

# Exploring Gender Relations in Sukuma Oral Poetry: A Thematic Comparative Study

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to capture gender relations in Sukuma oral poetry. The paper is designed to answer two questions: How does Sukuma oral poetry illustrate gender relations among the Sukuma? In what ways Sukuma oral poetry sung by men differ from those sung by women in representing gender issues? The paper is a qualitative content study, which involved document analysis in the collection of data. Sukuma oral poetry was analysed by using Thematic Coding Analysis (TCA) and interpreted by using Third World Feminism Theory. The study found Sukuma oral poetry noticeably distinctive in highlighting the problems of inequality among people in this community. Each gender group in a society illustrates its position in its oral poetry. The paper recommends harmonization of relationship between genders as one of the corrective measures to be undertaken by the responsible authorities.

## Ikisiri

*Makala hii inahusu uchanganuzi wa mahusiano ya kijinsia katika nyimbo za Kisukuma. Lengo ni kubaini majibu ya maswali mawili: Ni kwa jinsi gani nyimbo za Kisukuma zinadhihirisha mahusiano ya kijinsia miongoni mwa Wasukuma? Ni kwa namna gani nyimbo za Kisukuma zinazoimbwa na wanaume zinatofautiana na nyimbo za wanawake katika kujadili suala la mahusiano? Utafiti huu ulifanywa kwa kuzingatia misingi ya kitaamuli ambapo data zilikusanywa kwa kutumia mbinu ya mapitio ya nyaraka. Uchanganuzi wa data ulifanywa kwa kutumia Nadharia ya Kifeministi. Matokeo yanaonesha kutokuwapo kwa usawa wa kijinsia baina ya wanawake na wanaume kunakosababishwa na mapokeo ya mila na desturi zinazotukuza mfumo dume. Hali hii inathibitishwa na maudhui ya nyimbo hizi ambapo kila jinsia inaimba nyimbo zinazoeleza nafasi yake katika jamii. Makala inapendekeza mamlaka zinazohusika ziweke mkazo zaidi katika kuimarisha usawa wa kijinsia miongoni mwa jamii hasa katika maeneo ya pembezoni.*



## **1.0 Introduction**

Gender relations involve perceived behavioural norms associated, particularly, with males and females, their roles, differences, equality and bias (Jule, 2008). This is among the crucial topics extensively discussed by many scholars in different social institutions worldwide (Hofmeyr, 1992; De Beauvoir, 1993; Sunderland, 2006; Monk-Turner, 2008; Cortese et al, 2012; Omari and Senkoro, 2018). From these studies, it is clear that gender relations play an essential role in the development of any society and contribute positively or negatively to the socio-economic development of a community. For example, the marginalization of one gender group in a particular society, not only impedes socio-economic development, but also an individual's progress in that society.

In many countries, gender relations have been linked to national development policies to ensure equality in economic, political and social life. This enables a society to establish the rights, responsibilities, and identities of men and women in relation to one another. In that case, departments and ministries of gender have been set up in a number of African countries and other parts of the world to ensure gender equality in all spheres of life. In Kenya, for example, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Gender and Social Services have been established to address gender issues (Njogu and Mazrui, 2006). Similar measures have been undertaken in Uganda, whereby in 1997 the country instituted a Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), which ensured availability of funds for gender equity in the national budget (Njogu and Mazrui, 2006). This mainly focuses on promoting equal participation of women and men in education, politics, and legal rights to property ownership. Such measures, as Wyrod (2008) noted, were buttressed by changes in the Constitution in 1995. These changes focused primarily on increasing women's political participation, and thus, promoting gender equity.

Apart from Kenya and Uganda, Mozambique has also introduced the concept of gender in the design, analysis, and definition of national development policies and strategies (Casimiro and Andrade, 2006). The aim was to ensure involvement of women in the development of the country. In the case of Nigeria, Ore-Ofe (2011) points out that, different supportive organizations are assisting women in their liberation, like the National Council of Women Society (NCWS), the Women in Nigeria (WIN), and Nigeria Association of Women Advancement (NAWA).

Tanzania, as reported by the URT (2014), established Women and Gender Development Policy (WGDP) to upscale the position of women in the society. Also, there are some organizations such as Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), Tanzanian Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA), and the Women Legal Aid Centre

(WLAC), which ensure gender equality in mainstreaming all programmes. According to Omari and Senkoro (2018), these organizations focused on income-generating activities, advocacy, education, and protection of women's rights. The organizations as Omari and Senkoro put it, use the independent media that mushroomed from the 1990s to raise public awareness of such issues including women's rights, children's rights, environmental concerns, and human rights.

The national gender machinery in Tanzania was established in 1990 and by then it was known as Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children. Due to changes of government leadership, in 2015 this ministry was integrated with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Currently, it is known as the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elders and Children, which is responsible for not only promoting gender equality but also general wellness of the people (URT, 2017). The measures taken by the Ministry and related organizations, to some extent, have managed to eradicate many actions of harassment and discrimination to women such as unequal distribution of wealth, perpetuation of gender stereotypes and other social deprivation (URT, 1992). Apart from the good intent of the government, this service is not available fully in rural areas to save women from dangerous cultural practices that have been suppressing them. For instance, the gender desks which the government established, are not reliable enough to serve the purpose and on the other hand some of the women are not aware of their presence. Likewise, some women in rural areas feel that male domination is part and parcel of their culture, hence they don't bother to seek any assistance from the authorities including gender desk because they believe that they cannot interfere their traditional and culture (Masele, 2017).

Efforts of harmonizing relationship between women and men in many societies have led to the emergence of gender studies in language and literature among scholars. This is because language is a powerful medium through which the world is both reflected and constructed (Jule, 2008). It is evident from some of these studies that perpetuation of unequal gender relations is reflected in the language that people use in their speech and literary discourses (Womack and Marti, 1993; Sunderland, 2008 and Adamson, 2013).

In oral literature, a number of studies relating to discourse and gender relations have been undertaken. Among the significant works are those done by De Lauretis (1998), Senkoro (2005), Kabaji (2005), Monk-Turner (2008), Wakota (2010), Okeke (2012), and Omari and Senkoro (2018), to mention just a few. These works highlight the underlying unequal gender balance and illustrate how each gender group exercise power or marginalization in their community. For example, Omari and Senkoro (2018) argue that women's maxims make much contribution to group identity formation, gender relations and culture. Through maxims women marginalize their role, empower themselves, create gender

constructs and gender differences and give themselves new outlook in the modern society. Such discussions on gender relations in human interactions and the way they are represented in both oral and written discourses have contributed to a great deal in understanding gender status in many societies.

With regard to literature, De Lauretis (1998) argues that literature speaks about universal truth through its forms, whereby all the purely subjective norms of a particular society are transformed through the medium of art. More important, Pala (2005) proposes that the position of women in contemporary Africa needs to be considered at every level of analysis as an outcome of structural and conceptual mechanism by which African societies have continued to respond to and resist the global process and cultural domination. Based on these remarks and observations, the current study was designed to explore gender relations in Sukuma oral poetry so as to highlight gender equality and inequality as presented in this discourse. This is because uncovering the truth is a crucial mechanism towards changing the situation.

## **2.0 Methodology**

This is purely a thematic qualitative study on oral literature and gender. The data which were basically six Sukuma oral poetry with the content of gender relations and other information related to the Sukuma were collected through document analysis from different published and unpublished sources including the author's PhD thesis. Thematic Coding Analysis method was used to analyse the data based on Third World Feminist Theory.

## **3.0 Theoretical Framework**

Third World Feminist Theory, which is the base of discussion of this paper, is a great social movement of the latter half of the twentieth century, which emerged from the demands of U.S. Third World Feminists (Sandoval, 2000). It is sometimes referred to as 'postcolonial feminism'; born out of the critique aimed towards Western feminism (Mishra, 2013). The theory was influenced not only by the struggles against gender domination, but also the struggles against race, sex, national, economic, cultural, and social hierarchies that marked the twentieth century (Cortese et al., 2012). Sandoval (2000) recognizes the U.S. Third World Feminism as a model for oppositional political activity and consciousness in the postmodern world, and through differential consciousness the subordinated classes are able to weave "between and among" the remaining oppositional praxis within this newly conceived topographic space. But one should be aware that Third World women belong to different countries in Africa, Asia and South America (Cortese et al., 2012). In African countries, Third World Feminism is one of the latest Western theoretical perspectives applied in gender studies (Oyewumi, 2005). These studies become the cornerstone of much feminist discourse and gained interest to a number of African feminist scholars. The topics covered in the studies of gender

through Third World Feminism as stated by Nfah-Abbenyi (2005) and Oyewumi (2005) include women's rights, sexuality, differences, social identities, representation and social transformation. Due to this reason, this paper focused on the third world women from African countries who are nowadays identified as the women of the global south. The general principles of oppositional consciousness in Third World Feminism, as proposed by Sandoval (2000), were applied in this study for understanding the status of gender relations in the Sukuma and the struggles of women in a patriarchal society as presented in their oral poetry.

#### **4.0 Results**

Sukuma people occupy four regions in the Northern part of Tanzania which are Mwanza, Geita, Shinyanga, and Simiyu. Singing in this society is part and parcel of their life and they have variety of oral poetic forms: Work oral poetry, wedding oral poetry, dance competition oral poetry, ritual oral poetry, childbirth oral poetry, burial and bereavement oral poetry and other oral poetry during their celebrations (Masele, 2017). The current study did not specify the type of Sukuma oral poetry to be analysed because the intent was to capture the content of the oral poetry which focuses on gender issues. The study found that oral poetry in the Sukuma is highly influenced by gender relations. That means, each gender group in a society illustrates its position in its oral poetry. The content of women's oral poetry, for example, is based on the expressiveness of women's position in their community, particularly, family issues, life experiences, social relations and personal feelings. Most of them are performed in marriage ceremonies and few in other occasions. On the contrary, men's oral poetry is sung in dance competitions and few of them are sung in other contextual environments such as in work and celebrations. Like those sung by women, men's oral poetry are contextually determined.

The subject matter of Sukuma oral poetry, as Masele points out, covers a variety of subjects, ranging from domestic issues to wider societal matters. In most cases, it is revealed that men's oral poetry is long and elaborates in language and express men's position in the society. That being the case, it significantly differs in content from those composed and sung by women. Most of the themes found in the content of Sukuma oral poetry, which basically express gender relations in this society, are those related to unequal distribution of family wealth, deprivation of women's position and perpetuation of stereotypes. These are also the typical issues, which Tanzania, through the Ministry and organizations is dealing with.

#### **4.1 Sukuma Families and Unequal Distribution of Family Wealth**

Access to family wealth normally determines the position and status of each gender group in a particular society. This is another aspect that illustrates gender relations among the Sukuma. The family, which in Sukuma is referred to as *kaaya*, consists of the father/husband, wife or wives, relatives and any other person(s) who live together in a homestead and work together to generate family wealth

(Songoyi, 2005). As such, the Sukuma live in joint or extended families, which they consider as a symbol of respect. Speaking on Third World Feminism, Sandoval (2000) asserts that all social orders hierarchically organized into relations of domination and subordination creates particular subject positions within which the subordinated can legitimately function. These subject positions, once self-consciously recognized by the inhabitants, can become transfigured into effective sites of resistance to an oppressive ordering of power relations. Likewise, in the Sukuma familial system, father/husband is the head of the family and he is the owner of the family wealth and mother/wife is the co-owner of the wealth and she has no voice or decision on the wealth. This unequal distribution of power in family wealth and as illustrated by Sandoval, is also the theme of Sukuma oral poetry. The song *Nanogaga Tulekane Duhu* is an example.

### *Nanogaga Tulekane Duhu*

1. *Ka yaya ngoshi wane nalikuwila giki  
Nanogaga ukuyutulwa.*
2. *I haha ulin'hije kuyunipeja.*
3. *Ahene ubhebhe ulilemba.*
4. *I haha olin'hije kuyunipeja.*
5. *Ahene ubhebhe ulilemba.*
6. *Nanogaga tulekane du.*
7. *Ulu kwinga ng'wana Milembe  
mn'ho twagabhan'ha shose aha nyango.*
8. *Ulu kwinga ng'wana Milembe  
mn'ho twagabhan'han shose aha nyango.*
9. *Tusole a masumbi tugajinj.*
10. *Na mabadi, ulu laki, usole  
hamsini nu nene hamsini.*
11. *Tutule mbasa a mabeseni iki gali mingi  
ubhebhe nusu nu nene nusu.*
12. *I koroboi bhiya ukukulekela  
I yene niza nayo.*
13. *Ni lidiaba mali yane onen'hela Sengi o  
Maganzo.*
14. *Ni lidiyaba mali yane  
oneng'hela Sengi o Maganzo.*
15. *I lyene ukunilekeja.*

**Source:** Masele (2017)

Due to patriarchal nature of the Sukuma culture, customs and practises, the production, ownership and accessibility to wealth in the family is gendered. When husband and wife separate, normally, women leave with empty hands (Masele, 2017). In this oral poem, it is revealed that the wife, who is the co-owner or relegated to the second position of ownership of this wealth, does not accept this inequality. She demands for an equal share of what they have produced together. She says that both should get (fifty-fifty) half of what they have generated. This

### **I am Tired, Let Us Separate**

1. Listen to me my husband, I am tired of being beaten.
2. You are now chasing me away.
3. By doing so, you are cheating yourself.
4. You are now chasing me away.
5. By doing so, you are cheating yourself.
6. I am now tired, let us separate.
7. Ng'wana Milembe! If we separate, know that everything will be distributed equally.
8. Ng'wana Milembe! If we separate, know that everything will be distributed equally.
9. We will sell the chairs.
10. If the iron sheets are hundred, let everyone get fifty of them.
11. We will also divide the dishes, everyone will get half of them.
12. But I will not give you my local lamp because I came with it.
13. The plastic water container is mine; I was given by my aunt from Maganzo.
14. The plastic water container is mine; I was given by my aunt from Maganzo.
15. You will forgive me for that.

closely reflects the argument of many African Feminist Scholars including Pala (2005), Njogu and Mazrui (2006) and Mishra (2013), to mention just a few.

#### **4.2 Socio-economic Deprivation**

Sukuma oral poetry not only illustrates a sense of inequality when divorce or separation occurs, but also demonstrates how women are considered as people who have nothing necessary for pleasant life, hence, need not be involved in crucial decisions. In Sukuma oral poetry, women lament upon their husband's decision to use family wealth without their consent or involvement. A good example is seen in the poem discussed below:

##### ***Igete Nayombe***

1. *Igete nayombe pye mvidegeleke.*
2. *Shiliwa dulilima daponu, ulojiza ungoshi wane wahaya atole nkima ungi.*
3. *Ngoshi wane ulinibhonela gete, I shiliwa shane na bhana bhane.*
4. *Ulu i shikolo chene dugabhanhage uje ugatole nkima ungi.*
5. *Aliyo ahene i mhali yaki shi?*
6. *Natukulemejaga bhebhe umo uhayile ahene imhali jibhayangije bHINGI.*
7. *BHINGE bhalemelwa gemaga nang'ho.*
8. *Ulubhiza a bhageni shiliwa shitimo mukaya.*

##### **Let Me Speak**

1. Let me speak and all of you have to listen.
2. We sowed seeds, and got a bumper harvest, now my husband wants to marry another woman.
3. My husband, you're unfair to me because the foodstuffs are mine and my children.
4. On the issue of other wealth (cattle), let's divide between us so that you may use it to marry another woman.
5. Anyway, what do you benefit from polygamous practice?
6. I'm not barring you from getting married to another woman, but many people failed to handle polygamous practice.
7. Many people failed to handle polygamy, you can also try.
8. Remember that we do not have enough food even for our guests.

**Source:** Masele (2017)

The wife in the song is against her husband's behaviour of spending family wealth for marrying another woman. She is not willing to let her husband use the family wealth in a selfish manner, since she had participated in producing it. Also, she says that if her husband thinks of using the food produced for the family to marry another woman, then, they should divide the wealth they have generated such that the husband would use his part to marry the woman he wishes. The content of the song reveals the social economic deprivation experienced by the Sukuma women. This is similar to what the Third World Feminists through their works condemn, emphasizing the problems caused by polygamous practises and arranged marriages. For example, Nnaemeka (2005) considers economic deprivation as typical social problems concerning the Africans. Sukuma women work hard and produce much wealth for their family, yet they have no control over it. It is the men who have access and authority to use it in ways they like. For example, the



man in this song wants to use foodstuffs to pay bride wealth without considering his wife's contribution and willingness.

### 4.3 Women's Role

Women's role in society is another aspect that is expressed in Sukuma oral poetry. Like men, Sukuma women are concerned with establishing their vital role in society. Their oral poetry addresses the importance of work as the cornerstone of the family. When women are performing their domestic chores, they usually sing. Such work related songs keep them going on with their activities; and at the same time they express women's views about domestic chores and their position in the society. The following song, titled "Greetings", sung when women are performing their domestic chores is an example.

#### **Jiigisho**

1. *Madiilo Mangaluke.*
2. *Ilelo hulala ahaa.*
3. *Alimbiti mayu jinangaluche.*
4. *Madilo madilo mangaluke?*
5. *Alimbiti mayu jinangaluche "Mangaluke."*

#### **Greetings**

1. Good Afternoon.
2. Today I will sleep here in the bush.
3. The hyenas will come to greet me.
4. Good morning, how are you?
5. They will meet me, and greet me "Good morning."

**Source:** Gunderson (1999)

This is a brief song like other work songs, which is sung repeatedly. In this song, women allude to the major activities, which they perform as custodians of the families. These activities include preparation of food, grinding of the millet and child rearing. The song may seem to bear no significant message when one examines it superficially. However, it bears an implied feeling of protest against what women experience in society. They always go to sleep late and tired having worked all day. They also wake up early when the hyenas are still out preying. Hence, the phrase "the hyena will come to greet me/Good morning" is a reference to stereotyped images of women. Gunderson (1999) asserts in this regard that today women composers in Sukumaland have much more difficult time making their way than their male counterparts. This is because they are expected to get married and perform never-ending tasks like managing large households.

### 4.4 Family Conflicts and the Definition of Women's Identity

Apart from women's stereotyped role, domestic violence features prominently in Sukuma women's oral poetry. URT (1992) remarks such violence against women as actions of injustice to women. This song sung by Miswaki women group is a good example of Sukuma oral poetry, which expresses domestic violence.

**Kaya Yane**

1. *Kaya yane yabhulagilwe lita.*
2. *Bhuyaga mapuya.*
3. *Abhanamugi ulubhinga kuwalwa, nagutulagwa nuwilwa Nagiki "Jaga kaya".*

**Source:** Songoyi (2005)

**My Homestead**

1. My homestead has been killed (destroyed) by the "litre".
2. Every day he drinks alcohol.
3. The husband when he returns from drinking, I am beaten and I am told "Go home".

This is an instance of Sukuma women's oral poetry of lamentation. The song is about a woman who complains about her husband's behaviour of drinking too much and beating her. The family of the woman in the song, "My homestead" *Kaya Yane*, is destroyed by alcohol. Wyrod (2008) and McHale (2009) observe that domestic violence differ in source, intensity and reactions between genders. For instance, in a study of gender and social transformation in Bangladesh, the World Bank (2008) identified that the idiosyncratic and unpredictable nature of violence by men on women indicates that men use it as a coping mechanism in the face of frustration, which was noted to be enhanced by pressures of poverty. This is similar to the findings in this study whereby in many Sukuma homesteads, poverty, alcoholism, polygamous practice and infidelity are among the sources of domestic violence. Unreasonable scolding, harassment in different ways and beating, which sometimes lead to separation, are common as it is clearly revealed in the phrase "My homestead has been destroyed by the litre," and other oral poems presented in this paper.

**4.5 Perpetuation of Gender Stereotypes**

On the other hand, Sukuma men sing oral songs, which emphasize perpetuation of gender stereotypes. In this aspect, men believe that they are superior and have the right to usurp wealth from their wives. Because of such stereotypical notion, they sing oral poetry about laziness and negligence to show their status and role in the society. In Sukuma community a person gets great respect according to the wealth he has, which includes the number of cattle and children. These do not only bring respect to the owner but also they help them to sustain the family (Songoyi, 2005). Hence, Sukuma men tend to sing songs mocking those who do not want to work hard in order to acquire wealth and compare them to women whom they regard as weak persons. The themes of these oral poetic forms illustrate men's discontent with laziness and they always mock the lazy people who are not ready to produce wealth, food and cattle. They urge men to avoid such kind of laziness. The singer in the song *Ngosha N'habhi* portrays Ng'wana Masangu as among the people who died shamefully without owning even a single head of cattle.

***Ngosha N'habhi***

1. *Jidalonjaga nangi ni munenhele ulupanga lo namhala atina bhi na nzala.*
2. *Ni gabudi ya munhu uyo ubhahebha mbina*

**The Poor Man**

1. Jidalonjaga, you would have brought me the sword of an elder whose family has never starved.

- pye hacholaga.*
3. *Namutuma pye bhobha ng'wena Iya Ng'wana Masangu, ngosha gudi nkima.*
  4. *Bha Ng'wana Masangu bhinga kuwelelo nulu agang'ondi ga ng'ombe yaya.*
  5. *Ni nva gete nduhu ukozulu.*
  6. *Nulu nyabhu gete nduhu kuzulu*
  7. *Gashi gagalolaga a manyabhu ng'wa nsabhi wa ng'ombe.*
  8. *Gali majanja sawa na mamunhu.*
  9. *Aho bhakikalaga nzala gamanile gataganihaga ho.*
  10. *Gina Bhunwani na mang'ombe*
2. The overcoat of a man who is a champion in dance.
  3. I sent only the cowards who brought the sword from Masangu's son, a man who was like a woman.
  4. Masangu's son, has departed from the world without owning even a single head of cattle.
  5. Not even a dog visited his home.
  6. Not even a cat visited him.
  7. Even cats look for the homes of cattle owners (the rich)
  8. They are clever like human beings.
  9. They know and avoid going to the homes of the poor people.
  10. They are friends to cattle.

**Source:** Songoyi (2005)

The song highlights the prestige of Sukuma men in owning herds of cattle, which for them symbolizes wealth and high status. In this song, the son of Masangu is referred to as the lazy man who died without wealth. The singer says that no one visited Masangu's son; neither the dog nor the cat because there was no food in the homestead. The oral poetry, upholds wealth as something that can give men power over women, and which differentiates men from women. The sense of wealth as a symbol of power for men is also one among gender stereotypes, which corresponds to what Omari and Senkoro (2018) observed in their study. When speaking on maxims referring to men, Omari and Senkoro argue that most of them are characterized by the notion that a man has to have a car, house, farm, job and money. Also man should be highly educated and the hardworker. They add that these maxims may occur in the women's discussions of achievements of one's male partner or when discussing about characteristics of the ideal man or husband they prefer. The composer of the song *Ngosha Nhabhi* in this study has used simple language with a lot of figures of speech such as the name *Masangu*\* which is used metaphorically to mean people of low status. Exaggeration is also used in the song when the singer says, '*Ni nva gete nduhu ukozulu*' to mean that neither the dog nor the cat visited his home. The exaggeration or hyperbole in this song aims at revealing the theme and suggest the importance of wealth to men in this society.

#### 4.6 Men as Custodians of Social Values

Criticism of the behaviour of women in the society also forms a significant feature in oral poetry sung by Sukuma men. Usually, men see themselves as custodians of social values. It is, therefore, not strange to find oral poetry that praise or mock women for their social conduct, as in the case of the song entitled *Rejina* as presented below:

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\* Sukuma traditional food made of maize and beans.

**Rejina**

1. *Mpaka kucha kone  
naliyomba hali Regina.*
2. *Yiyo mbiyu ilinamasala.*
3. *Idi giti bha Esta nu Flora bhahuluhulu.*
4. *Ng'waka ng'waka bhaduma u gutolwa.*
5. *Bhahuluhulu bhang'wanhinhi,  
unaying'we ng'wenheleja nu Liku  
unipela.*

**Source:** Salinguji (2011)

**Regina**

1. Till my death  
I am talking to Regina.
2. She is a clever seed.
3. Not hooligan like Ester and Flora.
4. Years pass without being married.
5. The hooligans of Ng'wanhinhi, you are the one  
who convinced Liku to run away from me.

In this poem, a man is complaining about the behaviour of young girls. Instead of staying with their families and getting married, they run away and roam around. As if that is not enough, they even convince other girls to do the same. Regina is said to be 'wise' (clever) in that she was able to make Liku, a good girl. The singer is advising Liku to come back home; otherwise she will remain unmarried. Again, this song, like many of the oral poems composed and sung by men, carries with it the male's point of view. Men, in the Sukuma society, believe that women (girls) are for marriage and a girl who stays long without being married is usually not respected, whom they refer to as *nshimbe*.

**5.0 Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

According to Senkoro (2005) oral art enables us to observe through telescopic eyes people's beliefs, customs and their philosophy of life. This is observably evident in Sukuma oral poetry with noteworthy features of gender imbalance, which has great impact on their social life. One among these features, which is also significantly different from the content of oral poetry sung by men from those sung by women, is that men are considered as pillars of the families, wielding almost all the power and authority in the homestead and outside. Their oral poetry, to a great extent, shows elements of power, prestige and their assumed superior role and status in the community.

Like in many societies, women in Sukuma are presented as family carriers and subordinated group as in the poem *Jiigisho* (Greetings), where women are described as preoccupied with stereotypical thinking. Njogu and Mazrui (2006) in their study, *Gender Inequality and Women's Rights in the Great Lakes*, argue that gender roles assigned to men and women are significantly defined structurally and culturally in ways which create, reinforce, and perpetuate situations of male dominance and female subordination. This is also the case in Sukuma society, as also observed in the poem *Jiigisho* (Greetings) where women do all the domestic activities, which always keeps them occupied for the whole day. The vigorous time they get are used effectively in the composition of poetry expressing their discontent. Explaining about the same experience Omari and Senkoro (2018) state that women's maxims are an important space where women can express and

represent themselves and their relationships, and contrast themselves with men. They are used to demonstrate, persuade, encourage, advocate and represent their presence to the public arena. Likewise, the contents of Sukuma oral poetry reflect, what Sandoval (2000) points out in the depiction of Third World Feminism that the subordinated classes normally, seek subjective forms of resistance other than those determined by the social order itself. For example, in the oral poem entitled *Igete Nayombe* (Let Me Speak) the woman persona is against polygamous practice and she is not ready for her husband to use the wealth she participated to generate as bride wealth when marrying a second wife. Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed* describes the significance of human beings as “citizen-subjects,” who are able to find their identity not only through society’s depiction of themselves, but their performance of particular social practices and validation of personal values and desires. The oral poem, *Nanogaga Tulekane Duhu* (I am tired Let us Separate), is an example of women’s discontent of injustice in marriage. This woman is aware of the egalitarian principles of divorce and separation and hence, she wants to get equal share. Although Sandoval (2000) outlines the conditions, which lead to oppositional consciousness to the subordinated group to resist and take actions against the situation, the model does not explain clearly the aspects, which give power to the dominant group. This is different from the Sukuma whereby, wealth is described to be the aspect which give men power over women.

### 5.1 Conclusion

Finally, gender relations in Sukuma oral poetry under the condition of male domination reveals that life of women in this society is surrounded by suppressed power and marginalization. The women use oral poetry as their weapon or platform for ventilating their discontent. Apart from showing their struggle and effort to end inequality, their oral poetry to a great extent expresses women’s painful experiences in African societies. It is also found that the content of oral poetry sung by women seem to differ from their male counterparts, particularly on depiction of gender issues. However, in general, both are seen to highly reflect gender relations influenced by social experiences. From the content of oral poetry, one can learn many things because oral poetry carries very important messages to the society and they are used as tools for teaching moral issues and encouraging social change.

### 5.2 Recommendations

In his article, *Oral Literature as a Vehicle for Gender Studies in East Africa*, Senkoro (2005) asserts that the arts play a major role in liberating the minds of the people. Without liberating the mind, the psyche, the imprisoned world outlooks, the beliefs, the attitudes that often effect self-denial and denigration, no positive gender awareness can be achieved. The findings of this study contribute to this notion. When analyzing Sukuma oral poetry, it was realized that the content of oral

poetry presents the consciousness of the women about gender inequality and at the same time plays the role of liberating the society from this problem. This is the concept that Sandoval (2000) calls as oppositional conscious of the oppressed. Also, Sandoval's principle, as derived from Althusser (1970) on postulations, suggests that "means and occasions" do become generated whereby individuals and groups in opposition are able to effectively challenge and transform oppressive aspects of identity and social order. However, consciousness without action and support from the authorities to overcome the problem cannot yield positive fruits. Hence, this study proposes that extra effort is needed to change the mindset of the people with regard to gender inequality and stereotypes and to prohibit the cultural norms and logjams that hinder the development of both sexes. Therefore, the Government through the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elder and Children and other organizations, as stated in the introductory part of this study, should monitor promotion of gender equality through education, particularly in rural areas where most of the women suffer. This will help in protecting the rights of women and bring about equality between the sexes.

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