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Textualizing masculinity : discourses of power and gender relations in Manguliechi's Babukusu after-burial oratory performance (khuswala kumuse).

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Abstract

This study is a reading of *khuswala kumuse* (funeral oratory) among the Bukusu from the perspective of contemporary theories of masculinity and gender relations. Funeral oratory performance is an age-old practice performed on the third day after burial (*lufu*), of honoured males from clans that enjoy respect from other clans because of their leadership qualities. The thesis is about the performances of John Wanyonyi Manguliechi. Focusing on his unique personality and creative oral skills as a performer, the thesis seeks to demonstrate Manguliechi's artistic contribution to a venerated tradition. This study benefits from ethnography and fieldwork as methods of literary research in order to interrogate concerns of gender, power discourses and performance in a traditional oral text. The study focuses on pre-recorded texts of Manguliechi and critically analyzes them through the prism of masculinity, gender and power discourse. Specifically, our analysis employs masculinity and gender relations theories to study circumcision, ethnicity and elements of power discourses in Manguliechi's funeral oratories.

The notion of 'textualizing masculinity' in this study refers to the various ways of being a man as highlighted by Manguliechi in his recitals. The study examines the funeral oratory as a cultural discourse shaped by masculine nuances and an oral literary genre laden with multiple images of power discourses and gender relations. In the Bukusu parlance, *'khuswala kumuse'* connotes rhetorical excellence, and the genre represents the most elaborate and creative verbal expression. Thus, persuasive public speech is a much-vaunted art form in the community and any man whose oratory skills demonstrate good rhetoric and eloquence is held in the utmost esteem. In this study we argue that although Manguliechi's performances are essentially funeral rituals, his recitals are rare examples of rhetorical genius with highly expressive and idiomatic creativity that can be subjected to literary analysis. The study interrogates the interfaces between the textual and thematic concerns of Manguliechi's *kumuse* renditions on the one hand and the masculine gender constructions and power imaginations within the same texts.