

## Ohangla Performance as a Vehicle for Transforming Gender Consciousness Among the Luo of Kenya

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### Abstract

This paper interrogates the role *Ohangla* performance has played in transforming the Luo community's gender consciousness. The analytical procedure was informed by the theories of gender, advanced by the concepts of Butler's and de Beauvoir. Their theories played a significant role in the analysis of gender related practices integrated and displayed in the *Ohangla* performances. Thus the study argued that since gender is performance, it should be seen as a fluid variable which shift and change in relation to the social context. Through ethnographic method of data collection, the study attempted to understand the ways in which culture, on one hand, and the performer of the *Ohangla*, on the other hand, adjusts to the cultural modification in informing the Luo community about the cultural changes with an aim of transforming the Luo community's gender consciousness. The study sampled respondents among the Luo *Ohangla* artists and their audience drawn from Siaya County's Bondo and Rarieda sub-counties. Two sets of data were collected for this study; they comprised some *Ohangla* performances and information about the artists' use of *Ohangla* performance as a vehicle for transforming social consciousness. Data was collected mainly using participant's observation and in-depth interviews. Recording was done by taking field notes, making comments, and videotaping *Ohangla* performances. The data was analyzed qualitatively. The study offered insights on the understanding of the contemporary Luo *Ohangla* performances and the social transformations *Ohangla* performance had created overtime so as to conform to the current social demands of the Luo society.

**Key terms:** Consciousness, gender, *Ohangla*, performance

## INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the role of *Ohangla* performances in transforming the contemporary Luo community's gender consciousness. Musical performance plays a significant role among the Luo community, who inhabited the Western part of Kenya; therefore, it forms part and parcel of the community's social-cultural practices. The Luo community has a rich tradition of musical production, most notably songs and dances. *Ohangla's* musical performance plays a central role in communal life for the Luo community. Omollo-Ongati (2005) describes *Ohangla* performance among the Luo community as a genre involving songs and dance. It is accompanied by an ensemble of between four and eight drums, distinguished by a long cylindrical drum, the *Ohangla*. Other instruments that accompany the performance of *Ohangla* include the *Abu* (traditional trumpet), the *Kinanda* (a wind instrument), the *Nyatiti* (lyre), the *Tung'* (horn), the *Ongeng'o* (tinklets) and the *Orutu* (fiddle), among others. Traditionally, it was the most widely practised musical art among the Luo. At any given time of the day or night, members of the community will be seen participating in the performance. In the modern Luo nation, *Ohangla* performances have gained so much popularity in Kenya that many *Benga* musicians and a few Luo gospel singers, such as Lillian Auma and Elias Princes Jully, have embraced the performance in place of their originally preferred *Benga* genres. As a result, *Ohangla's* popularity has tremendously grown in the country to overtake *Benga* music, increasing the number of people listening to it, buying *Ohangla* records and attending live bands organised by *Ohangla* artists (Nyanga, 2013).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the contemporary Luo community, *Ohangla* performances have addressed some of the critical issues that were not in existence before the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, the issues of gender among the Luo community, according to Magak and Okombo (2014). They argue that some of the Luo performances, such as *Ohangla* performances, are inordinately skewed towards the scrutiny of relationships between men and women. In most cases, the artist's fascination with the subject of feminism could be partly explained by the centrality of women

in the Luo social system. However, some of these *Ohangla* performances simply celebrate feminism from the patriarchal perspective. It is common within the Luo social system to find elements of tension, contest, resistance and even rebellion between men and women. This resistance, in most cases, results in the subversion of the Luo cultural ideologies, which may not be public but are masked by performances and discourses such as the *Ohangla* performance, which are currently transforming the mainstream perception of gender relations. *Ohangla's* performance, therefore, can be seen as a system of persuasive dialogue in which the audience embraces, as their own, a given set of socially constructed and validated gender roles and attitudes. Thus, *Ohangla's performance as dialogue can be employed as a genre for the re-creation and transformation of gender concepts, symbols, meanings and the social structural divisions in raising gender consciousness more effectively than any other musical genre among the Luo community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

However, this study assumed that general changes in the overall Luo culture, as a result, emerging issues such as Western education, which has enlightened the Luo community on gender dynamics, would automatically trigger similar changes in the role that the *Ohangla* genre plays in the current Luo community in relation to the transformation of the community's gender consciousness. Therefore, it follows that the new form of performance has created new roles that were scanty in *Ohangla's* performance in the past. In relation to the foregoing, reviewing some of the studies concerning *Ohangla* musical performances, many authors have carried out some studies concerning *Ohangla* performance among the Luo community. In relation to the traditional role of the *Ohangla* genre, Nyakiti (2011) investigated the functions of the indigenous music prompted by the adoption of the *Onanda* accordion by some Luo musicians, Omollo-Ongati (2005) studied the hybrid nature of *Ohangla* performances, and Akumu (2012) investigated the functions of *Ohangla* performances on various occasions, such as funerals and weddings. In relation to gender, Magak and Okombo (2014) studied the gender dynamics in *Ohangla* performances among the Luo; Nyanga (2013) focused on the theme of gender and socio-economic empowerment in

relation to *Ohangla* performance among the Luo community. Awuor and Anudo (2016) discusses how masculinity is captured in Luo *Ohangla* music. From the foregoing, we concluded that most studies concerning the Luo *Ohangla* musical performances in the past were mainly descriptive, and some of the studies were anthropological in nature. Thus, they failed to investigate the role *Ohangla* performance plays in the transformation of the contemporary Luo community's gender consciousness.

Therefore, it is in order to confidently make an assertion that none of the authors discussed in this paper had investigated the roles that *Ohangla* performance as a genre has played in transforming the contemporary Luo community's gender consciousness comprehensively. Thus, given the paucity of information concerning the social transformation of the Luo community's gender consciousness, it is necessary to do a detailed cultural and literary analysis of the role that the *Ohangla* performance has played in transforming the contemporary Luo community's gender consciousness in order to bridge the existing gap.

## METHODOLOGY

The Luo *Ohangla* performance has gone through transformation in relation to some of its structure, contents and the role it played in the past and the new roles it is currently playing among the modern Luo community. In this study, the data were collected through oral interviews and personal observation. Secondary data were also collected from the relevant books, while others were downloaded from the internet. The interviews were carried out among Luo elders and *Ohangla* artists both men and women. This was done in social places such as weddings, political rallies and bars. The research was done in 2021 in Siaya County, Bondo and Rarieda Sub-counties. A systematic study of *Ohangla* performance revealed that the genre has undergone some functional changes over a period of time, which is before and after the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We noted that these changes have been necessitated by the changes in the social, cultural and political influence. As a result, the contemporary Luo community has experienced the same changes in the transformation of gender consciousness.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Ohangla* Performance and Gender Consciousness

This paper proceeded to interrogate issues related to gender in *Ohangla* musical performances among the Luo community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and compared the findings with the traditional gender-related themes. These were done to determine whether *Ohangla*'s performance had played a significant role in the transformations of the Luo community's gender consciousness. The discussions were guided by the assumption that some of these musical performances, such as *Ohangla*, were created in the past and are still being re-created since they articulate broad gender values and ideologies. Furthermore, Geertz (1975) argues that such performances contain detailed contexts and a web of social relationships that join individuals being studied to each other with their community's social context. Thus, considering the foregoing arguments, it is reasonable to reason out that gender-related issues integrated into the *Ohangla* performance and transmitted to the Luo community through performance have the ability to transform the Luo society's social consciousness in relation to gender.

This paper is based on the view of (de Beauvoir, 1989), who points out that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." In the same breath, we could as well argue that "one is not born, but rather becomes a man." This section specifically investigated ways in which an individual can become a 'man,' a social way of measuring gender equality. We argued that every society has its own socialising agents through which gender ideologies could be transferred. One such agent among the Luo community is *Ohangla* musical performances, which transform the Luo gender consciousness as revealed in the preceding discussions and analysis of gender-related issues in *Ohangla* performance. This paper, therefore, interrogated the role *Ohangla* musical performance played in transforming the Luo community's gender consciousness.

As mentioned earlier, this paper was based on the view of de Beauvoir (1989) and Butler's (1993) view on the dynamic nature of gender in the analysis of the *Ohangla* performance texts. This is a concept in which gender is interpreted as a fluid variable that can easily

be shifted and changed within different performance contexts. These ideas were appropriately employed in this paper in the analysis and interpretation of the gender-related issues depicted in *Ohangla* performance to reveal the role *Ohangla* performance had played in transforming social consciousness in relation to gender. The study is based on the belief that *Ohangla* performances in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be viewed as an agent of gender transformation. It should act as a lens through which the community can understand the transformation of gender consciousness among the contemporary, especially women within the Luo community.

## Women and *Ohangla* Performance

We have noted that among the traditional African communities, most feminists observe women's roles from the patriarchal perspective. Scholars who had written about gender, such as Ostergaard (1992), argued that women are viewed as a group who are disadvantaged in terms of power relations. They are confined within oppressive cultures; therefore, they are exploited particularly in most patriarchal societies, such as the Luo. de Beauvoir (1989) argues that women have choices to make, either to be liberated or to struggle to liberate themselves through appropriate means; this is in reference to de Beauvoir's famous slogan, which states that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Among the Luo community, and according to this study, such means may include but are not limited to various musical performances such as *Ohangla*. Therefore, this study interrogated *Ohangla* performances to reveal thematic concerns integrated into the *Ohangla* performances that are crucial in transforming gender consciousness among the contemporary Luo community. This paper, therefore, discusses the role that the modern *Ohangla* performances played among women in transforming the Luo society's gender consciousness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is done by interrogating the role of women artists in the modern *Ohangla* performance content. In relation to the structure, the *Ohangla* performance will focus mainly on the gender issues in the *parkruok* (virtue boasting) during the *Ohangla* performance.

According to Ochieng (1975), the Luo were a patriarchal community; most of its cultural

performances were not left behind. *Ohangla* performances are equally perceived as works of literature associated with the male as the leading performer (Nyakiti, 1998). The women played either active or passive roles during the performance. They could play an active role when they took part in dancing and singing. In most cases, they were portrayed as symbolic objects displayed on the stage to be looked at and admired by men, and it was pleasurable to both of them (the lookers and those being looked at), as depicted by Foucault (1977). This was the women's responsibility during the live performances and was in tandem with society's cultural expectations (Ochieng, 1975). In other words, they could also play a passive role when they simply become part of the audience listening and enjoying the *Ohangla* performance. Among the Luo community, being an *Ohangla* artist was considered so superior that women could not be allowed to perform, and they were not accorded a space, let alone perform it; touching the *Ohangla* drum was taboo, according to Nyakiti (1998). Thus, male dominance was the primary reason why women were not allowed to perform the *Ohangla*.

Of paramount importance was the need to interrogate the *Ohangla* performance texts to determine how gender-related issues are articulated and represented to the audience particular concepts of transformation of the Luo community's gender consciousness. In the Luo contemporary society, it was noted that the Luo female *Ohangla* artists were challenging the idea of patriarchy as a result of the introduction of Western education and Christianity, which altered the Luo community's ways of viewing patriarchy. The current *Ohangla* artists are transforming in terms of the artists, context and content in the performances so as to conform to the new demands of its listeners and the changing worldview (Okong'o, 2011). As a result, such transformation has assigned the *Ohangla* a new way of transforming gender consciousness among the Luo community.

This study reveals that the population of female *Ohangla* artists has recently risen among the Luo community. This is because they had acquired a space initially denied by the patriarchal Luo culture. Some of the Luo *Ohangla* artists whose performances we have

studied and analysed include Grace Nyar Kindu and Benta Nyar Koyugi, popularly known as (*Ogwe chaire*) translated literally as 'lizards are alike' and Late Lady Maurine. The findings above were important in this study in the sense that they focus on the shift in paradigms in African literary works, especially among the Luo *Ohangla* performers.

The interest of this section was to investigate whether women, through *Ohangla* performances, in any way subverted the Luo community's gender consciousness in relation to some of the dominant patriarchal ideologies of voices within the Luo society. Thus, the study identified some of the female *Ohangla* artists, whose major occupation is *Ohangla* performances. This is evidence to justify the concept of the transformation of the Luo community's gender consciousness.

### Female Artist and *Ohangla* Performance

In the past, women in Africa, just like the Luo women, were confined within patriarchal cultures, where they lacked space to share their frustrations and pains. On the same note, Duran (1995) argued that women all over the world were fearful and subdued by their male counterparts, as they could not openly talk about their suffering. In case they were to air their views, it was only done through gossip and when performing domestic duties such as beadwork. Thus, this study argued that the *Ohangla* performance has provided safe avenues for Luo women to perform and dialogise their challenges through the *Ohangla* performance openly. This would transform the Luo community's gender consciousness. This section proceeds to interrogate issues related to the female performers in the contemporary Luo *Ohangla* performance in the transformation of gender consciousness. As argued earlier by Nyakiti (1998) that traditionally, among the Luo community, women were not allowed to perform *Ohangla* music. Their role during the performance was mainly to dance as they displayed their bodies to be seen by men. This notion has been disapproved in this study, given the prevailing situations among the Luo in relation to gender consciousness. In contemporary Luo society, women have taken over from men, the art being *Ohangla* artists. In fact, they perform better music than some male artists, given the number of people attending their performances (Nyanga, 2013).

In fact, women have been struggling to fight for gender equality, in this case, through Luo *Ohangla* performances.

The discussion in this paper will reveal ambivalence of the discourse of women artists who supposedly speak for themselves, particularly on critical issues affecting society, such as politics and education against patriarchal beliefs. This discourse reveals what Foucault (1990) explains as the complex and unstable process, in that discourse can be an instrument that affects power, and at the same time, it can also be a hindrance and stumbling block. This may result in a point of resistance and a starting point for opposing ideologies, as in the Luo *Ohangla* performance by the female *Ohangla* artists. Therefore, in this instance, women projected a new ideology which presented themselves positively and through this process, new ideologies marked in *Ohangla* performances are imparted to the audience of all ages; hence, transforming cultural consciousness in relation to the cultural belief and traditions such as gender imbalance. In fact, de Beauvoir (1989) argues that the more females continue to challenge traditional dichotomous gender norms, the less "normal" they will become. Thereafter, the Luo patriarchal ideologies, which are oppressive to women, would progressively be rejected altogether by the female gender, in favour of what the women choose. They would opt for only those ideas which would make them feel free and equal to men. Since women have realised that the past patriarchal conditions were intolerable, this indicates that some gains have been realised in the transformation of gender consciousness, and perhaps it will continue to be made in future.

The song below is an example political song performed by a female artist in favour of Raila Odinga. He is both famous and popular among the Luo and in Kenya as a whole, and because of that, the Luo community refers to him as the top leader. *Raila Jakom* (Raila the chairman). This performance was done by a woman artist known as the late Lady Maurine; this is a portion of the performance.

**Artist: The lady Maurine**

**Artist: Raila Jakom: Raila, the chairman. Song text: 1a**

**Luo**

*Raila awer wendi woud Nyalego agwambo okegoneya*×2

*Raila awer wendi wuod Nyalego agwambo omin Akinyi Simba*

*Raila awer wendi wuod Nyalego baba woud Odinga*×2

*Awero wendi wuod Nyalego baba omin Akinyi*×2

*Awero Wendi Baba Tinga omin Adhiambo.simba*×2

*Sama wendi Amolo woud Nyalego tinga, X*

**English**

Raila, I sing your song, son of Nyalego, Agwambo Oneya's nephew,x2

Raila, I sing your song, son of Nyalego,x2 Agwambo Akinyi's brother of the lion,x2

Raila, I sing your song, son of Nyalego, son of Odinga,x2

I sing your song, son of Nyalego Akinyi's brother,x2

I sing your song, the tractor Adhiambo's brother,x2

When I'm singing your song, Amolo son of Nyalego, the tractor, x2

*Ohangla* performance has empowered women and artists generally. Although most of the Luo female artists have become popular to the extent that some male politicians could demand their performances during political campaign rallies, the Late Lady Mourine, a woman who had entrenched herself in this male-dominated art as an *Ohangla* artist, was then the leading performer among the Luo *Ohangla* artists (both men and women). As a result, she had a large following and greatly influenced Luo politics. This happened when she composed one of the best song performances in praise of an undisputed Luo leader known as *Raila Jakom* (Raila, the chairman), refer to the song text, 1a.

In relation to economic empowerment, female *Ohangla* artists have become more popular, and this has made them attract large crowds during their performances, and participants had to pay an entrance

fee. Currently, to attend any organised *Ohangla* performance, one has to pay for the service, without which one could not be allowed to participate. In most cases, charges could range from five hundred to one thousand Kenya shillings only per person (excluding meals and drinks taken during such entertainments). However, during political rallies and funeral activities, any interested individual was allowed to attend free of charge. Therefore, this female artist could perform in public rallies, social clubs and schools during educational days. During these occasions, the performance fee had to be paid by the host. This empowered these Luo female *Ohangla* artists, such as the late Lady Maurine, Grace Nyakindu and Benta Nyakoyugi. It is true to argue that *Ohangla* performance can and has empowered women artists economically and socially. In addition, it has created a space for them to air their views freely in a patriarchal-dominated Luo society. This has gender awareness, which eventually transforms the Luo community's gender consciousness, as noted by Nyanga (2013).

**Virtue Boasting in the Contemporary Luo *Ohangla* Performance**

One of the key features in *Ohangla* performances is virtue-boasting names. It was practised in the traditional *Ohangla* performances and is still practised in the modern Luo community. However, currently the structure, content and context have changed in response to the changes that *Ohangla* itself has undergone. It usually occurs at the beginning and in the middle of the performance. One of the audiences, traditionally men/women, who were interested in boasting could avail themselves and direct a virtue name at the gathering, not an individual. The Luo being patriarchal, women were restricted to using only men's names, not women's. Virtue boasting names played a significant role. It acts as an opening formula when the artist uses it to start the performance. It instils discipline among the community members in that only virtues were mentioned, not vices. It also informs the audience that the performance has started. Thus, they need to be alert. Finally, it entertains the *Ohangla* audience and creates a forum where important people or those who call themselves important in the community can get a space and the audience to assert their authority and let them be known. In that, they could order the *Ohangla* artist to

stop the proceeding performance in the middle of the performance, when the audience is at the peak of the dance, to stop as well. This was done at a cost. Such individuals were to pay the artists a certain amount of prize every time they felt like boasting. So not everyone could boast since it was a skill which was not for everyone, and it was learned. Hence, most people did not have it.

In relation to gender and virtue boasting, it is a very important Luo cultural practice that plays an important role in *Ohangla* performance as far as gender consciousness is concerned. Girls were traditionally depicted as being owned only by men because they could only boast using men's names, not women's. However, in contemporary Luo society, virtue boasting in *Ohangla* performances has created some gender transformations in relation to virtue boasting, which has occurred in the contemporary Luo community. It was noted that women boast about using women or their mothers, which was not the case in past; in fact, it was a taboo. Originally, it was argued that *Ohangla* performances, to some extent, are discursive agencies deployed by culture to subject women to a patriarchal ideology. Below is an extract of the modern virtue boasting text performed by a woman we recorded during the *Ohangla* live performance in Rarieda Sub-County, Siaya County.

### **Virtue Boasting was from Linet Auma**

***Ohangla* Artist: Otieno Aloka**

**Songtext: 1b**

*In Nga? In Nga? An Auma Simba.* "Who are you? Who are you?" "I am Auma the Lion".

*Dhako Opado chure yuak ka nyathi.* "A woman has slapped a husband. He is crying like a baby. Uwi! Uwi! Mayoo! Mayo! Uwi! Uwi! Mayoo! Mayoo!"

The above virtue boasting text analysis illustrates a key idea of the power struggle between men and women represented in *Ohangla* performance, according to Awuor and Anudo (2016). In this context, the virtue name is *Simba* (a lion). A lion in African communities, such as the Luo, is one of the strongest and most feared animals. Thus, "Auma Simba" is just a representation of the larger Luo women, who are violent and hence expect men to fear them or just

intend to create fear for the "other" gender. These women have got a performance space through *Ohangla* performance, where they could assert their authority by wresting power from Luo men and finally force them into submission to the females by slapping (beating) them. The artist claims that men, represented by husbands, can easily submit through coercion, just like children do. This submission is represented by crying. This argument above is against Luo's patriarchal beliefs. In the Luo traditional community, women were supposed to be beaten by their husbands just like children. In fact, the culture dictates that the husband must beat his wife to show love to her (Ogot, 1967). A wife who escaped beating from her husband would soon "grow horns" and become disobedient to other men in the community. This was because, among the Luo, a wife doesn't belong to the individual but to the entire Luo clan. Since women were treated as the "other," they had to be disciplined by their husbands, if not other males related to the husband. The discussion above can be summed up in Foucault's (1977) conception of power struggle between males and females as mobile, multiple fields of force relations, which will never become stable. He argues that although they appear terminal and fixed, they are temporary and precarious, and they will always create a point of resistance that cuts across the social order and its stratification of power and privileges, thus opening possibilities of resistance. The Luo *Ohangla* performance through the virtue of boasting names depicts this form of dynamic nature of power.

The above discussions revealed ambivalence of the discourse of women artists who supposedly speak for themselves, particularly on critical issues affecting society, such as gender roles. Therefore, in this instance, women project new ideologies which present them positively, and through this process, new ideologies marked in *Ohangla* performances are imparted to audiences of all ages, hence, transforming cultural consciousness in relation to cultural beliefs and traditions such as gender imbalance. These might have resulted in the loss of gender roles among the sexes being observed in contemporary Luo society. In fact, currently, in the Luo community, there is no role allocation to any gender. Instead, there is a gender struggle characterised by competition between men

and women in the performance of duties. Hence, regardless of gender, anyone can now perform any duty depending on their interest and as long as they perform it better. This has been occasioned by the emergence of Western education and Christianity, which have mutilated and transformed the Luo social and cultural structure, some of which have been transmitted to the community through *Ohangla* performances. In addition, the elements of Western culture have also penetrated into the Luo *Ohangla* performances, as indicated by Okong'o (2011), and this has resulted in the creation of hybrid cultural practices among the Luo, which is currently transforming the Luo communities' social consciousness in relation to gender.

### **Ohangla Performance and Marriage Consciousness**

In relation to marriage, for example, in the past, bachelorhood was abhorred among the Luo. A man who had passed marriageable age and had not married was considered incomplete. Similarly, a childless couple was looked down upon. Further, an unmarried woman who continued to remain in her home (birthplace) experienced hostility, hatred and criticism from the villagers, her own brothers and close relatives. This was considered a let-down to the family, and such families, the main mothers to such ladies, were considered to have failed in administering their role as mothers. Therefore, marriage and the subsequent birth of a child were held in high esteem among the Luo. People celebrated through performances such as *Ohangla* songs and dances whenever they happened.

These preceding discussions illustrate the intercultural marriage and gender roles in marriage among the Luo, an important affair cherished and admired by the Luo community (Wilson, 1968). However, inter-cultural marriage was not allowed since a person from a different culture may transfer undesirable traits to the community, and Onyi Papa Jey, a Luo *Ohangla* artist, contradicts this Luo custom in his *Ohangla* performance, as shown below in song text 1b.

#### **Milly Nyar-Jolang'o (Luo)**

*Papa wuod Adhiambo kakoro atugo nduma, x2*  
*Jeji Mawuod Adhiambo, X2*  
*Paro ochanda nyamin Achieng, x2*

*Alungo oberana Milly Nyar-jolang'o;*  
*Nyakaochijja toti*  
*Adonjo e dala Mili to Romona; x2*  
*Nyathi ma rwako nag wen e sama aonge dala x2*  
*Supa to nyiero anyiera, x2 Kabiro dala to*  
*Millie Rwaka Gi Mor, x2*  
*Oting'o millie golo yier e chak x2*

#### **Kalenjin daughter (English)**

Papa Adhiambo's son, I have started performing, X2  
Jeji Adhiambo's son, X2  
Am stressed the sister to Achieng, X2  
I'm calling my beautiful one, Milly Kalenjin daughter, X2  
Daughter of my in-laws, X2  
Baby who takes care of my hens when I'm away from home, X2  
The beautiful one is ever happy, X2  
When I come home, Milly welcomes me, X2  
I'm carrying milk while Milli removes the hair from the milk, X2

The excerpt above has been extracted from the *Ohangla* song *Nyar Massai* (daughter of the Maasai). It is concerned with issues related to the intercultural marriages between the Luo and the *Lang'o* (the Kalenjin community). In his song, the Luo *Ohangla* artist (Onyi Papa Jey) praises his wife, who is from the *Maasai* community. The marriages between the Luo and other communities in the past were treated with a lot of suspicion; in fact, according to the Luo community, it was discouraged. However, in case it happened, it was treated with a lot of suspicion.

To put more emphasis on this, there were oral narratives which were fronted by the Luo community to discourage this kind of marriage in future and for future generations from getting involved in intercultural marriage. For example, the narrative about "Luanda Magere". However, in this performance, *Onyi Papa Jey*, an *Ohangla* artist, transcended the traditional narratives meant to discourage the Luo men who intend to marry wives from other ethnic communities. *My Papa Jey* describes his Maasai wife as a unique lady who had the desirable character traits expected from the best women in the Luo community.

The artist describes the *Maasai* girl as being faithful, honest, simple and humble. This performance contradicts the (Ominde, 1952) argument about the Luo cultural belief that the Luo culture doesn't allow intercultural marriages. The artist describes his Maasai wife as proud. He states that he lives in peace; they have a child, just like any other family living in the same community. The idea of marriage confinement within the Luo culture territory is challenged in this performance. In this context, the artist deconstructs and subverts the Luo cultural belief concerning intercultural marriages. Thus, the marriage boundary is broken to provide space and freedom for the Luo men or women to exercise their marriage rights. The listener who listens to the song '*Nyar Maasai*' (daughter of the Maasai) internalises the information and hence transforms their consciousness in relation to intercultural marriage.

The performance, *Nyar Maasai*, again glorifies monogamy. The artist states that he had seen very many beautiful girls, but he ignored them all. This was because they had committed themselves to the marriage agreement during the marriage ceremony. This argument contradicts Evans-Pritchard (1950), who states that women were considered to be their husbands' property, and therefore they were brought up to accept that husbands have a right to entertain extra-marital affairs and having as many wives as possible was the norm.

Finally, the argument above resonates with Butler's (1993) argument that gender within performance should not be seen as a fixed attribute in a person but should be seen as a fluid variable which shifts and changes in relation to different contexts at different times, just the same way gender is reflected in *Ohangla* performances in creating gender consciousness. As a result of the introduction of Western education, Western religion and the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, many social transformations have taken place in the Luo community. These Western cultural practices had interfered with most of the Luo cultural practices, including Luo cultural marriages and family setups. With Western culture's direct and indirect penetration into Luo culture, performances such as *Ohangla* have been affected.

Currently, these practices are changing. For example, marriage has become an individual affair. As indicated in the song *Nyar Maasai* (daughter of the Maasai). In contemporary Luo society, the lady is free to choose any man of her choice without parental input, interference, or a go-between. At the same time, a woman is free to remain single or marry. Besides, a childless woman is never rebuked as was the case in the past, and it is treated as normal compared to the past, when immediate family members would ridicule a woman who was childless. Thus, being single and independent is not something that can worry the parents or the individual ladies themselves in modern society. In the past, the Luo had a procedure for marriage activities; an individual who underwent the Luo customary marriage must undertake this process. When a man reaches a marriageable age, his parents and close relatives identify a go-between (*jagam*) who should shoulder the responsibility of searching for the best girl. This person should know the girl and the girl's family well. The go-between mediated between the two families and their clans until a compromise agreement was reached (Wilson & Gordon, 1968, p. 96). In the contemporary Luo community, these procedures are no longer being followed.

Bride-wealth exchange was a very important activity among the Luo. It was not only about rights and property but also about the people and how social identity was constructed. Among the Luo community, this activity acted as a moment upon which a person's identity was constructed. Potash (1986) adds that this activity offered an opportunity for a man to confirm his identity in a complex social identity. He further explains that it gave the man rights over a woman's labour; therefore, a man could aspire for social and economic leadership after marriage. This could lead to an interpretation where women are viewed as objects.

The concept of objectifying gender is further captured by Obudho (1985). He argues that giving livestock in the form of bride wealth (*Mwandu*) to obtain a wife was actually a whole network of interpersonal relations which expressed gratitude from husbands to the family members of their wives. It was a symbolic gift of gratitude, and among the Luo community, this had an important social, economic and religious importance. In modern society, marriage can take

place without the bride's wealth as a result of social transformations that the Luo people have undergone, as long as the lady and the man have an agreement. Thus, these changes are transmitted through *Ohangla* performances that act as conduits where cultural transformation is transmitted to the next generation in this context of gender.

The Luo believed that sex is only allowed in a marriage relationship, and its main aim is for procreation. However, other uses of sex exist, especially during the performance of rituals and religious functions. Prostitution, commercial sex, fornication, rape, homosexuality, incest and bestiality do exist, but they are considered sexual offences, and in case a person commits any of such, they are heavily punished, secluded or excluded from the community, and, in some cases, they are cursed by the elders. In the Luo community, many rituals revolved around sex, as noted earlier. For example, a newly built house must be inaugurated through sexual intercourse between the wife and the husband. Luo believed that committing adultery was a serious offence, which only applies to women. A woman who commits adultery is sent back to her parents to await a delegation from her husband to her home, seeking an amicable warning and punishment before she returns. Incidentally, a man who committed the same offence did not undergo any punishment or even reprimand. Sex and sexual issues are no longer a secret among the Luo community as they used to be in the past years. There is a lot of freedom for any individual who indulges in any kind of sexual activity without any restriction. Some of the love and sexual connotations embedded in *Ohangla* performances are sung publicly without any fear. That is why some interviewees claimed that *Ohangla* performances published issues about sex and sexual intercourse publicly to curb the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic along the beaches of Lake Victoria.

### **Sexual Objectification of Luo Males by the Female *Ohangla* Artists**

The increased concern for women's liberation has prompted the interrogation of the Luo musical performances, such as *Ohangla*. The main intention was to reveal whether issues related to the subversion of patriarchal structures are available in some of the

*Ohangla* performances. Through the observation and interaction with some of the Luo *Ohangla* artists, mainly females such as Grace Nyakindu, it was realised that these artists had performed some of the musical performances that have transformed the perception of women in the community. First, as mentioned earlier, she has become an *Ohangla* artist, a field dominated by men. Secondly, she has emerged as one of the women who objectify the male bodies just as the male artist does to the female bodies. Below is the analysis of the contemporary *Ohangla* performance by Lady Maurine, a female *Ohangla* artist, to justify the argument.

#### **Song text 1C**

##### ***Lady Maurine: Olima, the son of Kadem***

*Awero wuowi ma yom ka budho x 2,*  
(I'm praising a man, whose skin is soft like pumpkin, x2)

*Awero wuowi ma ber ka nyako, x2*  
(I'm praising a beautiful man like a lady, x2)

*Awero wuowi makwar ka nyanya, x2*  
(I'm praising a beautiful man like a lady, x2)

*Yom ka budho machuo penjo, x2*  
(I'm praising a man, whose skin is brown like tomatoes, x2)

*ngute yom kabudhomachuo penjo, x2*  
(Soft like pumpkin, those men are asking, x2)

*Awero wuowi ma ng'ute ong'olo, x2,*  
(I'm praising a man who has a creased neck, x2)

Scholars such as Magak and Okombo (2014) have researched *Ohangla* songs that praised the Luo community's female beauty. In the same context, female bodies have been praised by mostly male artists. However, this study provided a contrary opinion; it demonstrates that some of the female artists have come up with some *Ohangla* song performances that depict the male body as an object of praise and gratification. However, this can be interpreted differently: women, like their male counterparts, admire the male bodies. Therefore, because of the cultural confinement as a result of patriarchy, women lack a space where they can express their feelings and opinions. Hence, Lady Maurine has found *Ohangla* performance as the best avenue to pass such information to her audience in general, something which transforms the listener's

consciousness in relation to gender. *Olima* (the man being praised) is described as beautiful, like a woman. This shows that, according to Lady Maurine's performance, both genders could be described as being beautiful. This resonates with Ostergaard's (1992) theoretical argument that gender should not be seen as a fixed variable in a person but is transferable in relation to the context. Again, the artist uses various metaphors to describe *Olima*; he is described as brown, like ripe tomatoes.

Among the Luo community, brown is considered superior, just like the colour white. Thus, it is common to observe that Luo men do admire brown women. They are considered to be beautiful. The reason is that most Luo people are black-skinned, and those brown-skinned people among the Luo are rare; hence, they are considered to be beautiful simply because of their scarcity. *Olima* has soft skin like a pumpkin, which is expected of a woman, according to the Luo community. Women are expected to possess soft skin, and Lady Maurine challenges this idea. These ideas influence the listeners' views that all bodies, males and females alike, should be viewed the same. That the female bodies should not be the only ones, but both should be subject to admiration.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** This paper concludes that in the past, the Luo community has been struggling to perpetuate a

culture of patriarchy; this has disadvantaged the female gender and skewed socio-political power towards males and, in the process, disempowered women both socially and culturally (Awuor & Anudo, 2016). It is believed that this paper will enable the Luo community to transform their perception in relation to gender equality and that it will enable the Luo community comprehend the need to suppress unconstructive male dominance, thereby supporting the findings and enabling the community to facilitate the evolution strategies depicted in this paper through *Ohangla* performances in transforming the community's gender consciousness.

**Recommendations:** This paper revealed that among the contemporary Luo community, women have not been passive in relation to the patriarchal structures oppressing them. Since the female struggle is a continuous process, women should continue contesting these oppressive patriarchal structures, such as forced marriage and social subordination. They should also reject the male actions of obstructing the females from making key independent decisions in the community. One of the ways in which this can be done is through taking part in *Ohangla* performances, since *Ohangla* performances are one of the traditional cultural discourses that have initiated social transformation in relation to the transformation of gender consciousness among the contemporary Luo women.

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