassam argues that the question of culture and custodianship can be linked to the issue of the "mother Africa' trope or metaphor whereby the African woman appears to be venerated and put on a pedestal, yet her voice is suppressed and she is cheated by the very men who claim to worship her whether as 'mother earth' the symbol of fertility or as 'the goddess of love' (Kassam 1996:113). While capturing their constraints and mythical existence, Kassam sees women contesting their ideological inferiority. She argues that although women are not given enough opportunity to participate in the production of culture, they try to beat the system which seeks to confine them to a limited domestic space by creating and re-creating popular songs/culture suitable for both private and public consumption.

Much as Kassam agrees with the ideas and problems posed by the use of Western gender categories that address peoples' expression of inequality, especially ideas of Henrietta Moore (1993) of "dislocating masculinity," she advises caution over the application of these theories to non-western cultural contexts, because of the disparities in the degree of empowerment of women in

the West and those in Africa, especially in areas where women's voices tend to be limited by socio-cultural dynamics, such as marriage, education and patriarchy, among other factors (Kassam 1996:13). Within the African context, women are not totally denied the chance to express their voice or sexuality. Social behaviour, through which culture finds its expression, is governed by certain norms, which require social behavioural propriety for both men and women in certain contexts. Given this paradigm, women's bargain and contest with patriarchal structures take the form that is appropriate within the culture: that which undermines patriarchy in its supposed innocence and powerlessness. It is this concern for cultural context that Annan Yao (2004) addresses when she argues that gender is socially constructed. In this respect, the concept designates behaviours, attitudes, roles and status that societies assign to one or the other sex in a given socio-cultural setting and/or in a particular socio-economic and/or socio political context to govern relationships among the sexes.

But it is Senkoro (2005) who provides a new perspective on gender in folktales. He asks: How do male and female narrators resemble or differ in the oral literature delivery process? Are there any similarities and/or differences? If so, how and why? How does the listener perceive such differences or similarities of treatment and portrayal? In unveiling this, Senkoro argues that one needs to open the symbolic meanings that are mediated through aesthetic impulses that are, in turn, prompted by a proliferation of various styles and a wide range of oral literary expressions, techniques and general worldviews and outlooks. He acknowledges that folktale telling is a socialising process and the performance is guided by a gender perspective either manipulated to uphold patriarchy or subverted to undermine it, the latter being the domain of the female performers.

While drawing from the positions discussed above, the present study investigates the narrative process to expose the underlying ideology and the subversive process of the performers, who are mainly women. Such an undertaking has to take into consideration Africa's specificity even while using western paradigms.

Gender and allied concepts have to be examined from African cultural experiences and epistemologies. This is the way through which African experiences can be taken into account in general theory building, the structural racism of the global system notwithstanding.

It is within this context that the works of theorists, such as Catherine Acholonu (1995) are significant. Acholonu uses the term 'motherism' as a 'multidimensional Afrocentric theory to define what she sees as being 'the essence of African womanhood' (1995:110). She argues that African feminism is distinctly heterosexual and pro-natal and grants a pivotal place to the distinctively supportive roles of the African as opposed to Western women. Contrary to this perception, Desiree Lewis (2004) dismisses this view and what she sees as African feminist scholarship's focus on the everyday, the ordinary and the seemingly insignificant. She questions African feminists' view of culture seen as encompassing all socially inflected exchanges and mediations and viewed as the site of localised struggles and transformations. This study operates from the premise that, focus on African cultural discourse in gender studies will reveal unique dimensions of social interactions, contest and contradictions within the African context.

Both Filomena Steady (1987) and Diere Badejo (1999) advance a type of African feminist ideology founded upon the principles of traditional African values that view gender roles as complementary, parallel, asymmetrical and autonomously linked in the continuity of human life. Badejo (1999) argues that African feminism recognises the inherent multiple roles of women and men in reproduction, production and the distribution of wealth, power and responsibility for sustaining human life. 'This feminist perspective is underscored by traditional mythical beliefs and religious practices found in African oral literary traditions and festivals that place women at the centre of the social order as custodians of the earth, fire and water and uphold men as the guardians of women's custodial rights' (Badejo 1999: 93).

Bedejo's position is that African feminism embraces femininity, beauty, power serenity, inner harmony, and a complex matrix of power and it is always poised and centred in womanness, demonstrating that power and femininity are intertwined rather than antithetical. Within this perspective, African femininity could be seen as complementary to African masculinity. African feminism is therefore active and essential to the social, political, economic, cultural and evolutionary aspects of human order. It is therefore imperative to adduce evidence from the corpus of folktales under study in order to validate or dismiss this complementarity theory.

The desire to break from the western gender ideology is further underscored by Waswa Kisiang'ani (2004). Writing on the need to decolonise gender studies in Africa, Kisiang'ani talks of the need to dismantle forms of knowledge authored and authorised in the West. He argues that gender studies in Africa have been a fertile platform upon which the West has used its immense economic resources to pit the African man against the African woman. The reason for the western engagement in this destructive project has been to consciously shift attention from the real issues. When the west installed colonial imperialism in Africa, it marginalised both the African man and the African woman. He dismisses as balderdash the view that both the western man and woman are the actual friends of the African woman who is continuously suffering under the brutality of the African man.

The argument here is that there is a need for gender studies in Africa to embrace a new identity. This is valid within the broad spectrum of the quest for relevance. The fact that both the African man and woman are complex entities whose consciousness goes beyond the obvious binaries is no doubt true but paying attention to ambiguities within the African world view would yield fundamental results regarding equality of sexes in the structure, focus and objectives of

gender studies. The African folktale discourse provides a fertile site from which we can speculate on the psyche of the African man and woman and create new knowledge about African identity.

In this study, what literary feminist theory does is to introduce into it the concept of gender as a fundamental category in literary analysis. Thus, it enables the critic to see representations in texts as mediated by sexual difference and aesthetics and political, cultural and economic assumptions that surround gender. At one level it permits us to contest and revise misconceptions and narrow representations that trap women within a male literary discourse; at another more liberating level it contextualizes women's creativity within a sphere of difference, of a female experience and perception, and asks different questions and reveals various significances from texts. Thus, 'although gynocritics identify four models of difference, biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical and cultural, the emphasis placed on each model may depend on feminine priorities within cultures' (Tagoe 1997).

French feminist criticism may for instance emphasise *écriture féminine*, the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text, but the African feminist critic, while acknowledging biology as a sphere of difference, recognises the possible limitations and stereotyping that it can generate in an African context. Ogundipe Leslie (1987:5), Nana Tagoe (1997) and Nannyonga-Tamusuza (2002), rightly observe that French and American critics may assert women's difference within a framework of sexual politics, while African feminists would argue that power relations between men and women should be reconsidered in the context of the limitations of an African world.

It appears that the key to unlocking the vulnerable African social-cultural context lies in the interrogation of cultural discourses. In pursuit of this, Wanjiku Kabira (1994) deals with gender and politics of control and focuses on images of women in Gikuyu oral narratives. She posits that in Gikuyu oral narratives, 'wives are

generally portrayed negatively, for instance as unreliable, disobedient, irresponsible, disloyal, disagreeable, adulterous, cunning, senseless, gullible, forgetful, unreliable, evil and full of trickery, and lazy. As co-wives they are ogres, cruel and malicious' (1994:80). She argues that the images of wives strengthen the argument that women need to be protected from themselves, from other women and men, because their "nature" is such that they engage in self-destructive activities. They are irresponsible, stupid and senseless. They also need to be controlled, because they are incapable of running their families and are disloyal and easily cheated. They also need to be disciplined, as a reminder that they need to stay in their place. She concludes that it is a general belief among the Kikuyu men that a man should beat his wife, at least once, because he may be cursed by his ancestors if he died before doing so. To her, folktales are used to perpetuate a negative image of women.

This reading of literary texts is done, unfortunately, within a representational problematic in which the text is perceived merely as the image of a given reality. The evaluation thus remains trapped in surface descriptions and analysis aimed at eliciting normative knowledge. There is need to go beyond this narrow perception by viewing women as active agents in the construction of gender.

Okelo Ogwang (1994) postulates that Orature, as a form of popular culture, constitutes a creative-cum-analytical means and proffers a critique of class, social relations and struggles. It is particularly the gender relations as are represented in, and mediated through, or which interact with Orature, which he focuses on. This analysis is undertaken in the context of material production and relations and social imperatives that govern and bear influence on orature's production and reproduction. This study further unveils how these interlocking interfaces are reflected in and are also influenced by the material culture and more specifically in Orature. The term "Orature" is used in the study in preference to the term oral literature. It is derived from orate and oracy which refer to the

ability to produce and detect sound and the competence in speech and listening capacity respectively. Their more developed forms are oratory and Orature.

Okelo Ogwang's contention is that gender and class ideologies and relations in material production processes and the related social relations are the basis of Orature's very origin and existence and determine the nature and form of its very reproduction. The fact that the creation, sustenance and persistence of the formulaic patterns of Orature cast women in a generally negative light are indicative of a presence of a male-biased social perception in orature. Inevitably oral literature may be used to attempt to justify and sustain this domination through insinuations and nuances aimed at perpetuating gender prejudices and stereotypes. Of major interest to this study is the idea that gender relations and ideologies are rooted in material processes and they sheds light on how material culture influences evolution of a culture of dominance.

The works of structuralists also inform this study in a special way. These works take the cue from Vladimir Propp's phenomenal study (1958) and follow lines established by Claude Levi Strauss. Propp studied the structure of the Russian folktales. Many scholars have since attempted a structural approach to the study of various genres. Works such as Alan Dundes (1964), (1980), (1989), (1997), Claude Levi Strauss (1969), Harold Sheub (1977), Max Luthi (1984), Muigai wa Gachanja (1987) and Egara Kabaji (1991) were partly inspired by Propp's work.

These Structuralists agree that the structure of the folktales remains stable, although characters change. They also assert that phenomena and objects around us may be studied from aspects of their composition and structure or origin (Propp: 1958: 7). The present study benefits from these studies through viewing Maragoli folktale texts as made up of structures. The study of these structures would provide basic understanding of cultural relations, values and ideologies. It is my contention that the binary oppositions of form in the structure



of the tales are guided by a gender ideology. The basic idea is that tales cannot be understood in isolation, but only as parts of an entire cultural system.

These structuralist studies extend our understanding of folktales in their postulation that tales, like language, consist of both 'langue' and 'parole. Levi Strauss (1963), for instance, sees tension or the structural binary opposition, as present in tales from all cultures. Thus, the significance of tales lies in the presentation of certain relations in the form of binary oppositions in all cultures. I extend this view by examining the binary relationships in gender roles and identify themes and their implications. By so doing, this study adds a critical element to the explanation of the position of both men and women and the interaction of both genders in African communities through rectifying the common perception that views women as objects acted upon and shows them as active agents involved in bargaining with patriarchy and contesting it. Besides, no one else has undertaken a systematic study of the Maragoli folktale in terms of the gender themes expressed. It is through such a study that folktales may be visualised as artistic and imaginative creations through which society socialises its young people.

The texts in this study comprise twenty folktales collected from the Maragoli community. The selection of the tales was based on their popularity of the tales. Although I participated in hundreds of performances, I selected tales that were performed at least twenty times. They were transcribed and translated into English. In interpreting meaning from these texts, I engage in a systematic close reading of the text in order to identify meaning and the features indicating it. I do not presume to identify the 'real' meaning of the Maragoli Folktales. I acknowledge that my interpretation is just one of many possible, and any interpretation represents a reduction of the richness of meaning in the cultural activity of story telling.

The folktales were collected through active participation in actual live performances in Vihiga District of Western Province, Kenya. This is the region where the majority of the Maragoli live. I worked without interpreters and translators and found out, like Harold Sheub (1975) did in his study of Xhosa Ntomi, that this was invaluable to the success of the project. My discussion with performers and members of the audience and my own experience as part of the audience were invaluable to me in the construction of this work. The performances involved children and adults. This was so because folktale performance is not a domain of one age group or sex. The collection of data also involved discussion among the audiences, the performer and the researcher. The translation of the twenty tales represents a compromise between preserving as closely as possible the original meaning of the text and making it comprehensible to English language readers not familiar with the Maragoli language.

The library research involved examination of works on folklore and gender relations. This was to establish the theoretical framework and review of related literature. Thus, I read concepts, meanings and symbolic representations from the metaphorical language, characterisation, the spatiality, movement and evocation of cultural beliefs in the folktales. I also consider folktale performance as both a concrete, goal-oriented activity and an expression of communally held concepts, values and perspectives. The investigation thus proceeds along the thematic axes that express sensitive, even painful, issues and contradictions within the owners of this cultural discourse. I therefore explore levels at which meaning in folktales can be analysed by considering the performer's own statements concerning the meaning of the folktales and their effects, the messages, both covert and public encoded in the language, which communicate propositions, evaluations or other cultural meanings. If these meanings are hidden, the covert interpretation will usually be that of the researcher. The analysis also considers the dominant semantic patterns including core-motifs at a higher level of abstraction, the hypothesised extra-linguistic process expressed through gestures and other body-movement.

The analysis and interpretation of meaning utilises different contextual frames.

These are as follows:

1. Textual Context: This involves the examination of the text provided by the informants. Ideally, the textual contexts also include such information as the name, gender, age, social class, occupation and marital status of the informant.
2. Performance Context: This involves the question of who performed the story, when, where and how.
3. Social Context: This involves mapping the piece of information given in the text to the social relations, expectations, roles and statuses designed by society.
4. Cultural Context: At this level I focus on identifiable cultural images, symbolic representations, values attitudes and other meanings associated with the text, often extrapolated by the researcher from the performances or folk belief context.
5. Folk belief context: This context illuminates how the information in the folktales is related to other aspects of the Maragoli daily experience.

The second chapter examines the Maragoli folk beliefs, cultural history and the place of the folktale-telling tradition within the changing cultural landscape. It explores the relationship between folklore and the socio-cultural context. The relation between a literary piece and the culture of which it is a part is here viewed as reciprocal, and the artist is the medium through which influences flow. The chapter shows how the world of a storyteller is largely defined by culture, and in composing the tale, whatever its form or length, the composer draws on the world s/he knows, whether as reality or fantasy (or one in which tradition has fused both), for setting, plot and characterisation and the sanctions that give meanings. Yet by this very act the performer reinforces the existing body of customs, bringing to it the validating force of emotional response.

This lays the socio-cultural base on which gender construction is examined in the tales. The chapter considers the fact that tales may be regarded as a stabilising

factor that calls for the adjustment of the individual in a world that is brought within his/her powers of comprehension. It provides the foundation on which the study of the Maragoli folktales is based in terms of the embedded patterns, which provide a frame for the exercise of fantasy within the limits set by cultural imperatives.

The third chapter deals with the institution of marriage and the socialisation of both girls and boys towards this ultimate goal. It therefore shows how various aspects of this institution emerge in the folktales, for instance, relationship between husbands and wives, courtship, incest, polygamy and the concepts of motherhood and fatherhood.

Chapter Four focuses on sex roles as they emerge in the folktales, specifically roles assigned to each gender and the power relations promoted. It discusses the perceived differences in character, be they biological or social between men and women, to be precise, what is considered the 'nature of women' and the 'nature of men' and their role in the management of household resources.

Chapter Five identifies aspects of performance, which contribute to the audiences' understanding and internalisation of the meaning and concepts embedded in folktales as they move from conflict to resolution. Chapter Six sums up my findings and suggests areas for further research.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Gendered Social, Historical and Cultural Context of the Maragoli Folktale Texts**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

If the world of the folktale performers is largely defined by their culture and the social, economic, geographical and historical conditions of existence, and if they draw on the world they know, for plot, characterisation and setting, then these ethnographic details are important to the critic of oral literature. The fact that oral literature is the image of the producing society validates interest in understanding the society whose oral literature is under study. Na'allah (1997:125) reminds us that an understanding of oral works depends upon an appreciation of the totality of their historical essence. It is with this in mind that the following overview of the gender aspects of the social, historical and cultural context of the Maragoli Folktale texts is given in a bid to establish gender relations, roles and statuses in this society.

#### **2.1 The Construction of Maragoli and the Abaluhya Identity**

The Maragoli people, the owners of the tales under study, are part of the patrilineal Luhya Community who inhabit the Western Province and parts of the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. The Luhya are a diverse group of Bantu-speaking people whose sense of common identity seems to have grown largely out of the colonial experience and has gained momentum in the years following World War II. Based largely upon common social, cultural and linguistic identity, people who once considered themselves distinct groups came to also identify themselves as Luhya.

The Luhya or Abaluhya of which the Maragoli is a sub-tribe are a northern Bantu people who occupy an area of 3,054 square miles to the north east of Lake Victoria in Kenya and Uganda. The country between Mount Elgon (Masaba) and the Kavirondo (Winam Gulf) is the country of the Abaluhya ethnic group. Its

southern border is on the equator. Its northern limit is the southern slopes of Mount Elgon. To the east, there are the Nandi escapements. To the west are Lake Victoria and the eastern boundary of Uganda. It averages a height of 5000 feet above sea level with the highest point above 7,500 feet on the slopes of Mount Elgon and the lowest at the lakeshore, approximately 2600 feet. The area largely forms the present administrative unit of Western Province. According to the 1999 national census in Kenya, the Luhya constitute the second largest tribe in Kenya after the Kikuyu and they speak a cluster of related dialects.

There are sixteen sub-tribes that constitute the Luhya community, namely: Maragoli, Banyore, Tiriki, Idaho, Isukha, Batsotso, Samia, Tachoni, Bukusu, Khayo, Wanga, Marachi, Kisa, Banyala, Kabras and Marama. Within the Luhya speaking community, there is, at the popular level, an awareness of existing cultural distinctions. There appears to be an established set of attitudes, which allow members of the various sub-tribes of the Luhya community to perceive themselves as belonging to a single cultural entity while acknowledging internal distinctions in terms of dialect and to a much lesser extent some cultural aspects. A good example of difference in cultural practice is the practice of payment of bride price. Whereas the Bukusu people have a set figure of thirteen cows; to the Maragoli, this is negotiable.

The Luhya have not always been called by this name. An earlier label applied to the people of Western Province of Kenya was Wakavirondo, though like the term Luhya, it is of uncertain origin and not apparently an indigenous term. Wagner (1949) records that the inhabitants of the Kenya coast hold all natives of the region to be Wakavirondo implying that the term was created and spread by Arab traders who had contact with some areas of the province before the coming of the Europeans. This term has, however, been perceived as being derogatory.

There is no agreement as to the time of the introduction of the word Luhya. Wagner (1949) sheds some light on the gradual rejection of the term Kavirondo.

He posits that owing to its constant use by Europeans, the natives adopted it but they used it with reference to the geographical region rather than themselves. The term kavirondo was therefore seen as being of European origin.

According to Osogo (1966), the term Luhyia was introduced in 1940 and was locally coined. 'Although the Abaluhya had a common language and a common culture, they did not have a name embracing the whole tribe... In 1940 the Abaluhya Welfare Association was formed. The name Abaluhya quickly gained popularity, which was strengthened when the Luhyia language Committee was established and formulated an orthography' (Osogo 1966: 8).

This position has, however, been contested by other scholars. Kesby (1977) for instance, dates its introduction some 20 years earlier and sees it as an externally coined term. 'Luhyia is a modern term, not in use in 1900, which grew up to denote peoples in Western Kenya who all spoke one language although they had formally no sense of unity and recognised a diversity of groups among themselves....European administrators and missionaries recognised the linguistic unity of the group, and coined a common name for them before they did it themselves' (Kesby: 1977:90).

It may be argued that the demand for contemporary political manoeuvring led to the adoption of new names to cover groups, which did not have a common name. Apart from the Luhyia, another good example is the term Kalenjin, which is used in reference to a number of Kenyan related tribes that inhabit the Rift Valley Province. The term Luhyia was, however, popularised by politicians from the region between 1960-64 period with the hope that the people designated as Luhyia would be made to vote together in elections. Strictly speaking therefore, the Luhyia community does not include very similar peoples across the border in Uganda.

Several people have suggested the meaning of the term Luhya. Huntingford (1944:3) reports that it is derived from Oluhya 'clan' so Luhya means 'fellow clansmen.' Osogo (1966:7) explains that the word means 'fellow tribesman' and that it is derived from the verb (Okhuya) 'to burn.' He further explains that the Abaluhya used to hold campfires to establish their presence in a particular area. Whenever a stranger came through their camp, he would be asked to which Oluhya he belonged and in that way they would identify which were fellow tribesmen and which were not. Thus, the word Abaluhya literally means 'those of the same fires.' Jane Nandwa (1976) reports that her mainly elderly-informants in various parts of Western Province of Kenya maintained that the word was derived from 'Oluhya' the name of a specific place in a field where clan members would gather to deal with official matters.

Rachel Angogo (1980), however, argues that most individuals she interviewed were unable to offer a specific etymology for the word, but they consistently defined it as meaning those who live in the Western Province, speak the same language and eat the same food.

We can draw one conclusion from the various positions on the term Luhya; that in the past there did not exist one tribe called the Abaluhya. The name came to be used much later to combine all the sub-tribes of Abaluhya. In the past, the sixteen sub-tribes were not grouped together as they are today. However, culturally and linguistically there is a large degree of homogeneity among the Abaluhya. The remarkable diversity is clearly manifested in cultural and dialectical differences. Folktales found in Maragoli land are also found in other parts of Luhya land with minor variations, mainly in names of characters but not the basic motifs.

It is, however, necessary at this juncture to focus closely on the Maragoli community and its Institutions as a single entity in order to establish the social, cultural, religious and economic background of the folktale texts examined in this



study. This will help contextualise these texts. By situating cultural productions or texts in their original settings, their meaning becomes evident. Indeed the meaning of a text can best be established through imaginative penetration into the context of the texts' creation. Thus, the deep meaning of oral texts can be determined through knowledge of the inner lives of the authors and the contexts in which they are created.

## **2.2 Forms of Worship and the Totem of Fertility**

The most significant feature about the Maragoli culture and religion is that it is geared towards procuring fertility. The rituals and prayers are made to obtain fertility for human beings and animals and for agricultural bounty. All other requests are subordinate to this. The agricultural basis of the Maragoli religion is rooted in myths, which also seem to explain the settlement of first Maragoli families in Western Kenya. The myth states that the ancestral spirit, *Umusambwa*, appeared to Murogoli and instructed him to emigrate to a land that the *Umusambwa* would show him; a fertile land where he would harvest two crops a year. And these are the instructions he followed until he settled in present day Maragoli country, having sojourned for many years in various lands (Gimode 1993).

The Maragoli evolved an elaborate form of worship that reflected their gender ideology. Sacrifices involved a white he-goat with horns. The sex signified the patrilineality of Maragoli society. After the priest's prayer, the goat fell down by itself and died. It should be noted that these rituals were presided over by the Nondi priesthood clansmen. The Nondi clansmen are the descendants of Maavi who was Murogoli's last-born son. Murogoli, the founder of the Maragoli community, is said to have been a diviner or medicine man. He bequeathed his divination role to his last-born son, Maavi, who in turn bequeathed it to his last-born son, Nondi. From then on Nondi's descendants provided the Maragoli with priests.

The Nondi clansmen would skin the goat and examine the omens in the entrails. If undigested food was green, they knew there would be great prosperity. In case of impending danger from enemies, at the time of sacrifice, the elders took the stomach, inflated it with breath then punctured it with a stick. This was to ensure the total collapse of the scheme of the enemies. The Nondi elders then roasted and ate the rest of the meat. It is, however, notable that the elders were men and not women.

The great population density among the Maragoli could be attributed to their religion and culture. Maragoli land is the most densely populated area in East and Central Africa. This can be traced back in time to ancient prayers for fertility. The Maragoli desired and still desire many children, irrespective of the land factor. They reasoned that an abundant progeny would fight for land and get it. A woman who gave birth to many male children was respected. She earned the title of *Umukaye*, meaning respectable woman, as opposed to *Umukari* meaning ordinary woman. This aspect is examined in detail in relation to the folktales under study in Chapter Three.

Members of the various clans made sacrifices to ancestors beseeching them to help solve societal problems. On such occasions *Ubwali*, sacrifices, were kindled for purposes of appeasing the clan ancestral spirits who were believed to be unhappy, because of wrongdoing in society or for being neglected. The clan elders took their spears and visited the graves of the clan heroes. They observed a commemoration, which involved singing and dancing in praise of the ancestors. They also made a lot of noise, *kokeremana*, and engaged in mock fights (Gimode 1993)

The Maragoli religion recognised the power of the ancestral spirits in their cosmology. They venerated these spirits to promote good health and the welfare of the community and family. The veneration of the Maragoli ancestors, at least at the family level, centred on three sacrificial stones. The stones were about one

foot high and stuck in the ground so that they formed a triangle. In the middle of the stones was the *Urwuvu* stick. The *Urwuvu* tree is a masculine symbol among the Maragoli. It is from this tree that men's walking sticks are made.

On all-important occasions in the life of an individual from birth to death and after, the *amagina ge misango*, sacrificial stones, constituted the centre of his relationship with the living dead. On such occasions, the family and close relatives met to offer sacrifices. The stones were placed only in homes of married men with children. The Maragoli thus believed in the existence of God approached by men through the medium of spirits of the dead to whom private respect was paid. But even more significant about the Maragoli fertility religion was the place of the royal snake, *Irihiri*, the puff adder.

None of those who have written about the Maragoli have mentioned the role of the royal snake, the puff adder. Among those things that Murogoli, the founder of the Maragoli sub-tribe, bequeathed to his last-born was this royal snake. Up to this day, the Nondi clansman are said to keep the snakes. Where could the Maragoli have picked this aspect of their culture and what does it signify?

The serpent has since the dawn of time been represented on every continent as having divine attributes. The serpent in many places has been made into a deity, feared and adored for its extraordinary vitality and energy. The serpent is an important phallic symbol and although universally linked with evil, it is above all else a link between the material and spiritual worlds. The fact that it sheds its skin offers a promise of rebirth. It is, consequently, both a symbol of death and rebirth, of life that is endlessly renewed, unchanging and eternal like sunrise and sunset. Its imagery is as flexible as its body: It can represent life, death, and rebirth; the sacred, knowledge and life after death. In ancient Greece, for instance, the serpent was seen as the incarnation of a soul that had just departed from the world.

Silent and supple in form, it becomes a creature of mysterious and supernatural power. The Nagas of India have seven-headed mythological serpents that have been venerated since the earliest times. Serpents have a great deal of influence over Buddhism on account of the legend that when Siddharta Gautama was meditating in the forest before his enlightenment, a friendly cobra, the spirit of a nearby lake, came and coiled itself seven times around his body and spreading open its hoods over his head, protected him from other animals for seven days and seven nights.

In *Genesis* we are told that Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden for having eaten the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, beguiled by the serpent. Since then it is irrevocably associated with sin, destruction, temptation and the devil. But was this not the fruit of wisdom and awareness? The serpent told the first woman that if she ate the fruit, her eyes would be opened and she would be like God to know evil and good. Eve gave the apple to Adam to eat. And then they saw that they were naked. Adam and Eve became aware of their individuality, restricted within space. In this case Eden is close to being a metaphor, because man's being chased out of paradise as a fallen angel opened the doors of his development, brought a sense of awareness and thus prevented him from being restricted to mere existence.

Writing about the Himba of Northern Namibia, Crandall (2002) notes that the Himba believe that God (Mukuru) is the one who created the world. His original creation was tortoise, which gave birth to the Puff Adder and the Puff Adder, in turn, begat all other snakes and so the Himba hold the Tortoise and Puff Adder in high esteem (Crandall 2002:299).

Although limbless, serpents are excellent climbers. They slide into narrow dark openings and emerge out of them without warning. This ability identifies them immediately as messengers from the underworld. It is not far-fetched to say that the Maragoli associated the snake with fertility, life's creative force in the world.

The shedding of a snake's skin may have signified renewal. Circumcision, a ritual, which began in ancient Egypt, was initially a ritual of rebirth in the serpent cult. Circumcision celebrates the rites of passage in many cultures including the Maragoli, much like a breath of new life. It appears that the serpent's exaggerated phallic shape has also led to it being made into a symbol of male fertility. It is, for example, believed by the Maragoli that one marrying from the family in which the snakes are kept as totems, must receive one before the couple has children. Failure to accept the snake would lead to sterility on the part of the couple.

If we accept the Maragoli explanation of their migration to present day Maragoli land from Egypt through western Uganda, then it is possible to postulate that they share this perception of the serpent with other peoples. Among the Ourobos, the ancient Greeks and Egyptians, a tail-devouring snake portrayed exactly the endless cycle of life, its completeness, rebirth and immortality. Although a masculine symbol because of its phallic shape, it is a strong feminine symbol for its power to tempt and devour, a symbol of sensuality, the libido or unconscious desire. As is the practice in some communities in Uganda with cultures similar to the Maragoli, the royal snake is considered a supernatural being, an honoured reptile, which is fed and generally cared for. To this day, it is believed that killing the snake-*Irihiri* in Maragoli would be followed by serious consequences even among those who do not keep them and who have converted to Christianity. When this snake dies, it is accorded burial rites fit for a human being.

Although other religions have been introduced into Maragoli such as Christianity and Islam, aspects of Maragoli religion and culture have remained glaringly visible. The royal snake is still a symbol of fertility, a totem the Maragoli still venerate.

### **2.3 Initiation Into Manhood**

The Maragoli have evolved strong cultural institutions. These Institutions have guided their lives to date. The institutions were and are still an integral part of the Maragoli religion and culture. One of the most cherished rituals is that of male circumcision.

This is the single most important event in the Maragoli calendar since 1740. Every Maragoli male has to go through the ritual. To be accepted as a member of this community, initiation is mandatory. Before modern formal education was introduced, this was an elaborate ritual that spanned six months. Those who resisted were initiated by force. The socialisation of Maragoli male children involved indoctrinating them about the significance of this ritual. A Maragoli boy grew up knowing that at some stage he would go through the ritual. It was a significant ritual that marked a transition from childhood to adulthood. After initiation, one was free to marry, to own property and was identified with an age group to whom a bond was established that lasted a lifetime.

Those initiated together shared the same knife and this was the single most important symbol of their bond. Nathan Luvai (1986) lists a number of reasons why the Maragoli initiated their male children. He notes that it was partly for cleanliness: that an initiated boy would be clean at all times. Secondly, he observes that the teachings after the ritual especially in the seclusion hut instilled courage in the boys. It also gave the youngsters an age group- *Ilikura*.

Luvai also observes that it was a symbol of maturity. It prepared the boys for war and, lastly, it was a time of getting formal education or learning the existential problems of life and how to solve them within the Maragoli culture. Ultimately, it was a way of preparing for marriage. It is also notable that the Maragoli acquired their close-knit social fabric through the associations and age sets created at the time of circumcision. The age grades provided the bases for social solidarity. The members of various age sets supported one another in everyday activity

including courtship and marriage activities. Women do not go through circumcision but their age would be known from the age group of their husbands.

Since 1740 the Maragoli have had names of all the initiation age groups. The preservation and remembrance of these names shows the importance that the Maragoli attach to this ritual. It was a way of recording their history since the names come from the most important events and happenings of the time. Good examples of the historical significance of the names are *Imbarabara*, which means a road and was given to those circumcised in 1913 when the first road was constructed through Maragoli land and *Ovovohorore* which means freedom, given to those initiated in 1960 when it was apparent that Kenya would soon achieve its independence from Britain.

The following are the names of the initiation age sets since 1740

|                       |      |
|-----------------------|------|
| Namagodo              | 1740 |
| Gimangu're            | 1750 |
| Ngurunguru            | 1760 |
| Isate                 | 1780 |
| Saave                 | 1790 |
| Angaya or Kiguliesi   | 1800 |
| Likuvati              | 1810 |
| Kihungira or vizilili | 1820 |
| Kigwambiti            | 1830 |
| Ingumba               | 1840 |
| Aluse                 | 1850 |
| Nyongi                | 1860 |
| Isaviri               | 1870 |
| Ivagare               | 1880 |
| Engengere             | 1890 |
| Lulolo or Libwoni     | 1900 |

|                                       |           |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Kigedi or lumiru                      | 1910      |
| Imbarabara                            | 1913-1917 |
| Imbarabara Nge or Munane or Kimangoli | 1920-1927 |
| Isigi or lfeza                        | 1932      |
| Lizuliza                              | 1939      |
| Nzelolele                             | 1946      |
| Silula                                | 1952-1953 |
| Vovohorore                            | 1960      |
| Imwu Indahi or haiburidi              | 1968      |
| Kegero or Ikilo                       | 1975      |
| Nyayo                                 | 1983      |
| Idisi                                 | 1992      |
| Milenia                               | 2002      |

The initiation ritual has undergone some changes in view of modern day realities. Some parents prefer to take their children to hospitals owing to the fear of HIV/AIDS infections. Many parents who still circumcise their children traditionally insist on different knives for each child. However, the ritual remains a very important event in the Maragoli nation's calendar to date in which the community enters a frenzied period punctuated with dance, song and other cultural performances.

If a Maragoli child is initiated far from Maragoliland, he is brought to Maragoli land on 26 of December of the year of initiation for the ceremony of *Kwaruka* (graduation) in which a name is bestowed on the age group. The 26<sup>th</sup> of December remains the Maragoli community's national day to date. The rituals and events that used to happen in ancient times are performed, though in a modified version. What is critical to this study is the fact that circumcision is part of the socialisation process in which subtle signals of what constitutes good



behaviour for both girls and boys are sent out. It is also a time when boys are taught about marriage and their role and obligations in it.

## **2.4 Marriage and Family**

Marriage among the Maragoli and indeed Africans is a complex affair. It is a meeting point of the dead, the living and those yet to be born. Marriage is necessary for procreation. It is expected that everybody should get married and bear children. This is the greatest hope and expectation of society. In the event of the man proving to be impotent, society arranged to have another man procure children for him. The elders arranged this in great secrecy. The Maragoli family operates on two levels. There exists the nucleus family on the first level, which is a social group living together and engaging in economic cooperation. It involves two adults of opposite sex responsible for rearing children born to them. It may also involve one male, with two or more females. At this level, the family is a sexual unit in the sense that husband and wife or wives engage in sexual relationships, which are not considered illegal or socially unacceptable.

Marriage among the Maragoli, as in most African communities, conveys status. Levi-Strauss (1963) speaks of the true feeling of repulsion, which most societies have towards 'bachelorhood.' This fact is also true of the Maragoli. A bachelor is seen as an incomplete man. A similar thought, although milder, is directed towards childless couples. It was almost an abomination for a woman not to get married. An unmarried woman, who remained in her village of birth, although rare, was a target of hostility even from her own brothers. She was an eyesore to her family. She had no role or status in the society and was denied access to certain occasions. Marriage and birth of children are thus occasions for celebration, congratulations and festivity. A groom or a new father has, in a sense, 'arrived' among the Maragoli.

On another level, there is the larger extended family, comprised of other clan and family members. It is within this larger family that basic security and emotional

satisfaction for the members is provided. Within this family unit children are socialised and receive their earliest education. In most cases, this is partly done through the folktale-telling tradition.

The preparation for marriage starts very early. As noted in the previous section, the act of circumcision was one way of preparing boys for this ultimate goal. The choice of a partner was done sometimes through parents or relatives. Sometimes a young man would identify a girl and inform his parents about her. The parents would then start investigations and later there would be negotiations with the family of the girl. It is notable that it is the boy's mother and aunts who are sent to request for the girl. The request, in most cases, is presented in metaphorical language. The women would say to their would be in-laws, 'we have a handle and have come to look for a hoe' or 'we have come to look for a cook, one who will be lighting the fire for cooking' or better still 'we have come to look for a blanket.'

The Maragoli are forbidden from marrying into or from the same clan or clans with pacts, which prohibits members from marrying one another. A good example of clans with such a pact is the Abayonga clan and the Avamuku clan. To this date, members of these clans do not inter-marry. Taboos exist to reinforce marriage prohibitions. It was, for example, believed that children born in a relationship involving relatives would "ripen" like bananas and die. Such marriages would be doomed. A marriage among the Maragoli brings together people from two different clans. Indeed, there are very strict rules of exogamy that govern marriages.

Incest taboos are clearly spelt out. The thought of one's children 'ripening' like bananas and dying was enough of a deterrent. It is also possible to assume that the Maragoli have all along known that inbreeding has deleterious biological consequences. On a psychoanalytic level, these taboos could be aimed at internal impulses. Sigmund Freud asserted that strong erotic impulses are

experienced within the family circle, primarily by a boy towards his mother. This is the basis for the Oedipus complex: an erotic attachment to the mother accompanied by feelings of hostility towards the father (in the case of a girl, the attachment is to the father). These feelings and impulses have to be renounced or repressed but may continue to exist in the individual's unconscious mind. The horror generally shown at the idea of incest could be interpreted as an unconscious defence against temptation. Incest taboos are to be regarded as reactions to the existence of incestuous desires.

The story-telling sessions are part of the preparation for marriage. As it will be established in analysis of the Maragoli folktales, they contain solemn themes on this important institution in the people's lives. Within these tales, one finds instructions on proper contact within marriage. The actual wedding ceremony lasts for many days. In some instances, the bridegroom and his party have to struggle with the bride's people in order to get the bride. Some mock fights and struggles are also arranged.

One of the most treasured aspects is virginity. A girl is expected to remain a virgin until she gets married. This demand was not put on the male children. Great honour was bestowed on the girl and her family if she is found to be a virgin at marriage. Her parents would receive gifts of good will from their son-in-law. Virginity was, at the overt level, the symbol that life had been preserved, that the spring of life had not been flowing wastefully, and that both the girl and her relatives had preserved the sanctity of human reproduction. A virgin bride is the greatest glory and crown to her parents, husband and relatives. It appears that at the covert level, the insistence on virginity had its roots on the realisation of the Maragoli males that they could wrest a small victory from death by siring a child to whom they could pass on their names and wisdom and possibly their weapons and totems. This made urgent the need to be certain a newborn was the result of one's copulation efforts. A mother never has to doubt her kinship to her progeny: her infants literally come from and through her. A man, however, can never be

completely sure. The man's heavy-handed solution was to demand virginity in his bride and absolute chastity in his wife thereafter. Consummation of marriage was a critical aspect and it marked the end of the marriage celebrations.

Among the Maragoli, payment of a dowry is made to members of the bride's family. Marriage, as it were, was not a union between individuals, but one between families and clans. This relationship is fostered by patterns of etiquette and reciprocity. A girl leaves her own clan and marries into another clan to live with her husband and his people. Her family and clan lose a useful worker. The groom's family may make up the deficiency by marrying one of its daughters into the other clan. This evened matters and further strengthened ties.

The custom of presenting gifts to the bride's people is valued among the Maragoli. It is known as *Uvukwi* in the Maragoli language. The Maragoli give cows as a dowry. The dowry is an important institution for it not only seals the marriage bond, but also distinguishes the man as a dignified member of society. A man who fails to complete payment of dowry is despised by his age mates and society at large. If at all the woman died before dowry is paid, her body is taken back to her parents' home for burial. This is the greatest shame that a man could ever receive.

The groom's parents make part payment of dowry to the bride's family at the time of marriage. This underscores the fact that the girl gets married into the clan not to an individual. The bride price is not considered as a form of purchase as modern postulations put it. The girl is not considered a slave or marketable commodity. The payment is taken as appreciation for the gift of a new member of the family. The cows are in turn used by the girl's family to finance the marriage of their sons. This gives the girl some authority over her brothers who would always appreciate her for facilitating their marriages. This remains a lifelong bond. In the case of the groom not completing the payment of the dowry agreed upon before his death, an institutionalized solution is available. His sons would

pay their maternal uncles on behalf of their dead father. It is not only the man's family that gives gifts; the woman's people also give gifts, although smaller than those of the man. Among the Maragoli, to be married is adulthood, but to be unmarried is childhood. It is therefore no wonder that the theme of marriage occupies a central place in the corpus of tales under study

Once the full contract of marriage is executed, it is extremely difficult to dissolve it in the Maragoli community. There are, however, few instances in which divorce could be sanctioned for instance if the woman was found to be a witch. This means that the woman would endanger the life of her husband. In case of sterility on the part of the husband, as pointed out earlier, another man is asked to sire children for him. If the woman is barren, the man would take another woman for the purposes of producing children but retain his barren wife.

Polygamy is a common practice among the Maragoli. Going by the clan system, it is possible to infer that Mulogoli himself was a polygamist. His first wife Kaliyesa had four sons whose descendants form the four major clans among the Maragoli. It follows that the other clans could have come from Murogoli's other wives.

The corporate existence within polygamous families is desired although friction occurs at certain times. It also seems to serve as a way of accomplishing the most important wish of a Maragoli man, to sire many children. To some degree, it may be perceived as having to do with giving security to the man. If one wife died, the man would not have to worry about not having a woman to 'cook' for him. It is with this understanding that the Maragoli say 'to have one wife is like having one eye.'

One other reason advanced in support of polygamous marriages is that a man's wealth is measured in terms of the number of wives, children and cattle or livestock he has. It is a fact that a man who has wealth is respected. Maragoli call

such a person *Umuhinda* or *Umutugi*. It is also prestigious to have many wives among the Maragoli. It may not be far-fetched to also see the men's preference of polygamy as a way of obtaining sexual gratification through diversity in mates. Among the Maragoli, it is taboo for a couple to engage in sexual intercourse during a woman's menstrual period, during pregnancy and a few months after delivery of a child. This enhances the desire for polygamy.

Wife inheritance was and is still one of the cherished institutions among the Maragoli. The Maragoli word for wife inheritance can be translated roughly as "to return." The term is derived from the fact that a woman, once married, belongs to her husband's clan. The death of the husband in some sense loosens the ties that bind the woman to the clan. She is first released from the clan for she is under obligation to have sex with an outsider before being brought back into the clan fold. Having sex with an outsider is believed to cleanse the woman before she is returned to the clan. A clan member or an age mate to the deceased husband is then asked to "return the woman."

Elaborate rituals are performed before a wife is returned to the clan. It is, however, necessary to note that the children who the 'returner' gets with the woman belong to her deceased husband. He therefore performs the duty of siring children for the deceased since he is not available physically to sire children, though spiritually he is. It is this shared responsibility that tie the dead, those yet to be born and the living together.

## **2.5 Sex and Its Uses**

Sex is first and foremost for procreation. This is why it is officially only allowed in marriage. Other uses of sex exist, which are religious and sacred. Any breach of them carries serious consequences. Sexual offences include fornication, incest, rape, homosexuality, and bestiality.

Many rituals involve sex. A man who builds his house officially inaugurates it by having sex in the new house with his wife. Sex in the new house with another woman other than his wife is taboo. It signifies that the house does not belong to his wife. In the same breath, a couple that loses a child through death is under obligation to have sex immediately after burial.

A girl who gets pregnant out of wedlock is a disgrace to her family. This type of pregnancy is called '*Indasimba*,' the pregnancy obtained in a 'boys hut'. A boy's hut is called *Isimba* in Maragoli language. The pregnancy is an offence; however, it is not met with heavy punishment like other sex offences. The boy responsible for the pregnancy is compelled to marry the girl. It appears that the concept of romantic love does not exist among the Maragoli and matters to do with sex are not discussed openly.

Adultery is a serious offence. What is notable about this offence is that it is only applicable to women. A woman who commits adultery is sent to her parents to bring a cow, which is slaughtered in an elaborate ritual. The man and his adulterous woman are made to go through an intricate ritual before they can become intimate again. Incidentally, a man who commits adultery does not have to go through any ritual. Certain prohibitions also exist in relation to sex. The Maragoli prohibit men from engaging in sex if they are preparing to go for war.

## **2.6 Sleeping on a Word**

One of the most interesting aspects about the Maragoli form of settling disputes, which is of significance to this study, is the idea of 'sleeping on the word' before delivering a verdict. In most cases, it is the elders (men) who listen to cases and deliverer judgment. However, women are only called in to give evidence. After listening to a case, the men adjourn the session in order to 'sleep on the word' before a verdict is offered. In other words, they spend the night thinking about the case before delivering the ruling.

Closer examination of this concept reveals that the men give themselves time to consult with their wives. In essence, therefore, although women are not directly involved in settling disputes, they are an integral part of the verdict for it is not given before they have been consulted. It appears that the exclusion of women from the actual hearing of cases is a deliberate attempt by society to massage men's egos when in a real sense both men and women agree upon the verdict.

The strength of women lie in their supposed marginalisation. This aspect of the Maragoli way of life mirrors the formal structure of the compatibility of genders. There seems to be some degree of shared authority. Neither sex is totally complete in itself. Each has and needs to be complemented, for it possesses unique features of its own. Within the metaphysical realm, both male and female values encompass life and operate jointly to maintain cosmological balance. Women seem to exist as silent but significant partners. It may, however, seem that women were relatively powerful in pre-colonial Maragoli society. This situation was eroded by the introduction of new power paradigms and opportunities, for instance, boys were given the opportunity to attend school while girls remained at home.

It is worth noting that most of my informants during the field research among the Maragoli acknowledged the fact that the worst curse that one could ever receive is from a woman. This involves a woman, mostly elderly, stripping naked and showing her private parts. This act is usually followed with utterances of condemnation from the woman. It is every man's desire never to push a woman to that level, be it one's wife or relative. We may refer to this as the curse of the vagina. In essence, the vagina had the power to bring forth life or curse life. Such a curse was believed to bring misfortune or even death.

## **2.7 The Gendered Roles in Household Economy**

Marriage is the most important organising concept in the Maragoli community; in it, gender values, ideals and taboos are shaped and framed. It is within this



institution that gender roles are determined in household productive activities. The nucleus family is not just the basic unit of social organisation but also an economic entity. Both men and women play a significant role. As pointed out earlier, this is a patriarchal society where men inherit land from their fathers. However, this can only be possible if one is married.

The woman was thus partly a co-owner of the land that belonged to her husband. It may appear, at a close examination that women did much of the domestic work. This gave them power over the home. Although this was a patriarchal society in the sense that men were recognised as being superior in status, there was a clear division of labour between the sexes. Indeed, survival in an environment of scarcity dictated gender partnership based on shared toil. There were specific tasks carried out by both men and women. Men for instance would go and clear virgin land and break the earth and help women plant crops while women would weed the crops. In essence, the duties carried out by men complement those carried out by women.

Men and women needed one another's labour for social production. The table below graphically represents some of the gendered responsibilities of the sexes as laid out and reinforced by taboos.

| DUTIES FOR MEN                              | DUTIES FOR WOMEN                       |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Hunting                                     | Taking care of the home                |
| Clearing the forest                         | Second digging of the land             |
| Breaking the ground                         | Weeding                                |
| Offering sacrifices on behalf of the family | Singing on public occasions            |
| In charge of security                       | In charge of domestic chores           |
| Negotiating dowry                           | Socialising daughters                  |
| Taking boys for circumcision                | Socialising boys and asking for brides |
| Taking cows to the grazing fields           | Gathering firewood                     |

|                        |                                        |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Planting trees         | Planting some type of crops            |
| Serving chicken        | Serving food except chicken            |
| Slaughtering an animal | Cooking and entertaining female guests |

The outlined gendered division of labour was reinforced by a set of taboos that governed the family unit. It is notable from the above table that, although the sexes complement one another, there is a sense in which the male enjoyed supremacy over the female

## 2.8 Gendered Taboos

Taboos seem to have existed almost like a constitution among the Maragoli. These taboos reinforce the desired gender contact in society. The following are some of the gender-inflected taboos among the Maragoli. It was a taboo:

- For a man to spend time sitting in his kitchen.
- For a man to beat his grandchild.
- To have sex with a relative.
- To ridicule an old person.
- To defecate in bed.
- To have sex with a menstruating woman.
- For a married man to sweep his own house.
- For a woman to sit on her husband's chair.
- To sprinkle water on a sister-in-law.
- To look at one's daughter-in-law's legs.
- To see one's daughter-in-law naked.
- To die in a son-in-law's house.
- To use poles from your son's house to build yours.
- For a bride to enter her mother-in-law's kitchen.
- For women to dig a grave.
- For a woman to serve chicken from "the man's pot" (*endede*)
- For a man to ululate.
- For a man to enter another man's kitchen.
- For an adulterous wife to look at the body of her dead husband.
- To look at one's brother's dead body if one had had sex with his wife.
- For a woman to eat chicken or eggs.
- To engage in unnatural sexual activities, such as homosexuality or bestiality.
- To witness the lowering of the body of one's father-in-law into his grave.
- For an adult male to sleep in his father's bed.
- To take milk to one's father-in-law's house.

For a newly wedded wife to drink sour milk before bearing a child.  
For a woman to use her mother-in-law's hearth before bearing a child.  
To injure somebody and make him bleed.  
To harvest before getting permission from one's father.  
To take one's aunt's advice lightly.  
For a woman to play with her husband's walking stick.  
For a woman to weed *evembe* (a type of grass used for thatching houses).  
For a woman to milk a cow.  
For a woman to plant bananas.  
For a woman to play *ling'alla* (a type of musical instrument).  
For a woman to dig holes as men plant.  
For a woman to visit a witch doctor.  
To tell folktales during the day.

These taboos governed the way of life of the Maragoli and a good number of them are still adhered to today. The following chapter will analyse how these taboos impact on the folktale motifs.

## **2.9 Survival of the Folktale Tradition Over the Years**

In traditional Maragoli society, the folktale telling tradition was a daily preoccupation. As darkness engulfed the environment, children would retreat to their grandmothers' or mothers' huts to be told and to tell tales. In most cases, these stories were told to the children by their grandmothers and mothers. Men preferred to meet other men and talk about war and such related activities while drinking. Within the Maragoli community there developed two systems of folktale telling. The first one involved several people taking turns to narrate stories to one another. Secondly, a single individual would perform for the rest of the people. However, performance by a number of people, one after the other, was the most common system. Each member of the audience was obliged to perform a tale on each folktale-performing occasion. Alternatively, the mature members of the audience would take turns in performing for the children.

This second system of narration presupposes that the adults would take the opportunity to display their prowess in performance and hence show the ability to prolong the tales. Prolonged tales were performed over several evenings. These

occasions were moments of transferring the narrative performance techniques to the young members of the community.

As Finnegan (1975) observes, both narrative methods had a strong impact on the formation of the folktales. These were occasions that the Maragoli utilised in teaching their children listening techniques. One would patiently wait for another to finish before one took over. The conscious part of the act of composition included the arbitrary lengthening of the tales. This is why the folktale performing tradition is not frozen, but is a living tradition. Each performer, at the time s/he performs, considers the tale hers\his. S/he gives the tale its flesh and lengthens it as the spirit moves her/him depending on her/his audience. It is therefore not an over-statement to assert that every story-telling occasion is a creative occasion in which new stories are told and therefore there is no standard version of a folktale text.

The folktales serve the purpose of spiritual nourishment to the audience. They release tension and helps induce a refreshing sleep. It forms a bridge from reality to illusion, from the state of wakefulness to that of the dreams (Linda Degh 1969). Folktale performance in broad daylight in traditional society was prohibited. It was believed that anyone who told these stories in broad daylight would turn out to be a dwarf or rather s/he would not grow tall, strong and healthy. Since folktale performance is one of the most enjoyable activities, it is understandable that the Maragoli had put certain restrictions on it to allow members to engage in other economic activities.

But like the rest of African cultures, the Maragoli culture suffered a severe blow at the hands of colonialism. Christian missionaries were the first to arrive in Maragoliland, followed by colonial administrators. They came to 'civilise the natives' and hence the first move was to wage a war on the Maragoli culture. They launched a concerted cultural imperialism campaign that they hoped would bring about the death of Maragoli culture. True, Maragoli culture just like other

African cultures suffered untold and unjustifiable treatment at the hands of missionaries and colonisers. It was dismissed as a simple and primitive culture.

The anthropologists, historians and sociologists who have attempted to study African culture were blinded by myths. They also attempted to rationalize colonialism. Misled by the image of the Dark Continent, they analysed African culture from a point of ignorance. It is indeed futile to compare two cultures in order to rate them civilized or barbaric (See Mtibwa 1977). Racism blinded the colonisers from seeing anything good in African culture. The administrators, anthropologists, travellers and missionaries equated Christianity with western culture and therefore civilisation. Against this self-arrogated excellence, they declared other cultures primitive and embarked on a scheme to dismantle them in the name of 'civilising the natives.' Western values were propagated in the name of Christian morality. The colonialists looked at African religions and culture as unconnected superstitions and an unreasonable blind fight against the gods of ill luck and circumstances (Mutibwa 1977:28).

What followed was cultural mutation especially in relation to African religion and cultural concepts and practices. There followed a process of accommodation and flexibility. The Maragoli abandoned some aspects of their culture while grafting western aspects to their religion and culture. What exists in Maragoliland is really not Christianity but a mixture of Maragoli indigenous culture and Christian practices. With Christianity came western education. The Maragoli embraced Christianity in order to benefit from the new type of education. They realized that it was important to acquire this type of education. Owing to this fact, efforts were made by missionaries to destroy Maragoli culture.

The first thing the missionaries did was to introduce Christian villages in which the converted lived. The converted or the saved moved from their villages beginning a slow process of destruction of family ties and disintegration of the neat African communal life. Those who moved to these villages were called the

'readers.' Out of these 'readers' emerged a committed army of Maragoli elite used by the missionaries to fight Maragoli culture. Among those institutions fought was the story telling tradition. It was referred to as heathen practice. The children of the converted listened to Bible stories while the heathen continued telling Maragoli folktales to their children.

Gradually, ancestor veneration, sacrifices and other rituals began to give in. The group led by one, Yohana Amugune embarked on the uprooting of ancestral stones and shrines. They were even indoctrinated to undermine indigenous Maragoli concepts of beauty. They physically assaulted girls who adorned themselves with bangles and bracelets (*ivivya*) beads (*ivyuma*). Amugune is said to have campaigned against eating meat from strangled animals, which was a common practice. His war was extended to gender relations. He encouraged women to eat eggs and chicken, foods traditionally reserved for men. He led the onslaught against all institutions attempting to reverse the practices dealing with funerals, marriage, divorce, worship and polygamy. Despite the onslaught, Maragoli culture has generally resisted decimation by western religions and culture. Strong resistance was launched against missionaries in 1902. The colour of the missionaries baffled the Maragoli. To the Maragoli people, the missionaries were the *Amanani* or ogres in their folktales.

The Maragoli sometimes resisted the invasion of their territory and culture by taking children from Christian villages to the shrine stones for *Kuswakira*, rituals. The Maragoli, it appears, wanted the material benefits they could get from the missionaries but not at the cost of forfeiting their religion and culture. The Maragoli continued to observe their traditions even when they had converted to Christianity. However, many converts found the Christian faith very repressive.

The truth is that many rituals and traditions, including the folktale telling tradition, have undergone some change, but the traditional procedures were not compromised too drastically. True, today there might not be any sacrifices

offered to ancestors, but ancestor veneration persists. For instance, dancing and drinking during circumcision, naming and burial ceremonies persist. These activities are done with a mixture of Christian elements. The folktale-telling tradition has been introduced in primary schools and Oral literature is taught in secondary schools and universities.

Ancestral powers lie latent under the surface of new features. The ancestors' potency clearly lies in funeral rites and commemorations. After death, the body of the dead lies in state on the verandah of the house for three days and nights. The practice of remaining awake the whole night is still observed. To help defray burial expenses, the community members donate food or money. The grave is dug at night before burial and leading clansmen discuss the procedure to be followed in burial in accordance with tradition.

During the 'waking' nights, traditional war songs are sung as well as Christian songs if the man was a Christian. A large crowd gathers to bid farewell to the departed. A bullfight as a final respect to the departed (in case of a respected man) may follow. The Maragoli have what we may call a hybrid culture. To this day, many Christians go to church, but also participate in beer drinking and perform folktales.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

It is with this gendered historical, social and cultural background that the Maragoli folktales are examined. As Esther Harding (1970:13) points out, myth and rituals of ancient religions represent the naïve projection of psychological realities. These myths are undistorted by rationalization. They deal with matters of the spirit and have psychological ramifications. The products of the unconscious contain psychological material, which is uncensored, and from which a store of knowledge that underlies life of the group and which would otherwise be inaccessible may be gleaned.

Myth and rituals at represent the fantasy of the group. This material may be interpreted psychologically by a method similar to that employed in the study of unconscious products of individual men and women to yield information relating to the hidden psychological realities on which the group life is founded.

The analysis should help to reveal the gender ideology and the psychological attitudes that underlie the Maragoli conscious facade. Of concern to this study are the genuine motives that underlie conscious and unconscious expressions and practices. In examining the folktales, the study tries to find out if what they express corresponds to the conscious practices discussed in this chapter and held dear by the Maragoli. The investigation tries to uncover whether the conscious egos of performers distort the facts leading to self-deception for self-preservation, self-esteem, and the like. The folktales are perceived as works of art, created partly as an expression of unconscious motives and responses. The next chapter proceeds to examine the folktales in terms of the gender themes that they express on the all-important institution of marriage.



## **Chapter Three**

### **The Gendered Frames of Coercion and Subversion in Marital Relationships**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The vital role that the folktales play in the process of socialisation in society has been recognised by many scholars such as Bettelheim Bruno (1975), Beidelman (1983), Senkoro (2005) and Utz Jeggle (2003) who, among other things, provide insights into the pedagogical and psychological value of folktales. In primary oral cultures, the folktale constitutes a major early foundation for the liberation of the imagination. Built largely on fantasy, the tale has therapeutic, emotional and cathartic usefulness as well as didactic functions. This literary art form provides an avenue through which society confirms its strengths and growth strategies, while inducting new generations into its life-flow (Opoku-Agyemang 1999).

The folktale may be construed as a social leveller in the sense that during the performance of the tale, barriers that would otherwise separate the sexes, classes and age groups in other social contexts are broken. As a result, one finds children, women and men, the rich and the poor gathered at the venue to share in this ancient oral art form. A critical study of these tales, however, reveals that gender is a determining factor in their construction and performance. The values that the folktales propound enforce a way of seeing that is anchored on defined gender lines and in a manner that generally purports to create balance between genders.

This chapter thus endeavours to identify the gender-based attitudes, themes and ideologies, which the Maragoli promote in relation to the institution of marriage through the narrative process of the folktale. It examines the Maragoli tales as a body of dynamic texts, which reveal the corpus of beliefs and practices that govern relationships between individuals in marriage. The discourse of these texts is considered as gendered in the sense that it is propelled by an ideology that defines one's place, space and role in society by upholding sexual differences. The folktales are particularly viewed not as folksy, domestic

entertainment, but as a site from which performers articulate a commentary upon power relations in marital relationships. Of paramount importance in this chapter is the need to interrogate the texts in order to find out how they articulate and represent, to the performer and audience, particular concepts on the institution of marriage.

Being works of art, the folktale discourse is presented in terms of cultural images, symbolic representations and formulaic patterns that mirror social realities. In essence, interrogation involves identifying terms, images, icons and frames by which both men and women are signified in marital relationships. In the same vein, attempts are made to match the findings with the social, historical and cultural context discussed in Chapter Two. The discussion is guided by the assumption that these folktales are created within a specific cultural context and that they articulate broader social values and ideologies.

It is argued here that although the folktales may, in a direct way, mirror the social reality, they at the same time, are a site from which the Maragoli construct ideologies about gender relations. The performers and the audience participate in constructing Maragoli cultural ideologies about the way men and women should relate to one another. Relations of this nature in a patriarchal society inevitably revolve around power structures. As Monique Deveaux (1994: 15) observes, where there is power there is resistance. Individuals will always challenge fixed identities and unfair power relations in ongoing and sometimes subtle ways. In this respect, the study examines sites and voices of contestation and subversion in the narrative process of the folktales in relation to marital relationships.

In oral cultures, folktales are perceived as works of literature associated with women who are usually the main performers and perpetrators of this tradition, as argued before. It is of interest to this researcher to investigate whether women in

any way uphold or subvert the dominant patriarchal ideology or present a multiplicity of voices within the society.

My framework of analysis is based on Hausa Kassam's definition of 'space' which determines what aspects of culture are produced and where, when and how much voice women have in the production of this art form (Kassam 1996). Within this framework, the study utilizes psychoanalysis in interrogating the internal processes that determine gender relations in terms of power and ideology.

The discussion also invokes African feminist concerns founded upon the principles of traditional African values that view gender roles as contemporary, parallel, asymmetrical and autonomously linked in the continuity of human life as expounded by Steady (1987) and Badejo (1999). This feminist perspective recognises the inherent, multiple roles of women and men in reproduction, production, and the distribution of wealth, power and responsibility for sustaining human life. It is grounded in traditional mythical beliefs and religious practices found in African oral literary traditions and festivals that place women at the centre of the social order as custodians of the earth, fire and water. Women are symbols of continuity, production and life while at the same time they uphold men as the guardians of women's custodial rights.

It is within this context that the study offers another articulation of power relations through the opening up of ways of seeing ambivalences and inner contradictions within the texts. This perspective leads to a critique of our gender system; that set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human social behaviour.

### **3.1 The Centrality of Marriage**

In her study of socialisation among the Igbo, Duro (1980:128) observes that a majority of women interviewed reported that their main objective in life was

marriage and that glory was in their children. While discussing the importance of children, her respondents agreed that childlessness is the most serious misfortune that could befall a woman and as a result, all efforts are made to ensure the birth of a child. In my fieldwork among the Maragoli, both men and women spoke of the importance of bearing children and explained their concern for having male children. They unanimously agreed that the main reason for desiring male children was to perpetuate the family name and the ancestral lineage. They also explained that male children are expected to assume the fathers' role of caring for family members. Since women have no direct inheritance rights, it is also the male child who will inherit the family's land, animals and compound.

This seems to be the dominant significance of marriage and children throughout Africa. As noted in the second chapter, the outstanding feature of the Maragoli religion was that it was geared towards procuring fertility. The rituals performed and prayers said were to obtain fertility for the man and his domestic beasts in general and for agricultural bounty in particular.

The Maragoli, however, believe that children should be born within a marital arrangement. Marriage is therefore held in high esteem for, through it, the society perpetuates itself. This centrality of marriage in the Maragoli culture is mirrored in Maragoli folktales. All the tales under study deal with relationships within the family unit or the process of socialisation of both boys and girls towards marriage. This is done through symbolic presentations for the sake of identification and emulation.

As will be seen in the following analysis of the main motifs, icons and images in the Maragoli folktales, all tales are about proper behaviour in marital or pre-marital relationships. Closely related to this are basic standards of conduct in families. The tales also attempt to symbolically legitimatise patriarchal structures by defining gendered boundaries of operation as the acceptable order. The tales,

to a large degree, also mirror the rights and obligations of the sexes in marital relationships. They also subversively present a site from which patriarchy is contested through presentation of rebellious archetypal characters through which the female voice is expressed.

### **3.2 Domains of Gendered Operation**

Most of the Maragoli tales revolve around boys, girls and women making journeys from their homes to the outside world. These journeys could be looked at as journeys towards maturity. It is, however, noticeable that these journeys are informed by a gender ideology. Although girls and women are symbols of continuity, identity and the very existence of Maragoli culture, the Maragoli accord them a low status. The following discussion thus unravels the patriarchal system, which overtly emphasises the importance of sons and the absolute authority of the father in the family. As Nannyongo-Tumusuzza (2002) points out, childbearing and domestic work define a typical woman and inability to satisfy those roles disqualifies her. In this respect, there seem to be defined zones of operation for both girls and boys. These zones of operation are defined in order to provide specific experiences that could produce good wives and husbands from the girls and boys.

It is precisely because of the desire to present experiences that the boys and girls would learn that the 'strange land' theme is common in African folktales. Birago (1984) observes that the common denominator in the strange land tales is the distance, the odd events, which occur en route, and the element of trial. The lands are clearly initiatory. Initiates or protagonists face the hostility and isolation of the bush as a part of becoming adults. In these narratives, the tests take place away from the society of the protagonist's own village. They are journeys into the unknown, and surviving the tests en route means that the protagonists have acquired the privilege of being tested further. Success in the tests administered in the strange land assures access to the fullness of life. Failure to give proof of self-discipline leads to punishment. The movement to the strange lands and back

is, however, determined by gender ideology that is meant to influence the audience to accept or reject the actions of the protagonists.

At a very close range, one may even argue that many Maragoli folktales are about boys and girls and how they grow up into responsible husbands and wives. The tales present archetypal characters whose actions are aimed at providing a symbolic framework for emulation or rejection. In order to grasp the full implications of the strange land motif and how it presents images for emulation by male children, consider MT4, *The Bird That Produced Honey And The Farmer*, which focuses on a journey made by a boy in a symbolic movement towards maturity.

MT4 is a long tale. It depicts a hard working farmer whose life is destabilized by a strange bird, which would not allow him to grow crops on his farm. After preparing his farm, the bird comes to order weeds to grow in it. This goes on for a long time before the man seeks the intervention of the ancestors, but to no avail. He lays a trap and captures the bird. But pleading for its life the bird promises to provide him with *uvudugi* (a mythical nicety that is sweeter than honey) if he spares its life. It provides *uvudugi* to the family for a long time before the only daughter of this family mistreats it and it flies away. Upon realizing what had happened, her brother decides to go out and look for it. He wanders in the wilderness for a long time, encountering all sorts of experiences until he comes back home, a mature and wealthy man. The tale ends on a happy note after the hero has performed a miracle. He resuscitates his sister who had been accidentally killed by his mother.

This is perhaps one of the most fascinating Maragoli tales. At the beginning of the tale there exists a sense of tranquility. This is a common situation in the structural composition of the Maragoli folktale. In a strictly structural sense, the Maragoli folktales move from a state of equilibrium to a state of dis-equilibrium and back to a state of equilibrium.

In this story, the farmer and his family of mother, son and daughter live happily. The farmer has mastered his environment well and all indicators show that he is at peace with his gods. He is a hard-working man who plays his traditional role of father perfectly well. Interestingly, just as in many other Maragoli tales, the setting is monogamous. Though traditional Maragoli families were typically polygamous, many tales present monogamous families. It is therefore not far-fetched to postulate that the mainly female narrators disapprove of polygamy and symbolically subvert the patriarchal ideology to present what they consider the ideal form of marriage.

Initially a strange bird destabilizes the tranquility and establishes the conflict that propels the story forward. The bird commands weeds to sprout in the farmer's well cultivated farm. This is a strange, unnatural phenomenon. The farmer is disturbed and institutes measures to bring the situation to order. As it is the custom in a society whose religion revolves around ancestor worship, the man makes the necessary moves to restore order. He offers sacrifices to the ancestors just in case he has inadvertently annoyed them. This is in line with what we noted in Chapter Two. It was the role of the man to mediate between his family and the ancestors.

The bird's activities continue to undermine the tranquility as it continues to order the weeds to sprout on the farm. The second stable element of the tale, which Propp (1958) calls function, is significant to the understanding of the deep meaning of this tale in the sense that the man seeks to solve the problem through his own agency. He traps the bird and it subsequently promises to provide *uvudugi* in exchange for its life. At this juncture, the initial order would have been restored. However, the introduction of a set of other characters propels the tale to new heights. The departure of the old man and his wife from the centre stage shifts the focus from the older generation to a new generation

involving the son and daughter. And this is where the journey to maturity begins for the boy hero.

To the child listening to this tale, the departure of the old man from the centre stage nourishes his budding ego in a special way. The boy-listener identifies with the boy hero in the tale from this stage up to the denouement. The hero becomes an archetypal character in Jungian terms for he is cast as a primordial image reflecting a pattern on which the boys should model their lives. Although the values of hard work and necessity to be at peace with one's ancestors are already imparted in a variety of ways, none parallels the symbolic revelations to the child in moulding him into a responsible husband as witnessed in this tale.

The sister to the boy hero abuses and maltreats the magical bird by first failing to keep a family secret. She reveals to other children, her friends, that the family has acquired a treasure. Secondly, she lets it produce a lot of *uvudugi*, which the children were unable to finish eating. Again, one notices a sense of carelessness, laziness, disregard for family property, and misuse of family resources in the girl. The narrative process is, in essence, sending signals to any boy child listening to this story that that is the nature of girls. The boy child is being prepared for life with one such girl in future. On another level, the girls listening to this tale imbibe the feeling that the boys are superior to them and that they bring order to society.

The bird flies away but not before it produces its own droppings as a sign of disgust. The girl starts crying because she realises that she has made a big mistake. But this is the best she can do! What else can she do? She cannot follow the bird into the forest or try to bring it back. Why the girl cannot go for it can only be understood within patriarchal constraints that limit operational space for girls. It is at this juncture that we come to terms with the Maragoli society's definition of gendered spheres of operation.



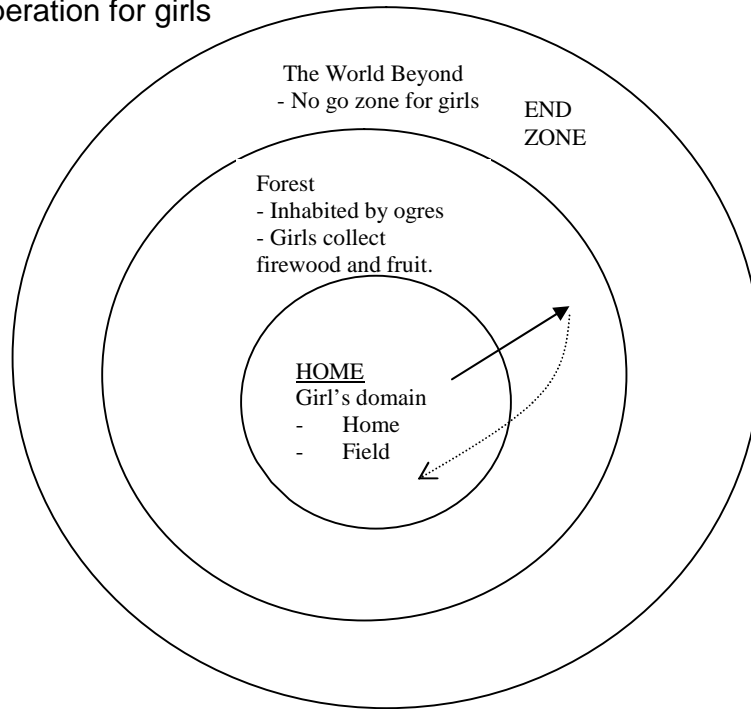
There seem to be three domains in the Maragoli folktale: the home, the environment just outside the home, and the world beyond. The home is the basic unit of economic and social organisation. In the Maragoli society, the home is a crucial symbolic unit. It consists of dwelling spaces, buildings and fields; in other words, all of the elements necessary for the production and reproduction of crops, livestock and human beings within it. It is the home that provides the framework for negotiating of gender boundaries and it is the domain of the girls and women. From here, women and girls plot to subvert patriarchy while presenting a supposedly conformist image.

The world outside the home is the forest or the woods. This is the area called *muuritu* in Maragoli language. This environment is where boys take cows to graze and girls collect firewood and fruit. In the world of the Maragoli folktale, this is where many of the tales are set. This is the area where ogres attempt to devour girls and where boys fight and eliminate the ogres. This is a dangerous domain especially for girls in the Maragoli folktales.

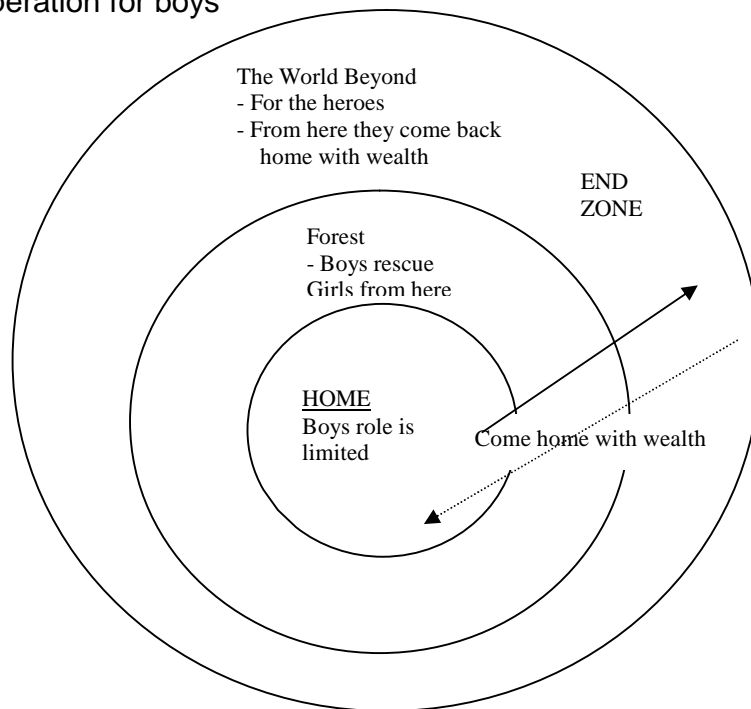
The last sphere is the world beyond the forest, the wilderness. The Maragoli call this sphere *Mukizimwi* or *Mwigendinyama*. This is the world for the brave and courageous. It is a no-go zone for girls and women.

These worlds can be plotted as shown below:

Sphere of operation for girls



Sphere of operation for boys



Having been socialised to obey the limits of her gender, the girl can only cry for she cannot attempt to go after the bird. The questions that militate against her venturing into the next sphere are: What if she met an ogre? What about if the bird proceeded into the last sphere? The girls in Maragoli folktales are cast as being unable to confront ogres without help if they came in direct contact with them. In most cases they are victims who are devoured by ogres.

It is her brother who then takes the challenge to restore order. The narrator says, "When the girl saw that the bird had flown away, she started crying. Her brother saw what had happened and he went out in search of the bird." The mere fact that the two characters remain nameless signifies their symbolic nature. They represent all the boys and girls in the Maragoli community. It is from their actions that the audience solves questions of moral ambiguities in terms of what is good or bad, acceptable and unacceptable. The folktales also provide models for identification.

The journey that the boy makes in search of the bird is, in essence, a journey toward maturity. All the symbolic projections point to the fact that the boy is being made a man and, by extension, a husband. The penetration into the end zone in search of something that is a source of pleasure is symbolic of the ultimate sexual penetration within a marriage. The very idea of penetrating the end zone or rather the 'virgin' land into which no one within his setting had penetrated is yet another pointer at the virginity he has to break before procreation.

Indeed, as pointed out in the second chapter, virginity was and is still treasured among the Maragoli. If a Maragoli man marries a woman who turns out to be a virgin, an elaborate ritual takes place in which the bedding on which her virginity is broken is taken to her mother who hands it over to the grandmother to use. Other gifts are given to the mother of the girl in an apparent appreciation of her guidance to the daughter in preservation of her 'end zone', which in marriage becomes the frequent go zone for the hero.

In this story, the journey to the end zone in search of the treasured bird is hazardous. It is symbolic of the journey towards maturity. The boy encounters many obstacles. While still in the forests around the home, to which women and girls are allowed to visit in search of firewood and fruit, the boy comes across an old woman. The old woman promises to show him the object of search, which to him is the object of pleasure and satisfaction, but she reneges on this promise.

The old woman is symbolic of the boy's mother whom he has to break away from for she cannot provide the pleasures that the object of search can provide – maturity and hence sexual gratification. The act of the old woman lying to the boy is significant in psychoanalytic terms. It is symbolic of the obvious practice of parents in any African society not to be explicit about matters to do with sexual pleasure. She represents the apron strings of a mother that any male has to break away from in order to enjoy sexual gratification. The act of tying the boy in the bundle of firewood is equally symbolic. It demonstrates the inability and reluctance of the mothers to let go of the boys so that they may experience sexual pleasure.

The fact that the boy does not break away from the mother until she releases him is a noteworthy subversive move in the tales. The performer, through this tale, is affirming to the young men that their mothers are important in their lives. They have to will and bless their enjoyment of the end zone pleasures if anything good is to come out of it. The performer, although telling a patriarchal tale, underscores the importance of women in the lives of men thereby passing judgment on a system that looks down upon women. Indeed, as noted in Chapter Two, to the Maragoli, marriage is for procreation. Without the blessing of a mother, a marriage might not yield children. The centrality of mothers in choosing the spouse of their sons is underscored in their role as matchmakers. This fact is also presented in MT6 which features women choosing wives for their sons.

The release of the boy marks a turning point in his life. It is a symbolic 'release' from the mother's apron strings, as already mentioned, so that he may do what is expected of him as an adult. It marks the recognition of the fact that the boy can now take decisions that affect his life. It is through the presentation of such symbolic images to the young through the folktale that the Maragoli people assign men their roles as husbands. After this release, the boy wanders in the wilderness with cattle without any supervision. It is, indeed, at this juncture that he takes an important decision that turns his life around. He has to 'withdraw' from this world of fantasy to the real world in which he can take his rightful place as a man and become an active agent and do all that the patriarchal structures dictate.

He decides that he should go back to his home, but he cannot do so without the cattle. This is again a momentous move that reflects the Maragoli culture. First, to a Maragoli, cows constitute wealth. One who wants to marry must have cattle for it is the cattle that are used for payment of the dowry. As the boy withdraws from the fantasy of childhood to real life, he is aware of the requirement and expectation before one is allowed to enjoy the pleasures of adulthood.

The tale would have taken a completely new turn if the boy had been given the daughters of the donor woman to marry. It would, in essence, have become like the Gikuyu myth of origin. This myth is about a woman called Mumbi and a man called Gikuyu who had nine daughters but no men to marry them. *Ngai*, God, provided nine men to marry the girls. It is the descendants of the nine daughters who form the nine clans of the Gikuyu people of central Kenya (See Jomo Kenyatta (1939).

The journey back home is indeed hazardous. The boy travels for a long distance then he encounters yet another problem. Ironically, a bird once again triggers the next challenge. Could it be the bird that he was in search of when he left home? The performer of the narrative does not give any clue to solving this puzzle. It is

my assumption that this is the same bird, which is an object of pleasure within the realm of the fantastic world. This search for pleasure nourishes the hero's budding libido. The bird, thus, presents an obstacle that ensures a struggle in the mind of the boy to determine whether he should continue enjoying his fantastic coitus or break from this to real coitus as an adult.

The bird informs the woman and her daughters that the herdsboy had run away with the cattle, and hot pursuit ensues. The inhabitants of this sphere pursue the boy, but he eludes them by using a magic stick to cross a big river. He commands the river almost in the same way Moses commanded the river to stop flowing for the children of Israel to pass into the Promised Land. His journey back home is reminiscent of the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land from Egypt. It is in a more symbolic way a journey to the promised land of maturity and adulthood. This tale thus renders credence to the myth among the Maragoli that the proto-Maragoli originated from Egypt and sojourned southwards to the present day Maragoli land.

The events that surround the crossing of the river add to our understanding of the gender aspects of the tale. The boy commands the river, saying: "The river that belongs to my ancestors, disperse. May some of the waters move to my mother's home and others to my father's home." This expression is a critical signifier in understanding the meaning of this tale. The fact that water is symbolic of life cannot be gainsaid. The temporary separation of the water from the father's and that from the mother's home signifies that it is only through the merging of these sources of life that the Maragoli can be sure of continuity of their community. This merging is only possible through coitus in marriage. It is therefore possible to read a hidden sub-text that underscores the importance of both genders and the centrality of marriage. In this tale, the mainly female narrators underscore their major role in production.

The boy lets the healthy animals pass, but drowns the emaciated ones to signify the separation of evil from good. The healthy animals with which he crosses the river towards maturity signify the Maragoli desire for health and fertility. It echoes the Maragoli prayer for bounty. It is not surprising therefore to note that Maragoli land is the most densely populated area in East Africa.

The pursuers, just like the emaciated cattle, drown in the river as the boy evokes magic by ordering the water to stop flowing and then to flow once again. The next obstacle is presented in the form of an old man who stands in the boy's way towards the pleasures of adulthood. The old man is symbolic of the rivalry between boys over girls that the boy will have to contend with. He attempts to rob him of the herd of cattle, which would enable him pay dowry for a wife. The boy sings a song:

My father's wasps  
Take heart wasps  
Take heart wasps  
My father's wasps  
Take heart wasps

This is followed by the bellowing of one of the bulls, and wasps from its mouth attack the old man. All these events have meaning in the mythological world of the Maragoli. The invocation of the father's name in the song is really a call for ancestral assistance. On another level, this is a direct reference to the Maragoli cultural practice whereby it is the father who pays dowry for his son. Put in another way, it is the father who marries a girl for the son. Invoking his name basically implies a call for his father's wish to prevail. Any Maragoli father would wish to see the son take the herd home and acquire a wife. This is therefore a form of prayer, which is in line with the Maragoli desire for a large progeny. The fact that it is a bull that bellows and not a heifer points to the power balance within this patriarchal society.

The events that follow are critical:

1. The boy arrives home

2. He is recognised by his sister.
3. The mother beats the boy's sister to death, thinking that she is lying about her lost brother's return.
4. The mother confirms that her daughter rightly recognised her brother.
5. The boy commands the cows to jump over the dead girl's body.
6. She is resurrected.
7. There ensures a celebration.

All these moves have meaning within the structural scheme of the tale. The fact that it is the sister who recognises her brother's voice tallies with the fact that she was the last to see him before he made the journey to the unknown. This marks the end of the circle from childhood to adulthood. The crossing over of the cows on the dead girl's body has its roots in the Maragoli religion. The Maragoli, as discussed in Chapter Two, believe that if one crosses the stretched out legs of a pregnant woman, then the child to be born will look like that particular person. The symbolic interpretation of this act points to a rebirth of the girl as a mature woman, similar to the brother. She is no longer the careless girl we encountered before the boy's adventure into the wilderness. The girl who is reborn is mature and ready for marriage.

The ending of the tale climaxing with the rebirth of the girl signals the end of the fantasy exploration. The fantastical voyage into the wilderness produces a mature man with powers like those of *Mulogoli* the proto-Maragoli, healing the wounds inflicted and creating harmony and wealth within the homestead. The father of the hero is not mentioned at the end, because the boy graduates into the head of his family. The murder of the old man in the forest should also be seen as a fantastic wish and points to the dark desires of Oedipal complex where the father is destroyed and the boy hero takes the reins of power.

It appears that within the Maragoli community, there are boy-centred tales and girl-centred tales that define the spheres or domains of operation for each



gender. A number of tales under study focus on the girls who venture out of the home. These tales depict the sphere of operation for girls and the attendant danger they face. Whereas the boys who venture out struggle and go into combat with their adversaries, the girls require rescue missions. This is perhaps one of the most persistent and distinctive features of these two genres of tales. To appreciate this fact, it is necessary to look at girl-centred tales.

There are a number of tales that bring out issues concerning growth challenges for girls. Among other things, they define and mirror the spheres of operation for girls and the proper conduct in matters related to sex. One such tale is MT14. This tale is now closely examined closely.

MT14 is the story of a married man who decides to become an ogre. He changes despite the protestations of his wife and becomes an ogre. From now on he does what wild animals and ogres do. His sense of smell is heightened and that is why he is able to smell the presence of his sister-in-law when she visits. His sister-in-law is, however, shielded by her sister and she escapes back to her home unharmed. When another sister-in-law visits, she unfortunately does not heed the advice of her sister. As a result, she is killed and eaten by the ogre. This cruel act makes the ogre's wife take revenge. She kills her ogre husband and escapes to her parent's home.

The move to become an ogre basically means that this man decides to become inhuman. But why should the man opt to become an ogre? The act of becoming an ogre signifies that the man rejects what makes one human in Maragoli estimation. In the same vein, he rejects all that the Maragoli consider good conduct. The ogre is a symbol of anti-social and inhuman behaviour that is the anti-thesis of what is approved of by society. This man, like other ogres and wild animals, joins other ogres in their hunt for animals for food. It may be assumed that he joins other anti-social people in engaging in activities that contravene what the Maragoli consider good conduct.

A set of new circumstances propels the tale to a new level in which the ogre is seen in action. It so happens that one day his sister-in-law visits. This move is dangerous considering the fact that this man is an ogre. Ogres in Maragoli mythology eat girls. At this juncture, the audience is filled with anxiety. The audience understands the dangers that the girl faces. It is with this understanding that the ogre's wife instructs her sister on how to conduct herself in order to escape destruction. The ogre senses the presence of a new person in the house, through his sense of smell, when he comes back home. As the performer narrates the tale the audience's emotions are heightened.

It is at this stage that we realise that indeed, the man is an animal, because he uses the sense of smell, which is the dominant sense in wild animals. But the girl is hidden somewhere in the house and does not come out even when the ogre plays good music. The fact that this girl follows instructions casts her as a model for emulation. She is decorated as a heroine with bangles and given niceties to take home. The mention of the bangles invokes the Maragoli sense of aesthetics that the colonialists attempted to destroy (See Chapter Two). She is, however, given another set of instructions to follow in order to reach home. She is, for instance, told not to dance if she sees grass dancing and that she should drop some grains on a rock for a specific bird on the way and move on without looking back. The act of leaving some of the grains for birds is in line with the Maragoli philosophy of caring for birds as a sign of generosity. It shows the Maragoli philosophy of co-existing with birds and animals. On another level, it demonstrates the Maragoli way of preserving the eco-system. The unnamed girl is symbolically warned not to be influenced by anybody while on her way home. She follows instructions and reaches home. It should be noted that she ventures out only up to where the sister got married; that is, within the designated sphere of operation for females.

Her arrival home causes a stir. Her other sister notices that she has come with “goodies” and decides to venture out in order to secure for herself the same possessions. Here we notice a case of sibling rivalry. The visit of the other sister turns out to be disastrous. She does the direct opposite of what she is told to do. In a nutshell, she does not follow the instructions given. She comes out of her hiding once the ogre arrives home and plays his guitar. She even dances with him and proves to be the anti thesis of the sister who visited earlier. It is clear at this stage that her journey will end in disaster. She is finally killed and eaten by the ogre.

But the tale takes a new direction when the wife to the ogre decides to take revenge. She cuts the skin on the ogre’s head and finally burns him to death for having killed her sister. Ironically it is a bird that communicates the information about the tragedy. We therefore see the bird at this stage as a benevolent messenger at the service of the underprivileged. But the tale does not end before the drama is intensified. Other ogres pursue the woman with a view of avenging the murder of their friend. Through the help of yet another bird, magic, and her own people, she escapes to the safety of her home. Her people celebrate her actions as being heroic. She is thanked for avenging the murder of the sister. Since women are considered weak, this brave act, in what could be considered a patriarchal tale, is yet another sub-text that exalts the heroic deeds of women providing yet another voice of feminine consciousness and opposition to evil.

A number of issues emerge in this tale in so far as the conduct of girls and women and their domains of operation are concerned. The tale, apart from making salient comments about the proper conduct of girls in this community, defines their place and space. They should only venture out when they are ready to follow the instructions they are given. It is also clear that the tale owners believe that for a woman or a girl to escape from ogres or to fight ogres, external assistance is required. This signifies that women are perceived as being weak and incapable of decisive action. Yet paradoxically even within this patriarchal

tale, it is possible to read subtle voices that uphold the fact that women are active agents of subversion. It is therefore easy to conclude that the women performers play trickster roles in the narration of the patriarchal tales by constructing other sub-texts that give the opposite of the patriarchal ideology. While seeming to uphold the patriarchal standards they uphold the woman as fighter of evil and conscience of society.

The overt instructions being given to the girls among the audience is that they should not venture out of their domains of operation. They are also told to adhere to instructions given by those in authority. However, another sublime voice in the tale gives women a window through which they see their role as that of fighting evil.

### **3.3 Polygamy and Polygamous Families**

As noted earlier, it is through the narrative process of the Maragoli folktale that both girls and boys are told things pertaining to sexuality and marriage that cannot be articulated in an overt way. The folktale performance is thus an occasion to articulate, in symbolic ways, what may be considered socially unacceptable. That is why whatever is contained in these folkloristic texts is meaningful, though full insight into what the meaning is may not be clear at once. It may therefore be vouchsafed platitude to assume that folklore contains irrational nonsense, which has no meaning.

It is with this assumption in mind that we notice, at the superstructure level, the deliberate socialisation of girls through various demeaning images aimed at producing the woman who conforms to the patriarchal gender ideology. The images presented of the ideal girl growing up into an ideal woman, mostly demean the female. Nevertheless, underlying this perspective contesting voices emerge. It is only through examining this cultural discourse in terms of women's agency and not in terms of how they are affected by social institutions that the

sub-texts created to contest patriarchy can be read. From this paradigm, it is necessary to examine the issue of polygamy.

A number of Maragoli folktales depict polygamous situations. MT1 depicts a situation in which a man has a polygamous family, but one of the women is barren. MT2 discusses the adventures of two step-sisters who get married to one man. MT10 depicts the story of Girwanga, the polygamous trickster, while MT17 talks about the evil of a step-mother who is expected to take care of a step-daughter after the death of her co-wife. For a better understanding of this theme, this researcher proposes to look closely at MT2, MT12 and MT10.

As noted earlier, to the Maragoli girl, marriage is the ultimate goal in life. With marriage comes the wish and desire to produce children. Many of the Maragoli tales focus on this aspect. MT2 *Kalisanga and Kalimonge*, presents the story of a polygamous family of two wives, a husband and two daughters. The stepsisters are age mates and love each other very much. But of the two, Kalisanga is more beautiful. Unfortunately, her mother dies and she is left in the custody of her stepmother, the mother to Kalimonge.

The love between the two sisters is extraordinary. They even share a boyfriend! But their mother does not approve of their love for one another. So she separates them and gives each one of them different tasks. She also has a sinister motive of killing the stepdaughter. While her biological daughter has been sent to the river for water, she forces Kalisanga into a drum and throws it into a lake. Kalimonge comes back to find her sister and friend missing. Her efforts to find her fail. She is so sad that she goes to the lakeshore in desperation and starts singing. She is surprised to hear her stepsister responding through song and explaining what happened. She reveals that her stepmother planned all that happened. She sings, revealing what happened to people who gather to listen to her song from the lake. The drum she was in floats to the lakeshore and Kalisanga is removed from it. We are told that one side of her body was rotten.

The two girls decide not to go home, but instead they accompany their boyfriend to his home from where they get married to him. And they live happily thereafter.

This is a fascinating tale indeed. It reveals a number of aspects about Maragoli culture and beliefs. The fact that polygamy is presented as a form of marriage acceptable to good women is rather obvious. Although marriage to sisters is no longer cherished, it appears that the Maragoli, like their Luo neighbours, approved this type of marriage. But the sisterhood fostered by the two sisters is a strange type. There is a sense in which the love between the two sisters tends to hinge on the unnatural and the unacceptable among the Maragoli. One gets the feeling that the two girls are in a lesbian relationship. This is something that the stepmother is opposed to and by extension the dominant ideology. It is precisely because of this realisation that she separates them.

The two sisters, however, subvert social norms by happily getting married to one man. By so doing, they ensure that their relationship goes on under the cover of the acceptable practice of polygamy. Whereas only heterosexual relationship is the norm, it is possible to see that under the cover of polygamy subversion occurs where the two co-wives are involved in a lesbian relationship. Two propositions lead to this conclusion. First, it has so far been established from the tales that many of the men in the tales are absentee husbands, which makes this union tenable. Men's absence in homes makes it possible for lesbian relationships to prosper without their knowledge. Secondly, it is a known fact that co-wives make special bonds in a polygamous family to subvert the husbands' power. In this case, the two sisters have found a way of conforming to the patriarchal norm overtly but they secretly subvert it.

Another equally significant point that emerges from this narrative is that stepmothers have the tendency to be jealous. They even harbour the desire to destroy their stepchildren. The image being presented to the girl child as she is socialised to get married is that marriage within a polygamous set up is not bad

but some women are by nature evil. In the same vein, the girl child gets to understand that the ultimate in life is marriage. The wicked stepmother is cast as one who stands in the way of the stepdaughter. She does not want to see her enjoying the pleasures of marriage, which among other things includes sexual relationships resulting in reproduction.

The Maragoli community, just as other African communities where polygamy is institutionalised, seems to have very few narratives depicting polygamous situations. Out of the twenty narratives under study only five depict polygamous situations. The picture one gets from these tales is, however, the same as in many tales from other African communities. The stepmother is depicted as devious and callous to say the least. In MT2 *Kalisanga* and *Kalimonge*, the stepmother attempts to destroy Kalisanga because she was more beautiful than her own daughter, Kalimonge.

In the above-mentioned tale, the conflict between Kalisanga and the stepmother is solved when the two stepsisters get married to one man and become co-wives. It is the husband to the girls who rescues and actualises the girls' aspirations by isolating them from their evil mother. By so doing he ensures that their relationship, however unnatural, continues unhindered.

On the overt level, this is a patriarchal tale that depicts the usual stereotypes about women being jealous, evil, murderous and heartless. But it is interesting that the two girls who have suffered under polygamy get married to one man and become co-wives! This action provides yet another possibility of interpretation, which seems to, once again, subvert the patriarchal ideology.

It would also be important to consider the role women played in traditional African community. Okonjo Kamene (1976) has observed that the popular belief that African women were less important in the male-dominated communities is a gross misconception. Though the practice of polygamy and patrilocal domicile

secure men's power over women in general, women still wield considerable influence in both marriages and within the community. For example, women are a major force in the society's agrarian economy. This gives them a significant say in how the village was run and ensured that their needs would not be ignored.

The practice of polygamy worked in subtle ways to contribute to the outcome in which women were in control of certain resources or production. While polygamy was not a perfect marital arrangement, it was well suited to the agrarian lifestyle and contained several inbuilt mechanisms that allowed women to cope with the burdens of that type of lifestyle. Janet Pool (1972: 253) has noted that polygamy allowed co-wives, for example, to 'form a power-bloc within the family'. This power-bloc was notoriously effective in coercing an otherwise stubborn husband to behave in ways congenial to his wives. By the two sisters getting married to one man, the tale is not just castigating their mother and approving of polygamy, but it is also presenting a strategy of wresting power from the dominating man through special bonding of co-wives and establishment of a power-bloc. Indeed the mere fact that the father to these girls is rarely mentioned shows how irrelevant men are rendered in the struggle for survival in this community.

MT12 continues exploring the same motif of jealousy of stepmothers. In this tale portrayal of the stepmother is the same as in MT2 *Karisanga and Kalimonge*, if not more intense. The stepmother attempts to destroy *Donyobe*, the tiny little stepdaughter, after the death of her mother. The vulnerability of the little girl is stressed in the images presented. *Donyobe* is said to spend most of the time sleeping in her little bed called *Avingili musaba*. This symbolises her helplessness. This tale seems to be a variant of the famous European tale of the Sleeping Beauty narrated by the Grimm Brothers (See Jacob and Wilhelm 1948). The images presented are similar to those in the famous European tale. But the absurdity of this tale revolves around the stepmother's desperate attempts to destroy *Donyobe*, because of her beauty.



It is observed that Donyobe's stepmother spent most of her time trying to be like Donyobe. It is clear that Donyobe is a symbolic rival in the stepmother's relationship with her husband. In the symbolic realm, she represents her mother and hence the hatred her stepmother has towards her. To understand the gender implications of this story we need to take into consideration all details of the tale.

The question that guides my inquiry into this tale is: Why should women derive evident pleasure from the telling of such supposedly drab, joyless and critical tales about themselves? There are psychological aspects of the tale, which speak to aspects of women's experience with more subtlety, and with greater self-affirmation in a patriarchal set up.

Without denying the possibility of the patriarchal reading, I want to show that the tale is rich and possesses thematic complexity that supports a subtle reading. It is a fact that folklore means something to the taleteller and to the audience and that a given item of folklore may mean different things to different members of the same audience. It may mean different things to a single taleteller at different times in her life (Dundes 1980).

Through the crucial device of projection, various impulses are ignited in an audience. In psychology, projection refers to the tendency to attribute to another person or to the environment what is actually within oneself. What is attributed is usually some internal impulse or feeling, which is painful, unacceptable or taboo. The ascription of feelings and qualities of one's own to a source in the external world is accomplished without the individual's being aware of the fact.

It is within this context that the tale *Donyobe* will now be interpreted. Basically, this tale is about a sibling and her relationship with her parents. The 'step' relationship is a convenient device to allow for an examination of this relationship. The fact that the stepmothers hate and mistreat their stepdaughters without the knowledge of their fathers is a clear indication of the failure of the

men to take control of the home yet patriarchy bestows this role on them. This is not the only instance when the tales in our corpus castigate absentee fathers. In MT1 the man in a polygamous home is cast as being ignorant of all that goes on in the homestead. In MT9, Kalasimba spends most of his time drinking beer with other men and has no time for matters pertaining to his home.

But more important, in MT 12 *Donyobe* projects the hatred of stepmothers towards their stepchildren abandoned by their fathers. Although these impulses exist in stepmothers, they ascribe them to the fantastic character in the tale. Through the process of telling and listening to this tale, the female performers of the tale and audience are able to cleanse themselves of those impulses and treat their stepdaughters well. The tale thus serves as cleansing agent and provides a cathartic effect while castigating men for abdicating their duties.

On yet another level of reading, the tale is symbolic of the contesting forces in a patriarchal society. The tale draws a picture of the weak in society and shows them in confrontation with the patriarchal forces. *Donyobe* is symbolic of women oppressed by patriarchal structures. The stepmother is a symbol of the evil around her and by extension men who oppress women and kill them. But the tale gives hope at the end when a benevolent man brings *Donyobe* back to life.

Magical resurrection only shows that there are hidden forces, which support the underprivileged. It is therefore, possible to say that a narrow reading could only give the surface meaning that stepmothers are devious and bent on destroying their stepdaughters, but consideration of other symbolic levels of meaning yields a totally different perspective. As Jessica Hooker (1990:10) asserts, the central important aspect of such tales is their very mixed message about female gender.

MT10 is the story of the trickster called Girwanga and his wives. This tale offers an equally fascinating revelation in relation to polygamy and how women contest it. In the tale, Girwanga is a trickster whose main source of survival is theft from

ogres who live nearby. He steals from ogres for a long time until they arrest him. To escape their wrath he promises to kill his wives and children one by one until they are all dead. As expected from a trickster, this is said merely to escape the wrath of the ogres. He cheats the ogres by slaughtering dogs for them as he hides his family members in a cave. He then draws ogres to his hideout and kills a number of them by inserting a hot metal bar in their anuses before the others flee leaving behind their belonging, which he takes over and he lives happily with his wives ever after.

As expected from a patriarchal tale, Girwanga's wives are never allowed to say anything. They are simply voiceless like his children. As he engages ogres and fights them, his wives and children play no role. It may therefore be argued here that Girwanga provides an archetypal character that presents to the men and boys the model from which they fashion their characters to become insensitive, selfish and lazy, only relying on trickery to survive. It is therefore not far-fetched to argue here that such tales are responsible for producing the stonehearted men who selfishly steal from public coffers in modern day Africa. On another level, trickster tales, such as this one may be read to show the women's role in society. The women performers of this tale achieve a hidden satisfaction for they also see themselves as tricksters due to their limited physiques and yet they outwit men through their subversion of patriarchal structures.

### **3.4 Courtship, Deceit and Pride**

A close reading of the Maragoli folktales reveals a number of other folk beliefs that find expression in this medium. Tales MT2, MT5, MT6, MT8, MT11, MT12, MT14, MT15, MT16 and MT20 all depict girls in various situations in which the Maragoli attempt to show their view of good, evil, wisdom and stupidity.

What seems to emerge in all these tales is that girls contain, in their bosom, a tendency to destroy other girls, sometimes purely because of jealousy. These tendencies are nurtured even in adulthood when they become wives. In MT6, for

instance, we are presented with the cultural way of choosing a wife. We are told that Maragoli boys were prohibited from marrying girls from their own villages. Girls who were old enough to marry would gather together and travel to another village where the boys' mothers receive them. The performer observes that it was the mothers who chose wives for their sons.

The mothers would go to the arena where the girls were and each would choose a wife for her son. Although this might not happen today, the mothers' grip on their sons in matters of the choice of a marriage partner is still very strong in Maragoli land. In the case of MT6, the girls who arrived in the arena had turned one of them into a dog. This girl happened to be the most beautiful. This was because they feared that she would be chosen before them for her beauty. Because of malice, they turned the friend into a dog. This seems to insinuate and echo, in the patriarchal sense, the stereotype that girls or women have a tendency to be evil to fellow women.

It is not only in MT6 that girls are seen as being evil, jealous and unkind to a fellow girl. In MT8, girls mislead a friend to enter a deer's hole and they close the entrance. We are not given the motive of this action. They even go further to lie to her parents that they do not know her whereabouts. The same situation is also described in MT11. In this tale, the girls convince a friend to close her eyes while they are harvesting fruit. She is foolish enough to fall in the trap. In MT 18 a hen's carelessness has put all chicken in trouble by losing a razorblade that was borrowed from Hawk. What these tales suggest, is that women and girls have an inborn tendency to cheat one another and to be careless. To some degree it may be concluded that the tales advance the view that women have the desire and tendency to destroy one another.

The tendency of the girls to be unreasonable and insensitive is also detected in MT12 in which girls laugh at absurdity. In this tale a group of girls come across a human skull and start laughing. One of them overdoes this and invites the wrath

of the skull. The skull, which the girls come across, signifies death. Indeed, the skull of a human being is not something to laugh at since death among the Maragoli is not a laughing matter. Contrasting the character of girls and that of boys, a clear pattern emerges. Boys are depicted as brave, sensitive and caring while girls appear deceitful, careless and arrogant.

This consistent picture of the girls in the tales under study is in line with the patriarchal gender ideology of the society. As Louis Althusser (1970) notes in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus* there are two major mechanisms for ensuring that people within a state behave according to the rules of that state, even when it is not in their best interests. The first is what Althusser calls RSA, or Repressive State Apparatuses, and ISAs or Ideological State Apparatuses. These ISAs are institutions, which generate ideologies, which individuals and groups then internalise and act in accordance with.

These ISAs include schools, religions, the family legal systems, politics and sports and the arts. It is in the arts that the Maragoli folktales fall. These traditions generate systems of ideas and values, which individual members of the society internalise. The girl child, socialised by these tales, internalises certain values about herself. Indeed as Althusser (1970) observes, ideology works unconsciously. Like language, ideology is a structure, a system, which speaks to us and gives us the illusion that we are in charge. We freely chose to believe the things we believe and find lots of reasons why we believe in those things. It is this attitude that gives rise to modern stereotypes about women. We may therefore say that the folktales embody these ideologies internalised by the listeners.

### **3.5 The Combatant Hero and his Magical Stick**

It is worth noting that unlike the girl-centred narratives, the boy-centred narratives depict brave boys who go out to perform heroic deeds. Among other things, they

sometimes bring wealth to the family or rescue lost and abducted girls. This is a recurrent motif. The boy child in the audience identifies with the protagonist. This image of boys is contrasted with the one we get in girl-centred tales.

In the boy-centred tales, the boys seem to be victims of girls' lies. In MT1 it is the girl who suggests that she and her brother should get married. In MT4 the boy hero suffers owing to the carelessness of his sister who mishandles the bird that produces *Uvudugi* for the family. It takes the boy years in the wilderness to come back home with wealth. He even performs a miracle using the magical stick that leads to the resuscitation of his sister. In his sojourn, the hero in MT4 goes through many trials and tribulations. In the wilderness, he has to fight in order to survive.

MT7-*Muhonja And Her Brother* present a typical case of a heroic boy who is also the sister's guardian. When the ogre tricks Muhonja and swallows her, it is her brother who goes out in search of the villainous ogre. He fights and slays it before rescuing Muhonja from its stomach.

The consistent picture that bombards the boy child who listens to these stories and learns from them through the process of identification is that he has to be courageous, brave and adventurous. This is necessary in order for him to protect those around him and to create wealth for his family. Maragoli boys grow up with this attitude into adulthood. A boy is thus the father of the man who will become the head of the family and the protector of all those under him. His wife who internalises the weaknesses presented in negative images looks up to the man as the leader, head and ultimate authority in the home.

It is also of interest to look at other elements of male authority. One persistent magical item used in the tales under study is the magical stick and spear, both of which are phallic symbols. In MT1 the boy hero uses a spear to kill the ogre and save the sister. In MT4 the boy hero utilizes a magical stick to ward off attack

from various people. He uses it like Moses in the Bible to separate the waters of a river and finally uses it to bring back the sister to life by stroking her with it. Muhonja's brother makes use of his sword to kill the ogre that had swallowed the sister. In MT9 Kalasimba uses his walking stick to strike his dead children so that they come back to life. In MT13 the boy hero uses a sword to kill the ogre and rescue the whole village from its stomach.

It therefore appears that the stick as a phallic symbol is a source of life. As a symbol of the male organ, it serves as a signifying symbol of authority. In a sense, the magical stick signifies the masculine ideology of male supremacy and hegemony that is gained, not out of intellect, but due to their biological make up as men.

### **3.6 Bitter Fruits of Disobedience, Defiance and the Perversion of Beauty**

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, girls in the Maragoli community look forward to marriage as their ultimate goal. This fact is not just stressed in folktales, but also in other cultural expressions. Ideally, children are supposed to be born in wedlock. A girl who gives birth to a child out of wedlock is derogatorily called *kidwadi*. In the estimation of the Maragoli, a *kidwadi* is ugly. She is looked on as one who is sexually so active as to engage in sex before marriage and therefore is capable of committing adultery. Beauty among the Maragoli has a lot to do with adherence to the values of the society and conforming to the dominant ideological framework. Ironically, the boy who impregnates a girl is not likewise looked upon as ugly. Society does not demonise him either. This skewed understanding confirms the dominant patriarchal gender ideology.

There are many proverbs that reinforce the perspective that beauty has to do with conforming to the values of the dominant class. The Maragoli say *Umukana umuravu nekevoge* (a beautiful girl is like rotten fish). This is in reference to physical beauty. In MT 5, Anakaguku's beautiful sister is considered dangerous. She is the type whom the Maragoli believe would give her husband a rough time.

The fact that she decides to demand an exceptional man, one without an anus, is in itself proof of her rebellious nature. This tale presupposes that a girl has no right to choose the kind of partner she wants.

The underlying message is that if a girl is allowed to make her own choice, she is bound to make a mistake. Contrasting the ugly Anakaguku and her beautiful sister, the story seems to conclude that Anakaguku is more beautiful due to her bravery, wit and conformity to the societal way of perceiving reality than her physically more attractive sister. This perception is widespread in Africa. In the Yoruba *Ijala* entitled *Kunuwen*, the chanter indirectly presents a Yoruba conception of women, namely that beautiful women are often arrogant and self opinionated. The chatter portrays such women as the cause of whatever goes wrong in society. This is but the patriarchal ideology (Ogunsina 1996).

Kalasimba's wife in MT9 disobeys her husband and the consequences are that she almost destroys the family. When told not to cook a certain type of pumpkin- (*riungu*) for the children, she goes ahead and does what she is told not to do. It may be argued that this is the rebellious voice of the woman attempting to assert herself. But the ending of the story emphasises the dominant ideology. She is reprimanded and told never to repeat that again. Her subversion is ultimately contained.

The message sent out through these tales is that those women who are proud of their beauty and refuse suitors, as in MT5 and MT16, could end up marrying ogres. The tale sends out the message that girls and women should perform their duties as instructed or else they bring calamities to society.

### **3.7 Incestuous Relationships**

Close examination of Maragoli folktales also reveals unacceptable conduct in matters of sex within the family. It is within this context that they speculate about incestuous relationships and provide a mirror through which the Maragoli position



on the issue of incest can be viewed. Although many of these messages are presented in a symbolic way, one tale that is quite explicit on this aspect is MT1, *Livogoi and Lusaga*. It is necessary to look at this tale in detail.

This tale is one of the most complex tales from Maragoli. It begins with a situation of absentation in Proppian schemata. There lived two children, a sister and a brother. They lived all alone because ogres had eaten every other person in this part of the world. One day the girl suggests that they get married. This is a significant move in the overall meaning of the tale. Note that it is the girl who suggests that they get married. This is reminiscent of the Adam and Eve story in the Garden of Eden. From the onset one gets the impression that it is the female gender that is imbued with the Eve spirit of temptation.

The boy, like Adam in the Bible, accepts the proposal and they marry. That night, presumably after consummating their marriage, their house catches fire and they perish in the inferno. This does not mark the end of the story, which should naturally end when the two receive the punishment of death after committing incest. Where they died there grew two plants. *Livogoyi*, a soft and sweet vegetable, grew where the girl died. *Lusaga*, a bitter and hairy vegetable grew where the boy died.

The sprouting of the two healthy vegetables, which are normally cooked together, signals a rebirth of the boy and girl. The scene shifts to a new location and presents a set of other circumstances within another family. It therefore becomes clear that another group of people lived elsewhere even before the children committed incest, believing that they were the only ones living on earth.

It so happens that there was a drought in this part of the world where an old man lived with his family in a large compound. This old man was polygamous. However, one of his wives was childless. This barren old woman wanders in the country looking for food and stumbles upon these two nice healthy vegetables

and plucks them. She takes them home and prepares them. Her co-wives are amazed at the green vegetables when the world was so dry. They even insinuate that it is abnormal to get such vegetables during the dry season. The woman prepares and cooks the vegetables. The vegetables prove too bitter to be eaten. She opts to put them in the granary so that she could try eating them later.

The barren woman spins a lie to the co-wives that she has eaten all the vegetables. This contravenes the sharing principle within a family. When this woman goes to check on the vegetables, she finds two little bones in the pot instead of the vegetables. She is puzzled and suspects that 'her ancestors have remembered her.' The next day she finds two little children in the pot. The third day she finds the two children having grown big. She is very happy. This new order changes her moods. She believes god has remembered her and given her children.

She takes them to her house and hides them and nourishes them until they grow big. The lack of a parent in their previous existence is replaced. The children now grow up under the guidance of a mother. A new set of circumstances destabilizes this balance. An ogre happens to see this girl while she is bathing behind the house and vows to marry her. He demands a girl from the home. Since no one knew that the barren woman had children, they parade all the girls within the home, but the ogre insists that the one he wants had not been produced. The ogre has powers to punish the community, so he withholds rain. What follows is suffering until this girl is found.

The discovery of the girl is a terrible setback for this barren old woman. However, the brother to the girl insists on going to witness the destruction of the sister by the ogre. The boy carries a spear with him and spears the ogre to death just before he destroys the sister. He comes back home with his sister and so sister, brother and mother move to another place where the boy puts up a house for the family and they live happily thereafter.

A first reading of this tale reveals a symbolic presentation of the right conduct between relatives. It also brings to light the effects of unmet needs. Psychologists have long asserted that in unstable families where children's needs are not met, they may meet those needs through unacceptable means. Children need a certain amount of physical affection from their parents. If children are distanced from their parents then there is unmet need for intimacy, and incest is a symptom of family dysfunction (Ascherman & Safier 1990). But the fact that the boy and girl indulge in an incestuous relationship in this moral tale calls for punishment. Punishment comes in the form of death through fire.

Fire as a purifying agent is well known throughout all cultures. It is within this context that people talk about baptism by fire. After the purification, they emerge healthy and strong. The healthy vegetables signify the fact that they are only symbolic of the boy and girl. But for these children to know the right conduct, they have to be socialised. The initial incest occurs, because they were all alone without parental guidance.

The introduction of the mother figure is a significant move since it presents a sub-text that provides a feminine perspective and glorifies the role of women. It is from this sub-text that the important role of a mother in the upbringing of children is underscored. The tale performer at this stage celebrates the role of women in socialising children. This move contests the patriarchal ideology of downplaying the role of women.

The introduction of the ogre in the tale is an equally significant cultural signal. The ogre demands a girl in order to restore rain. It is common in our communities to be told of girls who were sacrificed in order for the community to get rain (see Grace Ogot 1972). The boy, using a phallic symbol, a source of life, the spear, directs it to an external being and not his sister. The spearing of the ogre shows that he is ready to direct his libidinal energy to the outsider and not his sister.

From this perspective, the tale provides a means through which boys and girls are socialised to understand the limits in their relationships. The tale ends with the boy building a house for his mother where they live happily thereafter. In a sense, the boy is prepared now to live with his sister until an external suitor comes for her hand in marriage.

The absence of authority and the greater chances of concealment (out of mutual fear) enhance the eventual perpetuation of the incestuous sexual relationship. This specific type of incest, probably because of its indirect nature, appears frequently in the folklore of almost all ethnic groups. From generation to generation it was taken up purposefully in the myths, legends, folktales and customs in a disguised style. This was done to instill a general dread of incest. The Finnish tale *Kalevala* contains the tragedy of Kulervo who seduces his sister without being aware of their blood ties. At the moment of revelation, he is thunderstruck to immobility while she drowns herself in the lake. Afterwards, he also falls upon his sword and dies (Heights 1973:8)

The common resolution to the crisis in many tales involves the renunciation of the union. It may also involve punishment for the lecherous brother or sister (if the relationship resulted from the deviousness of one partner).

### **3.8 The Curse of Infertility (Barrenness)**

Upon marriage, women among the Maragoli are prized particularly, because of their ability to bear children and their status is dependent upon the satisfaction of this function. Motherhood is regarded with veneration. It is a well-acknowledged fact that motherhood is the highest goal of a traditional African woman. Motherhood is therefore widely seen as a woman's identity and without it her life has no meaning. To marry and mother a child, preferably a son, entitles a woman to respect from her husband's kinsmen as she is thence addressed as mother of so and so. It is this concern that makes the Maragoli to discuss this aspect in

their tales. MT 1 discusses the sad plight of a barren woman in society. It is said that the woman protagonist's countenance changes when she gets children. Other co-wives ask her why she has become so happy. Without children, she misses the pleasures of motherhood and the joy of socialising children until she receives these two children whom she socialises into responsible children. Though dominated in society, women through such tales underscore their importance in the perpetuation of society.

It is, however, noticeable that the woman attributes her good luck to the ancestors whom she thinks have visited her. This alludes to the belief in ancestors among the Maragoli. As noted in Chapter Two, there was what could be referred to as ancestor-worship among the Maragoli. It was through ancestors that one approached God. The ancestors were believed to have the ability to bring good or evil to a person, depending on the behaviour and conduct of the person.

The boy and girl are first kept in the granary. The granary is a symbol of fertility and plenty. Their preservation in the granary is a kind of prayer to the ancestors for plenty on the part of the barren woman.

### **3.9. Vulnerability and Hopelessness of Changing Status Quo**

A strong sub-text running through the tales under study is the sense of vulnerability and hopelessness of women and girls and their inability to change the *status quo*. In MT2 the two sisters, Karisanga and Karimonge, suffer at the hands of their mother until a suitor rescues and marries them. In MT3, women are so vulnerable that Anakanani kills and eats them.

In MT5 *Anakaguku and her Sister*, the girl who decided to marry a man without an anus has to be rescued from the ogres by a frog, which, in psychoanalytic thought, stands for male genitalia. For Muhonja in MT7, her vulnerability leads her to give vital information to the ogre that finally swallows her. It takes the

efforts of the brother to rescue her from the ogre's stomach. Girwanga in MT10 has to hide his children and wives and to employ several tactics to defeat the ogres who were bent on eating them.

Vulnerability and hopelessness is further demonstrated in MT17 in which Donyobe, the beautiful little girl, could only be rescued and brought back to life by a man who sympathised with the mourners. Her stepmother had killed her. The mourners were going to bury her when the benevolent man appears. MT18 and MT19 also reveal the hopelessness of women in changing the status quo. In MT19, Goat finds it very painful to see all her children being killed once they get to a certain age. She commits suicide in desperation, because she has nothing to do. In MT18, Hen has nothing to do after losing the Hawk's razorblade and so her children are snatched any time Hawk finds them. It is her carelessness that led to the loss of the razorblade. The vulnerability of the female is the image being sent to the psyches of the audience. This is one way through which patriarchy is sustained.

### **3.10 Voices of Transgression**

Although to a large extent the Maragoli folktales describe the lives of women and uphold the values of the dominant patriarchal culture which is biased against women, in a rhetorical self-flagellation some of the tales seem to appropriate the prevailing misogynist images of women. They tell about obedient good girls, evil stepmothers, jealous co-wives and daring bad girls using this powerful socialising engine to condition female children for their role as procreators. To ensure space of expression for themselves within this culture, they speak in the dominant ideological voice. However, below the overt embracing of traditional structures, dreams and images of transgressing the boundaries imposed on women persist in undermining the impeccable logic.

Although initial reading may show that the tales play to the gender laws in a patriarchal society, at another level, there is subversion of the status quo. On this

level signs of resistance and rupture are evident from the symbolic surface. Under psychoanalytic lenses, a 'semiotic discourse' appears to be at work in these tales, liberating the desires women usually repress to fit within the cultural norms.

Julia Kristeva (1980), who first developed this category of the semiotic language, defines it as a challenge to paternal discourse together with return to the proverbial identification with the mother figure. It appears that in some of these tales both the symbolic and the semiotic order collide and contradict each other in a profusion of metaphors, symbols and signifiers attesting to both the wealth of the folktale images and tensions in the female and male unconscious. From the twenty tales under study, three of them are chosen for theoretical introspections since they seem to grant the researcher with privileged access to the unconscious.

First let me critically examine MT 5. In this tale, Anakaguku's sister refuses all men but wants one without an anus. Her demand, in a world in which choice of a man to marry is the domain of people other than the woman herself, is in itself a rebellious act against society. The first reading of the story reveals a patriarchal tale. The heroine is a condensation of the desirable femininity in women that has been suppressed. She is physically beautiful, independent, courageous and daring. If these were not desirable, many men would not have sought her hand in marriage. While subverting the canons of femininity she triggers the lust of men around her. To make it worse she demands a man without an anus. This means that she rejects the cultural way of doing things.

A set of circumstances allows her to get the man she desires, thereby subverting the accepted standards. She gets married to a man who turns out to be an ogre. The tale thus becomes a succession of abortive trials to escape from the femininity that the community wants to confine her to. Her desire to escape patriarchy is expressed in her choice of qualities for a husband. She has power

to control, direct and make demands, yet as a woman she is expected to submit to society. Her journey to the ogre-husband's home is first an attempt at breaking the zones of operation for women. It appears that the home is far beyond the defined sphere of operation for women.

Her journey also signifies a subversion of the penetration principle. In the case of this tale, it is the woman who sojourns in foreign lands. This journey is a flight from patriarchy and all it entails. Her disabled sister desires to be like her, that is why she follows her and becomes her helper in her endeavour to escape from patriarchy. To escape from the ogres, the girls send ogres for water in quail baskets. Going for water from the well is a feminine duty as defined within patriarchal order. The girls subvert this rule by sending ogres (men) for water. This marks the beautiful girl's triumph over patriarchal ideology.

There ensues a fight in which the ogres are outdone partly as a result of a frog's help to the girls. Ernest Jones (1965) has observed that the frog is a phallic symbol connoting disgust. The frog is the unconscious and constant symbol of the male organ when viewed with disgust. The story thus depicts the girl's gradual overcoming of intimacy with this part of the body. The beautiful girl is thus above obsession with the male. There is an inversion of the primary symbolism, which presumes the girl embracing of traditional values in this secondary symbolism in which she rejects her status and desires a position of power.

The girl, thus, rises above being an object of male desire. It may appear that, although women are the ones who tell these stories, they indulge in a semiotic discourse but only within the confines of the symbolic order. Although it could be argued that the tales, to some extent, are discursive agencies deployed by culture to subject women to a patriarchal ideology, this deeper reading reveals ambivalence of the discourse of these women who supposedly speak against themselves. The discourse reveals what Foucault (1985) terms as the complex



and unstable process whereby discourse can be an instrument and effect of power but also a hindrance, a stumbling block. This marks a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing ideology. In this instance, women project a new ideology which views them positively.

Instances of voices of transgression also appear in most tales, albeit not as loudly as in the tale discussed above. In MT 14, patriarchy is undermined when the very potent masculine weapon of violence is appropriated to the female protagonist in the tale. The tale depicts a man who decides to become an ogre and informs his wife of his intention. This transformation turns him into an inhuman being. Eventually he kills and eats one of his sister's-in-law. His wife embarks on a revenge mission and manages to kill him. She then escapes to her home. Violence as a weapon of masculine hegemony is appropriated to the female thereby challenging the belief that only men have the monopoly of this weapon.

MT13 challenges the notion of women as weak by presenting the tale of Nunda the cat that grows too big and consumes everything on earth except one pregnant woman. The woman gives birth to a son. The son grows up into a strong inquisitive lad at the hands of a single mother. The very fact of bringing up this boy single handedly shows the female resilience and power to triumph against all odds. The boy acts under the direction of the mother to rescue all those who had been swallowed by the ogre. This is a subversive statement celebrating the important role of women in socialising children to become responsible members of society and re-populating a world hitherto destroyed by masculine hegemony.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

It appears that storytelling among the Maragoli is an art form through which a storyteller projects mental and emotional images about marriage to an audience using the spoken word, sign language and gestures while carefully matching

story content with audience needs and environment. The motifs reflect educational, recreational, historic and ideological leanings of the owners of the tales. The Maragoli folktale could also be considered an art form whose performance provides a means of preserving and transmitting images, ideas, motivations and emotions to the young. This is done for the purpose of making them grow up into responsible wives and husbands.

Folktale performance is therefore a sophisticated practice aimed at imparting the ideological proclivity of the society in the audience. It is an exercise in publicising, remembering and confirming the Maragoli culture, history and cosmic consciousness. In a sense, a performer is a mediator between a people and their literature. Just as tales have a structure, the narrations conform to rules governing the shape of the tales, which in turn depend on the cultural 'truths' defined by society.

In this sense, Norma Livo and Sandra Riezt (1986:9) are right when they observe that making and encoding the oral story during storytelling is the shared task of both audience and storyteller. The audience and the teller negotiate a story into being in a highly dynamic interactive process. The teller may know the specific story content that is not known to the audience, but all participants in the performance have a role to play in bringing a story to reality. They all hold in common a cluster of intentions and expectations, constraints and guidelines that direct the telling and help shape the story.

The narrative process of the Maragoli folktales is therefore an attempt at asserting Maragoli culture, but for the majority of the women tellers it is also an occasion to celebrate their femininity. In terms of marriage, the Maragoli folktale presents cultural archetypes for emulation by the young. It is a model or pattern for construction or recognition of societal truths. These archetypal patterns are, in Jungian definition, subconscious images, ideas or patterns of thought universally present in memory in all individuals within the culture. In essence, therefore, all

characters within the tales, their thematic content, common patterns of the tale structure, and even the 'story' itself are archetypal.

In the same vein, the narrative process of the Maragoli folktale constructs the cosmic consciousness of the Maragoli in regard to marriage. The perceived shape of the cosmos is reiterated in the pattern of the tale. The narrative pattern also confirms the cultural definition of order in marital relations. It satisfies the audience's expectations and is understood to be correct and sensible. Thus, to a large degree, the Maragoli tale's coherence is a function of narrative structure, which in turn is a reconstruction and subversion of the Maragoli ideological standpoint. The narrative process is thus an act through which the Maragoli people learn and confirm their understanding of the organisation of their lives in a family setup.

Eichenbaum & Orbach (1983:20) have argued that men are brought up to display their independence and separateness. But it is notable in this analysis that men are quite hesitant, even afraid to disclose that they feel emotionally dependent. They develop a defensive stance when they fear (unconsciously) a threat to their conception of self, the loss of something felt as important, or as a protection against a painful or unpleasant idea. Men, however, express their fears in unconscious images about themselves and their interaction with women. They also recognise the power of women through the same means. The Maragoli folktale therefore presents, in a symbolic way, men who, despite their patriarchal advantage, count on and depend up on women for emotional and physical well being.

It is obvious that all men are utterly dependent in infancy and the central authority figure and the nurturing persons are female. These dependency needs are brought to marriage. So hidden in the folktale narrative process are men's dependency needs. Every woman knows that men rely on them and that the idea that men are independent and women dependent is essentially a false one. A

girl, as observed, in the analysis above, grows up knowing that she is expected to marry a man whom she will nurture, care and emotionally support. She also knows that she will bring into the world children who will depend on her. She may initially appear dependent, incompetent and somewhat fragile. But behind this façade is someone who, whatever her inner state, will have to deal with the emotional problems of male members of her family. The woman knows that others will expect to rely and lean on her and that she will never really be able to depend on others or never feel content about her dependency.

The Maragoli thus endeavour to socialise their young ones through the narrative process so that they take up their future responsibilities as responsible husbands and wives. The narrator, while presenting patriarchal tales, transmits signals through archetypal characters that reveal the overwhelming responsibility of the female members of the society.

A common Maragoli saying states that: *walegella umukari yaregella enzogu* (he who has managed to keep a wife in control has managed to tame an elephant). This proverb points to the obvious recognition of the power of women in a home. It not only underscores the subversive tendencies of women as they contest patriarchy, but also stresses the fact that it is impossible for men to control a woman, because women wield immense power.

From the discussion in this chapter, it may be asserted that the Maragoli tales, in the process of perpetuating the patriarchal gender ideology that governs marital affairs that perceive women as inferior to men, also recognise and give voice to methods and strategies that women use to contest and subvert patriarchy. The tales thus establish a subtle alternative feminine perspective and centre of power. They, to some extent, reveal the sublime fear that men have of women. At the centre of patriarchal ideology is the fear of women's power and trickster-like ability to subvert dominance.

Although many tales among the Maragoli focus on the socialisation of both girls and boys towards marriage, it is, however, clear that the dominant ideology in this socialisation process is the idea of construing a woman as an inferior being. But being the main performers, women, while operating within defined safe paradigms, subvert the dominant gender ideology and project images that exalt and celebrate their self-image.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Gendered Sex Images, Roles and Socio-Cultural Expectations.**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

Psychoanalytic theory explains the development of masculine or feminine identity as the result of different kinds of relationships that typically exist between mothers and children of both sexes. According to Chodorow (1989:6), the key to understanding how family psychodynamics create gender lies in realising that we are all mothered by women and that women, rather than men, have primary parenting responsibilities.

Because the mother herself is gendered, she forms distinct relationships with sons and daughters. Consequently, male and female infants follow different development paths depending on the specific relationship they have with the mother (Wood 1994). Psychological theories of gender also highlight the role of communication in individual learning and cognitive development as the genesis of gender. Social learning theorists argue that individuals learn to be masculine and feminine (among other things) through communication and observation.

A large number of theorists believe gender is best understood through a cultural perspective. The way that mothers, fathers and other models for children behave, for instance, embody socially approved views of masculinity and femininity. Thus, interpersonal influences on gender are part of a broad system of cultural views and values. However, an important contribution to cultural theory of gender is the concept of role and specifically, how our society defines roles for women and men. According to Julia Wood (1994:49), a role is a set of expected behaviours and the values associated with them. Roles are assigned to individuals by society as a whole. There are masculine and feminine roles and statuses that are ascribed to individuals. The value of these roles is also defined by the same society.

This chapter focuses on the gender roles assigned to various human and non-human protagonists in the folktales under study. These will include, among others, human beings, physical features, animals and birds that appear in the Maragoli folktales and signify masculinity or femininity. It further attempts to unearth the underlying gender ideology in assigning these roles. Guiding the discussion in this chapter is the hypothesis that the roles assigned to each and every character have an underlying gender ideology. Under scrutiny are the various statuses, as viewed by society, of the roles assigned to each character and the impact of the images on the psyche of the audience.

#### **4.1 General Status of the Masculine and the Feminine**

From a general perspective it may be argued, from the outset, that the work and activities assigned to any particular sex define the respective positions in the overall hierarchical order of social status in the African context. In this sense, the roles women play are deemed inferior to men's. Rosaldo and Lamphere (1985) explain this phenomenon explicitly in their study *Women, Culture and Society*. They argue that most and probably all contemporary societies, whatever their kinship organisation or mode of subsistence, are characterised by some degree of male dominance. There is no society in which women have publicly recognised power and authority surpassing that of men. 'Everywhere we find that women are excluded from certain crucial economic or political activities, that their roles as wives and mothers are associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than are the roles of men' (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1985:3). Therefore it seems true to say that all contemporary societies are to some extent male dominated, and although the degree and expression of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human life.

It may be argued here that internalised images, collective memories and traditions are handed down from one generation to the next and are fundamental to the construction of peoples' worldview. The emphasis on women's maternal role has led to a universal opposition between 'the domestic' and 'public' roles

that is necessarily asymmetrical. Women, confined to the domestic sphere, do not have access to the sorts of authority, prestige, and cultural values that are the prerogatives of men. Given this imbalance, the avenues by which women gain prestige and a sense of value are shaped and often limited by their association with the domestic world (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1985:8).

As noted earlier, close scrutiny of the Maragoli tales under study shows that characters are not just men and women, boys and girls but a wide corpus of natural features, non-human characters, animals and birds, all of which represent relationships between men and women and signify a well-defined gender perspective. It is therefore possible to see that the Maragoli folktale is governed by a binary principle where objects, natural features, animals and birds stand for male or female and therefore strong/weak, superior/inferior or good/evil. It is through the study of these features, which could be designated as signs, that the general status and role of both men and women is evaluated. The fundamental principle in this analysis is that since the text is a signifier, there must be a knowable underlying system giving rise to meaning. On this model, the texts are analysed in terms of shared features in an attempt to describe the rules, which generate these texts (Easthope & MacGowen 1992).

Every sign is considered gendered. The study therefore engages these tales along the three lines outlined by Easthope and McGowan (1992) from which the gender debate has been betrothed within the domain of critical and cultural theory. Gender can be understood in terms of social roles of women and men; as determined by body female and body male; or in terms of the attributes of feminine and masculine. It can be theorised in terms of its constitution of people on the grounds of biology, the psyche, and the cultural constitution of the body (Easthope & McGowan 1992:132).

On the overt level, the Maragoli folktales generally present the status and role of feminine creatures and all those elements that stand for the gender as inferior.



This is expressed in the work and roles the feminine are assigned. Whereas women are left to take charge of the domestic front with their lives revolving around the hearth, men deal with external matters. The Maragoli community, being patriarchal, stipulates a clear division of labour between the sexes. Indeed, survival in this peasant culture of scarcity requires gender partnership based on shared toil.

Although the assigned roles fit within a defined gender framework, which give the male a distinct elevated role, voices of contest and disapproval can be heard. These voices are expressed in the sub-texts and legitimately gain entry into socially accepted norms in the art of the folktale telling tradition. This is what Helen Mugambi (1999:20) refers to when she points out that there is a complexity of conceptualising the subtle interplay between perceptions or images of the power or powerlessness, of the feminine and the associated visibility or invisibility ascribed to her in social, mythical, and political representations. These images of power and powerlessness are sometimes visible through examination of the precarious and simultaneous paradoxical moments in the woman's experience and in the manner in which her story is constructed in various texts.

The tasks carried out by women and those objects and beings, both inanimate and animate that symbolise femininity complement the masculine but in a subordinate role. This state of affairs, as stated in the third chapter, is readily obtained through marital arrangement. It is no wonder that there is a sense of marital harmony in relation to types of work that both sexes need to engage in. It is upon the need for survival that the necessity of the institution of marriage is founded. However, cultural notions of femininity obtained in images of the female body are also key metaphors for the expression of cultural ideologies of power. More specifically, power itself is often conceived of as gendered.

In all the twenty tales studied, it is observable that each gender contributes its labour in daily life. Girls fetch firewood and water while boys go hunting or

herding; men join others in beer drinking while women are left in charge of the home. This interdependent relationship does not necessarily generate a harmonious, equal share of burdens in the Maragoli peasant household. The balance of power, as it shall be seen in due course, is tilted towards the masculine gender that enjoys greater freedom of choice and power than the feminine. It is this state of affairs that necessitates resistance and contest on the part of the dominated gender.

The masculine gender does what is perceived to be 'manly jobs' while the feminine gender does the 'womanly jobs.' It is, for instance, a masculine role to go hunting while it is feminine to plant 'female crops,' fetch water from the well and collect firewood from the bushes around the home. Among the most common requirements that a girl had to meet before she was selected as a bride among the Maragoli was the ability to grind grain. While men were not expected to engage in female occupations, women were equally not expected to indulge in manly work. It was for instance taboo for males to be found in the kitchen or to sweep the house while it was also taboo for females to dig a grave or sit on a man's chair (Luvai 1986:45). This gendered division of labour and space as exposed in the tales entrenched each gender in its domain and enhanced the power and authority of each.

As the gender roles of the sexes as depicted in the Maragoli folktales are examined, it is essential from the outset to underscore the fact that the marriage partnership between women and men is not based so much on emotional bonds, ideals of equality and commitment in the modern sense, or shared labour and toil, but on the need to fulfil societal obligation. Labour division is primarily based on a clearly gendered relationship for what is presumed, in a patriarchal sense, the best way of living. These attitudes and beliefs are expressed through the choice of language. When a Maragoli woman gets married, it is said 'she has gone to cook.' This expression defines her domain, the domestic domain.

A close look at the Maragoli folktales has so far not yielded any evidence of an unmarried mature woman. Mature women are always depicted in marital statuses. The folktales thus uphold the ideal situation as envisaged by the patriarchal structure of the Maragoli people. The tales discuss the female as she relates to her role as a wife or a girl in the process of becoming a wife. It is no wonder that a number of the tales depict parental matchmaking, as a role especially designated for mothers as an ideal practice. Thus, from the outset, a woman is socialised to take up her designated role in marriage. As Felman Shoshana (1975) observes, the woman has to accept the behavioural norms of her sex.

It is apparent that the perceived natural limitation in the feminine is the controlling ideology in assigning duties to both men and women. The general perception is that women are born weak, and therefore vulnerable. This patriarchal ideology, as Masinjila Masheti (1994:10) notes, 'operates on the premise that men are biologically superior to women who are weak and have to depend on men for survival.' This controlling perception underlies the confinement to the domestic sphere and the assignment of roles deemed feminine. This is part and parcel of the culture, which finds expression in the Maragoli folk literature. As early as 1966, Mellville and Francis Herskovits (1966) had celebrated this relationship between culture and literature:

The relation between a literature and the culture of which it is a part is reciprocal, and the artist is the medium through which these influences flow. The world of the story-teller is largely defined by his culture and in composing his tales, whatever its form or length, he draws on the world he knows, whether as reality or fantasy (or one in which tradition has fused both) for setting, plot, characterisation and the sanctions that give these meanings. Yet by this very act, he reinforces the existing body of customs, bringing to it the validating force of emotional response (1966:70)

From this general perception of gender roles and duties evident in the overall corpus of Maragoli folktales under study, it is now prudent to proceed with a close and systematic analysis of the roles and signifying images of various feminine and masculine characters depicted in the tales and what they imply in

the total structure of power relations. Close attention is given to the image patterns, which provide a frame for the exercise of fantasy within the limits set by cultural imperatives.

#### **4.2 The Ogre: Symbol of Masculine Hegemony**

Mention of the ogre in Maragoli folktale evokes a sense of shock, awe and fear among the audience. The ogre is known for being inhuman, cannibalistic and evil. To some extent, it may be said that the ogre is actually an embodiment of evil. His ultimate role is to commit a villainous act. It is therefore imperative to ask: How is it that the Maragoli tales are saturated with these grotesque creatures, which sometimes exhibit human or animal characteristics? What do they signify? I would like to argue that the ogre-centred tales among the Maragoli explore moral ambiguities of social life and examine the themes of bravery and cowardice, loyalty and deceit, generosity and greed, kinship and individual male ambitions.

In all the relationships in which the ogre appears, the element of evil creates disharmony and hence its symbolic significance as the villain who is always ready to commit evil. Within the frame of the tale, the ogre is sometimes cast as a powerful man. Viewed through a gender-sensitive lens, the ogres seem to represent strong, violent and destructive males. They are devoid of human compassion whereas the females whom they devour seem to symbolise the wise and the oppressed. The ogre tale thus contrasts weakness with power, gentleness and courtesy with brutality. In so doing, the mainly female performers subvert the patriarchal ideology. It is therefore possible from the outset to read voices of transgression on the part of the performers who contrast women with men and evil with good through performance of these tales. Inge Brinkman (1996) recognises these voices when she asserts that the choice of textual strategy is influenced by the gender of the particular author, and hence implies a gendering of the literary imagination. This is achieved through the foregrounding

of perspectives of female characters and emphasis on moral dilemmas inherent in normative ambiguities.

Out of the twenty tales under study in this work, seven of them focus on the interaction of ogres with one another or with human beings. In MT 1 for example, the ogre withholds rain until his demand of being given a bride is met. The ogre demands the bride in order to destroy her. In MT 5, the girl who demands a husband without an anus gets an ogre that transforms itself into a human being and marries her. This girl and her sister Anakaguku escape from the ogre just before they are devoured. The dramatic escape is facilitated through magical help from various donors. In MT 7, an ogre swallows Muhonja after tricking her. She is rescued by her brother who slays the ogre and saves her together with all the other people who had been swallowed by the ogre.

MT 10 is the story of a lazy man called Girwang'a and his fight against ogres. Girwang'a is cast as a trickster who kills a number of the ogres, but some manage to escape leaving their large fortune to him. MT11 presents the story of an ogre who captures a girl and turns her into his maid pending a ceremony in which she would be cannibalised by the ogres. The girl escapes just before the big ceremony in which she would be part of the menu. The ogres are so bitter to have lost her that they vent their anger on their host, whom they cannibalise. In MT 13, Nunda, the ogre eats all creatures on earth except a small boy and his mother who miraculously escape from it. The boy grows up to fight Nunda and rescue all the people and creatures that he had swallowed.

A man who decides to become an ogre is the protagonist of MT14. He then kills his sister-in-law, but his own wife in turn kills him and escapes to her home. She is, however, helped to escape by birds, magic and her own people. MT15 discusses the fate of an irresponsible girl who is punished by an ogre after failing to follow the instructions given to her, while MT 20 depicts the relationship

between an ogre and his daughters. One of the daughters proves deceitful and she is punished through death.

From the above outline of the ramifications and actions of the ogre, it is notable that the ogre is presented with varied attributes. Like normal human beings, some ogres marry and raise children as observed in MT 20. This is an indicator that ogres are symbolic creatures representing men. Some ogres have magical powers and are capable of withholding rain until their demands are met. To be able to withhold rain is an attribute, which the Maragoli ascribe to a special clan from their Abanyore neighbours, the Avasiekwe. The Vasiekwe men are held in awe for it is believed that they have powers to bring rain or withhold it. The fact that this attribute is given to the ogres is a further indication that ogres signify powerful masculine beings.

One particular aspect about ogres in the Maragoli folktales is that they target small girls whom they cannibalise, but boys slay them. The boys fight the ogres, defeat, kill and rescue those swallowed by the ogres. But the ogres are also capable of going through various transformations. They can turn themselves into human beings at will and change their voices in order to trick their victims.

On the whole, the ultimate aim of the ogres is to execute a fatal crime. This is especially possible because of the foolishness, innocence and inexperience of girls who do not follow the instructions given. The eating of the girls basically confirms that the ogres are cannibalistic. But since 'eating' is a euphemism for sex in Maragoli language, this also implies that the ogres commit rape. They are also cast as greedy since they destroy everything in sight once they have their way. Due to the fact that men sometimes transform themselves into ogres in some tales, it may be argued that ogres represent masculine hegemony.

Ogres cast a dark shadow on the movement of female characters and they limit their sphere of operation to the domestic domain. This view is further supported

by the fact that the ogres can only fought and killed by the male characters. The tales' ideological position is that women's quest for security can only be fulfilled by men hence their dependence on the male for security. The presence of the ogre in the Maragoli folktale is therefore a symbolic warning to the girls and women folk to confine themselves to their defined spheres of operation. Through performance of these tales, the female performer, in a subtle way, presents a critique of the masculine oppression by depicting the unfair restrictions imposed on the feminine.

Since the men are cast as the only beings capable of combating the excesses of ogres, it appears that the ideological position is to compel women to accept patriarchal authority and power. This is precisely why ogres easily manipulate female characters in the tales. As symbolic masculine figures, ogres are presented as being larger than life creatures, exceedingly greedy, crafty, wily, patient but sometimes gullible.

The Maragoli folktales use ogres instead of human male beings to create social distance for contemplating acts and ideas that otherwise might appear as intolerably disturbing; for instance matricide, fratricide, theft and cannibalism. The tales thus appropriate some of the evils attributed to men to the ogres. Thus, this technique of theriomorphism establishes distance from the real social world so that the drama may be played out reflectively. The driving vitality of men, striving to achieve their pleasures and ends in the face of social and cultural confines, seems to be the overriding motif of the ogre-centred tales. Yet even as they perform these patriarchal tales, the performers also show instances where women out-manoeuvre the ogres, as is the case in MT14. This is, however, accomplished through external help. Through these moves, the mainly women performers pass a warning to the males in society that they can be outmatched.

### 4.3 The Trickster as a Masculine Figure of Wisdom and His Dupe

The trickster is a common figure in oral literature throughout Africa. In the West Indies, he is called Anansi. In his phenomenal study of the Azande Trickster, Evans Pritchard (1967) notes, that asked if Ture is an animal or man, the Azande would say he is an animal, but in the telling of the tales, in the situation of the drama, they are both. They are animals acting as persons, and persons in animal forms. He writes:

Ture is a monster of depravity, liar, cheat, lecher, murderer, vain, greedy, treacherous, ungrateful, a poltroon, and a braggart. This utterly selfish person is everything against which Azande warn their children most strongly. Yet he is the Hero of their stories, and it is to their children that his exploits are related and he is presented, with very little moralizing, if as a rogue, as an engaging one. For there is another side to his character, which even to us is appealing, his whimsical fooling, recklessness, impetuosity, puckish irresponsibility, his childish desire to show how clever he is, his flouting of every convention...what Ture does is the opposite of all that is moral ( Pritchard 1967:28).

Pritchard goes on to suggest that Ture's behaviour represents the subconscious desires of the society, which created him, and is the personification of their released inhibitions. Venetia Newal (1984) agrees with Pritchard and observes that the subject of the trickster stories is adaptable. In some stories collected, he referees football matches (Venetia Newal 1984:50). It is therefore possible to conclude that the trickster is a universal symbolic character.

What is also true in relation to the Maragoli folktales is that they are built on a symbolic system signifying gendered and structured relationship. One of the most fascinating and profound symbolic characters in the corpus under study is the trickster. In this collection there are two trickster tales namely MT3 *Anakamuna and Anakanani* and MT10 *Girwang'a and the Ogres*. In the former tale, the trickster is paired with Anakanani the dupe while in the later tale *Girwang'a* the trickster is paired with Ogres who play the dupes.



In MT3, Anakamuna, the trickster, cheats the friend to go and cannibalise the mother while he hides and protects the mother. After killing his mother, Anakanani realises that his friend did not do the same to his mother. He then plots and kills Anakamuna's mother. This triggers a revenge action, which leads to Anakanani's death at the hands of Anakamuna the trickster.

In MT10, Girwang'a is a slothful, polygamous man who survives by stealing from the ogres. The ogres capture him, but he employs tricks to kill some of them and force others to flee leaving their property for him. He then takes over the ogres' farms and lives happily thereafter with his wives and children.

It is noticeable, on the surface, that the trickster in the Maragoli tales is consistently male. Here, the trickster is cast as being combative and rebellious. These are, in patriarchal perspective, definitely male characteristics. It would, however, appear that the trickster tales operate on multiple levels of signification. On one level it could stand for any marginalized male in a world of hierarchy, size and weight. All those he is paired with are big and overwhelming in influence and size. He is smaller than the characters that he finally outsmarts. At this level the trickster tale mirrors the desires of the low class. No wonder the trickster tale depicts tricksters as witty, brave and whimsical capable of out manoeuvring the great and the physically and materially well endowed.

It could also be argued here that the trickster's rebellious and metamorphic spirit is socially motivated. There is always a need for either the male or female underdog to challenge, confront and even attempt to subvert a system, be it natural or social, that does not recognise him or her. It is here that the female figure, as the underdog in a patriarchal system fits in. But the overbearing characteristics of the trickster as an intellectual are thought to be a characteristic of males. Once again this becomes a site from which the mainly female performers subvert a popular belief for they see themselves as the intellectuals that the society has refused to recognise. Thus, underlying the trickster tale is a

sub-text that remains secretive. On the symbolic plane therefore the triumph of the trickster over other animals that are physically endowed serves a double signification since trickery is a logical reaction to a hierarchical social order by any character that appears as an underdog.

The trickster is therefore a fundamental part of the Maragoli cultural self-understanding. Through these tales the Maragoli symbolically make social reality problematic by simulating areas of gender tension in events of social relations enacted by fictive characters. The Maragoli trickster is therefore a hermeneut or a source of discourse or critique of cultural life. The trickster is seen in combat with forces that appear superior to him in physical size and social consequence. The trickster tale is therefore a means of presenting social conflict in which both the Maragoli men and women see themselves as underdogs. By depicting male vulnerability, it is possible to see the tales as psychological projections of the inferiority of the males to females. On another level, the triumph of the trickster is therefore the triumph of the female that appears as an underdog.

The fact that it is mainly the women who perform these tales lends credence to my thesis and provides a perspective through which women can be visualized as they create sub-texts that subvert the patriarchal ideology. On one level, the tales depict both male supremacy and vulnerability. These female performers constantly depict the trickster as rebel, metamorph and transformer, avenger, a whimsical character, lazy, cunning and tricky, which is consistent with the frame of the trickster as a power-seeking but disempowered member of the society. In so doing, they make the tales communicate on another subversive level by popularising the trickster tale discourse to reveal men's vulnerability and women's hidden desires. It is therefore not far-fetched to say that this portrayal is a way of commenting on male personality on the part of the mainly women performers. The performers state, in their telling of these tales, that they understand the hidden male egocentric weaknesses and fears.

The Maragoli trickster as noted earlier, is small in body, lazy and deceitful yet he is also portrayed as the champion of the powerless group, women. This ironic presentation of this character by women who know that they carry a heavy burden in this society seems to be a subconscious cleansing process, a subversion of patriarchy. The rule of juxtaposition imbedded within the tale as the trickster and dupe struggle draws attention to the covert desire of the underdogs for self-assertion and emancipation. As the trickster is always paired with the dupe, so do women, as tricksters, pair themselves with the men in a psychological display of anti-social traits.

This symbolic contrast is further heightened when the character traits of the two protagonists in the trickster tales are considered. Incidentally, hyenas and the tricksters have similar traits. Both are clever and tricky though the trickster's cunning works, because he combines this with some wisdom, whereas the Hyena does not since he is very short-sighted and greedy. The Hyena's cleverness ultimately amounts to stupidity. The Maragoli have very strong notions about the hyenas based on moral attributes, which they metaphorically associate with certain behaviour. Hyenas have strong jaws, which they use to devour dead and badly decomposed meat, a disgusting diet. Their appetite knows no bounds. They are so stupid that they would even prefer bones to meat. In addition, they have a clumsy, dirty and negative image besides talking in a grotesque voice. Their actions go against civility to say the least. Their laughter punctuates the dark night, which is associated with evil, wizards and all that the Maragoli fear.

Hyenas, like ogres, are referred to with the prefix *Gu-* that implies largeness, for instance, *Guviti* or *Gunani*. But the Hare is referred to with the prefix *Aka-* meaning small. The prefix *Aka-* is diminutive, signifying affectionate regard. In the same breath, the trickster is thought to be the cleverest animal. His nimble thinking and guile matches his agility and speed. He is smooth-talking, a trait associated with wisdom. It is the trickster's physical and mental dexterity that

allows him to reach his goals. The very traits that make the trickster adept also make him moral while the ones that make the dupe clumsy make him selfishly bad and ultimately ineffectual (Beidelman 1983).

Clear contrast is drawn between trickster and dupe. The dupe is foolish, gullible, tactless, irresponsible, murderous and anti-social while the trickster is the direct opposite of all that. In MT 3, for instance, the performer ascribes all the positive characteristics to the Anakamuna trickster. Although the trickster is, at the surface level, perceived as a male member of the society, the female performers subvert this reality and see themselves as the tricksters. This is because their existence and survival in a patriarchal society depends mostly on trickery. They embody the same traits like those of the trickster. This is why it is possible to see the trickster texts as operating on two levels. They address men on the surface level but embody a symbolic sub-text that speaks a different language to women as the underdogs of society.

#### **4.4 The Role and Place of Girls and Wives**

A close scrutiny of the Maragoli folktale reveals that the image of the woman is in line with the roles assigned to her. The roles assigned to her affirm her place in the hierarchical arrangement of society. One basic element that defines the female gender is its vulnerability and susceptibility in a world governed by the principles, which call for physical combat for survival. A woman, as noted earlier, is also defined by her role as a wife.

The Maragoli folktales talk about girls, that is, young girls preparing to get married and become wives and those who are already wives. There is no category of women because the feminine, in Maragoli estimation, can only be defined in relation to her designated role, with attachment to children or a husband, father or mother. Thus, a woman is worthy only if she realises her potential to play the role of wife, and by extension, mother. The other category of women that is present in the Maragoli folktale is the group of old women who

have played the role of mothers and wives and now play the role of grandmothers.

It is from this premise that the images and role of girls and wives as depicted in Maragoli folktales are discussed. By and large, the Maragoli folktales are centred on the role that wives and husbands play in society. As noted in the previous section, even when characters like the hare as trickster and ogres are used, they symbolise human beings. It is, however, notable that a good number of the tales focus directly on wives and girls.

One image that defines a wife or a girl in the Maragoli folktale and influences the roles assigned to her is her susceptibility. Most of the stories in this study depict wives and girls as standing in a very precarious position of being devoured by ogres or destroyed by forces they have no power to fight and conquer. In MT 7 Muhonja is confined to the home and house by the brother, because ogres could eat her. It so happens that the ogre tricks her and eats her. It once again takes the efforts of the brother to rescue her from the ogre's stomach. In MT1 the ogre demands a girl in order to give rain to the society in return. Once again, it takes the girl's brother to rescue her and kill the ogre. In MT10 Girwang'a hides his wives and children in a cave and remains outside it to do battle with ogres until he defeats them. It therefore appears that within the Maragoli folktale world, wives, girls and small children occupy the same ideological slot due to their vulnerability. Men, as Misimang (1990:121) observes, believe that this is a man's world and that women are subordinate to the divinely-ordained authority of men.

In the absence of a lad or a husband then wives and girls would be destroyed. The ideological underpinnings, which are being passed on to the female consumer of these tales in the narrative process, are that wives and girls are dependent on boys and men generally. This then becomes the ideology perpetuated. It is this ideological position that reinforces the confinement to the domestic domain of women and girls. It is therefore possible to read the source

of women's observable fear to undertake certain tasks as a product of this process of socialisation. The fear is compounded and reinforced further by taboos to restrict her even more to the domestic domain. The girl or woman who defies these restrictions is considered mad. Ideally, therefore, the character that rebels is the 'other'. And these female characters are many in Maragoli folktales for instance those who set their own standards for a suitable suitor like the case of MT 5. Through such characters, the performer introduces the female perspective and shows how women contest the fact that they are defined within a limited sphere.

Other tales within the corpus under study depict women as being stubborn, rebellious and wayward. They are unable to take advice and follow instructions. Such women end up bringing calamity to their families. In MT 9, *Kalasiimba and His Wife*, Kalasiimba gives specific instructions on what his wife should cook for his children. He allows his wife to cook any of the pumpkins in the home except one, but the wife does the opposite by cooking the very pumpkin she was prohibited from cooking. Although confined within the domestic domain, she still cannot follow instructions. The patriarchal logic of this story is that constant guidance for wives is critical for the well being of the family. Vigilance is needed on the part of the man for the sake of marital harmony. Yet underlying this surface meaning is another sub-text that presents, to the female audience, a totally different meaning. In defying the order, as is the case in MT9, the female character articulates another paradigm. She asserts her right as the home keeper and controller of the domestic domain.

A number of the tales under study depict women in various roles and responsibilities. However, in all these positions, the girls and wives exhibit unimaginable jealousy towards one another. This jealousy is at times triggered by the envy of the physical beauty of some of the girls. In MT 6, the girls turn one of their friends into a dog. This girl happens to be the most beautiful. This is done so that she does not get a man to marry her. In MT 8, girls who go to fetch

firewood cheat one of them to enter a deer's hole and they block the path leading out of it. This action is partly done for sheer amusement. This results in the suffering and near death of the girl who is ultimately rescued by her brother. The rescue is made possible through the prompting of the family bull. While grazing near the hole, the bull bellows and the girl hears it. She immediately starts singing as the bull continues to bellow. The brother who is herding the cows comes closer to the bull and discovers the sister. The bull is yet another signifier of male benevolence. Here again one notices the patriarchal ideology that attributes all positive elements to masculine props.

In MT11, the girls who go to harvest fruit cheat one of them to harvest the fruit with her eyes closed. She does this and ends up harvesting raw fruit. The next episode moves the tale to a higher plane where the girl goes back to harvest ripe fruit, but she is tricked by an ogre who directs her to his home. With a combination of cleverness and external support from a donor, the girl escapes being destroyed by the ogres. This act of cheating reveals the selfishness and unreasonable nature of girls. This is the dominant perception of what girls are capable of in a patriarchal society. The girls are cast as being devoid of intellectual capability and lack a sense of self-reflection.

In MT17, a stepmother displays crude and unreasonable jealousy towards the step-daughter and finally kills her. As a stepmother, she is to say the least grumpy, irresponsible, murderous and callous. It takes a benevolent man to resuscitate her to life. In MT2, a stepmother commits a cruel villainous act to the step-daughter. She puts her in a drum and throws it into a lake as already described. She is, however, simply motivated by envy, because her step-daughter is more beautiful than her own daughter. It once again takes a boyfriend to rescue the step-sister from the evil step-mother.

The overt picture obtained of the girls and wives as they play their designated roles is that they are so jealous of one another that they cannot live without the

regulating influence of the men and boys. It appears that there is an underlying drive to deceive and to be dishonest within the feminine being. Wives and girls deceive, either because they are envious of the beauty of others or for puerile amusement.

The ramifications of these attributes of wives and girls are many and varied, ranging from the truly absurd to bizarre. Some of their actions and deeds show that they are extremely cold-hearted, careless and untrustworthy. They display a high degree of emotional stupidity. It would appear that the tales are an indoctrinating agent to make the female recipient believe that she cannot measure up to the masculine virtues. This should be seen as the root of lack of confidence in women, especially in taking up certain public roles.

Women narrators perform tales about women that undermine the independent and responsible development of the feminine character. Take for instance MT 7, Muhonja is instructed not to open the door until the brother comes home. She ends up opening the door after she has given away an important secret to the ogre. In MT 18, Hen borrows a razorblade from Hawk but she is not careful enough so she ends up losing it. She brings a curse to her kind since the Hawk has to keep taking away Hen's young ones. This story mirrors the common perception about women in mythology generally. There are many African proverbs that view the woman as a source of evil. Writing about African proverbs, Schipper Mineke (1991) argues that a number of traits are attributed to women in proverbs across cultures. The only category of women favourably portrayed in proverbs is that of mother, unique, loving, reliable, hardworking and therefore a wife should be like one's mother. Nevertheless, the mother often seems to prefer sons to daughters. As far as other women are concerned, they are more unfaithful than virtuous and men are warned again and again not to fall for their charms and evil intention (Schipper Mineke 1991:4). This particular perception is also found in holy books, such as the Bible. In the book of *Genesis*, Eve is presented as having brought a curse to humankind.



The analysis of these tales in order to unearth the roles and images of wives and girls reveals that the Maragoli believe that there is an inborn trait in the female gender that makes them disobedient, callous, jealous, deceitful and stupid. This raises the need to make sure that they remain in check, hence the necessity for masculine dominance over women. Any action on the part of the women to undermine the power of the male is countered with images of plunder, death and darkness. Wives are portrayed as being in need constant guidance and protection coupled with a constant process of discipline and rebuke. This legitimatises the establishment of an iron rule for the sake of marital harmony. In essence, this ideology justifies patriarchal hegemony and makes it hard for women to hold custody of critical resources in society.

The logic underlying the role and attributes assigned to women reinforces the belief that women are naturally doomed to occupy a low status. This perspective is not confined to the Maragoli community. In her study of the rural Greek Society, Juliet du Boulay (1986: 139-40) notes that the first picture of women is that they are essentially weak and thus in all respects subordinate and inferior to men. This produces a parallel opposition classification of inferior/superior, impure/pure, closer to the devil/closer to God, stupid/intelligent, credulous/strong-minded fearful/cool-headed, brave/cowardly, unreliable/reliable, weak/strong irresponsible/responsible. This classification is based on a system of complementary opposition and the relationship it generates is centred on the figures of Adam and Eve and on the understanding of male strength and female weakness.

There is, however, a sense in which one reads an element of ambivalence in this classification, which is also true of the Maragoli folktale. The Maragoli describe the woman as '*Wenyumba*', 'of the house.' This definition gives rise to the saying '*Umukari ni nyumba*', 'A woman is the house.' This means that it is the woman that holds the family together. The idea of the woman being vital to the well-being

of the household seems, at first, to be somewhat at variance with the idea of woman as destroyer. The paradox is heightened when it is remembered that the house is the key symbol of the Maragoli family. It becomes apparent that, in the context of the house, women are given attributes and qualities that conflict sharply with those attributed to them as inferior beings. This contradiction can be explained through the realisation that there exists a sub-text by means of which the women attempt to subvert the accepted order and voice their concerns and independence while castigating patriarchy at the surface level. The sub-texts in this context mean simply a body of well-crafted opinion held by women within society and which, in some degree, contradicts values ostensibly held by society as a whole. The portrayal of the rebellious, defiant and independent girls and women in the tales is, therefore, the voice that contests patriarchy embedded within the sub-text.

It is clear that the Maragoli folktale assigns wives the role of tenderers, but the policy direction on marital issues remains the domain of the men. The men also determine women's social status. The society thus creates the ideology that presents the norms and the role patterns which make inequality look natural and unchangeable. Women's low status becomes the result of inscriptions to which tales contribute by presenting images that justify this role. Nevertheless, the hidden voices of contest remind us of the female perspective.

Interestingly, however, women are the main performers yet they bring up their children presenting these images to them supposedly oblivious of the effect of the underlying ideological underpinnings. But a critical look reveals that elements of subversion are foregrounded and they persist, undermining the dominant ideology. It may be argued that having listened and told these stories to children themselves they end up internalising this ideology, which they now perceive as the true progressive ideology. But as active agents, women challenge some aspects of patriarchy in silent trickery through voices of transgression.

Patriarchy is therefore an ideology legitimatised, but also subverted by centuries of tradition. Snippets of women's subversive tendencies can be read in their participation in politics of modern times. Lisa Gilman (2001:59), in a paper entitled "*Purchasing Praise: Women Dancing and Patronage in Malawi Party Politics*", shows how women subvert the notion that they are stupid as politicians use them to spice up their campaigns through dance and song. Women take advantage of this perception to exploit political parties that offer money. Some women who dance at functions held by political parties are not supporters of the party. They pretend that they are members of a party, especially the ruling party by regularly attending meetings, wearing party clothes, and dancing in order to receive material benefits. Come voting day, however, they cast their vote secretly voting for a different party. Essentially this is an act of resistance and rebellion (Lisa Gilman 2001:59).

Folktales are part and parcel of the vehicle of ideological indoctrination. The overriding ideology aims at upholding the status quo. The dominant ideological position is to show wives and girls as a source of stress. Men are, therefore, under an obligation to dominate them in order to combat this oppression. But as Chuck Kleinhans (1994:4) observes, while it might be argued that the situation of powerlessness is not ironic to those who suffer it, it is necessary to recognise that one of the ways that the oppressed have dealt with their situation is by themselves being ironic about it, by making jokes about it, in a protective and tendentious way. This, it seems, is what Maragoli women do through the subversion of the narrative process of the folktales.

Having looked at the roles and images of wives and girls, it is now important to turn to the images of boys and men vis-a-vis their sex roles in the Maragoli community.

#### **4.5 The Nature and Role of Boys and Men**

As noted in Chapter Two, Maragoli traditional religion revolves around pursuit of fertility. A man has to win God's favour in order to prosper. What emerges, however, is the superiority of men and the boy child. A family with only female children can never be happy. This is partly because the prime means of production, land, is only owned or inherited by a male member of the family. The conflict that this ideology engenders has been a subject of many literary works. It is the subject of Francis Imbuga's play *Aminata* (1987) that is set in the fictional Membe Society, which bears a striking resemblance to the Maragoli community in which these patriarchal values are discussed. The playwright presents us with a well-educated lawyer, Aminata, and her husband, a medical doctor, who are caught up between forces of western culture and traditional religious beliefs. A central and contentious issue in the play is whether women should inherit ancestral land.

As is the case in this play, a male child is presumed brave and grows up being socialised to take over leadership of the family in the event of the foremost male member dying. The Maragoli folktales, as one of the primary means of socialising children, abound with images of male heroes for emulation. The tales hold up a mirror reflecting a male picture for other males of society to measure themselves. As noted in the previous section, girls and women are generally depicted as open to danger and dependent on the male members of the society for survival. The boys and men are therefore presented in a completely different light. They are the heroes; they are daring fortune-hunters who bring wealth to their families in addition to rescuing female members of the families from danger. It is within this ideological context that the role and position of men and boys as heroes should be perceived.

It is a characteristic of the Maragoli folktale hero to be responsible. He is seen taking the role of caretaker and protector of family members seriously. He assumes the role of saviour. In MT 1, the boy hero rescues the sister from an

ogre that wanted to destroy her. In MT 2, the boy hero comes to the rescue of two sisters suffering at the hands of a mother. In MT3, Anakamuna shields his mother from harm until Anakanani kills her in a well-plotted scheme. Nevertheless, Anakamuna finds a way of avenging the killing his mother. In MT4, the boy hero realises that the sister has mistreated the family bird that produced *vudugi* and goes out to look for it in order to bring it back into the family. He comes back home with wealth after a protracted adventure. In MT 7, Muhonja's brother goes out to hunt for the ogre that had swallowed the sister. He kills it and rescues his sister and other people from its stomach. Kalasimba, in MT 9, saves his family by resuscitating his children who had died due to his wife's carelessness and hard-headedness. In MT 13, the hero is a small boy who grows up to take the responsibility of rescuing the father and the rest of the people who had been swallowed by the ogre called Nunda. Finally, in MT 16 it takes a benevolent man to bring Donyobe a small baby girl, who had been killed by an evil stepmother, back to life.

The male characters are not only cast as breadwinners, but also as protectors of women. Girwang'a in MT10 hides his children in the safety of a cave as he battles the ogres. Despite being lethargic, Girwang'a protects his family dedicatedly. Men and boys are therefore presented as the controllers of the destiny of society and capable of changing the course of history. The portrayal of the heroes is both awesome and prestigious and is a dominant feature of the Maragoli folktale. All the other characters are defined in reference to them. These characters may either be the heroes, adversaries or their helpers. It is obvious that the interest of the boy centred tales is to show the heroic deeds of boys and men. This dramatic persona thus occupies a central position. It is within this context that one may refer to such tales as masculine tales.

An obvious and apparent aspect of the Maragoli hero is that he is an isolated creature. He is often an only child as in the story of MT13, *The Old Man and Nunda*, or in MT1, *Lusaga and Livogoyi*. Some of the heroes survive

miraculously when the ogres devour a whole society. In MT13, the boy escapes from the ogre since he was in the safety of his mother's womb. Ironically, although a female character, the mother is at the centre of the hero's survival. She is, however, quickly relegated to an insignificant position as the boy hero takes the centre stage. The Maragoli folktale hero is mostly a young child. In truly biological terms, the youngest, smallest child or stepchild is also the weakest but the folktale subverts this reality. This aspect is also prevalent in Jewish mythology as exemplified in the stories of King David and Joseph and his eleven brothers as recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible.

The boy hero found in the Maragoli folktales is, in a sense, also detached and independent. He departs from home while girls operate in the domestic domain. The journeys he takes are partly undertaken as a family obligation. He goes out to wander in the wilderness, in the void, to return from the odyssey with wealth. Interestingly, the hero does not know the world, which he goes out into, and does not even know how to operate in this new world and accomplish his task but he is brave enough to venture out. This is a necessary risk for he is the model on which all the boys fashion their characters. It is therefore possible to argue that the hero is therefore a risk taker per excellence. Thus the 'departure from home motif' is an appropriate theme in line with imparting the desired gender ideology amongst male children.

The boy hero is on another level depicted as one who does not know the means with which to accomplish what he has set out to do. He does not even know how to overcome difficulties since he is vulnerable while in foreign lands. Although shown as the destroyer of evil as symbolised by the destruction of the ogre, the hero is also cast as one who is in need of help. This help has to come if he has to accomplish his tasks.

Sometimes the hero is cast as deficient with no specific abilities. He has no special trade, no special training and yet paradoxically he triumphs. Since he is

not equipped with special skills and training, he cannot accomplish his tasks without external assistance. The image being presented to Maragoli boys in these tales is that there is always help for the risk takers. Ironically, again as a sub-text, sometimes help comes from feminine benefactors or volunteers of vital information, as in MT13. It is in such circumstances that the performers present the female perspective and state the important role that women play in society.

To some extent the boy hero is merely a carrier of action, and he is open to the most diverse possibilities. Due to the fact that he is isolated and detached from his people in his adventures, he is capable of entering into new constellations and relationships. This is observed as he makes friendship and receives help from donors. He makes contact with his helpers and demonstrates that he is a deserving recipient of help. While it is true that the hero is brave, he is also a receiver of help but he has to earn it. The helpers sometimes include magical birds and animals. Less often, the helpers appear in human form as faithful servants. They may turn out to be underworld beings that become helpful. In MT 1, for instance, the boy hero gets help from wasps and birds, as already discussed.

The boy hero's loneliness is an important signifying aspect. Sometimes he is all alone in the jungle, as depicted in MT1. This necessitates the acquisition of survival tactics, which include entering into fruitful contact with distant worlds, with worlds above and below, with nature and with strange people and creatures. He therefore acquires a universal ability to forge new centres of power and interaction. He is therefore a master of his own fate. This is what the Maragoli perceive as the role of a man in general. His dependence on help from without, especially from other worldly sources, is parallel to what is referred to in theology as grace; a tribute to the anointed.

The hero never tries to find out what context his magical helpers belong to, neither does he ask about the sources of their powers. He just wanders through

the world and acts. He is not seen thinking, but he does what is right. Help often comes from unfamiliar powers. This is the picture of the masculine hero being presented to the Maragoli children.

Boys are presented with this portrayal for emulation. They are expected to be independent men capable of entering into a number of fruitful relationships. It seems to be ordained that the boy hero will receive help from donors who support him from cradle to grave. Although highly vulnerable, the heroes are capable of reaching distant, high-set goals. They are capable of withstanding tension. Often they reach their goals after struggle with powerful forces. They are also saviours of girls and destroyers of evil, yet ironically they are also rescued from danger by benevolent beings.

#### **4.6 Birds as Symbols of Masculinity**

Writing about Tuvinian Shamans and the Cult of Birds, Kevin Losan and Mongash Boraxco (1997) note that the Tuvans' respect for nature is expressed through shamanist traditions. All of nature is considered sacred, the fabric of their worldview being woven in the sacred thread of myths. Here, features of the landscape and creatures inhabiting it are characters in great stories that describe and explain the world. Birds, as some of the creatures of nature, are important in Eurasian traditions. Helander (1994:6-7) has underscored this fact by observing that Sami people pay attention to the behaviour of birds, because they serve as messengers between human beings and supernatural powers. The Maragoli, like the Tivans and Sami people, interpret the behaviour of birds and place great trust in the birdcalls. The owl is for instance a symbol of misfortune and when it lands on one's house the Maragoli people sense danger.

The Maragoli folktale, as noted earlier, depicts various birds and animals playing various roles. One such prominent character is *Imbiraviriza*, the mythical bird that appears in a number of tales. In the corpus of tales under study, it appears prominently in the tale MT 4, *The Bird that Produces Vudugi and The Farmer*. In



this tale, this bird comes to torment a farmer by commanding weeds to grow in his farm once he has ploughed and prepared it for planting. When the farmer captures it, it promises to provide him and his family with honey in exchange for its life. It does provide *vudugi* for a long time until the farmer's daughter mistreats it. It escapes and the farmer's son goes out in search for it.

Although the boy does not get the bird, it reappears when he is in trouble and serves as a helper. It gives the boy a magical stick, which he uses to escape danger and so arrives home safely. In another tale, MT16, a boy who wants to marry a specific girl changes into a bird, which the girl falls in love with. The boy goes through another transformation into a human being and marries the girl. In MT14, a bird helps a woman to escape from ogres who were pursuing her for killing her ogre-husband. This ogre had killed her sister. In MT9, the woman who kills her children by feeding them on a prohibited pumpkin sends a bird to go and inform Kalasimba, her husband, about the tragedy. This bird acts as a messenger.

These birds have one significant characteristic; their uncanny and human-like behaviour. They offer help at times when human beings need it most. Another thing about these birds is that they take offence when they are cheated or taken for granted. They also do not like the greedy and evil people. In MT 4, it is the greed of the farmer's daughter that makes the bird escape. It may be assumed that this bird does not harm the boy who goes after it because he is not the one who had mistreated it. The birds are also capable of brewing trouble for human beings. Sometimes they appear vindictive and have magical powers. In this case, they could also symbolise men. Indeed, in one of the tales a boy transforms himself into a bird to marry a very beautiful girl who had refused all suitors. It may therefore be argued that birds that appear in Maragoli folktale are male and so espouse those qualities of kindness, revenge, adventure, magic and strength, which, by patriarchal standards, are masculine qualities and so the birds are symbolic of masculine benevolence.

#### **4.7 The Matriarch: The Old Woman**

A discussion of the gender roles and images in the Maragoli folktale cannot be concluded without an examination of the meaning attached to the old woman. This group is distinguished from wives partly, because old women are presented in a completely different light. In all cases in which this type of woman appears, the husband is never mentioned. In MT 1, the old woman who discovers the two vegetables, which turn out to be two children, male and female, is presented as having been barren in a polygamous family. She, unlike girls, is free to venture out of the defined domain for women. In MT5 Anakaguku meets an old woman who gives her and the girls a formula to escape from the ogre's house. Interestingly, the ogres have no interest in harming the old woman. In the same tale, an old woman grants the request of a frog that had rescued girls from being destroyed by ogres. The frog finally vomits the girls from its stomach. It may be said that the old woman in Maragoli folktale is presented as being wise and kind.

In MT 4, an old woman whom the hero finds in the forest carries him to her home and takes care of him until he grows up to be the old woman's herdsboy. In MT 7, Muhonja's brother rescues all people whom the ogre had eaten, but one old woman comes out of the ogre's stomach without her tobacco-smoking pipe. She goes back to look for it, but the ogre begs the boy to let him retain her in the stomach. In this case, this old woman is presented as being so stupid and senseless that she goes back into the ogre's stomach just for a pipe even after she had been rescued. But why does the boy leave her for the ogre? In a patriarchal society, a woman's worth is linked to her reproduction function. It is possible to see this act as a demonstration of the fact that the old woman is, per the standards of this society, worthless. She has performed her role as mother and outlived her importance.

An old woman in Maragoli language is called *Umukeere* as opposed to a wife who is called *Umukari*. The old women are cast as those the ogres have no

interest in. They interact with ogres who could destroy girls and wives and venture far beyond the designated domains for women. They are women whose ages seem to have enabled them to acquire some masculinity that makes the ogres not to devour them. The Maragoli tales are therefore battlefields of power struggles between husbands and wives. Old women are out of this highly charged field for they do not challenge the dominant patriarchal ideology.

#### **4.8 Signifying Physical Features**

It is also evident that, forests, lakes and rivers play a role as signifiers of male authority in the Maragoli folktales. In MT1 the beautiful girl is taken to the lake in order to be eaten by the ogre that lives in the lake. The lake is thus the home of the creatures that symbolise evil. In MT7, Muhonja's brother goes to the forest to kill the ogre that had swallowed the sister. The forest is also presented as the home of the ogres that destroy the girls. It is therefore interesting that MT 8 presents the story of girls who go to fetch firewood from the forest, which is a dwelling place of the ogres. It may be argued that such stories enable the Maragoli to show how vulnerable girls are in a world in which physical features are under the control and obey the male members of society.

Since forests are dangerous domains for girls and women generally, the girls who venture into them are given clear instructions, which they have to follow. These instructions are products of patriarchal ideology. They are meant to define the female sphere of operation. The rivers, consistently, obey the orders of the male heroes. In MT4, the boy hero commands the water in the lake to give way for him to pass and the water obeys. In the case of MT2, Kalimonge is rescued from the lake by her boyfriend. She later joins her sister to marry the hero who rescues her. It therefore appears that these natural features useful if male authority is established over them. They, to a large extent, reflect the obvious patriarchal philosophy that gives controlling powers to male members of the society.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

It appears that the process of characterisation in the Maragoli folktale is governed by a gender ideology. Every relationship, action and motif is gendered. Whereas the boys and men are cast as brave, courageous, hardworking and adventurous, the girls and wives are consistently presented as vulnerable, weak, stupid jealous and unreliable. These images therefore determine their gender roles. It is also clear that the natural features, for instance forests, rivers and lakes are gendered for they represent the male domain. Equally significant are the animals and birds, which represent patriarchal hegemony. But as noted earlier on, the female performers have a way of subverting patriarchy by creating sub-texts in which they exult female attributes.

Looking at these tales through a purely feminist lens, it may be emphasised that a woman's experience is determined by the fact that she is treated as a commodity to be acted upon. She exists as something to be marketed or manipulated, as an object whose value is conferred unto her by others, and who is thus forced to consider herself to a large extent as an object. She is thus, by virtue of the male social forces around her, fundamentally alienated, turned into an object for others, and compelled to think of herself as inferior.

It may be said that her consciousness has been colonised and hence there ensues a struggle for liberation. Her conscious and subconscious attempts are aimed at subverting patriarchy. John Berger (1981) agrees with this position when he argues that the social presence of a woman is different from that of man. To be born a woman is to be born within an allotted and confined space controlled by men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage, within such a limited space. She has to review everything she is and everything she does, because of how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, which is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life.

It is therefore true that these constraints necessitate contest in the folktale tradition through the creation of sub-texts. These sub-texts are crucial for survival of the female voice. Marxist analysis suggests that oppression necessitates resistance, the development of class-consciousness, and finally action. It is one of the great realisations to analysis of the oppression of women that this resistance occurs in a cultural discourse, such as the folktale. The supposed complicity in exchange for survival is balanced with production of sub-texts that fight the extinction of the self.

In essence, the female character in the Maragoli folktales is not a construction of the physical sexual organs and other possible physical features. She is not biologically determined; rather, she is created by and in the interests of men and her own struggle to contest domination. It is the hidden respect for the self that makes resistance conceivable.

## Chapter Five

### Composition, Performance and Internalisation of the Gender Ideology

#### 5.0 Introduction

In a guide to anthropological research practice, Ruth Finnegan (1992:51) underscores the interest that has developed in the field of anthropology and indeed in many other disciplines revolving around processes of creativity in relation to social meaning. She argues that the concern for individual voices, repertoire and creativity is part of the disquiet within anthropology and other disciplines from 'structure' to 'agency'. Meaning, she argues, can be extracted from the 'text' and through a multiplicity of voices. What is involved in a narrative process, is more than just the voice of the composer; it is also the participants who help to form the work and mediate its meaning and the dynamics through which this occurs. This position resonates with the need to direct inquiry into the wholesome folktale performance by taking cognisance of the totality of the context, text and the mode of delivery.

The interaction between the performer and audience is crucial to our understanding of the intersection of the texts and sub-texts that express and challenge ideology. The Maragoli folktale discourse presents a commentary upon power relations in the society through a variety of rhetorical devices and tropes, which illuminate the society's philosophy of communication. It is notable that the performer reserves the power to use particular tropes and determines the terms of the discourse. Determining the terms of discourse involves contestation, challenging different standpoints and engaging in debate over perceived and evolving roles and, at times, shifting identities. Situating the folktale performance within a context and seeing it as a form of dramatic rendition inevitably brings to focus the relationship between the text and the vehicle of delivery, the elements of performance.

The intersection between texts and sub-texts is in many ways discernible through close reading of the relationship between performer and audience at the moment of performance. This will inevitably lead to an understanding of the operations of the *non-dit* (Elizabeth Roux 2005). This refers to what is not said in a society or what is swept under the carpet or excluded. It also refers to that which is difficult to study, because it is occluded, hidden or silent (Elizabeth Roux 2005:19). This chapter thus directs inquiry into how the performer achieves his or her objective of communicating particular gender ideology at the time of performance. Since folktales communicate at several levels, this makes them more complicated than they seem on the surface given that, to some degree, they embody the *non-dit*. They communicate in a language that utilises various signs beside the use of tropes and extra-verbal devices. I wish to argue here that the folktale narrative discourse, being subversive, employs various techniques in the narrative that conceal the expressive sub-texts that subvert the dominant patriarchal ideology. This chapter also attempts to identify some aspects of composition and performance that contribute to the audience's understanding and internalisation of the gender ideology perpetuated in the Maragoli folktales.

The folktales, like buildings, are perceived here as artifacts designed to meet specific needs and aspirations of those who construct and reconstruct them. Just as knowledge about construction techniques can help us to understand architecture, it can also help us to understand folktales (Christine Goldberg 1986). Folktales are however, not forms of natural life nor are they ordinary language. They are artistic products. Looked at in this way, they must be understood as forms produced purposefully with structures, functions and even beauty (Christine Goldberg 1986:169). The central purpose of the folktales is nevertheless to express certain concerns dear to the community.

Indeed, a number of explanations for prevalence of gender concerns in folktales have been advanced, and most of them regard communication as central to the process. Because theories attempt to explain only selected dimensions of

gender, they are not in competition with one another to produce the definitive explanation of gender. Instead, theories complement one another by sharpening our awareness of different ways in which communication, gender and culture interact (Wood 1994:39). In this respect, theories are only a guide to the analysis of the basic dramatic elements of the Maragoli folktale. They also help to unravel the communicative strategies that the performer employs during performance or effective communication. In attempting to unravel the techniques of construction and performance of the tales, this chapter specifically considers the Maragoli folktale performance as a signifying communicative text.

A number of theories of gender that highlight the role of communication in individual learning and cognitive development as the genesis of a gender perspective are considered. Social learning theorists have, for instance, claimed that individuals learn to be masculine and feminine (among other things) through communication and observation. Children notice how others interact and imitate the communication they see (Wood 1994:43). Within this school of thought, theorists like Lawrence Kohlberg (1958), Jean Piaget (1932), (1965) and Carol Gilligan et al. (1982), (1988) have offered models of how children develop gendered views of themselves, relationships and moral orientation (Wood 1994:45).

It is therefore possible to say that in all cultures and societies, gender stereotypes begin from the moment we are born and are identified as either a boy or a girl. These labels determine how we will be treated, how we are expected to behave and our view of the world. Gender characteristics are learnt at a very young age and as we grow up, we learn in our every day interactions what is appropriate behaviour for a boy or a girl: 'Boys do not cry' or 'Don't be a sissy' are common criticisms made of little boys (Krishner Kumar 2001). How these values are communicated is the concern of this chapter.



Two aspects of the Maragoli folktale discourse are examined; those inbuilt elements of composition and the various stylistic and dramatic elements, which are manipulated at the time of performance including gender-inflected vocabularies, icons, codes, formulae and image patterns that are used to signify masculinity or femininity and the relations of power. These elements are examined with a view of extracting evidence of how they communicate gender ideology. Thus, the chapter unveils the intricacies involved in weaving the performance from beginning to dénouement. The assumption is that the manipulation of the communicative conventions, tropes, patterns and language play a role in the transfer of gender ideology.

### **5.1 In-built Subversive Elements of Composition**

The Maragoli tale at the time of performance is spatial temporal. The tale exists primarily in time. Each performance is a distinct work of art. The twenty tales studied were performed many times by different performers yet each performance was distinct from others. Although stable elements, what Propp (1958) calls the functions, remain unchanged throughout the various productions, each performance varies in terms of the variable elements and images invoked. These elements reflect varying gender ideological perspectives. Every performer seems to be aware of this. Unlike, say, a painting or a written novel, which once completed remains unchanged, the same folktale performed by different people or the same person at different times renders a new tale each time it is performed. It is basically because of this that various performers delivered different gender messages while narrating the same tales.

The difference in various performances lies in the stressed images, comments made, descriptions, gestures and pace of narration of individual narrators. It is necessary consider MT 17, *Donyobe*. While performing this version of the tale selected for analysis, the performer, Torokasi Mugomati, a blind artist, takes time to moralize, comment and even condemn the stepmother for attempting to destroy Donyobe, the frail little girl. She concludes that Donyobe's stepmother

was 'a bad woman.' Other versions listened to, especially those narrated by children, were devoid of this authorial intrusion. It is therefore the narrator's voice, her comments and method of intensifying images that trigger a sense of pity and moral judgment in the audience.

Although operating ideally to enhance a certain patriarchal cultural perspective, the Maragoli folktale also works covertly to undermine it. However, it strives to avoid to be seen as doing so. It is therefore, in a sense, fugitive art. It is fugitive art in the sense that the performance occupies only a few hours or even minutes and then is gone forever. From the point of view of the performer, its effects must be achieved within the narrow limits of time, which circumscribe a single performance. The impression it makes on the mind and emotions of the audience is complete at the end of the particular performance. And once concluded there can never be a repeat of exactly the same performance. It is within this limited time that the performer works with this fugitive art subversively. Its aims are not obvious but subtle, clandestine and even abstruse. It is precisely this distinctive element that conceals the sub-texts that carry the subversive messages. Each and every tale has a sub-text that presents a critique of the patriarchal system.

Equally important is compression of time and action used to heighten unity. In the Maragoli tales studied, the action is shown as taking place within successive days or in one day or over a period of years. Many a performer compresses the imagined time of the whole action sequence so that the events, which in life would be separated by weeks, months or years, proceed without interruption. The dramatic time presents the uninterrupted progression from beginning to dénouement. This compression of time makes the audience, who are mostly children, experience life as it is lived from childhood to adulthood in one sitting, hence acquiring the values to live for at various life stages of growth in the community.

Compression of time is achieved through antecedent action. This device economises exposition by the compression of the visible action of the tale into a two or three hour performance. It does so by necessitating the establishment of a certain amount of knowing in the audience. The audience knows and understands at least who the principal characters are and have an idea of what sort of tale to expect. These tales are well known to the audience and that is why economising on exposition is achieved through the use of character types.

The stock characters are easily recognisable in appearance and manner of speech since they resemble characters frequently seen in other tales or in the tale being performed. Since they are easily recognisable, the necessity of introducing and explaining them is obviated and the tale is able to get underway sooner. One such character is the ogre. He is well known for his cruelty towards female characters. Mention of the ogre invokes a sense of fear in the audience. Equally well known is the trickster who is well known for being cunning, murderous, lazy and mischievous. The performers of the tales do not need to offer any explanation for the actions of these characters.

The Maragoli folktale is at the same time mimetic. That is to say, it re-creates and represents objects in the real world of the Maragoli people. The tales mirror the Maragoli way of life in speech and action. The thoughts, feelings, decisions, history, values and actions of the Maragoli constitute the principal material from which the tales are fashioned. These tales reflect the activities, values and beliefs of the Maragoli as discussed in Chapter Two. The tales thus provide an avenue through which the Maragoli values are presented, acted out and at times contested. Sometimes segments of life are recreated with great fidelity to details. The typical conversations, characters, scenes and the socio-cultural milieu give these tales their mimetic qualities. The audience, being familiar with the culture, measures the truth of the tales to what they already know. Each character is therefore evaluated considering the standards already established.

The tales appeal to the audience, because they are true to some broad or even fantastic concept of how life is or ought to be. In any case, truth to life is a condition of the tales' acceptance as authentic. The characters and actions are plausible since they reflect what the Maragoli in general consciously or unconsciously do, might do, or ought to do or say. To some degree they also depict the fears and hopes of the Maragoli. Since truth to life is a condition of its acceptance, the tale has to be about the Maragoli way of life to be understood or valued as a system of signification.

The performed tale is therefore a fresh creation and an interpretation of an aspect of life following a previously created scheme or design. It however has to be remembered that the audience remains at the centre of its interest. The more dramatic the performance, the more readily the audience come to believe the ideas and attitudes as the cherished values of society. This is how the gender ideology is internalised. The evocation of the variable motifs gives the tale its dramatic qualities. As the narrator selects her/his images, arranging them in a given order, so does she/he interpret and present her/his views of life and how it should be lived.

As a participant in many Maragoli folktale performances, this researcher came to consider it as a form of drama. The tale as manifested in the performance is a synthesis, a blend or fusion of distinct elements into a complex whole. The synthesis fundamentally consists of the tales' composite features of creation, the invariable structure and the variable elements, which depend on the performers' creativity, the occasion, time and the audience. The audience thus determines the length of the tale and the variable ingredients that will be infused in the tale. In her performance of MT13, *The Old Man and Nunda the Cat*, Rosa Sindavi hurriedly goes through the last moves on realisation that some of the children had started dozing.

As Yankah Kwesi (1985:134) points out, the audience's role in folklore performance is varied. The composition of the audience determines, for the performer, what item of folklore, style or lexicon to employ in a given situation. And likewise, the mood of the audience may condition the duration of a performance. Instances also abound of the participation of the audience in the actual performance by way of song, dance or comment. In commenting on the performance, the audience, in essence, demonstrates its sensitivity to the expressive quality of the performer's enactment. In this regard Ropo Sekoni (1990) has rightly observed that the spontaneous exclamation, actual questions and emotional reaction to the development are also sources of beauty in oral literature.

By assuming responsibility to an audience for communicative competence, the performer inevitably submits to critical evaluation. The evaluation in the Maragoli folktale performance is a form of instant justice. The audience is the jury and the guardian of the folk aesthetics. Just as the performer is responsible to the audience, the audience is accountable to the culture at large. The simultaneity of performance and evaluation in folklore necessarily makes all folklore performances a voluntary exercise in risk-taking (Kwesi 1995:135). Women, being the majority performers, distinguish themselves as risk takers, a trait that is considered masculine, as observed in Chapter Four. Thus, the superior performance is one in which the performer achieves a synthesis between her gender perception and that of her audience. Her subversion of patriarchy by production of sub-texts is concealed and remains underneath the surface throughout the tale time. As John Ruganda (1992) observes:

Such an artist is trapped between the mortar and the pestle, or between the demands of conformity to the authorities' ideology of dominance, and the dictates of his or her creative muse. The actor or the parrot in him or her, must adopt what Czeslaw called "the art of dissimulation...a constant and universal masquerade." This seeming self-effacement helps the artist to appear conformist and dissentious at once, to be applauding when he is condemning, (John Ruganda 1992:5).

It is in actual fact from hidden elements of context and composition that the Maragoli folktale gets its subversive shape in the process of performance. On another level, controlled manipulation of the variable elements enhances its subversive nature. The audience internalises most strongly those elements to which the performer guides its attention. The performer is at the same time an interpreter who recalls most vividly the high points of the performance. After the performance, the elements and values most vividly remembered are the images, and ideas stressed and emphasised by the performer. The Performer is therefore driven by certain desires and the way her story develops and ends is gender-driven (Senkoro 2005).

In *The Oral Artist* (1986) Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira argues that the ideological standpoint of the performers determines the principles and ideas that she stresses in the process of performance. It appears that the Maragoli performer is first and foremost a creative ideologue creating from a clear ideological framework. The variable elements or rather the flesh that she places on the invariable structure or the skeleton is her contribution to the folktale creation. The synthesis, once completed, is an ideological piece of art. The primary purpose of the tale is therefore to persuade the audience to accept a particular way of thinking.

The performer has a particular attitude towards life and her material. This attitude is shaped by the socio-cultural life she lives as a Maragoli. She has internalised the taboos and dictates of patriarchy discussed in Chapter Two. Her material is drawn from life and her attitude towards it may be serious, subversive, satirical, light hearted, bitter, mocking or even facetious. The Maragoli folktale performance is therefore a signifying dramatic occasion. It is emotional in its intent and in its principal effect. The performer's attachment to certain aspects of her material produces a similar identification on the part of the audience during the performance as she intensifies images and foregrounds certain

characteristics of protagonists. If her emotional involvement is deep and strong enough, then the effect on the audience persists for long.

Before we examine the dramatic structures of the Maragoli folktale at the time of performance, it is necessary to look at the theatrical space of the African folktale drama in relation to the gendered operational domains.

## **5.2 The Power of the Subversive Stage**

Ideally the Maragoli tales are performed in a small space in the house next to the hearth. This space as defined in the gendered domains of operation in Chapter Three is the feminine sphere. Once circumcised, the Maragoli boys are prohibited from sitting in the kitchen. It is argued here that by appropriating the task of performing tales in this setting, the women call attention to their domain and augment their sphere as the centre of socialisation. From this vantage point, they take up the role of socialising children and influencing their gender perspective.

The very nature of the stage is subversive and determines the relationship between the audience and the performer. The small space next to the hearth, being the woman's area of jurisdiction, gives the women performers power to influence the audience made up of impressionable young minds, and produces a more intimate physical relationship between performer and audience. The audience, mostly children, surrounds the performer expectantly and gives her their undivided attention. The direct communication that ensues between performer and audience creates an enviable ambiance for absorption of the ideological position and a life-long bond.

All the conventions of this theatrical space contribute to produce the closest possible performer-audience relationship. The lighting system is equally significant. The dim light within the kitchen as the food cooks, while the smoke finds its way through the grass-thatched roof, contributes to image formation and

the impact of the tale. The darkness that engulfs the world outside the hut and the dangers it entails is invoked in the tale as it unfolds. This stage gives the female performer the power and authority to subvert patriarchy, shape and influence behaviour of the young from her pivotal domain. It is precisely this understanding that John Ruganda employs in his play *The Burdens* (1972) in which Tinka, the main character, subverts a well-known tale in influencing her children to hate their father and side with her in what appears as a failed marriage. She does so through the means of editing out details and intensifying the negative masculine images in this famous folktale as she performs it to her children.

### **5.3 Formulae of Sublimation**

Sigmund Freud (1949) sees two fundamental principles at work in human culture and civilization: the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The pleasure principle tells us to do whatever feels good and the reality principle tells us to subordinate pleasure to what needs to be done, to work. Subordination of the pleasure principle to the reality principle is done through sublimation where one takes desires that cannot be fulfilled or should not be fulfilled and turns their energy into something useful and productive. These desires that cannot be fulfilled are packaged or repressed into a particular place in the mind, the unconscious. To access the unconscious, indirect routes are used. One of these routes is through folktales. A primary means through which tales are made to hide desires is through evocation of formulae. But even within the folktales, certain formulae are used to disguise the desires and project them into the past and to other people.

The Maragoli oral narrative performance is, like any other stage production, characterised by an immediate interaction of performer and audience. The first contact between both parties provides the first effort by the performer to achieve aesthetic harmony with her audience (Sokoni 1990). The opening formulae are therefore significant in this enterprise. Egara Kabaji (1991) notes that the



Maragoli folktale begins with an opening formulae *Kale Kale muno*, a long, long time ago. This formulae is a significant signifier for it invites the audience to the world of the folktale, a world of fun and fantasy. It moves the audience to enjoy a theatrical production. However, this is a production in which both the performer and the audience share values, beliefs and the same environment from which the images and symbols are drawn. They also know the tales for they have listened to them many times.

Both the audience and the performer share beliefs in relation to gender construction. The formulae signal the audience to move to another world where they learn, albeit in a pleasurable way, what society expects of them as boys, girls, fathers and mothers. The formulae, as a strategic feature, create distance from the present world, the reality, to a world in the fictive past. Through this technique the performer creates illusion in the audience that whatever they are being treated to has nothing to do with the present. It is this denial that enables the performer to pass across and sometimes subvert the societal gender ideology, however objectionable, in a subtle, pleasurable, convenient way without eliciting questions from her audience. Throughout my field research, the performers were not under obligation to explain why it should be Muhonja's brother who slays the ogre and not Muhonja herself in MT 7. In the same breath, the audience did not question why men appear ignorant of the important happenings in their homes.

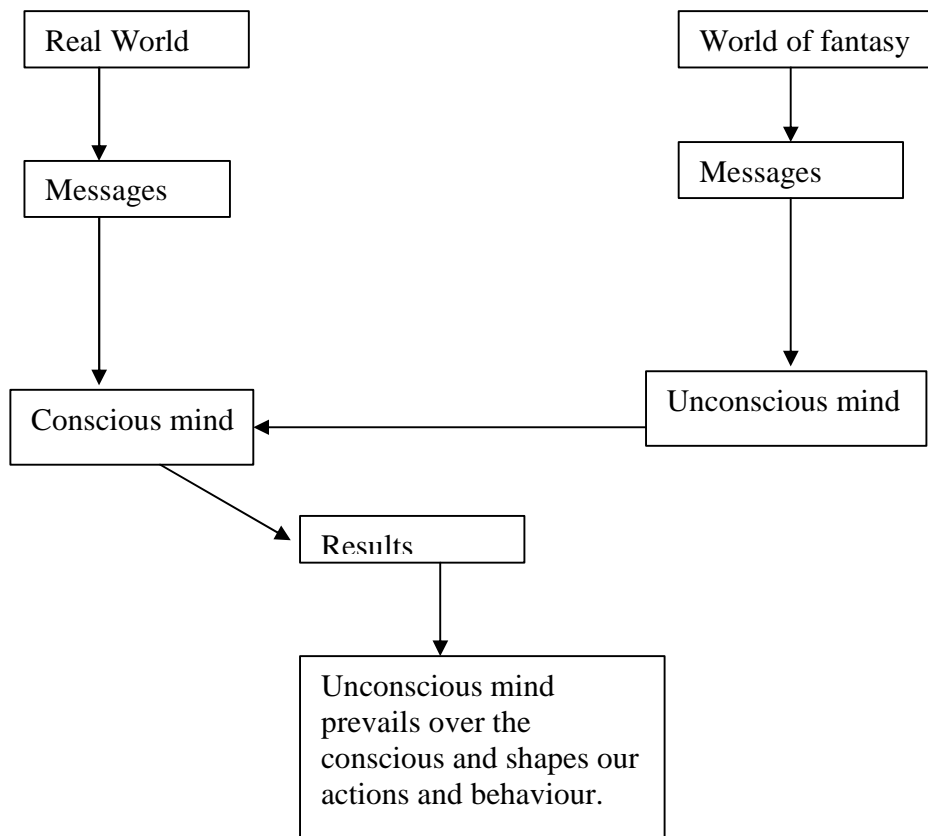
While performing these tales, it is no longer necessary and valid to ask why girls who venture out of the home are vulnerable and are or can be eaten by ogres while the boys fight and triumph over the ogre. After all one would say, "It is just a story." The illusion of the unreal world is what enables the audience to absorb the gender ideology unconsciously. Once the formulae are invoked, questions of logic are no longer valid. It is no longer necessary to ask why Kalisanga and Kalimonge in MT 2 are not jealous of each other while sharing a boyfriend. The audience does not even question why the sisters happily marry one man and yet

they understand the antagonism inherent within polygamous homes. It appears that disbelief is temporarily suspended.

The closing formulae *Ulugano rwange loheri yaho*, that is the end of my story, signals the audience to come back to the real world. The distance already created is intensified when the performer makes the concluding statement: 'and they lived happily thereafter!' One may argue that the distance is conveniently created to signal the audience to the fact that since we are not told when they died, they are still alive and living with us. Through this formula, the Maragoli, by means of fantasy, are able to defeat death. Whereas the opening formula leads us from reality unto the unreal, the closing formula snatches the instances out of the fantastic fairytale world and sets them gently or not so gently back in the everyday world (Luthi 1987).

The purpose of the opening and closing formulae is to create an enclosure within which the performer initiates action and brings it to a satisfying conclusion giving a sense of completion and finality to the end of the tale. The journey from the sphere of reality to the world of fantasy and back to the real world is controlled by these two formulae. The two worlds depicted have two different ways of communicating messages to the audience. In the real world, gender ideology is communicated through instructions, taboos warnings and orders directed to the conscious mind. In the realm of the folktale fantasy world, gender ideology is transferred through pleasurable means, for example, through fascinating patterning of images directed to the unconscious mind.

Below please find an illustration of the way the two worlds function:



The figure above demonstrates how the world of fantasy works to influence behaviour. It is a Freudian fact that the conscious mind as we know it relies on the unconscious mind. The images implanted in the subconscious are filtered through to the conscious mind, determining our actions and values. It follows that the narrative-telling tradition becomes a major player in the construction of our values. The tales may be seen as a domain of communication in which we experience the pleasure principle without feeling guilty. By subverting the commonsense bonds between utterances and their situations of use, we explore new kinds of identity and forms of gender relationships.

#### **5.4. Strategic Repetition of Gendered Images**

Writing on the technical means and artistic effects of oral narrative discourse, Max Luthi (1987) argues that one of the most notable characteristics of style and composition is the principle of repetition. All oral narrative, whether strictly constrained or impoverished, is dependent on repetition (Luthi 1987:76). This principle is applicable to the Maragoli folktale and operates on a number of levels. The impact of the Maragoli folktale accrues from the images evoked through repetition of various aspects of the tale, for instance, the songs, characters and theme.

Through this crucial device of repetition, the narratives evoke specific images creating memorable mental pictures in the audience. Although the structure of the tales is invariable, it is around this invariable linear structure that images are strung around in the development of the central theme. The images are developed through words, gestures, intonation, and audience participation. The perception formed around each episode or action and character is visualized in images. The realisation of these visualized images is made possible because the narrator and audience share the same narrative tradition and each brings to the tale performance a rich experience.

The success of the performance, therefore depends, to a large extent, on the performer's repertory of images. It may be argued that images are the basic materials of the tale, which are evoked during performance through the externalisation of experiences that the members of the audience share.

The narrator repeatedly evokes well-known images in a common context to invite the audience's participation. Mention of, say, the ogre or trickster evoke variegated images in the audience. While doing this, the performer relies on voice and rhythm, creating levels of tension and involvement by increasing or decreasing speed of delivery, raising or lowering her voice, using different voices for different *dramatis personae* and introducing sung elements. In her rendition of

MT 7, *Muhonja and Her Brother*, Torokasi Esekele varied her voice a number of times to delineate the various personae that she sang to prompt Muhonja to open the door. Any time she sang in the deep voice of the ogre, the audience sensed danger. The sung elements are therefore the principle carriers of images. Each time the performer repeated the song, the images were deepened and tension developed.

The repetition of song is a very important ingredient in the Maragoli folktale. It is notable that the song comes at a crisis moment in the tale. At this juncture the audience's emotions are heightened and remain tensed in anticipation as can be seen from a close look at a number of tales.

In MT 2, the song comes at a time when Kalisanga reveals who the villain in the story is. The song thus intensifies the conflict and moves the tale to a higher, more exciting plane. In MT 9, the song comes at a crisis moment when Kalasimba's children have all died owing to the carelessness of his wife. The song is therefore a central component in the Maragoli folktale. It gives special pleasure to the audience and indeed it forms a special structural component in the tale. Apart from providing the emotional link between characters as seen in MT2 *Kalisanga and Kalimonge*, the song also provides information on the evil intentions of the female dramatis personae. There is a subtle gender ideology passed on to the audience through the songs; that stepmothers are evil and need constant surveillance by the male members of the families.

Songs are important in the daily life of the Maragoli. Cultural activities, such as naming, circumcision and burial ceremonies, work, and weddings are accompanied by music. The repetition of song in the folktale is therefore an imitation of the repetition of song in Maragoli life. Songs, among the Maragoli, to a greater or lesser extent, deal with gender roles and the expected behaviour from men and women in the society. The repetition of music does not bore the listener but rather intensifies their aesthetic experience. In everyday life, music,

among other things, intensifies the joy of the singers and drains their frustration and fears leaving them with renewed interest in life. Songs are, however, gendered in the Maragoli folktale just as they are in real life. Consider the songs sung by boys and girls in the tales and the messages they imbibe, for instance:

Figure 5:2

| TALE | SINGER                 | SEX    | MT                                                                                                                    |
|------|------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MT 2 | Kalisanga              | F      | 1,Sung to reveal where she was.2, to condemn evil stepmother 3; to express her love for the sister.                   |
| MT3  | Anakanani              | M      | Sung to cheat Anakamuna's mother.                                                                                     |
| MT4  | The boy                | M      | 1,Sung to tell the bird to stop so that he can take it home.<br>2, Sung to order wasps to sting the old man to death. |
| MT7  | Muhonja's brother ogre | M<br>M | 1, Sung to ask Muhonja to open the door. 2, The ogre sung to cheat Muhonja to open the door.                          |
| MT9  | A Bird                 | M      | Sung to Inform Kalasimba that his wife had killed all his children.                                                   |
| MT10 | Girwang'a              | M      | Sung to boast of how he could not accept to be ordered to kill his children and wives.                                |
| MT12 | Skeleton               | -      | Sung to ask Mulele why she laughed at it.                                                                             |

|      |                        |   |                                                                         |
|------|------------------------|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MT13 | Boy                    | M | Sung vowing to kill the ogre that destroyed his father and the village. |
| MT15 | Girl who broke her pot | F | Sung to ask the ogre to eat her.                                        |
| MT19 | Goat                   | F | Sung to lament the killing of her children.                             |

From the foregoing analysis, it is observable that the songs sung by females consistently express their emotions and seek sympathy or help. Those sung by boys either express their determination to accomplish the task at hand as in MT 13, or give a command.

The audiences thus develop a repertory of these repeated image sequences in songs and imbibe the gender ideology as the tales are performed. Within this heightened tension, the tale moves towards resolution. The repeated image sequence of the weak girl and the brave boy constructs a particular patriarchal gender ideology. The performer proves, at this juncture, that she is operating within a tradition, which imposes an ideological position through the oral narrative. She becomes the conveyer of this ideology.

To some degree the Maragoli folktale also relies on the repetitions of theme and motif in its aesthetic and social function. The tales basically tell of the perceived nature of men and women. They are therefore linked to each other through their meaning. Their meaning is, however, established from the same cultural field. The Maragoli folktale is usually restricted to a single overriding theme, showing its critical moments together with its causes and immediate consequences. This is clearly visible from the discussion of the theme of marriage in Chapter Three. It is through this means that the tales achieve their unity and effect.

Repetitions of character traits of various stock characters are common in the tales and they contribute to the way the texts are built and create meaning. Stock characters are repeatedly presented in most of the tales. It may be argued that repetition has two main functions. The first function is formal; they add to the look or sound of the text, secondly, repetition serves a cultural function: adding to the texts' meaning and impact in delivering gender ideology.

Repetition inside the tale text contributes to the way they create feminine and masculine difference. While drawing upon repetition operating in the Maragoli culture they, for example, build a recurrent thematic opposition between male and female which is made parallel in the tale. The opposition of male and female is a fundamental one in Maragoli culture. The tale thus simply adopts this already existing repetition and puts it to use in a symbolic form.

It may be argued that repetition makes the texts easy to remember specifically through repeated choruses, repeated phrases or refrains and repeated patterning of events. It is the repetition of the tragic song in MT16 that enables us to remember the stupid girl who laughed at a skeleton. This is important since the Maragoli tales exist by virtue of being remembered. But above all, repetition also creates expectation and excitement. It is also used for emotive and persuasive effects. This rhetorical function is what makes the theme and character clear and memorable.

### **5. 5 Contrasting Polarities**

Closely related to repetition is the inbuilt contrast within the tale. A close look at the Maragoli folktales under study shows that the tales are built on dual basis. This binary principle gives the tale its distinctive character. Contrast operates on two levels, on character and on action. Good is contrasted with bad, ugly with beautiful, success with failure, helplessness with successful outcome, reward with punishment, death with resuscitation, magnificent with dirty and small with large. These contrasting polarities run through the tales in manifold variations. In



MT 3 Anakanani, the murderer, is contrasted with the caring Anakamuna. The clever girl in MT 14, who follows instructions, is contrasted with her younger sister who fails to follow instructions. It is these contrasting characters that are in competition which create a sense of conflict between the competing values.

Conflict in Maragoli folktales is but a manifestation of the phenomenon of contrast that gives vividness to all artistic creations. There are two types of conflicts discerned in the corpus of tales under study. Conflicts in the Maragoli folktale are developed in plotting and in characterisation. Plot conflict creates that sense of struggle, which is developed when several lines of action each point toward some outcome, which is incompatible with the others. This conflict is seen in the overall plot of the tales in which the desires of male characters are directly opposed through creation of contradictory sub-texts that subvert masculinity and to make it appear evil and inhuman. A good example is MT 9 in which Kalasimba is portrayed, in a sub-text, as an irresponsible man who does not care for his family, but spends most of his time drinking with fellow men.

Closely related to the vitality of characterisation are the degrees of contrast among characters in the Maragoli tale. The more sharply the characters are contrasted with one another, the more vivid each becomes and the richer the total effect is. The more readily recognisable contrasts are those in which characters are strongly differentiated. The best examples of such characters are found in MT 14 *The Man who Became an Ogre and His Wife*. In the process of performing this tale, Torokasi Esekele intensified the contrast between characters through pairing two sisters whose attributes are diametrically opposed to one another. One is keen, diligent, and careful while the other is careless and hopelessly bawdy.

This powerful rendition of the tale through contrasting characters gives it dramatic qualities and makes it more readily acceptable as true to life. Vividness of character contrast is also a means through which gender ideology is contested

since each character signifies certain values. Conflict develops when the principle of contrast evokes ethical values of fairness and justice. Most of the conflicts in the Maragoli folktales studied are bilateral, and involve two main characters signifying masculinity and femininity.

### **5:6 Patterning of Images**

The basic resources of the Maragoli tale are the images, which are evoked during performance. The narrator evokes these images by externalising experiences, which each member of the audience shares. Without this shared experience, what Harold Sheub (1977) has called, in respect to the Xhosa *Intsomi*, the 'Conspiracy' between narrator and audience, there can be no folktale.

The movement of the tale from beginning to end is like a journey through tribulations, trials, and struggles to the ultimate destination when one is signaled to get back to the real world through a combination of signs and formulae. The narrative process is governed by specific conventions, which the performer and the audience understand and uphold. This accounts for the performers' successful transmission of implications and innuendos. It is through this process that the gender ideology is transmitted and absorbed unconsciously. As Egara Kabaji (1991) notes, the structure of the narrative remains intact, but the performer dresses it by drawing from the common images and happening of the time. It is through this that it is possible to read a silent pact between the audience and the performer who agree to cooperate and enjoy the performance.

The performer of the Maragoli tale achieves her goal of creating the desired emotions in the audience through the images she evokes. Images, according to Harold Sheub (1978:71) are felt actions or set of actions evoked in the imagination of the members of the audience by verbal and non verbal elements arranged and controlled by the performer, requiring a common experience by both artist and audience. Many such images are extreme, fantastic, vivid, even

violent; others call forth warmer emotions, feelings of the hearth, familiarity and serenity.

The performer blends these images through the rhythm of the performance in repeated segments. In the Maragoli tale MT12, *Mulele and Her Friends*, the girls go out to fetch firewood, but while doing so they come across a human skeleton. In an absurd turn of events, they start laughing at it. A human skeleton is not something amusing; neither is it a spectacle worthy of our fascination. Already, all of them have committed a crime by laughing at a human skeleton. The skeleton signifies ill treatment of the dead, a fact that is unacceptable. It means that somebody who died did not receive a decent burial, as it should be. All the girls except one realise that they have made a mistake and stop laughing. Mulele does not stop laughing. She does not even join others to fetch firewood. Mulele goes home laughing. At night she hears a song from outside the house:

Mulele mulele  
Yaseka kihango mulele  
Mulele mulele

Mulele mulele  
Mulele laughed at a human skeleton  
Mulele mulele

The elders sympathise with Mulele, because she is traumatized. They decide to burn the skeleton. The act of burning to destroy the spirit that torments the girl reflects the weird practice among the Maragoli in which those guilty of murder organise to burn the remains of the deceased in order to free themselves from the vengeful ghost of the deceased that may haunt them, as dramatically depicted in Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* (1976). The repetition of the song as Mulele gets more and more traumatised creates an even more vivid picture in the minds of the audience. This inevitably evokes emotional responses in the audience. The burning of the skeleton and the continued singing of the ashes traumatises Mulele. It signifies and validates the fact that the dead are always with us hence the elaborate rituals that the Maragoli indulge in after the

death of an individual as described in Chapter Two. Mulele drops dead and that is the climax of the tale, when justice is done. The pleasure of the tale and the ultimate cathartic release is realised at this juncture. In the end, a strong message is sent out that a girl who gets amused over absurdities is ill-mannered.

It is therefore important to point out that the patterned images in the folktales convey a specific gendered message. This is achieved through the technique of juxtaposition. This technique dictates that events and characters are placed side by side in a bid to communicate gender messages. Juxtaposition opens up a plurality of possible meaningful connections between juxtaposed elements. Looked at closely in terms of which character does what, it becomes clear that the overriding idea is that the female character destroys what the male character has built. The female character is presented as being passive, careless and destructive while the male character is active, careful and constructive.

In order to demonstrate how juxtaposition works, it is good consider MT4 in detail. In this tale, the rhythmic patterns seem to juxtapose the actions of the female characters to those of the male. A clear pattern emerges at the end as we will see in the following sets of actions that make MT 4:

Figure 5:3

**EPISODE 1**

|                                                       |      |          |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------|----------|
| 1. A hard working farmer endeavours to earn a living. | Male | Positive |
| 2. A bird disturbs the order.                         |      | Negative |
| 3. The man lays a trap.                               | Male | Positive |
| 4. The bird is trapped.                               | Male | Positive |
| 5. The bird agrees to provide honey .                 | Male | Positive |

**EPISODE 2**

|                               |        |          |
|-------------------------------|--------|----------|
| 1. The girl misuses the bird. | Female | Negative |
|-------------------------------|--------|----------|

|                                                 |        |          |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| 2. The bird escapes.                            |        | Positive |
| 3. The boy goes out to look for it.             | Male   | Positive |
| 4. The boy meets a false Donor                  | Female | Negative |
| 5. The woman and her daughters exploit the boy. | Female | Negative |
| 6. He takes off to his home.                    | Male   | Positive |
| 7. The boy hero arrives home.                   | Male   | Positive |
| 8. Mother kills her own daughter.               | Female | Negative |
| 9. Boy initiates magical resurrection.          | Male   | Positive |

As the performer takes the audience through all these actions showing clearly that all the negative actions are done by women, a clear patriarchal ideology is imparted in the audience. Women are destructive, deceitful, careless and murderous.

The Maragoli folktale is structured along a defined formal configuration. It is through the unveiling of this structure during performance that the aesthetic satisfaction is achieved. As Max Luthi (1987: 54) notes, the style and structure of the tale is one of great precision. It is characterised by clarity, compactness and exactitude.

The enjoyment of the tale and the transfer of the gender ideology occur through the juxtaposition of desirable and undesirable actions as the narrator moves the narrative from beginning to dénouement. The feeling created in the minds of the audience is like that of swinging on a pendulum between polarities, which constitute pleasure/pain, good/bad, desirable/undesirable stability/instability, order/disorder and so on. The fearful frightening actions are followed by hilarious and pleasant actions. The juxtaposition of evil and good characters gives the tales their distinctive aesthetic quality. However, there is a sense in which the

juxtaposition is gendered where, on the surface, the feminine represents the negative while the masculine represents the positive.

The main characters in the twenty tales studied are contrasted. The female is cast as weak while the male is cast as strong, both morally and physically. The contrast is achieved through juxtaposition. The juxtaposition of the characters appeals to the audience. The audience is led to develop a relationship of love/hatred towards characters. The female characters are consistently portrayed as gullible, foolish, and jealous while the boy/male characters are portrayed as courageous, strong, and tough. The clear categorization and unmistakable identity of the characters make it easy for the transfer of the patriarchal gender ideology. The distinct attributes to each character create unforgettable pictures in the minds of the audience. To be called Anakamuna, Mulele, Girwang'a, Muhonja has meaning. The vivid picture of gender roles and attributes plays a major role in the socialisation of both girls and boys in Maragoli land. The unconscious absorption of the gender ideology is assured in this consistent patterning of images.

### **5.7 The Gendered Language of the Tales**

The performance of the Maragoli folktale involves both verbal and extra-verbal aspects, as already stated. Apart from these extra-linguistic aspects of performance, the image-construction process in the minds of the audience is achieved through language. It is, however, important to note that everyday language has in-built gender biases.

In the Maragoli language, conventionally-established patterns of transitivity restrict the use of verbs to allocations with nouns indicating males only. Take, for instance, all the actions of the transitive verbs indicating intimate relationships: (*Kovoriza*) to seduce (*Koleta, Kushira*), to marry, (*Kogona*) to make love. Only the male subjects can perform these actions. This is, however, not peculiar to Maragoli language which has entrenched sex differentials in language. There are

also hosts of words/terms, which give all-important positions in society to the father figure. A man is for instance addressed as '*Omwami*', which is also the term for god or ruler.

The male power and superior rank are reflected in numerous expressions and images, which are infused in the folktales. The underlying ideology is to portray the male above the female, physically, intellectually and symbolically as in virtually all positions of authority. In the same breath, some of the images used in idioms, particularly in relation to the sex act are violent. Violent images make the female the passive recipient or victim of the male's action. The most euphemistic references make the woman an object or victim of the man's action. In nine of the tales under study, namely MT1, MT3, MT5, MT7, MT8, MT10, MT11, MT14, MT15, girls are either eaten or under the threat of being eaten.

Language in the tales is used to show man's physical power, which makes him the provider and the leader of the household. The women who are praiseworthy in the tales, on the other hand, earn this through being loyal, kind, generous and hardworking. The implication of this portrayal in the socialisation process as the children imbibe different images leads girls and boys to develop distinct characteristics. A consistent pattern of images emerges in the narrative process. The boy is what the girl is not: courageous while the girl is weak, brave while the girl is passive, hardworking while the girl is lazy, thoughtful while the girl is thoughtless, dependable while the girl is emotional.

It is through the binary relationship presented in the process of performance that transfers gender ideology. The differences between the qualities for which men and women are praised are reflective of a complex system of complementary role allocations based on gender.

Indeed language in Maragoli folktales should be seen as a tool for lifelong sociological conditioning of the sexes. The symbolism used in all the Maragoli

tales is recurrent and fairly standard reflecting the binary oppositions between men and women. Their effect is to reinforce the traditional ethos, norms and practice.

### **5.8 Conclusion**

In this assessment of aspects of performance, which contribute to the audiences' understanding and internalisation of the gender ideology, it is notable that the action from beginning to dénouement consists of moves, images and icons that convey a specific gender ideology. The structure of the tale is in built with gender-differentiated images. The philosophy behind characterisation supports the fact that girl/women characters are weak, jealous, and evil while the male characters are consistently portrayed as strong, courageous and morally upright. It is through this patterned portrayal that the dominant gender ideology is conveyed. Yet underlying this surface there are sub-texts that contest the dominant ideology and exalt feminine values and ideals.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to identify gender related themes from a cultural discourse in order to determine how gender is constructed in an African society. It specifically examined a selection of twenty folktales from the Maragoli community. The tales were studied to uncover the gender-inflected images, symbols, signs and formulaic patterns. As an ethnographic research, it took cognisance of the fact that ethnographic knowledge about construction of gender ideologies is valuable as part of a global history (Connell 2004). The findings of such a project therefore become important in understanding the global structure and dynamics of gender.

Following an eclectic model, the study utilised a number of theoretical approaches, namely, gender theories, feminist literary discourses, psychoanalysis theory and discourse analysis theory. This combination was grounded in modern folkloristic perspectives, which include viewing oral texts as representations of collective thinking. It also paid attention to intertextuality and contextual information in the analysis of the texts.

Generally, the study's entry point was to illuminate how the Maragoli folktale reflects and teaches both men and women to assume certain identities. It also aimed at examining how gendered interaction and power are structured. This necessitated the integration of both men's and women's experiences and emotions. Since gender is the most important organising principle of society, it became mandatory to consider the effect of socialisation on character formation. Unlike many other studies of this nature, which mostly consider women in terms of how they are affected by certain social institutions and systems, the study looked at women as active agents and how they contest patriarchy.

Apart from Chapter One in which some of the important theoretical and methodological issues, which have been raised in recent studies and which inform this study on the construction of gender are discussed, the intermediate

chapters discuss various gender issues by presenting evidence adduced from data collected from the Maragoli people themselves who inhabit mainly Vihiga District of Western Province of Kenya. (See maps in appendix B). Chapter Two undertook an overview of the gender aspects of the social, historical and cultural context of the Maragoli folktale texts. Chapter Three identified the gender-based attitudes, themes and ideologies, which the Maragoli promote in relation to marriage through the narrative process. Chapter Four focused on the gender roles assigned to various characters in the folktales under study while Chapter Five directed inquiry into the folktale performance by taking cognisance of the totality of the context, text and mode of delivery of the folktales. It therefore remains, a my last task, to summarise the conclusions and make a few suggestions for further research.

It was established that the Maragoli community, like many other African communities, is patriarchal, and therefore the tales perpetuate the dominant ideology in terms of what is perceived as the correct gender values, which enables them preserve their sense of social order. Yet underlying this supposition it was revealed that the folktale narrative process is also a site from which this dominant ideology is contested and subverted. The Maragoli folktale performance, apart from being for recreation, it was revealed, is part of Maragoli formal education. However, the tales also express hidden female desires and wishes especially expressed through creation of sub-texts that contest and subvert patriarchy. Through the folktale performances, the audience experiences the pleasure of a symbolically nature. This is possible partly through the patterning of images in the tales, which are configured to discuss gender roles and perspectives.

From the ethnographic data discussed in Chapter Two, it was shown that the folktale performer is largely influenced and defined by her/his culture and socio-economic, geographical and historical conditions of his or her existence. The folktales are therefore created out of the performer's observation, assessment,

criticism, celebration and subversion of his or her social cultural milieu. The tales are, in this sense, the mirror image of the producing society, reflecting the moral ambiguities and the hidden desires and aspirations of the people.

While contextualising the folktale texts within the socio-political and economic situation, it was established that the tales also reflect the religious orientation of the Maragoli people. Being deeply religious people, the folktale performance also reflects the Maragoli form of worship. The symbolic drum as a representation of masculinity that is revered among the Maragoli is cast in the tales as the magical drum whose divine functions include saving girls from ogres. The Maragoli forms of worship including the slaughter of a he-goat with horns signify the superiority of the masculine gender. The peripheral position of the women in rituals is also symbolically presented in the tales, demonstrating the hegemonic nature of the gendered structure of power.

The Maragoli believe in abundant progeny. This fact was not only vindicated by the ethnographic data presented in Chapter Two but also through the tales' reverence of the number eight. A woman who gave birth to eight children becomes a *mukaye* meaning respectable woman. In the same vein the Maragoli, it was revealed, associate the royal snake Puff Adder with fertility. It therefore means that the hierarchical nature of society upholds the masculine as superior to the feminine, but a woman's ability to produce children, and male children at that, moves her up the ladder towards some status within patriarchal society.

Most rituals performed are geared towards making one a responsible husband or wife. The folktale performance among the Maragoli is therefore part of preparation of the children for their future responsibilities in adulthood as husbands and wives. It is with this folktale medium that the conflicts that may arise within polygamous marriages are introduced and resolved for the young to learn from. Although presented as peripheral in rituals and folktales of the Maragoli, women, as active agents, initiate sub-texts to ennoble and extol their

role and virtues. They also play an important role through consultation in the institution of “sleeping on the word” in which men defer verdicts in order to consult their wives.

What was presented as taboo in day-to-day life, is imaginatively presented, debated and contested through folktale performance. This symbolic presentation serves a psychological function. It is this aspect of fantasy and wish-fulfilment that appeals to the audience. The narrative process becomes an avenue through which what is lost in reality is recreated in fantasy. When those objects, relationships and experiences that give life meaning and make us feel full, satisfied and secure are snatched from us, part of our garden neurosis is the creation of a stockpile of symbols that remind us of those lost qualities (Kimmel 2003). Folktale performance therefore constitutes a major source for the liberation of the imagination. Built largely on fantasy, the Maragoli folktale has therapeutic, emotional, cathartic and didactic functions. It also provides a medium through which this society inducts new generations into its life-flow.

The discourse of the texts is gendered and it articulates a commentary upon power relations in marital affairs. Although folktales mirror the social realities, they are at the same time a medium through which the Maragoli construct ideologies about gender relations. Maragoli folktales abound with voices of contest and subversion of patriarchy especially in regard to marital relationships. This is especially done through presentation of female characters that subvert patriarchal structures by contesting their defined social spheres of operation.

The study noted the centrality of marriage in the Maragoli folktale. All the tales in the corpus under study deal with relationships within the family unit or the socialisation of both girls and boys towards marriage. The tales, interrogated at a close range, reveal that they are about proper behaviour in marital or pre-marital relationships and therefore they constitute a site from which the Maragoli reflect and ponder over their gender ideology.

The tale performance is a sophisticated practice that imparts the ideological inclinations of the society to the audience. In a sense, a performer is a mediator between a people and their literature and discusses the conflicts within the society. The narration conforms to the rules governing the shape of the tales. These rules are defined by the patriarchal ideology that governs the society. The narrative process of the Maragoli folktale thus constructs the cosmic consciousness of the Maragoli in regard to marriage and gender roles. The perceived shape of the cosmos is reiterated and given form in the pattern of the tales.

The study has further revealed that Maragoli folktales define what the community perceives as the proper domains of operation for the sexes. There exists, within the Maragoli worldview, three gendered domains: the home, the environment just outside the home and the world beyond, the wilderness. The girls and women only operate in the first and the second spheres, but only boys and men venture into the third sphere. However, a limited number of women attempt going beyond the second sphere. These instances constitute the sub-texts created to contest patriarchal order. Paradoxically the home, which is the domain of the women, provides the framework for negotiating, contesting and subverting gender ideology. Men as the privileged group are more often out of the home, leaving this core domain for women who utilize it to form special bonds and establish power blocs relegating the men to the periphery. This is evident from the many tales that depict men as absentee heads of families.

The tales subtly draw a picture of the dominated in society and show them in confrontation with patriarchal forces. It is through this medium that the women as underdogs achieve, albeit fantastically, a wish-fulfilment through the process of identification with the heroes and heroines. The tales also provide a means through which boys and girls are socialised to understand the limits of their relationships while providing a wish fulfilment medium for them.

While upholding the values of the dominant patriarchal culture, which are biased against women, a number of the tales appropriate the prevailing misogynist images to create sub-texts that glorify women. Spots of resistance and rupture are evident from the symbolic surface of the tales. This is evident in tales that depict women who defy the social order and set masculine goals for themselves. Such female characters rise above being objects of male desire and direction. By telling these tales, the women indulge in a semiotic discourse and project a female perspective of society with desire to change it.

The study has shown that characters in the Maragoli tale range from human beings, physical features to animals and birds, but they all signify masculinity or femininity. It has been established that the work and activities assigned to any particular sex defines its position in the overall social hierarchical order. The tales reveal a gendered division of roles and labour. The tasks carried out by women and those objects and beings both inanimate and animate that symbolise femininity complement the masculine in a subordinate role.

The ogre as a masculine hegemonic figure inspires fear in the female characters. The ogre casts a dark shadow on the movement of girls and women characters and they limit their sphere of operation to the domestic domain. The ogres represent masculine hegemony that is often contested and subverted through creation of sub-texts in the folktale performance.

Some degree of ambivalence is discerned in the tales. Women are cast as jealous, hardheaded, disobedient, foolish, vulnerable, callous, deceitful and stupid, yet at the same time the same tales uphold their role in reproduction and as nurturers of children. The tales thus place the power and control of resources within the family in the hands of the male characters while upholding women's reproduction capabilities and care of children. Various stimuli are invoked in order to uphold the status quo and instil a sense of fear in the female characters.

The boys are cast as breadwinners, responsible, independent, decisive and brave. We may therefore conclude that this discernible ambivalence is a product of contesting voices.

The actual performance of the tales is also governed by a gender ideology. The composition and performance of the Maragoli folktale manifests a spatial temporal and mimetic nature. It is also marked by a compression of time and action but it remains reflective and interpretive. From the point of view of these characteristics, the Maragoli folktale gets its shape through controlled manipulation of the variable elements along an invariable structure at the time of performance.

Women, as the prime performers, utilise the folktale performance as a stage from which they contest their subordination. Performance is usually done in the kitchen next to the hearth. From this vantage point, women tell their children about desirable behaviour while at the same time subverting the patriarchal structures by castigating the male characters. The opening formulae invite the audience to the world of fantasy in which gender concerns are transferred through a pleasurable means while the closing formulae signal the departure from this fantasy world.

The most critical device in the transfer of gender ideology is the device of repetition. The performer repeatedly evokes images through description, song, theme and character creating a consistent image of feminine and masculine attributes. Contrast is also employed in the tales to enhance the binary principle depicting the feminine and the masculine. Contrast operates on the level of character and action clearly distinguishing male and female. These images are patterned and juxtaposed to create a mental picture of binary polarities.

Having presented the findings of this study, it is now appropriate to make a few suggestions on further research in cultural discourses in Africa. From the

literature review presented in Chapter One, it is evident that very little research in Africa is directed towards traditional cultural discourses yet they hold the key to our understanding of a people's philosophy of life. The fact that very few universities in Africa have departments of folklore studies reveals our attitude towards this area. Yet findings from research in this area are critical in helping us solve modern problems of power relations at the family and societal level.

It is therefore necessary to direct our intellectual inquiry into folklore. Apart from the folktale, which has received considerable attention, other genres are yet to be given critical attention. In the same vein, research has to be directed to modern contemporary folklore forms like the urban legend, the chain letter and the narratives of new technology. Folkloristic materials created in order to cope with changes caused by technological culture deserve attention. These folklore forms revolve around transport systems, telecommunication forms, such as radio, television and the computer.

As African societies change and recognise the effects of patriarchy to the development of society and in particular the rights of both men and women, it is important to direct inquiry into ways through which the dominated class contests the dominant ideology. This will help us redefine our methods in dealing with emerging gender conflicts. In essence, the findings would help us redefine our methods in the struggle for gender equity. Social and cultural discourses are not just sources of entertainment, but ideological tools, which reflect, justify and enhance certain beliefs and attitudes (Kabira 1997). A study of these discourses would yield information on how patriarchy subjugates a section of the population and the underlying ideological assumptions. This would assist in providing information on how the underprivileged contest and preserve their humanity.

It has been acknowledged widely that the battle against HIV/AIDS will not be won until we deal with the question of power relations, not only at the personal level, but also in the way we distribute resources. It is my belief that gender research in



cultural discourses will enable us to comprehend power relations in patriarchal societies, thereby facilitating the evolution of intervention strategies. This study has for instance revealed that women have not always been passive, but have always actively contested patriarchy and so the feminist struggle is not a recent phenomenon in Africa. It could be given impetus by study findings from traditional cultural discourses.

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## APPENDIX A

### MARAGOLI TALE 1 *LIVOGOYI AND ULUSAGA*<sup>2</sup>

Performer: Milly Sabwa (Female)  
Age: 52 years old  
Occupation: Peasant farmer  
Audience: Five people - Adults  
Place: Keveye Village, West Maragoli, Sabatia Division.  
Time: 6.00 p.m.

Long, long time ago, before my grandmother was born, ogres ate all the people in our part of the world. There remained only two children in a certain village: a boy and a girl. The two managed to hide from the ogres until the ogres became few. The two children lived all alone, then one day the girl said to her brother: “we are alone in the world: Let us get married. If we do not, how will we get more people?”

The boy said, “even if I looked for another girl to marry, where will I get her? There is nobody living except us.” The girl said, “my brother you are very handsome. I’ll marry you.”

Night came and they slept. Late in the night, their house caught fire. By the time they woke up, it was too late for them to escape and they both perished.

It was once again the rainy season and the ground became nice and wet and plants sprouted out of the ground. Where the boy and girl died there sprouted two vegetable plants. One very bitter vegetable plant called Ulusaga sprouted from the remains of the boy’s body and a sweet and nice vegetable plant called Livogoyi sprouted where the girl had laid her head.

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<sup>2</sup> Livogoyi and Ulusaga are two types of indigenous vegetables relished by people from western Kenya.



Not long after, the rainy season ended and ushered in the dry season. What this boy and girl did not know was that there was a certain village, which had remained with one man who had many wives. One of his wives did not have any children. She was barren. Since the whole land was very dry there were no green vegetables. One day this barren woman told the others, "I am going to look for vegetables. She went very far into the countryside and by good luck she saw two lovely green plants. One was Ulusaga the other was Livogoyi. Her heart danced with joy for she had found some vegetables at last. She picked them hastily and after putting them in her basket, she went home.

When she reached home she took olodelu<sup>?</sup> on to which she put her vegetables and started preparing them for cooking. When her co-wives saw her preparing green vegetables they all gathered around her and exclaimed, "what green vegetables! Where did you get these vegetables from?"

"I got them from very far away, in the countryside," she replied.

"How could anybody plant green vegetables in such a dry season?" One of them asked.

"I found the vegetables growing in the ruins of a house which had burnt down."

"It must be very far, the vegetables look nice, and healthy. You must be very lucky," one of her co-wives replied.

After preparing the vegetables, the barren woman cooked them. After sometime she tasted them and found that they were very bitter. She added some water into the pot and continued cooking them. A few minutes later, she tasted them again, they were still very bitter. "They must be cooked by now," she thought. "But why are they still very bitter? What shall I do?" She wondered. She then removed them from the fire and took them to the granary and left them until the next day.

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<sup>?</sup> Hand woven winnowing tray.

The following morning she went into the granary to check whether they were still bitter. When she uncovered the pot, to her surprise, she found two little bones but no vegetables. Then she exclaimed, "Uuu! Have my ancestors visited me?"

She covered the pot and went back to her house quickly. She did not tell her co-wives what she had seen.

During the day, her co-wives came and asked her, "Why didn't you give us some of your vegetables?"

"The vegetables are finished, even though they were bitter," she answered.

"In these times of famine could anyone have eaten vegetables without sharing? How mean can you be? You should have given us to taste for ourselves," they retorted.

"You wouldn't have liked them," she replied.

"No, we wouldn't have refused. Do we have any of our own?"

The next day the woman went back to the granary to check the pot. When she opened the lid of the pot, she found that the two bones had changed into two small babies. One was a boy and the other, a girl. The woman backed off in amazement saying, "has my God remembered me today and given me these children? Or are they my ancestors who have come back to life?"

She did not tell anyone what had happened. She feared that the others would laugh at her and think that ghosts had visited her through vegetables.

She covered the pot nicely and left it in the barn. The following day she went again to check on the progress of the children. This time, the children had grown into two healthy children. They were now too big for the pot. She thought to herself, "my God has done this to remove shame from me." While she was still thinking, she saw the children laughing. Then she said to herself, "let me go and bring two calabashes and put the babies in them." She did so, putting each baby in its own calabash and left them in the granary.

The next day, she went back to check on them again. The children had become too big for the calabashes. She looked at them and saw that they were very beautiful children. She had a great longing to take them out of the barn and hold them on her lap, but she feared what people might say. They would ask her where she got the babies. So she decided to take them out of the granary and hide them in a very big pot in the house.

She waited till it was dark, then went into the barn and took the children out and put them in a big pot, which was in her house. All night, her heart was beating with great longing. She yearned to hold the children. But she could not do this openly. She thought carefully as to when she would be feeding and bathing them. She decided to be doing all these things when everybody had gone away to work in the fields. When the whole homestead was quiet, she would quickly take out the children from the pot and bathe and feed them. The children grew in strength and they were very beautiful children. Whenever the woman looked at them, she would want to jump up with joy. Her co-wives noticed a change in her countenance. They asked her, "why are you so joyful nowadays? You seem as though you would even fly with joy?"

"What's the matter with you people. Wasn't I meant ever to be happy?" she replied shyly. But inside her, she knew why she was so happy.

When she checked on the children again, she found that they could no longer fit in the same pot. She then put each in a different pot. They grew into big children. Their foster-mother no longer bathed them. They bathed themselves in the evening behind their house. They would then eat and stay for a while with their mother before going back into their respective pots.

They continued this routine for days. The man of the home did not know that such children existed till the ogre saw them one evening when he was passing

behind their house. The ogre admired the girl and he said, “so there is such a beautiful girl in this home.”

The ogre changed into a human being. Then he came back to the girl’s home to ask for her hand in marriage. He arrived at the girl’s home and was cordially welcomed. The people in that home did not know that he was an ogre and not a human being. The young men in the home took him to their own hut and entertained him.

After talking with them for some time he said, “I would like to make known to you the purpose of my visit.”

“Go ahead and tell us,” the boys said.

“I want a girl from this home.”

All the girls in that home were called to come and be seen. When they had assembled, the boys told him, “now choose from these the one you want.” He began looking through the group of girls who had come. He looked at each one of them keenly, scrutinising each one of them, but he did not see the one he had seen bathing behind the house. After examining all of them he said, “the girl I wanted is not among these ones. I saw her one day from a distance.”

“So you had already chosen the one you want to marry before you came here?” The boys asked.

“Oh yes. I had already seen the girl,” he replied.

“The girl you saw does not belong to this home, “ they said.

“Are you sure?” He asked.

“We don’t have any other girl in this home. If you saw another girl, she was just a visitor,” the boys answered.

It was not long before he came back and asked for the same girl. When he entered the house he said: “I want the girl I saw in this home.” “There is no

other girl in this home apart from the girls we showed you the other day," the boys answered.

The ogre came back again and again asking for the same girl whom the members of this homestead did not know existed. When they were tired of his visits, they asked him: "In which house did you see this particular girl?"

"I saw her behind that house; that is where I saw her." He replied pointing at the house of the barren women.

The man of the homestead said. "In that house there is no child. You might have seen a visitor."

"Oh no, there is a boy and a girl in that house," he replied. "Are you mad?" The man replied angrily.

When the barren woman overheard this discussion she was worried. She came and told him, "you young man, am I the only barren woman in the world? Stop there, and don't say another word."

The whole of that day and night the barren woman was very worried. She did not sleep that night. She kept on turning and tossing in bed as she thought. "I used to pray all night long and then my God was merciful to me and gave me these two children. Now what does this young man want from me?"

This ogre did not stop bothering them. He kept on coming and demanding to see the girl.

"I want the girl I saw, that's all," he said.

But he got no response from the members of this homestead who were now tired of his unreasonable demands. At last he was so annoyed. He began thinking and scheming in order to be given the girl. Then an idea occurred to him and he said to himself.

“If I went and lived in the sea and ordered all the rivers and lakes to dry up and then stopped the rain, there would be a great drought. This might force them to give me the girl.” Then he went and did as he had planned. All the lakes dried up, and all the rivers too and there was no rain. Then the grass dried up and the cattle had nothing to eat and no water to drink.

People began wondering why all the lakes, rivers and streams had dried up and why there was such a great drought. They investigated this strange happening and discovered that it was the ogre called Nasu who had dried up all the water in the land and stopped the rain from raining. They also found out the reason why he did this: That one day Nasu was passing near a certain house and he saw a very beautiful girl. When he asked for the girl to marry, the man of the homestead refused to give him the girl. That’s why he went and dried all the water in the land.

“Let us therefore go to the home of this girl and tell the father to give up his daughter to Nasu or else all our children and cattle will die,” they decided.

All the people got together and went to this man’s home. They urged him to bring out the girl he was hiding and give her to Nasu so that people may get water. The man did not know what to do. When he was tired of their frequent visits, he decided to take one of his daughters to the sea where Nasu was staying. When the man arrived at the riverbank he sat there and began singing this song:

*You who dwells in the riverbed  
Come, here is a girl for you,  
Come, here is a girl for you,  
And give me water for my cattle.*

Then the ogre replied:

*That is my sister-in-law  
That is my sister-in-law  
It is Namulahi<sup>2</sup> I want  
That the cattle may drink.*

The man went home, left the girl there and this time took one of his sons to the sea and sang:

*You who dwells in the sea  
Come, here is a boy for you.  
Come, here is a boy for you;  
And give me water for my cattle.*

Nasu replied:

*That is my brother-in-law  
That is my brother-in-law  
It is Namulahi I want  
That the cattle may drink.*

The man went back home with his son. Then he took his wife and repeated the song. Nasu replied that that was his mother-in-law.

The man went home with his wife and this time brought his cow. He took it to the sea and sang:

*You who dwells in the riverbed.  
Come, here is a cow for you.  
Come, here is a cow for you  
And give me water for my cattle.*

Nasu replied:

*That is yours  
That is yours  
It is Namulahi I want  
That the cattle may drink.*

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<sup>2</sup> Namulahi means 'the beautiful one' or 'the good one'.

The man took to Nasu all the things he had but he refused them. The drought continued and people and cattle began dying. The people, having seen this man offering all sorts of things to Nasu and Nasu refusing, said, “we are just bothering this fellow for nothing. He is not the one who is causing the drought. He does not have a daughter called Namulahi.”

But others objected saying, “no, let us keep on urging him to produce Namulahi. Our people are dying one by one. Will the whole village perish because of one girl?” They decided to search his home. They took the members of the family out of their house and searched everywhere. At last they found the two children in the barren woman’s house. They were so amazed and exclaimed, “Oooo! What was the matter with you? You have caused so many deaths because you hid your daughter away. Take her to Nasu now.”

But Namulahi’s brother objected saying, “you are not taking her now. You will take her tomorrow. Go and tell Nasu that tomorrow he should come and take the girl at the cliff next to the river bank. She will not go into the water.”

They went and took his message to Nasu. The following day it started to rain. The rivers, lakes and streams were filled with water

Hearing that she would be given to Nasu the following day, Namulahi wept the whole night. But her brother kept on comforting her by saying, “don’t weep whatever will eat you will eat me as well!”

The boy made two types of spears. One as straight as a stick and other was forked. At dawn, Namulahi was taken to the appointed cliff. Her brother accompanied her and when they got there the girl went up at the very top of the cliff. Her brother hid himself in the hollow side of the cliff, with his weapons. The man then went to the river bank and sang:



*You who dwells in the sea  
Come here is Namulahi  
Come here is Namulahi  
And give me water for my cattle.*

When Nasu heard that he had been given Namulahi, he ran out of the water in great haste with his tail high up in the air as he danced with joy. As soon as he got out of the water, it began raining heavily. He did not mind the rain. He made for the cliff. When he got there, he began climbing quickly but before he got halfway, Namulahi's brother pierced him at the side. He fell off and asked, "what has pierced me?" All this time the girl was screaming, desperately terrified.

Once more he tried to climb. Again Namulahi's brother pierced him with a spear. Once more he fell off and exclaimed, "what is this thing that is piercing me. Where is it hiding?"

Namulahi went on screaming and crying as Nasu tried to climb again for the third time. Once more the boy pierced him with the spear and he fell down heavily and was unable to get up. The boy then pierced him again and again till he died.

The boy climbed up on the cliff and brought his sister down and took her home. They found their mother dying with grief. They left that village and went to stay elsewhere. The boy built his mother a house and the three of them lived happily thereafter.

MARAGOLI TALE 2  
*KALISANGA AND KALIMONGE*

Performer: Maluha Imbwaga (Male)  
Age: 27 years old  
Occupation: Farm worker  
Audience: Six people - four adults and two children.  
Place: Kidundu Village  
Time: 3.00 p.m.

Long time ago there was a man who had two wives. The two wives gave birth to daughters. The first wife called her daughter Kalisanga and the second wife named her's Kalimonge. These stepsisters were age mates. They grew up together and were very fond of each other. Between them Kalisanga was the most beautiful.

After some time Kalisanga's mother died. Kalisanga was placed under the care of her stepmother. As the girls matured, they grew even fonder of each other and did everything together. They were always collecting firewood, fetching water and bathing together. Even when they grinded grain, they did it together. You can't believe this, but they even shared a boyfriend!

Despite the great love the two sisters had for each other, their mother hated Kalisanga and always tried to destroy her. At one time she had the intention of separating them. She gave them different assignments and instructed them not to do things together. She did this in order to accomplish her evil plan on Kalisanga.

Kalimonge was asked to go and fetch water from the stream while Kalisanga was to remain at home and grind grain. The children begged their mother to allow them to do the two duties together but she refused and demanded that they do what she had asked them to. They decided to obey their mother for they did not want to show disrespect.

Immediately Kalimonge left for the stream, her mother stopped Kalisanga from grinding grain and forced her into a drum. She then carried the drum and threw it into a nearby lake and went back home.

When Kalimonge returned from the stream, she found her beloved sister missing. She then asked her mother to tell her where Kalisanga had gone to. The mother insisted that she didn't know. Kalimonge was puzzled. She checked at their grandmother's place but never found her. From there she went to all relatives and neighbours but did not find her. She checked at their boy friend's home and she was told that Kalisanga had not been there. She returned home crestfallen. She once again inquired if Kalisanga had shown up while she was away but she was told she hadn't been seen yet. Their father too had looked for her everywhere but had not found her. Kalimonge felt very sad and distressed. She refused to eat and began to mourn the loss of her beloved sister who was her companion and best friend.

One day she left home and went to the lakeshore. And she began to sing:

*Oh Kalisanga, oh Kalisanga  
my mother's child Kalisanga  
With whom shall I grind  
With whom shall I walk  
With whom shall I collect firewood  
My mother's child Kalisanga*

Kalisanga sang the song for sometime. When she paused, she heard a voice that sounded like that of a sick person, singing from the direction of the lake. She listened carefully and heard the voice sing:

*Oh Kalimonge, oh Kalimonge  
My mother's child Kalimonge  
It is our mother Kalimonge  
It is our mother who planned this  
My mother's child Kalimonge*

The song sung in answer to hers disturbed Kalimonge very much. She repeated her song again. Kalimonge noticed that the voice was her sister's and ran home to call her father. Their neighbours and relatives accompanied them to the lakeside. Again Kalimonge began to sing:

*Oh Kalisanga, oh Kalisanga  
My mother's child Kalisanga  
With whom shall I grind  
With whom shall I collect firewood  
My mother's child Kalisanga  
Oh Kalisanga, oh Kalisanga*

And Kalisanga responded:

*My mother's child Kalimonge  
My mother's child Kalimonge  
It is our mother Kalimonge  
It is our mother who planned this  
My mother's child Kalimonge*

The voice was now faint and weak which showed that she was about to die. Their boy friend too sang and the drum in which Kalisanga was in floated to the shore and was removed from the water. It was opened up and Kalisanga was removed from it. One of her sides was virtually rotten. When Kalimonge saw her sister so thin and sick she got some food and helped her eat.

The two girls refused to go back home but instead accompanied their boyfriend to his home and got married. Kalimonge together with their husband carefully nursed Kalisanga until she healed. From there, they lived together in perfect love for a long time.

### MARAGOLI TALE 3 *ANAKAMUNA AND ANAKANANI*

Performer: David Umbwanga (Male)  
Age: 54 years old  
Occupation: Peasant farmer  
Audience: Four people, two adults and two children

Place: Navuhi Village, Central Maragoli, Vihiga Division.  
Time: 6.00 p.m.

Long time ago, before our grandparents were born, there lived Anakamuna and Anakanani. The two were great friends. They always went hunting together. They would get the meat, roast it and eat together at their bonfire as they talked.

This went on for a long time. But one day when they were out hunting they failed to get any animal to kill. The two great friends came back home very hungry and tired, and as they sat around the fire Anakamuna stood up and suggested a solution to their problem:

‘Eeeh hunger can easily kill us, the only thing we can do to save ourselves is to eat our mothers!’ he said. On hearing this, Anakanani was overjoyed, and quickly swallowed saliva at the thought of devouring the flesh of his mother, “yees Anakamuna, this is the first time you have come up with a grand idea,” he said.

And so the two friends agreed to go to their homes and eat their mothers. ‘Anakamuna did not eat his mother. He hid her on the *lirungu*<sup>2</sup> and instructed her to be opening the door only when she heard him sing at the door.

But Anakanani went home and ate his mother. So Anakanani ate his mother, but Anakamuna was clever for he did not eat his mother. Have you ever heard of a person eating his mother? Only a fool could do that, nobody with a drop of intelligence can forget that it was his mother who gave birth to him! The clever Anakamuna went round the house trapping lizards and geckoes. He killed and ate them then smeared blood on his lips to cheat his friend that had eaten his mother.

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<sup>2</sup> Lirungu is a kind of a ceiling in a hut which also serves a store.

Anakanani, the murderer of his mother, was already there at their meeting place with a protruding tummy. He excitedly explained his experiences. "Eeeh my friend, my mother had very sweet meat," Anakamuna quickly added, "oh yes my mother's was also sweet". The two friends talked for a long time and parted late in the day. Anakamuna went home and sang at the doorstep

*Mother, Mother please pull the rope  
Pull the rope  
Pull the rope  
So that I climb in  
So that I climb in.*

Since he had tied a rope on the door, his mother pulled the rope and the door was opened. Once inside, his mother prepared food and gave it to him, he ate and enjoyed to his full.

Anakanani went to his home to find no fire in the house. He walked around the homestead desperately because there was nobody to welcome him. He entered the house and slept hungry.

The two continued to be friends. They would sit at the fire warming for a long time, and part in the evening to their different homes. All the time they met, Anakanani used to look desperate, hungry and sad, but Anakamuna was ever happy for his mother continued to feed him.

One day Anakanani asked his friend, "why are you so happy? You seem to be having somebody who cooks for you?" On hearing this, Anakamuna changed his face and said, "oh my friend, why do you ridicule me? You can't see that hunger is killing me? I just hunt for lizards for food."

Anakanani was not convinced. One day he trailed Anakamuna to his home and hid behind the house. Anakamuna reached the door step and sang:

*Mother, mother please*

*Pull the rope  
Pull the rope  
So that I climb in  
So that I climb in.*

His mother quickly opened the door and Anakamuna entered the house. Anakanani was surprised and shocked, he cried and said, "ooh Anakamuna cheated me to eat my mother but he did not eat his! We will see how far he goes!" And he went away.

When they met again Anakamuna as usual looked very happy. "Why are you very happy?" Anakanani asked, "ooh just leave me alone, you mean you do not know that we ate our mothers." Anakamuna answered. They never talked about this again.

On another day Anakanani hid from Anakamuna and went to his friend's house with the intention to kill and eat his mother. At the doorstep of his friend's house he sung:

*Mother, mother please  
Pull the rope  
Pull the rope  
So that I climb in  
So that I climb in.*

Anakamuna's mother noticed at once that the voice was not that of her son and replied from within:

*"Ng'o ng'o, my son does not sing with a deep voice - go away you fool."*

Anakanani was annoyed. He went away to consult a black smith so that he could tune his voice to be like that of Anakamuna. He came back and sang again.

*Mother, mother please  
Pull the rope  
So that I come in  
So that I come in.*

Anakamuna's mother was convinced that the voice was her son's, she opened the door and what did she see! Anakanani, ready to pounce on her. She was scared and afraid, so she started singing:

"Please, please do you want groundnuts," Anakanani answered, "I have tasted groundnuts"

"Please, please do you want fruits," Anakanani answered, "I have tasted fruits of all kinds"

"Please, please do you want fish," Anakanani answered "I have tasted that"

The woman mentioned all kinds of food but Anakanani insisted that he had tasted them. He then got hold of the woman, killed and devoured her. He ate every part but left her leg hanging on a rope in the house. He then locked the door and went away. When Anakamuna came back home he sang at the door:

*Mother, mother please  
Pull the rope  
Pull the rope  
So that I climb in  
So that I climb in.*

There was no response from the house, he got surprised and sung again but his mother never opened the door. He broke the door and entered the house. He saw blood everywhere and when he looked up, he saw his mother's leg hanging. He sat down and tears rolled from his eyes; he knew that Anakanani had eaten his mother.

He went back to the fire and sat down as tears rolled from his eyes.

"Why are you crying?" Anakanani asked.



“Oh it is just the smoke,” Anakamuna answered. As he cried, he thought of a way of killing Anakanani.

Anakamuna did not take long before coming up with a plan.

“I have discovered a beehive somewhere, let us go and burn the bees and eat the honey?” He told his friend. Hearing this, Anakanani was very excited. His mouth remained open for a long time before he asked; “Where! Where is it?” “There, (performer pointing at the other side of the ridge), close to Garani’s<sup>?</sup> hill”.

They took off immediately to the place. “You will climb as I light the fire on these sticks, I will then tie the sticks on your tail so that when you reach the beehive, you will just turn, get hold of the sticks and direct the fire on the beehive”. Anakamuna explained.

Anakanani foolishly followed the instructions. Immediately he started climbing Anakamuna lit his tail. Anakanani’s tail started burning slowly as he climbed.

“Eeeh my friend, I am burning,” he said.

“No, that is the normal warmth of the tail,” Anakamuna answered.

When he reached the top, the fire had engulfed the entire backside and was spreading to the other parts of his body. He dropped from the tree and ran towards the river. Noticing that Anakanani would easily put off the fire by falling into the river, Anakamuna ran faster to the river and said:

“My water, dry up!” and the water dried up in seconds.

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<sup>?</sup> Garani was an old man who lived on the ridge next to where I collected this story.

Anakanani arrived at the river to find a dry river and his entire body was in flames. He started off for the next valley. Anakamuna ran passed him and commanded the river to dry again.

Anakamani's body was now completely engulfed in fire, he cried and said *nguyio ndakutsanga goi,* "here I die." He fell down and died.

My tale ends here.

#### MARAGOLI TALE 4

##### *THE BIRD THAT PRODUCED VUDUGI AND THE FARMER*

Performer: Torokasi Mugomati (Female)  
Age: 61 years old  
Occupation: A blind artist.  
Audience: 6 people, four children and two adults.  
Place: Rogohe village, Central Maragoli, Vihiga Division.  
Time: 5.30 p.m.

Long time ago there lived a farmer who was very hard working. He would prepare his farm early by slashing the weeds and then plough it carefully by uprooting all the weeds. The farmer would then set the weeds on fire leaving his farm ready for planting. After performing these tedious jobs there was a bird that used to fly to the farm and say, "who is this who ploughs my father's land. May weeds flourish in this farm." The weeds would all of a sudden grow in the farm.

The farmer wondered why such unnatural things were happening. Thinking that his dead parents were annoyed with him, he sacrificed a sheep to them but this did not stop. He would work very hard just to find weeds flourishing in his farm again.

One day he ploughed the land and hid in the bushes to see what happened. The bird, as usual came and sang:

“Who is this who ploughs my father’s land? May weeds grow in this farm again.” When the farmer heard this, he ran and caught the bird with anger. His aim as to kill it but it pleaded and said:

“Oh please, do not kill me. I will excrete *uvudugi*<sup>2</sup> for you”. The farmer stopped squeezing it and it excreted *uvudugi*. When the farmer tasted the *uvudugi*, he found out that it was so sweet.

He carried the bird home and kept it in a pot on the Lirungu, and the bird continued to excrete *uvudugi* that filled many pots in the house. The people of the home ate the *uvudugi* until they could eat no more.

The next day the farmer and all the grown-up members of the family went to work, while two of his children were left to take care of the home. They were a boy and a girl.

While at home the girl was expected to remove the cow dung from the cowshed and clean the houses, but she felt lazy and called other children from the neighbourhood to assist her. “If you assist me,” she told them, I will give you part of what we ate *ubuchima*<sup>2</sup> with yesterday.”

The other children got excited and wanted to know what it was.

“Was it fish?” they inquired, but she shook her head.

“Was it *omutere*?” she shook her head.

“*Omena*? Quill bird? Meat? They questioned, but she insisted it was none of what they had mentioned.

She eventually enticed them to help her do the work. It did not take long before they had cleared the work. Noticing that the work had been done so fast, the girl

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<sup>2</sup> *Uvudugi* is a mythical nicety said to be sweeter than honey.

<sup>2</sup> *ubuchima* - Maragoli name for ugali. A paste made from maize flour.

climbed onto the *Lirungu* and brought the bird. She squeezed it and the bird excreted *uvudugi*. She continued to squeeze it even after all the children had their fill of the *uvudugi*. At last the bird excreted its droppings and flew away.

When the girl saw that the bird had flown away, she started crying. Her brother saw what had happened and went out in search of the bird. He followed it as it flew from one place to another. He would shout, “our bird that excretes *uvudugi*, wait for me,” and the bird would answer “come, I am waiting.” The bird would then fly away as he approached.

He continued to go deep and deeper into the forest. While in the thick forest, he met an old woman collecting firewood. “Have you seen our bird that excretes honey?” He inquired. “I can assist you if you help me gather firewood first,” the woman answered.

So the boy started gathering firewood for the woman. When they had collected enough, the woman tied the boy in the middle of the bundle and carried him home.

The reason why the woman carried the boy home was that she had no son but she had eight daughters. She arrived home loaded, and her daughters helped her bring down the bundle. After the daughters had helped her, she untied the bundle and hid the boy in a pot on the *Lirungu*. The girls continued to suffer with the herd of cattle, but the old woman never revealed that she had a boy who would help them.

Each evening the girls would come home tired and start the evening chores. The mother instructed them to be preserving her *ubuchima* to cool first. While the girls were busy with other things, the woman would take part of the *ubuchima* to the boy. This continued for a long time. The boy grew into a strong healthy man.

One day the woman asked her daughters, "if I gave you a herdsboy would you be happy?" The girls were excited and answered in unison "yes, give us." The woman climbed into the *Lirungu* and brought the boy down. The girls were happy. They shaved the boy and washed him well. Now herding was no longer their job. The boy used to go with the animals in the morning and bring them back late in the evening.

One day the boy wondered what he was doing in a foreign land instead of settling in his home. He took off with all the animals, heading for his home. He travelled a long distance through the forest and arrived at a big river, which he could not cross. He then commanded it saying, "the river that belongs to my ancestors, give way, may some of the water move to my mother's home and others to my father's home."

The water gave way and he selected the best animals to cross the river. He then led the emaciated and unhealthy animals to the river to drown as the water started flowing again after he had crossed.

Meanwhile there was a bird on a nearby tree that was monitoring everything the boy was doing. It flew to where the woman and her daughters were having a feast and sang:

*The herdsboy you brought  
The herdsboy you brought  
Has taken all the cows and goats  
Usuuu*

The people were too much engrossed in the feast to hear what the bird was saying. The bird sang again:

*The herdsboy you brought  
The herdsboy you brought  
Has taken all the goats and cows  
Usuuuu.*

When the woman heard the singing, she listened carefully to what the bird was saying and noticed that the bird was talking about her herdsboy.

She immediately alerted the other people and they took off following the herdsboy. They ran to the woman's home and found the home deserted, and then they followed the boy at a terrific speed.

They ran and arrived at the river and saw the boy on the other side. They shouted asking him to show them how he crossed. The herdsboy asked them to move closer to the banks and once again he commanded the water:

"The river that belongs to my ancestors, disperse, let some water go to my mother's and the other go to my father's home." The water separated and they started crossing. When they had reached midstream, the boy commanded the river to flow. The river started flowing with a lot of force that it swept away his pursuers.

Having gotten rid of his enemies the boy took off again. He had not walked for long before meeting an old man who asked him:

"Where are you taking my cows?" On hearing this, the boy started singing:

*My father's wasps  
Take heart wasps  
Take heart wasps  
My father's wasps  
Take heart wasps.*

Before long the bull bellowed: 'moooo, moooo' and wasps flew out of its mouth and attacked the old man and he died instantly. The boy continued with his journey home. When he was about to reach home, he started singing and dancing as he walked. His sister who was in the kitchen heard his voice. "That sounds like the voice of my lost brother," she told her mother. On hearing that, her mother took a stick and beat the girl to death. The boy continued to sing as

he approached the house. His mother came out of the house and saw her son. She cried and said, “oh I have killed my daughter, yet she was saying the truth”.

The boy brought the animals to the doorstep and let them cross over the dead girl’s body. When all of them had crossed, the girl was resurrected and they lived happily thereafter.

My tale ends here.

### MARAGOLI TALE 5 *ANAKAGUKU AND HER SISTER*

Performer: Violet Everia (Female)  
Age: 29 years old  
Occupation: Vegetable seller.  
Audience: 7 people - three children and four adults  
Place: Givudimburi village, north Maragoli Location, Sabatia Division.  
Time: 5.30 p.m.

A long time ago there lived two sisters. One of them was called Anakaguku because she had a hunchback and ugly but the other one was extremely beautiful.

Many suitors used to flock to this home looking for the beautiful girl but she rejected all of them. The story of a beautiful girl who rejected all suitors spread all over the land. The girl wanted a man without an anus. So one day the king of ogres learnt about it and decided to marry the girl. He changed himself into a handsome young man without an anus and travelled to the girl’s home. When he arrived at the home, he announced to the people of the homestead that he was looking for a lady to marry. When the beautiful girl saw the suitor she agreed to marry him because he was very handsome and did not have an anus.

The “handsome man” was so happy that he rushed home quickly and brought dowry to the parents of the girl. The wedding was arranged almost immediately. After the wedding, the beautiful girl asked other girls from the village to escort her

to her new home. She, however, did not want Anakaguku, her sister, to escort her because of her disability. Anakaguku would not hear of this, and she insisted that she had to go with her sister. So very early in the morning, at the time when naked wizards retreat to their houses, and the early birds start singing, Anakaguku and the others set off on the long journey. Not knowing where they were going, the poor girls walked, walked and walked. Climbing and descending on hills and deep valleys, the girls walked. Through the dense and thick forests, they moved. You see, in those days roads like the ones we have today did not exist.

When they arrived at the man's home, they were received warmly but they did not know that they were now in the company of ogres. Anakaguku strayed into the kitchen and found a lot of water boiling in a big pot, and she thought that was strange because she never expected human beings to boil that amount of water. She left the kitchen and wandered around the village. As she wandered, she met an old woman and asked her:

"Why is it that the people my sister married into boil a lot of water?" The woman looked at her for a long time and answered: "Oh child, your sister has married an ogre, and that water is meant to boil you. Don't you see what ogres did to me?" The woman said as she showed Anakaguku her legs and hands that had neither toes nor fingers. Anakaguku rushed back and told the girls all that she had been told. The girls were terrified but they could not think of a way of escaping from this foreign land for their home was very far.

So Anakaguku called the ogres and told them that the girls wanted to drink water, but they did not want to drink the water in the house. "We can only drink water that has been brought from the river in quill bags," she told them. When the ogres heard this, they took the quill bags and left for the river, running. Left alone, Anakaguku told the girls to take off. They started the journey home running as fast as they could.



Meanwhile the ogres had reached the river and were trying to fill the quill bags with water without success. The water kept on flowing out through the holes in the quill bags. The ogres tried to fill the holes with mud but this did not help. After a long time, they decided to go home and eat the girls.

“The first one for me to swallow will be that hunchback. I will do it the way I break lice when I get them in my cloth,” the ogre that married Anakaguku’s sister announced as they raced towards home.

When the ogres arrived at their home, the girls had already ran up to the river but were unable to cross it. While standing by the riverside they saw a frog, and pleaded with it.

“Please, swallow us and cross the river with us before the ogres arrive and kill us:” The frog accepted the request and swallowed the girls. The last one to be swallowed was Anakaguku. The frog’s stomach was already full so it placed her in the mouth and covered her with mud.

Meanwhile the ogres pursued the girls with all their hunting gear. A cloud of dust hung around the air as they raced towards the direction the girls took. When they got to the river the first thing they saw was the frog.

“Have you seen some girls passing here?” They asked. The frog told them he had not seen any girl passing. “And why is your stomach so big?” They enquired. “Oh this is just mud,” the frog answered and vomited some of the mud that had covered Anakaguku. When the ogres saw this, they crossed the river and went to the girl’s home. Just before they got there, they changed into men and entered the village. They inquired whether the girls had arrived but they were told that the girls had not been seen. The ogres took off again, now going to confront the frog once more. When they arrived at the river, the frog had already hidden itself in the bushes. They went to their home tired, bitter and frustrated.

The frog saw them departing and emerged from its hiding place. It set out for the girls' home. It travelled for a long time and eventually arrived at the home.

When the girls' people saw the bulging frog, they were amazed. Some children wanted to kill the frog but one old woman restrained them. After a few hours the frog asked for food saying, "please give me food and I will tell you something good." The people of the home were puzzled, but the old woman gave it food. After eating, the frog asked for oil to massage its stomach, and the old woman gave it. After massaging its body the frog started vomiting the girls. The first one to come out was Anakaguku and the others followed.

Anakaguku narrated their experiences to the people and they wondered how the handsome man could have been an ogre. All the people were happy to see the girls back. The frog was given presents before it left for its home.

This is the end of my tale.

MARAGOLI TALE 6  
*THE GIRL WHO WAS MADE A DOG*

Performer: Loice Kagai (Female)  
Age: 76 years old  
Occupation: Traditional midwife.  
Audience: Seven people, three adults and four children.  
Place: Rogohe Village  
Time: 6.30 p.m.

A long time ago among Maragoli, girls were not supposed to get married to men from their own villages. The girls who were old enough to get married would gather together and make a trip to another village where there were men to marry them. This was well planned. The girls would leave their homes ready to get married and on the other side, the men would go out to hunt for what they would prepare for their brides. Meanwhile their mothers would clean their homesteads and have everything set, then rush to the arena to select the brides

for their sons. So these mothers would then meet the girls and each mother would then select one for her son according to her liking. Those who arrived at the arena early would select the good-looking girls and the latecomers would only find ugly girls. Some girls would be left to go back home, having missed admirers among the boys' mothers. Mothers struggled to get to the arena early in order to get the best girls for their sons.

Now, there was a village, which had girls who were ready to get married. Plans were made for the girls to travel to the next village and be selected as wives. Among these girls was one who was the best behaved of them. She was also the most beautiful of all the girls in the village. Although her age-mates were also good looking, she had some unique features that made her beauty stand out. Her skin was light, her eyes and face were somewhat round, her teeth were milk-white with a natural gap in the upper set and she was of average height for a lady with a full and well-rounded body. She drew the attention of all the people in the village and many people talked about her beauty. This created a feeling of envy and jealousy among her peers.

On the day of the trip to the other village to get married, they organised themselves into a group that included the great beauty and set off. They all looked nice and beautiful but the girl far surpassed her friends. Her friends were not happy about it as they felt that she might overshadow them since all the mothers might rush for her. So they decided to find out from the people they met who among them was the most beautiful. When they had moved a kilometre from their village they met an old man and their leader asked him.

*“Guga kuli kokeye ndi vwaha weligondo kuvita kwosi?”*

“Grandfather, look at us, who looks better than the rest?”

The old man answered, pointing at the most beautiful girl,

*“Mwosi muveye avalahi navutswa uyu niyio umulahi kumwosi.”*

“Although you are all beautiful, that one is the most beautiful,” he said pointing at beautiful girl.

When they heard this, they decided that they should change the girl into a broom so that she would not be seen when they got there. When they had gone another kilometre they met an old woman and asked her.

“Grandmother, who, among us, is better looking than the rest?”

The old woman answered: “Although you are all good looking, the broom looks better than all of you.”

This answer annoyed the girls and they decided to change her into a cooking pot. Before they had gone farther, they met another man and they asked him who was the most beautiful. The man said all of them were beautiful but the cooking pot looked much better than all of them.

The answer made them even angrier and this time they decided to change her into a walking stick. When they met another person and asked him the same question, they were told that all of them were good looking but the stick was glittering like gold and therefore appeared to be the best. The girls were so infuriated that they decided that she should be put into a dogs skin. The beautiful girl remained in the dog's skin up to the time they reached the arena of the village they were going to.

In this village there was one man who was an only child. This man happened to be the most handsome of all the men. But then here it was the mothers who selected brides for their sons. Because the mother of this man had no other child that would have helped her in getting everything ready for the occasion, she arrived late at the arena and found other mothers had already selected girls for their sons and only the dog remained! So, the woman had no choice but to take the dog to guard her house when she was away.

When the men came back from the hunting expedition, they were very happy that their mothers had selected brides for them. But this handsome man was shocked that his mother should have got a dog and taken it home instead of a bride. He wanted to commit suicide but then people pleaded with him not to as there would be other girls in future. He agreed to wait. The dog remained in the compound guarding the home as the man and his mother went to the farm.

Once she was sure that all the people had gone and were busy digging, this girl would come out of the skin and then get millet from the granary, prepare it and then grind it on the grinding stone singing, while smoked meat cooked on the fire. She would sing:

*Pii anachitu, pii anachitu  
Beautiful one! Beautiful one  
Girls became so vicious, I wondered  
Kagai<sup>2</sup> come and look at me  
They made me into a broom, I refused  
Kagai come and look at me*

*They put me into a small pot, I refused  
Kagai come and look at me  
They turned me into a dog, I accepted  
Kagai come and look at me  
Kagai come and look at me  
Kagai come and see for yourself.*

She would then cook ubuchima and eat but leave some on cooking stones for her would-have-been mother-in-law and husband. Then she would bathe in the cowshed while singing her song. After bathing, she would go back into her dog's skin and lie at the door waiting for those who had gone to the farm to come back. On the first day when the boy and his mother came back, they were surprised.

But still, they just sat down and ate the food. This continued for some time and then one day the boy got curious and wanted to find out who it was that was

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<sup>2</sup> Kagai is the name of the performer

preparing food for them while they were away on the farm. So, one day, the young man decided to come back and see what happened.

When he came back, he found the girl locked in the house working very hard and singing her song. Because, this was the olden days, the traditional huts had no windows, so he just peeped through a crack in the wall.

What he saw was a stunning beauty! He listened to her song and in his excitement he ran back to tell her mother what he had seen. But by the time they came back, they found that she had already gone back into her dog's skin. The following day, mother and son, decided to hide at a distance until she had come out of her dog skin. She did all her work and when she was going to bathe in the cow-shed, the man tried to get hold of her but as soon as she saw him, she ran very fast back into her skin and started barking at him.

The mother got very excited, particularly after listening to her son's story: that other girls had been envious of her beauty and placed her into a dog's skin to scare away the mothers who would have rushed to pick her.

The next day, they hid again and waited for her to come out of her skin. As usual when she was sure nobody was around, she came out of her skin and started working while singing. The man ran very fast and took the skin and hid it very far when the girl had gone to bathe. She could not see her skin so she just sat in the house and started crying. Mother and son came into the house and asked her: "Who are you?" She said that she was the dog that the woman collected from the arena. The man convinced the girl to get married to him. The girl agreed since the man was very handsome. That night the man persuaded the girl to sleep with him in his *simba*<sup>?</sup>. The man's mother called the parents of the girl to come and collect the bride price and they held a wedding ceremony.

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<sup>?</sup> Simba is a boys' hut

In the meantime, those friends of the girl who had maliciously put her into the dog's skin had settled and some had babies. Now when the story spread and their husbands heard it then saw how beautiful the girl was, they went home and killed their wives and children and their mothers who had brought them those ill behaved women.

Then the men committed suicide so the whole village was left with no living human being except the beautiful girl and the handsome man and their mother. And they started a generation of beautiful women and handsome men.

MARAGOLI TALE 7  
*MUHONJA AND HER BROTHER*

Performer: Torokasi Esekele (Female)  
Age: 63 years old  
Occupation: Peasant farmer.  
Audience: 6 people, three children and 3 adults  
Place: Bugamangi village, central Maragoli Location, Vihiga Division.  
Time: 5.00 p.m.

Long time ago there lived two children, a brother and a sister. The girl's name was Muhonja. These two children used to stay together, but the boy used to take the cattle to graze everyday while Muhonja remained at home to clean the house and prepare food. The boy used to come late in the evening and he would sing at the door, saying:

*Muhonja Muhonja  
I have been herding Muhonja  
Herding sheep Muhonja  
Herding bulls Muhonja*

On Hearing this song, Muhonja would open the door to let her brother in, and she would then prepare food for him. This went on for a long time. One day when an ogre was passing by the house he heard the boy singing and saw the door open

afterwards. The next day the ogre waited for the boy to go away with the cattle and then came at the door and repeated the boy's song in a deep voice:

*Muhonja Muhonja,  
I have been herding Muhonja  
Herding sheep Muhonja  
Herding goats Muhonja  
Herding bulls Muhonja  
Muhonja my sister Muhonja.*

When Muhonja heard the ogre singing, she realised that the voice was not that of her brother. She refused to open the door and told the ogre to go away because her brother's voice was not deep.

The ogre got offended and went to consult a blacksmith who tuned his voice so that it resembled that of Muhonja's brother.

Muhonja's brother came and sang at the door and Muhonja noticed it was the voice of her brother. He came into the house and ate *ubuchima* and left with animals again.

The ogre came back and sang with a refined voice.

*Muhonja Muhonja  
I have been herding Muhonja  
Herding sheep Muhonja  
Herding goats Muhonja  
Herding bulls Muhonja  
Muhonja my sister Muhonja*

The voice was so convincing that Muhonja believed that the voice was that of her brother. She opened the door only to be confronted by an ogre. Before long, the ogre violently got hold of her and threw her in its mouth just like a roasted maize seed. The ogre locked the house and went away.



When Muhonja's brother came back, he sang:

*Muhonja Muhonja  
I have been herding Muhonja  
Herding sheep Muhonja  
Herding goats Muhonja  
Muhonja, my sister, Muhonja.*

There was no response from within. He repeated the song again but the door was not opened. He broke the door and entered the house. There was no trace of Muhonja. This was enough evidence that an ogre had eaten Muhonja.

Muhonja's brother was very sad. He sharpened his sword and went out to look for the ogre that had swallowed his sister. He walked and walked until he met an old woman collecting firewood.

"Have you seen an ogre passing here?" He asked. "Yes, I have just seen an ogre passing with a full stomach," the woman answered.

The boy ran very fast and before long he saw the ogre resting under a tree. He got hold of his sword and cut its stomach 'puuuu'. Muhonja came out of the stomach accompanied by many people who had been swallowed by the ogre. One old woman who had come out remembered she had left a pipe in the ogre's stomach. She ran back to the stomach. While she was still inside, the ogre said:

"Oh man, leave this one for me so that my intestines can have something to hold."

It then closed its stomach with the woman still inside. The people who came out were very happy. Muhonja and his mother went back home and lived happily. My tale ends here.

MARAGOLI TALE 8  
*THE GIRLS WHO WENT TO FETCH FOR FIREWOOD*

Performer: Mildred Lukamika (Female)  
Age: 19 years old  
Occupation: A form four student  
Audience: Six children and three adults  
Place: Rogohe village, Central Maragoli, Vihiga Division

TIME: 3.00 p.m.

A long time ago there lived five girls. The five girls were great friends. One day they went to fetch firewood together. While fetching firewood they came across a big hole dug by a deer. They decided to explore what was inside. Four of them tried to go inside but did not go far before crawling back. One of them was foolish; she decided to go up to the end of the hole. The others cheered her as she crawled further.

As you know, the holes dug by a deer are zigzag in nature and so the girl went very far. When the others were sure she had gone up to the end, they took thorns and tree stumps and blocked the opening of the hole and went home.

When asked to explain the whereabouts of their friend, they insisted that they did not know where she was. Meanwhile the girl stayed in the hole for so long that moulds grew on her body. One day when her brother took their cows to graze, one of the bulls bellowed and the girl heard it. The bull continued to bellow and the girl noticed the voice of their bull and sang:

*Ijirichi ikumulanga yeyo  
Ijirichi ikumulanga yeyo  
Ikumulanga siyali yitu nzeererere  
Tsimuvole mama na baba  
Vakana vatsia ivurina  
Inyanza yavigarila  
Tsererere*

*That bull bellowing*

*That bull bellowing  
That bull sounds like ours nzerererere  
Go and tell mother and father  
The girls who went as friends  
Have been separated by an ocean  
Nzerererere*

When her brother heard the song he wondered saying, “who is that singing from this hole with a voice like that of my lost sister?”

The girl sang again:

*That bull  
That bull  
That bull sounds like ours nzerererere  
Go and tell mother and father  
The girls who went as friends  
Have been separated by an ocean  
Nzerererere.*

The boy took the cattle home and explained to his parents what had happened saying, “I have seen and heard strange things today. When I was in the valley our bull bellowed and scratched the ground with its legs then I heard a voice like that of my lost sister singing. The song went this way:

*That bull bellowed  
That bull bellowed  
That bull sounds like ours nzerererere  
Go and tell mother and father  
The girls who went as friends  
Have been separated by an ocean  
Nzerererere.*

His mother could not believe him. She said: “Oh you child, why are you teasing me with dreams when you know that my daughter is lost.”

He then asked his father to accompany him and when they got there the bull bellowed again and scratched the ground, then they heard the girl singing:

*That bull bellowing  
That bull bellowing  
That bull sounds like ours nzerererere  
Go and tell mother and father  
The girls who went as friends  
Have been separated by an ocean  
Nzerererere.*

The old man sent his son to call his mother and other people very fast. They arrived with a hoe in no time and started pulling off the thorns, stumps and soil with it. They worked for a long until they pulled the girl out. There were moulds all over her body. They carried her home and removed all the moulds and aired them. The girl was then washed, clothed well and fed.

The family organised a big party where they invited her friends who had locked her in a hole. They came not knowing that the girl they left in a hole had been rescued.

The moulds that had been removed from the girls body were well cooked and given to the girls. They ate and fell down and died. The members of the host family were so worried. They called their daughter out to see what had happened to her friends after eating the moulds that came from her body. She went to the house and came out with a stick. She beat each one of them saying: "You abandoned me in a hole thinking that you will never eat anything from me, now you have eaten the moulds that came from my body, wake up."

They all came back to life.

That is the end of the story.

MARAGOLI TALE 9  
*KALASIMBA AND HIS WIFE*

Performer: Faith Kagai (Female)  
Age: 16 years old  
Occupation: A form one student  
Audience: Five children and two adults

Place: Shikoti Village, Lurambi Division, Kakamega District.  
TIME: 2.00 p.m.

Long time ago there was a man called Kalasimba. Kalasimba had a wife and eleven children. He was a great farmer who grew among other crops, beans, maize, potatoes, cassava and pumpkins. One day he instructed his wife to cook anything she wished to cook except pumpkins. He then joined other men for a beer drinking session.

His wife did not take what she had been told seriously. She went ahead and harvested pumpkins from the farm, cut them into pieces, and started cooking them. She left them cooking and called her children outside the house in order to shave them. As she was shaving them, she sent her first-born child to go and check on whether the pumpkins were ready.

“If they are not ready give more firewood to the fire,” she said.

When the child got to the kitchen, he fell down and died. After sometime, she did not understand why it was taking long for the boy to come out of the house. She sent the second born to go and find out what had happened. When the child got to the kitchen he also fell down and died. She sent the third one who also fell down and died immediately he got to the kitchen. She sent all of them and none came out alive. She decided to go and find out why the children did not want to come out of the house. She went to the house and lo! All her children were lying on the floor - dead. She cried and mourned saying, “Kalasimba told me not to cook pumpkins for the children now he will kill me.”

She had to send a message to Kalasimba to tell him what had happened and to ask him to come. There was nobody around so he decided to send a bird. The first bird she called was a crow. She explained to the crow all that had happened. When she finished, the crow made its usual sounds - wao... wao... wao... and flew away. She then called an eagle. After listening to her story the eagle made its usual sounds koo ... koo... koo and flew away.

On the next tree was the bird called *Imbiraviliza*<sup>?</sup>. She called the bird and explained to it all that had happened. *Imbiraviliza* agreed to take the message to Kalasimba. It flew to where Kalasimba and his friends were drinking beer and sang:

*Tsie tsie tsia mmbo*  
*Tsie tsie tsia mmbo*  
*Tsie tsie*  
*Tsia kolola Kalasimba tsie tsie*  
*Tsie tsie*  
*Amahondo gayataga tsie tsie*  
*Gamaliye vaana tsie tsie*  
*Irikomi na mulala tsie tsie*  
*Katiguli isugudi*  
*Tsie tsie*  
*Amanani geduvuli*  
*Tsie tsie.*

*I am going, I am going far*  
*I am going, I am going far*  
*I am going I am going*  
*To tell Kalasimba*  
*I am going*  
*The pumpkins he planted*  
*Have killed all the children*  
*Eleven of them*  
*Play Isugudi<sup>?</sup> now*  
*I am going, I am going*  
*So that ogres can dance*  
*I am going.*

In the first place Kalasimba did not hear what the bird was saying. The bird repeated the song and Kalasimba and his friends heard it. "What is that bird saying? I am the one who has planted pumpkins and I have eleven children" Kalasimba wondered. The bird sang again just to make sure there was no doubt in Kalasimba. Kalasimba stood up very fast and ran home only to find all his children dead.

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<sup>?</sup> Imbiraviliza is a mythical bird found in many Maragoli tales.

<sup>?</sup> Isugudi is a musical instrument.

“You are a bad woman, you do not follow instructions as they are given,” he reprimanded his wife. He then sent her to her home and warned her not to return until she paid the prescribed fine for such a mistake.

Kalasimba took his walking stick and beat his children saying: “my children wake up?” And they all came back to life and they lived well.

MARAGOLI TALE 10  
*GIRWANG'A AND THE OGRES*

Performer: Ambaka Kiringa (Male)  
Age: 28 years old  
Occupation: Secondary School teacher  
Audience: Seven people, three children and four adults  
Place: Magui Village, Central Maragoli, Vihiga District

There lived a man whose name was Girwang'a. This man had two wives and eight children. Unlike other people, Girwang'a never used to grow his own food. The only way he fed his family was by stealing from the ogres who were his neighbours. The ogres had planted a lot of groundnuts in their farm and this is what Girwang'a used to steal.

Every time the ogres went to their farm, they found some groundnuts uprooted. This went on for a long time. So, one day they decided to lay a trap for the thief. They locked their house and hid in the nearby bushes.

Girwang'a, as usual, went to the ogres' farm and started harvesting the groundnuts. Having established whom the thief was, the ogres emerged from the bushes and caught Girwang'a. “Today we shall kill you,” the ogres roared. Girwang'a cried and begged them not to kill him.

“If you do not kill me I will cook one of my children for you,” he told them. The ogres accepted the offer and set him free.

Girwang'a left for home wondering how he would kill his own child for the ogres. He told his wives about the ogres' demands and they decided to cook one of his dogs for the ogres.

The next morning Girwang'a cooked a puppy and carried the meat to the ogres. They were so happy with the meat that they told Girwang'a to go and kill another child for them. Once again Girwang'a could not kill his child. He cooked another puppy and took the meat to them. The ogres were not yet satisfied. They told him to go and cook another child. Girwang'a noticed that the ogres were out to wipe his family from the face of the earth, so he decided to be transferring his children one by one to a cave as he continued to cook puppies for the ogres.

This went on for eight days. He now announced to the ogres that he had cooked all his children for them.

"Go and kill one of your wives for us," they demanded. Girwang'a went home and transferred his wife to the cave. He then cooked the mother of the puppies for the ogres. He took the dog to them and they told him to go and cook his other wife. Girwang'a transferred his other wife to the cave and cooked the father of the puppies for the ogres. He then explained to them that he had now cooked all the people of his household for them.

The ogres would not stop asking for more, they told Girwang'a to go and cook himself so that they could eat him.

Girwang'a left the ogres, wondering what they were up to. He picked his trumpet and went straight to where his family was hiding. He lit a big fire in the cave and started burning a strong metal wire until it was red hot. Girwang'a came out of the cave and started singing and playing his trumpet.



*Tuti tuti*  
*How could I cook my children?*  
*How could I, Girwang'a cook myself?*  
*Tuti tuti*

His wives were so worried, they begged Girwang'a to hide in the cave but he could not listen. He sang and danced until the ogres heard him. They came running to where he was and started dancing to the song he was singing.

Girwang'a then entered his cave and welcomed them in. "How can we enter the cave?" They asked him. Girwang'a explained to them that they could not crawl in with their backs coming in first. Imagine they were to crawl into the cave with their backs moving in first!

The ogres were very happy because they knew that they would eat Girwang'a when they entered the cave. They started entering the cave, one by one.

The first one pushed his buttocks inside and Girwang'a pushed the hot metal into his anus. The metal, which was the size of a man's arm, entered the ogre's anus and the ogre jumped with a lot of pain.

The ogres could not understand why their friend was crying. "Heeehe - just cry, when we enter, you will not taste the food we get from Girwang'a," they told the dying ogre.

Another one tried to go in and again Girwang'a inserted the metal into his anus. Ten of them died instantly. When the rest noticed the danger, they ran away and migrated to another place.

Girwang'a left the cave with his family and went back to his home. He took all the granaries and farms that belonged to the ogre.

Girwang'a continued to stay with his family as he did before.

And that is the end of my tale.

MARAGOLI TALE 11  
*THE GIRLS WHO WENT TO HARVEST TSINZAGAYAGA*

Performer: Milka Muhonja (Female)  
Age: 44 years old  
Occupation: School matron  
Audience: Four people, two children and two adults.  
Place: Keveye village, West Maragoli, Sabatia Division

A long time ago you could not find a girl walking alone on the road. Girls used to walk in groups and so one day five girls left home and went to harvest *tsinzagayaga*<sup>?</sup>. When they arrived at the place where the *tsinzagayaga* trees were, they agreed to harvest while their eyes were closed. This was to test who among them would harvest more ripe fruits than the others.

After closing their eyes, four of the girls opened theirs immediately but one adhered to the agreement. They harvested the fruits and took off while one of them still had her eyes closed.

On the way they agreed to open their eyes. The girl who chose to close her eyes as she picked the fruits was shocked to discover that most of her fruits were unripe while those of her friends were ripe.

She wondered what her parents would tell her if she went with unripe fruits at home.

“Please escort me back to get ripe ones,” she pleaded with her friends.

“Just go alone, we shall indicate the way for you to follow by dropping *Masatsi*<sup>?</sup> leaves on the road. The ogre, hiding in the nearby bushes, heard their conversation and instead dropped the leaves on the road to its home. Not

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<sup>?</sup> *Tsinzagayaga* is a mythical fruit found in Maragoli folktales.

<sup>?</sup> *Masatsi* is a type of indigenous tree.

knowing what the ogre had done, the girl harvested the fruits and followed the road on which *Masatsi* had been dropped.

The girl ended up in the ogre's compound. In the ogres compound there were so many fruits so the girl started plucking some. Before long the ogre arrived and found the girl plucking some of the fruits in the compound.

"Who is that harvesting my fruits?" The ogre roared. The girl was so frightened to see the ogre. "Enter my house and grind for me," the ogre commanded. The girl complied and did as the ogre said. The girl did the job so well that the ogre was impressed. He asked the girl to prepare food, which she did. After eating, the ogre told the girl that she could now stay permanently with him.

"You will never leave my house," the ogre declared. The girl could not do anything to help herself. She was carried and put in a pot on the *lirungu*. After this, the ogre was so happy because he was assured of the next meal. He left immediately to go and call other ogres to come and feast on the girl with him. As the ogre left, the girl came out of the pot and started her journey home. She walked for a long distance and met an old woman. She told the woman her problem and she sympathised with her. The old woman gave her a drum and told her to play the drum as she went home and that if she met an ogre she was to say that she had been attending her mothers funeral.

The girl continued on her journey home, but it was not long before she met the first ogre going for the feast.

"Where are you from? I will crash you," the ogre shouted.

"I have been attending my mother's funeral, that is why I am carrying this drum," she answered. "Play it for me", the ogre demanded. The girl started singing and playing the drum.

*Anduma iree Anduma iree*  
*Anduma iree Anduma iree*

*Anduma iree Anduma iree*  
*Anduma iree Anduma iree*

The ogre was so impressed that he let her pass. She went on and met another ogre who asked the same questions and she answered in the same way. The ogre left her to go her way. She met many other ogres who were also convinced by her story. The girl arrived at her home safely.

Meanwhile the ogres arrived in the compound of their host and were given a warm welcome. The host started boiling water in a big pot so that the girl would just be thrown into it and the ogres start the feast.

When the water had boiled, the ogre climbed on the lirungu to get the girl. On opening the pot, haa! There was no girl! The ogre came down and started apologising to the visitors. The visitors would not believe what the host was saying. They wondered how they could waste their time when the host knew that there was nothing for them to feed on.

They were so annoyed that they carried the host and threw him in the boiling water. After a few minutes they got his body out of the water and feasted on it. They dispersed later and went to their homes.  
That is the end.

#### MARAGOLI TALE 12

##### *MULELE AND HER FRIENDS*

Performer: Aggrey Kigali (Male)

Age: 22 years old

Occupation: Form four graduate

Audience: Seven people, five children and two adults.

Place: Rogohe village, central Maragoli, Vihiga Division, Vihiga District.

Time: 6.30 p.m.

There were three girls one of them was called Mulele. One day they went to fetch firewood in the forest. While doing this, they came across a human skeleton. They stood there and laughed, laughed and laughed.

Two of the girls got tired laughing and continued fetching firewood. Mulele remained there, laughing. She laughed the whole day. Up to such a time, Mulele was still laughing. (It was 6:35pm). She would just look at the human skeleton and burst out laughing.

Her friends came back to the spot they had left Mulele and found her still laughing. 'Mulele, we have now got enough firewood, we would like to go home,' they told her. Mulele did not answer she just continued laughing.

So they decided to drag her along. When they got home Mulele was still laughing. She was given food but instead of eating, she continued laughing. At night Mulele could not sleep, she just continued laughing.

In the middle of the night Mulele heard a voice singing:

*Mulele mulele X 2*  
*Mulele laughed at a human skeleton,*  
*Mulele laughed at a human skeleton,*  
*Mulele mulele*

Mulele got shocked and wondered. Again the voice sung:

*Mulele mulele X 2*  
*Mulele laughed at a human skeleton*  
*Mulele laughed at a human skeleton*  
*Mulele mulele*

That voice continued singing till morning. When Mulele went outside the house, she found the skeleton on the veranda of the house. It was the one that was singing.

Old men were called to come and make a decision on what should be done. They decided that the skeleton has to be burned to ashes. So firewood was assembled and the skeleton burnt. As it burned, it sang even louder:

*Mulele mulele X 2*  
*Mulele laughed at a human skeleton*  
*Mulele laughed at a human skeleton*  
*Mulele mulele*

It sung so loudly until Mulele fell down and died.  
That is the end of my story.

### MARAGOLI TALE 13 *THE OLD MAN AND NUNDA THE CAT*

Performer: Rosa Sindavi (Female)  
Age: 68 years old  
Occupation: Retired petty trader  
Audience: Eleven people, seven children and four adults.  
Place: Chambare Village, South Maragoli, Vihiga Division.  
Time: 8.40 p.m.

A long time ago there lived an old man who loved cleanliness. Everyday this old man used to wake up and clean his compound. One day when he was clearing the bushes around his house he saw a small cat. The cat was so small that he decided to tame it so that it would be killing rats in his house. He then instructed his wife to take good care of the cat.

The cat grew big, and he gave it the name Nunda. It continued to grow past the size of a normal cat. Nunda grew and became very big, and in the process, developed eleven more heads.

Now, as Nunda grew big he demanded more food. Nunda could not feed on the food an average person fed on.

“What can I eat?” Nunda asked one day. The old man was so frightened and convinced that he had kept an ogre in his house. “Eat all the cattle in the world,”

he told Nunda. It did not take long and Nunda had eaten all the cattle in the world.

“I have eaten all the cattle, what can I eat now?” Nunda demanded. “Go and eat all sheep and goats in the world,” the frightened old man answered. Nunda did not waste time. All sheep and goats were eaten within days.

Nunda came back and demanded more, the old man continued to tell Nunda to eat other things. Nunda ate all birds, insects, fishes, animals and lastly all human beings. After eating all the human beings, it was only the old man and his pregnant wife who remained in the world.

Nunda demanded food but the old man had nothing else to offer. Before he could answer, Nunda grabbed him and swallowed him. When the man’s pregnant wife saw what was happening, she ran and climbed on the *lirungu* before Nunda could swallow her.

Nunda was satisfied so he decided not to follow the woman. He left the home crawling away to the dense forest in the valley. The woman stayed on the *lirungu* for some time and gave birth to a boy. The woman took good care of the boy and he grew up into a strong lad.

One day the boy asked his mother: “why are we the only people in the world”? Where is my father?”

His mother told him the story of Nunda and how he ate everybody including his father. “Nunda had twelve heads with a big stomach,” she explained to the boy. “Where does Nunda live now?” The boy continued to probe his mother. The worried woman told her son that Nunda went to stay in the forest. She begged him not to hunt for Nunda because he would kill him.

The boy could not listen. He took his sword and asked her mother to come and show him where Nunda lived. So they took off to the dense forest. They met the first ogre and the boy sang:

*Mother if I get Nunda  
If I get Nunda  
Help.*

The mother answered, "this is not Nunda," they continued to walk and met another ogre and the boy sung:

*Mother if I get Nunda  
If I get Nunda  
Help.*

His mother told him that the ogre was not Nunda and they continued to walk. They met another ogre with eleven heads. When the boy sung, his mother told him that that was Nunda the ogre.

Nunda opened all the twelve mouths to swallow the boy but he moved back and cut one of the heads. Nunda fell down and the boy continued to cut the heads. When he cut the twelfth head, Nunda cried in a loud voice and died.

The young man dissected the stomach and people, animals, birds and insects came out of its stomach. The boy's father came out and they went home with some of the cattle that came out of the stomach.

They lived happily there after.

My tale ends here.

#### MARAGOLI TALE 14

#### *THE MAN WHO BECAME AN OGRE AND HIS WIFE*

Performer: Torikasi Esekele (Female)  
Age: 63 years old  
Occupation: Peasant Farmer  
Audience: Four people, two children and two adults  
Place: Bugamangi Village, Central Maragoli, Vihiga Division.



Time: 7.30 p.m.

There was a man who married a woman and he lived happily with his wife until he decided to become an ogre. His wife did not like the idea of her husband turning into an ogre, but she could not do anything because the man had already made his decision.

One day the sister to the ogre's wife came to visit them. When she arrived the sister cried and said: "oh my sister, why did you come here? My husband has become an ogre and will eat you?"

The visiting sister got worried but the ogre's wife hid her on the *lirungu*. When the ogre arrived, he sat in the sitting room and sensed a strange smell. He took his trumpet and started playing it while singing:

*Nase nase something is smelling  
Ndindi ndi Ndindi ndi  
Nase nase a visitor is smelling here  
Ndindi ndi Ndindi ndi  
Nase nase sister-in-law is smelling  
Ndindindi ndindindi.*

When his wife heard him singing, she asked him, "what do you mean? There is no visitor in the house." He did not continue to sing because he thought he was mistaken.

The next day the ogre went out to hunt as usual. The woman got her sister from *lirungu*, and decorated her. She gave her good and beautiful rings, which she wore. She then gave her fruits saying: "Go with these fruits and when you reach the valley you will find a big rock with four holes in it; put the fruits in the holes and a bird will immediately appear to eat them. The moment the bird starts eating, take off," she advised the girl. "On the way, if you find grass dancing do not join in the dance. If you follow what I have told you, you will not be eaten." Having received the instructions, the girl started her dangerous journey home.

She reached the valley and she did as she was told. When the bird started eating, the girl took off. On the way, she saw grass dancing but she did not join in the dance and she eventually arrived home safely. On arrival, her younger sister envied her earrings and all that she had been decorated with.

“Where did you get these?” She asked. “Oh my sister it was not easy to come back home. Our sister married an ogre and I had to run away from her home.” But her sister would not believe this, she accused her of blocking her from going to the place so that she could also be decorated.

This girl took off to her sister’s place immediately.

“Why did you come? Did our other sister tell you what she went through? Now if you are foolish you will be eaten,” she told her then gave her food and hid her on the *Lirungu* with instructions that she should not come down once the ogre arrives.

The ogre arrived and asked, “nase nase, what have you prepared?”

“Can’t you see that I am just preparing *ubuchima*,” the woman answered. When the ogre saw that the *ubuchima* was not yet ready, he started playing his trumpet and singing:

*Nase, nase something is smelling here*  
*Nase, nase a visitor is smelling here*  
*Ndindi ndi Ndindindi*  
*Nase nase sister-in-law is smelling*  
*Ndindindi Ndindindi.*

When the girl on the *lirungu* heard this, she was so happy that she came down and started dancing with the ogre. They ate *ubuchima* together and the ogre went away knowing very well that he would come and eat her. The ogre’s wife knew her husband would surely eat her sister if she found her in the house. So she decorated her and instructed her as she had instructed her other sister.

The girl started her journey home, and on reaching the valley, she put the fruits in the holes and waited until the bird had finished eating, then she started off. When the bird saw her going away it started shouting.

“There she is, there she is; she is running away!” The girl ran fast and came across grass that was dancing, and she joined in the dance contrary to the instructions she had been given. While she was dancing her ogre, brother-in-law arrived and challenged her to a fight.

She fought him for some time. She succeeded to throw the ogre down but when he rose up, he got hold of the girl and violently threw her on a stone ‘puuu’. The girl’s head was broken into pieces. The ogre licked the brains saying:

“Yees, yes niceties are flowing from sister-in-law.” He then ate the whole body but carried her leg home. When his wife saw the leg, she knew that her sister had been eaten. She cried for a long time. The next day the ogre asked her to shave his hair. When the woman was shaving him, a bird flew to the nearest tree and sang:

*Shave him in lines  
Shave him in lines  
He ate your sister on the way.*

When the ogre heard this, he chased the bird away but it came back again and sang:

*Shave him in lines  
Shave him in lines  
He ate your sister on the way.*

When the woman heard this, she cut the skin from back of the head and moved it to cover the face. “What is happening?” the ogre asked. “Oh no the razor is very sharp,” she answered.

After removing the whole skin, the ogre collapsed. She carried him to the house, took her children out and set the house on fire. The ogre was burnt to ashes. Other ogres saw the fire and came running but the woman had taken off, heading home.

Noticing that their friend had been killed, they started following the woman at a terrific speed. The woman was now in the forest when she looked back and saw the ogres coming.

It happened that a hawk was on a nearby tree. The woman begged it to carry her and the children to the tip of the giant tree. The hawk sympathised and carried them up to the tip of the tree. The ogres arrived and saw her on the tree and started cutting down the tree. They cut it until it was about to fall, then the woman shouted, "my tree do not fall."

And the tree never fell. The place that had been cut filled up again. They cut it again and she shouted, "my tree do not fall."

They decided to climb the tree, but as they were climbing, the woman whistled loudly and the people of her home came running, armed with their hunting weapons: spears, bows, knives and dogs. They arrived and found the ogres still trying to climb the tree. They attacked them and killed some of them. Some of the ogres who were lucky ran away but many were killed.

The woman came down with her children and told her people what happened. They were happy because she had killed the ogre that had killed her sister.

They went home and stayed well.

And that is the end of my tale.

MARAGOLI TALE 15  
*EIGHT GIRLS AND EIGHT POTS*

Performer: Rosa Sindavi (Female)  
Age: 68 years old  
Occupation: Retired petty trader  
Audience: Ten people, eight children and two adults.  
Place: Navuhi Village  
Time: 4.00 p.m.

Long ago there was a mother who had eight daughters. This mother was a potter. She made eight pots for her eight daughters and warned that any one who broke her's would be taken to Nasio, the ogre.

One day after it had rained heavily, the eldest of the daughters went to fetch water. It was extremely difficult to walk down the slippery bare path to the river. However, being a careful and cautious girl, she managed to get to the river. It happened that as she was coming up, she slid and the pot broke. Knowing and fearing the consequences, she started for Nasio's home instead of returning home. On her way, she met other ogres who would dare not attack her until they were sure that the victim was not Nasio's visitor.

*'Nasu Nasu utsitsa hai?'*  
*'Nasu Nasu where are you going?'*

They would ask her and she would explain how it had come to be that she was going to Nasio's home. This she did in a song.

*Mama yalonga tsinyingu munane*  
*Na vaana munane*  
*Naboola oliatanya eyeye*  
*Ndakamuhe Nasio*  
*Alamulie.*

*Mother made eight pots*  
*And she had eight children*  
*And she said*

*Whoever breaks her's  
I will give her to Nasio  
To be eaten.*

After passing these ogres, she came to a river and saw an old woman by the river. The old woman asked the girl to scratch her back as she explained her misfortune. The old woman promised to help her. She gave her millet grains cautioning that the first task Nasio would put to her would be to pick the lice off his body and eat them. What the girl was to do was to pick the lice, drop them down and loudly chew millet grains.

At Nasio's, the millet trick worked so well that Nasio felt flattered. He quickly sent the girl through other tests and came to the final one. She had to watch over a boiling pot without knowing what was inside, until Nasio came. Nasio warned her not to open the pot. So disciplined was this girl that she overcame the temptation to peep in the pot. When Nasio returned and opened the pot treasures hitherto unknown to the girl were revealed. Nasio decorated her and gave her many presents to carry home.

This girl's youngest sister, impulsive as they usually are, made a pretext to go for water, broke her pot and hurried to Nasio's. She went through the steps her sister went through with these differences: She never sung a song to the other ogres, on being asked to scratch the old woman's back, she replied: "Who do you think I am to touch an old woman's dirt?" Thus, she missed the necessary advice and did actually eat the lice off Nasio's body. She failed all the tests.

At last she did not follow instructions Nasio gave while watching over the pot. As soon as Nasio turned his back, she dipped her fingers in the pot and then kept looking inside the pot from time to time. Nasio came and opened the pot and horrors hitherto unknown to the girl were revealed. With these she was bedecked: dead frogs and rust coated tins and other such ornaments.

Do not be hard headed. It leads to no good.

MARAGOLI TALE 16  
*THE GIRL WHO REJECTED SUITORS*

Performer: Catherine Mihegwa (Female)  
Age: 18 years old  
Occupation: Secondary school student - Form Four.  
Audience: Eight people, six children and two adults.  
Place: Navuhi Village, Central Maragoli, Vihiga Division  
Time: 6.00 p.m.

Long ago there lived a young beautiful girl of marriageable age who had turned down all suitors. One young man who wanted to marry her turned himself into a beautiful small bird and landed in the garden where she and her sister were working. The beauty of the small bird that made no attempt to escape struck the girls. When they reached home, they kept the bird in a pot, which was then covered. When they uncovered the pot the next day they found it full of honey and the bird was floating in it. They transferred the bird into a second pot, which was also filled with honey on the following day. The bird was then transferred from pot to pot until all the pots in the house were filled with the finest honey.

One day, as the beautiful girl uncovered the pot, the bird skipped out and landed neatly on the house. From there, it skipped onto trees as the girl unsuccessfully tried to catch it. One thought kept burning her as she followed the bird.

“What will father do to me if his bird escaped?” She started crying as she sang:

*Nondanga Kayundi ka baba  
Nondanga Kayundi ka baba  
Kaniezanga uvwuki  
Uvwuki vunavulugu*

*I am following my father's bird  
I am following my father's bird  
That excretes honey  
Sweet honey.*

But the bird kept skipping from tree to tree keeping a fair distance between them. At last after many miles into a land unknown to the girl, the bird changed into a handsome young man. He asked her to be his wife and she accepted.

On the day of their marriage, a fat white bull was slaughtered and eaten amid drinking, dancing and singing.

The two became man and wife and lived happily together for many years.

MARAGOLI TALE 17  
*DONYOBE*

Performer: Torokasi Mugomati (Female)  
Age: 60 years old  
Occupation: Blind Artist  
Audience: Seven people, three children and four adults.  
Place: Navuhi Village, Central Maragoli, Vihiga Division  
Time: 6.00 p.m.

There was once a man with his wife. The two lived together happily and got a beautiful daughter. They gave their daughter the name Donyobe. Not long after the birth of the girl, her mother died. Her father decided to marry another woman. The woman envied Donyobe's beauty so much. She then planned to kill her!

Donyobe, the small beautiful girl, used to spend the whole day in bed, sleeping. Her bed was called *Avingili musaba*. Donyobe's stepmother was so envious of her beauty that she decided to work hard and make sure that she becomes as beautiful of her stepdaughter. She bought the most expensive soap and used it all the time to bathe. She would bathe for hours and then go to the mirror and ask the mirror: "Am I as beautiful as Donyobe?" The mirror would answer "No. Donyobe is far more beautiful than you."

She would feel so bad and go back to bathe. He would then come back to the mirror and ask: "Now am I as beautiful as Donyobe?" And the mirror would



answer: “Oh no Donyobe is far more beautiful than you.” She felt so bitter and now decided to execute her plan of killing Donyobe.

One day she bought a banana and put poison on it before giving it to Donyobe. Donyobe ate the banana and died. So many people came to mourn her. Those who came from her late mother’s village carried her body and moved along the roads mourning her. Meanwhile her stepmother who had poisoned her took all her belongings and went back to her home.

As the mourners moved along the roads with Donyobe’s body, they met a man who asked them: “What are you carrying?” They told him that they were carrying Donyobe’s body. “If I brought her back to life would you give me part of the dowry that will be paid for her?” he asked them. They told him that they would give it to him.

The man touched Donyobe with his walking stick and she came back to life. The mourners were very happy. They took her to her late mother’s house to stay there until she got mature to marry.

Donyobe’s father did not want his wife back. He vowed that he would never admit a murderer back in his home.

That is the end of the story.

MARAGOLI TALE 18  
*THE HEN AND THE HAWK*

|             |                                    |
|-------------|------------------------------------|
| Performer:  | Eside Alivitsa Kilavuka (Female)   |
| Age:        | 80 years old                       |
| Occupation: | Peasant farmer                     |
| Audience:   | 3 people: 2 adults and 1 children. |
| Place:      | Vohovole Village, Sabatia, Vihiga  |
| Time:       | 6.00 p.m.                          |

A long time ago Hen and Hawk were friends. One day Hawk came to visit Hen. After a short discussion Hen asked Hawk:

“Please my friend, lend me a razor blade to shave my children’s hair”.

“That’s no problem, I’ll give you the razor blade,” replied the Hawk.

Hawk then lent Hen the razor blade on condition that she does not lose it. Hen was very happy. She shaved all her children and then kept the razor blade safely in the house.

The next day she wanted to use the razor blade but she could not find it. She was so worried. She remembered Hawk’s warning that she should not lose the razor blade. She went round the house looking everywhere, turning everything upside down but to no avail. She went outside the house where her children had been playing and scratched the ground just in case one of her children had gone outside the house with it. Unfortunately she did not find the razor blade.

The following day Hawk came and asked for her razor blade. Hen explained that the razor blade was lost but she was still looking for it. On hearing this, Hawk said:

“Hen, I’ll come back for my razor blade tomorrow morning. Make sure you find it or else I’ll take one of your children as compensation.”

Hawk went away leaving Hen trembling with fear. Hen continued with the search. She searched and searched all over the place, but there was no razor blade. The next day Hawk came back and asked Hen:

“Have you found my razor blade?”

“No,” Hen replied.

Hawk took one of Hen’s children as she had promised and left Hen weeping. The following day, Hawk came again and asked for the razor blade. Once more Hen said she had not found it. Hawk took away another of Hen’s chicks and

went away. Hawk kept on coming and each time Hen's reply was the same and for that reason Hawk took away another chick.

When most of Hen's chicks had been taken, Hawk said:

"From now on, I'll be taking and eating your chicks as long as you have not returned my razor blade."

Since that day Hen is still scratching the ground and Hawk is still eating Hen's chicks.

MARAGOLI TALE 19  
*A GOAT AND HER CHILDREN*

Performer: Patrick Kavugwi (Male)  
Age: 36 years old  
Occupation: Farm worker  
Audience: 8 people, 4 adults and 4 children.  
Place: Keveye Village, West Maragoli, Vihiga District.  
Time: 11.00 p.m.

There once lived a goat that used to give birth to very beautiful kids. Its kids used to be fat and beautiful. The owner of this goat would wait for the kids to grow to a reasonable age and then slaughter them. So mother goat did not have the joy of seeing its young ones grow up. It lived a sad and lonely life. One day it wondered: "Oh why can't this man spare one of my kids to keep me company in the fields? When I get other kids I will not allow anybody to take them away. It would be better to die than see all my children being taken away."

When the goat gave birth to the next kid, it gave her the name Navigulu. Navigulu was more beautiful than all the other kids that had come before her. When Navigulu had grown to a reasonable age, the mother overheard its owner saying that he was about to slaughter her.

The goat took off and ran towards the lake as Navigulu followed. It ran as it sang the following song:

*Navigulu my kid meee*

*We will throw ourselves in the lake meee  
In the fishermen's lake meeee  
Others just give birth meee  
Oh why should all my children be slaughtered meee*

Navigulu followed the mother as they ran towards the lake. At the lake, Navigulu's mother jumped into the water and Navigulu followed. Both of them drowned and they died. Mother goat did not want her kid slaughtered and be left lonely again.

That is the end of the story.

MARAGOLI TALE 20  
*THE OGRE AND HIS SIX DAUGHTERS*

Performer: Eside Alivitsa Kilavuka (Female)  
Age: 80 years old  
Occupation: Peasant farmer  
Audience: 6 people: 3 adults and 3 children.  
Place: Vohovole Village, Sabatia Division, Vihiga District.  
Time: 11.00 a.m.

A long time ago, there lived an ogre with six daughters. One day the ogre decided to prepare *Mahengere*<sup>?</sup> for his children. He prepared the beans and maize and put them on the fire. Meanwhile, he instructed his daughters to go and weed his crops. Five of his daughters went to the farm but one of them remained at home claiming that she was sick. The father asked her to make sure that the beans were well cooked. This was a job light enough for one who was sick. He then went with his five daughters to the farm.

The girl who remained at home cooked the *mahengere* until it was ready. She then removed them from the fire and started eating them. She ate and finished the food. She then put water in the pot and returned it back on the fire.

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<sup>?</sup> Mahengere is a mixture of maize and beans.

When the sisters came back from the farm they found water in the pot instead of *mahengere*. "Who ate the mahengere?" They asked the sister. "I do not know what happened, perhaps the ogre that came for fire earlier in the day ate the *mahengere*," she answered.

Her ogre father arrived and was told what had happened. He asked all her daughters to follow him up to the stream in the valley. He asked them to jump over the stream one by one. If any one of them fell in the river he would know that she is the one who ate the *mahengere*.

The five girls who had not eaten the *mahengere* jumped over after singing the song:

*If I did eat the mahengere*  
*If I did eat the mahengere*  
*Let me fall in the stream*  
*Let me fall in the stream*

When the sixth girl tried, she fell in the stream and died. That is the end of my story.

APPENDIX B

The Map of Maragoliland

