

**SOCIETAL CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY AS
PORTRAYED IN KIRUNDI PROVERBS**

BY

SPES NIBAFASHA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A DEGREE OF MASTER
OF ARTS IN LITERATURE OF MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

JUNE 2013

DECLARATION

I, **Spes Nibafasha**, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work and has never before been submitted for a degree in this or any other university or institution of higher learning.

Signed:



Spes Nibafasha

Date:

21/03/2014

Thesis or Dissertation Approved for the Degree of Master of Makerere University.

Endorsed:



Dr. Mark Benghe Okot

Date:

21/03/2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	vii
DEDICATION.....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
LIST OF PICTURES.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Introduction and background to the study	1
1.2. Background to the study	3
1.2. 1.Geographical background	4
1.2.2. Marriage and household structure.....	6
1.2.3. Bringing up children	7
1.2.4. Customs of Barundi	9
1.2.5. Historical-political set up.....	10
1.2.5.1. The woman and Burundian tradition	10
1.2.5.2. The woman and the republican governments	13
1.2.5.3. The woman and pluralist democracy	15
1.2.5.4 .The woman and negotiations for peace	15
1.3. Statement of the problem.....	17
1.4. Objectives of the study.....	18
1.4.1. General objective	18
1.4.2. Specific objectives	18

1.5. Hypothesis.....	18
1.6. Scope and delimitations	19
1.7. Definition of key terms	19
1.8. Review of Literature	21
1.8.1. Works on proverbs.....	21
1.8.2. Works on Kirundi oral literature.....	28
1.9. Significance of the study.....	31
1.10. Theoretical framework.....	32
1.10.1. Background to the framework	32
1.10.2. Social construction of gender as framework of the present study	39
1.11. Methodology	42
1.11. 1. Field Research.....	43
1.11.2. Techniques of data collection	44
1.11.2.1. Note-taking	44
1.11.2.2. Audio-recording of interviews.....	45
1.11.2.3. Observations	45
1.11.2.4. Photography.....	46
1.11.3. Techniques of data analysis	46
1.12. Encountered constraints.....	48
1.13. Chapter outline.....	49
CHAPTER TWO	50
NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF THE KIRUNDI PROVERB.....	50
2.1. Introduction.....	50

2.2. Proverbs and oral society	50
2.3. Artistic and stylistic qualities of Kirundi proverbs	61
2.3.1. Tone	63
2.3.2. Tonality	64
2.3.3. Alliteration and assonance	65
2.3.4. Imagery	66
2.3.5. Parallelism.....	70
2.3.6. Paradox	71
2.3.7. Allusion.....	72
2.3.8. Symbolism	73
2.3.9. Repetition.....	74
2.4. Textual structure of Kirundi proverbs.....	75
2.5. Linguistic and literary identity.....	79
2.6. Social contexts of Kirundi proverbs	82
2.7. Social function of proverbs.....	85
2.8. Conclusion	87
CHAPTER THREE	90
FEMININE AND MASCULINE CONSTRUCTS IN KIRUNDI PROVERBS.....	90
3.1. Introduction.....	90
3.2. The difference and relation between sex and gender.....	91
3.3. Masculinity and femininity	93
3.4. Social roles of men and women in Burundi.....	100
3.5. The shadow of patriarchy through masculinity constructs	106

3.5.1. The man as husband and head of family.....	106
3.5.2. The man as concentration of physical and moral strength.....	113
3.5.3. The man as a concentration of a certain economic strength and material abundance	116
3.5.4 The man-Mushingantahe as ideal construct of masculinity.....	118
3. 5.5. The man’s abuse of power and its intolerance by society	124
3.6. Femininity constructs in the patriarchal order	129
3.6.1. The woman as wife and mother	130
3.6.2. The woman as co-manager of the household.....	136
3.6.3. The woman as a labour force	137
3.6.4. The woman and physical or moral weakness	139
3.6. 5. The power of the Burundian woman	141
3.7. Consequent men-women relations.....	143
3.8. Conclusion	152
CHAPTER FOUR.....	156
KIRUNDI PROVERBS IN RELATION TO CHANGING GENDER ROLES	156
4.1. Introduction.....	156
4. 2. Major changes affecting gender roles	157
4.3. Proverbs in relation to the changing masculinity and femininity	163
4.3.1. Proverbs as old wine in new bottles.....	164
4.3.2. The matching of proverbs recommending opposite courses of actions	168
4.3.3. Discard of some outmoded Kirundi proverbs from everyday use	170
4.3. 4. Emergence of new variant forms	171

4.3.4.1. New masculinity?.....	172
4.3.4.2. New femininity?.....	174
4.3.4.3. Integration of sex differences.....	178
4.4. Social meaning of proverbs' behaviour in relation to changing gender roles	181
4.5. Conclusion	183
CHAPTER FIVE	186
CONCLUSION	186
5.1. Introduction.....	186
5.2. Conclusion	187
5.3. Recommendations.....	194
BIBLIOGRAPHY	197
APPENDICES	203
APPENDIX A: LIST OF INFORMANTS.....	i
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE	ii
APPENDIX C: COLLECTED PROVERBS.....	v
APPENDIX D: SOME PHOTOGRAPHY	xxvii

ABSTRACT

Using the Kirundi proverb as a literary indicator and enhancer of culture, this study demonstrates that the differences in the construction of masculinity and femininity which sometimes result into unequal gender relations serve a social function. It further explores how proverbs as a 'fixed form' heritage of tradition adjust to current political, economic and socio-cultural changes that affect gender roles in turn.

The empirical material on which the argument is based comes from fieldwork done in Burundi where the researcher collected a total of 279 proverbs for eleven months. The collection of data was conducted basically through qualitative research which employed various methods. These are interviews, observations and document analysis with a checklist as well as photography of some significant scenes in supporting the argument. The corpus of proverbs analysed in this study is a collection of proverbs that use the images of female and male lexemes plus proverbs of contextualization. They have been collected from field and from one published source. Attention is particularly given to proverbs and variants of proverbs in contemporary use.

The present research is framed by an array of social constructivist theories- ranging from gender social construction theory of Simone de Beauvoir, through Monique Wittig to Judith Butler's performativity theory. Other approaches such as linguistic approach, discursive interpretation as well as cultural explanations have been used in the discussion whenever it is necessary. In the present study, Kirundi proverbs have been analysed as both a literary and social phenomena.

With evidence from data, the study proves that the societal construction of masculinity and femininity differently reveals society's aspiration and desire to social order by presenting patriarchy as a stable or immutable part of that social order for the building of a solid nuclear family, contrary to suggestions in previous African oral literature scholarship that women are presented as oppressed and men as oppressors. Overall, it is undeniable, basing on the Kirundi proverb that the differences between men and women are socially constructed on the basis of biology for humanity purpose. From the social construction of gender frame, gender roles are changeable to cater to new challenges just as culture is dynamic. Despite change however, the differences between masculinity and femininity should remain but be inspired by the demands of each epoch and configured in each culture so that society never becomes confusion.

Key words: proverbs, culture, masculinity, femininity, gender differences, social organisation

DEDICATION

To the memory of my late father,

And to my sweet mother,

Who did not think that female education is a loss of humanpower for household work;

To my darling husband who did not block the fulfilment of my dreams for graduate studies;

To our lovely four *Buntu* : Love Ines, Sage Star, Milly Lewis and King Odrin for their readiness to sacrifice a mother's warmth and care in home during my stay away for studies;

To all those who confess that the future of humanity lies on the shoulders of both men and women;

I warmly dedicate this dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this research would not have been possible without the assistance and insights of many individuals and institutions from near and far. I am happy to extend my sincere appreciation to all of them, but I feel indebted to mention the following in particular.

First and foremost, my deepest and heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor Dr. Mark Benge Okot, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Literature, Makerere University, whose professional guidance and generous patience made this study what it is.

Second, I wish to acknowledge greatly my debt of gratitude to the Burundian Government via the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research for sponsoring my two years training programme at Makerere University in Uganda. The staff of the College “Ecole Normale Supérieure” of Burundi where am employed, especially Mrs. Rachel Nsimire Bigawa, are highly appreciated for their support.

Third, my sincere thanks are directed to the academic staff in the Department of Literature of Makerere University for their academic input and guidance and for having laid the foundation of this study. In a special way, my sincere appreciations go to lecturers whose classes directly contributed in the hatching of the topic under study. These are Professor Abasi Kiyimba who shaped my interest in gender in Literature and who improved my skills in Research Methods, Associate Professor E. Okello Ogwang who shaped my interest in Oral Literature and Dr. Susan Kiguli who sharpened my sense of taste of poetry by African Poetry and Contemporary Experience course. I pay tribute to late Dr. Sarah Namulondo for her constructive comments during the vetting session of the proposal of the present study and the useful reading materials she provided me with. May God rest her soul in peace!

Next, I am very grateful to all the people who kindly accepted to be interviewed as well as those who facilitated the field work process of gathering the necessary data to this study. Particular appreciations go to the couples respectively Mr. Zephyrin Nihezagire & Mrs. Sophie Inamahoro and Mr Emmanuel Niyonkuru & Commander Christine Sabiyumva who kindly gave me permission to use their wedding pictures for illustration

in this study. I owe more than I can express to my husband Enock Niyongabo for his technical assistance during my fieldwork, his moral support, his readiness to sacrifice a wife's care in home, and his endeavour to lead the household and to manage domestic affairs whenever activities of the study demanded it.

In addition, my acknowledgements go straight to the academic colleagues that are the M.A. students 2011/2012 who provided me with moral support, encouragement and academic cooperation. May they find in this work a reward to our true friendship.

Furthermore, my heartfelt appreciations are directed to Professor Domitien Nizigiyimana of the University of Burundi who kindly availed me with useful reading materials from his library and to Professor Father Adrien Ntabona from the same university who provided me with academic tips on how to analyse proverbs. I thank very much the staff of the Central library of the University of Burundi, the main library of Makerere and the book bank Makerere Uganda for the good service I got from them.

Besides, special thanks go to Mrs. Dorine Rwehera and her family and to Burundian fellow students at Makerere University who made enjoyable my academic life and my stay in Uganda. The non-academic staff in the Dean of School of Languages, Literature and Communication and in the Department of Literature is thanked for their valuable contribution. To all those who may not have found their names mentioned here, I really express my sincere gratitude for their contribution.

Last but not least, thanks be to the Almighty God who made it that this study took place and be completed as required. May He bless all who contributed towards its success in one way or another.

However, none of the mentioned above should be held responsible for the views and opinions, omissions or shortcomings in this study. I bear the full responsibility of what is presented in this dissertation.

Spes Nibafasha

LIST OF PICTURES

<i>Picture 1</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Picture 2</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Picture 3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Picture 4</i>	<i>144</i>
<i>Picture 5</i>	<i>158</i>
<i>Picture 6</i>	<i>160</i>
<i>Picture 7</i>	<i>160</i>
<i>Picture 8</i>	<i>162</i>
<i>Picture 9</i>	<i>162</i>
<i>Picture 10</i>	<i>165</i>
<i>Picture 11</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>Picture 12</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>Picture 13</i>	<i>179</i>

LOCATION OF BURUNDI ON THE MAP OF AFRICA



www.mapsofworld.com

Picture 1

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction and background to the study

This study investigates the ways Burundian culture stratifies men and women, perceives them as they relate to one another and to social obligations and evaluates them, through a critical examination of the Kirundi proverb as a genre of oral literature and enhancer of culture. Proverbs are examined from a gender construction conscious perspective to explore the needs, interests or values behind distinguishing men and women. The present study further analyses how a more or less fixed form like the genre of proverbs behaves in relation to changing gender roles, and a social meaning is derived from the analysis. In this research context, oral literature is seen as folklore expressed in words¹ from Burundian culture.

Culture is described as the software of the mind by some scholars. This software is installed in society's members through socialisation. Raymond Williams (1963, p.16) as quoted by Andrew Milner and Jeff Browitt (2002) draws attention to four important kinds of meaning that attach to the word culture: an individual habit of mind; the state of intellectual development of a whole society; the arts; and the whole way of life of a group or people². In William Bascom's terms, 'culture has been referred to as man's "social heritage" and as man-made part of the environment'³. In the present study, culture is understood as the way of life of Burundian people. A proverb is thus a part of culture as it codifies and /or reflects how a people live. One of the most important issues of human

¹Archer Taylor. "Folklore and the student of literature" in Alan Dundes.ed. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965, p. 37.

In this study, "oral literature" and "folklore" are therefore used interchangeably. However, it is important to be aware that 'Oral literature is folklore but all what is folklore is not literature'. As William Bascom puts it, oral folklore is verbal art.

² Andrew Milner and Jeff Browitt. *Contemporary Cultural Theory*. Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2002, p.2.

³ William R. Bascom. "Folklore and Anthropology" in Alan Dundes .ed. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.1965, p.27.

life that proverbs reflect is gender. Many factors such as religion, colonisation, cash driven economy, formal education, human rights issues, democracy, environmental changes, and globalisation have significantly had an effect on Burundian culture. Given that culture is dynamic, the construction of gender roles keep on adjusting to changing social, economic and political imperatives; just as the language and literature that reflect the situation are expected to be.

Language and literature are known as the carrier of cultural knowledge and wisdom. In fact, most of the cultural knowledge and wisdom of Africans is often artistically expressed through different genres of oral literature like songs, folktales, names, riddles, dirges, and proverbs and handed down from one generation to another. But in this technological age, the technology has altered and is significantly altering the transmission of these forms as they can be passed on in various ways; and the tradition as the handing down can be between different generations – diachronic – or within one generation – synchronic. Oral literature as a non material component of folklore in a given culture helps in reflecting people’s collective thinking or a people’s image of themselves. It is true that, as Alan Dundes (1980) says, ‘the image may be distorted but at least the distortion comes from the people themselves and not from an outside observer armed with a range of a priori premises’⁴. However, folklore is not only used to reflect but also to shape, to perpetuate, to enhance and to pass on the dominant ideology from generation to generation because people often draw from their folkloric wisdom to apply to current situations as it is discussed in the present study.

Although proverbs are not the only medium through which the cultural knowledge and wisdom of Barundi are artistically expressed, the present study focuses on Kirundi proverbs as a genre of folklore and involves samples of Kirundi native speakers of different sex, age groups, marital status and educational backgrounds – and implicitly occupations – as the list in appendices shows it. The study of folklore is very important

⁴ Alan Dundes. *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington&Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980, p. viii.

according to William A. Wilson because it is crucial in our attempts to understand our own behaviour and that of our fellow human beings.⁵

Examining Kirundi proverbs necessarily entails examining the language itself to see what kind of cultural knowledge and wisdom are carried by these proverbs about societal construction of masculinity and femininity in Burundian culture and the reason behind it. Actually, language reflects social relationships and particularly proverbs are markers of the culture they come from. Kirundi proverbs are therefore used to inquire into the gender view of Barundi as producers of Kirundi proverbs. This study critically examines the Kirundi proverb to understand the philosophy of Barundi or at least their mentality with regard to what men and women are and to their social obligations. While culture is dynamic and not static, the Kirundi proverb is a fixed form that is applied in different and varying situations. The assumption behind this research is that the construction of masculinity and femininity serves a social purpose that is why it resists complete alteration just as proverbs do.

1.2. Background to the study

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, there has been, both at national and international levels, a lot of concern and intense activities attempting to sensitise society about gender prejudices resulting from male/female biological differences and to suggest various solutions. Construction of masculinity and femininity differently which sometimes result into unequal gender relationships refer to the rules and roles assigned to people according to their sex, following traditional custom or social background for a certain purpose.

Folklore in which proverbs are one component cannot be studied and analysed meaningfully outside the socio-cultural forces of the society that created it. This is because like other vehicles of culture, they serve as a vehicle of people's culture and

⁵ William A. Wilson as quoted by Robert A. Georges and Michael O. Jones. *Folkloristics: An Introduction*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995, p.23.

history. However, it is not possible to present an exhaustive socio-cultural context of Burundi in a dissertation of this size due to the time span and means. Thus a brief overview of Burundian society and culture is presented.

Burundi political map and national flag



(www.mapsofworld.com)

Picture 2



Picture 3

1.2. 1.Geographical background

Burundi, commonly known as the heart of Africa for its geographical location, is a member country of the East African Community. Its surface is 27,834km² with a population of 8,053,574 in which more than a half is female⁶. The Republic of Burundi is surrounded by the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire) to the West, Tanzania to the East and South-East, and Rwanda to the North. It has a large part of the waters of Lake Tanganyika, the second deepest lake all over the world after Lake Baikal. Its capital city is Bujumbura. Burundi is one of the smallest and most populated of African countries.

The people from Burundi are called *Abarundi* (Barundi) when referring to many, and *Umurundi* (a Murundi) when referring to one person. The word *Burundian* is used as an adjective to refer to what belongs to Burundi. In the pre-colonial time all Barundi lived in scattered homesteads throughout the country. But nowadays, some Barundi live in urban centres (8%) apart from those living in rural areas where they live in scattered settlements surrounded by fields of various crops. More than 90% of the population live on agriculture.

All Barundi share the same culture and the same mother tongue Kirundi, a Bantu language, which is spoken and understood throughout the whole country; that facilitates the transmission of cultural values to which proverbs are part. Kirundi as a language coexists however with three other languages. These are Kiswahili, a regional language of East Africa that is mostly spoken in urban areas; French, a legacy of Belgian colonisation which is used as a means of instruction in schools and which is used in administration; and English, adopted for strategic reasons after the acquisition of independence in 1962. But French and English are spoken and understood by few Barundi, particularly those who have learnt them at school.

⁶ As of 2008 National Population Census in <http://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/BURUNDI-population-2008.PDF> [accessed on 25 September 2012]

In this study, the word *Kirundi* is used as a noun to signify the language of Burundi when it is used alone or as an adjective before the word ‘proverbs’ to mean proverbs from Burundi.

1.2.2. Marriage and household structure

Burundian society was greatly patriarchal. The family consisted of a man, his wife or wives, and children. The father was the head of the household and was supreme in all family affairs. His honour in the society depended on his ability to organize his family group. The father was substituted by the eldest son in case of his absence. His lineage was carried on by male descents. That is why the man was eager to have male children in marriage. The education that was given to the child girl or the would-be-woman focused on respect and subservience. She had to stay home, hence the names *umunyakigo*, that is, the one-who-stays-in- the-backyard, or *umuzezwanzu* the one- in –charge- of- the- house- affairs. She had to stay closer to her mother to learn how females should behave. That kind of education did not encourage open mindedness for female persons.

Looking for a partner to marry involved an arrangement between the family of the groom and the one of the bride. It was also the two families that would decide on the bride wealth to be paid. While the woman was expected to be faithful in marriage, the man was not. He could be polygamous whenever he could afford to.

Burundi is still patriarchal and the lineage is still carried on by male descents. But nowadays, the civil code on families – which is uniform everywhere in Burundi – prescribes only the “one man, one wife” principle. In addition, marriage is an affair between the girl and the boy and their consent is a prerequisite to conclude it. The current Burundian civil code on persons and families also gives the woman the right to co-manage the household matters with the husband and to inherit them in full in case of the husband’s death or absence⁷.

⁷ Code des personnes et de la famille du 28 Avril 1993 in http://www.ligue-iteka.africa-web.org/article.php3?id_article=36 , clauses 120-130 [Accessed on 12 August 2012].

1.2.3. Bringing up children

The woman had and has a great role to play in the education of children, both boys and girls during their early age. And Burundian parents were conscious that the education given at early age constitutes the foundation in shaping the personality of the child as these proverbs portray it: *Imbuto itewe niyo imera* [The seed that is sown is what comes out of the soil], *Indero iva hasi* [Character is moulded at the early age] and *Igiti kigorogwa kikiri gito* [A tree plant is straightened when it is still young], which implies that if you straighten it already grown up the probability to break it is high. This shows how women who are mothers are more influential in the behaviour of children of both sexes as they are supposed to stay with them during their early childhood. The responsibility that a mother had for her children was delicate. It was commonly believed in Burundi that it was easy for a child to adopt many of the mother's ways and behaviour since children spent a great part of their time with their mother. That is why the mother was blamed in case of her child's bad manners. The following proverb from F. M. Rodegem (1983) reflects this by using "the mother metaphor" to show how much responsible mothers are in the education of children: *Umwana aya inkoko nyina akayiruka amoya* [When a child eats a chicken, his/her mother vomits its feathers]. The mother comes first in influencing children given that she is supposed to spend much time with them, and therefore seems to be more accountable of their deviations. Another proverb showing that the mother is the first and long lasting influence of the child is: *Wabira intabarirwa ukavyara intumva* [If you marry a stubborn woman you will beget children who do not listen]. Literally it means that if one marries a woman who does not listen, he will beget children who do not hear anything.

Traditionally, boys and girls were not socialised in the same way from a certain age. For example at 8 or 9, socialisation of children started to be same-sex groups oriented. Girls were expected to stay closer to home, working with and for mothers, while boys were freer to move around with father, brothers and friends, a pattern that continued through adulthood. That is where the responsibility of the father was very significant as portrays the following proverb: *Umwana asūra umugina se akanya ibigara* [If a child plays with an anthill, his father consequently defecates very big mushrooms]. In this proverb, each word is deep in meaning for grasping the height of the message. An anthill is a place where

people get ants or termites especially during the rainy season in some regions of Burundi. In the neighbourhood of the anthill often grow mushrooms. But that place is also believed to provide shelter for different beings including those which are very dangerous like snakes. Some dangerous ants and snakes can bite the child who is playing in that place. So it is not a recommended place for children to go to play in. On the other hand, people normally defecate faeces and in normal shape. When the shape of the faeces is big, it is painful when discharging it from the body. It is even abnormal when it comes to discharging big mushrooms. Symbolically, playing with an anthill for a child is an image of bad behaviour; it is breaking a taboo as the anthill is a forbidden place to kids because it is a very dangerous place for them, as Marc Ntabakunzi⁸ explained. The first meaning of the proverb therefore is that the father suffers or bears pain of the bad consequences of his children's bad behaviour.

The two proverbs reveal that the faults of children do not leave parents indifferent, as they are the first responsible for the education of their children. By extension, the two proverbs suggest that when you are responsible for someone, you have to be ready to pay for their wrong behaviour.

In fact, children learned primarily by imitation and experience works 'appropriate' to their sex. Boys were encouraged to have greater independence and bravery, while girls were expected to be modest and shy.

It is worth mentioning that throughout the history of Burundi, a major change in girls' and boys' socialization has been school attendance. From the far past and much of the 20th century, girls rarely went to school, but today, education is for all, girls and boys, at least elementary education and they follow the same curricula. School education encourages creativity and openness of the mind of both males and females, in contrast to traditional culture emphasizing mother-to-daughter and father-to-son work.

⁸ Marc Ntabakunzi and Rahel Bucumi, oral interview, Buhinga, 09 March 2013. Marc Ntabakunzi is the eldest of all my informants. He is about 100 years. His wife is about 75 years old and she is the second wife that Ntabakunzi married after his first wife died.

1.2.4. Customs of Barundi

Burundian society has a patriarchal and patrilocal oriented social order. The family has been and is still the basic unit of social organisation in Burundi. When it is time to found a nuclear family, it is normally the groom who courts the bride and not the other way round. Children belong to the clan of their father. At marriage, women go to live with their husband and his kin after the payment of the bridewealth but they do not become members of their husbands' clans. This was and is particularly done in rural areas. Nowadays, males who are employed prefer to set up homes in cities far from their parents' homesteads.

In Burundi, like in many African countries, not to get married as a grown up boy or girl is misfortune while to be childless once married is a tragedy. Before the influence of European civilisation, there used to be a practice in Burundian culture of burying a man who dies without leaving offspring with an extinct charcoal in hand, a sign that his life was extinguished forever, not having left any child who would perpetuate his name.

Barundi value sons highly; men want sons to ensure generational continuity of self and clan. So to some extent, the importance of a woman lies in her children, especially if she bears boys. The reason is the patrilineal system which makes girls reproduce and extend other families than the paternal ones, hence the origin of the proverb: *Umugabo avyara abakobwa basa ngo ndahonye* [A man who begets only girls says 'I get destroyed']. Motherhood in black Africa in general and Burundi in particular asserts the position of the woman in the clan where she has gone for marriage because it is maternity that helps her to be fully integrated in the family that has received her.

The main source of life for the majority of Barundi is the land and only children boys inherit pieces of land from their parents. Women play an important role in digging and planting but the decision of how to use the harvest lies mainly in the hands of the man.

According to what Jean Baptiste Ntahokaja investigated in *Imigenzo y'ikirundi* (1977), each Burundian man used to marry only one wife a long time ago. Polygamy was later legalised as a solution to barrenness and to only baby girls' birth to maximise the chances

of self and clan continuity. But nowadays, the civil law of persons and family commands people ‘one man, one wife’ style. Polygamy is officially condemned by the law.

1.2.5. Historical-political set up

The background of this study would be incomplete without tracing the trends of changes in the socio-political roles and relations of men and women throughout history, with particular focus on the place of women, with the premise that the change of the position of the woman necessarily involves the change in that of the man. Four main points help to understand the position of the woman in this patriarchy dominated setting: the woman and the Burundian tradition, the place of the woman during the republican period at the time of independence, then the woman at the period of pluralist democracy, and finally the place of the woman in negotiations for peace⁹.

1.2.5.1. The woman and Burundian tradition

Traditionally, the woman was more involved in the domestic domain while the man was more involved in the public domain. Myths and legends say that the Kingdom of Burundi was founded by *Ntare Rushatsi Cambarantama* towards the end of the 17th century. Before the arrival of colonisers – Germans – in 1896, Burundi was an organised Kingdom, with an administrative structure. The country had well separated powers. At the head of the Kingdom was *Umwami*, the King; and the position was hereditary, that is, transmitted from father to son. He was helped in administrative matters by princes *Abaganwa*, chiefs *Abatware* and notables *Abashingantahe* in descending order. For Burundi, the King was believed to be a guarantor of peace, order and prosperity because they attributed to him a divine origin. He was considered as a sacred monarch and this gave force to Burundian monarchy.

The traditional culture played a great role in social cohesion maintenance, and to its highest degree in the politico-social organisation of the pre-colonial Burundi. Not only

⁹Burundi went through a decade of political crisis that was ended by cease-fire signature and Arusha Peace Agreement in 2003 after negotiations between Burundian government and armed groups.

did the tradition legitimate the power, but put all the attributes of sovereignty in the hands of power holders. That state of affairs gave reason to patriarchy. Women were not allowed to physically participate in Kingdom administrative matters. It was also popularly believed that they were not supposed to speak up or express their opinion in public. But, due to strong cultural foundations, the society was coherent despite that fact of male domination and female subservience. Manassé Shirambere (1984) highlights the role of culture in strengthening power in traditional Burundi when he says that:

C'est ce complexe culturel qui a fourni au pouvoir traditionnel du Burundi une base morale qui lui a permis de survivre à plusieurs vicissitudes pendant des siècles¹⁰.

It is that cultural complex that provided to the traditional power of Burundi a solid moral base that permitted Burundi to survive against several vicissitudes for centuries.

The profound belief in the sacredness of power explains the favour that was attached to monarchy, and therefore patriarchy, given that the King and all his close collaborators were men. There was even a popular salutation “*Ni haganze umwami n’abagabo*”, that is, ‘Let the King and men reign’. Any woman who dared challenge the status quo would be labelled a rebel.

Traditionally, the woman was exclusively associated with the farm and procreation. Being a source of life, the woman had to take care of children in various ways. She had to take part in field work to grow crops until the harvest and storage in granary and so could feed her family. She was the centre of the family economy. She had to manage the harvest to feed the family until the forthcoming harvest.

It is true that the Burundian woman was denied the right to speak in public (*Nta jambo ry’umugore*, that is what was said ; literally meaning ‘The word of a woman has no value’). But in reality she occupied an irreplaceable position not only in the management of the household but also indirectly of the public affairs and men knew it. She was the

¹⁰Manassé Shirambere. “Les fondements culturels du pouvoir dans le Burundi ancien”, Mémoire, Bujumbura : Université du Burundi, 1984, p.1.

indispensable secret counsellor of her spouse. That complementarity was often observed especially at evening. When the husband arrived home, the wife had to give him an account of how the household matters had been managed. The husband had to inform his spouse of the news from outside and would not forget to talk about the political domain. The woman had a great word to say as Bonaventure Bandira (1975) points it out:

Très souvent dans les discussions entre les notables, ceux-ci suspendaient leurs discussions sous prétexte que chacun va devoir y réfléchir à son aise, ce qui signifie dans cette mentalité que chacun va d'abord consulter sa femme le soir¹¹.

Very often in discussions by notables, the latter used to suspend their discussions under the pretext that each one is going to think deeply about the case at his ease, what means in that mentality that each one has first to go to consult his wife in the evening.

The political role of the woman in ancient Burundi has often been overlooked despite her great influence. One may wonder why the woman would be excluded publicly yet she was highly involved in the family matters on a social level. There is a hidden agenda behind this sense of marginalisation and inclusion simultaneously.

Examples of women who were very influential in the life of the Burundian monarchy are many but a few can be mentioned: Queen-Mother Ririkumutima and the revolutionary woman Inamujandi. In the history of Burundian monarchy, the queen-mother played an important role. As André Gahama (1975) mentions, she was “un rouage indispensable pour la bonne marche et l'organisation politique du royaume du Burundi”¹², that is, “she was an indispensable person in the good running and political organisation of the kingdom of Burundi”. Ririkumutima was an ambitious woman whose political role

¹¹ Bonaventure Bandira. “Le rôle de la femme burundaise dans la société traditionnelle et moderne” in *Au Cœur de l'Afrique* no 3, 1975, p.144.

¹² André Gahama. “Le rôle de la reine-mère” in *Au Cœur de l'Afrique* no 3, 1975, p. 146.

marked the life of Burundian monarchy. She even played the role of regent under two reigns: the one of Mutaga IV and the one of Mwambutsa IV¹³.

As far as Inamujandi is concerned, she was a woman who led a revolutionary movement in the 1930s in the North-East of Burundi. That movement which was neglected at the beginning later on symbolised the resistance against Belgian occupation that had started in 1916 until 1962, date of independence acquisition in Burundi. Inamujandi is an example of a woman who, because of her intelligence, was able to lead an anti-colonial revolt. It shows that women were able to mobilise people, as did big chiefs.

Other women were irreplaceable in the role they played in politico-religious life of the Burundian Kingdom such as during *Umuganuro*, that is, the feast of the blessing of the seeds where there was *Nyangemanya*¹⁴; in service to divinities like *Mukakiranga*, that is, the wife of *Kiranga*¹⁵; *Mukakaryenda* or the symbol of cult to the drum *Karyenda*¹⁶. On one hand, women were treated as inferior and dangerous and on the other hand they were venerated. This translates in fact the religious status ambiguity towards women and the complexity of men-women relationships.

1.2.5.2. The woman and the republican governments

From 1896 to 1962, Burundi opened its door to explorers and to colonial agents after a long resistance against foreign invasion. Colonisers justified the weight of their mission by three principles: exploration, evangelisation and civilisation. First came Germans in 1896 and left in 1916 replaced by Belgian colonisers. Belgium came in 1916 and occupied Burundi until independence in 1962.

¹³ Aline Nshimirimana. "Rôle socio-économique et politique de la femme burundaise de l'époque monarchique à l'ère républicaine". Mémoire, Bujumbura : Université du Burundi, 2010, p. 16.

¹⁴ Nyangemanya was the coordinator of materiel aspects of the feast of seeds.

¹⁵ Kiranga was considered as the mediator between God and Burundians.

¹⁶ Karyenda was a drum which was the symbol or the emblem of Burundian monarchy.

The passage of Germany and Belgium in Burundi altered the culture and the customs of Burundi. On one hand, the changes operated by the colonial power such as the judiciary reform and the administrative reorganization took away the means that used to help the indigenous authority to exercise his sovereignty. On the other hand, the introduction of foreign values carried mainly by Christianity deeply affected the monarchy by desecrating it. Furthermore, the cash economy changed gender relations. Power no longer lay exclusively in the hands of the man because women could have money even more than the man.

The legal framework of the Burundian woman was somehow improved because of the advocacy against the women's plight by some leading women since 1976. For example, the marriage was no longer an arrangement between parents but consent of the bride and the groom. The law was also changed in 1980¹⁷ in favour of women in decisions related to the management of the family which had to be done by the husband with an active participation of the wife. She could also exercise works outside her home like commerce or entrepreneurship and contribute financially in a significant way. The 1980 code on persons and family was further revised and the currently used was published on 28th April 1993¹⁸. According to the law now, for instance, a married man cannot sell his valuables such as land or house without the consent of his wife, and even children when the latter have reached maturity.

Women started to be integrated politically in a direct form with the coming of the first republican government in 1966. In fact, since the acquisition of independence of Burundi, the power officially recognised the irreplaceable role of the woman in the development of Burundi by her involvement in public structures. Different initiatives such as encouraging women to be in associations were made in the purpose to promote the woman socially and economically. The government also created a ministry in charge of promoting the woman since 1983. The government's will to integrate the woman in all spheres of life

¹⁷ "Le code civil des personnes et de la famille de 1980" in *Bulletin Officiel du Burundi BOB*, no 3/80, p.90.

¹⁸ Aline Nshimirimana. op. cit., p. 41.

was also manifested by ratification of different treaties in favour of women. Women contributed a lot inside and outside the house in the development of Burundi alongside men.

1.2.5.3. The woman and pluralist democracy

Another significant event that marked a turning point in Burundi was the competition of many political parties since 1991. The constitution of 1992 gave women a very significant place compared to previous constitutions. They were very active during the electoral campaigns of 1993. The victory of one new political party (victory over the old unique party that had led Burundi to independence) the 1st June 1993 after competition of many parties gave much importance to the gender dimension. But the elected president was soon assassinated the 21st October the same year and this was followed by a civil war that lasted for a decade. Both men and women equally suffered in the crisis and contributed to the survival of their families. During the crisis that broke in October 1993, some women tried to stop violence. Others hid fugitives and welcomed forsaken children at the risk of their own lives. In the government, they were present. The prime minister was a woman in 1993 when the crisis broke out. In addition, a good number of women were enrolled in armed forces either willingly or unwillingly. It is during this same year that the first women were allowed to enter the regular national army like their brothers.

1.2.5.4 .The woman and negotiations for peace

Having been victims of the conflict, Burundian women could not be excluded from the conflict resolution. They took part in negotiations for peace and for cease-fire that was signed in November 2003. In the institutions that had to run the post-conflict country, the gender dimension was taken into account. For example, in the government, parliament and senate, women had and have to be represented at least at 30% since 2005. This was another significant improvement as Nshimirimana points it out:

Cependant, par rapport à 2001, la situation s'est nettement améliorée. La volonté d'inclure les femmes au niveau de certaines

*sphères de prise de décision s'est matérialisée par l'intégration d'un quota de 30% de femmes au gouvernement et au parlement*¹⁹.

However, compared to 2001, the situation has been meaningfully improved. The will to include women at the level of certain spheres of decision making was materialized by the integration of a quota of 30% of women in government and parliament.

Women have been occupying various ministries such as the ministry of health, the ministry of justice, the ministry of gender, the ministry of economy and finances, and others. After the 2005 elections, the positions of the deputy president and the president of the national assembly were occupied by women although they were dismissed and replaced by men some time after. From then on, women are encouraged to participate in different leadership positions from local to national and even international level.

In brief, the place and the role of the woman have changed. She is no longer exclusively confined to the compound. Despite some shortcomings, the legal framework has contributed to improve her conditions and her status. Her way of life and her manners of expression have been changed, and she has been freed to take part in public life.

*A picture of participation rate of women in positions of responsibility in public structures*²⁰

year Position	1990			1993			1998			2003		
	Total	Women		Total	Women		Total	Women		Total	Women	
		Nbr	%		Nbr	%		Nbr	%		Nbr	%
Minister	24	2	8.33	24	2	8.33	22	1	4.6	26	4	15.38
Senate										53	10	18.87
Parliament				81	10	12.3	117	17	15	181	37	20.44
Ambassador	22	0	0	22	1	4.55	16	2	13	16	2	12.5
Counsellor of Embassy	47	0	0	47	6	12.8	23	5	22	19	2	10.53
Head of cabinet	27	0	0	23	2	8.7	22	2	9.1	26	3	11.54
Director General	79	2	2.53	81	4	4.94	40	1	2.5	44	3	6.82
Governor of Province	16	0	0	16	1	6.25	17	0	0	16	0	0
Counsellor of Governor	45	0	0	45	0	0	48	0	0	48	0	0
Communal Administrator	114	0	0	114	2	1.75	114	0	0	114	0	0

¹⁹Aline Nshimirimana . op.cit., p. 78.

²⁰ Sources: - National action implementation plan of Beijing action programme (2003-2005), Ministère de la Solidarité Nationale et du Genre.
- Observatoire de l'Action Gouvernemental (O.A.G.): "Rapport final Participation femme. Document du 8 Mars 2012". Bujumbura: OAG. p.29.

Year	2005			2008			2009			2012		
Position	Total	Women		Total	Women		Total	Womenn		Total	Women	
		Nbr	%		Nbr	%		Nbr	%		Nbr	%
Pres.& Deputy Presidents	3	1	33.3	3	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0
Minister	20	7	35	26	8	30.7	26	8	31	22	7	31.8
Minister Assistants										11	4	36.3
Senate	49	17	34.7							41	19	46.3
Parliament	118	36	30.5	118	37	31.35				106	35	33.1
Ambassador	17	2	11.8									
Counsellor of Embassy	19	2	10.5									
Head of cabinet	20	3	15	23	1	4.3	26	2	7.6	22	4	18.1
Director General	48	4	8.3	56	6	10.7	52	6	12	78	12	15.8
Governor of Province	17	4	23.5	17	3	17.6	17	2	12	17	3	17.6
Counsellor of Governor	48	0	0									
Communal Administrator	129	17	13							129	41	31.7

The above brief overview, though not exhaustive indicates the changing roles of women from exclusively domestic roles to positions of responsibility in public affairs though the level of participation is still lower.

1.3. Statement of the problem

This study seeks to investigate the construction of masculinity and femininity in Kirundi proverbs. While theoretical accounts using the concepts of man and woman in interpretations of gender relations have a tendency towards universalising male domination and female oppression in all sectors of life, failing to recognize cultural variations in their assumption that relations between men and women are the same all over the world, there is a need to investigate the gender situation in Burundian society on its own terms. Little has been done in gender as an area of academic discourse in Burundi. Most of the previous studies in Kirundi proverbs, and oral literature as a whole, have never specifically had gender power relations as their main concern. The present study therefore aims at covering the identified scholarly gap: the proverb, as a lasting aspect of human culture, is used in this study as a literary indicator of how the Burundian culture perceives men and women as they relate to one another and to social obligations.

These proverbs are worth studying because they help to understand the roots of a contemporary issue. The exploration of male and female attributes in Kirundi proverbs will undoubtedly enrich the understanding of who men and women are socially in Burundian culture.

1.4. Objectives of the study

1.4.1. General objective

The general objective of the present study is to analyse Kirundi proverbs as they portray masculinity and femininity in the Burundian society, using a social construction of gender framework coupled with a linguistic approach: Elements of language such as qualifiers in relation to males and females and other word choices in proverbs are studied for their reflection of Burundi's perception of man and woman.

1.4.2. Specific objectives

- i. To examine the nature and structure of Kirundi proverbs;
- ii. To analyse how masculinity and femininity are constructed in the Kirundi proverb;
- iii. To explore how Kirundi proverbs with gender inclination behave in relation to changing gender roles in contemporary society.

1.5. Hypothesis

The Kirundi proverb is used as a literary indicator and enhancer of culture to support the hypothesis that:

- i. Gender construction based on biological differences serves a social function.
- ii. Though new ways of being men and women are nowadays being constructed to adjust to changing socio-cultural, political and economic imperatives, the gender ideology of patriarchy is persistent because of its organising principle.

1.6. Scope and delimitations

This study does not deal with the whole range of folklore genres; rather it concentrates on Kirundi proverbs. If it ever uses a non-Kirundi proverb, it is for the sake of comparison. The research therefore seeks to discover what Kirundi proverbs reveal about gender identity as regard to how the society sees males and females or wants them to be. The analysis mainly concentrates on this genre of Kirundi oral literature though it is not the only vehicle through which one can study the attitudes of a society about gender issues. The choice of this genre is motivated by the importance proverbs have in the life of Africans in the way that, as Michael Kuelker points out, ‘they are very concise, short ways of capturing a lot of philosophical, wise and ideological perspectives that a particular culture has’²¹ in a tangier and more charming way. The choice is further motivated by the liking I have for proverbs, a liking that was nurtured by my growing up with my grandmother.

1.7. Definition of key terms

Family: husband and wife formally married and living together, with or without children.

Feminist: anyone who is dedicated to the idea that men and women although possessed of different sexual natures, and thus of differing ways of relating to reality, have equally valuable and valid contributions to make to the world and therefore ought to have equality of opportunity²².

Folklore: A socially relevant communication with constants and variables in content and style, based on tradition, and applied to current needs, whether caught in primary or secondary orality, printed or electronically reproduced out of the normal context of use.²³

²¹ Michael Kuelker. “A Life in Proverbs: An Interview with Anand Prahlad”. *African American Review* 43.4 (Winter 2009). p. 655.

²² Definition by Anne M. Maloney in <http://www.feministsforlife.org/history/cassandr.htm> [accessed on 25 September 2012]

²³ Adapted from Linda Dégh’s “Introduction”. *American Folklore and the Mass Media*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994. p.1.

Gender: the way in which man and woman are stratified, what one does or the way one behaves as a man or woman, and the way they are evaluated by a society. In other words gender is about masculinity and femininity in the present study.

Gender equality: While remaining biologically different as a man and a woman, gender equality means having the same rights and duties, opportunities, mutual respect for each other and affirmation of one another in their difference.

Gender ideology: cultural beliefs and the worldview about women and men in society.

Gender power: Authority exercised by one gender over the other.

Gender relations: the way men and women regard each other or behave towards each other and to social obligations.

Lexeme: a fundamental unit of vocabulary of a language that may exist in a number of different meanings.

Man: literally, a male person in formal relationship with a woman, whether the woman is still alive or dead.

Oral literature: non material component of folklore, that is, folklore expressed in words such as proverbs, folksongs, folktales, riddles, and similar categories.

Patriarchy: a form of social organisation in which the father is the head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line.

Sex: The natural, physical and biological differences between men and women.

Woman: literally, a female person in formal relationship with a man, whether the man is still alive or dead.

1.8. Review of Literature

In relation to the objectives of the study, the related literature was reviewed under the following two headings:

1.8.1. Works on proverbs

Many African societies have codified their various social constructs in different forms of folklore in order to educate, to correct or socialise their members. This view matches with Alan Dundes' argument in his work *Interpreting Folklore* (1980) where he discusses in detail the relationship that exists between folklore and social institutions. In his arguments he seems to prove that items of folklore continue to exist in a given society because they play a great role in the internal construction of that society as they 'reflect or refract' the culture of a people. Because cultural practices and norms give rise to the existence of social constructs, people act as if these social constructs exist and because of people's subjective agreement, they do. Any form of oral literature as non material component of folklore becomes an embodiment and manifestation of the beliefs, worldview, wishes, desires and fears of the people in which it occurs. According to Dundes as quoted by Mieder²⁴, 'proverbs are one of the oldest forms of folklore'. He defines a proverb as 'a traditional saying that sums up a situation, passes judgement on a past matter, or recommends a course of action for the future.' With regard to the structure of proverbs, they consist of at least one topic and one comment about that topic, according to the same paremiologist. Are these features of proverbs as defined by Dundes present in Kirundi proverbs or does the Kirundi proverb has some peculiarities? That question is answered in the present study.

Ruth Finnegan (1970) also pays attention to the involvement of proverbs in social issues. She points out that there are some general characteristics of a proverb and, in a way she sums up the definition of a proverb as "a saying in more or less fixed form marked by

²⁴ Alan Dundes. "On the Structure of the Proverb (1975)" in Wolfgang Weider,'s "The Proof of the Proverb is in the Probing" in <http://haldjas.folklore.ee/folklore/vol35/mieder.pdf> . p.11 [Accessed 27 September 2012].

‘shortness, sense and salt’ and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it”²⁵. The truth of proverbs remains popularly accepted though it may not always be absolute. Finnegan quotes among other things proverbs from different African places. For examples, among the Thonga, “the strength of the crocodile is in the water”; which implies that man is strong when his kinsmen help him. “No fly catches for another”, which underscores the importance of self-help. These and many other proverbs depict a variety of social issues past or contemporary.

Finnegan also posits that ‘in many African cultures a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs.’²⁶ She observes that proverbs are used to advise, rebuke, or shame another person into complaisance, comment or persuade, add colour to every conversation, and that they may be a particularly suitable tool of communication in situations and relationships of potential or latent conflict. According to her, proverbs use figurative language which is based on various motifs such as similes, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, sarcasm, paradox, comparison of people with animals and other inanimate objects as a way of ‘hitting the proverbial nail on the head’ of the addressee when one is communicating.

Isidore Okpewho (1992) also gives due consideration to oral literature and particularly to proverbs. According to him, a careful study on origin of proverbs has revealed that there are three basic sources of origin: folktales, comments on actual historical experience, and well-considered observation of various aspects of the natural environment as well as general human affairs and conduct. Whether the proverbs are taken from the world of animals or of people, or from the weather and the physical landscape, they ultimately reflect on people’s lives and fate in the world.

Okpewho considers a proverb as ‘a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm’. He further explains each of the key terms in his definition as follows: ‘the

²⁵ Ruth Finnegan. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970, p.393.

²⁶ *Ibid.*,p.390

terseness' implies economy in the choice of words and sharpness of focus while "charm" conveys the touch of literary or poetic beauty in the expression. "Folk wisdom" refers to the fact that every proverb must have started its life as the product of the genius of an individual oral artist²⁷. But it ends up being appropriated by the whole community (the folk), as Okpewho continues to say, because it contains a truth about life, whether local or universal, accepted by the "folk" and appealing to their imagination.

The aforementioned author quotes a number of proverbs from different parts of Africa to illustrate his point. For instance, the Yoruba say that "the hands of a child do not reach the high shelf, those of an elderly person do not enter a gourd", implying that every person has peculiar characteristics. The Zulu say that "no polecat ever smelt its own stink", commenting on the tendency of people to be blind to their own defects. The Massai say, "Which of the two would you rather be, the father of the mischievous one or the father of none? The father of the mischievous", indicating the high premium placed on having children.

Furthermore, Okpewho discusses in the same work how proverbs are composed in various ways, ranging from simple to complex structures. In terms of style, the author argues that the most 'acknowledged stylistic quality of the proverb is its economy of words' and its sharpness of focus and the literary or poetic beauty in the expression. In his conclusion, he suggests that more efforts should go into understanding smaller forms such as proverbs to "derive from them further insights into the relationship between art and the specific experience which art invariably endeavours to reflect or refract" (p.365). The present study fits in here as it intends to examine how Kirundi proverbs as art reflect or refract masculinity and femininity among Barundi.

What is evident from what precedes is that proverbs are defined in various ways by different scholars because as Finnegan points out, "the exact definition of proverb is no easy matter"²⁸. There is necessity to investigate the definition of a proverb among

²⁷ Okpewho, Isidore. *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992, pp.226-238.

²⁸ Ruth Finnegan.op.cit., p.393.

Barundi. In addition, Dundes, Finnegan and Okpewho deal with proverbs in general without any focus on gender power relations.

While it is easier to adopt any of the definitions provided by the different scholars, Okumba Miruka tries to compile a list of salient features from their many definitions of “proverb”: short, terse or brief; indirect, obscure or gnomic; relatively invariable/fixed; statement; full of wisdom, truth or meaning²⁹. On that list one can add the authoritative validity of the proverb and its ambiguous nature which gives the proverb possibility to be successfully applied to different and varying situations.

Until today, a lot of studies have been and are being carried on proverbs on one aspect or another.

Jeylan W. Hussein’s study (2004)³⁰ examines the representation of women in Oromo folk-proverbs and folk-religion, and analyses the position of women in Oromo cultural practices. In this study, Hussein observes that despite all the barriers of patriarchal power, Oromo women had an influential position in the past, although this has now declined following the decline in the people’s indigenous cultural practices. According to Hussein, even though gender ideology is a real fact of life, the way it is constructed varies from one culture to the other.

In another article, the same scholar Jeylan Wolyie Hussein (2009) still focuses on the image of women. He discusses how gendered ideology is discursively framed in some sexist proverbs selected from Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan. One of his conclusions is that in asymmetrically structured societies, linguistic resources are systematically used to perpetuate gender inequality. In the words of Hussein, all the selected proverbs directly or indirectly show that the cultural stereotypes about man and manhood form the base for the discursive construction and reconstruction of gender, to weigh the strength of

²⁹ Okumba Miruka. “Understanding and Teaching Proverbs” in Austin Bukonya, Wanjiku M. Kabira, Okoth Okombo. eds. *Understanding Oral Literature*. Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1994, p.37.

³⁰ Jeylan W. Hussein. “A Cultural Representation of Women in the Oromo Society”. *African Study Monographs*, 25(3). October 2004, p.104.

women's thoughts and practices, and to fix their positions in the society³¹. Hussein's works concentrate on the images of women and does not give a gender-based contrast.

Unlike many studies which concentrate on images of the woman, Abasi Kiyimba (2001) studies the stereotypes of both men and women and further examines the relationship between men and women against the assumption that the literature casts men into positions of social and political advantage. Kiyimba's study proves that the oral literature of the Baganda both positively and negatively stereotype men and women, contrary to convert suggestions in previous scholarship that it is only women that are negatively stereotyped in African oral literature. However, he does not focus on how those gender stereotypes result from the social construction of the different but complementary masculinity and femininity.

In his article "Gendering social destiny in the proverbs of the Baganda: reflections on boys and girls becoming men and women", the same scholar Abasi Kiyimba (2005) focuses on demonstrating how the unequally gendered relationships among the Baganda men and women have their foundation in early childhood and even infancy. This scholar observes through an analysis of Ganda proverbs that boys and girls begin to develop life-long prejudicial attitudes towards themselves and each other since the early stages of life. Kiyimba states that 'a number of scholars like Mugambi (1994), Kabira (1993& 1994), Schipper (1987& 1991) and Chesaina (1994) have discussed the portrayal of men and women from a number of angles, and have come to various conclusions'³². Whatever their differences of opinion, however, what is common to most of these scholars, according to the same author, is their conclusion that women are greatly marginalised and depicted as powerless. He mentions that some authors even go far to suggest that the literature that marginalises women is 'put in place' by men for the purpose of controlling women.

³¹ Jeylan W. Hussein. "A Discursive Representation of Women in Sample Proverbs from Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya". *Research in African Literatures*, Vol.40, No. 3(Fall 2009), p.96.

³² Abasi Kiyimba. "Gendering social destiny in the proverbs of the Baganda: reflections on boys and girls becoming men and women". *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Volume 17, Number 2, December 2005, pp.254.

However that is not how Chinweizu³³ (1990) sees it. For him, the power lies in the hands of females. He states that motherpower, bridepower, or wifepower” (14) are three forms of female power that dominate every man from birth to death. He also lists five pillars that he thinks women have as advantages to “fool” men, and these are: “women’s control of the womb, women’s control of the kitchen, women’s control of the cradle, the psychological immaturity of man relative to woman, and man’s tendency to be deranged by his own excited penis” (14-15). According to the same author, this is how female power acquired the five pillars from whose tops it dominates men:

The womb is evolution’s priceless gift to woman; man’s psychological immaturity and his deranging penis is evolution’s special handicaps on man. As if these natural advantages were not great enough, women have artfully annexed the kitchen and the cradle, and turned them into control centres from which to manipulate men. (15)

Yet, he seems to show that women are only elevated for their womb and therefore their maternity. He seems also to strengthen that the kitchen is an exclusively female domain, which is not the case anymore. What would women become if the womb was removed? If the female would be praised only for her maternity, what would she become if she does not give birth, let us say because of a natural infirmity? That is what leads Butler (1997) to state that “if gender is constructed, it could be constructed differently”³⁴. Even the language that performs gender construction can be deconstructed.

It is in the vein of gender struggle that Helen Yitah (2009)³⁵, in her study on proverbs, focuses on critically exploring what she terms the ‘proverbial revolt’ of Kasena women from Northern Ghana. She examines how perceptions of gender and female personhood are invoked, evoked, enacted, rejected, consciously reshaped, or completely transformed by these contemporary African women. The women from Ghana take advantage of a socially sanctioned medium, the joking relationship that exists between a Kasena woman

³³Chinweizu, *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy*. Lagos: Pero Press, 1990.

³⁴ Judith Butler .op.cit., p.281.

³⁵ Helen Yitah. “Fighting with Proverbs”: Kasena Women’s (Re) Definition of Female Personhood through Proverbial Jesting”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 40, No.3. 2009, p.74.

and her *symbolic husbands* (that is, her husband's siblings or kin) of the same generation to subvert, contradict and deconstruct the sexist ideology in traditional Kasem proverbs. Yitah's study seems to demonstrate that when old gender rules and roles seem insufficient or impracticable in the face of contemporary challenges, they can be deconstructed and reconstructed. An awareness of incompatibility to the established norms leads to innovation or to adaptation of the existing ones. In the case of Kasena women, that innovation and adaptation is made in the expressive domain of proverbs for a new construction of male and female personhoods. The nature and structure of Kirundi proverbs do not allow women and men to express the new masculinity and femininity dictated by the changing socio-cultural, political and economic imperatives.

Another article worth mentioning in this review is Rose Marie Beck's "Texts on textiles: proverbiality as characteristic of equivocal communication at the East African coast (Swahili)" (2005). This article argues that proverbiality may be seen as a characteristic of a specific communicative strategy in which equivocation plays a major role. She bases her argument on the communicative uses of the wrap cloth *kanga* from the East African coast (Swahili) with its proverbial inscriptions printed on it. According to her, the wrap *kanga* with its proverbial inscriptions is a communicative genre which affirms and subverts rather than transforms and violates rules, "expressing the arrangement of women in a patriarchal society"³⁶. As Rose Marie Becker points out, in communicating with a *kanga*, either a woman wears a *kanga* for others to see, respectively a woman is seen wearing a certain *kanga*, and understood to communicate, or a *kanga* is given as a gift. The texts usually formulate what is culturally considered to be inappropriate or impossible to speak about openly or sensitive topics such as love, conflict and exhortative sayings. *Kanga* and its inscriptions display both traditionality and innovation and that communication oscillates between conformity and resistance on the part of women.

In short, a lot has been written on gender and art. While some have focused on the image of the woman, others have focused on both the image of the man and the woman.

³⁶ Rose Marie Beck. "Texts on textiles: proverbiality as characteristic of equivocal communication at the East African coast (Swahili). *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Volume 17, Number 2, December 2005, p. 156.

Whatever their conclusions, the general tendency is that the image of the man is boosted as superior and that of the woman as inferior and this is constructed since the early childhood, as demonstrates Kiyimba (2005). Still other scholars have focused on how women use the social sanctioned medium of proverbs to subvert patriarchy. However, power relations between men and women are more complex than it is generally assumed. And yet, the coexistence of men and women is desirable and inevitable for the extension of self and therefore continuity of humanity. The present study interrogates Kirundi proverbs on this matter of gender relations to see how men and women relate.

1.8.2. Works on Kirundi oral literature

Oral literature is still a living art in Burundi. It is present all along the human everyday life and is part and parcel of communal property. There are various genres in Kirundi oral literature and according to a classification done by Jean Baptiste Ntahokaja (1979), the main ones are, *ibisôkoranyo* riddles, *imigani* tales, *ibitito* romance-tales, *ivyugûmbiro* or *ibihozo* lullabies, *imvyino* choral songs, *indirimbo* songs in solo, *inanga* recital with accompaniment of the harp, *ibicuba* pastoral poetry, *amazina* praise poetry, *imigani* proverbs which have been finally called *imyibutsa*³⁷ to distinguish them from the category of *imigani* tales³⁸. The same author tries to frame the proverbs by suggesting that:

*La variété dans le genre imigani va du simple dicton consacrant une constatation de faits quotidiens qui tombent sous les sens à la maxime philosophique et aux principes premiers de la métaphysique.*³⁹

The variety in the genre of *proverbs* ranges from the simple dictum consecrating a notice of daily facts which fall under one's senses to the philosophical maxim and to the first principles of metaphysics.

³⁷ In Kirundi oral literature, they distinguish two types of proverbs: **anterior proverbs** (*imyibutsa y'akame* = from anterior tradition) and **posterior proverbs** (*imyibutsa y'imituzuka* = from posterior tradition or those that seem to be variants created by contemporary generations).

³⁸ Jean Baptiste Ntahokaja. "La littérature orale du Burundi". *Etudes scientifiques*, mars 1979, pp.19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

The specific Kirundi term for ‘proverb’ is *umwibutsa* from *the verb ku -ibuk-ia* = “to remind” or “*cause* someone to remember”. Sometimes they call it *umugani* from *ku-gan-a* = “to narrate” but this is a general term for tales and folktales to which they add proverbs. Actually, a proverb is a summary of a long experience of human life. Proverbs were first called *imigani* because many of them are like short moral lessons from long narratives. But there is now a clear distinction in terminology between proverbs and other types of literary expressions of Kirundi oral literature. Barundi call ‘proverb’ *umwibutsa* any brief formula of popular wisdom in declarative form that is used because of a lived situation or experience that it recalls to the mind, no matter the degree of semantic transparency or the level of its aesthetics. In other words, a proverb is a lapidary formula in which the popular wisdom expresses the cultural understanding of life experience at the same time transmits them to the next generation. The genre of Kirundi proverbs includes proverbs in classic sense, aphorism, dictum and maxim. Francis Marie Rodegem collected 4000 proverbs under the title *Sagesse Kirundi. (Proverbes, Dictons, Locutions Usitées au Burundi)* (1961) which was edited later and published under the title *Paroles de sagesse au Burundi* (1983) with 4,456 proverbs.

A number of works have been written on Kirundi language and literature developing various themes such as friendship, hatred, greedy, hard work and many more themes. Most of them are students’ dissertations. Of all these works, two have caught my attention in relation to the present study because they deal with the portrayal of women in different genres of Kirundi oral literature though they do not directly relate images of women to images of their counterpart men.

In her B.A. dissertation, Laetitia Gatimantangere (2000) sets herself to carry out research on the concept of “women” as it is depicted in Kirundi proverbs from a linguistic perspective and concludes that the Burundian woman is perceived in her multiple roles in society such as wife, mother, and co-wife as well as in her biological structure and moral conduct.

From an angle different from the preceding work, Gad Ndayiragije (2011) describes how the Burundian society represents the image of woman through two genres of oral literature: folktales and epithalamiums (wedding songs). The author compares the attitudes of the traditional Burundian society towards woman as they are presented in oral literature with sociological and anthropological descriptions on Burundi. The author concludes that the woman is in the centre of life. Her image, according to Ndayishimiye, is not isolated but derives from her relations with other members of the society and then appears as grandmother, mother, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, aunt, daughter or stepmother and sometimes as barren⁴⁰. To a certain extent, there is no “woman” in the abstract universe devoid of social hierarchy, in the thought of the author. That fact is peculiar to the African society where the whole makes the body or where the place of the individual is so small to leave place to community.

The two works above concentrate on the image of women only and do not give a gender-based contrast or deal with power relations. To the best of my knowledge, there is no study on Kirundi oral literature that has focused on what it means to be female and its counterpart male and the consequent male-female relations. This is not however to mean that the concept of gender relations is new in Burundi, as it can be noticed that in the Burundian culture, there are several songs, tales, folktales and proverbs that depict behavioural attitudes or relations between men and women. The fact that men-women relationships are portrayed in different elements of Burundian culture prove that in Burundi gender is not a foreign notion, imported from the western world as some people would say. Furthermore, it is not a new concept. It is present in Burundian culture; it is translated in their proverbs that depict man-woman relationships and social obligations as it is demonstrated in the next chapters. Gender is a concept that Burundi live with, it is anchored in their life, and it is part of their social realities though they do not have a Kirundi concept to name it. Before contemporary time with the feminist movement, it was taken for granted.

⁴⁰ Gad Ndayishimiye. “Images de la femme au Burundi à travers les contes et les épithalames”. M.A Dissertation. Oslo : Univeristas Osloensis, 2011, p. 65.

In conclusion, while most studies have focused on the image of the woman or the unequal gender relations between man and woman, no study has focused on the exploration of values, interests or needs behind the different construction of men and women. The complexity observed in relationships between man and woman reveals that, though it is a universal phenomenon, gender is worth studying in each culture in order to provide the means of raising levels of consciousness which are locally adapted. This study goes ahead to fill in that gap in African oral literature drawing illustrations from Kirundi proverbs.

1.9. Significance of the study

Scholars in the field of humanities agree that analysing verbal arts can result in discovering general patterns of a culture and such knowledge can contribute in raising the level of consciousness that may facilitate the process of social transformation. Indeed, it challenges men and women to be aware of certain important aspects of human affairs. This awareness provides a map for social action as it helps to make “the unconscious conscious”⁴¹.

This research is worth doing because it intends to contribute to the analysis of the Kirundi proverb as a genre of folklore to point out the gender relations pattern. No similar study has been done on gender power relations and proverbs in Kirundi. It therefore intends to contribute to the studies of gender in Burundi as an academic discourse. The knowledge from the study will help social workers to strengthen the society because understanding gender could help in how men and women should be approached in the effort to bring peaceful changes into their life during the process of social transformation. Masculinity and femininity construction which is the concern of the present study affect men’s and women’s relations. The institution of marriage of a male and a female, which is the base of the family, is the one of the areas that benefits male and female differences and their construction against each other. It is evident that the crossing of the traditional family to contemporary epoch is not without difficulty when taking into account the construction of

⁴¹ Alan Dundes, *op.cit.*, p. X.

masculinity and femininity in the past and today's challenges. This study is a contribution in raising the awareness at this turning point in the history of humanity. In fact it is the construction of masculinity and femininity that affects a stabilisation of gender in the interests of heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domains⁴², as Judith Butler puts it. Finally, the findings of this study are intended to contribute original knowledge to the African oral literature scholarship. Kirundi proverbs are used as monuments of African oral literature to inquire about how men and women thought or felt about themselves at a certain epoch of history and the implication that it can have on human life today.

1.10. Theoretical framework

1.10.1. Background to the framework

Sex differences may be traced right from the beginning of humankind as illustrated by various legends and other elements of traditions from various societies about the origin of human beings as surveyed by Alice P. Tuyizere (2007). Sex is a natural phenomenon but the way sex differences have been manipulated through the assignment of rules and roles to people on the basis of sex is what brings the gender issue. In relation to trying to theorise the relationships between male and female as an academic discourse, various gender theories⁴³ have been developed five of which are looked at, here, in the vein of the topic under study.

Biological determinism is a set of theories but all those theories make up one framework that has been named biological determinism. According to this framework, the way men and women relate is biologically determined. It means that as men or women, there is a certain way one behaves, there are things one is able to do and other things one is not able to do because of one's biology. Sigmund Freud is the most prominent author in this

⁴² Judith Butler. "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity" in *Feminist Theory*. p. 100 .

⁴³ Abasi Kiyimba gives a detailed account of the first four frameworks, that is, biological determinism, cultural determinism, the labour paradigm and feminism in "Gender Stereotypes in the Folktales and Proverbs of the Baganda", Ph.D. Thesis, University of Dar es salaam, 2001, pp.38-42.

framework. Others like the evolutionist Charles Darwin followed the line of Freud's argument. Biological models claim that sex determines gender and the way men and women should relate. This has been rendered in the Sigmund Freud's famous statement 'anatomy is destiny'⁴⁴. Nevertheless, though biology has a role to play in the way society is organised, the so called destiny varies enormously in different historical, cultural and social contexts. If gender was fixed like physical sex, then it would not vary. It would remain constant just as other biologically determined characteristics.

Next, there is **cultural determinism**. For cultural determinism proponents, culture is destiny. According to this framework, the way men and women relate is culturally determined. In other words, culture is an offspring of group behaviours. According to this theory, the unequal gender relations result from the fact that the male culture is dominance and the female culture is subservience. However, though culture has a role to play in the assignments of roles and rules to men and women, culture is not destiny as they would say it because it is not static. "Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature"⁴⁵ as Judith Butler puts it.

Another gender framework worth considering is **labour paradigm**. This theory is based on practical considerations and quantifying of work so that each one may be rewarded proportionately to his contribution and gender is included in the broader context. This paradigm arises from the theories of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The logic is that by living together as men and women, there is division of work according to what one is able to contribute. The result is that when one looks at human relations, the woman remains behind because she has to take care of children. However, not only technology has now revolutionised tasks traditionally assigned to women but also it would be taking for granted that all women have to take care of children and to deal with kitchen only. The division and not segregation of labour on the basis sex can be valid.

⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud quoted in Gabriele Pamperl. "The subversion of Gender: Representation of New Women of the Fin de Siècle". Mag.Phil. Wien: Uniwestät Wien, 2008. p.6.

⁴⁵ Judith Butler. "Subjects of Sex/ Gender/Desire" in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.280.

Another interesting framework to consider is **the feminist framework**. This framework is a reaction to all the above perspectives that intend to limit women's rights. Feminism rejects the division of labour based on gender and rejects also the biological determinism which argues that anatomy is destiny of humanity⁴⁶. The focus is mainly on the change of legal matters. The Feminist framework attempts to describe, explain and analyse the conditions of women's lives with particular reference to unequal relations between men and women and what they propose to address gender asymmetry depends on the assumptions forming the basis of their theory⁴⁷. Though feminist theorists work to achieve equal rights with men, they have differences in approach. For example, within feminism as a framework of gender analysis, there are sharp differences such as the radical feminists who argue that for women to get full rights, they need to have a total independence from men, even for sex⁴⁸.

The fifth framework worthy to look at and which constitutes the framework of this study is **the social construction of gender**. Still the question is: are these differences between men and women determined by biology, culture or are they socially constructed? If socially constructed, on which basis? And for what purpose?

It is said that a social construction is something that does not exist independently in the "natural" world, but is instead an invention of society. Paul A. Boghossian writes:

[t]o say of something that it is socially constructed is to emphasize its dependence on contingent aspects of our social selves. It is to say: This thing could not have existed had we not built it; and we need not have built it all, at least not in its present form. Had we been a different kind of society, had we different needs, values, or interests, we might well have built a different kind of thing, or built this one differently⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Alice P. Tuyizere. *Gender and Development*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2007, p.95.

⁴⁷ "Reading Feminist Theory" in Wendy K. Kolmar & Frances Bartkowski .eds. *Feminist Theory*. 2nd ed. New York: Mc Graw-Hill, 2005, p.2.

⁴⁸ Abasi Kiyimba. op.cit.,p.40.

⁴⁹ <http://philosophy.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1153/socialconstruction.pdf> , p.1 [Accessed on 20 August 2012]

So, if something were shown to be socially constructed in the first sense, it would follow that it would contravene no law of nature to try to get rid of it. However, this does not necessarily mean the same as saying that it would be easy to do so. This is true because once a social construct is set, it becomes useful in a way or another.

I agree with those who say that gender categories owe their existence more to their social function than they do to the scientific evidence. Functionalism even went far in supporting the status quo as the best and perhaps only way to organise an ongoing stable society.⁵⁰ It seems that making gender differences essential or biologically grounded has the intention to give them immutability and God-ordainedness.

Gender differences and roles are avoidable but are said to be purely the product of social forces conceived in order to build a solid hierarchy, and therefore a sustainable social organisation. For some thinkers, that gives reason to assume that genders ought to remain as two. Judith Butler genuinely gives reason to that view when she states that ‘gender [seems to be] as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation’. In such case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny⁵¹ as Butler goes on to say though culture itself is not fixe. As culture changes, so do people’s constructs. Some constructs come into being, and then fall out of use; others remain but change from one culture and historical period to another. Gender does not make an exception to remain static. But apparently there are some cultural aspects of gender ideologies that seem to remain constant despite changes. So, in my understanding, it is neither biology nor culture which is destiny but all are means to an end and this end is the survival of humanity through social organisation: humanity is therefore destiny. Society couples culture with biology not as end in themselves but as a means to an end. That is why it calls for both men’s and women’s participation.

Even though gender ideology is a real fact of life, the way it is constructed varies from one culture to the other, according to Jeylan Hussein’s (2004) conclusion from his study

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.2.

⁵¹ Judith Butler .op.cit., p.281.

of Oromo society. History is seen as a dynamic process which develops from conflicts of interests. In this kind of struggle, there is always resistance especially from men because they must not lose their monopoly of the model of human kind and also women who cannot define a female model.

Viewing gender from a social construction perspective entails that gender is potentially mutable. According to Toril Moi:

What is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies. A brief example will illustrate this shift from essence to position: if patriarchy sees women as occupying a marginal position within the symbolic order, then it can construe them as the *limit* or borderline of that order⁵².

If patriarchy sees that women occupy a marginal position within the symbolic order, it can construct them in the way that enhances it. It is this position that has enabled male culture in some areas sometimes to vilify women as representing darkness and chaos.

As Toril Moi notes, Julia Kristeva's emphasis on femininity as a patriarchal construct enables feminists to counter all forms of biologicistic attacks from the defenders of phallogentrism. To posit all women as necessarily feminine and all men as necessarily masculine, is precisely the move which enables the patriarchal powers to define, not femininity, but all *women* as marginal to the symbolic order and to society. According to Moi, 'the difference between male and female experience is shaped by the patriarchal structures feminists are opposing; and to remain faithful to it is to play the patriarchal game'⁵³.

Given the usefulness of male and female differences no matter what shapes them, the man is a man and the woman is a woman. To be accepted and considered, women are not to be more like men. As it appears in Simone de Beauvoir's thought⁵⁴, the society should be educated that women are there with all rights to live side by side with men.

⁵² Toril Moi. "Feminist, Female, Feminine" in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 248.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 249.

⁵⁴ Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex* (1949). A New Translation by Constance Borde and Sheila

Freud's description of women as deviations from the male was for de Beauvoir, one example of the ways that culture constructs woman as man's other, rather than as an autonomous being⁵⁵. It is in the spirit of giving credence to woman's autonomy that Luce Irigaray suggests the idea that all women have to do is cut themselves from man, desist being defined against man or patriarchal culture⁵⁶. But is it possible to cut themselves from man? I contend that as woman is defined against man, man is in return defined against woman. The reason why the woman is defined from a male point of view is because she is constructed to live with the male. If she is the other to the man, it means that the man is the other to her and her complement as well. He is also defined from female point of view to a certain extent as he is called to live with her. They are interdependent in their definition. The woman is the Other at the heart of a whole whose two components are necessary to each other⁵⁷, as de Beauvoir would say.

To identify with this, Irigaray's idea is to construct an objectivity that facilitates dialectic proper to the female subject, meaning specific relations between her nature and her culture, her same and her other, her singularity and the community, her interiority and her exteriority.

Although there is a "causal continuity among sex, gender and desire"⁵⁸, categories 'man' and 'woman' need to be questioned as they are culturally defined today but not in the same way as other classes are questioned because the concept of 'woman' puts women in the position of fighting within the class of 'women' for its defence and reinforcement. But, is not there a danger of creating a 'women only club' as Wittig tries to say? By deconstructing heterosexuality as a system, would not the feminists be creating another system, say one that would privilege lesbianism over heterosexuality? And if that is the

Malovancy- Chevallier. London: Vintage, 2009.

⁵⁵"Lexicon of the Debates" in Wendy K. Kolmar, and Frances Bartkowski.eds. *Feminist Theory*, 2nd edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005, p. 54.

⁵⁶Luce Irigaray. "The Other: Woman" in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 312.

⁵⁷ Simone de Beauvoir. op.cit., p.9.

⁵⁸ Judith Butler. op.cit., p.280.

case, what guarantees are in place that this particular system would not replicate the same oppressive mechanism that the other is accused to have ? But most importantly, does the solution lie in creating a feminine society that exists outside a masculine society? The devil Satan is seeking to drive a wedge between men and women with the radical feminist movement, playing upon the hurt and rejection that women have suffered. Because females and males together complete the physical expression of God's image in humanity, the devil is promoting homosexuality and lesbianism to counteract God's plan.

My point of view is that the promotion of lesbianism and gay men, as a choice for woman and man to live in total independence on each other, would lead to the destruction of the family and implicitly humanity. While recognising that the family is the basic unit of the society, any threat to the family has great implications to the society at large. The dismantling of the family cannot serve the society. The suggested alternatives to the family by modernity such as homosexual marriage, lesbianism, the insemination of a single female, concubine and the like are, in my opinion response to the needs of individual fulfilment, individual egocentrism and not to serve humanity. Little results can be expected from 'same sex marriages' as they are not based on engagement by alliance.

It is against the practice of deconstructing heterosexuality that Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argues that women have been defined by men and that if they attempt to break with this, they risk alienating themselves. There will always be men and women. Contrary to other nominal categories for which we can fight for their dissolution, the category of men and women cannot be dissolved because humanity will always need these two wings to fly. As Irigaray puts it, 'Man and woman should not be abandoned to a mode of functioning in which woman is hierarchically inferior to man – to positively construct alterity between them is the task for our time'⁵⁹.

For Elizabeth Grosz, the body is indeterminate and indeterminable outside its social constitution as a body of particular type. This implies that the body which it presumes and helps to explain is an open-ended, pliable set of significations, capable of being

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 310.

rewritten, reconstituted in quite other terms than those which mark it, and consequently the forms of sexed identity and psychical subjectivity at work today.⁶⁰ In my understanding, whatever way to rewrite or reconstitute the female body, women do not have to alter their bodies as would suggest some extremist feminists. It is rather society that has to change and integrate women and men as “two halves riveted to each other”⁶¹ rather than women trying to change their bodies. Women do not need to become manlike to create a space for them in society because history cannot do without the existence of two human subjects, man and woman defined against each other if it is to get away from past failures in human relationships. That is why there is necessity to carefully bridge between tradition and modernity. The woman’s body is very crucial and its functions add to her agenda extra social roles when compared to the man.

The categories ‘woman’ and ‘man’ are depicted by the language and literature of a given culture in a particular society and their construction is often rooted in early childhood when they are still boys and girls.

Of all the five frameworks mentioned above, the researcher has chosen to use the social construction of gender framework because it is the one which helps to wrap her arguments better than the rest. However, the other four are kept in mind during the analysis because biology, culture, division of labour and human dignity, women included have a place in the social construction of masculinity and femininity.

1.10.2. Social construction of gender as framework of the present study

In this study, Kirundi proverbs are analysed through the lens of social construction of gender framework coupled with linguistic approach. Although the Kirundi proverb deals with other concerns, the construction of people into male and female roles is dominant. And though proverbs can be used in various situations, our analysis mainly uses a gender conscious tone of this genre. We mainly deal with the linguistic level that corresponds to

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Grosz. “The Other: Woman” in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 310

⁶¹ Simone de Beauvoir. op.cit, p.9.

the first denotation, that is, the situation from which the proverb draws images and that it directly signifies. Expressing how useful is the linguistic tool in the study of proverbs, Jean Cauvin says, “*L’outil linguistique est au parémiologue ce que la machette est au cultivateur: un outil indispensable pour débroussailler le chemin*”...⁶², that is, “The linguistic tool is to the paremiologist what a machete is to the farmer: an indispensable tool to clear the undergrowth from the way,...”

In the analysis of proverbs and gender differences, it is necessary to carefully look at the dynamic relationship between men and women and address oral literature from a gender social construction view point. The construction of gender theory helps to posit that gender is an invention of society therefore is mutable. However this mutability is not automatic because as it is said, once a social construct is set, it becomes useful in a way or another. “Gender is culturally constructed, hence the gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex.”⁶³ Gender is seen as multiple interpretation of sex. It would make no sense then to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. If gender is socially constructed, the underlying idea is that it can be reconstructed differently. But, as Butler raises the point, the way gender is conceived in many cultures “presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender and desire but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire.”⁶⁴ So, it seems that it is not easy to strip sex of gender without some damage in organisation of the society.

The social construction of gender framework helps to explain that there is no essential, universally distinct character that is masculine or feminine. According to the proponents of this theory, behaviours are influenced by a range of factors including class, culture, ability, religion, age, body shape and sexual preference. It discusses how the biological basis to the differences between the female and male sexes does not explain their lived

⁶² Jean Cauvin. *L’image, la langue et la pensée: L’exemple des Proverbes (Mali)*. Antropos-Institut: Saint – Augustin. 1980, p. 153.

⁶³Judith Butler .op. cit. , p.280

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.284.

differences and inequalities in society. These differences are only a result of social construct intending to establish order. For instance, social construction of gender framework helps to explain that gender is an arbitrary social construction created as a major organising principle of the whole social world.

Given that the “naturalization” of gender differences has been more unfavourable for women than for men, these constructions have been more questioned by women. Counter-arguing Freud’s view that ‘anatomy is destiny’ and proving that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes a woman’⁶⁵, Simone de Beauvoir questioned the assumptions behind such formulations in her feminist classic *The Second Sex* (1949). Nevertheless, in de Beauvoir’s account, it seems that there is nothing that guarantees that the ‘one’ who becomes a woman is necessarily female. De Beauvoir’s famous assertion is equally true for men: one is not born, but rather becomes a man. Though one is not born ‘woman’ or ‘man’, one is born with biological predisposition to become one. Owing to the fact that the one who is made woman is necessarily born female while the one who is made man is necessarily born male, I contend that “man” and “woman” are both born and made. A female can choose not to be made woman or a male can choose not to be made man but a female cannot choose to be made a man or a male to be made a woman, at least in the researcher’s culture.

From the very beginning of the human race, it seems that man has always been the dominant and blameless figure in various societies until very recently, when women decided to denounce, mainly through the medium of literature, the abuses of males over females. The clinical use of the Freudian conception of sex differences, which identified power with the penis, took the form of trying to persuade women to accept their inferiority. In fact it was argued that “the way women perceived themselves and were

⁶⁵ Simone de Beauvoir. op.cit., p.253.

perceived was ineluctably shaped by the ways in which images of women were constructed and communicated to the population at large”.⁶⁶

Hence, those Kirundi proverbs with a gender inclination do not express ‘natural’ differences so much as produce them. This matches well with Butler’s (1990) thought that language performatively constitutes those sex/gender categories of which it speaks.

The present research is informed by the ideas formulated by constructivist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Monique Wittig and Judith Butler, to critically analyse the portrayal of masculinity and femininity in Kirundi proverbs and the consequent relationships between woman and man. Men and women relations are well expressed without any speculation in the folk wisdom, especially with proverbs because the proverb, as a literary genre and living aspect of language, is a noble genre of oral tradition that is characterised by fixity and stability in time and space. Therefore it is important to pay attention to selected Kirundi proverbs, through a gender social constructionist perspective, to discover how masculinity and femininity are socio-culturally constructed in Burundian society and how this construction adapts to modern environment.

1.11. Methodology

The study was conducted basically through qualitative research. This qualitative research employed various methodologies such as systematic interviews, observations and document analysis with a checklist as well as photography. The corpus of proverbs in focus is a collection of all proverbs that use the images of female and male lexemes from fieldwork and from one published source. Attention was particularly given to proverbs and versions of proverbs in contemporary use. The internet also availed the researcher with useful information.

⁶⁶Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan. *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. London: SAGE Publications, 2004, p. 135.

1.11. 1. Field Research

This informed the basic source of data of primary orality. Fresh data was collected from wedding ceremonies' speeches, ordinary conversations and from informants. With informants, the researcher held an interview using an interview guide that helped while interviewing men and women informants in seeking information concerning the meaning of some proverbs, the occasions or situations in which they are used and the purposes they serve. A total of twenty two informants made up of eleven males and eleven females were chosen from different ages and milieus. The young mainly gave examples of proverbs using the male and /or female lexemes they had heard so far and elderly Burundian men and women were chosen for their knowledge of culture to help in interpreting proverbs. Informants also provided the researcher with other information relevant to this study. The group of informants particularly included some Burundian women of "influence" from Bujumbura Township. This study used a non-probability purposive sampling method. The researcher targeted those people she thought were knowledgeable in the domain of study.

The fieldwork was done in Bururi commune in Bururi district and in Bujumbura district, the capital city of Burundi. Given that Burundi speak the same language and have same culture, the choice of the two places was guided by the researcher's familiarity with them, in Bururi as a rural area for being born and grown up there and in Bujumbura as a political, cultural, social and economic capital for living there since 1994. The idea behind choosing the two places was that the rural area is more conservative while most changes start from the capital and spread countrywide.

Next, data of secondary orality was collected from songs from radio or television broadcasts. Other useful data for this study was got from textiles, billboards, walls and banners. To complete the corpus, other proverbs were drawn from one published material, a selection from Rodegem's collection (1983)⁶⁷. Most of the proverbs collected

⁶⁷ Francis Marie Rodegem. *Paroles de Sagesse au Burundi*. Leuven: Peeters, 1983. This is a collection of 4,456 Kirundi proverbs.

in primary or secondary orality were the same as those from the published material or their variants.

1.11.2. Techniques of data collection

This study is based on data obtained through four sources:

- Note-taking of proverbs in spontaneous performances or conversations as primary orality and from media such as radio and television broadcasts as secondary orality. Most of these proverbs are either the same as those that appear in the printed material or their variants;
- Recording of systematic interviews. I conducted systematic interviews to give myself deeper insight into Barundi's perception of masculinity and femininity through proverbs and other relevant information;
- Collection of proverbs from Rodegem's printed material and from epigraphs and other material supports plus photography of the latter;
- Archival research on Burundian culture. I read archives with a checklist, which gave me the key to the understanding of Burundian culture.

In order to get the best information to be used during the analysis, the following techniques were used:

1.11.2.1. Note-taking

A notebook and a pen were very useful to take note of proverbs in spontaneous performances or conversations from various occurrences as primary orality and from other sources like radio, television as secondary orality; in planning visits for interviews and writing down the biodata of informants. The notebook and pen were also used in recording notes from read archives on Burundian culture and in recording selected proverbs from Rodegem's publication (1983).

1.11.2.2. Audio-recording of interviews

A digital voice recorder was used during the performance to capture in real life situation the performance of proverbs and other necessary information. Apart from proverbs from interviewees, examples of proverbs were elicited by the researcher and then described and discussed through questioning and interviewing. For some people, I interviewed them singly. However, it proved irrelevant to organise focus group discussions as it was planned before. As men and women matters, it proved better to interview married couples as husband and wife. So there were four married couples among my informants.

Open interviews to people who are culturally knowledgeable helped in the clarification or explanation of some proverbs. The interviewing of people was done selectively, to interview people according to their special skill or knowledge with regard to proverbs or to culture.

1.11.2.3. Observations

I also used the observation methods well since, as a member of the Burundian society, I am well versed in the cultural practices of the inhabitants where the study was carried out. Here, observation is to be understood not only as observing with eyes but also as the selective and deliberate examination of something via the sense of hearing for the purpose of gathering information, including proverbs here. As a Murundi and given my intimate familiarity with Kirundi proverbs, I conditioned myself to take note of examples of proverbial speech and occasions on which they were used on a period of 11 months (from June 2012 to April 2013).

At this period of “electronic explosion”, the approach to the field of folklore is modernised. It is different from Richard Bauman’s (1977)⁶⁸ whose opinion is that “verbal art is performance”, and the “way of speaking” is the target of observation at the moment of utterance, in the situated context, separated from the larger social, cultural, economic,

⁶⁸ Richard Bauman. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Austin: Waveland Press, 1977, pp.4-11.

and historical context. That is not the way Linda Dégh (1994)⁶⁹ perceives folklore. According to her, modern vehicles of communication technology have added to the slow-moving regularity of passing on tradition from “father to son” a new and more vigorous form of transmission in addition to allowing the emergence of new forms of folklore. Folklore is no longer an operation of rescuing a dying tradition or a “reconstruction of the past from relics in the memory of old people” but a social relevant form of communication that can be captured in primary as well as secondary orality.

1.11.2.4. Photography

A camera was used to capture pictures with some of my informants during oral interviews, or other significant scenes to serve as illustration of some points in this study. Given that changing technology is altering the notion of oral literature as “tradition” and “transmission”, proverbs and supplementary sayings printed on billboard, textiles, walls and banners reflecting changes in Burundi were taken in photos.

So, proverbs analysed in this research were collected from live speech, from radio magazines and songs, from other material supports and from one published book as already stated.

1.11.3. Techniques of data analysis

The transcription and translation from Kirundi to English was done all along the analysis of data. The translation has been done by the researcher herself. First, the “texture, text and context” of Kirundi proverbs were studied. Next, the data was assessed, categorised thematically and examined from a social constructionist gender conscious perspective. As well as social construction of gender frame, other approaches such as the linguistic approach and discursive interpretation as well as cultural explanations were used in the discussion whenever it was necessary.

⁶⁹ Linda Dégh. op.cit.,p. 5.

In this work, proverbs were analysed as both a literary and social phenomena. Samples of Kirundi proverbs were discussed with mentioning the cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity that they portray with mention of what the proverbs evoke by analogy or by extension. There was a discursive interpretive interaction between the researcher and respondents in order to explain the semantic values of images used in proverbs. It is the images the users of proverbs call upon which were exploited. Those images reflect men and women relations and their social obligations. But since the proverb is a one statement whole unit, or a concise form, extra-linguistic and even cultural explanations were called upon. In fact, in proverb, the communication is beyond the art and the beauty of the statement. What is previously known by the addressee is important for the proverb to make impact on the addressee. Finally, the proverb was studied as a more or less fixed form in relation to a dynamic culture.

The results of this research appear throughout the work in the background to this study, in the literature review, in the discussion of chapter two, three, and four and in appendices.

A corpus of 279 proverbs is presented in appendices under four headings: I) proverbs using images of the male lexeme, II) proverbs using images of the female lexeme and III) proverbs using or implying both lexemes, and a fourth category of proverbs (IV) contextualising the messages carried in proverbs portraying males and females most of which were raised by my informants during oral interviews. Under each of the four categories, proverbs are listed in alphabetical order basing on the first word of the proverb. For the sake of not overloading the proverbial text, tones are put on few examples to illustrate their aesthetic and stylistic qualities.

It is important to mention that all the proverbs using the lexemes *umugabo* man and *umugore* woman whether they portray their strengths or weaknesses were recorded. As it appears in appendix C, the proportion 165/65 is meaningful. Given that the woman was traditionally perceived in her narrow circle of the domestic arena, it is quite normal that the number of proverbs that portray her is small compared to the number of proverbs that portray the man since the latter had a wide field of action and reaction at home and in public spaces.

1.12. Encountered constraints

The first constraint is the inability to get all the proverbs under study in a live situational context. According to Finnegan (1970) “oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion. There is no other way it can be realised as a literary product.”⁷⁰ Finnegan’s argument is particularly motivated by the fact that the nature of performance itself makes an important contribution to the impact of the particular literary form being exhibited. Many proverbs are known by people but were not all used in ordinary conversation or in formal speech during my field work. Only some are frequently quoted but this does not imply that those which are not quoted are unknown. So, it was not possible to get all of them in live situational contexts. Therefore the researcher analysed proverbs some of which taken out of their situational context of oral performance and focused on the form and contents of the proverbs while realising that limitation, which actually seems not to be a big issue any more at the time with technology, according to Linda Dégh (1994) where one can get material of folklore from primary as well as secondary orality or from print and absorbs the ideology carried in. Orality and technology are not exclusive but complementary. Nowadays, there is a symbiotic relationship between oral literature or folklore whose proverbs are component and the information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The second constraint was caused by linguistic and cultural limits of translatability of proverbs from Kirundi, a Bantu language to English, an indo-European language. On the linguistic level, untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the target language (TL) for a source language (SL) item. It is evident also that linguistic features that constitute the aesthetics and the savour of the Kirundi proverbs got lost once translated into English. Cultural untranslatability is due to the absence in the TL of a relevant situational feature for the SL text. When a text carries a whole cultural meaning which cannot be easily translated into a foreign language, the translator can make a literal translation and then put a footnote to explain for readers and this makes

⁷⁰ Ruth Finnegan. *op.cit.*, p.2.

rich one's translation. Unfortunately, even with an effort kept on alert and a supported application, the translation does not render all the richness, all the dimensions of the original text, the colours, the sonic richness and musicality, the depth of words does not go through the second language; the image itself appears somehow distorted when going through the spectre of translation. It was hardly possible to render the spirit of the original proverbs but the researcher did the best she could under the circumstances. To render as much meaning as possible from the original proverbs, she adopted mainly a literal translation that is, word for word translation and then provided the meaning of the proverb and used footnotes where need was.

1.13. Chapter outline

The present study is made of five chapters. Chapter one is the general introduction to the present study. It highlights the nature of the study, makes a review of some literature in relation to the topic under research and lays out the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the first chapter shows the methodology used and the constraints encountered during the study. The second chapter presents the nature and structure of the Kirundi proverbs, the role of proverbs in a society of oral traditions such as Burundi and demonstrates how the form of Kirundi proverbs informs the content. The third chapter discusses the constructs of masculinity and femininity and the role of this differentiated construction in social organisation. The fourth chapter analyses Kirundi proverbs as a more or less fixed form in relation to gender identity permanent changes while the fifth chapter concludes the study and presents some recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF THE KIRUNDI PROVERB

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the place of proverbs in a society with a strong oral tradition like Burundi. It also analyses the aesthetic elements of the Kirundi proverb, its style and composition. The chapter finally presents the context of usage and the social function of proverbs among Barundi.

2.2. Proverbs and oral society

A society is made by members who are united by relationships. In societies with strong oral traditions, oral communication is the deeply privileged medium to convey those relationships. In such societies, tradition is often present to express ideas or to influence the human behaviour. Tradition also serves to support certain speeches, to underline, to give weight to the oral discourse and therefore make tradition a point of reference of the social experience. Proverbs are common features of oral traditions.

Etymologically, the term tradition comes from the Greek word *tradere* (*trans-* : across + *dare* give). It is said that *tradere* has the origin in the fourteenth century, and it meant “to hand over” or “deliver”. In the process of handing down or delivering, there is repetition. Therefore, repetition is important in establishing tradition. In fact, a group repeats something because it matters to them, because it is meaningful. Furthermore, the process of passing down something through generations involves selection of what one or the group considers meaningful, significant or indispensable. This act of handing something on therefore implies a deliberate and highly motivated choice of what to transmit. If something is not meaningful to the group, it cannot be repeated, hence cannot be passed on and if it is not repeated it cannot become a tradition.

Joel A. Adedeji (1971)⁷¹ provides a working definition of the phrase ‘oral tradition’. He suggests that oral tradition is ‘the complex corpus of verbal or spoken art created as a means of recalling the past’. For him, that art is ‘based on the ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of persons’ and its mode of acquisition is ‘through a process of learning or initiation and its purpose is to condition social action and foster social interaction’. With regard to tradition, Richard M. Dorson (1972) says that ‘Africa is the continent supreme for traditional cultures that nurture folklore’⁷². In fact, the African oral tradition distils the essences of human experiences, shaping them into rememberable, readily retrievable images of broad applicability with an extraordinary potential for eliciting emotional responses, as Harold Scheub (1985)⁷³ puts it.

Proverbs as a genre of oral literature or folklore not only record the nature of a society but also impacts greatly on people in society during the process of socialization into being members of their society. Therefore, as Tanure Ojaide (2007) puts it, “[a]rt reflects life just as life informs artistic creations”⁷⁴ and no aspect of people’s experience is excluded. To illustrate that point, in a proverb about proverbs Barundi say, *Umugani ntuva ku giti uva ku muntu*. This can be translated as ‘A proverb does not originate from a tree but from human behaviour’. This proverb serves to remind people that, although proverbs use metaphors mentioning plants, animals or inanimate objects, their real source and target is actually human behaviour. As a consequence to that fact, proverbs are intertwined with real life situations as portrayed in another Kirundi proverb about proverbs, *Umugani ugana akariho* which can be translated as ‘A proverb portrays noticed facts’. It suggests that a proverb reflects a real situation. The role of this proverb is to let

⁷¹ Joel A. Adedeji. “Oral Tradition and the Contemporary Theatre in Nigeria”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol.2.No.2.(Autum, 1971), p.134.

⁷² Richard M. Dorson. “Africa and the Folklorist”. *African Folklore*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1972, p.3.

⁷³ Harold Scheub. “A Review of African Oral Traditions and Literature” in *African Studies Review*, Vol.28, No. 2/3 (Jun.-Sep., 1985), p.1.

⁷⁴ Tanure Ojaide. *Ordering the African Imagination: Essay on Culture and Literature*. Malthouse: Malthouse Press Limited, 2007, p.vii.

people know that no proverb has been coined in a vacuum; that each proverb has been prompted by a real situation that may be still hanging around despite apparent changes. Proverbs establish a truth of life which could be universal or relative, generational or intergenerational. So, proverbs reveal how to solve some of the daunting issues of life. One of the important social issues confronting humans is how to perceive one's self and how to conduct life as either male or female in society.

Proverbs are known as products of social imagination, and they are first and foremost orally cited either as primary or secondary orality though there may be collections of proverbs in printed forms. No one claims the authorship of a proverb. The good reason is that a statement on life observation, no matter how perfect and how true it may be, does not become 'proverbial' until it has survived the test of time and has been handed down from generation to generation. Each citizen has free access to tradition and to creativity of that "popular knowledge" inherited from ancestors. Time is a defining feature of tradition. For proverbs to be transmissible there must be some elements of storage, package and retrievability.

Given that Kirundi proverbs are products of orality and have been transmitted orally over time, it is impossible to date neither original proverbs (stable) nor their variants. One can guess that the complex or unintelligible structures are ancient because language unconsciously targets the economy of expression and the simplified contemporary Kirundi language. And of course, when one talks of performance, there is an element of modification. The lexical variants of proverbs are either formed by substitution of terms or a complete disappearance of a term as the following variants illustrate it:

*Ikijuju c 'umugabo kirya imboga caritse.*⁷⁵

A stupid man eats the side dish while boiling water for bread (main dish).

⁷⁵In Burundian culture, the side dish may be composed of seasoned beans, peas, vegetables, meat or fish or a combination of either of these sauces depending on the wealth of one. It is eaten with cassava bread, wheat bread, millet bread, maize bread or sorghum bread. The side dish is normally made ready before the bread and a normal person has to keep it aside and wait for the bread that goes with it to be ready.

Akatazi k'umugore karya imboga karitse.

An ignorant woman eats the side dish while boiling water for bread.

Akabigira kabizi (or kabibona) karya imboga karitse.

The one who does it knowingly (or seeing it) eats the side dish while boiling water for bread.

There is disappearance of some words of the past time and use of new words instead because of contemporary main trends. For instance in the new variant of the proverbs above, the male and female lexemes have disappeared and have been replaced by a neutral term.

It is also important to define the two Kirundi terms *umugabo* man and *umugore* woman which are the key lexemes in our proverbs. The term *umugabo* comes from the Kirundi verb *kugaba* having two fundamental meanings, which are 'to command, to give the orders, to rule or to control' and 'to give somebody something'. According to Hilaire Ntahomvukiye (1991), the two meanings are linked:

Ce dernier est lié au premier et en constitue un mode spécifique d'effectuation: on donne gratuitement quelque chose sur laquelle on exerce un droit de propriété, et céder son bien est une forme d'exercice du pouvoir.⁷⁶

The second meaning is linked to the first one and is for it one specific way of operation: one gives freely something on which one exercises right of possession, and to yield one's possession is a form of exercising power.

Etymologically, in the thought of the same author, *umugabo* is the *one* who has beings and goods at his disposal and on which he exercises full power, but it is also someone who for the sake of his right of possession manages them exactly as he likes and can give them away to whom pleases him. At the very beginning, society wanted this *one* to be the male.

⁷⁶ Hilaire Ntahomvukiye. "Particularités linguistiques des ethno-textes burundais. Niveau lexical et structure syntaxiques". Thèse, U.C.L., Louvain-la-Neuve, 1991, p.245.

On the other hand, the term *umugore* stems from the verb *kugora* which means ‘to make someone feel upset’, ‘to distress’. *Umugore* seems to be exclusively sending to a social state and that term refers to probable difficulties and even impossibilities that she is likely to encounter in her situation as a bridge between two families. Etymologically speaking, society does not make things easy for the woman. According to Ntahomvukiye:

Umugore est au centre d’alliance interfamiliale à laquelle elle a peut-être consenti mais, dont les termes se sont fixés sans elle, alors qu’elle en est l’objet et le nœud ; de ce fait elle est socialement entravée. Umugore donc serait quelqu’un d’entravé, de lié.⁷⁷

Umugore is someone who is in the centre of inter-family alliance in which she probably consented but whose terms and conditions were fixed without her while she is the subject and the knot in that matter; by that fact, she is socially hindered. *Umugore* would be therefore someone hindered, someone tied.

The Kirundi term *umugore* carries in its roots the meaning of someone who is likely to face hardships inherent in marriage relations.

In Kirundi language, the term *umugore* woman seems to be always used as an antonym to *umugabo* man according to tradition. In fact, one becomes a woman because she is the wife of a man and one becomes a man because he is the husband of a woman. Kirundi has one term *umugore* for both *wife* and *woman* in general and one term *umugabo* for both *husband* and *man* in general. Many proverbs use the two lexemes *umugabo* and *umugore* from Kirundi language to express Barundi worldview in a cultural way. Actually, it is through language that people conceptualise their ideas and feelings about the world around them. By using a proverb in communication, it is at the same time handed down. The proverb *umwibutsa* constitutes a kind of social code that reminds each member of the society his/her rights and obligations, the norms or standards in the society, the social principles and cultural values.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.247.

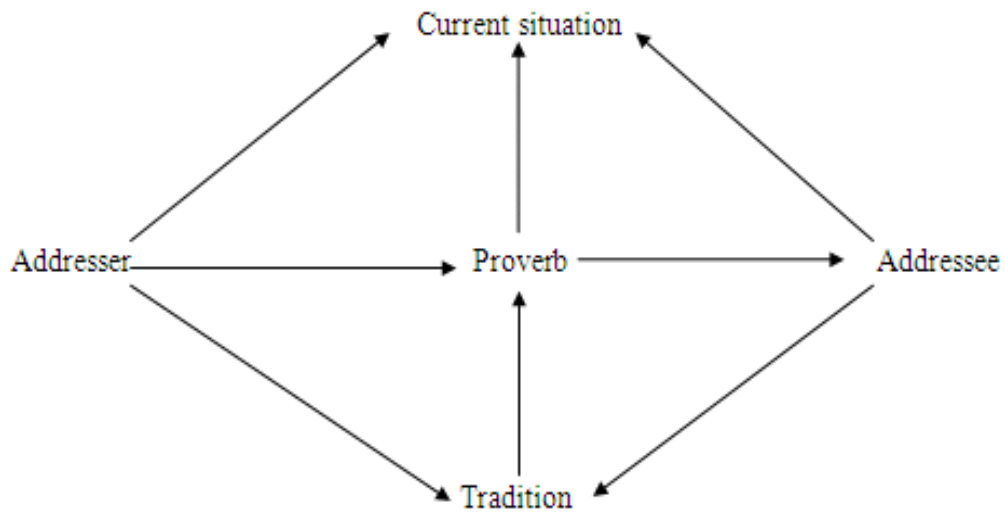
The two terms *umugabo* and *woman* have been the researcher's focus in the proverbs analysed in this study. They carry different meanings depending on the contexts in which they are used. For example, a simple word like *umugabo* "man" may have the sense of an adult male, a husband, a father, the head of family, the rich, judge, brave, courageous, eyewitness, and many more. The word *umugore* "woman" may suggest an adult female, a wife, mother, co-wife, widow and so on. In the whole, "man" is the image of power and authority while "woman" is the image of warmth and all nourishing goodness, comforter, gentle and tolerant though she is sometimes associated with weakness, inconsistency, vulnerability and naivety.

In Burundian culture, the proverb is a living genre exchanged between the addressor and the addressee in contemporary times but originating from tradition, therefore charged with a whole history. Identifying with this point of view, Richard M. Dorson (1972) states that 'proverbs are compact and cryptic and require considerable exegesis, [and] when this is available they yield fruit for the historian'.⁷⁸ In Burundi, that genre captures all aspects of social, moral and spiritual life of Burundi, including gender matters. In the present study, Kirundi proverbs are analysed for a better understanding of gender through genre.

Language plays an important role in the study of proverbs. Although it is the human beings who may decide on the kind of images that are supposed to reflect their ideas, they need a language to pack the ideas that they have conceived in their minds in order to transmit their conception of reality, to transfer their ideas to other people. Language is extremely important in the transmission of those images. The combination of elements that make up the proverb is not arbitrary. The choice of forms corresponds to functional criteria and to an undeniable research done by the unknown artist.

⁷⁸ Richard M. Dorson. op.cit., p.58.

At schema level, the proverb is located in the intersection of two axes⁷⁹:



The identities of the addresser and the addressee are not crucial with regard to whether a particular proverb is appropriate or not but the use of a proverb supposes a series of tacit conventions between the addresser who draws from the tradition to cite a proverb, and the addressee who must be able to decode not only the traditional ‘already-said’ but also ‘already-seen’. In any specific situation, one relies on memorised custom from which s/he borrows an efficient argument and the addressee recognizes intuitively the voice of the dead wise, as the following example illustrates it:

*Umugabo yihindukiza mu kirago ntyihindukiza mw-ijambo.*⁸⁰

A real man turns himself in a mat but not on his word.

The proverb above is an indirect recommendation to keep one’s word or promise.

⁷⁹ Schema adapted from Jean Cauvin.op.cit., p.128.

⁸⁰ The researcher collected that proverb on 22/12/2012 during a wedding ceremony when the father of the bride was officially announcing that he was there with his family members, relatives and friends to “give” the bride to the groom’s family as a fulfilment of a promise that had been made some time before during the bride price payment ceremonies.

Traditionally, people in Burundi used to sleep inside two mats, one below and another spread above as a cover to self protect against cold. When lying, it was quite normal for a man to change the position inside the mat so as to face the opposite direction, but it was a scandal for a man to nullify what he had promised. That is the original situation from tradition. Nowadays the mat has been replaced by mattress in many places and it could be said instead that a real man turns himself on a mattress. Even today, a real man has to hold firm on his word. Nowadays, this proverb can be applied in different situations, without distinction of sex, wherever a person is expected to hold strong on his/her promise or word.

With regard to tradition and creativity, Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes (1964) point out that ‘by the very nature of [proverbs], the messages are culturally standardised in form and content’, and ‘the creativity and adaptation lie rather in the successful application of these traditional materials to new situations’⁸¹. A speaker picks a proverb from the stock of the tradition and uses it in order to comment on a current situation or fact, to persuade, to advise, to warn, to rebuke, ridicule or shame their addressee because of the relationship that is between the situation of origin and the current situation of application. When appropriately quoted, the proverb demonstrates the attitude of addresser towards what s/he is talking about: it may be an attitude of disapproval, irony, satire, humour, cynicism or other. In any case, the images chosen from tradition in the creation of the proverb and the situation in which the proverb is used work hand in hand to lead to the understanding of the proverb once it is used.

A number of conditions must be fulfilled for a proverb to be told and understood. The communication must be established effectively between the addresser and the addressee. For instance, there must be a cultural unity between interlocutors: they share the same language, the same semantics, the same images and the same values, according to Jean

⁸¹ E.Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes. “Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore”. *American Anthropologist* (66)6, 1964, p.80.

Cauvin⁸² and these are fulfilled in Burundi as interlocutors share the same mother tongue Kirundi and same culture.

The English word “proverb” does not perfectly render the cultural reality of the Kirundi word “*umwibutsa*”, that is, ‘a reminder’. By calling a proverb from tradition, it means that the addressee is caused to remember or to think of something known to her/him. If the aforementioned proverb is referred to for instance, the addressee knows that a true man is characterized by courage and a firm hold on their decision or promise, and by extension any worthy person.

In Burundi, there are no social conditions to use proverbial speeches. Though it is often associated with age but not restricted, everybody, young or old, men or women can use a proverb, any time of the day or the night and no matter the occupation of the moment. For instance, one Sunday afternoon I was in the sitting room with my 12 year-old daughter watching Burundi National Television. It was time for a magazine entitled “The artist and his work” that was broadcasting in our local language. When my daughter saw the artist that was invited for that magazine, she told me, ‘*Bavuga ngo “Amosozi y’umugabo atemba aja mu nda”, none ko nabonye urya muririmvyi... ariko ararira aho Matata yapfa, n’amosozi agashororoka ku matama; n’abagabo bararira*⁸³; meaning ‘They say that the tears of a man roll down into the belly, but I saw that artist...⁸⁴ crying at the death of Christophe Matata⁸⁵ with tears flowing on his cheeks; even men cry’, she concluded. The stereotype is that only women and weak men cry. I asked her where she had heard that proverb from for the first time and she told me it was in class. It means that she already has the information that men ought to show courage and strength in the face of pain and grief.

⁸² Jean Cauvin.op.cit.,p.131.

⁸³ The above comments were made by my daughter Love Ines Buntu, on 11 November 2012

⁸⁴ The real name of the artist referred to is not mentioned for the sake of discretion.

⁸⁵ Christophe Matata, one of the famous Burundian oral artists who died some years ago, was a fellow singer and friend to the non named oral artist.

On one hand, in using proverbs what is implicit is bigger than what is explicit given their shortness. On the other hand, in the process of understanding a proverb, what is known is more important than what is said in some cases because the paremiological idea is expressed in images and symbols. It is traditionally believed that the younger learn traditions of their society through elders. As Isidore Okpewho puts it, it is assumed that the older folks' "age and experience put them in a better position to understand the full implication of the wisdom and truth contained in the proverbs and so to impart these to the younger members".⁸⁶ A Kirundi proverb stresses that traditional truth of learning proverbs from elder people:

Uwufise se ntayoberwa umugani wa sekuru.

He who has a father knows the proverb of grandfather.

This proverb reflects father-to-son heritage of tradition and implicitly hierarchical structure based on age. The son inherits from father who has inherited from grandfather. Humanity becomes finally like a chain where each generation is a link.

In fact, Burundi is a strictly hierarchised patriarchal society. The living people are expected to respect the dead first, then the King (the president nowadays); then men come before women and finally come children in the social hierarchy. The effectiveness of a proverb therefore comes from the fact that a proverb is a peremptory argument surrounded by the respect we owe to ancestors who are the custodians of the word of wisdom.

But technology has altered 'father-to-son transmission' of tradition nowadays because of school education or exposure to various sources of knowledge including traditions where the younger can learn from and sharpen their minds. Technology is in fact giving oral tradition new life. Oral literature in modern technology is now no longer conceived only as those stories told by old people around the fire or the oral transmission of proverbs from one individual to another. For example, technology can facilitate the storage and transmission of proverbs and other oral arts to a larger geographical area and to a larger

⁸⁶Isidore Okpewho.op.cit., p.230.

number of audiences than possible by oral transmission from one person to another. Apart from literacy which can act today as a complement to orality, we can talk of primary orality from the mouth of the performer or secondary orality from technological devices.

Though there are no social conditions to use proverbs in Burundi, conditions from circumstances are required for one to use a proverb. The latter is used in a concrete situation that conditions its understanding. The addresser and the addressee ought to take part to the given situation up to a certain extent. The optimal condition is fulfilled if the proverb clarifies the situation leaving no ambiguities at all, either at the level of understanding or the level of action. The proverb is a privileged tool of communication from tradition that allows the addresser to say a whole story in one concise statement that will be decoded for an understanding.

The search for the meaning of the proverb must follow the four directions of the axe. But there is something that is common to all the four and that something is a language. When the addresser chooses words that make a proverb, s/he does not only choose from lexemes in a semantic code, s/he chooses images from a cultural code. The tradition puts at the disposal of the speaker a corpus of proverbs from which s/he can choose according to what they want to say.

As far as the analysis of proverbs is concerned, Alan Dundes (1980) states that with respect to any given item of folklore, one may analyse its texture, its text, and its context.⁸⁷ The next section tries to summarise the main elements of the stylistic qualities of the Kirundi proverb or its texture.

⁸⁷ Alan Dundes. "Texture, Text and Context" in *Interpreting Folklore*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980, p.22

2.3. Artistic and stylistic qualities of Kirundi proverbs

In discussing the style of Kirundi proverbs, one of the striking things that is noticed is the poetic form in which many are expressed and this finds its justification in the social role of proverbs. It is believed that emotion is the source of action and that it is much affected by aesthetic factors. Manipulation of emotions by aesthetic devices is therefore the principal business of speech behaviour. Oral art fulfils that function very well. Some people are much more listened to than others because they know how to manipulate linguistic devices than others. Poetic devices in oral performance attain more the pragmatics than does the written. The touchstone of Kirundi proverbs lies ‘in a maximized “use of the devices of language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon”’⁸⁸, to borrow Richard Bauman’s expression. The artful and aesthetic quality of proverbs resides in the way in which language is manipulated in the construction of proverbs in order to communicate for impact. A lot of Kirundi proverbs have been artistically built as a reflection of life but have ended up codifying among other things behaviours of men and women and their social obligations. It is the rhythm of these forms that ensures their permanence in the memory of people and therefore the transmission of tradition by their use in a culture of orality. Only formulas well thought out and well shaped stand the test of time.

I agree with Stith Thompson’s assertion that ‘by its very nature, folklore is traditional and its preservation depends mainly upon memory’⁸⁹ as demonstrated through the analysis of Kirundi proverbs in this section. In fact, the form plays a very crucial role in allowing further repetition. Since every repetition displays variations, even with the repetitions of the same proverb, each version of folklore can be taken as a ‘variant’⁹⁰.

⁸⁸ Richard Bauman.op.cit., p.7.

⁸⁹ Stith Thompson in Robert A. Georges and Michael O. Jones’ *Folkloristics: An Introduction*.Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995,p. 12.

⁹⁰According to Robert A. Georges and Michael O. Jones in “Folklore and its Study” in *Folkloristics: An Introduction*, every folklore example exists in multiple versions or variants. Each version is distinctive because it is generated at a given time and under a unique set of circumstances. There is usually no difference, for instance in wording each time the proverb “ A rolling stone gathers no moss” is spoken, but there may be notable contrasts in stress and intonation or in the situations it comments on.1995,p.11.

Kirundi proverbs originate from oral art. As it is often the case with many other African oral traditions, Kirundi proverbs are highly abundant in poetic devices. That suggests their sonic richness and the complexity of orality. Unlike writing, the complexity of technicality in orality is different from the technology of writing because the oral communicator relies heavily on mnemonic devices. In Burundi, a truth, a piece of advice, a warning, may be transmitted naked or wearing a proverbial dress. What gives proverbs much power in Burundian culture is that they have, as Bascom would put it, ‘often been characterized as the distilled wisdom of past generations and are mistakably so regarded by many African peoples’⁹¹. Proverbs almost acquire a spiritual dimension because considering what they say is not only respecting tradition but also venerating our ancestors who first authored them. There is a traditional belief among Burundi that if you do not respect the inheritance of dead ancestors, they could come to you in form of spirits and cause harm to you.

The “anonymous” oral artists who first conceived Kirundi proverbs used their genius to weave the proverbial text in a more pleasing way by manipulation of words from Kirundi and use of various linguistic features. The aesthetic dimension of Kirundi proverbs does not only allow fulfilling the intended function which is to communicate effectively for impact but also is a memory friendly asset. The form of proverbs is undoubtedly at the service of content.

The spiritual desire of Burundian people to live in harmony with one another, environment and the natural order is reflected in the harmony of the form of their proverbs. The Kirundi proverb uses various stylistic features. Many of the proverbs are built on the basis of a combination of various stylistic qualities though they may be used to illustrate one quality or another. It is impossible to describe the stylistic features of every Kirundi proverb. A proverb may even use more than one technique in its structure. Sound or lexical effects and syntactic or stylistic figures – which would necessitate a

⁹¹ William R. Bascom. “Four Functions of Folklore” in Alan Dundes .ed. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice –Hall, 1965, p. 294.

detailed study – are not free of signification. In this section, only some samples of proverbs are chosen to illustrate cases.

However, it is worth reminding here that most of these stylistic devices are lost through translation of Kirundi proverbs into English. Carried away to another ‘land’ in a totally different linguistic territory and culture, the Kirundi proverb loses a part of its charm. The translation does not take into account rhythm, alliteration and assonance and other features whose importance is to embellish the idea conveyed and to make it more attractive.

2.3.1. Tone

One of the stylistic devices in orality is tone because Kirundi sounds carry tones or pitch when one is speaking. In Kirundi, there are four tones and these are present in proverbs, with more significance in some proverbs than in others. There is always presence of these tones in various sequences when one is speaking though they are often not put on sounds when writing Kirundi, simply because these tone markers are not known by all Kirundi speakers but also it overloads the text for those who know how to put them in the text.

First, there is the low tone or unmarked: **à ì è ò ù**. This tone is unmarked except when a word has two consecutive vowels which give a long vowel: **àà = ā; ìì = ī; èè = ē; òò = ō; ùù = ū;**

Second, there is a high tone: **á é í ó ú;**

Third, there is a rising tone: **ě ǎ ĭ ǒ ů;**

Finally, there is a falling tone: **â î ê ô û.**

Examples:

Umugabo akira iryo atēwé / ntakira iryo agēndána.

A man can escape that (spear) which is thrown at him but not that which he always carries with him.

There is the presence of a long vowel and a high tone in the last words of the two slots.

In the following example there is also alternation of long vowel and high tone.

Umugabo anyāgirwa umubiri ntányāgirwa umutíma.

A man's body can be soaked by the rain but his heart will never get wet.

In the two proverbs, the tone reflects the relation of semantic parallelism that exists in the bipartite. There are many other examples such as the following:

Kibûrabwênge c'ûmugabo yakwîkiye ishênyo mu gisomasoma.
Fool man has fitted a handle in stem of courgette into his axe.

Intáshirwa y'ûmugabo ishirwa rímenetse.
A stubborn man gets convinced when his eye bursts.

Tones in general help to express different lexical, grammatical and even semantic meanings. In the case of some proverbs, the tones follow a certain pattern and it gives rhythm and enhances musicality.

2.3.2. Tonality

Proverbs as a genre of oral literature are performed by the voice of people. They benefit a lot from the flexibility of the voice. The speaker can put the tone of their voice and the tonal qualities of their language to good use in their speech discourse. To paraphrase A. E Meeussen and Greimas as quoted by F.M. Rodegem (1983), tonality is a very indispensable verbal spice that puts the proverb in evidence, imposes a contextual breakdown in discourse and therefore confirms its oral nature: it is the low intonation⁹². Indeed, to express a truth in a restrained tone with a moderation that is suitable to the wise is to give it more weight. It is in fact another way to discreetly underline it. However, as it is not possible to put into the written form the modulation of voice, it can only be schematically represented in the following way:



Legend:

~~~~~: The ordinary flow of speech where the speaker uses an alternation of rising and falling tone of the voice

————: A proverb that can be uttered at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a speech.

<sup>92</sup>A. E Meeussen and Greimas in Francis Marie Rodegem.op.cit., p. 384.

When the speaker wants to use a proverb during his/her speech, the tone of the voice lowers to give weight and particular attention to the proverb about to be quoted.

All in all, it is the images of the proverb that the addresser calls upon together with tone of the sounds, intonation of voice and the context of application in order to communicate a message.

### 2.3.3. Alliteration and assonance

Kirundi proverbs are rich in sounds and this helps to play on the emotions of addressee through their ears. The alliteration effect has an evident aesthetic and mnemonic value. In most Kirundi proverbs we have alliteration and assonance and their combination gives pleasure to the ears when the proverb is rendered orally. The overall mood serves to enhance rhythm. The following are examples among many others:

*Akagabo karajije akaguru hanze bakita imburamutima.*

A (small) man whose leg spends the night outside is qualified heartless.

In the proverb above, we have the presence of the consonant [k] four times and the presence of the vowel [a] twelve times.

The richness of the oral texture stresses the idea that the oral artist is not anybody since we see clearly that proverbs are ‘woven’ artistically. The artist is a person who uses ordinary words in a peculiar way. For example, in ordinary language, we could say “*umugabo araraguza mu bagore* meaning “a man who wanders among women” or simply a womanizer but there is use of *akagabo karajije akaguru hanze* using a diminutive strategy not only to express disapproval towards that behaviour but also to create a similar sound [ka] in three consecutive words for aesthetic effect of the proverb.

In the same way, there is creation of sound effects in the other examples of proverbs below.

*Umugabo agaramangana umugayo.*

A man proudly walks with scorn.

In the preceding example, the consonant [g] is present four times and [m] is present three times. The vowel [a] is present eight times and [u] four times. In this proverb, the dominant sound is [ga].

*Umugore agona agoramira umugabo.*

A wife who snores causes trouble to her husband.

In the example above, the consonant [g] is present four times while the consonant [m] is present three times. The vowel [a] is present six times and [o] four times. The dominant sound is [go].

In the following example, the consonant [s] is present three times, [m] three times and [g] two times. The presence of the vowel [a] is seven times.

*Isema y- umugore irasama rugasaba.*

The cries of an enraged woman disrupt the household.

Alliteration coupled with assonance make very beautiful sounds in Kirundi proverbs.

#### **2.3.4. Imagery**

This section presents imagery as especially the vehicle of metaphors and similes and vivid mental description used to create a picture out of words. Other types of images such as allusion are presented under their own heading. Images have a concrete and sharp vividness in communication.

Kirundi proverbs are very rich in figurative language as they try to give a lot of information clearly in few words. Proverbs themselves are often used metaphorically in speeches because they are used in contexts different from the original contexts that prompted their authorship. Metaphor is one of the most important imagery of Kirundi proverbs. Metaphor in proverbs is often constructed on analogy “which mediates between the elements of two different cognitive domains” or where “one proposition from one

semantic domain is used to conceptualise or describe another proposition from another semantic domain”<sup>93</sup>, to use Beck’s words.

The choice of words for proverbs to be effective is very important. The oral artist chose from the many words available in a language what is appropriate in creation of a proverb. Proverbs are shaped into rememberable and readily retrievable images of broad applicability with potentiality to draw out emotional responses. In fact, imagery is useful in giving a mental representation of abstract idea. The “anonymous” artist uses words effectively but economically as s/he needs to communicate while keeping the rhythm and beauty to please ears.

The following proverb is built on metaphor:

*Nta nkokokazi ibika isake iriho.*

No hen crows when the cock is there.

The hen refers to a woman while the cock refers to the man as one of my informants rightly puts it:

*Mu Kirundi bavuze ngo Nta nkokokazi ibika isake iriho, nibaza ko ari imvungo ngereranyo bashatse kuvuga umugabo n’umugore mu rugo. Ni ukuvuga ko umugore atofata ijamba ubwa mbere hariho umushingantahe mu rugo. Iyo rukamvye haseruka umushingantahe ubwa mbere.*<sup>94</sup>

In Kirundi, if they say that “*No hen crows when the cock is there*”, I think that it is a figurative speech when they want to talk about a man and a woman at home. It means that a wife cannot take the word first in the household if she has a husband. When the situation becomes hot, it is the man who shows up first.

---

<sup>93</sup> Rose Marie Beck, op.cit., p.148.

<sup>94</sup> Anne Spes Nishimwe, oral interview, Rohero, 07 February 2013. This woman is in charge of communication and plea for a collective of more than 45 feminine associations and NGOs “CAFOB” in Burundi. I met her in her office in Rohero area.



It is culturally assumed that women are not supposed to speak or express their opinions in public. This view is deeply embedded in African patriarchal standards of behaviour, which relegate the women to the domestic arena of the home and the family. We think it was traditionally done so for decency since despite the fact that they were not allowed to express their opinion in public, they were the best advisors to their husbands.

Another example of metaphor is:

*Umugabo ni umwugariro.*

The man is a barricade of the homestead's entrance.

Because the man is expected to be the protector of his family, he is equated with the traditional gate made by pieces of dry trees that are normally used to block the entrance to the compound of the homestead from outside the fence, and hence protect the family from intrusion or external danger. As it can be noticed, the metaphor serves to harness the emotions of the addressee.

There are also similes but they are not many:

*Urya nk-umugabo ukanirwa.*

If you eat like a rich, you get choked.

In the proverb above *umugabo* is synonym with rich. The proverb implies that if someone swallows a big quantity of food the person can get choked. Internally it is a simile but it can work as an external metaphor by analogy because it is more frequent to use proverbs as external metaphor. By extension it calls for each one to live on one's style and to spend according to one's means to avoid the worst that could result from imitation.

The following are examples of proverbs that reflect the image of vivid description:

*Umugabo yiganje aryama acuramye bakoroserezayo.*

If an imposing man sleeps with his head at the bottom of the bed, one content oneself with covering him as such.

The image carried in the proverb above is that the powerful always imposes his views even when they seem to be awkward. The next proverb almost similar to the preceding one reflects how authority is influential.

*Akageza k-umugabo kugara urugi atari kanini.*

It is the man's hand that closes the door no matter how small size it may be.

In the following proverbs, there is a vivid description of how a useless woman looks like.

*Imburakimazi y'umugore yirirwa irabagara imishatsi.*

A useless woman spends a whole day weeding from her hair.

*Imburakimazi y'umugore iramvya mw'irima.*

A useless woman sits her legs stretched on a mat during the cultural season.

*Umugore w'intarima yonsa isuka.*

A lazy woman feeds her hoe's handle with her breasts.

All the three proverbs above vividly describe the same type of woman: a lazy one who wastes her time in non profit things instead of using it profitably.

Normally, the work in fields is traditionally allocated to women who cultivate their field, plant seeds, and remove weeds from the field to expect good harvest to feed their people. And the value of a woman is measured on the basis of how hard working she is. A woman who does not work but wastes her time is useless. There is a philosophy of life behind this image. Once a woman has cultivated, planted and harvested, there is a lot of food for every member of the household. Children are fed and this shows that there is hope for continuation of life and hope in a future generation. If she wastes her time and does not cultivate, there is no hope for the future, she serves no purpose, so she is mean. That image can be applied across time, social and cultural boundaries to extrapolate the loss and hardships that those who are lazy cause to society because they are parasite.

Kirundi proverbs are very rich in imagery because they say very little to mean a lot. It is necessary to decipher intentions hidden between the combinations of words. The choice of words to "make" proverbs is not hazardous but well done because words are chosen for their evoking character and their cultural connotations. The visual imagery is so strong.

The opposition plays a capital role in the choice of imagery in Kirundi proverbs. That reflects the natural categorization of human beings in binaries potentially dichotomous:

man/woman, leaders/ subordinates, the rich/the poor, the great/the humble, coq/hen, milk/water, and many others. These are some examples:

*Umugabo ntiyicwa n'inzara yicwa n'inzigo.*

A man is not killed by hunger but by jealousy.

In the proverb above, there is opposition of *inzigo//inzara*, that is, hunger// jealous.

In the following proverb, there is opposition *w-ubwenge// ikijuju*, that is, wise// foolish, and *yubaka// kirusambuza*, that is, builds // tears:

*Umugore w'ubwenge yubaka urugo rwiwe ariko ikijuju kirusambuza ayiwe maboko.*

Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish one tears hers down with her hands.

There are a lot of Kirundi proverbs that are built with that technique of image binaries potentially dichotomous.

### **2.3.5. Parallelism**

Parallelism is a device whereby the “creator” of the proverb brought together in a balanced relationship ideas and images that may seem independent of one another. As Richard Bauman points it out, ‘parallelism involves the repetition, with systematic variation, of phonic, grammatical, semantic or prosodic structures, the combination of invariant and variant elements in the construction of an utterance.’<sup>95</sup> The repetition and /or opposition of sounds, words and forms give the symmetric parallelism. From a functional point of view, the parallel constructions may serve mnemonic aids.

*Umugabo aravuga umugore yavuga rukaba rucitse itongo.*

The husband speaks and if the wife argues the marriage gets dislocated.

In the proverb above, there is opposition of man and woman and a relation of causality.

---

<sup>95</sup> Richard Bauman.op.cit.,p.18.

Parallelism indeed becomes more striking when two elements are brought together in contrast or contradiction within the same statement. This technique is called antithetic or purely contrastive parallelism.

*Umugabo ntatwarwa n'uruzi aba atwawe n'urubanza.*

A responsible man is not carried away by a river but by that which obliges him to cross it.

There is contrast of *ntatwarwa// atwawe*, that is, is not carried away // is carried away.

In the proverb above, there is opposition of negative-affirmative verbal forms while in the next proverbs, there is opposition of affirmative-negative verbal forms *akira// ntakira*, that is, can escape // cannot escape and *musangira// ntimusangira*, that is, share // do not share.

*Umugabo akira ikimwirukako ntakira ikimwirukamwo.*

A man can escape that (danger) which runs after him but not that which runs in him.

*Umugore musangira amata ntimusangira amazi.*

With a woman you share milk but not water.

In this type of parallelism that may also be properly called semantic because strengthened by opposition of verbal forms, the change is in the senses or meanings assigned to words escape // cannot escape; after//in; share// do not share; milk// water. Like sonic elements, parallelism is also a tool that enhances rhythm and pleasure.

### **2.3.6. Paradox**

Paradox is another strong literary tool used in proverbs as the following Kirundi proverb illustrates it:

*Wirukana umugore ngo aguguna igufa ukazana uwurimira miyonzwa.*

If you chase a wife under the pretence that she scrapes out a bone, you may bring the one who swallows it wholly without chewing it.

*Igufa* symbolises behaviour. To capture the whole meaning of the paradox contained in the proverb, one needs to know that *igufa*, bone symbolises behaviour of a woman, to

mean in whole that after chasing a woman accusing her of bad behaviour, you marry one of worse behaviour.

The paradox resides in the fact that one may think to have reacted in a reasonable way while s/he aggravates the situation. The result finally got is contrary to what was expected. Paradox is like a wink of an eye. The phenomenon of paradox consists of complementarities of two opposite concepts. Paradox targets surprise in proverbs. It is very rich in meaning. It asserts a truth sometime stinging, astonishing, shocking and even cutting in order to shock the spirit and to oblige it to think.

### 2.3.7. Allusion

By allusion, it means reference to some familiar concept. Each proverb alludes to an original situation or experience in the past from which other various contexts of application in the society can be generated. ‘Allusion is a device whereby such an idea or image is used in a tightly compressed form; the origin or source of the allusion is hardly apparent from the context in which it occurs, but the user has assumed that the speakers of the language already know that source’<sup>96</sup>, according to Isidore Okpewho. Of course, the allusion makes sense to the addressee only if s/he is familiar to the situation of origin. In most cases, allusion is made to the daily experience of human relationships, tensions, joys and pains, and individual preoccupations. The popular mind ignores abstract terms and the “creators” of proverbs use allusive equivalence which is able to seduce and convince by its concreteness.

For example, to know a comprehensive construction of masculinity of the Kirundi proverb *Ubugabo si urucumu*<sup>97</sup>, that is, [Bravery /virility does not mean carrying a long spear] one needs to know what *urucumu* alludes to in the life of a Burundian man.

---

<sup>96</sup>Isidore Okpewho. op.cit., p. 100.

<sup>97</sup> The proverb was collected during news time from one of private radios in Burundi in February 2013. A journalist was talking to one of Burundian political leaders who had fled the country after 2010 elections and who was announcing his intention to come back to Burundi. The journalist asked him if he had no fear of what could happen to him once he comes. The political leader answered with the proverb and added that death is one of the big steps of life.

According to tradition, a spear was an indispensable tool for Burundian men. It was used in hunting, in protection of their families and in wars. But, a fearful man could run away with his spear or even injure himself with his own spear as the Kirundi proverb says it: *Umugabo-bwa yicwa n'icumu ryiwe*, that is, A man-dog<sup>98</sup> is killed by his own spear. That is why a true man was characterized by courage, not because of the size of the spear but in handling it when facing an enemy or any challenge. Thereof the proverb was prompted: a big or long spear is not enough to determine who is a “real man”, as he can have it and fail to manipulate it properly. Successful manipulation says more than simply having it. By extension, spear may allude to the male sex and then to virility.

All in all, proverbs, whether using images of animals or inanimate objects, allude to the daily experience of human relationships.

### 2.3.8. Symbolism

Symbolism is another device that is found in Kirundi proverbs. A symbol is a concrete or familiar object that is used to refer to or to explain an abstract idea and less familiar reality. For instance, in the proverb below:

*Impfizi y'umugabo ntiyimirwa.*

The bull-man is set no boundaries.

The bull symbolizes the man. It is the archetype of power and virility.

The symbol is normally between two things. In the symbol, there is always a relationship between an object and another one that is different. The symbol is any concrete sign which evokes something that is absent or that is abstract. The symbol is a privileged mechanism to translate a profound idea and many Kirundi proverbs are built on the basis of symbol. All what is associated with “man” such as spear, machete, bull and pillar symbolise power, superiority while all what is associated with “woman” like pot, bread symbolise weakness and vulnerability.

---

<sup>98</sup> Man-dog = coward; man equated to a dog

### 2.3.9. Repetition

Proverbs are also built with the technique of repetition as illustrated in the next two proverbs:

*Akari mu nda y'umugabo gaserurwa n'akari mu nda y'umubindi.*

What is in the belly of the man is revealed by what is in the bottom of the pot.

In the first proverb above, there is repetition of [*akari mu nda.*]. We have that phrase in the two sections of the proverb. In the next proverb, there is repetition of [-sib-] because that part is present in the two sections of the proverb in question.

*Akayira ko musi y-urugo karasiba umugore n-umugabo bakaba basibiranye.*

When the way leading to the south side of the homestead is no longer maintained, it is a sign that the husband and the wife do not get along any more.

Repetition can be used either to make music or to emphasize. Repetition also involves regularity of beat and the latter pleases to the ear and thus functions as both mnemonic and musical devices.

In brief, Kirundi proverbs as poetically crafted literary entities are still widely used within the cultural boundary in contemporary Burundi. They display various stylistic techniques characteristics of the Kirundi language which are not common in everyday speech, in order to achieve specific effects of beauty and meaning.

The different devices in proverbs suggest the oral complexity of oral texts. They contribute to the effectiveness of the proverb. Without them we might have an ordinary piece of sentences without any sophistication. Because of these stylistic qualities Kirundi proverbs linger in people's minds and touch their heart.

## 2.4. Textual structure of Kirundi proverbs

The textural structure, that is the stylistic qualities, underlines the textual structure. The text in the case of proverbs consists in one version or the recitation of a proverb. The Kirundi proverb is categorized as a normative and not performative discourse<sup>99</sup> according to Hilaire Ntahomvukiye (2010). In the thought of the same author, the normative discourse is “a one statement discourse” built by a speaker as unchangeable and indisputable in order to communicate where the speaker must use a universal or culture specific norm to persuade his partner, to put an end to a hot discussion or only to remind his/her addressee a principle of life that he was about to violate by his/her behaviour or act; and Kirundi proverbs have this nature of operation.

The structural identity of proverbs of our corpus falls into two main categories. Some proverbs seem to be talking to a particular person. These proverbs implicate the addressee by making use of the second person singular [*u-*] (you). But this ‘you’ is actually used to express an impersonal value since it does not vary whether you are talking to one person or to many persons. There are few proverbs of that type in Kirundi.

*Ukengera agafu ka mukeba kakakuraza umugabo.*

You can despise little flour of your co-wife but it makes you spend the night without a husband.

The use of [*u-*] ‘you’ in that context is as if one would say:

One can despise little flour of her co-wife but it makes her spend the night without a husband.

The proverb conveys the lesson that an apparently weaker individual can cause unexpected difficulties for a more powerful rival. So no one would despise the rival but should treat them with seriousness.

---

<sup>99</sup>Hilaire Ntahomvukiye. *L'univers Littéraire du Burundi*. Bujumbura: Presses Lavigerie. 2010, pp 106-130.



*Inkoni ikubise mukeba uyirenga urugo.*

The stick that has whipped your co-wife ought to be thrown over the fence (away).

The [ *u-* ]‘*you*’ in the proverb can also be understood as impersonal:

The stick that has whipped one’s co-wife ought to be thrown over the fence (away).

However, most of Kirundi proverbs are told in impersonal style as involving a third person. They are told indifferently whether addressing to one person or to a group of people or to one person and using the group as an eyewitness.

*Umugabo anyagirwa umubiri ntanyagirwa umutima.*

A man’s body can be soaked by the rain but his heart will never get wet.

The word [*umugabo*] in the proverb above suggests how a courageous person, male or female, can remain intact in the face of problems.

*Umugore wa karima-nzira ntiyubaka.*

A woman who does nothing else other than wandering cannot sustain her marriage.

The proverb suggests the meaning that the household or the marriage of a lazy woman is threatened to ruin.

In Kirundi proverbs, it is evident that proverbial usage is traceable to a non-featuring third party, which exists outside the domain of the communicative discourse. As it appears in the proverbs-sample, I agree with Kwesi Yankah that ‘the speaker promotes the perception of the proverbs as an intrusion by a third person in a situation where a neutral authoritative source is needed, rather than the speaker himself, to articulate redeeming cultural principles appropriate to the situation at hand’<sup>100</sup>. The next proverb that may be told as a piece of warning to someone who likes to stay outside during late hours in the evening demonstrates that thought even further:

---

<sup>100</sup> Kwesi Yankah’s “Proverbs: The Aesthetics of Traditional Communication” in Rev. Canon Benji Egede’s “Selected Ika Proverbs: Their Aesthetics and Contexts of Usage.” *Education*. Vol. 127, no.4, p. 606.

*Umugabo ntatinya ijoro atinya ico vyarihuriyemwo.*

A man never fears travelling at dark night but he fears what he has already encountered in it.

The proverb above suggests that people fear the most consequences of their bad acts or behaviours rather than the cause itself. A dark night implies any awkward step or a dangerous behaviour that can be adopted by a person, brief whatever illegal. Darkness here is opposed to light, truth. The proverb can be extended to various situations. For instance, there are some people who fear stealing not because they are convinced that stealing is bad but because they fear the punishment that may be inflicted on them once they are caught. To them one can say: “A man never fears travelling at dark night but he fears what he has already encountered in it.”

The addressee feels that there is an authoritative source behind that truth as the addresser seems to invoke a reliable authority, uncontested if not incontestable. The one to whom a proverb is told is not invited to reflect upon its force, veracity or the height of the expression – because these are already taken for granted – but to put it into application, to conform his/her life to the message from the proverb, to feel joy or ‘proud’ if it is an exaltation, or to learn from it to avoid the worst in case it is a warning.

There are some common features to the structure of Kirundi proverbs. First, all of them are, to paraphrase Ntahomvukiye (2010), a “one formulaic statement discourse”<sup>101</sup> in declarative form. Second, all Kirundi proverbs have a rhythmic structure that is bipartite. Indeed, they have a beginning and a completion to the point that the speaker can tell only the beginning of a proverb and then the receiver completes the message as in the following examples:

*Umugore w’ishishi..... (ntareka guhehera umwana).*  
In spite of her repugnance..... (a woman does not stop wiping her child’s bottom).

*Umugabo atemba kw-icumu .....(ntatemba kw-ijambo).*  
A man can stumble on his spear..... (but never over given word).

---

<sup>101</sup> Hilaire Ntahomvukiye, op.cit. ,p.106.

The existence of such statements whose second part can be omitted during communication confirms that every proverb is a statement not only of public repute but also a simple reminder of a known truth well established by usage in public domain.

Identifying with this point of view with regard to the structure of the proverbial text, Alan Dundes (1975) as quoted by Wolfgang Weider states that ‘proverbs consist of at least one topic and one comment about the topic’. ‘The two basic structural slots, that is, topic and comment, can be filled contentwise with greater or lesser extension of either topic or comment or both’<sup>102</sup>, as he continues saying. The meaning of the proverb derives from the interaction of the two sections. The ‘two structural slots’ suggest their similarity to parts of compound words from whose interaction single meanings emerge. This fact determines how to read or utter a Kirundi proverb. Tae-Sang Jang (2002) calls that structure of proverbs ‘completely balanced bipartite and incompletely balanced bipartite structure’<sup>103</sup> depending whether the two parts have the same number of syllables or not.

The following is the way proverbs can be split into two sections or “slots” standing against each other according to the way they are read or uttered:

*Umugabo ntahora n-iryo / buba aribwo buzeze*

If a man never gives his opinion / that is stupidity.

*Umugore mugucura umugabo/ amucura umuniho*

A woman fond of food / pretends to be sick in presence of her husband.

*Ahari abagabo / ntihagwa ibara.*

Where there are men / no tragedy occurs.

---

<sup>102</sup> Alan Dundes. “On the Structure of the Proverb (1975)” in Wolfgang Weider’s “The Proof of the Proverb is in the Probing” in <http://haldjas.folklore.ee/folklore/vol35/mieder.pdf> . p.11 [Accessed 27 September 2012].

<sup>103</sup>Tae-Sang Jang. “Aspects of poetic balance and cohesion in Hausa proverbs”. *Journal of African-Cultural Studies*, Volume 15, Number 2, December 2002, p.216.

*Amosozu y'umugabo/ atemba aja mu nda.*

The tears of a man / roll down into the belly.

*Umugore w'isema /abika umugabo.*

A woman of bad omen / foretells the death of her husband.

The meaning of the proverb is derived from the inter-section interaction like the meaning of a compound word.

## 2. 5. Linguistic and literary identity

In Burundi, proverbs are 'linguistic maxims'. They constitute, to borrow Gbenga Fasiku's words, a 'powerful rhetorical device for the shaping of moral consciousness, opinions, and beliefs'<sup>104</sup> in a discreetly allusive manner. Better than a direct blame and with a detour that hits the imagination, the Kirundi proverbial discourse imposes itself better than a dry and brutal truth or remark. The proverb is opposite to an aggressive speech. It suggests but does not ordain, it advises and does not impose, it persuades the addressee basing on significant experiences from the past and the addressee draws himself/herself a lesson from the 'already-seen' and 'already-said' by analogy. The proverb also helps to develop mental clarity and perception by allowing a concrete representation of abstract ideas. In fact, it transcends the everyday speech by aiming at both social and literary excellence. The weight allocated to a proverb in argumentation in Burundian culture is reflected in the following proverb: *Umugani ungana ingoma*, that is, a proverb is as respectable as the drum<sup>105</sup>.

The proverbs' literary aspects enhance their role of 'didacticism and education and more generally a medium for the expression of commonly held views and wisdom'<sup>106</sup>, to use the words of Tae Sang Jang. The norms and etiquette that set and regulate the smooth

---

<sup>104</sup>Gbenga Fasiku quoted by Jeylan Wolyie Hussein in "A Discursive Representation of Women in Sample Proverbs from Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya". *Research in African Literatures*, Vol.40, No.3 (Fall 2009), p. 96.

<sup>105</sup> In traditional Burundi, the drum *ingoma* was the symbol of the royal power or the supreme authority.

<sup>106</sup> Tae Sang Jang. "A Poetic Structure in Hausa Proverbs". *Research in African Literatures* 30 (1), 1999, p. 83.

running of Burundi's social network, manifested in the practice of their religious belief, strong family ties and neighbourliness are depicted in proverbs. In fact, words in general and these words in proverbial forms are charged with power to shape consciousness for humanity. The figurative language where there is a play of words to express an idea in ironical way, or with exaggeration, or with paradox, and the like are tools and techniques that the creators of proverbs used to address their potential audience.

Identity of syllables in a proverb is intended by the "anonymous" artist who first conceived the proverb as a form of rhythm, as the following proverbs illustrate the case:

*Ahavye/ umugabo/ hasigara /umugayo*

Where a man is subtracted remains scorn.

Even the syntactic arrangement acts in favour of the aesthetics. The verb in Kirundi [*ahavye*] comes before the subject [*umugabo*] instead of the other way around. There is also opposition of [*ahavye*] 'subtracted' and [*hasigara*] 'remains'. Furthermore, there is opposition of [*umugabo*] symbol of honour, power and protection of a homestead and [*umugayo*] 'scorn', 'contempt'. In other words, that proverb could be understood as when a man is no longer in the homestead or when a man dies, the scorn enters and this is the consequent logic. Traditionally a homestead where there is a man was respected while the one without a man was despised.

The next proverb is a variant of the preceding one:

*Urugo rutagira umugabo rutahana umugayo.*

A household without a man is home for scorn.

A family in which the man is still alive was respected even when the man would be away to look for provisions for the family. But when the man was dead, it was a problem for the widow and orphans because of the absence of a protector and spokesperson. That proverb can be used in various contexts just to mean that the absence of the head in any organisation can lead to some disorder. But at the same time it serves to transmit the idea of the male superiority in the household.

Proverbs reveal the folks' worldview and their relation to socio-cultural and economic environment. Proverbs are a medium for the expression of commonly held views and wisdom.

By symbolical assimilation, one can see that one of views expressed in these proverbs is male and female identities. Proverbs using these images portray the construction of masculinity and femininity among Barundi. They show what kind of man and woman the Burundian society cherishes on the one hand and the one the society would not like to see sharing among its members on the other hand. In another way, they are restrictive traditional rules that regulate how men and women have to relate. Norms of conduct are very important in uniting members of a group and without these there would be chaos in the group.

For other types of folklore such as jokes for instance, collecting the context is important because the knowledge of the context can explain variations in text and texture, where you can have variants of jokes. It is not the case for proverbs because they are fixed forms. What is important for proverbs is the knowledge of the implied meaning. That meaning can be incorporated in any context, be it social-cultural, political and/or economic, provided that it suggests the meaning of the original context.

The importance of social order to Barundi is reflected in how norms of conduct for men and women are portrayed and so become like a code in proverbs, a genre that is easy to memorize for application or further repetition whenever need be. In return, proverbs can be used to inquire the gender view of Barundi.

Linguistically, the form of a proverb is short, stable and versatile and thus can easily be absorbed in everyday speech and into other folklore genres like stories, songs and plays used for education purposes or for entertainment. The choice of words and the way to link them gives the beauty of the form deeply connected to the content. Both the form and the content contribute to touch the sensibility of the listener. That kind of language imprints itself in the subconscious due to the effects of the different aesthetic elements.



involved in the quarrels of co-wives. Or else it may also have been used by someone who wanted to warn a man who was about to engage in polygamy in order to discourage him, by showing him the consequence that awaits him in case he engages polygamy. That context denotes the first meaning and it is very rare that a current situation be exactly the same as the one that “gave birth” to the proverb. For example, if a man has many wives and they start quarrelling, that proverb can be told in that real situation but one would feel shame to tell such naked truth. That is why few proverbs are self-explanatory while many are used symbolically. The possibilities to apply proverbs to new situations are indefinite. Therefore, proverbs are metaphorical statements since they reflect a general truth by reference to a specific phenomenon or experience. They are ready made figurative forms. Their performance consists in the accurate employment of them in novel contexts.

Thus for the same proverb, we can schematize contexts in the following ways, where the first context is the original while the following are the indefinite situations in which the proverb can be applied:

A.....X.....B  
 A'.....X.....B'  
 A''.....X.....B''  
 A<sup>n</sup>.....X.....B<sup>n</sup>

### ***ORIGIN***

*“A polygamous man* : A  
*always lives* : X  
*in quarrels (of his wives )* : B



**CONTEXT 1:**

Kabura is a landlord who has let his three apartments to three different families and he occupies the fourth apartment and they all share water and electricity. They are always in disagreement about the use of water and electricity because Kabura wants to use them economically while his tenants do not care. When Kabura complains about this situation, his friend tells him the proverb, just to remind Kabura that he should have separated counters by availing a counter for each apartment.

Kabura : A'

is often in disagreement : X

with his tenants : B'

**CONTEXT 2**

Marie is a full time student but she has a full time job at the same time which allows her to get fees. When she is absent at her job for some afternoons to go to class, her boss gets angry at her and threatens to chase her. When she dodges classes and goes to her job, lecturers are angry at her because she misses classes and assignments. One day, Marie goes to see her friend and tells him about her dilemma. She explains the problematic situation in which she is and starts by telling the proverb first and says jockingly that she does not see which wife to chase and which one to stay with.

Marie : A''

is : X

in dilemma : B''

Other contexts of application of the same proverb can be generated. It can be applied in any context of incompatibility of two actions. One cannot list all the contexts in which a proverb can be used because many of them may even be unpredictable. However one can mention for example as contexts of performance of the kinds of proverbs under study in weddings, meetings in cultural clubs, in ordinary conversations and many others. There is

no particular place in speech for Kirundi proverbs. It may initiate but also terminate a conversation. It can also unexpectedly be told at any time within the speech. Kirundi proverbs are therefore interesting because they are concrete, vivid, and fresh and charged with energy and surprise.

Contrary to riddles where the referent is presumably known by the poser of the riddle and is to be guessed by the addressee, in proverbs, the referent is already known to both “performer” and audience. That is why in Kirundi we say a proverb is “*umwibutsa*”, that is, a reminder because it presupposes that the referent is known by the addressee. By quoting a proverb, the speaker assumes that the audience is familiar with the example of folklore while simultaneously perpetuating it.

## **2.7. Social function of proverbs**

Proverbs as a genre of folklore are very important means of expression because they help to express abstract ideas in a concrete way. Kirundi proverbs are mostly used as rhetorical aids and stylized verbal forms.

As writers nowadays quote experts from various domains to back up their arguments, while religious leaders draw verses for example from the Bible or Qur’an to end any forms of discussion, Barundi recall proverbs to give weight to their speech. Proverbs are often the principal means a speaker uses to convey, illustrate, or reinforce a point in his/her speech.

The factor that gives proverbs power is that they are inherited from ancestors. This makes that when a Kirundi proverb is uttered, ‘it strikes like an arrow into the heart’ of the addressee, to use William Bascom’s words. Users of proverbs often preface such use with courtesy formulae like “*our forefathers concluded*”... or “*said that*”... , or “*our ancestors stated that*”... then comes the proverb. However, those formulae are not compulsory.

Proverbs are metaphorical statements since they reflect a general truth – but not always absolute – by reference to a specific phenomenon or experience that once happened in the past. In Isidore Okpewho (1992)’s argument, it may have once happened as an accident and was therefore passed on from generation to generation to shape the lives of men and

women. By recalling the ancestors, Barundi want to strengthen tradition, where proverbs originate, and to endow proverbs with greater value, prestige and spiritual dimension. They have been proved to be effective in exercising the social control and in the maintenance of institutions of the Burundian culture in the past. And so contemporaries believe this genre can fulfil the same function even today. Proverbs are very strong in keeping the status quo because they are considered as a spiritual legacy of our forefathers. To pay tribute to ancestors and to show them respect, we are supposed to keep their legacy. Proverbs therefore function as an intergenerational tool for the transmission of wisdom.

In Burundi, proverbs embrace all aspects of social, moral and religious life of Burundians. They help to establish the authority of a statement or a custom in situations during conversations, public speeches, court cases or contests of a speaker, and within stories and songs. In Kirundi, proverbs are told in various sorts of situations and serve a variety of purposes such as to reinforce or foreground the argument, to render clarity and charm to one's statement as well as authority to one's points, to correct vices, to justify or to encourage a behaviour, to add some wit or spice to one's statements and to make the points more firmly or to equip citizens, especially the younger with the fundamental lessons of conduct and moral discernment in an indirect but firm way. Kirundi Proverbs never tell you directly what to do or to avoid. They almost never use the imperative mood.

The fact that a proverb has the word '*umugabo*' or a male lexeme in it does not mean that it is exclusively used in context that involve men, and this applies for the image of '*umugore*' or female lexeme as well. They can be used in a political, social or economic situation. They add flavour to the speaker's style.

Whether used in social, economic or political context, what interests more this research is the choice of words containing male and female lexemes used to make the metaphoric folks. They are used to make a point but by making the point in a metaphorical way, they are conveying a message at the same time about the philosophy of Barundi in relation to what is a man and a woman and how they relate. In fact, proverbs purporting to play a

specific function may concomitantly provide secondary information such as gender roles, social values and gender ideology.

The analysis of proverbs in this study intends to cast light on gender identity with focus on the societal construction of masculinity and femininity.

## **2.8. Conclusion**

In oral societies, there are different genres for transmitting knowledge and wisdom. For the case of Kirundi proverbs, they are given a form that permits them to be repeatable. The various devices for creating Kirundi proverbs contribute to creating memorable ‘well crafted literary entities’<sup>108</sup>, as mentions Tae-Sang Jang, which can be easily retrieved from the memory. That is what makes that Kirundi proverb be a genre still alive in contemporary time.

In Burundian culture, the quoting of proverbs was often associated with age in the past, but there are changes nowadays due to the influence of school and to other media from where children and young people learn and use proverbs. However, it is not common for children to quote proverbs when addressing adults. In Burundi, when you are an elder, if in your speech you do not quote a proverb – appropriate to the situation – your speech lacks weight and you are also considered light. Both men and women use proverbs without distinction of sex. This means that women unconsciously play a role in the maintenance and perpetuation of negative gender stereotypes through proverbs alongside men.

The proverbs as defined by stylistic qualities are easy to retrieve from memory, and as a genre of oral literature, may be able to draw the receiver’s/addressee’s attention to aesthetic devices of the ‘text’ in case of a current context of utterance. The different artistic elements in a proverb interact with one another to create terseness.

---

<sup>108</sup> Tae-Tang Jang (2002). *op.cit.*, p.216.

The literary aspects of proverbs enhance their sense of didacticism and education by expression of an abstract idea in concrete terms. The neatness, the beauty and shortness with which proverbs are framed give them a mnemonic quality. As a Kirundi speaker, it is enough to hear a Kirundi proverb once to fix it once for all. That is one of the justifications of the hold of old-fashioned ideas carried through proverbs.

In orality, sounds play a great role. They have the power to the ears to convey the sense of words. That is why many features of Kirundi proverbs are better enjoyed when heard rather than when read silently. Their sonic richness and stylistic qualities are more pleasurable to the ears than to the eyes.

The different aesthetic devices, be it tone, assonance and alliteration, repetition, imagery, symbol, parallelism, paradox, allusion together with rhythm and tonality serve to give meaning to the performance clinging to the addressee(s)'s minds and emotions. They express the Barundi's aesthetic spirit. In other words, they reveal, as Bauman would put it, 'a fundamental interest in the dimension of human existence'<sup>109</sup>.

By its denotative content, the proverb captivates the sensibility and stimulates at the same time the power of the mind to think, understand and form judgments logically about the norms that the proverb evokes. Kirundi proverbs have sustainable qualities because of their terseness and their formulaic structure that play a mnemonic role.

If the proverb, which is a legacy of tradition, has been kept in contemporary time, it is not only because it has survived the test of time, but also because it is expressed in a friendly form to the memory that is easy to memorise and pass on. If one wants to transmit a message one wants to impact on several generations with less or no alteration, the proverbial form is very appropriate. Contemporaries could borrow this form to impact on future generations.

The harmony of the form in proverbs reflects Barundi's desire for social harmony by an arrangement of men, women and children into a certain order. That implies that in

---

<sup>109</sup> Richard Bauman. *op.cit*, p.vii.

Kirundi proverbs, there is an interaction of linguistic and social phenomena. It is important to understand the relation between proverbs as a sociocultural-aesthetic product (genre) and masculinity and femininity as gender identification, proverbs reflecting and yet continuously perpetuating the fabrication of gender. Those proverbs are part of the mechanisms that the Burundian society uses to fabricate and enforce the notions of masculinity and femininity. The Kirundi proverb translates the synthetic and harmonious spirit of Barundi.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FEMININE AND MASCULINE CONSTRUCTS IN KIRUNDI PROVERBS

#### 3.1. Introduction

Many scholars have developed a more elaborate description of patriarchy in literature by presenting it as an oppressing institution to women, but not an explanation of why it exists. Owing to the fact that each work of art reflects to some degree the age of its composition and the context of production, and that it is better to situate each work of art in its time to better understand it and appreciate it objectively, this study relates the construction of masculinity and femininity to tradition.

This chapter focuses on interrogating tradition through Kirundi proverbs to understand who men and women are before asking why they behave and relate in the way they do. Society has clearly delineated categorical distinctions between men and women to organise itself in a hierarchical way because hierarchy cannot be built without differences according to common belief. Based on their biological differences, people learn which emotions they're supposed to display, which activities they're supposed to enjoy and excel at, and which ones they're supposed to avoid or suck at, how to talk to each other, how to manage one's body language, which kind of work or hobbies they're supposed to deal with.<sup>110</sup>

Society brings up its people to act, to behave and think as male or female in order to maintain social and sexual identity for the organisation of the society. In order to create coherence between men and women, society tries to build unchangeable and predictable attitudes and behaviours through the process of socialisation. In that traditional structure,

---

<sup>110</sup> See: "The Social Construction of Gender" in *The Feminist Agenda* in <http://www.thefeministagenda.blogspot.com/2009/04/social-construction-of-gender.html> [Accessed on 20 August 2012]

the woman is not at all less responsible compared to the man. However it does not exclude the hierarchical relationships between husbands and wives. In order to avoid confusion or potential clashes, the society constructed various qualities for men and women and these are transmitted from generation to generation. This could be equated to contemporary organisation of work with job description for the staff in a given enterprise or company. From the top to the bottom, each one has what s/he has to do but the life of the company equally depends on the contribution of each one.

### **3.2. The difference and relation between sex and gender**

Sex and gender are two different concepts but gender is determined by sex to the extent that the two terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are used interchangeably in Kirundi language, given that Kirundi does not have a concept to name ‘gender’.

On the one hand, sex refers to biological differences of male and female. Males and females have different sexual organs. Their biological and physiological conditions are different as well. For instance, women have menstruations, get pregnant and give birth while men engender. Women have breasts, which can be used in period of lactation, whereas men have a beard as an external feature. Those fixed biological and physiological differences are what define sex.

On the other hand, gender results from cultural, social and psychological factors. Gender refers to differences acquired not through birth, but through the process of socialization. According to Jeylan W. Hussein (2004), gender is ‘the multiple ways in which maleness and femaleness are perceived, evaluated and stratified in various societies’<sup>111</sup>. In this study, gender is seen as the way in which man and woman are stratified, what one does or the way one behaves as a man or woman, and the way they are evaluated by Burundian society.

While sex of a person marks the distinction between a man’s and a woman’s body, gender refers to the social role of individuals based on their sex. In other words, gender is

---

<sup>111</sup> Jeylan W.Hussein (2004). op. cit., p.103.



the meaning connected to the anatomical configuration of men and women within a culture.

In all societies, it is quite natural for people to divide into two groups according to different criteria. This is what is known as binaries of life. Of all the binaries, the sex binary – on the base of which gender is constructed – is the most crucial and complex to deal with for three main reasons. First of all, sex taken as natural, physical and biological differences between men and women is non-negotiable. While one can shift from one binary to the other in other binaries of life, the sex binary is exceptional: one is born either male or female, except for a few rarely occurring genetic or hormonal anomalies. As witnessed in most societies including the Burundian one, the biological sex differences impact on gender identity constructions because socialization is done on the basis of the sex differences. As a consequence, it seems that there is a direct relationship between gender identity construction and gender power relations which results in male dominance and female subservience. Second, despite the seemingly unequal relations, there is a constant attraction and mutual dependence between men and women. As men and women want to please each other as ‘real man’ and as ‘real woman’ according to the societal standards, there is a “causal continuity among sex, gender and desire”<sup>112</sup>, as Butler puts it. Actually, the mind of men and women is trained by their society to appreciate one another on the basis of gender. For instance, when someone adopts the expected standard behaviour of his/her sex group – example of dressing in a certain way in a society where men and women are expected to dress in that particular way – the person from the other sex group leaves the way of dressing and goes beyond, and starts thinking about that behaviour in relation to sex; hence follows desire. The third reason which results from the two preceding reasons is that the continuity of the human race lies on the two wings of gender binary: masculinity and femininity. None of the other binaries have the continuity of the human race on their shoulders. That is why gender concern as an academic discourse has attracted much attention of the society particularly since the

---

<sup>112</sup> Judith Butler. *op.cit.*, p. 284.

twentieth century in an effort to deal with the gender issue with research based policies. Before that period gender relations were almost taken for granted.

One of the main objectives of society is to achieve harmony among the various members of the community. By experience, it has been proved that gender cannot be dealt with like other forms of power relations. The institution of a compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire<sup>113</sup>. The regulatory practices that govern gender must be culturally intelligible notions of identity to avoid confusion among members of the culture in question.

### **3.3. Masculinity and femininity**

According to Mark Bengé Okot (1994), “[m]asculinity refers to the quality, state and degree of being masculine [whereas] femininity refers to the qualities designated by society as feminine”.<sup>114</sup> In each culture, there is a fundamental construct of what constitutes an ideal man and an ideal woman. As a matter of fact, each society sets up accepted behaviours to which men and women are expected to conform. There are perceptions of maleness and femaleness that are seen as dominant, natural and privileged and that are taken as the norm. Therefore, boys and girls are socialized in a way to meet those standards of predominant definitions of masculinity and femininity as social constructs. Those norms vary from society to society, from culture to culture; and from one historical period to another or from one place to another even within the same culture depending on the needs or values to aim at or safeguard. This reflects the complexity of masculine and feminine identities. To be masculine or to be feminine is to conform to socially set up forms of maleness or femaleness. A man or a woman who does not conform is considered to be a deviant, rebel or a ‘missed’ male or female [*ikirumbirane*].

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Mark Bengé Okot. “Gender Representation in Acoli Oral Poetry”. Kampala: Makerere University. 1994, p. 72.

By ‘missed’ male or female, Barundi mean a human being who lacks something of being a man or woman. Masculinity and femininity are culturally and socially constructed and later on reflected in pieces of arts. And so by reflecting, there is perpetuation of the practice of constructing masculine and feminine attributes as different, from generation to generation.

As examples of Kirundi proverbs reflect, the philosophy of Barundi in construction of masculinity and femininity turns around the ideas of both the necessity of authority and uniqueness of power, especially for the establishment of the family institution.

From experience of tradition, two persons cannot equally share the power within the same unit as portrayed in these few Kirundi proverbs among many others:

*Abagabo babiri ntibabana mu nzu.*

Two men/husbands can never coexist in one household.

Important words in the proverb above are [*abagabo*] men and [*mu nzu*] house in the sense of household. It implies that two husbands cannot be responsible of one family unit; or a house or a family cannot be headed by two masters as there would be conflict of powers. That is the first meaning of the proverb which reflects that there is incompatibility between two males to set up family, to be the first responsible persons of the same house. The tradition is that a male sets up family with a female. No male with a male or two males for one female in a household. By extension, the meaning behind ‘men’ in that proverb is power, authority or responsibility. Therefore, beyond incompatibility there is prediction of the clash that could result from the coexistence of two powers, two authorities or two heads within one same unit or organisation.

By extension, man is symbol of power. So, no organisation unit can be headed by two persons with equal power.

In the next proverb, the main words are [*inkuba*] thunderbird and [*igicu*] cloud.

*Inkuba zibiri ntizisangira igicu.*

Two thunderbirds cannot coexist in one cloud.

Barundi people have a belief that the noise that follows lightening flash and thunder is a result from an encounter of two thunderbirds in one cloud and this is common during the rainy season. So, in normal conditions, they do not share one cloud. When it ever happens by accident, it is catastrophic, it is frightening. Barundi are aware that it is very dangerous as it even sometimes causes death among people, animals and even burns trees.

*Buranganywa yica urugo.*

(Saying :) 'Equal slices (of bread)' destroys a household.

Proverbs one and two suggest that two equal forces cannot coexist in harmony while proverb three completes the two by showing that the fifty-fifty logic destroys a household instead of strengthening it. Who would be humble before whom? Who would be considered to hold responsibility? The same idea is entrenched by Aloys Nibizi backed up by his wife Seraphine Nicayenzi in the following terms:

*Umugabo aza imbere kuko niwe agenda kurondera umugore kubera aba akeneye umufasha... Umugore agomvye kugira rya jambo ryari rifise umugabo, kandi umugabo ataho araja akiriho, gaca kaba akajagari. Urwo rugo ntiruba rwubatswe n'abantu babiri ahubwo ruba ruriko ruhiganwamwo abagabo babiri. Ni rwa rugo ruca rusambuka.<sup>115</sup>*

The man is the head since it is he who goes to look for a wife because he needs a helper... If the woman wants to usurp the authority of the man while he is still alive, it becomes chaotic. In that case, the home is no longer set up by two individuals but it rather becomes an arena of two competing forces. As a consequence, that marriage breaks down.

It reflects that a home, and implicitly any other organisation, must have only one boss. In the purpose to reach that order, Barundi tried to institutionalize, formalize or naturalize women's secondary position in their social constructs as it can be noticed through the analysis of Kirundi proverbs. This allowed creating the hierarchical difference for the sustainability of the social order starting from the very basic unit of the society which is

---

<sup>115</sup> Aloys Nibizi & Séraphine Nicayenzi, oral interview, Nyavyamo, 11 March 2013. They have been married for 33 years .

the nuclear family. That is what lies behind the idea of fabricating a dominant man and a subservient woman who at the end of the day becomes submissive in order to circumvent possible clashes. To our ancestors to conclude: *Nta nkokokazi ibika isake iriho* [No hen crows when the cock is there], *Urugo n'urw'umugabo* [The household belongs to the man/husband], *Nta ntahe y'umugore* [A woman cannot act as a judge] as a portrayal of what is there which results from socialisation. But the use of such a discourse also informs life of men and women in that order. So, it has become like a circle.

Traditionally, the way boys and girls were educated was influenced by that kind of behaviour that was expected from man and woman. It seems that all mechanisms were put in place to create and to reinforce the myth of male superiority. Men and women tried to behave according to expected masculine and feminine attributes. The role of enculturation has been therefore to construct two different but complementary characters of males and females.

I am inclined to agree with constructionists that it is the culture and not biology that conditions men to present dominating characteristics and to women to appear more submissive and emotive. But things do not end there. In my understanding, there is a reason behind. The fact that culture is dynamic while the two characters have constants and variants is motivated, I opine, by a concern to organise a sustainable society through marriage and families. To be desired by the other sex, females and males have to meet the standards of their sex group. Following cultural evolution, some of those standards stay constant while others change to adapt to the needs and challenges of the moment without disturbing the existing order.

Since every society must be organized in order to survive, Burundian society has relied on differences of masculinity and femininity to organize itself as it is proved through analysis of proverbs in this study.

The first unquestionable manifestation of masculinity and femininity is sex: male genitals for a man and female genitals for a woman. If someone happens not to have a penis, though one may gather a number of other so called masculine attributes, one is never considered to be a man but they will say one walks, behaves or speaks *like* a man.

The same is true if one does not have a vagina, no matter how many feminine attributes one has, they will say he is *like* a woman.

In Burundian culture, becoming a man or a woman, that is, getting married is a social promotion that any male and female who meets the masculine and feminine standards /conditions must accede to in order to become a ‘full man’ and a ‘full woman’ respectively. If you do not you are socially accused of not being ‘normal’. To the question of knowing why the youth strongly aspire to step to that social stratum despite numerous obligations that are connected to it, for Anne Spès Nishimwe<sup>116</sup>, the answer was that it is a “social duty”; for Andronique Ndikumana<sup>117</sup>, it is like a “commandment”, it “is like a social law”; for Marie Claire Kezakimana<sup>118</sup>, it is “a compulsory duty required by the society”. Still, for other informants, it is an unshakable custom for Burundi that has been inherited from ancestors. Each person who meets either the male standards or female standards ought to fulfil that assignment. Whoever does not conform to that custom even nowadays is considered as an insult to their family and the society. To whoever fulfils it, it is an honour which confers to him/her a social prestige. The culture and custom are among things that push people to marry. Above all, there is a felt need in every person to love and to be loved. And unless a couple has a particular infirmity, it is through marriage that they reproduce.

To be feminine or masculine enough is to be able to fulfil the social expectations as wife and mother or husband and father except when one is naturally barren. Boyhood, manhood and fatherhood are components of masculinity while girlhood, womanhood and motherhood are vital constituents of femininity in normal cases. The Burundian culture does not have a room for grown up boys and girls who do not get married. In other

---

<sup>116</sup> Anne Spès Nishimwe <sup>116</sup>, op.cit.

<sup>117</sup> Andronique Ndikumana and Jérôme Yunzuguru, oral interview, Kivuruga, 10 March 2013. With 41 years of marriage, they stressed during our oral interview on 10 March 2013 that for a marriage to last, there must be a sincere dialogue between the husband and the wife and in the whole household when the couple have grown up children. What is furthermore evident in most of my informers is the influence of Christian religion in Burundian culture in shaping relationships between men and women.

<sup>118</sup> Marie Claire Kezakimana, Oral interview, Nyakabiga, 06 February 2013.

words, there is no social institution that wholeheartedly welcomes them. In consequence, the Kirundi language does not have terms to designate such types of persons.

If a boy at the age of maturity fails to marry, doubts about his masculinity are entertained.

Masculinity and femininity aim at well defining the status and roles of each member of the family whose founding members are man and woman. The construction of masculinity and femininity prescribes the place and position of each person, male and females in order to avoid anarchy in the family and for its balance. What is allowed or what is taboo for men and women in Burundian society intend to train especially the character and to maintain the social order, starting from the family itself which is the nucleus and nursery of the society. The culture of hierarchical order and authority is strong among Barundi according to tradition as portrayed in the next proverb: *Utaronse ikimugaba ntaronka ico agaba*<sup>119</sup> [S/he who does not have anybody to command him/her will never get somebody under his/her order]. The aforementioned proverb is a pure reflection that “[s]ociety from its highest place to its lowest, is one long chain, or rather ladder, where every individual is either above or below his nearest neighbour, and wherever he does not command he must obey. Command and obedience are but unfortunate necessities of human life”<sup>120</sup>, as John Situart Mill would say it. This identifies with Okot p’Bitek’s opinion that “man [as human generic] cannot, and must not be free...permanent bondage seems to be man’s fate.”<sup>121</sup> The following proverb entrenches the necessity of authority even more: *Nyamubura-ikimúhanūra niwe nyamubura-ikimúhāmba* [S/he who does not have anybody to reprimand her/him is the one who will not get someone to bury her/him]. From what precedes, it is evident that differences aiming at organisation have been

---

<sup>119</sup> *Ikimugaba* comes from *kugaba* the verb from which derives *umugabo* man/husband. This proverb reflects how society is like a chain where to get one who you command you must be commanded yourself.

<sup>120</sup> John Stuart Mill. “From The Subjection of Women” in Wendy K. Kolmar & Frances Bartkowski, eds. *Feminist Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2005, p.83.

<sup>121</sup> p’B.Okot. *Artist, the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Limited, 1986, p.20.

created by tradition and transmitted by enculturation and both male and female internalise it as it appears in the next comment by some of my informants:

*Umugabo yama ari umugabo, umugore akama ari umugore. Naho yoronka ubutware, araba umukuru akaba umugore, umugabo aguma ari umugabo. Naho batwara bose, witwa umugore nawe akaba umugabo*<sup>122</sup>.

A man is always a man, and a woman is always a woman. Even when she is promoted to a position of leadership, she can be a leader but she is still a woman. Even when both a man and a woman are chiefs at workplace, you are a woman and he is a man.

Marc Ntabakunzi and his wife echo the voices of many, in emphasizing the differences between men and women and the high rank that the male occupies in the mind of Barundi. Their comment suggests the traditional man-woman hierarchy which confers honour to the man even when he has done little.

What is evident through the interviews with my informants is that the idea that the Burundian culture reflects a certain social order giving priority to the man in the family household is shared by all my informants, whether old or young, men or women, educated or non educated, town dwellers or village dwellers.

This chapter tries to demonstrate that masculinity and femininity cannot be dissociated, for one cannot exist without the other. As a matter of fact, masculinity brings to mind a plethora of images diametrically opposed to that of being female in the intention to organise a coherent society. Apart from that, men and women have to develop differences to keep attraction to each other as some authors say. As it appears, masculinity and femininity have their essence in sex first and then mainly in culture. Society plays on the two factors to determine the destiny of humanity. According to constructionists, masculinity and femininity as gender identification is a construction of civilisation. During this process, there is a tendency to favour the male domination and interests in the detriment of the female that results from the hierarchy.

---

<sup>122</sup> Marc Ntabakunzi & Rahel Bucumi .op.cit.



### 3.4. Social roles of men and women in Burundi

Actually, construction of masculinity and femininity forces the question to know the needs, values or interests behind distinguishing men from women. It is worth recalling that Burundi is a patriarchal society. The Burundian society wanted that in a family where there are a husband, a wife and/ or without children each one recognises his/her status and roles. And yet, both men and women equally produce and reproduce for society sustainability.

According to Marc Ntabakunzi, ‘*Umugabo mu rugo niwe mukuru. Umugore nawe ni awa kabiri kuri we*<sup>123</sup>, that is, “the man is the first responsible in household and the wife is second to him”. In other words, the man is the head of family and is the supreme authority to whom all other members of the family have great respect. He is assisted by his wife. The wife and children owe unconditional respect to him and it is up to him to command, however without being a dictator.

On the other hand, the custom recommends that the man be the first responsible person in the family in order to guide it, protect it and to provide for the basic needs of the family. The education of boys is particularly the man’s responsibility. Thus Barundi say: *Impfizi y’intama itendera nka se* [A ram takes after its father] to reflect that boys look or behave like their father as the first meaning. By extension, that proverb suggests the influence of ‘a teacher on his pupil’, the leader on his subordinate, and the like.

In addition to taking care of little children and to educating girls, the woman has the tasks among other things to do household works and to provide the family with cooked food, care and affection. It is worth mentioning that, nowadays, this division of labour on the basis of sex is still more practiced in rural areas than in urban areas where most working women assist themselves with maids for domestic work. However, although the woman plays an important role in the family, she remains under the authority of the husband.

---

<sup>123</sup>Marc Ntabakunzi and Rahel Bucumi. op.cit.

The perception of masculinity and femininity thus constitutes one of the central points around which gender relations and gender ideologies revolve. For instance it is expected in Burundian society that a man marries into a good family to maintain his prestige, honour and dignity. And there is from where his sense of responsibility is evaluated. On the other side, the woman is perceived as a failure if she does not live up to expected standards. To be “a woman”, one has to be a ‘real’ one. However, the same applies to being “a man”. What makes them real according to Burundian tradition is presented in the present study. That is why gender differences are given importance during socialisation in order to be culturally intelligible. For a better understanding of the societal construction of masculinity and femininity in Burundian culture, it is better to recall Burundi’s conception of “family”, the basic unit of the society whose founding group members are a man and a woman, products of masculine and feminine constructs.

According to Pope John Paul II quoted by Adrien Ntabona, “La famille demeure le lieu naturel et primordial d’éducation et d’humanisation des jeunes”<sup>124</sup>, that is, “the family remains the natural and primordial place of education and humanisation of young people”. It is the basic cell in which the young make their first steps in the social exercise of solidarity and fraternity. To attack the family would therefore mean to destroy humanity because the family is the nursery of humanity as one of my informants Astère Kwizera<sup>125</sup> raised it during our oral interview.

In Burundi, the family is not only a frame of life, but also and especially a socio-economic organisation. For that organisation to be well and especially successful, one notices a hierarchy of statuses implying a differentiated traditional distribution of functions and roles. As each hierarchy must be based on differences, it reposes on factors such as age and sex in the case of men and women in Burundi. That hierarchy is there to mark the difference among the statuses of different members of the family in question. That differentiation had the advantage since time immemorial to establish smooth

---

<sup>124</sup> Pope John Paul II quoted by Adrien Ntabona in *La famille Burundaise et ses défis*, Bujumbura : Presses Lavigerie, 1992, p.281.

<sup>125</sup> Astère Kwizera, oral interview, Buyenzi, 31 January 2013.

relationships by avoiding clashes at the family level as well as at the social level. What is at the centre is not what a man or a woman loses as individual but rather communal interests for social organisation in order to live in a coherent society. In Burundi, the sense of community is very strong: to live is ‘to live with’ (*kubana*).

A male and a female are mature enough and responsible when they have had their family into which children will be born and hence perpetuate the family lineage. Human beings are mortal. So they seek to prolong their life through child bearing and education in a family. To have a child is to expand one’s personality, to have one who will prolong your existence. The project of life continues in the younger ones that one has educated (*gusiga umugani*). Celibacy for life has no place in the Burundian society according to tradition. In the same line as the child is a continuation of parents, it goes without saying that education of the child by the family occupies an important place in Burundian society.

To illustrate how important the family is among Burundi, when a grandparent greets his/her grand child or another child, s/he says: “*Gira so, gir’izina, gir’iy’uva n’iy’uja...*” which can be translated as: “Have your own father, have a name, have where you come from and where you go”; in simpler terms it means “May you have roots and destiny!” That type of greeting contains all the blessings that one can formulate towards a dear person and it encompasses a whole philosophy of life. In fact, nothing is more important for the Burundi than being born in a family, to be recognized by members of that family especially by the man who fathered the child, and to grow from there.

To have a father means to have a guarantee of being recognized and integrated in a given family, since it is the father who confers identity on children and integrates them in the big family in patrilinear system. In addition, those who claim to belong to the same father are also interconnected by the duties of fraternity. To have a name is also to be recognized and identified in the family as a full member in the long line of family relations.

To have where to come from and where to go is to belong to a human group, to have one's origins and roots in that same group with all what that encompasses in terms of rights and duties, that is, to belong to the community-family in order to become an accomplished person. That confers in return a great consideration on such person even at social level as portrayed in the following Kirundi proverb: *Akana kari n'iwabo kendanwa ibinyoro*, that is, [A young girl who originates from a healthy family is married even when she has leprosy]. It implicitly reflects that originating from a family has endowed the girl with better education. In that proverb, there is a play on words [*iwabo*] implying a healthy family and [*ibinyoro*] leprosy, a dangerous disease that attacks the skin and which is even contagious. A character which is shaped in a family – founded on marriage of masculinity and femininity – takes precedence over the leprosy according to the proverb. The following variant of the same proverb further highlights the social prestige wielded by a girl born from “a man”: *Umwana w-umugabo<sup>126</sup> yendanwa ibinyoro*, that is, [A young girl who belongs to a (rich) man is married even when she has leprosy]. In that proverb, there is a play on words [*umugabo*] rich man and [*ibinyoro*] leprosy. According to tradition, a real man is the one who is economically self-sufficient. The two variants suggest by extension that it is by interests that people accept to take risks.

In Burundi to be born and raised in a family is a passport to get consideration in society even when the one does not have external beauty as the following proverbs further stress it: *Ubwiza ntiburibwa* [Beauty is not edible] and *Ubwiza buba ku mutima nay-agatonde gatonda akamyira*, that is, [Beauty lies in heart while from a well shaped nose comes only nasal mucus]. These proverbs suggest that internal qualities of a person are more valuable than a good physical appearance. Burundi appreciate “beauty of heart” because it is imperishable and this one is nurtured in and by the family values. It is in the family where the child first acquires values of *ubuntu*<sup>127</sup>. For a Murundi well born, “to belong to a man (father)” is the ideal norm. A father is the honour to a child. In ancient times, this helped to maintain sexual order and therefore social order. It was strictly forbidden to a girl to

---

<sup>126</sup> In this proverb, the term *umugabo* refers to power and richness.

<sup>127</sup> *Ubuntu* is a Kirundi term to mean human qualities such as sharing with others, respect, sensitivity to others' pain or suffering or joy, hospitality, solidarity, understanding and the like.

give birth to a “fatherless” child, that is, before marriage while still under the shelter of her father’s house.<sup>128</sup>

The type of kinship organization in Burundi which is patriarchy, patrilocality and patrilineality dictates the constructions of gender relations in the group. Patriarchy is culturally and socially constructed during the process of socialization, later on reflected and codified in proverbs. To reread the proverbs shows who men and women are or are expected to be.

Gender ideology is perpetuated in patterns of verbal expressions. At the linguistic level, when a woman performs an important task or behaves courageously, she is qualified as “*umugabo*” man, it is a stair upper. But when a man fails to meet the male standards of masculinity, he is equated with womenfolk in general and it equals to degradation; which confirms that women occupy secondary position in the mind of Burundi.

The social construction of masculinity and femininity is known as “gendered culture” because it is a social division imposed on the sexes and a deliberate transformation of males and females into men and women. James and Saville- Smith (1989:6-7) quoted by Jeylan W. Hussein state that in gendered culture, “[m]asculinity and femininity are central to the formation of the society as a whole.”<sup>129</sup> The society constructs femininity and masculinity by educating men and women differently. Though it seems that more power is laid in the hands of men, Burundian women are not less responsible in reality. They are actually the pillar of economy in the family: *Umugore ni inking y-urugo* [A woman is the pillar of the household].

---

<sup>128</sup> Illegitimate children, that is, children born of parents not lawfully married to each other were rare in the past. According to Burundian oral tradition, a girl caught in fornication was severely punished and chased away from the family. Once it was discovered that a girl was pregnant before the celebration of marriage, a big stone was winded on his neck and she was thrown into a deep river from where she would die drowned. I contend that the rigor was benefit for the education of young girls except that it was partial. It should have been applied to boys or men authors of pregnancies as well.

<sup>129</sup> Jeylan W. Hussein (2004). op.cit., p.103.

Society has constructed masculinity and femininity so differently that it seems that men and women are from different planets. In her essay “Conversations”, Helene Cixous clearly entrenches the importance of this difference:

I don't believe a man and a woman are identical. The fact that a man and a woman have the whole of humanity in common and that at the same time, there is something slightly different, I consider a benediction. Our difference has to do with the way we experience pleasure, with our bodily experiences, which are not the same, our different experiences necessarily leave different marks, different memories<sup>130</sup>.

Cixous is right to believe that men and women experience the same thing differently but it is because the culture has constructed and nurtured them to be so. The biological differences are really what make a person male or female: the vagina, the womb, ovulation, the breasts, menstruation for the female; and all reproductive organs for the male: the penis, erection, coitus, sperm and procreative power. Other masculine or feminine attributes that can be used to fabricate masculinity and femininity are socially constructed for social purpose, starting from becoming a man and woman.

Given the importance of the family in Burundi<sup>131</sup> – a frame where strong relationships of fraternity are weaved – Burundi did all that is possible to create favourable conditions to its consolidation by establishing norms, rules of conduct that must characterise men and women who are founders of the family, hence masculinity and femininity. In Burundian philosophy of life, man or woman is always part and parcel of the whole community and you become humane when you faithfully assume your responsibility towards others. The community is not a sum total of isolated individuals but people who are interrelated and interconnected by some family links and all what it entails as duties and rights.

---

<sup>130</sup> Helene Cixous, “Conversations” in Lodge, David.( ed.). *Modern Criticism and Theory*. London: Longman, 1988., p.321.

<sup>131</sup> Without a family springboard, it is hard for one to weave valuable and long lasting human relations. In family, the self of the community becomes the complement to the individual self, which gives sense to life. A proverb illustrates well that conception: *Ishengero ritirimwo uwawe rikubera ishamba* [A crowd in which there is nobody who manifests solidarity in you quickly becomes to you identical to a forest]. You get lost, you feel like being in a deep forest and you feel life is not worthy living.

There are a number of masculine and feminine constructs as portrayed in Kirundi proverbs of which a few shall be examined. Some proverbs are self-explanatory while many others are couched in symbolic terms.

### **3.5. The shadow of patriarchy through masculinity constructs**

A big number of Kirundi proverbs portray the patriarchal order in Burundi and serve to strengthen the ideology of male superiority or patriarchy as Burundi has had and still has a patriarchal order. In Burundi, the head of family “*umugabo*”, that is, the man occupies the top position in his household, without forgetting that he has the right to use his authority in his commandment for the respect of order in the whole nuclear family.

In Burundian culture, the man is destined to play the role of chief, that is, the responsible person of the family. That does not mean that the man is superior in nature to the woman, but simply because every family unit or every society strongly needs an authority for its survival and that one must be one. To be a chief or leader of an organisation is to be the first responsible person and to be the model in that unit. There are social constructs that society uses to sustain the notion of male superiority. These are portraits of the powerful male as husband, father and social agent.

#### **3.5.1. The man as husband and head of family**

Being a man is first of all connected to having been born with male genitals, having grown and contracted marriage with a female woman. One of my informants<sup>132</sup> told me a story about a man who got a tragic accident in which his sex was smashed. He was quickly admitted into hospital and thereafter conducted into the theatre. Coming from the theatre, the surgeon announced to the man’s mother and wife that the gravity of the situation obliged the medical team to cut off the man’s penis in order to save his life, and that he would get well soon. The man’s wife stood thoughtfully for a while next to the patient’s bed and finally told her mother-in-law, “Our relations end here. Stay with your ‘person’ because ‘mine’ has been removed, I go back to my parents’ home.” This story is

---

<sup>132</sup> Eric Niyonemera, oral interview, Kanyosha, 22 March 2013.

simply an anecdote to show that sex is the first element in the identity of *umugabo* man in Burundi. However, it is not enough alone.

In Burundian tradition, apart from that biological asset, a man must be physically strong in order to defend his honour and his family's. Masculinity is linked to the ability of the man to protect his family as portrayed in the following proverb: *Umugabo ni umwugariro* [A husband is a barricade for the homestead's entrance]. It implies that he uses his strength to protect his family against external attacks. *Umwugariro* is actually a traditional gate used to close the fence at night and hence protect the homestead against intrusion at night. As head of family, he is considered by the tradition as the unshakable pillar of the family. He is also the spokesperson of the family as portrayed in the following proverb: *Inkokokazi ntitanga isake kubika*, that is, [A hen does not crow before a cock]. This is contrary to the commonly held view that this is conceived to deny women's rights. It is rather order. When the cock is crowing, the hen may be doing something else such as hatching or attending to little chicks; and hatching or attending to little chicks is as important as crowing according to Anne Spès Nishimwe<sup>133</sup>. That same idea of order that must characterise any form of organisation is also expressed in this other African proverb: "The hen knows that dawn has come, but it watches the mouth of the rooster".

The man is also the one who is supposed to provide the household with a shelter: *Igabo rigira uwiubakiye* [Manliness/pride belongs to the one who has built a house for himself]. Masculinity is evaluated by the man's capacity to protect his family against all kinds of evil. As Astère Kwizera<sup>134</sup> strongly asserts it, the man is also the protector and provider of the family. Traditionally, a man had to build his own house before getting married. But today with urbanisation, if building own house were a condition of manliness, some men's "manliness" would be doubted since they marry in hired apartments.

The male must present a picture of a brave and strong individual qualified to defend self, family and society. Because of his strength and his courage, the man *umugabo* can face

---

<sup>133</sup> Anne Spès Nishimwe. op.cit.

<sup>134</sup> Astère Kwizera .op.cit.



any danger susceptible of doing harm to his family. In addition, the entire neighbourhood respects a family under the protection of *umugabo* even when he is absent. The following proverb portrays this clearly: *Akarundi k'umugabo gakinga imbeho kari kure* [The (small) tibia of a man protects against the cold even from far]. Actually, the tibia is the inner and typically larger of the two bones between the knee and the ankle. But the proverb uses the diminutive [ka] to emphasise its worthiness even with small size. The proverb suggests that even when a man is absent, his shadow plays an important role in securing and giving honour to his family. In the same line of expressing the high esteem a man has in family, Barundi say: *Karaba gato kakaba akagabo* [Though he may be small in size he is still a man]. The following proverb highlights even further the role of the man in the protection of his family: *Uruhanga rw'umugabo rurararira rusinziriye* [The skull of a man is vigilant even when it is asleep]. The preceding proverbs and many others implicitly reveal how painful and vulnerable a family without a man/ husband can be.

Nevertheless, Barundi knew it very well that no matter how strong a man may be he needed some means to use in order to defend himself and his family. Among those means, the spear is the most preferred and most important tool not only because he had to carry it wherever he went but also it had to stay closer to him even when he was asleep as portrayed in this proverb: *Ikobero ry'umugabo ryamako ijisho* [The gaze of a man on whom to rely is always fixed on his spear]. A worthy man had always to keep his spear in his sight. The spear could be compared to the soldier's gun today. The spear was the symbol of the masculine power and authority. Thus, it was taboo for women to carry a spear. Only men were allowed to carry it. A man who dared to lend his spear to his wife was not worthy to be called "man" as the next proverb portrays it: *Inzanza y'umugabo itiza icumu umugore* [A disgraceful man lends his spear to his wife]. The proverb implicitly reveals that if a man ever lends his spear to his wife, it would be a sign of surrendering himself to female authority or domination, which would be a reversal of roles and a shame on him and on his fellow men. As consequence, he would be looked down upon. As there were activities forbidden for women, there were also, things forbidden to men as in this example: *Umugabo ntakubura* [A man never sweeps (the house)]. This simply reflects division of

labour based on sex. What one can retain from that analysis is that some roles are allocated to men while others are assigned to women according to tradition.

Another construct of masculinity is authority. A Kirundi proverb says: *Igitsure c'umugabo gihakuza bunini* [The menacing look of a man obliges one to give him a big portion of bread]. In this proverb 'man' is synonymous with authority. Authority as such is a positive element in the organization of people. No society or community can subsist without the existence of a chief or authority. The society has attributed that role to the man. However, authority is not synonymous with domineering. To get the position of authority does not mean that one is superior to those who are under authority. This attribute simply allows one to perform one's responsibilities without a hindrance.

There are many other Kirundi proverbs that portray man's authority in more strong terms. The following are some examples among many others: *Urugo rutagira umugabo ruvuga umwana* [A household without a man is commanded by a child] and *Urugo rutagira umugabo ntakitarukengera* [A household without a man is despised by anybody]. In the two proverbs, 'man' refers to husband or head of family. It is quite understandable that in such circumstances the family is despised when the one who is supposed to play the role of authority is absent, according to the proverbs. The two proverbs reflect that the widow is not considered, she is judged unable to ensure the survival of the family whose head is not any more. The inability of the widow to fulfil the role of the chief of family as portrayed in those proverbs results mainly from the fact that the Burundian woman does not have resources, according to tradition, to provide her family with. The idea is that when the husband dies, she is confronted with different responsibilities and this constitutes a problem in which nothing in her education had prepared her. By analogy, the message in the two proverbs is that the absence of authority causes disorder.

Another example of Kirundi proverb further stresses the idea of order and connection of masculinity with authority as illustrated in this proverb: *Irivuze umugabe ntirikura umugabekazi* [The word said by the king is not refuted by the queen]. The man is supposed to be the one who says the final word. When he fails to behave so, he is severely criticized by the society as reflected by a number of Kirundi proverbs.

I contend that there is nothing bad for the Burundian culture to construct masculinity to establish the man as responsible of his nuclear family. Like any head of a given organization that may be purveyed with some social and /or financial advantages, the man is endowed, according to the Kirundi proverb, with a number of social advantages. The culture of authority is a value to be kept because if it is not nurtured in starting at the family level, society would likely produce rebels.

Kirundi proverbs show that a true “*mugabo*” husband must require respect from his wife but that he has also to respect himself in order to merit consideration. Proverbs are so formal to the extent of suggesting restrictions and taboos to husbands: *Umugabo ntakokora inkono aba avuna umutima umugore* [A man never scrapes out the food from the bottom of a cooking pot, it would be breaking the heart of his wife]. Scraping out food from the bottom of the pot is normally something done by kids and not a male person worthy to be called man. If he does it would be breaking the heart of the woman because “every woman feels proud to belong to a ‘true man’”, according to the informant Clair Kezakimana<sup>135</sup>. Another proverb says: *Umugabo ntarya imihiti mu rugo rw’uwundi aba ashaka imiguzuko* [A man never eats gourds in the house of another unless he wants a fight]. This is a formal warning that the adulterous man is likely to get into troubles. Other proverbs degrade adult male persons who behave unmanly. It is for example: *Umugabo ntawe aragaya imboga mu mapfa* [An indecent man despises the side dish during the period of famine]. Actually, he is supposed to be the one to provide more for his family in time of penury rather than being too demanding. The next two proverbs even go further in stigmatising a man who behaves indecently: *Umugabo mubi ni ubwagi* [A bad husband is a torment], implying that a bad husband makes his wife unhappy and causes her hardships; *Isema y’umugabo yirukana ishishiro*<sup>136</sup> [A man of bad omen chases away a present’s ornaments], suggesting that to refuse something given as a gift is insulting.

---

<sup>135</sup> Claire Kezakimana . op.cit.

<sup>136</sup> *Ishishiro* translated here as present ornaments, is a metonym for visitors. In Burundian culture, when you go to visit someone, you normally carry some present with you and most of the time this present is put in a basket and the latter is ornated with *ishishiro* or banana leave in some places or flowers in other places of Burundi.

The example of greediness, brutality towards his wife and childish games taken as prototypes of an infantilized or unworthy man husband as portrayed in Kirundi proverbs reveals how much the title of “man/husband” must be earned by recourse to behaviour worthy of the noble marital condition. The Burundian culture, as it is portrayed in many proverbs, does not hesitate to satirise men who do not meet the social norms of masculinity, by for example qualifying them as indecent, disgraceful, indelicate, worthless, useless, dishonest, stupid and many more negative qualifiers such as in the following examples among many:

*Agatimatare k-umugabo kamutera kuburana atari butsinde.*

The stubbornness of a (rich) man pushes him to sue a case lost in advance.

*Imbuzibuzi y-umugabo irabura akantu ntirondera akandi.*

A careless man misses one thing and does not look for something else instead.

Kirundi proverbs reflect how Burundi promote desirable behaviour and correct or prevent undesirable trends in society.

Many other strategies to distinguish the man for his top position, particularly in family are of various kinds. When the child has socially accepted behaviour, he becomes the pride of his father. On the contrary, the bad behaviours are often directed to the woman’s failure in the upbringing of the child as the following proverb suggests: *Umwana arya inkoko nyina akayiruka amoya* [A child eats a chicken and his/her mother vomits its feathers].

Religion is not without influence. A proverb often quoted from the Bible in the book of *Proverbs* by Solomon<sup>137</sup> goes even further in upgrading the status of patriarchy: *Umwana w’indero anezereza se ariko uw’ikigaba ni agatukisha kuri nyina* [A wise son makes his father proud of him; a foolish one brings his mother grief]. The father is presented as an extraordinary human being. This is a skilful strategy to single out the man for his exercise of headship. In Burundian culture, if children behave well, Burundi say “*ni abana*

---

<sup>137</sup> King Solomon of Israel and Judah around 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was legally married to 700 women princesses and had also 300 concubines as we read it from the Bible in the Book of *I Kings 11: 3 in King James Bible*. He composed 1000 proverbs, but the few which have been used in this work are only those I heard being performed in my church during wedding ceremonies or teaching sessions to married couples.

*b'umugabo*” [They are children of a man]. The successful children are the pride of the father. On the contrary, when a child is a pariah or failure, they only belong to the (old) woman *Ni abana b'umugore canke b'umukecuru* [they are children of a woman or an old woman]. There is some truth in this fact of blaming the woman for the failure of a child as one of the roles traditionally allocated to the woman is the early socialisation of kids.

The proverbs examined and many others portray the emphasis on the importance of a man in a family as its head and authority. In fact, the man is considered as the first responsible person for the family. That said, it lets us know that the disappearance of the head of any group of people causes a disorder and lack of protection.

Actually, there is nothing bad in headship and authority of the man as such. In all spheres of our life, we have to submit to an authority, be it a boss, an employer, a director, human resource manager, professor, church leader, police agent or any other authority. The principle is that every man or every woman submits to a given authority in their life. It does not imply that those who are in position of authority or leadership are better than “subordinates”, but it is a matter of organisation or structure given that each community needs someone to assume the role of leader for it to subsist. The family unit does not make an exception. The setting of gender roles was intending to establish social order. In human nature, it is good to make things clear in order to avoid confusion. Substantialists think that harmony or coherency between men and women derives from their unchangeability and predictability<sup>138</sup>.

Some men however have got a wrong conception of their responsibility or headship and have maintained that position to their interests. Normally, headship does not at all exclude service. A husband is a servant of his family. Kirundi proverbs stigmatise men who do not fulfil well their responsibility. To be the head is to be the first responsible person and to give example to be followed by others especially those under one's responsibility. For her part, the woman gives according to what she receives from the

---

<sup>138</sup> Diana Fuss. “The ‘Risk’ of Essence” in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. pp. 251-52.

man. If she receives only criticism, disapproval, indifference, lack of appreciation or lack of affection, it is quite natural that she reacts bitterly and quarrelsomely for self-defence. The man receives from the woman what he invests in her. Putting into question patriarchy therefore may lead one to wonder if man has fulfilled his social role well. In our understanding, the fact that men's authority has been put into question by feminists is that some men have not used it lovingly, prudently and effectively.

### 3.5.2. The man as concentration of physical and moral strength

A man "*umugabo*" is the one who does not fear to face danger, if he cannot prevent or circumvent it. As it is already known, man's physical strength is related to virility. And for a man, virility is the principal quality. That is what leads Barundi to say: *Ubusaza bunyaga ubugabo* [Old age spoils (a man's) virility]. The term "*ubugabo*" designates power or strength. It can also mean courage. In that case to be "*umugabo*", that is, an adult male is one thing but to have "*ubugabo*", that is virility, is another thing.

The physical strength has a role to play in the identity of a man. When a child carries a weighty load, they tell him "*uri umugabo*" you are a man as a compliment in allusion to his physical strength. Furthermore, from physical and moral point of view, for a child or woman who proves to be courageous in certain circumstances, Barundi both men and women will not hesitate to say: "*wahabereye umugabo*", that is, you behaved like a man. In Kirundi, we have expressions which are derived from that term stressing that idea of strength or force such as "*ingabo*" (army forces), "*ubugabo*" (power, honour, pride, virility), "*kwigira akagabo*" (to make oneself strong or more powerful), "*igabo*" (manhood, virility, pride). Society has constructed male attributes as the standards against which to measure oneself: *Ubishoboye woba ubaye umugabo* (if you succeed you would be "a man"); *Kuri umugabo egera ngaha!* (If you are "a man", come closer here, meaning if you feel you are powerful enough, come here!: which is said to threaten one's opponent). Linguistically, these patterns of verbal expressions perpetuating the idea of male superiority are disseminated by both Burundian men and women.

Power or physical strength is also one of the constructs of masculinity. Power is not got from benevolent but is fought for as in the following proverb: *Ubugabo burihabwa* [Power/honor is self-given]. In this context, masculinity has to be demonstrated and defended and not given. The Burundian culture even exaggerates by praising the one who demonstrates his power to fight his opponent and rob his properties: *Umugabo ni uwurya utwiwe n'utw'uwundi* [A man is the one who eats his (food) and that which belongs to another one]. The message of this proverb is that when a Murundi eats what belongs to him and to others, even by robbing them, he is inflicting on his victims a lesson that he is a 'man', that is, about masculinity. In other words, he is demonstrating strength, power.

A man must present a picture of a brave, courageous, strong individual qualified to defend self, family and society as in the following proverbs: *Umugabo ntapfira izuba rimwe* [A man does not die in one day]. That proverb is an expression to praise men for their resistance expected even before death. Burundi believe that men resist to death during their agony. Bravery is shown in the way people try to overcome difficulties. A brave person stands both physical and moral sufferings. Bravery and resistance in the face of hardships are masculine constructs in Burundian culture.

Although Kirundi language talks about "man" as a powerful person, the degree of strength is not the same for all men. The following proverb illustrates that reality: *Umugabo ahura n'uwundi* [A man meets another]. Actually, a man who considers himself powerful learns the reality when he meets another man more powerful than he is. From this reality people therefore learn to avoid illusions as power is relative. It is a warning against anyone who would like to brandish his strength everywhere as nobody is strong before all people. The same idea is echoed in these two proverbs:

*Umugabo asiga imbwa ntasiga umugayo.*

A man can escape a dog but will never escape scorn.

*Umugabo akira ikimwirukako ntakira ikimwirukamwo.*

A man can escape that (danger) which runs after him but not that which runs in him.

By choosing the image of the male lexeme in the two proverbs, society recognises that even a man has limits. By extension, the aforementioned examples of proverbs and others similar suggest that each person has limits.

Besides physical strength, the man must also display moral strength whose first manifestation is courage. Masculinity is characterized with courage. The fact remains that in putting the courage in evidence, the man can sacrifice himself in order to achieve the objective that he had set for himself. That is what is reflected in this proverb: *Umugabo ntatwarwa n'uruzi atwarwa n'urubanza* [A (responsible) man does not die drowned by a river but rather by the mission that obliges him to cross the river]. It is in fact the objective to aim at that pushes a man to risk and to face obstacles that can cause him even death. By extension it applies to any responsible person, be it male or female.

The following proverbs further stress courage as a construct of masculinity: *Umugabo arinda akaje* [A man withstands whatever comes] and *Hiryu y-ubwoba haba ubugabo* [Beyond fear there is manliness (= courage)]. Retreating is cowardly and consequently dishonors the ancestors who preferred dying to surrendering or running away from a danger. There are many other Kirundi proverbs stressing courage as masculine construct: *Ibigora bigora abagabo* [It is always men who have to find solutions to problems]. This proverb suggests that masculinity must be demonstrated by the ability and the courage to stand trials.

The masculinity of the man also emerges from his ability to inhibit his emotions or being unemotional. In Burundian society, boys express pretence of masculinity as opposed to pretence of femininity. Boys are taught that tenderness and kindness are feminine. When a boy cries, he is told quickly that he is a grown up boy and that grown up boys do not cry. Women are often the ones who give that message as they are most of the time the companions to children. In different ways, parents indicate to their sons that a man does not exteriorize his emotions. That is why at the end of the day they say *Amosozu y'umugabo atemba aja mu nda* [The tears of a man roll down into the belly], and to say “*he is a man*” it means that a man does not have to show emotions in his behaviour. The idea is that a man is not supposed to be emotional – an attribute which is usually associated with



women – so that other members of the community may have someone to lean on in time of distress, someone who may not break down when others do. Actually, the society expects men not to exteriorize their emotions. If you do, you do not meet the standards for ‘full’ men. Inhibiting one’s emotions is good to a certain extent. However, emotions are not always negative. They can be a blessing in human relationships if channelled appropriately. To use the words of Alison Jaggar<sup>139</sup>, ‘emotions prompt people, either men or women, to act appropriately, to approach some people and situations and to avoid others, to caress or cuddle, to fight or flee’. This has impact on how men and women relate in marriage. In the words of the same author, ‘life without any emotion would be life without any meaning’.

### **3.5.3. The man as a concentration of a certain economic strength and material abundance**

Masculinity is also tightly linked to the capacity of the man to provide for the woman and the family in material sense. The man “*umugabo*” is called to live and to make his family live. He must do all what is possible to live well by providing for his family’s needs whose first need is food as portrayed in this proverb : *Indarandiye niyo mugabo* [‘I slept filled up’ is the one and the only one who is a man]. It suggests that the one who has what to eat is full and valid. For all living beings starting from humans, the first real need is food. When one had to judge the merit of a father of a family, being able to feed his family was one of the first criteria. Hence, he was called “man” the one who could sufficiently feed himself and feed his family and even foreigners if possible as portrayed in the aforementioned proverb.

Many other Kirundi proverbs also portray masculinity as being linked to material comfort. Here are some examples: *umugabo ni uwurya akaraza* [A man is the one who eats to his satisfaction and leaves something for the following day]. The meaning of the term “*umugabo*” is enlarged to signify someone who distinguishes himself by his wealth and

---

<sup>139</sup> Alison Jaggar. “Love and knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology” in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 190.

who lives in material comfort. Following tradition, to live in comfort for a Murundi is to live in the middle of green fields with kraals full of cows as reflected in this Kirundi proverb: *Utagira inka ntagira igabo* [He who does not have cows cannot have pride of manhood]. He also has to have a labour force to cultivate the fields and to keep the cows. Having cows would be equated today to someone having bank accounts full of money and castles built here and there.

To have a clear picture of that masculine construct of comfort in Burundi, it is better here to consider first the conception of a cow by Burundi. As Mathan Mwibira<sup>140</sup>, one of my informants said, to live without a cow was to live without honour for a Murundi in the past before the influence of the cash economy. The greatest wealth that the Murundi could get was the cow with all what comes from it such as milk, ghee, manure, meat, skin and so on. The one who did not own a cow had to spend days and days serving a boss in order to receive at least one. The one who did not have cows was discredited because he was not only deprived of cows but also of all the other many products from cows, with the most important being milk, as contrasted in the following two proverbs: *Urugo rurimwo umugabo runywa amata* [A household where there is a man drinks milk] whereas *Urugo rurimwo umugore runywa amazi* [A household headed by a woman drinks water]. It was actually the role of the man to get cows for the household welfare. Being restricted to the domestic arena, the woman had no possibility to get out and get a cow.

The two proverbs above portray how a household headed by a man lives in abundance while the one headed by a woman lives in poverty. The milk was and is still a precious nutrient in Burundian culture and only rich people, that is, those who owned cows could get it in the past. Today, even those who do not own cows buy milk with cash. In that traditional context, 'man' is synonymous with a rich person; and as it is proved here all the economic power was in the hands of men. Masculinity is here tightly linked to abundance. It is clear that material abundance is masculinised because it plays a crucial role in the construction of gender. To gain his place in society in general and particularly

---

<sup>140</sup> Mathan Mwibira and Mariam Bazahababaza, oral interview, Kiremba, 10 March 2013

in his family, a man strives to acquire wealth in order to provide for his wife, children, and dependents. So, since manhood is evaluated in terms of richness, men try at all cost to acquire wealth.

Because masculinity is tightly linked with the capacity of a man to take care of a woman in a material sense, it is no wonder that trying to live up to this gender identity entails destructive social, political and economic consequences<sup>141</sup>, to use Daouda Laoum's words. It leads to indebtedness or destructive competition between men who want to keep their positions and women who want to be given space as it is reflected in Kirundi proverbs like: *Nta mugabo atarya ideni* [There is no (real) man who does not eat debt] and *Ha kurushwa gutambikiza n'umugore wopfuma utabuka* [Better to get torn rather than spread your legs less than a woman]. In the second proverb the key words are [*gutambikiza*] to spread one's legs and [*gutabuka*] to get torn or to suffer some damages; which may bring one to think about performing in any given area. No man would like to have less or to perform less than or to be less brave than a woman, especially one's wife according to those proverbs. But in reality, a woman's gift can exceed a man's in some areas.

In short, wealth and welfare are presented as emblems of masculinity by Kirundi proverbs.

### 3.5.4 The man-Mushingantaha<sup>142</sup> as ideal construct of masculinity

The term 'man' reflects various constructs according to the context of its use. As already stated, Barundi first of all call "*umugabo*" man a human being of masculine sex who has reached the age of maturity and who has proved his maturity by getting married to a female woman. The other constructs of masculinity come to be added to that identity as

---

<sup>141</sup> Daouda Laoum. "The Ambivalence of Masculinity in Gorgui Dieng's *A Leap Out of the Dark*" in Helen Nabasuta Mugambi and Tuzyline Allan Jita. eds. *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*. Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2010, p. 285.

<sup>142</sup> The term "**umushingantaha**" is almost untranslatable into other languages although we refer to it as 'notable' in this study. The "**mushingantaha**" is an honest man, a person model in society, to whom everybody runs up to be listened to, the virtuous man, in whom the community has confidence. It is a state of being and not something learnt. The mushingantaha is responsible person of order, tranquility, truth and peace in his milieu not in virtue of an allocated administrative power but by his very way of being.

contextual and promoting complements. The concept of *mushingantahe* inspired a creation of many Kirundi proverbs that continued to be used even when the institution of *Bashingantahe* was suspended by colonisers.

So far, this study has examined masculinity as being tightly linked to headship, responsibility, authority, strength be it physical, moral or economic. Now, I examine the conception of masculinity in relation to the man's mission in his milieu, that is, the man as "*mushingantahe*" in the sense of a responsible person in his neighbourhood and the whole country: a judge, honest, intelligent, wise person, adviser, arbitrator, assistant of magistrates, brief a man noted for his honesty, integrity and noble character. The man *mushingantahe* was judged mature, honest and endowed with good sense and judgement. He was invested by the large familial community for the mission to restore justice, to defend the right and to guarantee truth, to be the father of orphans and defender of widows.<sup>143</sup> A number of proverbs reflect the conception of masculinity based on that cultural concept *umushingantahe* using the lexeme *umugabo* man because only men were believed to have those qualities of *mushingantahe*.

Literally, *umushingantahe* is someone who "plants the stick of judgement" and all what it symbolises. "Planting the stick of judgement" means pronouncing the judgement. "*Ubushingantahe*" was men's social promotion but which was to be earned. During public ceremonies for instance, the notables used to sit in places of honour and were given the straw for sucking drink first, in opposition to the lower status of ordinary men (*abakungu*). It was actually an ideal state aspired to by men, given the social consideration that was due to notables. A man was therefore required to behave according to a set of social norms of masculinity if he aspired to become one. The rank of notables was an honour that was not for all men. This reflects that even men are not equal among themselves. If a man asks to be invested as a notable, the committee of ancient notables had to check his behaviour and the community had a lot of influence for or against his investiture depending on his behaviour. The status of *umushingantahe* was

---

<sup>143</sup> Adrien Ntabona. « Le concept d'Umushingantahe et ses implications sur l'éducation de la jeunesse d'aujourd'hui au Burundi » in *Au Cœur de l'Afrique*, no 5, 1985, pp.263-301.

gained as a reward on merit. It was not imposed to anybody. However because of the condition and the rank of *bashingantahe* (notables) in Burundian society especially during big meetings, every *mugabo* man aspired to get one day that honour and would adjust his behaviours consequently. The man was evaluated on how well he organises his family and how harmonious he lives with his wife and his neighbours to earn that title.

Not only the traditional way of investing “*Bashingantahe*” was absent for some years in Burundian custom<sup>144</sup> but also the formal education brought a lot of change with it. Today, the one who gets his diploma or degree is assigned tasks in the society and automatically gets honour because of the position he occupies. Because of the honour that it conferred to be called “*umushingantahe*” and not “*umukungu*”, the term “*mushingantahe*” came to be used vulgarly since that time. What Astère Kwizera<sup>145</sup> and Anne Spès Nishimwe<sup>146</sup> call *umugabo nya mugabo* (a true man by his nobility of character), repeating the words of one of the famous Burundian artists, late Canjo Hamissi, was praised by society because it was he who was in charge of peace and order in the household and the community at large. This condition of being called “*umugabo*” surpasses being called *umugabo* only because one has the male genital or the beard. Because of admiring that honour that was conferred to “true men”, even ‘worthless men’ could put in place a proverbial discourse that protects them in order to keep that honour of being called “*abashingantahe*”.

---

<sup>144</sup> Investing *bashingantahe* the traditional way was stopped by colonial influence because most of indigenous practices were questioned by western civilisation. Since the time of independence, the *mushingantahe* became synonymous with educated elite or a wealthy man. The corresponding female is *umupfasoni* “lady”. The institution of *bashingantahe* was restored in 2002. But because of much social change with new structures and much external influence, that institution is there now by name but its role in society is no longer significant. Now, the words *mushingantahe* and *mupfasoni* are used as a formula to address respectively any man and any woman you respect. In important meetings, when the speaker wants to introduce, the greeting is “*Bashingantahe, Bapfasoni, tugire amahoro!*” [Gentlemen and ladies, let’s have peace!]

<sup>145</sup> Astère Kwizera. op.cit.

<sup>146</sup> Anne Spes Nishimwe. op.cit.

According to tradition, not every man was invested with the mission of a notable because to be a notable had specific qualities that a man ought to have. The attributes that were noticed in *mushingantahe* are portrayed in Kirundi proverbs and we shall discover that every “*mugabo*” does not deserve to be called “*umushingantahe*” though the term is vulgarly used nowadays as an expression of respect to all men. The conception of masculinity based on that cultural term *mushingantahe* is the highest rank in the hierarchical structure of the society that all men aim at. But those internal qualities can also be noticed in a woman.

The qualities that were appreciated in a man to be invested notable continued to be admired in people even at the absence of a formal institution.

One of such qualities is honesty. Honesty is masculinised because it plays a crucial role in the construction of manhood among Barundi. The more honest a male person is the more his masculinity is acknowledged. To tell the truth even when it may be risky is a masculine quality that cannot be ignored in a notable. The only male worthy of being invested as “*mushingantahe*” (notable) is that man who is able to discern the wrong from the right and tell the truth no matter the cost: *Ukuvuga ukuri ntikubuza umugabo gutaha* [Telling truth does not prevent a man from returning home]. The one who imposes himself by truth cannot fear because he is protected by the society that requires that every *mushingantahe* be a guarantor of truth. A man who could not tell the truth could not be considered responsible and made a judge in his milieu. A man who cannot tell the truth is as disgraceful as the one who is not constant in his opinions or who does not hold on his given word or promise.

Tenacity is therefore another construct that Barundi deem a requisite for manhood. That is what is portrayed in the following proverb: *Umugabo amira intore ntamira ijambo* [A man can swallow a pellet of bread but never the given word]. ‘Man’ in this context could be replaced by “*mushingantahe*”. No matter what may be the cost, if a true man has given a word, he cannot change his opinion. If he changes it, he does not deserve to be called “*umugabo*”, he is less manly according to tradition. A man must be courageous to impose himself in the decision despite the temptations that can stand in his way. That is why a *mushingantahe* is someone who thinks carefully before uttering a word. To go

back on one's decision is the lowest degree for a Burundian man. To the one who pronounces two different statements on one reality they say that he "has two tongues". It is a way to criticise him and to signify to him that he is untrustworthy. Full manhood requires courage and firmness in decision-making.

Intelligence coupled with wisdom is another attribute of masculinity especially for a notable (*mushingantahe*). Actually, intelligence and wisdom are very important things for everybody because they guide one in his actions and reactions. They are even more important for a notable who is called to settle social conflicts as portrayed in the following proverbs: *Umugabo ashikwa na rimwe* [For a good judge, one word is enough to discover the truth]. A man cannot be a judge if he is not able to perceive the truth and follow its route. It is worth recalling that public affair was the domain of men only in the past. Nowadays we could say a person cannot be a good judge if s/he is not able to perceive the truth. To be able to perceive and follow the route of the truth, a person ought to be both intelligent and wise independently of the sex.

Actually, for intelligence to be good, it has to be dosed with wisdom. In that way, a *mushingantahe* can predict things in form of advice by his intelligence and wisdom as portrays this proverb: *Inararivuze y'umugabo iratinda ntihera* [The word of a (wise) man delays to be fulfilled but it is never futile]. The word "inrarivuze" literally means "I had well said it" to underline that what a worthy man, and by extension what any worthy person predicts really happens or produces effects as they think twice and interrogate wisdom before opening their mouth to speak.

Another construct of man /*mushingantahe* is to play the role of protector of the whole community against misfortunes as reveal the following proverbs: *Ahari abagabo ntihagwa ibara* [Where there are (wise) men, no tragedy occurs]. This implies that they can predict and take the necessary strategies to avoid the worse before it occurs in their community. Manhood is measured by the sense of community. Other proverbs again underline the importance of "abagabo" in the community as "*bashingantahe*". It is the case of this one: *Igihugu kitarimwo abagabo camamwo induru* [A country where there are

no (wise) men is a permanent residence of quarrels]. To the question whether there may be a country without “*abagabo*”, Mwibira answers like this:

*Mu vy’ukuri abagabo ku bwanwa ntibabura ariko abagabo b’invugakuri barashobora kuba bake. Kandi muri ico gihe igihugu kigira ingorane zitari nke.*<sup>147</sup>

Truly, men by beard cannot be missing, but men of truth can be few.  
And in that case the country gets many troubles.

Traditionally, notables had a great duty in the society as peace builders, magistrates, king investors and advisors, and protectors of the entire community. With western education, most of these functions were done by the educated elite and the institution of *bashinganatahe* was neglected little by little.

Nowadays, the institution of “*bashingantahe*” has reappeared but not with the traditional flavour and prestige. Few people aspire to it because it is no longer a factor of social distinction as in former times. A lot of people want nowadays to brandish mainly intelligence and degrees, leaving aside the wisdom that characterised traditional notables. But in the history of Burundi, intelligence without wisdom has proved to be as dangerous as a vehicle that runs without brakes.

Though the institution of *Bashingantahe* has reappeared, it no longer plays the role it played traditionally and it is no longer revered as it used to be. Most of the tasks that they used to carry out like arbitrating cases are assigned to modern institutions such as courts. In addition, the tendency today is to call *mushingantahe* every man you wish to express respect as a title of honour whether he has been invested or not, or whether his behaviour entitles him for such honour or not.

However, as Aloys Nibizi who is one of contemporary Burundian notables and his wife Seraphine Nicayenzi testify, even today only men are given the symbolic stick of judgement while their wives are given a closed basket instead<sup>148</sup>. What is for sure is that

---

<sup>147</sup> Mathan Mwibira and Mariam Bazahababaza, op. cit.

<sup>148</sup> Aloys Nibizi and Séraphine Nicayenzi, oral interview, Nyavyamo, 11 March 2013.



there is still that symbolic traditional difference. While one may think of the symbolic phallus through the stick and the womb through the basket, this social differentiation does no longer have sense by the time we know that in contemporary courts of law, men and women sit without any distinction of sex.

All in all, what can be retained is that the *mugabo* man is first of all a person born male, then responsible and head of family and he is finally man *mushingantahe* if he fulfils the conditions, whether he has been formally invested or not. He must do all the possible to establish order and peace in his family and neighbourhood. Some examples of proverbs analysed in the point above also prove that some men can show themselves unable to carry out their responsibility and protection of their families. They can display a bad behaviour instead of giving good examples. Many examples use negative qualifiers to stigmatise such deviant men.

But in the overall, society recognises some strength in man and allocates him with power over the woman particularly in marriage. In the past, this domestic power was extended to public domain as the latter was forbidden to the woman, contrary to today. However, when evaluating man, society has never tolerated the abuse of power by certain men as it appears in the following point.

### **3. 5.5. The man's abuse of power and its intolerance by society**

The construction of masculinity in Burundi assigns the man power over the woman, especially in marriage. Actually, there is nothing bad in power as the capacity to act or do certain things when exercised in the right way, that is, when the power is legitimated by the society. In that case it is authority. But when it is illegitimately exercised, it becomes oppression or exploitation. In fact, in the nature of human beings, when someone sees that he has something more than someone else, he always wants to show that he is superior to the other. Some men change the authority that society confers on them into authoritarianism and therefore maintaining the social advantages the society confers them to their best instead of the best of the community, that is, instead of their best and that of women and children. They do not play their responsibility of headship appropriately.

Actually a true leader is a person full of humility, who cares for the well being of the ‘other’. For the man to succeed in his task, it is necessary that he assumes his position of power and authority in a spirit of “servant leadership”<sup>149</sup>. Otherwise he falls into the trap of destructive power. According to Kirundi proverbial discourse, some men have therefore become a working example of the ancient truth that “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” A number of Kirundi proverbs portray the man’s own ego and how he has tried to build a fence to protect his egocentrism. The next proverb is an example that portrays the idea:

*Amazi make ahaberwa impfizi.*

When the water is little it is left to the bull only.

The original situation of this proverb is the selfishness of some men. By extension, the proverb could also portray the reality in a society where when there are little resources the powerful take it all. But still the image of man as an incarnation of power is evident.

Many other Kirundi proverbs portray the overuse of power by some men:

*Impfizi y’umugabo ntiyimirwa*

The bull-man is set no boundaries.

*Aho umugabo ahandiwe niho yihandurira.*

Where a thorn sticks in a man’s body is immediately where the man removes it from.

In the second proverb there is a play on the two verbs [*ahandiwe*] a thorn sticks and [*yihandurira*] removes it. A thorn is known to be a sharp-pointed woody projection on the stem or other part of a plant. It is capable of inflicting a pain when it sticks into one’s body, not only a man’s. Thorns usually stick in barefeet or in hands. In the past, it was very common for thorns to stick in people’s feet as there were no shoes yet. When it sticks in one’s body when s/he is in the way, the immediate reaction is to stop walking to remove it first. The fact that the proverb uses the male lexeme *umugabo* suggests that it

---

<sup>149</sup> That phrase was first coined by Robert Greenleaf as new alternative and better way to lead contrary to the “big boss” style. According to him, “the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to [the leader’s] greatness”. R.K. Greenleaf. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of legitimate Power and Greatness*. New York: Paulist Press, 1977, p.7.

is not a thorn as such but the symbol of the male genital when he is sexually aroused. The logic is to gratify sexual desire with his wife. But the choice of image alluding to thorns is to create greater impact in the justification of men's sexual freedom outside wedlock. The two preceding proverbs refer to the man's sexual desire and its probable satisfaction out of wedlock. These proverbs and many others reflect some men's too much freedom and selfishness, by setting no constraints for themselves.

Because of the consideration and the favour that are conferred to them by the society, some men have the tendency to exalt might over right. The root cause here is abuse of power by attributing to oneself excessive freedom in acting or behaving. He fails to esteem woman as better as himself and to give her honour. As a consequence, power hits in the relationships between man and woman. It destroys relationships as portrayed in Kirundi proverbs as in this example: *Nta bucuti bw'umugore* (No relationship with one's wife). The wife always stays foreign to her husband. It is therefore a warning against trusting her. On the other side, as a counter to the preceding proverb, it is said: *Umugabo ni umwana w'uwundi*<sup>150</sup> [A husband is the child of the 'other']. According to that proverb, the woman should relate with the husband with much reserve because he is the child of the 'other'. It is a warning that the wife should not have total trust in her husband. This does not go without bad consequences if two individuals are called to live together but in suspicion of each other.

If they do not trust each other while they are called to live under the same shelter, it goes without saying that relations are spoilt. The destruction of relationship leads to the destruction of trust and dialogue. Power is the greatest obstacle in the way of dialogue between husband and wife. The following proverb even goes further to highlight that the way masculinity has been socially constructed has made that the secret for empowering a man is never to try to change him or improve him as this proverb portrays it: *Ubugaba bw'umugabo nibwo buryo bwiwe* [The carelessness of a man is his right way of doing things]. According to this proverb, a woman is not expected to offer an advice to man if it is not

---

<sup>150</sup> This proverb is the key theme in the song “*Ni Inyagasamvu rirarema*” [Even in Nyagasamvu there is a gathering of people at the market] by the Burundian oral artist late Christophe Matata.

directly requested. It indirectly implies that a man is not accountable to the woman. This is very dangerous to relationships if the man and the woman are not accountable to each other. Being accountable to no one is especially susceptible to the corrupting influence of power. No one is always right. Even men have their foibles and frailties and can learn from women. To the proverb above, the reaction would be: *Kananira abagabo ntiyimye* [The one who did not listen to the counsels of notables was never enthroned].

In the first sense, “*kwima*” means “to be impregnated” for animals . In the second sense, that word means to “be enthroned”. In that proverb, “*abagabo*” men means counsels. *Kananira abagabo* is that person who does not want to listen to the counsels of the wise, no matter his social status, including the king. In fact, it is a metonymic way to say: you cannot resist to counsels of the wise and secure the throne, or the position.

According to Yunzuguru, a frequent dialogue can help to reduce the distance between masculinity and femininity because dialogue implies consideration of the woman by the man as one cannot exchange ideas and opinions with someone they do not accept.

But, the problem is that power is often coupled with pride. Actually, pride entered some men though there is a tendency to take it as a stereotype to all men. Pride is choosing to lie about oneself. Because of anatomical differences, they think they are better than women. And pride can ultimately destroy a person as portrayed in some examples of Kirundi proverbs. The marriage between power and pride presided over by arrogance gives birth to over-inflated ego which in turn leads to consequent self-destruction.

Proverbs questioning the male dominance and attempting to impose some checks on phallographic authority abound in Kirundi. The Burundian wisdom does not hesitate to portray the tragic consequence to over proud men to call them to reason before it is too late as in the next proverb: *Intashirwa y’umugabo ishirwa rimetse* [A stubborn man gets convinced when his eye bursts]. The following proverb is even stronger than the preceding one in stigmatising such kind of men: *Ndi umugabo niko gupfa* [ (To tell to self :) ‘I am a man’ is the way to death]. There is an extralinguistic feature that is very indispensable to get the idea expressed in that proverb: the one who tells to self that he is a man does it hitting his chest with his hand as a way to show that he is strong enough, that nothing can shake

him. He is so boastful. To that one who is over proud, so boastful, they tell him the proverb as a way of warning him that he is in the route to self-destruction. By extension, it can be uttered to bring back someone to reason, without distinction of sex.

Other proverbs questioning male dominance are like *Akazikira k-umugabo kazikwa n-isi*. [The animosity of a man is covered by the ground]; *Intashinyagara y'umugabo ica ku risongoye* [A man who does not consider advice passes over a sharpen spear], the meaning is that an incorrigible stubborn man is compelled to give way by force.

The idea of self-destruction agrees exactly with Wittig's restatement of Marx's idea that 'individuals of the dominating class are also alienated, although they are the direct producers of ideas that alienate the classes oppressed by them.'<sup>151</sup> For a powerful and courageous man, it is not necessary to test his strength all the time and in all situations. For Barundi, to watch out before acting is a sign of wisdom. Only a weak-minded man despises advice in time of necessity. Although Barundi praise virility, physical strength and courage, they impose limits by showing bad consequence that may result from the misuse of power. For Barundi, the courage does not prevent someone from being prudent as the physical strength does not imply violence.

In short, one notices that the concept of *umugabo* accuses several meanings relatively close to one another. In other words, *umugabo* is a concept having one sense but distributed differently according to contexts of application. In some proverbs, man is appreciated for his strength and presented as a blameless figure especially when referring to him as a father while in others he is stigmatised for his faults by use of negative qualifiers. The societal constructs of masculinity are mainly courage, virility, strength be it physical, moral or economic. Men are also merely constructed by the society as the first responsible person of the family. Traditionally, the comfort, the luxury, the necessities of life itself, which the woman receives are obtained by the husband and given to her by him. It is interesting to see that proverbs do not however hesitate to portray the

---

<sup>151</sup> Monique Wittig. "One is not Born a Woman"; in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 224

weaknesses of some men and to stigmatise overuse of power as portrayed in a number of Kirundi proverbs. The reading of proverbs using the male lexeme shows that some proverbs were prompted by time of strength of men while others were prompted by time of weakness.

### 3.6. Femininity constructs in the patriarchal order

In the Burundian context, “being a woman” on the other hand is first of all having been born with a female genital, having grown and contracted marriage with a man. In the past, while the public affairs were the man’s domain, the woman’s space was the domestic arena. With the intention to build hierarchy, the education of the woman was to make her less powerful or less confident so she may not challenge or disturb the established order. The language that reflects how she has been lessened through her education and that hence continues to lessen her is very frequent in Kirundi proverbs as exemplified in the lines ahead. Actually, to domesticate women, thus posing no threat to the cultural foundation of hierarchy, Burundi have at their disposal a series of stereotypes on which they base the education of women. While proverbs codifying that situation did their role in the past, they are however today “the unfortunate proof that proverbs can take on very dangerous roles in condemning people by their stereotypical messages”<sup>152</sup>, if not handled appropriately.

Kirundi proverbs reveal that women’s behaviours vary within the Burundian culture: *Abagore bari kune bari gutanu*<sup>153</sup> [Women are of four or five types]. It simply means that women are of various types. There are strong and weak women, courageous and coward, hard workers and lazy, and the like. Implicitly, that proverb suggests that people are not homogeneous in a society.

According to tradition, the occupation of public affairs by the man and domestic affairs by the woman was aiming at labour balance and not a plot against women. But to a

---

<sup>152</sup> Wolfgang Mieder. “The proof of the proverb is in the probing: Alan Dundes as pioneering the Paremiologist” p.35 in <http://haljas.folklore.ee/folklore/vol35/mieder.pdf> [accessed on 27 September 2012]

<sup>153</sup> From *Umuduri wa Emmanuel Nkeshimana*, one of the traditional Burundian famous oral artists.

certain extent, it appears that the restriction of the woman to domestic arena made her less confident and more dependent on man. However, that hierarchical structure where the woman has to live does not abruptly fall upon her as a constraint or fatality, but her femininity is fabricated accordingly.

### 3.6.1. The woman as wife and mother

There are certain constructs related to a woman that a female acquires during the process of growing. These constructs are, among other things, humility, hard working, patience, persevering, submissiveness, and so on. Internal qualities are rated higher than external beauty, as already stated before. These attributes are strengthened nowadays even more through religious influence by quotation of biblical proverbs, for instance: *Umugore w'akazuru gusa arikw'atazi kuroranya, ameze nk'impeta y'izahabu yambitswe ingurube mu zuru*<sup>154</sup> [Beauty in a woman without good judgement is like a gold ring in a pig's snout]. The proverb above uses a modern picture of nose jewel. A jewel in the pig's snout is as becoming as a beautiful woman that is destitute of good breeding and who has lost all moral integrity. This proverb is used to shape the woman's character as she relates to her husband.

Cultural messages codified in proverbs reveal to us that society has constructed a woman as of lower self-image in order to hold women back from emerging in the society and to confine them to secondary position as wives. The Burundian society has programmed women to think of themselves in this way in order to pose no threat to the patriarchal hierarchy. Most of the proverbs depicting the lowering of woman are built with the use of negation as a main stylistic device as in the next proverb among many others:

*Nta rubanza rw'umugore* [No judgment from a woman]. The proverb conveys the idea that a woman has no valid opinion in case settlements, so she cannot sit to dispense justice. Actually, that proverb portrays the consequence to her traditional domestic life and hence continues to reinforce and to pass on the same idea. To a major extent, the woman's lack of agency was consequent to her staying in a less stimulating environment: the home.

---

<sup>154</sup> This is one of Solomon's proverbs often quoted during religious ceremonies at the wedding day (Proverbs 11: 22).

Traditionally low-self esteem was assigned to women and they were educated to behave so.

However, a close reading of those proverbs reveals that the fabrication of masculinity and femininity is traditionally done in a way so that the distribution of responsibilities follows a sense of balance. The hierarchical difference in the status of husband and wife only serves to strengthen the social order. As there were activities not appropriate to the man, there were also activities not allowed to the woman as portrayed in these proverbs: *Umugore ntiyurira inzu* [A woman never climbs on the rooftop of a house]. This would be usurping the roles reserved to the man. Still another proverb stressing the same division of responsibilities between the man and the woman: *Umugore ntatwara icumu* [A woman never carries a spear]. If she ever carries it, it would be granting herself the marital authority. Carrying a spear was exclusively done by men because it was a tool used to fulfil roles allocated to men. In other words, the above proverbs reflect the division of roles based on biological differences. From that proverb and many others, one can see that certain tasks are forbidden to women not because they are unable to carry them out but because society wanted to divide work among men and women for balance. Some of these proverbs portraying females are constructed like taboos, though in reality nothing was taboo. The intention was simply to make man stand out for his position of authority.

Motherhood is highly valued in Burundi as portrayed in the following proverb: *Ubworo buhetse buruta ubw-ifumbereje* [A poor woman who carries a baby on her back is far superior to the rich one who withdraws into herself]. The underlying meaning is that the former will get in her child what to expand her interiority with and hence gives meaning to her life. She has hope in the future. When she dies, she will “leave seeds” that will fructify and get the richness that the mother did not get while the rich woman will pass away without leaving any trace of remembrance for her, any descendant to extend her in existence. The worst of all, the fruit of her toil will be inherited by others. In that proverb, there is idealisation of the presence of a child. A child is the extension of self. The proverb implicitly reflects the African woman’s aspiration to motherhood. It is good to respect African women’s status as mothers although one can still go ahead to question obligatory motherhood and the traditional favouring of sons. As has been pointed out in respect of



Julia Kristeva's appeal to the maternal, this tends to an elision of symbolic and empirical features which is theoretically confusing: after all, if feminine difference is being defined in terms of maternal, then many actual, empirical women are going to find themselves cast out from femininity insofar as they are not mothers nor intending to become so.<sup>155</sup> But I opine that African women aspire to be mothers, contrary to western females, except one or another who may happen to be naturally barren.

The woman portrayed as mother is considered as someone deserving respect, a person of great importance and useful for the society as in the following two proverbs: *Nta wanka kwonka nyina ngo agwaye amahere* [No child can refuse to suckle his mother under the pretext that she suffers from swellings.] meaning that we should not abandon those whom we owe much because they are miserable. The same idea is echoed in *Ntawikura kuri nyina ngo yarashaje* [No one should forsake his mother under the pretext that she is old]. The two proverbs use the image of mother in the objective to warn people against bad manners of ungratefulness. The two proverbs reflect the value of the woman as mother, however ugly, poor or old she may be. The mother is a cherished person.

Femininity is so tightly linked to bringing up children and caring for to the extent of likening a woman with a child. In the past, women used to have a strict education in Burundi just as in many other traditional African societies. They had no freedom to go outside like men. They had no right to go out alone because it was supposed to be a source of getting involved in unwanted pregnancy, a sin that was severely punished on the part of the girl, as already mentioned in the previous sections. One of the main functions of Burundian women is to get pregnant and to deliver children. The woman's close association with children may compound her potential for being seen as a child by other members of the society, a view she herself, as an observer of herself and of the world would tend to agree with. The fact of constant association with children plays a role in this identity. This is for instance portrayed in a Kirundi proverb: *Umugore asa n'umwana* [A woman is like a child]. This proverb portrays the general view of Burundi that

---

<sup>155</sup> Kate Soper. "Feminism, Humanism and Postmodernism" in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. pp. 287- 288.

women are not intelligent or are as ignorant as children. It is thus not difficult to see how the feminine personality would lend weight to a view of women as being “children”, given that the limited traditional social contexts of her adult life reinforced this situation. Indeed, the woman in Burundi was traditionally socialised to have a narrower and generally more conservative set of views and attitudes than the man, in order not to be ‘spoiled’ by others’ thoughts, I imagine. Another alternative is that she was confined to the domestic family context because of her lactation processes. The tendency to describe her in proverbs as a childlike subject lacking agency has roots in her confinement to a non stimulating environment and that was consequent to the division of labour. The female’s private life as wife and mother became an obstacle to her public life as a woman. For the male, his private life as husband and father was not a hindrance to his public life as a man because he was in an advantageous position and free from domestic obligations. That is why it has been noticed that because of their freedom to move outside the house, men became the “natural” proprietors of religion, rituals, politics, land and other realms of cultural thought and action.

Kirundi proverbial discourse abounds in restrictions to women. Insofar as a woman is universally the primary agent of early socialization and is seen as virtually embodiment of the domestic group, she is put under heavier restrictions and circumscriptions surrounding that unit for the safety of the new progenitor. Since women are associated with and are more or less confined to the domestic context, they are somehow identified with a lower order of socio-cultural organisation. As Sherry B. Ortner (1997) posits, woman’s culturally defined intermediate position between “nature and culture”<sup>156</sup> would thus account not only for her lower status but for the greater restrictions placed upon her activities, particularly because of the influence she has in the socialisation of the infants. Because of her traditional function of producing well-socialised members of the human group, Barundi say *Wiba uhetse ukabwiriza uwuri mu mugongo* [When you steal you

---

<sup>156</sup> Sherry B. Ortner. “Is Female to Male what Nature is to Culture?” in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. pp.250-251.

contaminate the one you carry on your back]. This metaphoric meaning reveals how the mother is more influential in shaping the child's personality and behaviour. This proverb suggests by extension that parents, leaders, and all persons in leadership positions should be careful about what they do because they influence their followers. The carrying of babies on the back is normally an activity performed by women and the warning codified in this proverb was born from the traditional woman's role of socialisation of kids. Women as educators of the younger are in a better position to counter older gender rules and roles that are impracticable today.

In the same vein of avoiding contamination to the new progenitors, there are a number of codified social restrictions that are laid to the woman as it is reflected in the following Kirundi proverbs: *Umugore ntaririmba aba akumbuye iwabo* [A woman never hums unless she is nostalgic of her parents]. This is not singing for the sake of singing, but rather to sing as a means of expressing her malaise. This is even clear in this other variant: *Umugore ntaririmba aba ariko aracura intimba* [A woman never sings unless she is lamenting]. In fact since women were not allowed to express their opinion in public, some songs were used to exteriorise grief, pain or sorrow or were used as an expression of anger in order to hurt the opponent, to menace. That kind of songs could also fulfil a therapeutic function in the singer. These proverbs reflect that a woman has to avoid expressing her emotions or malaise loudly because it is a sign of lack of femininity. If she sings laments she would run the risk of being chased from the husband's abode. In fact the construct of a Burundian woman is to endure hardships silently. Tolerance and resilience before suffering and trying experience are feminine attributes. If she complains, she is likely to fail her mission of being a woman. The socially established punishment for such a woman is being sent back to her parents as reflects the second part of the proverb.

Still in the purpose to avoid spoliation of the new progenitors, restrictions extend into the woman's sexual life. The verbs evoking restrictions use the negation as a principal form: *Umugore ntasimba urugo aba agomba kurugwa inyuma* [A woman never jumps over the fence unless she wants to fall behind it]. This proverb acts as a warning against unacceptable behaviour in some women with particular reference to adultery. Any woman indulging in adultery has an unhappy end according to the proverb. The worst of punishment that a

woman may receive in Burundian culture is to be sent away from her husband's home. A woman returnee to her parents' home is scornfully regarded by Burundian society.

Another proverb echoing the same idea is: *Umugore ntasutamanga aba agomba imyuga ibiri* [A woman does not sit on her heels repeatedly unless she wants two professions]. This proverb portrays by satirising the abnormal behaviour of a woman who intends to cheat on her husband. Actually in Kirundi, to sit on one's heels is not feminine and it is even worse when done repeatedly: it suggests a willing exaggeration intending to attract the attention of men for sexual intercourse. The proverb portrays an unfaithful woman who, besides her role as a wife of one husband, sometimes extends provocative relations with the external environment in order to have space to cheat on her husband. Proverbs reflect that pre-marital sex and unfaithfulness in marriage is considered a taboo and formally prohibited for women.

Womanhood is also tightly connected with tender human sensibilities, patience and care as the Kirundi proverb portrays: *Umugore arakama intare* [A woman is able to milk a lioness]. This proverb is an exaggeration to reflect tenderness and patience as a feminine construct in opposition to the masculine toughness. A lioness is actually so ferocious an animal that no one can come closer, let alone milking it. When they say that a woman is able to milk lioness, it reflects that the tradition recognises in her patience, tenderness and care that can help her to tame a difficult husband that one can compare to a lioness. Her qualities can make her succeed in living with him and in that case they compare it to milking a lioness. This proverb expresses a very instructing wisdom, calling people to reason that women's tenderness is a positive attribute for family life in particular and for the society sustainability at large. According to that proverb, women are tender-minded, and society needs such an attribute. In fact, the world would burn if it were inhabited by only tough people. The society needs people either men or women who can moderate social tensions. Women are powerful persons because of their tenderness. A lot of marriages that would ordinarily break up are held together by the woman because of her tenderness in order to save her children from a broken home.

### 3.6.2. The woman as co-manager of the household

By tradition, women are also in charge of the family welfare but they have no right in decision-making for important matters. That is a man's right as chief of the family.

The Kirundi proverbs condemn any wife who intends to go beyond her own roles in family as the following proverb portrays it: *Umugore ntaganza urwarwa aba ashaka inzira ija iwabo* [A woman never has control over banana wine unless she wants the way back to her parents]. Banana wine was a very important commodity among Barundi men especially in socialising and it was under the control of the husband. Even today, beer plays a big role in socialising. There is no party that can be held without beer (or soft drinks). By analogy, it suggests that a wife at home has her own tasks just as the husband has his. According to that proverb, whoever interferes with someone else's roles merits correction, and this one is repudiation for the woman, a punishment that was socially heavy in former times. This proverb is an indirect instruction involving a whole human experience rather than controlling over banana wine. It is a warning to some women who may want to go beyond their social status as secondary human beings in the household and indulge in the husband's roles. Here the division of roles is again evident.

However, the distribution of food was and is still a woman's task, except in modern families where you may find house workers fulfilling that task on behalf of working women. The following proverb portrays the role of the woman in cooking food: *Umugore agaba inkono yo ku ziko* [A woman owns the pot that is on fire]. In the overwhelming majority of African societies cooking is the woman's work. This stems undoubtedly from practical considerations: since the woman has to stay home or around home with the baby to be nursed, it is convenient for her to perform the chores centred in the home. The two aforementioned proverbs reflect a balance division of roles between a man and a woman in the household where the man has to do this and the woman has to do that and this helps to avoid confusion of tasks between the two. According to the two preceding proverbs, certain powers are recognised to the woman in some domains. Women therefore earn all they get from their husband by house service in such a kind of allocation of roles.

In the following Kirundi proverb, the woman is portrayed as a good manager: *Umugore mu kuzigama inkono abanza urujo* [A woman normally starts using a potsherd in order to preserve the new pots]. Good management in the household is actually a quality that a woman is expected to have and according to that proverb, that quality has been noticed in women.

### 3.6.3. The woman as a labour force

Hard work is an emblem of womanhood. Hard working is an attribute that was considered among Burundians for a girl to be betrothed. According to Kirundi proverbs, a lazy woman has no place in society. She is worthless no matter how beautiful she may be as satirised in the following proverb: *Umugore w'intarima yonsa isuka* [A lazy woman feeds her hoe's handle with her breasts]. Instead of cultivating fields, she stands against the hoe's handle most of the time of the day. Agriculture was and is still the pillar of the Burundian economy from memorial times. So womanhood was evaluated in how tenacious the woman was at work with a hoe. That idea of laziness is also stigmatised in the following proverb: *Imburakimazi y'umugore iramvya mw-irima* [A useless woman sits her legs stretched on a mat during cultivation]. Hard-working is more valued than external beauty. This idea of hard work is echoed in this Swahili<sup>157</sup> proverb: *Uzuri wa mwanamke ni kazi* [The beauty of a woman is work].

The Burundian society praises a hard working woman. She is equated with the pillar of the family economy as in the following proverb: *Umugore ni inkingi y-urugo* [A woman is the pillar of the household]. This highlights her importance in the life of the family. Given the role played by a pillar in sustaining the walls of a house, it means that the family would collapse if the woman were not there. The previous proverb is completed by the following even in stronger terms: *Umuhushatunga ahusha umugore* [He who misses a wife misses wealth]. By 'missing' a wife, the proverb wants to suggest that a man can miss the opportunity to get rich if he makes a wrong choice in choosing his wife. When the woman cultivates and plants seeds for instance those who see how green the fields are

---

<sup>157</sup> Swahili is one of the languages also spoken in Burundi.

will praise the husband of the woman. The proverb does not suggest that the wife is a business partner with her husband. If it were the case, a man would be better in like relation. The proverb suggests that the man gets wealth by getting a woman who is compatible with him. That implies that the body of the woman, her services such as digging the fields and managing the crops, her children, and her moral support all belong to the man-husband. Although women may not be producers of wealth in cash terms, they serve in the final processes of preparation and distribution. Their labour in the household has a genuine economic value. Her industriousness is the pillar of family economy. The proverb above reflects that the Burundian society recognises the part played by the woman in the wellbeing of the man. That proverb is often quoted during wedding ceremonies.

Another proverb from religious influence still comes to reinforce the idea of how important is a woman and how great is her contribution in the well being of a man:

*Uwuronse umugore aba aronse ikintu ciza cane* [He who has got a wife has got something very good].

As a matter of fact, the woman manages the house and administers its functions and the man becomes happy. A happy and comfortable man can produce more than the unhappy and uncomfortable one. The woman serves the man so that, the man so well served, may produce more. This is a contribution not to be overlooked. On the contrary, if a man marries a woman of bad character, she may take from him the conditions which make him happy and comfortable and that can cripple his industry. The labour of a woman in the house certainly enables the man to produce more wealth than he otherwise could. In this way women are economic factors in the family and the society.

Despite the presentation of the woman as a secondary citizen, the quality of the woman's contribution to the life of the nuclear family is not secondary at all. There are proverbs that appreciate the 'real' women's work and behaviour as portrayed in the following one: *Umugore ntiyambikwa ariyambika* [A woman is not clothed but she clothes herself]. This reflects that by the work she does, she contributes in increasing the family's income. A woman has a great value in a family. She is not there to cross her arms and wait for what

the husband brings though he is supposed to be the provider. The proverb and many others portray balance of activities between men and women for the family welfare.

The enhancement of this idea of hard working in Kirundi proverbs reflects that the woman does not live in a parasite relationship with the man nor in oppression. It rather reflects a tight link to the division of labour in the household where the man has to do this and the woman has to do that for balance.

### **3.6.4. The woman and physical or moral weakness**

As proverbs portray deviation from some men, they do also the same for some women. That is why some proverbs stigmatise certain misbehaviour of some women. However it does not imply that all the qualities recognised in the woman as described in the previous lines are nullified. If a proverb portrays cowardice, inconsistency or gossipy as feminine, it means that this weakness may have been displayed by few women and generalised as feminine.

For example, on the contrary to man's tenacity, cowardice is attributed to the woman as in: *Umugoré w'umugoré uhinda uhéra* [The speed at which a woman starts a race goes in diminuendo]. That proverb portrays a woman's lack of courage in some aspects of life. According to it, the speed at which a woman starts a race disappears in the twinkling of an eye. But this is actually another side to stereotype women because in reality most of the work that is traditionally attributed to women requires courage and perseverance. This race must be something else. In fact, the proverb suggests that manifestations of anger are of short time, and this is mainly feminine, according to the image in the proverb. Cowardice of a person in such a case can be an asset to human relationships. For instance in case of disagreement in opinions between two persons, there must always be one who accepts that label of coward by conceding in order to avoid the worst. If all were tenacious in their arguments fire could explode.

Furthermore, women are not physically weaker; it is rather a matter of training. For what she is able to do, she always reaches her target. But because of lack of training, there are effectively things in which her speed would go in diminuendo.



Another weakness portrayed in women is gossip. *Agahugu karimwo abagore ntikabura amazimwe* [A (small) country that is inhabited by women cannot lack gossipers]. This proverb describes gossiping as a feminine characteristic. The proverb reflects how talkative women may end up quarrelling. However, talking is not bad as such when talking constructively and when it does not prevent people from fulfilling tasks assigned to them. Gossip can even be understood in a more positive way as “one of the forms of oral literature that remains” according to Taban Lo Lyong.<sup>158</sup> Traditionally, gossip was the only means of expression at women’s disposal since they were not allowed to speak in the public of men. So, they could spend time talking about many different issues affecting their lives when they came together, which the proverb may portray exaggeratedly as “*amazimwe*” [gossipers]. If women’s opinion is not considered by their husband, it is quite normal that they turn to other women whom they think might understand their lot. This is what some people call gossiping. This helps them to feel better because to use Taban Lo Lyong’s words again, “serious literature is a medicine to the heart and the soul”.<sup>159</sup> When women talk about their “stories”, it is relieving. That talk does not only have a therapeutic dimension but it also has a social function since it allows women to break down the isolation of the home by creating strong ties with other women beyond the fences.

There are also other proverbs that may seem to portray women as unfaithful and untrustworthy. But if one reads them in their context, they express a logical consequence of the construction of masculinity as in this example: *Umugore ni ndyana n’uwejeje* [A woman is ‘I-eat-with-whoever-is-about-to-harvest’]. Women are thought not to be stable, that they like comfort and that when a husband becomes poor, the wife’s love to the husband immediately flies through the window. That is what brought Burundian wisdom to choose that image of women to portray the idea that profit is the condition of many actions and reactions. Another satire against women is expressed in the following proverb: *Umugore musangira amata ntimusangira amazi* [With a woman you share milk but

---

<sup>158</sup> Taban Lo Lyong. Public talk on “Literature is not fun”, 27 September 2012, Makerere university

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

you do not share water]. That proverb is similar to the preceding one. That proverb portrays women as seeking easy and comfort life from their husband. In other words, when the wealth of the husband is over, the love of the wife withers and she disappears too. According to that proverb, a woman would marry a man in happy moments and leave him in hard times. I contend that women were right to behave so. Since masculinity was tightly linked with possession, the man about to harvest or to provide with milk was more “masculine” than the poor. In other words, if the yardstick to measure masculinity is wealth, the masculinity of the poor is doubtful.

All in all, if those proverbs exist, it means that what they portray has been noticed or experienced in a way or another as proverbs in Burundian culture portray noticed facts or experience.

### **3.6. 5. The power of the Burundian woman**

Although she is presented as secondary in patriarchal order and stereotyped as morally weak, the Burundian woman is also portrayed as a powerful person. First, she is mother and an educator of the younger. In fact, women are charged with the crucial mission of transforming animal-like infants into cultured beings. The power of the woman resides in that she is actually the primary agent of children’s early socialisation. It is she who transforms newborn infants from mere organisms into cultured humans, teaching them manners and the proper ways to behave in order to become fully-fledged members<sup>160</sup> of society, as Ortner would put it. Second, she is a cultural agent. Next, she is a contributor to the well being of the family thanks to her industriousness. Furthermore, she is the driving force behind family economy and a man cannot set up a home alone without her. In brief she is complementary to the man. Those are ones of her greatest contributions without which the society and humanity would not exist. Despite her secondary status in hierarchy in marriage, it is clear that the Burundian woman is in position of power. Power can be defined here as the aptitude of one person to exercise influence over another one. ‘The positions of the wife and mother – though subject to the male control, [also] offer

---

<sup>160</sup> Ortner.op. cit. pp.250-251.

forms of power - the power to socialize children, to run the house and to be the power behind the throne'<sup>161</sup>, to use the words of Chris Weedon (1987).

Because of the importance she has in the family, there are certain attitudes that men avoid despite the control they have over their wives as it has been demonstrated. The place of the woman in the household makes that respect to her be a must. That has astonished even certain foreign observers:

*La place de la femme dans le ménage est plus élevée qu'ailleurs en Afrique orientale. Dans la vie de famille, elle est à égalité avec son mari. Ils se repartissent les travaux journaliers,...*<sup>162</sup>

The place of the woman in the household is highly elevated in Eastern Africa than elsewhere. In the family life, she is on equal foot with her husband. They share the daily work,...

Given the woman's role in the family, a husband that ill-treats his wife makes a big error. He forgets that the family unit is founded on a man and a woman who decide to live under the same shelter and to unite their flesh (*Urugo rugira babiri*: The family unit is founded by two). The male sex is incomplete without the woman. There must be wife in the foundation of a family; otherwise it would be impossible for a man to set up a family without a woman.

Burundian women enormously contribute to the welfare of the family and to the progress of the society at large because the woman is a pillar of the family economy. Her role is fully recognized and acknowledged by the society as it is portrayed through Kirundi proverbs. The proverb above implicitly reflects that having a wife is a felt need by a man. A man is mentally, emotionally and socially balanced if he has a wife, according to one of my informants Eric Niyonemera when he was asked to explain the Kirundi proverb *Umugabo ahaga amazi ayivomeye* [A man is satisfied with water only when he draws it for himself]. Actually, it is traditionally known that drawing water is a role of children and

---

<sup>161</sup> Chris Weedon (1987: 19) quoted in Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan's *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. London: SAGE Publications Lt. 2004, p.114

<sup>162</sup> H.Meyer, *Die Barundi*. Leipzig, Otto : Spamer, 1916. (Traduction de J.P. Chrétien), Bujumbura : Ecole Normale Supérieure du Burundi, Polyc., 1968, p. 59.

women in Burundi. According to Niyonemera, “drawing water for himself” refers to having sex with his own wife rather than wandering here and there in adultery<sup>163</sup>. That idea is completed by another Kirundi proverb which says *Umugore w’uwundi ntamara agahinda* [The wife of another (man) does not end your anxiety]. This proverb does not only serve to disillusion those men who think that it is better elsewhere than at home but also to upgrade the status of the wife for monogamy. What derives from the two proverbs is that there is no better place than one’s home, there is no better than one’s property.

To a certain extent, the Burundian woman is therefore in position of power in some aspects of life as portrayed in Kirundi proverbs. Expressing a related view, Chinweizu (1990) writes about what he calls the five pillars of female power<sup>164</sup>.

All in all, women are constructed with complementary attributes to the man. Feminine constructs are industriousness, patience, perseverance, humility, submissiveness, caring, sensibility, and the like. In spite of some weaknesses that are portrayed in some women, the latter are depicted as powerful persons in the family. In a number of proverbs, their power is acknowledged. However, that does not exclude the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife.

### **3.7. Consequent men-women relations**

Relations between man and woman particularly in marriage benefits certainly from the way society constructs masculinity and femininity. As it appears through the analysis of Kirundi proverbs, the construction of masculinity and femininity shapes different lives for men and women by placing them in different social positions and patterns of expectations to organize an orderly society. This reflects humankind’s aspiration to order. The analysis of Kirundi proverbs reflects that the man and the woman seem to come from two backgrounds with opposite but complementary features. The man possesses features that the woman does not have and vice versa.

---

<sup>163</sup> Eric Niyonemera. op.cit

<sup>164</sup> Chinweizu. op.cit. pp.14-15.



For instance, for the better running of the family, the upheld masculine quality of dominance is closely related to the feminine quality of subservience. So, the ‘boy’ turns himself toward the ‘girl’ and the ‘girl’ toward the ‘boy’ in order to get what misses in each one. That justifies the constant sexual attraction despite the seemingly unequal relations between men and women. From an early age, the girl, the-woman-to-become is raised in the conviction that she has to adopt the ideal character of a woman, which seems to be the opposite of that of a man in order to be desired by the man. That validates Judith Butler’s assertion that there is a “causal continuity among sex, gender and desire”.<sup>165</sup>

*Masculine quality of dominance is closely related to the feminine quality of subservience.*

**Picture 4**

To some extent, the patriarchal order assigns the man enormous power over the woman in marriage for the benefits of the household though some men seem to have misused it, according to what is portrayed in proverbs. The practice of enhancing patriarchal hold has been internalised so deeply that even the victim herself seems to contribute in maintaining the status quo. Men think that it is quite normal to dominate women and most women think that the situation is normal as they grew up in the system and as everyone, including women themselves contributes to maintain and perpetuate it. That

---

<sup>165</sup> Judith Butler. op. cit. , p.284

reflects the human felt need of an authority or a leader who must have more special attributes than what one has.

Children and even some grown up people may seem not to understand that these cultural practices are not natural. But it is only out of the philosophy of male superior status that the domestic power arrangements grow. The family, peers, Christian leaders and Medias converge therefore to persuade boys and girls to adopt certain behaviours that will allow them to fulfil their roles as men and women in order to found strong families.

Though man's attributes are strength, freedom and control of his emotions, the Burundian society teaches him to tame his strength for the sustainability of the marriage. Hence we have a proverb like: *Amashakarugo aragora umugore ntiyotutse umugabo* [The will to have a family is very demanding otherwise a wife could not insult her husband]. Marriage which is the foundation of the family is an engagement between a man and a woman. There must be a wife in the house. That is why the man or the woman ought to accept each other and tolerate each other's weaknesses. According to that proverb, marriage is a serious engagement especially for a man since he is required to stand the vices of his wife despite the authority and the power the culture confers on him. Actually, the feminine courtesy requires that the woman addresses her husband with the most possible respect, even when the husband is guilty. She must see how to redress her husband without hurting him especially when they are in public. The fact of insulting one's husband is a shameful act. Being the powerful person in his house, the husband should not be insulted by his wife for he can beat her up and chase her away.

Nonetheless, beating one's wife is not a solution. Rather the understanding must be maintained for the benefits of both the man and the woman and their children according to that proverb. The husband must know that he needs a wife. The following proverb is like a wise warning to the man who would not make an effort to live in harmony with his wife: *Umugabo ntahora aragwana aba akumbuye guteka* [A husband does not fight with his wife all the time unless he is nostalgic of cooking for himself]. In Burundian culture, the division of work in the household is very rigorous in certain domains. Following tradition, that division is done on the basis of sex. In that way, all the works related to cooking are

exclusively reserved to women, assisted by children especially girls. That is why the proverb comes as an advice to the husband to not always quarrel with his wife for fear of doing himself that work which is not worthy of a man, according to tradition.

Chasing her is not a solution either because it does not honour either party. By reflecting the experience from tradition, the Kirundi wisdom warns men who would rely on their power and be tempted to chase their wife because of her bad behaviour: *Wirukana umugore ngo aguguna igufa ukazana uwurimira miyonzwa* [If you chase your wife under the pretence that she scrapes out a bone, you bring one who swallows it wholly without chewing it]. From this proverb, one could wonder why chasing one woman and bringing another one rather than living without one. It implies that a male always needs a woman. A male person cannot do without a woman; he is not accepted by the society. There are even some positions that a not married grown up male cannot be assigned in Burundi unless one is a dedicated priest.

The two preceding proverbs remind married people to be tolerant in their differences, to correct themselves whenever required in order to live in peace and harmony. It follows that men have to be careful in the way they treat their wives and to think twice before taking any decision whose results may victimise them. Of course the previous proverb is by analogy a warning against impatience and intolerance of a given situation as you do not know what may happen with the new one you want to engage in.

According to Burundian tradition, marriage, which is a contract on which the family is built, brings with it a commitment which is hard to break. It is first of all the responsibility of the husband to consolidate it. A husband who pleases his wife often harvests reward of good behaviour from his wife. And that good behaviour is important in the life of the household. The violence against a wife by her husband is today a valid reason to divorce than yesterday.

Analysis of Kirundi proverbs clearly demonstrates that a husband and a wife are complementary in working for the benefits of the household and humanity in general although the structure in sharing the work between the husband and the wife would make

some people think that the wife is less responsible than the husband. However, division of labour according to tradition between men and woman aims at balance in roles and responsibilities while keeping the hierarchy between them in the advantage of the man.

There is evidence from proverbs that man needs woman as much as she needs him: *Urugo ni babiri* [The family unit is set up by two (persons)]. ‘The couple is a fundamental unit with the two halves riveted to each other: cleavage of society by sex is not possible’<sup>166</sup>, as Simone de Beauvoir would say it. The woman does not need to try to be like a man because society will be balanced with men and women working on the basis of their abilities and gifts, without discrimination based on sex. Another example to illustrate that the man needs the woman though it indirectly portrays it is: *Umugore sinobigirwa agwa ku nzira* [The woman it-cannot-be-done-to-me dies wandering]. A woman who does not accept it to be “done” to her can move from one place to another and will never find where to stay with a man called her husband but who “does not do it to her”. Wherever she goes she finds men who like to “do”. In other words, that proverb suggests that a woman who does not accept to be penetrated by a man will die wandering because she cannot find a normal man who does not “do it.” It is another way to say that every man is urged by a desire “to penetrate” and as a result he gets balanced when he gets a woman to fulfil himself. “Doing it” is a masculine attribute. It is a sign of virility. For the marriage to succeed and last, the man needs to have good sex life without which he chases his wife and brings another one.

On the other hand, the woman needs the man as the proverb portrays it: *Nta bugiri bwigira, umugore agirwa n’umugabo* [Nothing makes it by itself, a woman is made by a man]. There is no evidence from Kirundi proverbs that women are perceived as Greek saw them “a beautiful and difficult to resist source of evil.” They are rather perceived as a source of wealth and welfare to the husband and to the family. So, the will to consolidate the household imposes a lot of sacrifice to the man, renouncing sometimes to his rights.

---

<sup>166</sup> Simone de Beauvoir .op.cit. p.9



To some men who want to exploit their social advantages to the detriment of women by for example attributing themselves too much freedom, the society stigmatises them as it is portrayed in many Kirundi proverbs such as the following: *Akagabo karajije ukuguru hanze bakita imburakimazi* [A (small) man whose leg spends the night outside is called worthless]. This metaphoric image is a criticism against sexual involvement outside the wedlock since nobody can actually leave one of his legs outside when one gets into the house. Kirundi proverbs also portray conflicts inherent in polygamy and henceforth warn men against such practice: *Umugabo aharitse ahorana induru* [A polygamous man always lives in quarrels]. The traditional view recognises only monogamy for men; in addition polygamy was tolerated on the part of individual men but they were warned about its detrimental effects. Polygamy is the origin of conflicts in a home. The following proverb emphasises the same idea of detrimental effects of polygamy: *Rwitera imanza yenze babiri* [He-who-would-attract-conflicts-for-self married two wives]. The two Kirundi proverbs echo a proverb from American tradition which says, “*A man who marries twice is a two-time loser*”. A man should not marry more than one wife if he does not want to live in difficulties. The man in fact can never live in peace with the tension, rivalry and hatred between co-wives or their descendants. Nevertheless, that proverb is no longer referring to polygamy since this practice is formally prohibited in Burundi. It is used in its extensional meaning to communicate the message that it is not possible to be involved into incompatible actions or that the one who has to conciliate divergent interests must face turmoil.

There are many proverbs that reflect on the other hand that the society tried to domesticate women so as not to pose threat to the cultural foundation of hierarchy as it appears in this other example often used by Burundi: *Umugabo aravuga umugore yavugara rukaba rucitse itongo* [The husband speaks, if the wife retorts the marriage gets broken]. The context of use of that proverb is a discussion between a man and his wife. The man speaks and the woman replies. As the woman goes on retorting, they end up quarrelling. The man is menacing the woman to send her away. The proverb comes as a concluding lesson to the scene. This proverb suggests that a woman should not exchange words with her husband in an attempt to present her case or to convince. The good wife keeps quiet

and does what her husband says. To make the women less powerful and easy to control, the society tried to tame the woman. For security of the couple the woman's voice was not supposed to be heard in the past although things are changing nowadays.

Religion in general and the Judeo-Christian tradition in particular seems to have contributed a great deal in the domestication or the taming of women in order to strengthen the "marriage" between masculinity and femininity in the patriarchal order. The two following proverbs are examples often quoted from the Bible during performance when church leaders are celebrating the engagement ritual of a bride and a bridegroom: *Umugore w'ubwenge yubaka urugo rwiwe, ariko ikijuju kirusambuza ayiwe maboko* [A wise woman makes her home, but the foolish destroys hers by her own hands]. This proverb reflects that there are wise women who make their homes and fool women who destroy theirs. To a larger extent, this proverb portrays the power of the woman in family sustainability and this is an aspect not to neglect. It suggests that the woman through proper management increases the property, furniture, food and raiment of the household, but the thriftless woman causes these blessings to depart. Another proverb that echoes the preceding is *Umugore atunganye abera umugabo wiwe igitsibo mu mutwe, ariko aw'agatetereza amubera nk'ikimungu mu magufa* [A good wife is a crown on her husband's head, but a wife who brings shame on her husband is like a cancer in his bones]. The proverb uses a strong opposition *crown on head /cancer in bones*. In the past, a crown was a sign of kingship and it was worn by the King on head, a part that is seen by everybody, as symbol of honour and power. So, the first slot of the proverb conveys the message that goodness of a wife elevates the husband to the level of a King. In other words, the woman becomes her husband's pride and joy and everyone can notice the man's joy. On the contrary, when the wife hurts the man (husband), the man tries to endure silently and to hide his pain from other people, just as the pain of cancer especially in bones is only felt by the sick person. To a certain extent, this proverb serves to reinforce patriarchy as the goodness of the wife becomes the pride and the joy of the man while the shame hurts him like cancer in bones, a very strong image. So a good wife is worth than jewels according to this proverb. The use of these proverbs among Barundi is an evidence of the influence of religion in the taming of women. Feminine constructs in Kirundi proverbs

have been projected in a way not to disturb the patriarchal order. All in fabrication of either masculinity or femininity turns around protecting the honour and the position of the man. Even the success of the woman is to the credit of the husband. And in my understanding there is nothing bad in that as long as the man acknowledges this woman's power in family.

Sacred are family relationships that rise through marriage. According to Abasi Kiyimba, "this is one of the most powerful methods of enforcing male authority<sup>167</sup>". And this is true to some extent. But as it has been proved through examples of proverbs in the previous lines, the will to sustain his family imposes some sacrifices to the man despite his authority. Besides, both the man's role as a provider, protector and first responsible person or head of the household, and the woman's role as a helper, sustainer and heart of the family unit have importance in exercising authority on wife by the husband and on children by parents in turn. In fact, this structure of hierarchy helps to nurture the culture of authority – an institution that people are enforced to live in everywhere – in the life of young generation.

That social organisation as reflected in Kirundi proverbs cannot lead one to conclude that the woman is reduced to the rank of slave in Burundi; not at all. Subordination is not synonymous with oppression. It is highly evident from human experience that no human organization can correctly function if it has two chairpersons. And this is particularly true for the family. Submission is not synonymous with inferiority. For order of the society, there must be a certain way of organising people on the basis of some differences. From various Kirundi proverbs, it is evident that healthy relationships cannot be built on a fifty-fifty philosophy, especially in marriage.

Hierarchy in status and balance in roles have helped to secure the society because that domestic unit institution built on heterosexuality is the very basic unit of the society. It holds times of great joy and creates the best environment for bringing up children. There

---

<sup>167</sup> Abasi Kiyimba. "Men and Power: Masculinity in the Folktales and Proverbs of the Baganda" in Helen Nabasuta Mugambi and Tuzyline Allan Jita. *eds. Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*. Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2010, p.43.

are households that live happily that are not taken as model because the tendency of human beings is to magnify the little that goes wrong while ignoring the big that goes well as Anne Nishimwe<sup>168</sup>, one of my informants says it. It is important to give good things as model but not problems.

A close examination of Kirundi proverbs reveals that in Burundian context, the forging of masculinity does not totally privilege men to the detriment of women. Although conferring advantages on men, the fabrication of masculinity simultaneously imposes men constraining social and economic responsibilities towards their wives, which turn out to be a privilege to women. There is interplay between masculinity and femininity as a game where, to use Daouda's terms, there is no weaker or stronger sex and where all biological features and gender roles are well balanced, valorising and complementary<sup>169</sup>. Each of the masculine and feminine features implies duties, social expectations and suitable behaviour for men and women. The societal construction of masculinity and femininity is a counter argument of the biological determinism of Freud's assertion that women are inferior and that their development is troubled because of their deficient genitalia, their lack and envy of the penis. It is rather because femininity has been socially constructed in a way not to disturb the patriarchal order by the domestication of the woman. From Kirundi proverbs, there is evidence that the woman needs a man as well as he needs her. It is also evident that men and women have their strengths and their weaknesses. To a greater extent a close reading of these proverbs reflects Barundi's insights of gender complementarities at a certain stage of culture, contrary to previous scholarship that African literature represents women as oppressed and men as oppressor.

From a constructionist point of view, gender is not constructed as a stable identity. It is changeable just as culture is dynamic. What is highly estimated in contemporary men and women is moral intelligence and ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and ethical from non ethical and an exercise of one's gifts independently of one's sex.

---

<sup>168</sup> Anne Spes Nishimwe.op.cit.

<sup>169</sup> Daouda Laoum. "The Ambivalence of Masculinity in Gorgui Dieng's *A Leap Out of the Dark*" in Helen Nabasuta Mugambi & Tuzyline Jita Allan.eds.op.cit., p.287.

However, there are some elements of gender identities that seem to remain constant in order to avoid confusion among members of the society.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

Overall, the analysis of Kirundi proverbs from a social construction of gender frame reveals a picture of some differences between man and woman putting the man in advantageous position, especially at the family level. But the Burundian paremiological discourse on gender speaks in the sense of balance in the allocation of roles between men and women. That division of labour in family is a reflection of the social definition of differences existing between husband and wife: the accomplished tasks are complementary. According to tradition, the allocation is done in the way that the man, at the same time head of family deals with duties that require long working hours or long travel outside their home, while women accomplish their work at home or near home such as to manage the household affairs and the good running of the home with flexible managements of the time due to the fact that they have to give birth and to nurse children. That division of labour based on sex is still a reality in Burundi in one way or another and it is even rigorous particularly in rural areas as testified my informants from rural region. As it has been proved by a number of proverbs, man and woman have each one specific activities in the household. From the same proverbs, it appears that the cattle, provision in basic needs to the family and external relations are the domain of the husband while the organisation of the household, cultivation and children care are the tasks of the wife. So, women are not less responsible as their roles are complementary to those accomplished by men. Even when a woman works outside it is assumed from the very beginning that the main responsibility of the house is the woman's and the main job of support is the man's, this to avoid anarchy. Furthermore, both men and women are accountable to their society. In fact, each of them has to accomplish their tasks satisfactorily. If not, the society warns, criticizes, ridicules, or stigmatises each of them without distinction of sex as the analysis of Kirundi proverbs has proved it. This is contrary to the commonly held view that proverbs blame women only. Even men are blamed by society when they do not fulfil what it expects from them. That is reflected in the way proverbs stigmatise men

with very negative qualifiers. To create order out of this chaotic world, each society sets accepted behaviours to which males and females are expected to conform.

As it is reflected in proverbs, Burundian society constructed masculinity and femininity in a certain way and whoever did not conform to those standards was stigmatised without distinction of their sex. This leads to conclude that Burundian ancestors had this knowledge that being the head of family does not entitle one with unlimited freedom and that there must be boundaries within which to exercise one's rights. The analysis of Kirundi proverbs reveals the wisdom that characterised our ancestors in managing men's and women's relationships. That social structure has helped to meet the needs and the challenges of the time and to sustain society for centuries.

Given the role that the man had to play in the society, the society constructed a myth around the male person so that he may receive due respect and hence assume his responsibilities as the head of the family. Now, that myth is not easy to break despite changes because the necessity of authority or leader in human relationships is felt everywhere and all the time. In this chapter, analysis of proverbs that use the images of male and female lexemes has helped to have a better understanding of gender through the genre of proverb from Burundian culture.

Masculinity is expressed among other things by physical and moral courage, strength, economic power, competitiveness, domination or authority, toughness, and control of emotions while femininity is expressed among other things by hard work, humility, kindness, tenderness, patience and perseverance. The unchangeability and the predictability of these constructs served to build coherence among men and women in history. Their predictability helped to know who is to do what in a given context to avoid confusion or clash. This is simply because the construction of femininity and masculinity is interlocked. These differences are nurtured in families since the early age. Children are taught explicitly or implicitly how to become man or woman. To a greater extent the faults or weaknesses of the man portrayed in proverbs seem to result from his power and freedom while those of the woman seem to be a consequence of her disempowerment during the process of socialisation. The role of socialisation today is therefore to work on

improving on man's and woman's weaknesses rather than perpetuate negative stereotypes.

The societal construction of masculinity and femininity places males and females in stratum intending to create a hierarchical structure between husband and wife in marriage with somehow legitimisation of husbands to exercise power over their wives. In the philosophy of Barundi, the guiding principle in the construction of masculinity and femininity is to shape in men and women two different but complementary characters for solid families where a new progenitor can grow from. Evidence from data shows that despite that patriarchal hierarchy, there are aspects of life in which the man has power and some others in which it is the woman who has power. So, the complex of gender relations includes benefits to women as well as liabilities. That is why as a whole, one can say that, as Mark Bengé Okot (1994) puts it, 'patriarchy does not necessarily and immediately suggest absolute male domination and complete female subjugation and subordination'<sup>170</sup>. Therefore, gender inequality is a hard nut to crack. In the logic, there must always be the first one and the second.

When put in its historical cultural context, the Kirundi proverbial discourse so far examined reflects that the construction of masculinity and femininity is based on biological considerations to fill some socio-political functions. Barundi's traditional worldview of gender is the male superiority over female in the household for social order, but with equity and complementary or reciprocity in roles between men and women for balance in labour. As Doret Ntamagara (1988) would put it, society consciously endeavoured to "destroy woman's confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life"<sup>171</sup> in order not to disturb the patriarchal order. Her wings were cut through the process of enculturation so she could not know how to fly high. Traditionally, it was thought that order could be only maintained through hierarchy, and the latter was believed to be best built on differences.

---

<sup>170</sup> Mark Bengé Okot.op.cit., p.70.

<sup>171</sup>Doret Ntamagara. "The womanist ideology in Alice Walker's works: *Meridian* and *The Color Purple*". B.A. Thesis, Bujumbura: University of Burundi, 1988. p.4

From the analysis of Kirundi proverbs, men's and women's differences complement rather than exclude one another. The traditional way of life and circumstances benefited from that differentiated construction of masculinity and femininity as it is illustrated in this chapter. It allowed meeting the needs and challenges of the time.

However, Kirundi proverbs portraying the construction of masculinity and femininity that have been examined so far are records of the past and through them one can see how gender was used to organize the society. Those proverbs were codified for past generation because people like us were not born yet. The historical circumstances and probably the cultural experiences that inspired the creation of the proverbs that have been analysed in the present chapter are different from today's realities and cultural experiences. From a social construction of gender frame, proverbs as a genre of folklore reveal the social and cultural sources of the male superiority logic and its social purpose, and implicitly indicate wherein the potential for change to cater for contemporary imperatives lies. So, how do Kirundi proverbs, given their more or less fixed nature, manage to serve to current needs in communication in a changing society? That is the object of the fourth chapter.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### KIRUNDI PROVERBS IN RELATION TO CHANGING GENDER ROLES

#### 4.1. Introduction

Given that culture is dynamic, the contemporary society faces new needs and challenges. Certain roles have disappeared and new ones appeared. Barundi are getting more and more aware, like in many places of the world that restricting women to the domestic life despite evolution of ways of life makes unviable the contemporary epoch especially for women and that many talents that could help to cope with the new challenges are buried in women. What follows from the view of masculinity and femininity as a social construction is that masculinity and femininity are not immutable or set in stone. Femininity and masculinity are ongoing, changing and changeable rather than static or fixed. The division of labour is good, but not segregation. In the words of Florynce Kennedy, “[t]here are very few jobs that actually require a penis or vagina. All other jobs should be open to everybody.”<sup>172</sup> In the face of social change, and the economic empowerment of women which to some extent have been influenced by western thought, education, democracy and human rights, new ways of being men and women are being constructed to make society not only sustainable but also viable for both men and women. Some of the social bonuses that society gave to man are challenged to create a room for women.

So, what have been the major changes affecting gender roles? How does the traditional Kirundi proverbial repository adjust to changing masculinity and femininity? Have they remained the same? Have they remained the same but acquired new signification? Is there a new proverbial discourse that reflects and reinforces the contemporary changing

---

<sup>172</sup> <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/Florynce-Kennedy-quotes.htm> [Accessed on 14 July 2012].

gender roles and the consequent gender relations? These are the questions this chapter attempts to address.

#### **4. 2. Major changes affecting gender roles**

As already mentioned, culture is dynamic. With change, some questions get answers and new ones arise. This section presents a general overview of changes affecting gender roles and new consequent challenges.

Much change has occurred in the socio-economic structure of Burundi and so proverbs using the image of male and female lexemes are now used in new contexts. Some roles such as hunting disappeared while new ones appeared. With changes, and especially in relation to cash economy, what has come evident is that certain roles are more highly charged with honour than others and that they confer authority. However, either those roles more honourable or those less honourable, all need to be done to make life possible in society.

Traditionally, the place of the woman was believed to be primarily the home and her role was mainly domestic: it included child rearing and attending to the well being, feeding and care for the family, and cultivating and growing crops near the homestead. Her private life as wife and mother was an obstacle to her public life as a woman. For the man, his private life as a husband was transposed to his public life as a man. In the face of new circumstances, it has been discovered that women's restriction from public life and her total dependence on men are a hindrance to a sustainable development of the family first and then of the society at large. So the woman has gone out to work. Technology and progress of medicine have facilitated the mobility of the wife and mother. Technology devices are progressively providing her with options. The artificial nursing devices help to cut that biological cultural tie and this allows some Burundian women to move in the search of wealth outside their home.

So, among the many remarkable upheavals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, huge increase in women's employment stands out. With the rise of the industrial economy, the growth of towns and the development of the migrant labour system, the traditional prescriptions on the role of

women came to be overthrown. With cash economy, the large number of employed women outside their home is defying the traditional stereotype of the stay-at-home housewife and bread-winning husband which characterised the traditional society. Economic activities beyond the home in order to help feed and clothe the family are now acceptable due to new circumstances though it was not accepted as feminine at first.

For example in Burundi, and even in many other African countries, there have been wars, and a lot of men died in these wars. In such situations women have become heads of their families. So, if men died while they were supposed to be providers for their household, protectors, defenders and spokespersons of their families, women would not stay arms crossed, as one of my informants among women vendors testifies<sup>173</sup>.



*Women vendors in Bujumbura town and Adèle giving a testimony*

***Picture 5***

In order to survive, women started to take those roles traditionally allocated to men. So as not to fail to successfully do works traditionally done by men after they were widowed, it was important to get opportunities to train themselves in these roles while their men were still alive. As society evolved, women started to lead a public life and their mind got more and more stimulated. Therefore, the man is not any more the lonely guarantor of

---

<sup>173</sup> Adèle Ndayishimiye, oral interview, Bujumbura town, 13 April 2013.

family survival today for the simple fact that some women have become heads of family after the death of their husbands, after the husband had fled or simply deserted the household, or simply because life has become so expensive to be guaranteed by the income of the husband alone. Women are increasingly questioning the patriarchal assumption that providing and protecting are the preserve of a man as the man will not always be on hand when the woman has to confront needs.

By going out to work, women have changed their relations with their husbands and children. The working woman is nowadays helping to support the family; and she is getting now more involved in decisions that are taken in the house, decisions that were traditionally always taken by the husband.

Because of school education where the would-be-women go to learn new things and can even perform better than the would-be-men, because of the right to associations where women come together to sharpen their minds, of stimulating places and challenging jobs that keep the mind active, a lot of women have got an air of independence. Women are serving now not only as farmers but also as teachers, educators, social workers, secretaries, parliamentarians, counsellors, musicians, tradespersons, heads of offices, police and army officers or agents, as well as in a lot of other positions and activities. Stereotypic roles for women are gradually replaced with allowing an individual's gifts to be used in whatever way, not just in the kitchen or in nursing children. And yet, humanity needs kitchen and children nursing and people to fulfil the two roles.

Nowadays with the evolution of ways of thinking linked to western education, girls are gaining more and more consideration in the mentality of Barundi given the extent to which they can be useful to their family as well as to society as Astère Kwizera<sup>174</sup> raised it during our interview. Furthermore, in intellectual environments, people not only know that it is the man who biologically carries the factor of the male sex but also that the wife who contributes a lot in giving birth today was born girl yesterday.

---

<sup>174</sup> Astère Kwizera, op.cit.

Besides, the contemporary community's values are radically different. Personal freedom, formal education, salaried employment and a money economy are new realities, and they call for a different way of forging masculinity and femininity. While strength, bravely, virility and fecundity among Barundi were core values in the past, and are still valued today, there has been a shift in perspective in relation to contemporary challenges. Strength and bravery served the purpose of hunting, defending families and the country against enemies. Today, people no longer live on the products of the hunt. In addition, the role to ensure the security of people and the country that was traditionally assigned to men is now performed by both men and women.

Virility and fecundity were needed in conjunction with polygamy to ensure a sufficient labour force to dig the land, and the siring of a large progenitor, especially boys. Today, there is overpopulation with the consequent exiguity of land for cultivation, hence causing inherent conflicts over lands. The following two pictures are examples of family planning campaigns:



*If we had borne few children at the level of our means, we would not have fallen into such troubles.*

**Picture 6**



*Lands have become exiguous. Let us bear few children so that we may not leave conflict in family.*

**Picture 7**

Nowadays, while recognising that it is important for families to procreate, the government sensitises people through different media including messages and sensible images to control their birth. Families are encouraged to bear and raise fewer children who are likely to go to school. While all children constituted a labour force in the past

and would be informally educated in their sex group, there is today the programme of formal “education for all” where both boys and girls attend and the cost to educate children is higher. Now, manliness is no longer measured in terms of how many wives and children a male has but in terms of how he is able to pay for good schools for his children and secure their future. Furthermore, there are a lot of diseases compared to the past, which requires expensive medical care and compels one to reduce the size of his family.

Now with school education, both males and females follow the same curricula. Society takes the opportunity of school programmes to construct new forms of masculinity and femininity that respond to contemporary challenges in general and gender realities in particular. As a matter of fact, the change in the status of women necessarily involves the change in the status of men. In other words, in order to reduce man-woman dichotomy a redefinition of the female personhood entails a redefinition of masculinity. Education has proved to be a key to loosen the patriarchal hold and to empower women, for as Maggie Coasts quoted by Daouda Laoum rightly puts it, “emphasizing a universal privilege transcending sex and gender, ‘education is about nothing but change, the opportunity to grow, to develop, to enhance one’s understanding and possibly one’s place in the world.’”<sup>175</sup>. The training and degrees men and women get from schools equally open for both of them doors of the job market.

Apart from the traditional fields and cows, which are of course still relevant, the new cows and new fields are now employment. The new spear is the pen and this time it is carried by both men and women while the traditional spear was exclusively carried by the man. The new enemies are ignorance, poverty and diseases, while the new yardstick to measure “manliness, that is power, is economic ability. While manliness/power was measured by bravery in war, and at home through fecundity especially of sons, today’s success in this cash driven economy is measured in terms of education that can enable one to compete favourably in the global village, and by the health of one’s account or

---

<sup>175</sup> Daouda Laoum. op.cit. , p. 287.

investments<sup>176</sup>, to use Kamalwa's words. Now it is said jokingly that *ubwiza bw'umugabo buri ku mufuko*\* [A man's good looks are on his pocket] as an emerging form. While manliness was measured in terms of physical and economic strength, now both men and women can acquire wealth. Now, masculinity and femininity are shifting from traditional sex differentiated roles to non differentiated materialistic, intellectual, psychological and ethical attributes. The following two pictures are campaigns of sensitisation against HIV/AIDS.



*AIDS is enemy to the youth. Let us guard ourselves against seduction.*

**Picture 8**

Through different means including sensitisation and education of people, different efforts are made to encourage individuals tame their virility and guide it into 'zero grazing' lest the virus reduces the community itself to zero."<sup>177</sup>



*Education sensitising men and women about HIV/AIDS*

**Picture 9**

While a high value was placed on virility in the past, today's world is beset by the deadly virus of HIV/ AIDS, and an uncontrolled virility can be a cause of contamination. In addition, it can be a reason for divorce today if one member of the married couple discovers that his/her partner is adulterous.

Education that sensitises men and women about protecting themselves and their families from this scourge through fidelity and self control is now reinforced not only in discourse but also in visual aids.

<sup>176</sup> Wotsuna Kamalwa. "Masaba Proverbs and the Pre-eminence of Kinship" in Dominica Dipio, Lene Johannessen & Situart Sillars. eds. *Performing Community: Essays on Oral Culture*. Oslo: Novus Press, 2008, p.68.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. pp. 69.



With change, education, independence and equality of opportunities are masculine as well as feminine. The highly persuasive logic of woman's second position to which some people keep subscribing to all the time in public spheres is progressively being challenged. To counteract the strength of tradition, there is now a development of a healthy self-image and a positive I-can-win attitude through education of women. On the other side, there is education to men to loosen the hold of patriarchy. The yardstick that was traditionally used for measuring masculinity and femininity is shifting in order to cater for the changed and changing environment.

In short, at the socio-economic, political and cultural levels, a lot of changes have occurred and are still occurring. To some extent, some masculine and feminine attributes have changed and are changing while others are constant. In his article "Indices of Social Change in the Oral Literature of the Buganda", Abasi Kiyimba (2008) uses similes and metaphors to show that 'oral literature is a fairly reliable indicator that when change takes place in a society, the literature changes to reflect it.'<sup>178</sup> What about proverbs with their "fixed form"? In spite of changes, the Kirundi proverb with its ancient content and style 'is still a relevant communication form from tradition but applied to current needs'<sup>179</sup>, to use Linda Dégh's words.

### **4.3. Proverbs in relation to the changing masculinity and femininity**

It has been noticed by certain scholars that proverbs fall in the category of "fixed form" genres. So, given their fixity, they can be transmitted to several generations with no alteration at all and thus can shape their conscious. Ademola Kazeem Fayemi (2009) writes that 'a proverb needs not necessarily be a traditional saying; it could also be posterior and contemporary reaction to conventional wisdom, natural intelligence and traditional sayings'.<sup>180</sup> But according to some people, deconstructing the existing

---

<sup>178</sup> Abasi Kiyimba. "Indices of Social Change in the Literature of the Buganda" in Dominica Dipio, Lene Johannessen & Situart Sillars. eds. *Performing Community*. Oslo: Novus Press, 2008, p. 169.

<sup>179</sup> Linda Dégh. op.cit., p.1.

<sup>180</sup> Ademola Kazeem Fayemi. "Deconstructing Proverbs in African Discourse: The Yoruba example". *Journal of Afro-European Studies in Afroeuropa* 3, 1 (2009), p.4.



proverbial forms would be diluting the tradition. From a social constructionist point of view, the better way to give an objective appreciation of proverbs in Burundian culture is to embrace the philosophy of proverbs as a whole. Those proverbial statements express a general truth but some of them are not always absolute. Each one aims at one aspect of reality, and when need be another one is pendent but without nullifying the first. Kirundi proverbs have four special ways to self adjust to changes as summarised below.

#### **4.3.1. Proverbs as old wine in new bottles**

The Kirundi proverb still presents itself as the chief active ingredient in Kirundi speech in contemporary time despite cultural evolution. One way that has allowed proverbs to stand the test of time is their adaptation to current situation due to the fact that they are built on metaphor or analogy. Kirundi proverbs are used nowadays as old wording in new contexts. By the technique of metaphor or analogy, a fact observable by everyone is transposed to the rank of maxim. So, proverbs are autonomous statements that are built on metaphor. And metaphor is generally seen as a source of equivocation because it is built on the structure of analogy. Ambiguity or equivocality is therefore an asset to the proverbial discourse because it opens to proverbs the door to many extensional meanings that can fit into different and varying contexts of real life with different functions while keeping the traditional flavour. The creativity of contemporary people lies in being able to apply correctly this social heritage in new contexts.

At the origin, Kirundi proverbs portraying gender identities started as an expression of cultural understanding using the image of the male and female lexemes as they were observed at the time. But instead of changing in the line of cultural evolution they have now acquired a general signification that transcends time and generations and that apply to general contexts. Some gender identities have been considered like constant and have been so internalised to the extent of being taken for granted. They are used in social, economic or political contexts. The proverb using the image of male or female lexeme can be used in any real situation where it can fit independently of the sex of the addressee because the two lexemes have now acquired a general signification in proverbs.

So, when referring to contexts involving control of emotions, courage, power, authority, competitiveness, toughness, proverbs using the male lexemes are most of the time the choice. When referring to contexts involving warmth, submissiveness, kindness, tenderness, emotions, inconsistency, proverbs using the female lexemes are most of the time where to choose from. This is so familiar that gender identities expressed in these folk expressions seem to become now secondary but they implicitly serve to perpetuate the gender ideology of patriarchy.



*Bujumbura Central Market on fire on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2013*

***Picture 10***

Like an old wine in a new bottle, anterior proverbs are used in contemporary contexts and still have their traditional flavour. They are many but here are some examples:

A proverb to illustrate how the lexeme man is associated with control of one's emotion is a proverb that is often quoted and I heard it particularly on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2013, when the Bujumbura Central Market was completely burning down with all traders' goods.

It was a serious tragedy for traders first and for the whole Burundian economy. On that Sunday, some traders were crying while others were in complete consternation. A journalist of Bonesha, one of the private Radio stations in Burundi, first told the following proverb to encourage a tradeswoman who was crying before his microphone:

*Umugabo abonekera mu magorwa.*

A man proves to be a real one through troubles.

Although the proverb uses the male lexeme *umugabo*, the real meaning is that troubles are a good tester of the courage of a person. If one manages to keep courage in times of problems, it means the person has a strong mind, in reference to the masculine attribute of courage and control of emotion. This proverb suggests that ‘a true man’ is the one who fully controls his emotions or pain. In the extensional meaning of that proverb, ‘true man’ can be any person, man or woman or child who demonstrates courage. The proverb can be said to encourage any person in hard times to have control over their emotions. The use of that proverb in such a context was about suggesting that although the tragedy happened, the life ought to continue, and decisions of how to survive after the catastrophe must be made. The same proverb was then after repeated by the president of traders’ union, former occupants of the burnt market to support and encourage them both men and women using the image of the male lexeme. Many other authorities who intervened to sympathize with traders went on quoting the same proverb.

Quoting a proverb referring to the past construction of masculinity to react to a contemporary situation, one of my informants Dorcas Karimanzira says what follows:

*Naho bivugwa ngo **umugabo ni umutwe w’umugore**<sup>181</sup>, ivyo kuvuga ngo **ubugaba bw’umugabo nibwo buryo bwiwe** vyarataye igihe. Nk’igihe umugabo yama afata ingingo zigoramyeye canke yikwega mu gufata ingingo umugore wiwe nawe akaba abangutse kandi akerebutse, ntiyoreka ngo ibintu bipfe. Umugabo akwiye kubitahura ntace yibaza canke avuge ngo umugore aramugaje .<sup>182</sup>*

---

<sup>181</sup> This is a religious argument that comes to confirm the secondary position of a woman in the household. It has a biblical origin in Ephesians 5: 23.

<sup>182</sup> Dorcas Karimanzira, oral interview, Rwankona , 12/03/2013.

Although it is said that **the husband is the head of the wife**, the fact of saying that **the carelessness of a man is his right way of doing things** is old-fashioned. If for instance a man always takes **clumsy** decisions or when he is too slow in taking decisions, when he has a clever wife, the latter cannot let things get spoiled. The husband should understand that and not think or say that his wife rules over him.

By head, that saying is about recalling that the husband is in a position of authority in the family. But, the speaker is not denying authority but denies authoritarianism. Authority is good when exercised well for the benefit of those under such authority. The culture of the authority is something not to be neglected in the family and the society. To avoid confusion in society and for uniformity, that authority has been conferred to the husband at the family level. But when he fails, the woman does not keep arms crossed. In this situation, a proverb is quoted to deny a traditional practice. The proverb is used here as a ready-to-wear garment adjusted to challenge an aspect of reality.

Despite change, some traditional masculine and feminine attributes are persistent in the mind of people even today, as it appears through our oral interviews with informants, because they are useful more than because they are “true”. In fact, it is the construction of masculinity and femininity that effects a stabilization of gender in the interests of heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domains.<sup>183</sup> That is why proverbs reflecting these differences continue to be used and henceforth making the gender ideology of patriarchy perennial because of its social usefulness.

In short, beyond the experience that gave life to the proverb, words acquire a signification of general range, the same way as facts, in themselves commonplace, are observed by a scientist and serve as basis for a scientific theory. What matters in a proverb is not so much what the words say as what one can make them say but in the light of the original context of creation. That is one of the ways in which proverbs self adjust to changing gender realities. The words may be the same but the application changes. The meaning of

---

<sup>183</sup> Judith Butler. “Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity” in Wendy K. Kolmar & Frances Bartkowski, eds. *Feminist Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2005, p. 500.

the proverb must be inferred from the addressee's interpretation of the situation. The Kirundi proverb is not a genre in which to express wish or tell predictions but it is used in a concrete situation as a "reminder" to people of the already-seen or already-said from human experience. Proverbs are language sign posts among Barundi.

All in all, as they are built on metaphor or analogy, proverbs can fit into a whole range of new contexts. They are more or less constant in form but variant in contexts. That way reflects the variation of gender identities in a constant patriarchal social order.

#### **4.3.2. The matching of proverbs recommending opposite courses of actions**

The easiest way to disapprove the idea that proverbs contain absolute wisdom to span every reality is to match proverbs recommending opposite courses of action. However, though two proverbs may reflect judgements opposite to each other's, no one nullifies the other's truth. For example, in a debate on the respective value of the Ancients and the Modernists which is of all times and all latitudes, a modernist will say, *ubukuru sîbwo bwênge* [It is not age that confers wisdom] what would be the equivalent of the French '*A coeur bien né la valeur n'attend pas le nombre des années*' [To the fully lucky from birth, the value does not wait for the cumulation of years]. The opponent (Ancient) will retort: *Agashitsi ka kera kavumbika umuriro* [An old dry piece of tree keeps fire well for the following day] and the modernist will add once more: *Amase ya kera ntahoma urutaro* [An old cowpat cannot cover the outer part of a basket]. Such kinds of proverbs abound in Kirundi proverbial discourse.

No matter which forms it takes, the Kirundi proverb is a normative expression with a somehow uncontested authority though some proverbs essentially contradict each other. When two proverbs contradict each other, it does not imply that either of two proverbs that seem to contradict each other is wrong. It rather means that each proverb aims at one aspect of reality, the other serving to it eventually as a corrector or complement but without nullifying the first truth. This leads us to assert that while some Kirundi proverbs express absolute truth, there are others that express a truth which is not for all time but which fit only certain situations. There are many Kirundi proverbs that function in that

way. It simply reflects the complexity of human nature. Men and women have their strengths and their weaknesses. The role of socialisation is to improve on weaknesses.

For instance in reference to men and women's behavioural attitudes and relations, one can for example see proverbs that sense the exclusion and involvement of the woman simultaneously: *Nta bucuti bw-umugore* [No relationship with a wife] // *Umuhushatunga ahusha umugore* [He who misses a wife misses wealth].

There are also proverbs that sense the appreciation of the woman as a good manager simultaneously with the stigmatisation of a woman as a careless human being lacking agency: *Umugore mu kuzigama inkono abanza urujo* [A woman normally starts using a potsherd in order to preserve the new pots] // *Umugore ahimvye amenesha ukuguru urugi ngo bworo n'uze* [A woman who has eaten her fill of food breaks the door of the house with her leg and says: 'welcome poverty'].

The same applies for proverbs using the male lexeme. There are, for example, proverbs that acknowledge the man's freedom and others that severely stigmatise him simultaneously: *Impfizi y'umugabo ntiyimirwa* [The bull-man is set no boundaries] // *Umugabo ahumura ahumiwe*<sup>184</sup> [A man calms down when he is struck by bad luck]. The first proverb seems to encourage the man by not caring about his behaviour but the second comes as a strong reminder to moderate one's freedom to avoid the worst before it is too late.

A proverb is in fact a ready-to-wear garment that must dress a thought or that must adjust itself to fit a thought. It can rather be the thought itself. As one chooses a cloth of a certain colour from his/her wardrobe to dress on a particular day, so one does with a Kirundi proverb from the proverbial repository, and the traditional experience and wisdom seem to have sewn almost all colours and sizes. So, the user decides and chooses which proverb can work for them and which one cannot, according to the situation at hand. Though some proverbs seem to contradict each other, they do not nullify each

---

<sup>184</sup> The researcher heard this proverb Thursday, June 28, 2012 on African Public Radio from a radio programme on how to educate the youth on the bad consequences of HIV/ AIDS.

other's truth but they rather complete each other. The other proverb comes as a complement without nullifying the truth expressed by the first.

For instance, if one says *Abagabo bararya imbwa zikishura*<sup>185</sup> [When men eat, it is dogs that pay the bill], another one can react to that with *Umwana arya inkoko nyina akayiruka amoya* [A child eats a chicken and his/her mother vomits its feathers]. The first proverb reflects that subordinates pay for the wrongdoings of their leaders. The second portrays another aspect of reality by saying that leaders pay for the wrongdoings of their subordinates, that parents bear the pain of their children's misbehaviour.

It can be concluded that the contradictory nature of some proverbs simply reflects the contradictions in society. Society has never been homogeneous and hence one is likely to say that it will never be so. In spite of changes, there are always virtuous and vicious people; there are weak and strong characters as it was during our forefathers' time. Therefore, the second way in which proverbs can self adjust to change without alteration is by the use of proverbs expressing opposite that one can draw from the vast Kirundi proverbial repository. Given that there are many proverbs in Kirundi, it is always easy to choose the one that can match with the situation at hand and communicate effectively.

#### **4.3.3. Discard of some outmoded Kirundi proverbs from everyday use**

While some Kirundi proverbs are for all the time, others have become outmoded and out of use, except for their literary and historical significance. Some elements of "the old cultural software" are now obsolete and are discarded.

In everyday usage, Barundi are saying goodbye to those proverbs that purvey a relatively devalued view of women and a mystified figure of the man, or those proverbs which

---

<sup>185</sup> The researcher collected it from midday news in radio on 17 March 2013 during an interview of a human right activist by a journalist. The human right activist used the proverb to dress the idea that leaders of political parties use their subordinates as scapegoats and when the plot is outmanoeuvred, the subordinates pay the cost in prison.

seem to show that there is a level beyond which a woman cannot go while it is known that she is a person capable to think of the development of her family and society at large.

However, the social order of patriarchy is still sensed in language and in proverbs.

#### **4.3. 4. Emergence of new variant forms**

In spite of the seemingly fixed nature of proverbs, one of my informants<sup>186</sup> gives an example of a proverb from the Bible to illustrate how proverbs can change throughout history. That proverb changed three times. At the very first time, it was said, “If someone takes out your tooth, take out their eye”. It was suggesting that if someone does something wrong to you, you do to him something twice wrong to inflict a lesson to him/her of never repeating it any more. Second, the proverb evolved into a new variant. Moses came and said ‘no’ to that practice of unequal treatment because it was unjust. He talked of what may be called equity or equal administering of Law. According to Moses, if someone does something wrong to you, do to him/her the wrong equal to what s/he did to you. The proverb became “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth”<sup>187</sup>. According to that proverb, it is not fair that you take out the eye of the one who took out your tooth, or take two cows of the one who took one cow from you. Third, the proverb changed into a third variant when Jesus came and changed the second variant by preaching forgiveness. He said, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, If someone sins against you, forgive him”<sup>188</sup>. The proverb gave a third variant and became “To every sin, forgiveness”.

It is clear that despite the apparent closure to creativity and innovation proverbs can change and others be created due to the time, people’s mind, governments, profession or the environment that have changed. Nowadays, there is emergence of new forms

---

<sup>186</sup> Willy Ngendakumana, oral interview, Nyakabiga, 01 February 2013

<sup>187</sup> Exodus 21: 24 in *The Holy Bible*. Authorized King James Version. Tennessee: Pilot Books, Hull, Georgia, 2008.

<sup>188</sup> Matthew 5: 38-9 . op. cit.



reflecting that new ways of being men and women are being constructed to adjust to changing realities. Most of these forms are variants of existing proverbs while others are emerging sayings<sup>189</sup> resulting from campaigns for gender parity or other activists. In fact, with Kirundi proverbs, there is subjectivity without outlet. Proverbs do not allow women say who they really are or what they are capable of in order to subvert patriarchy.

As it can be seen from new emerging variants, society is aware that the female personhood cannot be redefined without a redefinition of the male personhood. The emerging forms reflect a reconstruction of masculinity and femininity by loosening patriarchal hold and empowering women. For woman to gain some rights, there are some privileges that the man has to renounce.

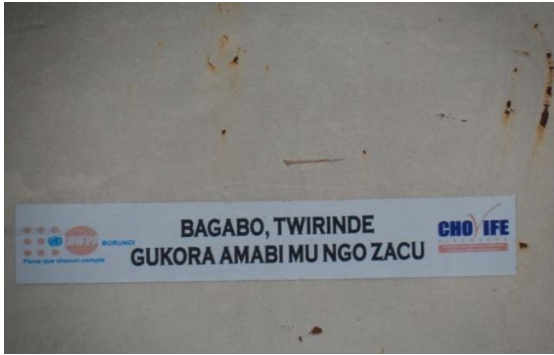
#### **4.3.4.1. New masculinity?**

For men there is a threat to their status and pride when we talk about loosening patriarchal hold. It requires them to move over and make a room for others, and even worse when these others are women. There is a continuous education to inculcate new forms of masculinity that accommodates well the “other”. As traditionally any kind of disagreement between a husband and a wife often ended in beating his wife as reflected in *Inkoni ikubise mukeba uyirenza urugo* [The stick that has whipped your co-wife ought to be thrown over the fence (away)], there is an emerging reminder to men to get rid of that practice by stigmatising the vice of beating one’s wife as Willy Ngendakumana<sup>190</sup> mentions: *Umugabo gito akubita umugore wiwe* [A worthless man beats his wife]. There is a play on the words ‘man’ and ‘worthless’ not only as an already-seen or already-heard but also to discourage that behaviour of beating women by showing that a husband who beats his wife is not worthy to be called a man. Actually no man would like to be qualified ‘worthless’. There are other sayings that are printed on material support as exemplified below in the sense to sensitise men and to remind those who misuse power to change:

---

<sup>189</sup>Emerging sayings from campaigns of gender parity or other activists are used in this study as supplementary material to illustrate how new forms of masculinity and femininity are being nowadays created. Those sayings carry a sign of star in the text.

<sup>190</sup> Willy Ngendakumana. op.cit.



Both read like “Men, let us avoid domestic violence in our home.” The left is in Kirundi and the right one is in French.

**Picture 11**

**Picture 12**

The message above and many others reflecting and intending to improve relations between men and women are printed on spaces where they can be accessed by a large public.

Nowadays, virility is not an emblem of man but his ability to tame that virility is celebrated. In Burundi, short messages in forms of proverbial sayings are printed on T-shirts, billboards, banners, or broadcasted on radios and television calling the attention of people to have responsible sexuality for fear of getting contaminated with the deadly virus of AIDS. Kirundi Proverbs like *Impfizi y’umugabo ntiyimirwa* [A bull- man is not set boundaries] and *Impfizi aho ishitse irivuga* [The presence of a bull somewhere is marked by its moo) vehicle an old fashioned philosophy (from the traditional proverbial repository) that wants to often encourage men who lack self control, and the consequences are many today such as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, open conflicts among children from different mothers, and the economy of the family that collapses because the man brandishes it for seduction wherever he goes to woo .

It is evident that the patriarchal hold is progressively being loosened as portrayed in the next variant: *Uguca bugufi kw’umugabo ni bwo bugabo bwiwe* [Showing low estimate of one’s own importance for a man is his real manliness] just to remind men to humble themselves in order to estimate others, including women as better as they are.

The next is also a reminder referring to man: *Ijunja ry'umugabo ntiriri ku bwanwa: n'inka irutwa n-impene urabiye ku gasakanwa\**<sup>191</sup> [The stature of a man is not on his beard: even a cow is less than a billy goat if you assess them from their chin]. The proverb suggests that while physical appearance or strength is still valid for a male, that stature alone is not enough without one's ability to face problems stoically and to propose solutions, to be useful to his family and society in general. That proverb suggests by extension that the external appearances may be misleading so we should watch out.

The following variant is like a complement to the preceding one: *Umugabo nya mugabo arangwa n'ukuri*<sup>192</sup> [A real man is characterised by truth]. So, it is not enough to have a beard for one to pride himself that he is "man". There are other internal qualities and values such as being a man of truth, integrity, sense of equity and justice that need to be progressively nurtured to make people more humane as the three aforementioned proverbs reflect it.

#### **4.3.4.2. New femininity?**

Women cannot be granted their rights without paying a price. For them, the cost is often a label: feminist in the negative sense, rebel, angry or unsubmitive, and many more.

Women already have tremendous power. So, empowering them is not a matter of giving it to them, but of freeing them to use the power and skills they already have. It is a matter of expending their opportunities to use themselves in service of common and meaningful purpose.

Barundi are acquiring awareness of the worth of women in activities not only inside but also outside the home as reflected in the following lines: *Umukenyezi ni umutima w'urugo\** [The woman is the heart of the household] to express how her role is irreplaceable in the household like the heart in the body. The following Kirundi proverb variant is a portrayal of the woman's importance this time not in family but also in the development

---

<sup>191</sup> From the song "Urudubi" by Mukombozi, one of the Burundian oral artists.

<sup>192</sup> From a song by late Canjo Hamisi, one of the famous Burundian oral artists.

of the nation: *Umukenyenzi ni inkingi y'iterambere\** [The woman is the pillar of development). Literally, *inkingi* pillar is used to support a certain weight of a building. Normally, if you remove the pillar from the building, the whole structure cannot last long, it rather collapses. Another important element to notice nowadays in new discourse as it appears in the proverb is the replacement of the word *umugore* (a word etymologically having a negative social connotation as it has been shown in chapter two) by the word *umukenyenzi* which is somehow neutral.

Now, efforts are made by different stakeholders to arrange a society where women are human beings with a chance to exercise their infinitely varied gifts in infinitely varied ways, instead of being destined by the accident of their sex to one field of activity: housework and child-raising<sup>193</sup>. Variants like *Umukenyenzi ni kirumara mu nzego z'igihugu zifata ingingo\** [The woman is a cannot-do-without person in national institutions in charge of decision making]. From that variant, there is reflection that the woman's area of activities is no longer limited to the domestic arena. *Uwureze umukenyenzi aba areze igihugu\**<sup>194</sup> [Who trains a woman trains a nation] is a common discourse that reflects how important the education of a woman is, that empowers women and reinforces the change of women's roles as exclusively followers to alternative leaders. When women are empowered, they fully participate in decisions that affect their life, the life of their families and the life of their communities. Education is the fundamental way to empowerment. When a woman has a strong mind, she cares well for her progenitor by better health and education for her children as well as more sustainable use of natural resources.

Nevertheless, though some women are promoted, they are still accountable to the society that has given them the opportunities. The society also criticises them on using those opportunities. This echoes the idea of Eric Niyonemera<sup>195</sup> that women should know who

---

<sup>193</sup> Chrystal Eatman. "Now We Can Begin" in Wendy K Kolmar & Frances Bartkowski.eds. *Feminist Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2005, p. 131.

<sup>194</sup>This saying has a foreign origin in "*Train a Woman a Nation Trained*" and has become popular in Kirundi speech in these days of campaigns for empowering women. It was raised by Nindorera Rebecca during our oral interview on 4 February 2013.

<sup>195</sup> Eric Niyonemera. op.cit.

they are when they are at home. The same idea is rightly reinforced by Christine Sabiyumva<sup>196</sup>. This is particularly true at this turning point of gender relations from tradition to modernity.

As proverbs are more or less fixed in form but used in various contexts, so gender rules and roles have constants and variants in face of changes. Today, although many things have changed for the betterment of women's conditions of life, the model of a woman well educated on Burundian style remains that hard working woman, discreet, and capable to suffer in silence, obedient, meek and submissive to her husband and ready to risk her life for the sake of her family. No matter how important the position that she holds in the public or private spheres may be, she knows that in her family her husband is the authority *Serugo*, the organizer of the family and the first to be consulted. That way of organising things is a precious cultural value kept and transmitted to contemporary generations as reflected in the use of these proverbs. It will always be important for the woman to differentiate her status as an employer or employee and her status as a wife since the expected behaviours are not the same. She knows where to humble and where not, where to command and where to consult, where to lead and where to follow. Men are also coping with change by working with or under the orders of women at the workplace. A woman can now lead where men follow or she can follow where men lead. However, that does not exclude that there must be a certain order at home in the family. Humility and patience of the woman is the key to the success of marriage life according to one of my informants.<sup>197</sup>

Actually society cannot function without a certain order. Rather than being one's destiny gender is becoming like a garment you put on in a particular context and that you change in another context, but the tradition has sewn which one to always put on as a husband

---

<sup>196</sup> Christine Sabiyumva, Oral interview, Ngagara, 12 April 2013

Commander Christine Sabiyumva is the very first Burundian woman to have enrolled in the Burundian national army in 1993. Now there are other women in the national army and the police who followed her example. She has a degree in Law. She served in the army for some years but now she is serving as a high officer at the national police. She is married and has five children. I interviewed her at her office on the 12 April 2013 in Ngagara.

<sup>197</sup> Jérémie Yunzuguru & Andronique Ndikumana. op.cit.

and wife to avoid confusion in household. In the matter of management and arranging things, there are abilities and skills specific to women and there are abilities and skills specific to men. But in the matter of leadership, every group of people, no matter how small it may be, even the one for two persons, there is always need of leadership. In the absence of a leader, it is chaos that takes over. Most often, it has been evident that the role of leadership in the family is played by the husband, according to Burundian tradition.

Linguistically even today, according to Jérémie Yunzuguru<sup>198</sup>, when they say in Kirundi *Umugore yavyifashemwo kigabo* meaning that a “woman behaved manly in a given situation”, it is undoubtedly known that it is a step up, it is a point to her credit; on the other hand, if they say *Umugabo yavyifashemwo kigore* meaning that a “man behaved womanly in a given situation”, it is undoubtedly known that it is a step down, it implicitly suggests that he did not do things or behave the way it should have been done. That does not imply that women are not able to do things well but it is a way to unconsciously reinforce the secondary status of the woman. What one can deduce from that kind of speech is that certain tasks are forbidden to women not because they are unable to carry them out but because society – men in general – want to demonstrate women’s inferiority compared to men. Other roles or tasks are forbidden to men because they are socially degrading – because associated with women.

While not neglecting ancient valued feminine traits such as a meek nature and submissiveness that were particularly associated with her domestic role, the contemporary woman is developing other traits that she may resort to in her new roles at the workplace. Now there is no level beyond which a woman cannot go. She is known to be a person capable to think of the development of her family and society at large.

Women are constantly denying the metaphor of “the crowing hen” in contemporary time as illustrated below by Jean Evode Niyubahwe<sup>199</sup> with the proverb variant: *Nta*

---

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Jean Evode Niyubahwe .op. cit.

*nkokokazi yobika isake ariho iri* [No hen would crow when the cock is there]. Order is good as asserts Niyubahwe. However a woman may probably have something to say or to advise on the account of the family. To say that she would not say it for the simple fact that her husband has not got something to say, that should change because it is old fashioned. The one who has what to say can say it. In the family it has become a tradition that men take the headship of the family. But if he is not serious, if he is absent or if he does it in a wrong way, the wife has the right to take that role and lead the family, according to Astère Kwizera<sup>200</sup>, stressing the same idea as Niyubahwe. Women can live in a patriarchal society but operate in non patriarchal ways.

#### **4.3.4.3. Integration of sex differences**

Difference in the construction of masculinity and femininity is not completely eliminated even in contemporary time but is shifting in focus because of changes taking place in society. This is a clear indication that once a social construct is set, it becomes useful in a way or another that one can hardly get rid of it. In fact, it is the ‘construction of masculinity and femininity that effects a stabilization of gender in the interests of heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domains’<sup>201</sup>, to use Butler’s words, for solid families. What would remain to the Murundi if he lost the foundation of the family?

The following example of change illustrates the benefit that is in differences between man and woman in influencing the neighbourhood: *Amahoro arama ahera mu rugo agasasagara mu kibano\** [Sustainable peace starts from one household and spreads out in the neighbourhood]. (*The first slot of that saying is printed on the T-shirt below*).

---

<sup>200</sup> Astère Kwizera, op.cit.

<sup>201</sup> Judith Butler. “Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity” in Wendy K Kolmar & Frances Bartkowski, eds. *Feminist Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2005, p. 500.



The logic is that the sum total of peaceful households makes a peaceful society as the society is a sum of individual households. Both man and woman now know that the family is founded by two partners and not three wherever they are and in whatever they do, and that the dialogue must characterise them for the sustainability of their “enterprise”, according to Rebecca Nindorera<sup>202</sup>.

*Sustainable peace starts from one household:*

*Let us uproot domestic violence against women.*

**Picture 13**

Actually, the masculinity-femininity difference as portrayed in Kirundi proverbs is constructive. They share their different experiences and this helps to sustain the household and so can influence the neighbourhood positively. The family becomes like an airport where planes land and takes off. The better the airport, the better planes can take off.

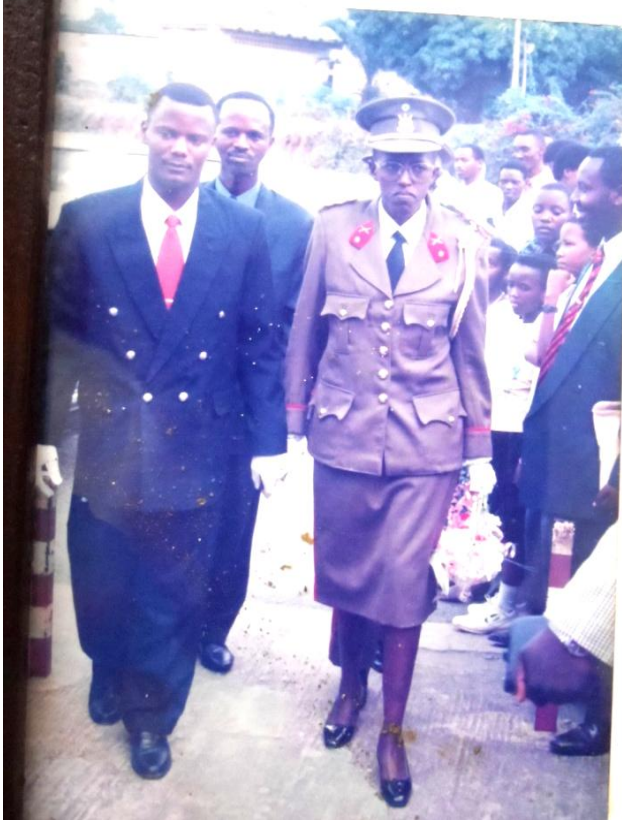
To express how man’s and woman’s fate are tightly linked and that the man ought to treat his wife kindly and lovely, one of my informants mentioned the following: *Umugore ni urubavu rw’umugabo, uwumukubise aba yikubise\**<sup>203</sup>[The woman is made from one of the man’s ribs, beating her is beating oneself]. In order to receive that kind treatment however, the woman ought not to behave provocatively according to the same informant.

---

<sup>202</sup> Rebecca Nindorera, oral interview, Gihosha, 04 February 2013

<sup>203</sup> This saying reflects biblical influence and was said by Jérémie Yunzuguru, Kivuruga, 10 March 2013





*A new form of masculinity and femininity is progressively being formed.*

**Picture 14**

It is important to note that a new form of femininity and masculinity is progressively being forged in Burundi. Nowadays, men admire the spirit of independence and self-respect in their wife. They admire a woman who can stand on her own two feet and does not let her husband walk over her; men admire someone who may successfully take care of herself and raise the “man’s children” when he is absent or dead.

That standing on one’s feet ensures the man that the woman will be able to secure the family and to protect it against “the scorn” that was traditionally believed to strike a household at the death of the head of the family. A man really needs a woman who can turn his house into a home in the face of contemporary challenges.

Nowadays, a society is being built where leading and following can be alternate and reciprocal between men and women depending on one’s gifts and on the circumstances. Some people are now aware that the confinement of the woman to the “backyard” has been equally disadvantageous to her as to man. Today, man is getting to know little by little that he cannot go further if the woman stays behind, as it can be sensed in the voice of one of my informants:

*Abagabo barakwiye kugurura amaso muri bino bihe. Bamenye yuko hariho imyibutsa isubije inyuma abagore, nabo bamenye ko baba bariko barisubiza inyuma. Ngo Nta kintu kigirira nabi umugore*

*ngo cijane kitagiriye nabi umugabo nawe mu buryo ubu canke mu bundi.*<sup>204</sup>

Men ought to widely open their eyes these days to see. They should know that there are proverbs which, when they devalue women, men have to know that they are devaluing themselves at the same time. It is said that “*Nothing does the woman harm and ends by itself without doing the man harm in this way or the other*”.

In fact, the woman is related to the man in a way or another: she is his wife, his mother, his grandmother, his lover, his sister, his in-law, and many more. So by alienating her, the man implicitly alienates himself because ‘those who are associated in their life tend to become assimilated in character’<sup>205</sup>, as Harriet Taylor would put it. In the present closeness of association between the sexes in marriage, men cannot retain “manliness” unless women acquire an elevated status contrary to the past. The experience has proved that there is inestimable advantage now enjoyed when a strong-minded man is united to a strong-minded woman.

All in all, the fourth way in which proverbs can adjust to change is through the use of variants. But this way is still timid because of the nature and structure of Kirundi proverbs.

#### **4.4. Social meaning of proverbs’ behaviour in relation to changing gender roles**

The form of proverbs informs the content. In my understanding, the ways in which proverbs react to change translate different attitudes of people in relation to change: there is acceptance of change, there is resistance, and there is neutrality or indifference. But what is clear is that to a greater extent, there is fear of change. In fact, the way proverbs resist to alteration reflects the way people resist to change. The state of things also reveals that there is no homogeneity among people. The self adjustment of proverbs in new contexts with the same form reveals exactly that gender construction tends to be more or

---

<sup>204</sup>Willy Ngendakumana. op. cit.

<sup>205</sup> Harriet Taylor “Enfranchisement of Women” in Wendy K Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, eds. *Feminist Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill. p. 77-79.

less fixed in the advantage of patriarchy. Even though there is reform at the social level in Burundi, the fact that the old artistic expression comes again and again is a clear indication that the mentality that gave form to traditional masculinity and femininity constructs has not changed.

Despite changes, the traditional mentality of hierarchy on which is based the inferiority of the feminine gender in comparison to the masculine gender persists for fear to disturb social relationships that have existed in Burundian society since a long time. Men always resist because they do not want to lose the monopoly of the model of human kind and also women resist because they cannot define a clear female model to propose to society. To a greater extent, it is difficult for women to be free from certain forms of dependence as it has been examined, in spite of change. These forms of dependence are such as sexual dependence, dependence on the husband's authority, and dependence on culture which unleashes the woman and assesses at the same time how she handles her freedom. Nevertheless, independence can be achieved in a state of dependency if women are well empowered.

It is evident that there is no universal ontological specificity for masculinity and femininity, the same as Judith Butler<sup>206</sup> rightly puts it, which can be copied from somewhere and pasted in every culture. Maleness and femaleness are known to be universal but cannot directly determine the configuration of masculine and feminine identities in a given culture. The signification of who is a man or woman and what it means to be a man or woman is more ethnocentric than universal and one needs to interrogate the very culture to know what kind of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are intelligible in that culture and for which purpose. For Burundian women, there are still restrictions and boundaries within which to navigate for the security of household in spite of change. The society that gives women the opportunities also critically evaluates them on using those opportunities.

---

<sup>206</sup> Butler, Judith. *op.cit.*

All in all, a lot of people resist change because they fear the unknown. They are a concrete example of the ancient saying that it is “*Better to deal with the devil you know than the angel you do not know*”. Actually, both men and women, as put by David Fraser, are confronted with the tyranny of change today<sup>207</sup>.

The outlet for change is in change. It means that if men and women change, there are certain rules and roles which are reformed and so proverbs that codify such kind of relationships will not be discarded as such but put back in the ‘wardrobe’. If ever the same experience reappears then the proverb will be drawn from the wardrobe to exalt a virtue or to stigmatise a fault. A proverb cannot be said if it does not refer to a real situation. As people go on changing, that is how some proverbs will lose weight because they no longer have situations of application and some proverbs that may serve for poster generations will be unconsciously created. With education and democracy, proverbs laden with allusions of female marginalisation and male overpower will be challenged and will become outmoded and of no use, except for their literary and historical significance.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

Viewing gender from a social construction perspective entails that gender is potentially mutable to fit with the socio-cultural change. However, because of interests, values and needs of the society, the change is not automatic. As there are variants and constants in proverbs, so are masculinity and femininity construction.

In the face of changing gender roles, the Kirundi proverb with its more or less fixed form self adjusts to changing gender roles in four ways, which are: the use of old wording in new contexts as an old wine in new bottles, the matching of proverbs recommending opposite courses of actions, the discard of outmoded proverbs from everyday use as well as a timid emergence of new forms. The nature and structure of proverbs as a genre of folklore does that there is a continuous use of ‘ancient’ proverbs despite changes. In fact,

---

<sup>207</sup>David Fraser. “Development Associates International” in *Making Human Strength Productive*. USA: Colorado Springs. 2001, p.30

folklore appears to increase its effectiveness in sustaining tradition maybe for three reasons.

First, to a greater extent, the construction of masculinity and femininity differently owes its existence to their importance in social organisation as demonstrated in this study. Though masculinity and femininity construction seems to be changing through education and women empowerment, the traditional mentality of hierarchical male/female relationship codified in proverbs persists for fear to disturb social relationships that have existed in our society since ancient time. Indeed, co-existence of male and female is both desirable and inevitable.

Second, proverbs are very powerful because they are inherited from ancestors. Proverbs are strong in keeping the status quo because they are considered as a spiritual legacy of our forefathers, hence are endowed with value, prestige and a spiritual dimension. Keeping the proverbial legacy is an implicit way to pay tribute and to show reverence to ancestors. If one follows this logic, proverbial jesting would be seen not only as weakening the tradition but also as blasphemy.

Third, proverbs have been artfully crafted into a form which is so friendly to the memory. These proverbs are often quoted in new contexts. So, like an 'old wine in a new bottle', the equivocal nature of Kirundi proverbs allow them to be quoted in various contemporary contexts and they make communication sweet, vivid and effective. Proverbs may seem to contradict each other but without nullifying each other's truth: it means each one aims at an aspect of reality, another one completes it or corrects it.

It is worth mentioning that the new discourse that is emerging uses the advantages of technology to a greater extent. It is mainly printed on textiles such as T-shirts, on banners, billboards, walls and other material supports<sup>208</sup> for didactic purposes, most of the time reinforced by visual images. In addition, some of this new discourse and the

---

<sup>208</sup> See examples in appendices

anterior proverbs re-enacted in new contexts to serve current needs appear in songs broadcasted on different Burundian television or radio stations.

There is much effort directed to changing cultural assumptions through male and female conscious raising groups.

Instead of criticising proverbs as perpetuating gender stereotypes, this can serve as a clear indicator of two things: the first may be that there are needs, virtues and vices that are transgenerational as there are proverbs that are transgenerational; the second thing may be that there is need of much training to men and women to get rid of some of their past failures. As said earlier, in Kirundi, they say *umugani ugana akariho* [A proverb portrays the reality]. It suggests that a proverb reflects a real situation, that each proverb has been coined because of a reality observed for a certain period of time. The best way to deal with it is to attack the reality, to uproot those situations that make the proverb to be told again and again and this can be done through education and multiplying trainings for men and women in order to improve on their weaknesses. That is the role of socialisation. Some proverbs will eliminate themselves if the situations they were portraying are no longer there. Others new will be prompted to express the new realities.

In the overall, proverbs using male and female lexemes though they can reveal information on gender roles, can apply to a general range of contexts, be it political, social, economic and cultural contexts. Their current use in different contexts reflects the persistence of patriarchal order and implicitly reflects the desire of a certain order and the necessity of a human kind model.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1. Introduction

The proverb genre is still a living art in Burundi. In Burundian culture, proverbs are ready-to-wear clothes that must dress a thought or that must self adjust to fit it. They can be the thought itself. The Kirundi proverb has been used in this study as a literary indicator and enhancer of culture to validate the hypothesis that gender construction based on biological differences serves a social function in organising the nucleus of society in a patriarchal order. What is undeniable is that society cannot live without a certain culture though certain elements of culture may be enemies to social organisation.

With evidence from data, the study proves that the differences between masculinity and femininity among Burundi are socio-culturally constructed on the basis of biological considerations for a social purpose, especially when it comes to the foundation of families. From the social construction of gender frame, gender roles are changeable to cater to new challenges just as culture is dynamic. Despite change however, the differences between masculinity and femininity should remain but be inspired by the demands of each epoch and configured in each culture so that society never becomes confusion.

As culture is dynamic because of many factors such as political, economic, social and cultural, proverbs adjust to changing gender roles with the old wording but in new contexts where a proverb can be used in communication or one can count on the matching of proverbs recommending opposite courses of action for self defence; a discard of some outmoded proverbs from everyday use and a timid emergence of new variants where most are sayings. The resistance of proverbs to alteration reflects exactly how gender roles resist to changes in the social order of patriarchy. It is worth mentioning beforehand that it has been noticed during our research that the Kirundi proverb as a genre of folklore, like other areas of life, is nowadays largely influenced by information and communication technologies.

The societal construction of masculinity and femininity in Kirundi proverbs reveals society's aspiration and desire to social order by presenting patriarchy as a stable immutable part of that social order in the nuclear family, contrary to suggestions in previous scholarship that African oral literature presents women as oppressed and men as oppressors.

## 5.2. Conclusion

In undertaking this study, we do acknowledge that the Burundian society has values and traditions that influence the behaviour of its people. These values and traditions are codified and communicated in proverbs among many other ways. Proverbs in Burundi are considered as a validation of their culture and as a guide to behaviour. Known as *umwibutsa* reminder, the Kirundi proverb works as “an internalized check on behaviour”, to use William Bascom's phrase. Although proverbs may be highly believed, they ironically contradict each other without however nullifying each other's truth. It is up to each one to decide which ones work for them when it is time to choose one proverb to use. This reflects that society is not homogeneous. There is always contradiction in society. In society, there is also resistance to change, the same as proverbs resist to alteration, because there are some values that members of a society cherish and hold dear.

Proverbs use language and literature to express those values and traditions because it is the way of life that influences artistic creation while the latter in return influences life. Therefore, language and literature are media through which one can find out people's philosophy of life. As introduced in the first chapter, the present study has focused on examining Kirundi proverbs as a genre of folklore to find out what kind of cultural knowledge and wisdom are carried by these proverbs about societal construction of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity and femininity constructions affect men's and women's relations. The institution of marriage of a male and a female, which is the base of the family, is one of the areas that benefit male and female differences and their definition against each other.

The second chapter presented the first objective of this study which was to examine the nature and structure of Kirundi proverbs. In oral societies, there are different genres of



transmitting knowledge and wisdom. For the case of Kirundi proverbs, it has been demonstrated that proverbs are given a form that permits them to be repeatable. The various devices for creating Kirundi proverbs contribute to creating memorable ‘well crafted literary entities’ which can be easily retrieved from the memory and thus remind people what is necessary. That is what gives power to the Kirundi proverb to be imprinted in the memory of generations. In fact, in relation to the power of proverbs to reflect and enhance the philosophy of life, the proverbs as defined by stylistic qualities are easy to retrieve from memory, and as a genre of oral literature, may be able to draw the receiver’s/addressee’s attention to aesthetic devices of the ‘text’ in case of a current context of utterance. The neatness, the beauty and shortness with which proverbs are framed give them a mnemonic quality. By its denotative content, the proverb captivates the sensibility and stimulates at the same time the power of the mind to think, understand and form judgments logically about the norms that the proverb evokes. Proverbs have sustainable qualities because of their terseness and their formulaic structure that play a mnemonic role.

In chapter three and four of this study, the researcher has endeavoured to interpret and give meaning to the collected proverbs.

As it was shown in chapter three, the harmony of the form in Kirundi proverbs implicitly reflects Barundi’s spirit of social harmony by an arrangement of men, women and children into a certain order. That implies that in Kirundi proverbs, there is an interaction of linguistic and social phenomena. It is important to understand the relation between proverbs as a sociocultural-aesthetic product and masculinity as well as femininity as gender identification, the latter reflecting and yet continuously perpetuating the fabrication of gender. Those proverbs are part of “the mechanism” that the society uses to fabricate and reinforce the notions of masculinity and femininity, though they can be applied into a wide range of contexts, be it political, social, economic and cultural contexts.

As examined in chapter three presenting the second objective of the present study which was to analyse how masculinity and femininity are constructed in the Kirundi proverb,

the first thing that is evident from the examination of the Kirundi proverb is the wisdom of ancestors to organise their society and to popularize the code of conduct through a form that is friendly to the memory. From the reading of Kirundi proverbs from the construction of gender framework, gender fabrication is not a plot against women but a desire of organising an ongoing stable society.

The notion of social organisation is first of all reflected in the practice of shaping men and women in opposite but complementary ways. Since their birth, children are told explicitly or implicitly how to become a man or woman. According to tradition, masculinity is expressed among other things by physical and moral courage, strength, economic power, competitiveness, domination, toughness, control of emotions while femininity is expressed by hard work, humility, kindness, tenderness, patience and perseverance. The unchangeability and the predictability of these constructs have to a greater extent served to build coherence among men and women in history, especially for the subsistence of the family unit.

In the different meanings of proverbs, one can distinguish *umugabo* in the biological sense of the term, that is, a male person who has reached the age of maturity, a vigorous male person well accomplished from an *umugabo* in the moral sense, that is, a responsible man, wise, the man who imposes himself by his human values and who has the virtues recommended by the Burundian society, brief the man that is called *umushingantahe* or *Umugabo w'ukuri*, that is, the man of truth, responsible, who is far different from the simple man who is only called so because of his male sex or his beard. An *umugabo* worthy of that name is different from a simple *mugabo* because of his beard, or simply *akagabo* or *akagabogabo* ("small man" not in size but in morality.) Kirundi proverbs do not hesitate to question male deviation in his exercise of authority and to attempt to impose some checks on phallogocentric authority.

On the other hand, one can distinguish *umugore* in the biological sense, that is, a female person who has reached the age of maturity, perceived in her multiple roles in society such as her role as wife, as mother, as co-wife, the woman as a widow, the expected attributes and obligations towards her husband and children as well as her moral conduct

in the society at large. The power of the woman in some aspects of life is acknowledged by the society as portrayed in proverbs. Given that she has been assigned the most fundamental role to “transform newborn infants from mere organisms into cultured humans”, we are likely to assert that even the weakness she is often labelled with is human made for fear that she may not disorganise the patriarchal order. One cannot imagine how the woman can mother the strong (man) and yet be weak. Women have actually given platform for men to be great.

With regard to stratification as demonstrated in chapter three, because of the function the man was called to fulfil traditionally, he was placed in a position of authority and empowered. On the other hand, to make the woman less powerful or less confident so she may not challenge or disturb the order, she was disempowered through her education first and then with “reminders” during her life span.

As far as division of labour is concerned in traditional Burundi, the division of roles on the basis of sex was regarded as the foundation of a complementary relation between man and woman, which along with sexual division of tasks contributed to a stable social order. The distribution was done in the way that the man, at the same time head of the family dealt with duties that required long working hours or long travel outside their home, while women accomplished their work at home or near home due to their motherhood. So, women were not less responsible because their roles were complementary to those accomplished by men. Given that women were expected to stay home or around home, it is quite normal that the political authority and other various occupations outside the home were exercised by the same men.

To create order out of this chaotic world, each society sets accepted standards to which males and females are expected to conform. Burundian society constructed masculinity and femininity in the patriarchal way and passed it on to generations and whoever did not conform to those standards was stigmatized without distinction of their sex, according to Kirundi proverbs. While we have Kirundi proverbs depicting good behaviour used to praise the well behaved man and woman, we also have proverbs stigmatizing poor behaviour used to stigmatise and prevent misconduct for both men and women. This is

contrary to the commonly held view that proverbs blame women only in African oral literature.

In order to organise the society, a hierarchical structure based on sex according to which the man has a superior status to that of the woman especially when it comes to relations in marriage was invented. However, this does not mean that the man is superior to the woman in nature or that his role is more important than that of the woman. The roles played by the woman are as indispensable as those played by the man. It is a matter of organisation for the family unit to survive. Their roles complement each other. As it has been shown the woman occupies a secondary status in family, but her contribution is as worthy as the man's contribution. It is to subordinate them, not to say oppress them. Subordination is not synonymous with oppression as it has been shown that both the Burundian man and woman are accountable to their society where there are boundaries within which to operate according to the same proverbs. Basing on sex differences, the society constructed different but complementary characters in men and men as a major organising principle of our social order and our very identity. From evidence in this study, I can assert that gender is a fundamental organising tool of society for the continuity of humanity.

The fourth chapter presented the third objective which is to explore how Kirundi proverbs as a more or less fixed form adjust to changing gender realities. It has been noticed that though there is evidence that new ways of being men and women are being created in the minds of Burundian men and women in order to cope with changes, the patriarchal order is still persistent for social purpose. What is for sure, an examination of proverbs collected during the field research in Bujumbura and Bururi Districts in Burundi reveal that masculinity and femininity owe their existence to their usefulness in the society. Though philosophy of life seems to be changing, the traditional mentality of hierarchical male/female relationship codified in proverbs persists for fear to disturb social relationships that have existed in our society since ancient time. Indeed, co-existence of male and female is both desirable and inevitable for the extension of self and henceforth continuity of humanity. In fact, folklore appears to increase its effectiveness in sustaining tradition because there is fear of destroying the existing order without having a

clear model of what could replace it. All my informants agree that women can no longer be exclusively confined to the domestic arena and that a woman can occupy any position at the workplace. However, according to the same people, the woman has to take off her workplace garment when she arrives at home in order to put on a wife's garment, that is, to fit into the family order. But educated women go further to say that the hierarchical order of patriarchy should tend to being flat. And according to them the better way to do it with less casualty is construction of the new forms of masculinity and femininity the society needs starting at the early age in addition to lifelong education in the matter.

All in all, it is my contention, based on the available data, that gender construction based on biological differences serves a social function in a patriarchal order. The fact that Barundi persist in their mentality granting the man superiority while a lot has changed reveals that though changes are occurring the mentality that gave that philosophy of life has not changed.

What is indisputable is that the construction of masculinity and its opposite femininity as portrayed in Kirundi proverbs is constitutive of social and sexual identities to organise a social order of patriarchy. At the same time proverbs contribute to a process that constructs the male in the dominant role only to confer him the necessary authority allowing him to play his role of chief in the family arena and female in a somewhat subordinate position to organise the social order. To justify hierarchy in the organisation of the society, gender is an invention of society rather than a product of differences in evolution as Darwin would say.

It is my persuasion that this study provides the basic knowledge that is essential for discussing and addressing the gender issue in Burundian society. The present study tried to reveal the origin and the social function of male superiority and wherein change lies. It has been demonstrated that gendered distinctions based on sex are socially useful and necessary but they have to be adapted to the change of culture to respond to the challenges of the moment without creating chaos. Feminists involved in the struggle for the promotion of women from male dominance have to look at the issue not from western perspectives but from a cultural perspective even within African societies.

The genital is the agent in the signification of who is a man and woman but it does not directly or literally determine the configuration or meaning of what it means to be a man and a woman in a given culture. If it were so, there would be some kind of universal conformity for men and women across the world's cultures and trans-history and therefore there would be an establishment, by feminists and gender theorists, of a theoretical framework that presents some kind of universal ontological specificity for women. Yet, the diversity seen in masculine and feminine identities is very surprising. Cultural factors play an important role in shaping 'man' and 'woman' identities. So, though femininity and masculinity are universal concepts, their nature is culture specific, that is, to understand them requires understanding their cultural, their social and their history contexts. Thus, rather than doing *tabula rasa* at this time of globalisation, it is better for Burundian society to reread its history and to reevaluate masculinity and femininity within its culture in order to assume values and correct non values. I do contend that what men and women need is freedom to exercise the right things, and not chaos. Thus, we cannot say that all traditional things are old fashioned.

Though it seems that male superiority appears to exist cross-culturally, I opine that it is expressed in local particular forms for particular purposes. In Burundian culture, the unequal gender relations serve a social function as it appears in Kirundi proverb patterns. Thus there is no universal solution to unequal gendered relations. Each intervention is to be locally adapted. Concretely, socialists and feminists in a context like Burundi should particularly be concerned with pleasure of men and women and how to get it from their complementary differences rather than dominance and how to end it.

This research brings a particular credibility to constructionists' thought that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed. The needs, the interests and the values of the society determine the fabrication of masculinity and femininity. Like the culture in which they are produced is dynamic, masculine and feminine identities are subject to change in opposition to unchangeable maleness and femaleness. Maleness and femaleness are universal but cannot directly determine the configuration of masculine and feminine identities in a given culture. This study is a case in point which shows how the construction of masculinity and femininity fulfils a social purpose in Burundian culture.

Therefore, the transformation of men's and women's relationships should be guided by relativism to be locally adapted to the same purpose.

By way of contribution to scholarship, this work has continued the crucial debate on gender studies, focussing on the relationship between proverbs as a genre of folklore or oral literature and the construction of masculinity and femininity. The relevance of some of the constructivist theories developed in the western academia now applied in a typically African situation has been at the heart of this research. This is only a modest contribution to the different attempts at filling the yawning gap in African oral literature and gender as an academic discourse. I hope that the results of this study will generate some discussion among readers.

### **5.3. Recommendations**

This study has a pedagogical implication on the teaching of oral texts in general and proverbs in particular. Because of their social function in a society with a strong oral tradition like Burundi, the vast repository of Kirundi proverbs should be availed to people in various ways in order to offer to everyone a space of choice. Actually, it is by the size of the proverbs directory at one's disposal that one can free oneself either by accepting entirely a truth expressed by a proverb or by challenging it either by opposite proverb or a variant. Proverbs can also be a vital tool for shaping men and women's awareness about human rights issues, men-women relationships in order to reduce man-woman dichotomy, to address population explosion and birth control and many more contemporary social issues. Though I do not advocate deconstruction of heterosexuality, the oral literary artists can take advantage of proverbs as a socially sanctioned medium to subvert, contradict and deconstruct old-fashioned traditional construction of masculinity and femininity in Kirundi proverbs and reconstruct and enhance new forms of masculinity and femininity for today's and future generations. In relation to the dynamics of repetition, transmission and dissemination, folklorists can take advantage to create "variants" of old proverbs to portray contemporary gender realities.

It would seem logical, from a construction of gender perspective that the society work at the level of language and imagery through creativity. The ancients fabricated their

masculinity and femininity that served to maintain social order and codified it into proverbs. That was their merits. Nevertheless, while pursuing the same purpose of organising a more viable society for both men and women, the contemporary challenges require men and women to develop and codify new definitions of masculinity and femininity and new patterns of relating across differences since some of the old definitions no longer cater for the changed environment and its new challenges. The oral literary artist has to create a new world-view that can dominate the behaviour of men and women for new generations.

Apart from the fact that there are associations of development, of human rights activists, of family welfare, there should be also associations of oral literary artists or folklorists who could create new proverbial sayings and even invent anecdotes in relation to shaping a new masculinity and its resulting patriarchy and to empowering women. There is a need of sayings that give contemporary men and women light on what to do and how to behave in a hitting but at the same time diverting or entertaining language, through a speech that appeals to imagination because of its terseness, neatness and beauty. Actually, there is need for words of wisdom, ancient and modern to shape life in our contemporary society with changes and its new challenges. The current composers that the society eagerly need should focus on and address the challenges of the contemporary time with a language that hits the heart through sounds and images. It is some of these sayings that will end up becoming proverbs to poster generations once tested by time.

In this mass media ridden society, we should use the advantages that modern vehicles of communication technology offer such as printing, radio, television, internet and other electronic devices to widely popularize the new code of conduct through a creation of new forms of proverbs among people especially the youth to water the new forms of masculinity and femininity we want for new generations. The age of electronic explosion has now made easy folklore transmission. In addition, we have to give value what deserves value and put down what does not deserve value in speaking and writing by promoting the positive cultural values expressed in existing Kirundi proverbs.



The same spirit of balance in traditional division of labour that is reflected in proverbs should characterise the society today with the new roles that have appeared thanks to socio-cultural evolution. Roles that do not require male and female genitals can be differentiated but not segregated, that is, they can be reversed when necessity demands it. There would be no reason to discriminatively allocate less honourable roles to women only. Opportunities have to be opened to men and women without distinction of sex. The woman should not be disadvantaged because of her “womanhood” or simply because of her anatomy. To completely unleash the African woman in general and the Burundian woman in particular, new institutions and new arrangements are required in order to ease the task of women in their professions and allow them to fully compete with their fellow men at the workplace. Until now, women working outside home have also to do household chores and to care for kids and this is burdensome for women. At the same time men should be trained to domestic work to lighten the burden of the woman. What is important is that the sense of integration of differences between masculinity and femininity should remain and be well constructed so that society never becomes confusion. Concerning forms that these differences can take, they will be inspired by the demands of each epoch and configured in each culture.

Finally, today than ever, social reformers should encourage a permanent training of the family through training sessions, retreats, reflections on contemporary family life, preparation of the youth for marriage and accompaniment of couples by marital mentors to render the encounter of values of tradition and values of modernity harmonious, for balanced and updated masculinity and femininity. In order to facilitate the transition of traditional masculinity and femininity to contemporary masculinity and femininity, the society must institute a transformation in the training and education of both boys and girls to nurture in them flexible characters which know what to do when need be, but not similar masculinity and femininity because “similarity does not create solidity”.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 1. Primary sources

A corpus of 279 proverbs collected during a fieldwork of 11 months is listed under appendix C. A list of informants is under appendix A. Other relevant information in recorded interviews is kept by the author. The fieldwork also includes photography: some examples of pictures are used in illustration and others are presented under appendix D.

### 2. Secondary sources

Adedeji, Joel. "Oral Tradition and the Contemporary Theatre in Nigeria" in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol.2.No.2. (Autum, 1971): 134-149.

Arewa, E. Ojo and Dundes, Alan. "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore". *American Anthropologist* (66)6: 70-85, 1964.

Bandira , Bonaventure. " Le rôle de la femme burundaise dans la société traditionnelle et moderne". *Au Cœur de l'Afrique* no 3, 1975.

Bascom, William R. "Folklore and Anthropology" in Dundes, Alan.ed. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice –Hall, 1965. pp.25-33.

———. "Four Functions of Folklore" in Dundes, Alan, ed. *The Study of folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, Nc. : Prince Hall, 1965. pp. 279- 298.

Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Austin: Waveland Press, 1977.

Beck, Rose Marie."Texts on textiles: proverbiality as characteristic of equivocal communication at the East African coast (Swahili)". *Journal of African Cultural Studies*,Volume 17, Number 2, December 2005:131-160.

Bukenya, Austin at al. eds. *Understanding Oral Literature*. Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1994.

Cauvin, Jean. *L'image, la langue et la pensée: L'exemple des Proverbes (Mali)*. Antropos-Institut: Saint –Augustin, 1980.

Chinweizu, *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy*. Lagos:

- Pero Press, 1990.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex* (1949). A New Translation by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovancy- Chevallier. London: Vintage, 2009.
- Dégh, Linda. *American Folklore and the Mass Media*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1944
- Dipio, Dominica at al. eds. *Performing Community: Essays on Oral Culture*. Oslo: Novus Press, 2008.
- Dorson, Richard M. "Africa and the Folklorist". *African Folklore*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1972.
- Dundes, Alan. *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington&Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980.
- Egede, Benji. "Selected Ika Proverbs: Their Aesthetics and Contexts of Usage." *Education*. Vol. 127, n° 4.
- Fayemi, Ademola Kazeem. "Deconstructing proverbs in African Discourse: The Yoruba example". *Journal of Afro-European Studies in Afroeuropa* **3, 1 (2009)**.
- Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Fraser, David. "Development Associates International" in *Making Human Strength Productive*. USA: Colorado Springs, 2001.
- Gahama, André. "Le rôle de la reine-mère". *Au Cœur de l'Afrique* no3, 1975 :129-135.
- Gatimantangere, Laetitia. "Image of Women in Kirundi proverbs". B.A. Dissertation. Bujumbura: Univeristé du Burundi, 2000.
- Georges, Robert A. and Jones, Michael O. *Folkloristics: An Introduction*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Greenleaf, R.K. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of legitimate Power and Greatness*. New York: Paulist Press, 1977.
- Hussein, Jeylan W. "A Cultural Representation of Women in the Oromo Society". *African Study Monographs*, 25(3). October 2004, pp. 103 – 147.
- . "A discursive representation of women in sample proverbs from Ethiopia, Sudan

- and Kenya.” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol.40, No.3 (Fall 2009): 96-108.
- Jang, Tae-Sang. “A Poetic Structure in Hausa Proverbs.” *Research in African Literatures* 30 (1), 1999, pp 83-115.
- . “Aspects of poetic balance and cohesion in Hausa proverbs”. *Journal of African-Cultural Studies*, Volume 15, Number 2, December 2002, pp.215-236.
- Kemp, Sandra & Squires, Judith. eds. *Feminisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Kiyimba, Abasi. “Gender Stereotypes in the Folktales and Proverbs of the Baganda”, Ph.D.Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam, 2001.
- . “Gendering social destiny in the proverbs of the Baganda: reflections on boys and girls becoming men and women”. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Volume 17, Number 2, December 2005, pp. 253- 270.
- Kolmar, Wendy K. & Bartkowski, Frances. eds. *Feminist Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2005.
- Kuelker, Michael. “A Life in Proverbs: An Interview with Anand Prahlaad”. *African American Review* 43.4 (Winter 2009): 655-660.
- Le code civil des personnes et de la famille de 1980 in *Bulletin Officiel du Burundi BOB*, no 3/80.
- Lodge, David. ed. *Modern Criticism and Theory*. London: Longman, 1988.
- Meyer, H. *Die Barundi*, Leipzig, Otto: Spamer. 1916. (Traduction de J.P. Chrétien), Bujumbura : Ecole Normale Supérieure du Burundi, Polyc., 1968.
- Milner, Andrew & Browitt, Jeff. *Contemporary Cultural Theory*. Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2002.
- Ministère de la Solidarité Nationale et du Genre: “Plan d’action national pour la mise en application du programme d’action de Beijing (2003- 2005) ”.
- Mugambi, Helen Nabasuta & Allan, Tuzyline Jita. eds. *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*. Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited, 2010.
- Ndayishimiye, Gad. “Images de la femme au Burundi à travers les contes et les

- épithalames”. M.A Dissertation. Oslo : Univeristas Osloensis, 2011.
- Nshimirimana, Aline. “Le rôle socio-économique et politique de la femme burundaise de l’époque monarchique à l’ère républicaine”, Mémoire, Bujumbura : Université du Burundi, 2010.
- Ntabona, Adrien. “Le concept d’Umushingantahe et ses implications sur l’éducation de la jeunesse d’aujourd’hui au Burundi.” *Au Cœur de l’Afrique*, no 5.1985, pp.263-301.
- . *La famille Burundaise et ses défis*. Bujumbura: Presses Lavigerie, 1992.
- Ntahokaja, Jean Baptiste. *Imigenzo y’ikirundi*, Tervuren : Musée Royal du Congo Belge, 1977.
- . “La littérature orale du Burundi”. *Etudes scientifiques*, mars 1979, Université du Burundi, pp.19-28.
- Ntahomvukiye, Hilaire. “Particularités linguistiques des ethno-textes burundais. Niveau lexical et structure syntactiques”. Thèse, U.C.L., Louvain-la-Neuve, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1991.
- . *L’univers Littéraire du Burundi*. Bujumbura: Presses Lavigerie, 2010, pp.106-130.
- Ntamagara, Doret. “The womanist ideology in Alice Walker’s works: *Meridian* and *The Color Purple*”. B.A. Thesis, Bujumbura: University of Burundi, 1988.
- Observatoire de l’Action Gouvernementale (O.A.G.): “Rapport final Participation femme. Document du 8 Mars 2012”. Bujumbura: OAG, 2012
- Ojaide, Tanure. *Ordering the African Imagination: Essay on Culture and Literature*. Malthouse: Malthouse Press, 2007.
- Okot, Mark Benge. “Gender Representation in Acoli Oral Poetry”. M.A. Thesis. Kampala: Makerere University, 1994.
- Okpewho, Isidore. *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity*. Bloomington & Indianapolis : Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Pamperl, Gabriele. “The subversion of Gender: Representation of New Women of the Fin

- de Siècle”. Mag.Phil. Dissertation, Wien: Uniwestät Wien, 2008.
- P’ Bitek, Okot. *Artist, the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Limited, 1986.
- Pilcher, Jane and Whelehan, Imelda. *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. London: SAGE Publications, 2004.
- Rodegem, Francis Marie. *Parole de Sagesse au Burundi*. Leuven: Peeters, 1983.
- Scheub, Harold. “A Review of African Oral Traditions and Literature” in *African Studies Review*, Vol.28, No. 2/3 (Jun.-Sep., 1985), pp.1-72.
- Shirambere, Manassé. “Les fondements culturels du pouvoir dans le Burundi ancien”. Mémoire, Bujumbura : Université du Burundi, 1984.
- Taylor, Archer. “Folklore and the student of literature” in Alan Dundes.ed. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965. pp.34-42.
- Tuyizere, P.Alice. *Gender and Development*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2007.
- The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*.Tennessee: Pilot Books, Hull, Georgia, 2008.
- Yitah, Helen. “Fighting with Proverbs”: Kasena Women’s (Re) Definition of Female Personhood through Proverbial Jesting”. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 40, No.3. 2009.
- As of 2008 National Population Census in  
< <http://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/BURUNDI-population-2008.PDF> >[Accessed on 25 September 2012].
- Code des personnes et de la famille du 28 Avril 1993 in < [http://www.ligue-iteka.africa-web.org/article.php3?id\\_article=36](http://www.ligue-iteka.africa-web.org/article.php3?id_article=36) >, clauses 120-130 [Accessed on 12 August 2012].
- <<http://philosophy.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1153/socialconstruction.pdf>> [Accessed on 20 August 2012].
- <<http://philosophy.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1153/socialconstruction.pdf>>. [Accessed on 20 August 2012].
- <<http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/Florynce-Kennedy-quotes.htm> >[Accessed

on 14 July 2012].

Maloney, Anne M. in <<http://www.feministsforlife.org/history/cassandr.htm>> [accessed on 25 September 2012 ]

The Social Construction of Gender” in *The Feminist Agenda* in

<<http://www.thefeministagenda.blogspot.com/2009/04/social-construction-of-gender.html>> [Accessed on 20 August 2012].

Wolfgang Mieder. “The proof of the proverb is in the probing: Alan Dundes as pioneering the Paremiologist” in

<<http://haljas.folklore.ee/folklore/vol35/mieder.pdf>> [Accessed on 27 September 2012].

**APPENDICES**



## APPENDIX A: LIST OF INFORMANTS

| Surname&Name            | Sex | Age   | Marital status | Profession                                                                     | Place of interview(Area and district) | Date       |
|-------------------------|-----|-------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Bazahababaza Mariam     | F   | ±75   | Married        | Farmer                                                                         | Kiremba- Bururi                       | 10/3/2013  |
| Bucumi Rahel            | M   | ± 74  | Married        | Farmer                                                                         | Buhinga-Bururi                        | 9/3/2013   |
| Hitimana Gordien        | M   | 27    | Single         | Student                                                                        | Kamenge-Bujumbura                     | 5/2/2013   |
| Itangishaka Marie Rose  | F   | 27    | Single         | Student                                                                        | Gihosha-Bujumbura                     | 4/2/2013   |
| Karimanzira Dorcas      | F   | 40    | Married        | School teacher                                                                 | Rwankona- Bururi                      | 12/3/2013  |
| Kezakimana Marie Claire | F   | 38    | Married        | Women rights activist                                                          | Nyakabiga-Bujumbura                   | 6/2/2013   |
| Kwizera Astère          | M   | 53    | Married        | Pastor                                                                         | Buyenzi- Bujumbura                    | 31/01/2013 |
| Manirakiza Aaroni       | M   | 22    | Single         | Cook                                                                           | Kanyosha-Bujumbura                    | 15/4/2013  |
| Mwibira Mathan          | M   | ± 91  | Married        | Farmer                                                                         | Kiremba- Bururi                       | 10/3/2013  |
| Ndayisaba Chantal       | F   | 20    | Single         | Babysitter                                                                     | Kanyosha-Bujumbura                    | 23/4/2013  |
| Ndayishimiye Adèle      | F   | 25    | Married        | Vendor                                                                         | Bujumbura town                        | 13/4/2013  |
| Ndikumana Andronique    | F   | 63    | Married        | Farmer                                                                         | Kivuruga-Bururi                       | 10/3/2013  |
| Ngendakumana Willy      | M   | 45    | Married        | Lecturer                                                                       | Nyakabiga-Bujumbura                   | 1/2/2013   |
| Nibizi Aloys            | M   | 56    | Married        | Farmer                                                                         | Nyavyamo- Bururi                      | 11/3/2013  |
| Nicayenzi Séraphine     | F   | 54    | Married        | Farmer                                                                         | Nyavyamo- Bururi                      | 11/3/2013  |
| Nindorera Rebecca       | F   | 21    | Single         | Student                                                                        | Kamenge-Bujumbura                     | 5/2/2013   |
| Nishimwe Anne Spès      | F   | 36    | Married        | In charge of communication and speaker for the defence of women rights (CAFOB) | Rohero-Bujumbura                      | 7/2/2013   |
| Niyonemera Eric         | M   | 50    | Married        | Trader                                                                         | Kanyosha-Bujumbura                    | 22/3/2013  |
| Niyubahwe Jean Evode    | M   | 25    | Single         | Student                                                                        | Gihosha-Bujumbura                     | 4/2/2013   |
| Ntabakunzi Marc         | M   | ± 100 | Married        | Farmer                                                                         | Buhinga-Bururi                        | 9/3/2013   |
| Sabiyumva Christine     | F   | 45    | Married        | A Commander in Burundi National Police                                         | Ngagara-Bujumbura                     | 12/4/2013  |
| Yunzuguru Jérémie       | M   | 61    | Married        | Farmer                                                                         | Kivuruga-Bururi                       | 10/3/2013  |

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### In Kirundi

Ndabaramukije. Jēwé nitwa Spes Nibafasha, nkaba ndi umunyêshûre muri Kaminuza y-i Makerere. Ndiko ndakóra igikorwá có kurāngiza amashûre. Nabatumbereye rēró ngo mūntērēre agacúmu k-úbumwé mu kũmpa inyishú ku tubāzo nzá kubábaza. Kubera ivyo muja kũmbwira ndabikenéye cāne, ntegerezwa kubifata nk-ukó mubĩbwĩye nkoreshaje akuma gafata amajwi. Nkaba mbāye ndabashimira ukungene mwānyakiríye no ku ntērerano y'ivyiyumviro mujá kumpá.

1. Umwibutsa ni iki?
2. Umeze gute canke utaniye kuki n'ayandi mayagwa y'ikirundi nk'imigani n'ibitito?
3. Ni ryari kandi ni hehe bakoresha cane umwibutsa?
4. Ni bande bakoresha kenshi imyibutsa ? Baba bayibarira bande?
5. Kubera iki bakunda gukeresha imyibutsa mu mvugo yabo?
6. Uwubariwe umwibutsa baba bashaka ko agira iki?
7. Mwibaza ko ari ibiki vyoba bituma imyibutsa igira inguvu nyishi mu gushimangira no mu gukwiragiza ivyiyumviro biri muri yo?
8. Biravugwa ko akenshi ibiringo bikurubikuru vy'ubuzima bw'umuntu vyama bifise imyibutsa ibigaragaza. Mwompa uturorero tw' imyibutsa y'ikirundi muzi ifatiye ku bagabo no kubagore mukongera mukansigurira uko muyitahura n'ikiringo yokoreshwamwo?
9. Mbega “ukuba umugabo” canke “ukuba umugore” bisigura iki, kubwanyu? Mwoshobora gutanga uturorero tw' imyibutsa ivyerekana canke ibishimangira?
10. Mbega uyu mwibutsa mwoba mwari bwawumve? ( Ndamubarira imyibutsa umwumwe).

11. Kubwanyu woba usigura iki?
12. Muravye turorero tw'imyibutsa ifatiye ku bagabo canke abagore muri rusangi, mubona yoba yaciwe n'abagabo canke n'abagore?
13. Mu Kirundi baravuga ngo "Impfizi y-umugabo ntiyimirwa", "Aho umugabo ahandiwe niho yihandurira" kandi ngo "Impfizi aho ishitse irivuga". Mbega mwibaza iki kuri iyo myibutsa ku buzima bw'abubakanye?
14. Mbega mwoduha uturorero tw'imyibutsa ifatiye ku bagabo n'abagore yoba igaragaza ko muri kino gihe hari ibimaze guhinduka mu vyerekeye imyifato n'imibano yabo?
15. Ku bwanyu ni nk'iyiye myibutsa ifatiye ku bagabo canke ku bagore yoba yarataye igihe?
16. Hari ikindi mwumva kiri ku mutima mwoshikiriza kijanye n'ibi twariko turavugana?

### ***THE TRANSLATED INTERVIEW GUIDE***

Good morning or good afternoon. My name is Spes Nibafasha. I am a student at Makerere University in Uganda. I am doing research in order to write a dissertation that will end my MA programme. I have come to you to get assistance from you by giving me answers to simple questions that I will put to you. As I need very much what you are going to tell me, I would like to record it with use of a voice recorder exactly as you are going to tell it. I thank you very much for your warmth welcome and for the contribution that you are going to give me.

1. What is a proverb?
2. What are its characteristics or what is its difference from other genres of Kirundi oral literature such as tales and romance-tales?
3. When and where do people use proverbs?
4. Who often use proverbs? Telling them to whom?

5. Why do those people like to use proverbs in their speech?
6. What do they want the one who is told a proverb to do?
7. What do you think are elements that give proverbs strength to reinforce and to continuously perpetuate images carried in them?
8. It is often said that the great stages of human life always have proverbs that portray them. Can you give me some examples of Kirundi proverbs you know that use the image of male and female lexemes? Can you explain to me the way you understand that proverb and the context of its use?
9. What does “being a man” or “being a woman” mean according to you? Can you give examples of proverbs that reflect your explanation?
10. Have you ever heard this proverb? (I elicit a number of proverbs one after another).
11. What does it mean, according to you?
12. If you look at the different examples of proverbs that use the image of the male and female lexemes as a whole, do you think they were first created by men or women?
13. In Kirundi, they say “A bull-man is set no boundaries”, “Where a thorn sticks in a man’s body is immediately where the man removes it from” and that “The presence of a bull somewhere is marked by its moo”. What do you think of those proverbs on the life of married couples?
14. Can you give me examples of proverbs that use images of the male and female lexemes reflecting that there are already changes in relation to male-female behaviours and relationships?
15. According to you, what are examples of proverbs that are outmoded today?
16. Do you have any other information in relation to what we have been talking about?

## APPENDIX C: COLLECTED PROVERBS

### I. PROVERBS USING THE IMAGES OF THE MALE LEXEME

1. *Abagabo babiri ntibabana munzu.*  
Two men/husbands can never coexist in one household.
2. *Abagabo bararya imbwa zikishura*  
When men eat, it is dogs that pay the bill.
3. *Abagabo ntibaronkera rimwe baba basemana.*  
Two men never receive gifts at the same time, it would be a bad omen for them.
4. *Agahanga k'umugabo gahuma katavuze.*  
The forehead of a man worthy of that name brings bad luck without speaking.  
= Influence of a very important person is effective and lasting.
5. *Agasaka kari amarere gasha abagabo babona.*  
A wood of misfortune burns under the eye of men of great reputation (=notables).
6. *Agasozi kari amarere gasha abagabo babona*  
A hill of misfortune burns while men (notables) are watching.
7. *Agasozi k'intabarirwa gasha abagabo babona.*  
A hill of misfortune burns under the eyes of notables.  
= The unsubdued will be left in misfortune.
8. *Agatimatare k-umugabo kamutera kuburana atari butsinde.*  
The stubbornness of a (rich) man pushes him to sue a case lost in advance.
9. *Agatumye umugabo gutega kamutuma gusura.*  
The same reason that drives a man to set traps urges him to go to visit them.
10. *Ahari abagabo ntihagwa ibara.*  
Where there are (wise) men no tragedy occurs.
11. *Ahari umugabo hahera umugayo.*  
Where there is a man the contempt stops.
12. *Ahavuye umugabo hashira igabo.*  
Where there is no husband, there is no honour any more.
13. *Ahavuye umugabo hasigara umugayo*  
Where a man is subtracted remains scorn.

14. *Ahavuye umugabo hasubira umugayo.*  
Where a husband leaves establishes itself scorn.
15. *Aho abagabo bari ntihagwa ibara.*  
Where there are serious men, no misfortune strikes.
16. *Aho abagabo bari ntihagwa isanganya.*  
Where there are serious men cannot strike any misfortune.  
= necessity of an authority.
17. *Aho umugabo agiye ahasiga amakanda.*  
A man (an important person) always leaves marks where he goes.  
= Tangible signs establish good reputation.
18. *Aho umugabo ahandiwe niho yibandurira.*  
Where a thorn sticks in a man's body is immediately where the man removes it from.
19. *Akabambagara k-umugabo kabaza inzira kari mu rugo.*  
By provocation, a man of patent insincerity asks for direction while he is still inside the homestead's enclosure.
20. *Akagabo karājije akaguru hānzé bakīta imbúramútima.*  
A (small) man whose leg spends the night outside is qualified heartless.
21. *Akageza k-umugabo kugara urugi atari kanini.*  
It is the man's hand that closes the door no matter how small size he may be.  
= advantages of autonomy.
22. *Akaje kera k-umugabo kazikwa n'isi.*  
A man whose hatred is so long-standing will be covered by the ground.  
= Reboiled grudges do not end until death.
23. *Akarimanzingo ka mugabo ntikimbura.*  
A man who holds grudges so much does not harvest anything.
24. *Akari mu nda y-umugabo gaserurwa n-akari mu nda y-umubindi.*  
What is in the belly of the man is revealed by what is in the bottom of the pot.  
= Drunkness reveals the true nature of a person.
25. *Akarundi k'umugabo gakinga imbeho kari kure.*  
The (small) tibia of a man protects against the cold even from far.

26. *Akazikira k-umugabo kazikwa n-isi.*  
The animosity of a man is covered by the ground.
27. *Amarushwa y-umugabo n-ugusigariza umwana adahaze.*  
The misfortune of a father of family is to be obliged to leave a portion of his food to his children while he has not himself eaten to his fill.
28. *Amazi make ahaberwa impfizi.*  
When the water is little it is left to the bull only.
29. *Amosizi y'umugabo atemba aja mu nda.*  
The tears of a man rolls down into the belly.
30. *Bipfūngiro aruta bihēngeri: umwōro yīzīgamyē aruta umugabo yīyōbewe.*  
An organised man is better than the one who forms large openings in his wall: a very tactful poor is better than an uncouth rich.
31. *Hirya y-ubwoba haba ubugabo.*  
Beyond fear there is manliness (= courage).
32. *Ibigora bigora abagabo*  
It is always men who have to find solutions to problems.
33. *Ibiriye umugabo ntibibeshera umwana.*  
What has been eaten by a full man cannot be imputed to a child.
34. *Igabo rigira uwiubakiye.*  
Manliness (virility) belongs to the one who has built a house for himself.
35. *Igihugu kitarimwo abagabo camamwo induru.*  
A country where there are no (wise) men is a permanent residence of quarrels.
36. *Igihuriko c'umugabo ukirira kucubaha.*  
It is by reverential awe to a rich (man) that you eat his evil spell.  
= For fear to be disliked, one takes fatal risks.
37. *Igitsure c'umugabo gihakuza bunini.*  
The menacing look of a man obliges one to give him a big portion of bread.
38. *Ijisho ry'umugabo rihakuza bunini.*  
The eye of a man (authority) obliges one to give him a big portion of bread.  
= An effective supervision by an authority favours prosperity.

39. *Ijoro ryagiye kera risubiza umugabo ku bwo yaraje.*

A night that delays to give place to the day brings a man back to the bread that he left the night before.

40. *Ijunja ry'umugabo ntiriri ku bwanwa: n' inka irutwa n- impene urabiye ku gasakanwa.*

The stature of a man is not on his beard: even a cow is less than a billy goat if you assess them from the chin.

41. *Ikijuju c'umugabo kirya imboga caritse.*

A stupid man eats the side dish while boiling water for bread (main dish).

42. *Ikobero ry'umugabo ryamako ijisho*

The gaze of a man on whom to rely is always fixed on his spear.

43. *Imbuzibuzi y-umugabo irabura akantu ntirondera akandi.*

A careless man misses one thing and does not look for something else instead.  
= ingenuity and clumsiness.

44. *Impfizi aho ishitse irivuga*

The presence of a bull somewhere is marked by its moo.

45. *Impfizi ntirongora iba yisema*

A bull never leads the herd; otherwise it would run the risk of getting into troubles.  
=The herd has as leader a mother cow; the bull follows //To everyone their duties.

46. *Impfizi y'intama itendera nka se.*

A ram takes after its father.

47. *Impfizi y'umugabo ntiyimirwa.*

The bull-man is set no boundaries.

48. *Imvugira kuyamara y-umugabo ikundwa na bake.*

He is esteemed by very few people the talkative man who talks for the sake of talking.

49. *Inararivuze y'umugabo iratinda ntihera*

The word of a (wise) man delays to be fulfilled but it is never futile.

50. *Incabacabanya y'umugabo ihanwa n-ukurya ntiraze.*

An eager strapping man is punished by the fact of eating without leaving any food for the following day.



51. *Indarandiye niyo mugabo.*

'I slept filled up' is the one and the only one who is a man.

52. *Indya y'umugayo irya umugabo.*

Only a man (important parson) can eat the food of contempt.

= to do well and to leave alone people say.

53. *Intashinyagara y'umugabo ica ku risongoye.*

A man who does not consider advice passes over a sharpen spear.

=An uncorrigible stubborn man is compelled to give way by force.

54. *Intáshirwa y'úmugabo ishirwa rímenetse.*

A stubborn man gets convinced when his eye bursts.

55. *Inyongera ishikira umugabo.*

Only a persevering man receives the supplement.

56. *Inzu y'umworo ntiyinjira muy'umugabo.*

The house of a pauper never fits into the one of a (rich) man.

57. *Isema y'umugabo yirukana ishishiro.*

A man of bad omen chases away a present ornaments.

58. *Iyo amazi yabaye make aheberwa impfizi.*

When the water has become scarce, it is put aside for the bull.

= The authority always monopolises the best one of shares.

59. *Iwabo w-inzoga ntiba abagabo.*

At the beer's home, there are never arbiters/ The home of beer is not the home of honest judges.

= Good judges ought not to accept bribes.

60. *Kananira- abagabo ntiyimye.*

The one who did not listen to counsels of notables was never enthroned.

61. *Karaba gato kakaba akagabo.*

Though he may be small in size he is still a man.

62. *Kibûrabwênge c'úmugabo yakwîkiye ishênyo mu gisomasoma.*

Fool man has fitted a handle in stem of courgette into his axe.

= To rely on a very weak protector leads to failure.

63. *Mana y-amanyama yari umugabo, bukeye agurwa buja.*  
The- insolent- luck was a handsome man, but the following day he was sold as slave.  
= Pride precedes humiliation.
64. *Ndi umugabo niko gupfa.*  
(To tell to self :) 'I am a man' is the way to death.
65. *Ngoma ya rivuz-umugabo yicwa n-ukugurwa buja.*  
The strong man who imposes his views is killed by being sold as slave.  
= Pride precedes humiliation.
66. *Ntaco – bungira y'umugabo yariye ikigega c'inkuba.*  
The man 'I-do-not-care-any thing' ate the granary of a thunderbird.
67. *Nta mugabo atarya ideni.*  
There is no (real) man who does not eat debt.
68. *Rwitēra imānza yēnze babiri.*  
Who-would-attract-conflicts-for-self married two (wives).  
= the one who has to conciliate divergent interests must face turmoil.
69. *Sinabikoze yakoze umugabo mw'irugu.*  
I-did-not-do-it hit a man at the nape of the neck/killed him.  
= Not to admit one's faults aggravates the punishment.
70. *Sinzi uwabikoze yakoze umugabo mw'irugu.*  
'I-do-not-know-who-did-it' hit a man at the nape of the neck/ killed him.
71. *Ubugaba bw'umugabo nibwo buryo bwiwe.*  
The carelessness of a man is his right way of doing things.
72. *Ubugabo burihabwa*  
Power/honor is self-given.
73. *Ubugabo buterwa n-impuzu.*  
Pride/Virility is according to the clothing.
74. *Ubugabo bwiganje bugaruza amazi ikirenge.*  
A personality who imposes himself as the leader diverts watercourse with his foot.
75. *Ubugabo si urucumu.*  
Bravery does not mean carrying a long spear.

76. *Ubugabo s-urucumu ku rutugu.*

Bravery/Virility is not a long spear on the shoulder. / It is not a big spear that makes a male to become a full man.

77. *Ubugenegene bw-umugabo nibwo buryo bwiwe.*

It is effectively his manner to behave that reveals the uncompromising attitude of a personality.

78. *Ubusaza bunyaga ubugabo.*

Old age spoils (a man's) virility.

79. *Ubutaja inama bw'aha bwagujije impfizi abagabo batahari.*

The dissension of this place made that they exchange bulls without witnesses.

80. *Ubuze ico aririra aririra ibirya umugabo.*

The one who has no reason to cry cries in order to eat what a man (a rich person well established) eats.

81. *Ubwage bukombesha umugabo igikoma.*

Destitution reduces a man to scrape porridge with a finger.

82. *Ubwage burisha umugabo ikivuzza.*

Destitution leads a man to eat an old marrow.

= Necessity often drives to extremes.

83. *Ubwana bw'umugabo ntibunyiganzwa n'ubusa.*

The beard of a man does not become agitated without a cause.

84. *Ubwiza bw'umugabo buri ku mufuko.*

A man's good looks are on his pocket.

85. *Uciriwe n'abagabo agira ngo cira na mawe bwaturaranye.*

S/he who receives from the rich asks for more and more.

86. *Ugaburirwa n-umugabo yita umutsima ibumba.*

S/he who is fed by a (rich) man calls pastry a clay.

= To have had as much as one can take brings disgust.

87. *Uguca bugufi kw'umugabo ni bwo bugabo bwiwe.*

Showing low estimate of one's own importance for a man is his real manhood.

88. *Ukuvuga ukuri ntikubuza umugabo gutaha.*

Telling truth does not prevent a man from returning home.

89. *Ukuvuga ukuri ntikubuza umugabo kuvumba.*  
Telling truth does not prevent a notable from having a drink.
90. *Ukw'umugabo aguye siko amena ivyiwe.*  
The way a man falls down is not necessarily the way he crushes his testicles.  
= The misfortune is not as serious as one fears it.
91. *Umugabo abonekera mu magorwa.*  
A man proves to be a real one through troubles.
92. *Umugabo agaramangana umugayo*  
A man proudly walks with scorn.
93. *Umugabo ahaga amazi ayivomeye*  
A man gets satisfied with water only when he draws it for himself.
94. *Umugabo ahagira ku nzira.*  
A man fills himself up on his way.
95. *Umugabo aharitse ahorana induru.*  
A polygamous man always lives in quarrels.  
= Who has to conciliate divergent interests must face turmoil.
96. *Umugabo ahumura ahumiwe.*  
A man calms down when he is struck by bad luck.
97. *Umugabo ahura n'uwundi.*  
A man meets another.
98. *Umugabo akira ikimwirukako ntakira ikimwirukamwo.*  
A man can escape that (danger) which runs after him but not that which runs in him.
99. *Umugabo akira iryo atēwé / ntakira iryo agēndána.*  
A man can escape a (spear) which is thrown at him but not that which he always carries with him.  
= Incurable character.
100. *Umugabo amira intore ntamira ijambo.*  
A man can swallow a pellet of bread but never the given word.  
= It is better to have the courage to stand firm on one's opinions.
101. *Umugabo amwera uwundi ubwanwa ko nawe azomumwa.*  
A man shaves another man's beard because the latter will shave his in turn.

102. *Umugabo anyagirwa umubiri ntanyagirwa umutima.*

A man's body can be soaked by the rain but his heart will never get wet.

103. *Umugabo arara aho yakoze iciza ntarara aho yakoze ikibi.*

A brave man stays where he did a good thing but he never spends the night where he did a bad thing.

104. *Umugabo ararima imbarabara imbaraga ikazoba iraza.*

If a man cultivates the edge of his field, the dispute will necessarily crop up.

= Conflicts in the neighbourhood are inevitable.

105. *Umugabo areka guterana imvi ibitoke akazivumbana.*

A man ceases to plant banana trees because of his white hair, nevertheless he goes to ask for beer with it.

= One uses her/his dignity as an excuse according to her/his interests.

106. *Umugabo arinda akaje.*

A courageous person withstands whatever comes.

107. *Umugabo aronka rimwe ngo ni je maronko.*

A man receives once and pretends to be always the receiver.

108. *Umugabo ashikwa na rimwe*

For a good judge, one word is enough to discover the truth.

109. *Umugabo ashira ubwoba ntashira inzara.*

A man can defeat fear but he will never defeat hunger.

= Even for a rich person needs are ineluctable.

110. *Umugabo asiga imbwa ntasiga umugayo.*

A man can escape a dog but will never escape scorn.

111. *Umugabo atari so abaga ubona agatekera ubona.*

A man who is not your father slaughters an animal in your presence and also packs meat in front of you.

112. *Umugabo atari so akwibuka amaze.*

A man who is not your father remembers you when he has finished/after finishing eating.

= Selfishness.

113. *Umugabo atemba kw-icumu ntatembera kw-ijambo.*

A man can stumble on his spear but never over the given word.

114. *Umugabo atinya ijoro azi ico vyarihuriyemwo.*

A man fears darkness because he knows what he has already encountered in it.

115. *Umugabo avyara abakobwa basa ngo ndahonye.*

A man who begets only girls says 'I get destroyed'.

= It is one's male descendants that ensure the perpetuation of lineage.

116. *Umugabo gito agaya ubwo yaraje.*

A difficult man finds insufficient the bread that he himself left aside the day before.

117. *Umugabo gito aragaya imburizi.*

A worthless man always despises the one who warns him.

118. *Umugabo mubi ni ubwagiyo.*

A bad husband is a torment.

119. *Umugabo ni umwana w'uwundi.*

A husband is the child of the 'other'.

= It suggests that a woman should not have total trust in her husband.

120. *Umugabo ni umwugariro.*

A husband is a barricade for the homestead's entrance.

121. *Umugabo ni uwurya akaraza.*

A man is the one who eats to his satisfaction and leaves something for the following day.

122. *Umugabo ni uwurya utwiwe n' utw'uwundi.*

A man is the one who eats his (food) and that which belongs to another one.

123. *Umugabo ntahora aragwana aba akumbuye guteka*

A husband does not fight with his wife all the time unless he is nostalgic of cooking for himself.

124. *Umugabo ntahora n-iryo buba aribwo buzeze.*

If a man never gives his opinion, that is stupidity.

125. *Umugabo ntakubura.*

A man never sweeps (the house).

126. *Umugabo ntananirwa n-umuzigo aba ananiwe n-inzigo.*

A man is not afraid of hard work unless he is overloaded down with hatred.

= One finds his work unpleasant when one hates the one who commissioned it.

127. *Umugabo ntapfira izuba rimwe.*

A man does not die in one day.

128. *Umugabo ntarya imihiti mu rugo rw'uwundi aba ashaka imiguzuko.*

A man never eats gourds in the house of another unless he wants a fight.

129. *Umugabo ntarya inzingo haba hari akaramutse.*

A man never eats unripe bananas unless he has a good unexpected cause.

130. *Umugabo ntategera amerwe ategera kazoza.*

A (wise) man does not take into account his bulimia in his shopping, but he banks on the future.

= The wisdom of the man of experience plans for long term.

131. *Umugabo ntatinya ijoro atinya ico vyarihuriyemwo.*

A man never fears travelling at dark night but he fears what he has already encountered in it.

132. *Umugabo ntatinya ishamba aba azi ico vyarihuriyemwo.*

A man never fears the forest unless he knows by experience what he encountered there.

133. *Umugabo ntatinya urukamvye.*

A brave / courageous man does not fear the fight that rages.

134. *Umugabo ntatinya urwamushikiye.*

A courageous man does not fear an evil that has already assailed him.

135. *Umugabo ntatwarwa n'uruzi aba atwawe n'urubanza.*

A responsible man is not carried away by a river but by that which obliges him to cross it.

136. *Umugabo ntatwarwa n'uruzi atwarwa n'urubanza*

A (responsible) man does not die drowned by a river but rather by the mission that obliges him to cross the river.

137. *Umugabo ntavumba inzoga avumba ijambo.*

A man does not want beer from his visit but the word of circumstance.

138. *Umugabo ntawe aragaya imboga mu mapfa.*

An indecent man despises the side dish during the period of famine.

139. *Umugabo ntiyicwa n'inzara yicwa n'inzigo.*

A man is not killed by hunger but by jealousy.

140. *Umugabo nyamugabo arangwa n'ibikorwa.*  
A real man is characterised by good works.
141. *Umugabo nya mugabo arangwa n'ukuri.*  
A real man is characterised by truth.
142. *Umugabo yiganje aryama acuramyeye bakoroserezayo.*  
If an imposing man sleeps with his head at the bottom of the bed, one contents oneself with covering him as such.  
= The powerful always imposes his views.
143. *Umugabo yiganje yica so, agacura nyoko.*  
A man who imposes himself kills your father and marries your mother.
144. *Umugabo yihindukiza mu kirago ntiyihindukiza mw-ijambo.*  
A real man turns himself in a mat but not on his word.
145. *Umugabo-bwa yicwa n'icumu ryiwe.*  
A man-dog (coward) is killed by his own spear.  
= The means for defense of the coward are seized by his adversaries to slaughter him.
146. *Umugabo umwe ntiyuriza umwami umugwa.*  
A single man cannot enthrone a king.
147. *Umugabo w-ingere agirwa n-umunangiri w-intango.*  
A too demanding man is put down by a well full jar.  
= To abound in one's sense until the excess allows triumphing over others.
148. *Umugabo w'isema akubura mu rutara.*  
A man of bad omen sweeps under the bed.  
= The statute of everyone conditions the division of labor.
149. *Umugabo w'isema yongeza umutsima.*  
A husband of bad omen asks for a second portion of pastry  
= He who is too demanding gets into troubles.
150. *Umuhogo ntumenya ubworo usara ibisara abagabo.*  
The throat does not recognize poverty as it always asks for what eat full men (rich).
151. *Umwana asūra umugina se akanya ibigara.*  
If a child plays with an anthill, his father consequently defecates very big mushrooms.  
=Parents react in face of their children's lapses in behaviours.



152. *Umwana w-umugabo yendanwa ibinyoro*  
A young girl who belongs to a (rich) man is married even when she has leprosy.
153. *Urugo n-urw-umugabo.*  
The household belongs to the man/husband.
154. *Urugo rurimwo umugabo runywa amata.*  
A household where there is a man drinks milk.  
= Authority ensures prosperity.
155. *Urugo rutagira umugabo ntakitarukengera.*  
A household without a man / head is despised by anybody.
156. *Urugo rutagira umugabo rutaha umugayo.*  
A household without a man is respected by nobody.
157. *Urugo rutagira umugabo ruvuga umwana.*  
A household without a man/ head is commanded by a child.
158. *Uruhanga rw'umugabo rurararira rusinziriye.*  
The skull of a man is vigilant even when it is asleep.  
= Important person.
159. *Uruhanga rw'umugabo rwica imvura rutayinyoye.*  
The skull of a man (authority) kills rain without having drunk it.  
= The prestige of the authority is enough to put an end to problems.
160. *Uruja kuja i bwami rubanza mu bagabo.*  
Before going to the royal court, a case must first pass before local notables.
161. *Urukamvye rumara umugabo.*  
Only a (strong) man can put an end to terrible fight.
162. *Urya nk-umugabo ukanirwa.*  
If you eat like a rich, you get choked.
163. *Utagira inka ntagira igabo*  
He who does not have cows cannot have pride of manhood.
164. *Uwanka abagabo asiga bagabura.*  
S/he who hates notables leaves them when they are sharing.
165. *Wirukana umugabo kera ukamumara ubwoba.*  
If you pursue a man for a very long time, you put an end to his fear.

## II. PROVERBS USING THE IMAGES OF THE FEMALE LEXEME

1. *Abagore bari kune bari gutanu.*  
Women are of four or five types.
2. *Agahugu karimwo abagore ntikabura amazimwe*  
A (small) country that is inhabited by women cannot lack gossipers.
3. *Akagore Inandagenda karaje irima.*  
Mother Jogging has left her fields lying fallow.
4. *Akatazi k'umugore karya imboga karitse.*  
An ignorant woman eats the side dish while boiling water for bread.
5. *Ha kurushwa gutambikiza n'umugore wopfuma utabuka*  
Better to get torn rather than spread your legs less than a woman.  
= It is better to suffer damages rather than being less brave than a supposedly weak opponent.
6. *Icimenyere c'umugore gikuburira imbere y-iziko.*  
Familiarisation makes that a woman sweeps up towards front of the hearth.  
= The hardening of one's heart is of bad omen.
7. *Imburakimazi y'umugore iramvya mw-irima*  
A useless woman sits her legs stretched on a mat during cultivation.
8. *Imburakimazi y'umugore yirirwa irabagara imishatsi.*  
A useless woman spends a whole day weeding from her hair.
9. *Inkoni ikubise mukeba uyirenta urugo.*  
The stick that has whipped your co-wife ought to be thrown over the fence (away).  
= Even the experience of an enemy can be profitable for the prudent person.
10. *Isema y- umugore irasama rugasaba.*  
The cries of an enraged woman disrupt the household.
11. *Isema y'umugore isema isambura.*  
A woman of bad omen removes wood from enclosure and demolishes.
12. *Isema y-umugore yisiga umusoma.*  
A woman of bad omen proclaims that she saw a leaf of marrow.  
= A silly person glorifies self for an activity that does not require efforts.

13. *Nta jambo ry'umugore*

No valid opinion from a woman.

=A woman is not qualified to give an opinion.

14. *Nta bucuti bw-umugore*

No relationship with a wife

15. *Nta rubanza rw'umugore*

No judgment from a woman.

= A woman cannot dispense justice.

16. *Nta wanka kwonka nyina ngo agwaye amahere*

No child can refuse to suck their mother under the pretence that she suffers from swellings.

17. *Nta wanka kwonka nyina ngo agwaye ibinyoro.*

No child can refuse to suck their mother under the pretence that she suffers from leprosy.

18. *Ntawikura kuri nyina ngo yarashaje.*

No one should forsake their mother under the pretence that she has got old.

19. *Sindabishaka w'umugore ashakira indaro iwabo.*

A woman I-do-not-feel-like-it risks going to stay with her parents

= To refuse to give herself to a man finally leads to repudiation.

20. *Ubworo buhetse buruta ubw-ifumbereje*

A poor woman who carries a baby on her back is far superior to the rich one who withdraws into herself.

21. *Uja kwa mukeba ntakebera.*

She who goes to her co-wife will not look away.

= to distrust one's enemy.

22. *Ukengera agafu ka mukeba kakakuraza umugabo.*

You can despise the small flour of your co-wife but it makes you spend the whole night without a husband.

23. *Ukira mukeba ntukira ico avyaye.*

You can escape safe from your co-wife but you never escape from what she gives birth to.

24. *Umugere w'umugore uhinda uhera.*

The speed at which a woman starts a race goes in diminuendo.

=Her manifestations of anger are short-lived.

25. *Umugore agaba inkono yo ku ziko.*  
A woman owns the pot that is on fire.
26. *Umugore ahimvye amenesha ukuguru urugi ngo bworo nuze*  
A woman who has eaten her fill of food breaks the door of the house with her leg and says:  
'welcome, poverty'!
27. *Umugore arakama intare.*  
A woman is able to milk a lioness.
28. *Umugore asa n-umwana*  
A woman is like a child.
29. *Umugore atanwa abana ntatanwa ikigega.*  
A woman is forsaken for not having children but she is not repudiated for not having a full granary.
30. *Umugore muhor-iwabo yaraye irima.*  
A woman always in way to her parents'home misses cultivation.
31. *Umugore mu kuzigama inkono abanza urujo*  
A woman normally starts using a potsherd in order to preserve the new pots.
32. *Umugore musangira amata ntimusangira amazi*  
With a woman you share milk but you do not share water.
33. *Umugore ni inkingi y-urugo*  
A woman is the pillar of the household.
34. *Umugore ni ndyana n'uwejeje*  
A woman is 'I-eat-with-whoever-is-about-to-harvest'.
35. *Umugore ntaganza urugo*  
A woman never regulates the homestead.
36. *Umugore ntaganza urwarwa aba ashaka inzira ija iwabo*  
A woman never has control over banana wine unless she wants the way back to her parents.
37. *Umugore ntakimazi abura ico akumarira akakwicisha iminihiro*  
A useless wife deadly bores you with lamentations instead of serving you.
38. *Umugore ntaririmba aba akumbuye iwabo*  
A woman never hums unless she is nostalgic of her parents.

39. *Umugore ntaririmba aba ariko aracura intimba*  
A woman never sings unless she is lamenting.
40. *Umugore ntasimba urugo aba agomba kurugwa inyuma.*  
A woman never jumps over the fence unless she wants to fall behind it.
41. *Umugore ntasutamanga aba agomba imyuga ibiri.*  
A woman does not sit on her heels repeatedly unless she wants two professions.
42. *Umugore ntatwara icumu.*  
A woman never carries a spear.
43. *Umugore ntiyambikwa ariyambika*  
A woman is not clothed but she clothes herself.
44. *Umugore ntiyurira inzu.*  
A woman never climbs on the rooftop of a house.
45. *Umugore nyamuhora iwabo arutwa n'umutsima watose.*  
A woman 'always- at- her- parents' home' is less than a so soft pastry.
46. *Umugore sinobigirwa agwa ku nzira*  
The woman 'it-cannot-be-done-to-me' dies wandering.
47. *Umugore wa karima-nzira ntiyubaka.*  
A woman who does nothing but wanders countrywide cannot sustain her marriage.
48. *Umugore w'akazuru gusa arikw'atazi kuroranya, ameze nk'impeta y'izahabu yambitswe ingurube mu zuru.*  
Beauty in a woman without good judgement is like a gold ring in a pig's snout.
49. *Umugore w'ingare agirwa n'umugongo w'umuhoro.*  
A cantankerous woman is brought to her common senses by the blunt edge of a pruning knife.  
= Strong treatment to a difficult person.
50. *Umugore w'intarima yonsa isuka*  
A lazy woman feeds her hoe's handle with her breasts.
51. *Umugore w'isema asera ihaha.*  
A woman of bad omen grinds grains to accompany the calf's lung.  
= Naivety leads one to do silly things.

52. *Umugore w'ishishi ntareka guhehera umwana.*

In spite of her repugnance a woman does not stop wiping her child's bottom.

= One can stand well things when it is to do with hers or his (relatives).

53. *Umugore w'ubwenge yubaka urugo rwiwe, ariko ikijuju kirusambuza ayiwe maboko.*

A wise woman makes her home, but the foolish destroys hers by her own hands.

54. *Umugore w-umukunzi w-inda arorerwa ku rubakuzo rw-amazi.*

A greedy woman is recognised when she is in front of a gourd of water.

55. *Umugore w'uwundi ntamara agahinda.*

The wife of another (man) does not end your anxiety.

56. *Umuhushatunga ahusha umugore.*

He who misses a wife misses wealth.

57. *Umukenyenzi ni inkingi mu muryango.*

A woman is the pillar of the family.

58. *Umwana aya inkoko nyina akayiruka amoya.*

When a child eats a chicken, his/her mother vomits its feathers.

=It is to the mother that the child's faults are imputed because they think it is by the mother's mistake that the child behaves in an undisciplined way.

59. *Urugo rurimwo umugore runywa amazi.*

A household headed by woman drinks water.

60. *Urugo ruvugamwo umugore rumeramwo ivyatsi.*

In a homestead that is regulated by a woman push bad herbs.

61. *Uruvugo rw'umugore ruvuga ingogo y'umuhoro.*

Only the curved shape of a pruning knife talks about the bad reputation of a woman.

= Strong treatment to a difficult person.

62. *Utambana na mukeba ntakubita urugohe.*

She who dances with her co-wife will not bat her eyelid.

63. *Uwubuze uwo bakina akina na nyina.*

The child who does not have anyone to play with plays with his mother.

64. *Uwuronse umugore aba aronse ikintu ciza cane.*

He who has got a wife has got something very good.

65. *Wirukana umugore ngo aguguna igufa ukazana uwurimira miyonzwa.*

If you chase the wife under the pretence that she scrapes out a bone, you bring one who swallows it wholly without chewing it.

= The fickle risks to have worse than before.

### III. PROVERBS IMPLYING BOTH MALE AND FEMALE LEXEMES

1. *Akayira kó mūsí y-úrugó karasiba, umugore n-úmugabo bakaba bāsibiranye.*

When the way leading to the south side of the homestead is no longer maintained, it is a sign that the husband and the wife do not get along any more.

=when husband and wife do not get along anymore no visitors come to their home.

2. *Amahoro arama ahera mu rugo agasasagara mu kibano*

Sustainable peace starts from one household and spreads out in the neighbourhood.

3. *Amahoro mu ngo niyo nkingi y'iterambere mu gihungu.*

Peace in households is the pillar of development to the nation.

4. *Amashâkarúgo arōgora umugoré ntyōtutse umugabo.*

The will to have a family is very demanding otherwise a wife could not insult her husband.

5. *Buranganywa yica urugo.*

(Saying :) 'Equal slices (of bread)' destroys a household.

6. *Icimenyere c'umugore kigaruza impfizi urushi.*

An imprudent woman taps a vicious bull with a hand strike.

7. *Ikiyago ca babiri nico cubaka.*

The dialogue of two is what constructs strong family structures.

8. *Inkokokazi ntibika insake iriho.*

The hen does not crow when the cock is there.

9. *Inkokókazi ntitanga isake kubika.*

A hen does not crow before a cock.

10. *Inzanza y'umugabo itiza icumu umugore.*

A disgraceful man lends his spear to his wife.

= A woman cannot allow herself the marital authority.

11. *Irivuze umugabe ntirikura umugabekazi.*

The word said by the king is not refuted by the queen.

12. *Nta bugiri bwigira, umugore agirwa n'umugabo*

Nothing makes it by itself, a woman is made by a man.

13. *Nta nkokokazi ibika isake iriho.*

No hen crows when the cock is there.

14. *Ntanyakokazi yobika isake ariho iri.*

No hen would crow when the cock is there.

15. *Ukengera agafu ka mukeba kakakuraza umugabo.*

You can despise little flour of your co-wife but it makes you spend the night without a husband.

16. *Umugabo aravuga umugore yavuga rukaba rucitse itongo.*

The husband speaks and if the wife retorts the marriage gets dislocated.

17. *Umugabo gito akubita umugore wiwe.*

A worthless man beats his wife.

18. *Umugabo ni umutwe w'umugore.*

The husband is the head of the wife.

19. *Umugabo ntakokora inkono aba avuna umutima umugore.*

A man never scrapes out the food from the bottom of a cooking pot, it would be breaking the heart of his wife.

20. *Umugore agona agoramira umugabo.*

A wife who snores causes troubles to her husband.

21. *Umugore atunganye abera umugabo wiwe igitsibo mu mutwe, ariko aw'agatetereza amubera nk'ikimungu mu magufa.*

A good wife is a crown on her husband's head, but a wife who brings shame on her husband is like a cancer in his bones.

22. *Umugore mugucura umugabo amucura umuniho.*

A woman fond of food pretends to be sick in presence of her husband.

23. *Umugore ni urubavu rw'umugabo, uwumukubise aba yikubise.*

The woman is made from one of the man's ribs, beating her is beating oneself.

24. *Umugore ntarya incira niko gucira umugabo.*

A woman never eats meat got as gift unless she despises her husband.



25. *Umugore w'isema abika umugabo.*

A woman of bad omen foretells the death of her husband.

26. *Umwana w'indero anezereza se ariko uw'ikigaba ni agatukisha kuri nyina.*

A wise son makes his father proud of him; a foolish one brings his mother grief.

27. *Urugo ni babiri.*

A family unit is set up by two (persons).

28. *Urugo rugira babiri.*

The family unit is founded by two.

#### IV. PROVERBS CONTEXTUALISING I, II & III

1. *Agashitsi ka kera kavumbika umuriro*

An old dry piece of tree keeps fire well for the following day

2. *Akabigira kabizi ( kabibona) karya imboga karitse.*

The one who does it knowingly (or seeing it) eats the side dish while boiling water for bread'.

3. *Akana kari n'iwabo kendanwa ibinyoro*

A young girl who originates from a healthy family is married even when she has leprosy.

4. *Amase ya kera ntahoma urutaro*

An old cowpat cannot cover the outer part of a basket.

5. *Igiti kigorogwa kikiri gito.*

A tree plant is straightened when it is still young.

6. *Imbuto itewe niyo imera.*

The seed that is sown is what comes out of the soil.

7. *Indero iva hasi.*

Character is moulded at the early age.

8. *Inkuba zibiri ntizisangira igicu.*

Two thunderbirds cannot coexist in one cloud.

9. *Ishengero ritarimwo uwawe rikubera ishamba*

A crowd in which there is nobody who manifests solidarity in you quickly becomes to you identical to a forest.

10. *Nyamubura-ikimúhanūra niwe nyamubura-ikimúhāmba.*

S/he who does not have anybody to reprimand her/him is the one who will not

get someone to bury her/him.

11. *Ubukuru sibwo bwo bwênge.*

It is not age that confers wisdom.

12. *Ubwiza buba ku mutîma nay-agatonde gatonda akamyira*

Beauty lies in heart while from a well shaped nose comes only nasal mucus.

13. *Ubwiza ntiburibwa.*

Beauty is not eadible.

14. *Umugani ntuva ku giti uva ku muntu.*

A proverb does not originate from a tree but from human behaviour.

15. *Umugani ugana akariho.*

A proverb portrays noticed facts/ A proverb reflects a real situation.

16. *Umugani ungana ingoma.*

A proverb is as respectable as the drum.

17. *Ũtaronsé ikimúgaba ntáronká icó agabá.*

S/he who does not have anybody to command one will never have anybody under one's order.

18. *Uwufise se ntayoberwa umugani wa sekuru.*

He who has a father knows the proverb of grandfather.

19. *Wabira intabarirwa ukavyara intumva.*

If you marry a stubborn woman you will beget children who do not listen.

20. *Wiba uhetsé ukabwiriza uwuri mu mugongo.*

When you steal you contaminate the one you carry on your back.

21. *Ntazibana zidakubitana amahembe.*

Cows living in the same kraal cannot miss to hit their horns at each other.

= Conflicts are inevitable among people who have something in common.

## APPENDIX D: SOME PHOTOGRAPHY

1) The researcher with some of her informants



Nibafasha with Ntabakunzi & Bucumi at their home in Buhinga



Nibafasha and Nibizi & Nicayenzi at their home in Nyavyamo



At Mwibira's home in Kiremba



Nibafasha with Mwibira & Bazahababaza at their home in Kiremba



Nibafasha and Police Officer Commander Sabiyumva at her office in Ngagara





## 2) Examples of communications on material supports



