

WANAWAKE WACHUKUA HATUA NYINGINE: ANALYZING WOMEN'S IDENTITIES IN KISWAHILI SHORT STORIES

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Wataalamu mbalimbali wamefafanua dhana ya hadithi fupikwa namna mbalimbali. Kipera hiki cha fasihi andishi ni zao la athari za kimagharibi. Hadithi za fasihi simulizi zimerutubisha hadithi fupi zinazoendeleza majukumu ya tangu jadi ya kuelimisha, kuongoza, kuonya na kuburudisha. Hadithi fupi ya kisasa ina sifa za matumizi ya lugha ya nathari, masimulizi mafupi aghalabu ya tukio moja, mhusika mkuu mmoja au wahusika wachache, msuko sahili na hatimaye mshikamano na umoja wa mawazo na mtindo. Katika makala haya, tunachambua hadithi teule za Kiswahili kuhusu nafasi na ujitambuzi wa wanawake. *Kachukua Hatua Nyingine* ya Kyallo Wadi Wamitila inajadili hatua ambazo mwanamke anafaa azichukue ili ajikwamue na utumwa wa ndoa zinazompa mwanamume uwezo wote. Nayo *Ngome ya Nafsi* ya Clara Momanyi inaonyesha hatua anazochukua mtoto msichana kujikomboa dhidi ya mila na desturi zinazomnyima utambulisho wa kibinafsi na kijinsia. *Wasia wa Baba* ya Ahmad Kipacha inaonyesha jinsi utamaduni na mafundisho chanya ya dini kuwa njia mwafaka za kujengea utambulisho wa mwanamke. Hatimaye *Usia wa Mama* ya Fatima Salamah inaonyesha mtoto msichana akijihami kupitia utamaduni na mafundisho chanya ya dini dhidi ya ushawishi hasi wa mamake.

Introduction

In this paper, we will analyse women's identities in four selected Kiswahili short stories which have been published during the last decade. The stories are taken from two anthologies – *Mayai Waziri wa Maradhi na Hadithi Nyingine* ('Mayai, the Minister for Disease and other stories'; 2004), edited by Kyallo Wadi Wamitila, and *Kunani Marekani? na Hadithi Nyingine* ('What's in America? and other Stories'; 2011), edited by Patrick I. Iribemwangi.

The Kiswahili short story is a genre that has of late gained prominence on the Kiswahili literary scene with the publication of a number of anthologies in recent years (King'ei & Wafula 1996; Mbatiah 2000, 2007; Wamitila 2004, 2010; Mohamed 2005a, 2005b, Walibora & Iribemwangi 2011, Babu 2011, Momanyi & Timammy 2011). McOnyango (2006: 9) contends that the genre gained prominence in the 1960s especially amongst Kiswahili scholars in the East African region and in countries where Kiswahili is taught in universities. On the other hand, Wamitila (2004: v) argues that the genre has existed for a while on the Kiswahili literary scene, only that there is (up to 2004) a dearth of published short stories in volumes by one writer or in anthologies.

As a genre of written Kiswahili literature, the short story is a descendant of the oral tale or narrative, and continues to perform a pedagogical and didactic function in modern society. This is

not to forget the pleasure or entertainment role and function of oral tales also reflected in the modern short story. The resemblance of the short story with the oral tale is manifest in the different styles that are attributed to oral narratives. The short story has a brief history in Kiswahili literature (Wamitila 2002: 66; 2008: 185). Mbughuni in Msokile (1992: 10) argues that though the modern short story exhibits differences with the oral tale, the style and thematic assertions of the two still resemble a lot. The Kiswahili short story seems to have emerged along with and exhibits influences from regions and cultures that Kiswahili literature has had contacts with, the most important being the Gulf, India and Europe. Ohly (1981: 6) explains that the short story (and narrative prose), was overshadowed by classical poetry. The narrative mode seems to have started with Steere's collection of *Swahili Tales* (1870) going through a lull in the early 1900s till the mid 1960s when writers started to treat the genre seriously. This lull in the development of narrative fiction by indigenous writers during this period can be attributed to the World Wars, the publication of anthologies of African oral tales by Europeans and the struggle for independence. Despite this, the genre is developing quite rapidly in societies where in the past short stories were published in newspapers, journals and finally, in books. In Kiswahili literature, the development of this genre can directly be linked with or attributed to the presence of oral narratives in society. In essence, this means the modern short story different from the oral tale was influenced structurally by its Western predecessor, but regained its traditional and local flavor in thematic engagement and style.

The short story as a genre of written literature has characteristics that distinguish it from the novella and novel, both of which use the prose form. The issue of what characterizes a short story has been a subject that has engaged literary theorists and critics for quite a while. Most of the arguments that have been put forth revolve around length, characterization, setting, narration and style. Evidently, regarding the aspect of length, the short story is shorter than both the novella and novel. Msokile (1992: 13) defines the (Kiswahili) short story as a narrative of a single episode. On the aspect of length, McOnyango (2006: 11) refers to Edgar Allan Poe's definition of a short story. Poe had proposed that a short story should be read in a single session of about half an hour or one hour. Wamitila (2008: 185) defines the short story as a narrative that revolves around a single episode or incident, involving a single character or few characters who relate in a specific period of time, using a concise style.

The most distinctive characteristic that sets aside the short story from the novella and the novel is compression. As early as the 1930s, Bowen (cf. May 1976: 152) puts the short story closer to poetry in brevity and clarity, while in terms of action, it is more dramatic than the novel. Hawthorn (2001: 44-52) contends that this compression is manifest not only in the form (or structure) of a short story, but also in its characterization, setting, narration, thematic engagements, language use and/or stylistic aspects, and the brevity of plot limiting it to a single episode.

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Characterization in a short story is often limited to a certain extent, either focussing on just one central character, or on certain aspects in the development of a character that are important in the development of the themes. Similarly, setting is another feature that is compressed within the short story. And finally, the compression of narration is another feature of short stories, which provides the writer with the possibility of employing the technique of ellipsis. Writers may also use imagery like symbols, metaphors and similes mainly in order to ‘round up’ the brevity that makes the short story a condensed form of literary art (Msokile 1992: 13; Wamitila 2008: 210).

In this paper we will analyse and compare Kyallo Wadi Wamitila’s *Kachukua Hatua Nyingine* (‘He has taken another step’; Wamitila 2004: 38-49), Clara Momanyi’s *Ngome ya Nafsi* (‘Self-Fortitude’; ivi: 98-114), Ahmad Kipacha’s *Wasia wa Baba* (‘Father’s counsel’; Iribemwangi 2011: 50-55) and Fatima Salamah’s *Usia wa Mama* (‘Mother’s advice’; ivi: 120-129). The two stories from Wamitila’s anthology will be analysed with regard to the changing roles of women in society and the struggle of the girl-child against traditions that are a hindrance toward her acquiring education and the age-old retrogressive practice of early forced marriage, respectively. As concerns the latter two stories, both Kipacha’s *Wasia wa Baba* and Salamah’s *Usia wa Mama* engage in a dialogue between parents and children about contemporary social issues and how they affect and direct their relations in a modern setting. The four short stories have several things in common – the discussion of both the personal and societal issues in societies embroiled in cultural, ideological and social conflicts and how the different writers handle them.

Analysis

Introductory Remarks

In all the four stories that will be analysed women’s identities form a central topic. They all discuss the interaction between men and women in society and the undercurrents of gender equality and identity. In Kyallo Wadi Wamitila’s *Kachukua Hatua Nyingine*, the protagonist Sakina questions her role and function in the institution of marriage as prescribed by tradition and how vague customs affect her personal and gender identity. Clara Momanyi’s *Ngome ya Nafsi* tackles the question of debilitating customs that continue to enslave and deny the girl-child herself and of gender identity. Ahmed Kipacha’s *Wasia wa Baba* handles the question of conformity to good cultural and religious practice as being apt tools with which young women can construct positive gender identities. Lastly, Fatima Salamah’s *Usia wa Mama* shows how good cultural practice and religion enable the girl-child to construct a positive gender identity.

Wamitila's *Kachukua Hatua Nyingine*

In Wamitila's *Kachukua Hatua Nyingine* ('He has taken another step'), the theme of woman's ineptitude and complacency is shown to be a result of upbringing and socialization. This is a society where a woman is so interpellated by patriarchy's machinations that she believes being subservient to man (and husband), is the natural order of affairs. This is why Sakina has always lived in Mavitu's shadow. The writer rightly tells us: "*kosa lake tangu akiwa mdogo ni kuwaamini wengine na kupumbazika kiasi cha kuwaachia uhuru wakumwendeshea maisha*" (since childhood her mistake had been to believe in others so much that she entrusted them to make all decisions for her; Wamitila 2004: 40)¹.

On the other hand, antagonist Mavitu is depicted as the absolute patriarch and agent of culture. However, Mavitu's status and identity is tarnished and diminished by his inability to perform his role and function to society's expectations. Despite this, he is able to convince Sakina to abandon her teaching job in spite of her parents' exhortations to the contrary. In this way, Sakina gives up her self-identity, self-esteem and individuality. She fits perfectly in the niche created for women in a patriarchal setting. She becomes passive. She is now relegated to the domestic realm (private) and not the public one (her teaching job). She suffers physical and psychological anguish especially after her brother's demise, who had been a source of both financial and psychological refuge. Her predicament is compounded – her dependency and despondency are now the characteristics that describe her marriage.

Mavitu seems to suffer a continued inferiority complex emanating from his many tribulations in life. He is jealous of his wife and detests her being referred to as *shemeji* (in-law) by fellow villagers. Thus, he leaves his job in town to be with his wife and 'watches' over her. Unconsciously, he seems to be struggling to assert his authority as a patriarch, and performs his roles and functions as prescribed by society, being its agent. In this sense, it can be argued that Mavitu is intent upon jealously 'protecting' his wife, as his own property.

Subsequently, Mavitu commits suicide. This is no surprise as his role of patriarch has suffered several tribulations. As the patriarch, whose role and function were to take care of his family as tradition demanded, Mavitu failed, or, arguably, fate had it that he could not. His complete despondency is what eventually leads to his suicide.

While Mavitu's situation is deteriorating, Sakina step by step realizes that she needs to be a person on her own – an individual with an identity and a sense of purpose. "*Akili yake ilifunguka ghafla kama mlizamu*" (Her senses came back to her like the rush of a rivulet; ivi: 48). Mavitu seemingly dies with the ideology he represents thereby giving Sakina a new lease of life. Death

¹All translations by the authors.

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releases Mavitu's (and patriarchy's and culture's) iron grip on Sakina. The role and function prescribed to her as well as her identity as a woman, are subverted. "*Sasa itakuwa zamu yake kuchukua hatua nyingine ambayo angeichukua tangu hapo*" (Now it was her turn to take another step which she should have taken long time ago; ivi: 49). Sakina's new role, function and identity which is immediately linked to Mavitu's decline and death symbolizes the writer's deconstruction of the status quo of woman's conformity.

This story uses figural counter-pointing as the basis upon which Mavitu (the patriarch) and Sakina (the other) are compared and contrasted. Inference is a tool by which the writer shows the relationship the couple had in their marriage (Ivi: 38-40). Suspense allows us to follow the happenings with bated breath in order to find out 'what steps' (*hatua*) Sakina takes after Mavitu exhausts all his steps (Ivi: 48). He struggles to maintain culture's prescribed role and functions of being the patriarch and provider to his family. Images of what kind of tribulations Mavitu and Sakina undergo makes the reader read in between the lines. Finally, symbolism is used to capture and explain each of Mavitu's *hatua* (actions) and finally, *hatua ambayo* (the step which) Sakina would have taken long time ago (Ivi: 49).

Clara Momanyi's *Ngome ya Nafsi*

Clara Momanyi's *Ngome ya Nafsi* ('Self-Fortitude') tackles the theme of the outdated practice of early forced marriages in a patriarchy. The heroine, the young school girl Naseko, is 'kidnapped' on her way to the well and forcefully married to Mzee Sakaja, who is old enough to be her grandfather but had already received the bride price in form of cattle from Naseko's father Mzee Mengo. In this society, the girl-child is only but an asset, an object to be disposed off once a bidder with the right price is found. The writer castigates this cultural practice seemingly shored up by an ideology that shows preference towards the male gender. In essence, this practice denies the girl-child a chance to grow up, be educated and mature into adulthood and be free to make individual choices.

The situation where passers-by ignore Naseko's cries for help seems to justify this custom and, meantime, to reflect the author's critical stance. Finally, Naseko's sense of purpose, resolve and impeccable character, is what drives her to run away from Mzee Sakaja's home in the dead of night. Her escape to preserve her chastity symbolizes her distancing herself from the prescribed role, function and identity imposed by culture and patriarchy. She takes the path towards Bi Tesi's residence, who provides a safe haven for girl-children who manage to evade their tormentors. Her residence symbolizes woman's unity of purpose – to fight for women's rights to education, chastity, self-esteem and self-identity.

Bi Kija, Naseko's mother, on the other hand, is representative of the traditional society so interpolated that she has totally and completely surrendered herself to cultural and patriarchal machinations. She has submitted to her being 'other' – with no voice, no authority, in a man's world, where she would only cry her heart out. Bi Kija "*alijipweteka kitini huku machozi yakimtiririka kuwili*" (Bi Kija resignedly sat on the couch crying her heart out; Wamitila 2004: 103).

With characters like Naseko and Bi Tesi, the writer insists that as long as society disregards its female members, a few of them will rise up to fight for their rights. They would want to see both female and male gender live in harmony, in a world devoid of antagonism and oppression. Naseko's thoughts: "*aliwaza juu ya wale wasichana kama yeye ambao hawakubahatika kutoroka kama yeye*" (she thought of those girls who were not as lucky to run away as herself; ivi: 114), show the reader that Naseko is a fighter for the rights of the girl-child and female gender in general. Her personal success points to their possible brighter future.

The narrator uses different images to create a vivid picture of Naseko's tribulations (Ivi: 99-103). Irony imparts the message that neither Naseko's mother Bi Kija, nor her father Mzee Mengo, nor the chief Mzee Mshabaha, and not even the passers-by come to her rescue as she was being 'kidnapped' to be taken to Mzee Sakaja's residence: "*walisimama kuitazama sinema ile ya kushangaza. Wengi wao washaiona mara nyingi mle kijijini*" (they stopped to look at the strange happening. Most of them had witnessed the same in the village; ivi: 101). It is also ironical that the man was the agemate of Naseko's grandfather. Symbols capture Naseko's flight from the clutches of Mzee Sakaja and the outdated cultural practice of forced marriage (Ivi: 107-112). Bi Tesi's residence symbolizes the girl child's refuge and hope for the construction of self and female identities.

Ahmad Kipacha's *Wasia wa Baba*

Ahmad Kipacha's '*Wasia wa Baba*' ('Father's counsel') is an epistolary story about a father's advice to his daughters on how to conduct themselves to avoid being entrapped in the glamorous, enchanting but evil world. The father's advice is guided by traditional African culture and Islamic teachings captured in the metaphors the writer continually uses to drive home his message,

Nitakuwa msaliti wa amali iwapo sitatimiza yale Muumba wa wakati aliyonitabarukia katika huu mgongo wa dunia. (Iribemwangi 2011: 50)

I will have betrayed all my deeds and actions had I not fulfilled what the creator of time granted me in this life on the face of the earth.

It seems the father is preparing his daughters for adult life as they have already undergone the rites of passage, "*kutoka kwa makungwi na masomo zenu*" (Ivi: 51). He exhorts them to be upright, not to be alienated from their culture and religious beliefs. He reiterates the fact that the Creator is all-seeing and all-knowing, and thus would guide them well in life as long as they are ready to follow

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his wise counsel. They should shun peer pressure in their day-to-day interaction in society. All this he sees as a parent's obligation he has to fulfill:

Seuze vifaranga hugubikwa ndani ya mbawa za wazazi wake iweje nami nishindwe kuwakinga wanangu na shuruba za dunia? (Ivi: 50)

Befitting that chicks are covered within their parents' wings how it be that I fail to protect my children from the bitter experiences of life?

The father, who already had a session with his sons, rightly tells them that they cannot go against the natural order of things, but rather should strive to humble themselves in society not to be judged harshly, or to be relegated to 'otherness' (*habithi* – evil ones). He gives his counsel which is part and parcel of their culture in the following way:

Mama yenu kaning'ata sikio kuwamsha kuwa nanyi ni watu mbele za watu na mme-shakabidhi wa vyungu hadi vyelezo. (Ivi: 51)

Your mother has already informed me that you are now all grown up and are your own persons and have already passed both the traditional and religious rites of passage.

What the father perceives as positive gender identity cannot be constructed or cultivated by deviating from conventional cultural traits and religious teachings. But the two should together create synergy and harmony within them as individuals, the wider community and ultimately, society. These 'positive' cultural traits which the father wishes his daughters to imbue, will inculcate in them a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and self-identity. Of course, out-dated and disparate cultural rites and practices will be detrimental to any given person's identity. The father reiterates:

Wanangu! Sina budi nishukuru mila za wazazi wangu waliotangulia njia ya mlango mmoja zitufunzazo. (Ivi: 52)

My Children! I am obliged to be grateful to my parents whose traditions I follow in the same manner they did.

In the opinion of the father, physical looks and endowment are but gifts from the Creator and not a reason to let the world use and abuse oneself. For women, to use their looks for financial gains described as an immoral and dehumanizing act which, according to tradition and Islamic teachings, imbues them with a 'negative' identity and ultimately alienates them both from themselves and society.

Furthermore, the father insists that "*ukweli ni kambare mkavu aliyeonja jahanamu katu hapindiki*" (the truth is a dry mud fish that has seen hell and cannot be folded whatsoever; p. 52). The image of dryness impresses upon the daughters that one's identity depends on what effort one puts into shaping it. In essence, the father argues that a person's character and identity are shaped gradually through a person's different stages of physical and mental development.

This is the bitter truth the father avers, which is captured in his words “*nitawalisha hirizi ya simba*” (I will give you the lion’s amulet; Ivi: 55). The father is quite aware of his daughters’ maturity and hence ability to decipher his message to them. He tells them:

Wanangu si wajinga na fumbo hufumbiwa mjinga; kitambo wao washang’amua nili-yoyasema; kwamba tamu hugeuka chungu, kuna malimwengu ulimwenguni na subira, walinena wenye kunena, huvuta kheri! (Ivi: 56)

My children are not stupid and puzzles are meant for fools; they have already understood what I had to say a long time ago; that a sweet thing could become bitter, and the world is full of evil, but patience leads to good.

To conclude, *Wasia wa Baba* is a well-told story that uses imagery and metaphors to instill a sense of purpose, awareness and moral uprightness to one’s daughters as they embrace adulthood. The father as the head of the family is fulfilling his role and obligation of offering guidance and wise counsel to his daughters. Though traditionally this duty is performed by the mother, we would assume she could be absent for reasons not explained. The writer insists that the positive attributes of culture and religious teachings can and are the sure ingredients for the construction of a person’s moral integrity and positive personal identity in society.

As the monologue of the father is dominating this story, the reader is mainly exposed to his point of view, opinion, and directives. The story uses metaphor to create vivid images of what the father wishes to have his daughters hold onto and cherish (Ivi: 50f). Symbols and similes are also used to create an impression of a father who understands cultural and ideological norms well enough to advise his daughters to live in accordance with them.

Fatima Salamah’s *Usia wa Mama*

Fatima Salamah’s *Usia wa Mama* (‘Mother’s advice’) is ironical in tone and captures a daughter’s and mother’s dialogue and the daughter’s astute mind, high sense of morality, personal and gender identity.

From the beginning, the mother, Chaurembo, is eager to convince her daughter, Furaha, of her innocence. This is with regard to why Abdulhaq (Furaha’s father) divorced her: “*Lakini hayo yote, yalikatizwa na huyo babaenu – kwa kunisingizia na kunisakama kwa urongo uloumiza*” (But all that was cut short by your father for persisting to believe in the lies that hurt me a lot; Iribemwangi 2011: 120f.). It is interesting to note that Chaurembo’s advice to her daughter is both an avenue for trying to evade blame for her contribution in her failed marriage and a way of avenging for the same, by trying to influence her daughter to grow up to be like her. Chaurembo’s words capture her intentions vividly.

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*Mwanangu usithubutu kutiwashemere na silsila za sijui utamaduni, sijui dini, sijui nini!
Wewe ni mja huru – huru kama ndege angani. (Ivi: 121)*

My child, do not be enslaved by the chains of tradition, religion or whatever else! You are a free, free like the birds in the sky.

From the onset Furaha, a young woman in form four, is quite aware the reason for her parents' separation. She, however, does not wish to be dragged into her parents' disputes and differences. She enquires as to whether her mother really cared or loved her children at all. Despite the separation, Furaha's father, Abdulhaq, has struggled to bring up his children to love, revere and respect Chaurembo as their mother.

Babaetu katulea kwa kutuelekeza kukupa heshima kama mamaetu, na mtu uliyetubeba tumboni mwako. (Ivi: 122)

Our father brought us up and guided us to respect you as our mother and the person who carried us in her womb.

It can be inferred that Furaha being an astute young woman – conscious of her culture, faithful to her religious teachings – seems to have lived harmoniously with her siblings, her father, her step mother, and to be aware of her biological mother's ill intentions. Chaurembo tries to endear herself to her daughter by creating animosity, breathing fire and vitriol into Furaha's heart. She paints and portrays a very negative image of her estranged husband, who is called *mnafikiki* (hypocrite) and *mzandiki* (evil person; ivi: 120). In essence, the mother seems to intend to avenge her divorce from Abdulhaq for having deviated from cultural norms and religious teachings. Her utmost goal is to influence Furaha to take on negative attributes like lewdity, promiscuity, spite and egoism. Chaurembo wishes her daughter to be defiant and hence be alienated from both herself, her father and siblings, her stepmother and the community. She wishes to see her old self in Furaha; a reckless, promiscuous, unfaithful woman with little self-esteem and no positive identity.

Chaurembo as a mother is struggling to imbue negative attributes in her daughter Furaha. She is jealous and extremely annoyed with her former husband's choice of a wife. She has not changed for the better, which is discernable in the abusive language she uses to describe him, calling him *kipofu* (blind) and *punguani* (crazy; ivi: 122). As for Sakina, her former husband's wife, she is a *jini* (genie) and has legs like *vichokonoameno* (toothpicks) and *vishavu vimebonyea* (flabby cheeks). Chaurembo wonders whether she Sakina will deliver a *katuni, jini, zimwi au nini?* (a cartoon, a genie, an ogre or what?; ivi: 123). These are the words of a mother pretending to love and miss her children. This is the height of hypocrisy meant to create hatred, animosity, doubt and gender antagonism between Furaha and her father, her stepmother and all those who nurtured her to what she is at present. All this is meant to derail Furaha's efforts at constructing a positive identity for herself.

However, Furaha counters her mother's insolence with a higher discursive language which, to a large extent, is telling of her becoming a morally upright and discerning young woman who cannot be swayed by the whims of a vindictive loser. Furaha tells off her mother thus,

Lau uzuri wa sura na umbo kingelikuwa kipimo cha utuna ubinadamu wetu, baadhi yetu tusingelizaliwa kuuona uso wa dunia. (Ivi: 124)

Had a person's beauty and the shape of a person's body been the parameters to measure our personality and humanity, some of us would not have been born to see the surface of the earth.

Furaha insists that the reason for her parent's separation is well known to her. This is confirmed by her mother's escapades. A case in point is how she met the fathers to her other children – Rukia and Yasin. The two are the products of promiscuity and desperation on the part of Chaurembo. And this is the treacherous, dehumanizing path Chaurembo wishes her daughter to tread, the personality and character she wishes to nurture and cultivate in her 'beloved' daughter. Having failed to construct a positive self-identity by shunning her roles and functions in her marriage to Abdulhaq, she wishes to avenge her being a divorcee by trying to entice her daughter into following in her footsteps.

The writer uses Furaha as a representative living example of the immense power of personal fortitude, moral standing and education as the ingredients towards a personal identity. No identities or personalities are created in a vacuum or isolation of family, friends and community, rather in an atmosphere of interaction between the genders, where understanding, respect, care, morals, genuine love and a clear vision and mission reign supreme.

Furaha summarizes her refusal 'to relive' her mother's turbulent life in these words,

Lakini naomba nikuulize, una mfano upi wa kuigwa? [...] Lau watupenda kweli, basi dawa uwe mbali nasi mfano wa mbingu na ardhi! [...] Nakusihi mama, hadi utapojitambua wewe nani, waelekea wapi, ishi katika ulimwengu wako ulioulilia, ukaupigania. Kama usia wako mama ni kutaka kuniteka na kunipulizia sumu ya shaka, tamaa na wasiwasi kuwa na hakika kama ya umauti si mimi. (Ivi: 129)

But I beg to ask what is it to be emulated from you? [...] If you really love us, then it would be best if you stayed far away from us like earth and the skies! [...] I implore you mother, till you understand who you are, where you are going, live your life that you craved for and fought hard to have. If your advice to me mother is to try and entice me, poison my mind with doubt, greed and uncertainty, be sure like death, that I will not be the one.

This epistolary story which is a dialogue between a daughter and a mother uses irony as the mother pretends to care for her son and daughter: "*Furaha kipenzi, usichukie kwa kimya cha karibu miaka yote*" (My dear Furaha, do not blame me for being silent for that long; ivi: 120). Suspense is created from the onset as the mother tries hard to entice Furaha into her fold (Ivi: 121). It is ironical that Chaurembo's beliefs and ways did not work for her though she so wishes Furaha to relive her past.

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Finally, sarcasm and antithesis are used when Furaha repulses her mother's cajoling and woes to rebel against her father Abdulhaq: "*Shikamoo mama kwa usia wako na mawaidha yako yalionitoa taka masikioni na utandu machoni.*" (Congratulations mother for your advice which has removed dirt from my ears and eyes and enabled me to hear and see more clearly.; ivi: 128f).

Conclusion

The four short stories analysed deal with women's identities in an East African setting. Wamitila's *Kachukua Hatua Nyingine* shows that a woman's identity will only be constructed when she takes the necessary steps in life and especially in marriage. She has to empower herself through education and be independent rather than be dependant on the patriarch (husband).

Ngome ya Nafsi is a scathing attack on the outdated practice of early forced marriage. Naseko, the heroine, intends to get a good education by rebelling against her father. Her running away and finding safe refuge at Bi Tesi's residence translates into her ability to construct a 'positive' personal and gender identity.

Wasia wa Baba, different from Wamitila's story, insists that good cultural practices and religious teachings are tools which young women can use in their quest for personal and gender identities. This is because they have survived the test of time.

Usia wa Mama pits mother against daughter in negotiating for women's identity. The mother is a rebel and non-conformist while the daughter vows to conform to her father's counsel, culture and religion. In this sense, the daughter is able to construct a positive self and gender identity, while the mother's intentions and identity she wishes her daughter to construct for herself are subverted.

This paper has shown that the four short stories analysed have discussed women's identities in a variety of ways. Wamitila's *Kachukua Hatua Nyingine* and Momanyi's *Ngome ya Nafsi* resemble in their narrative perspectives. Both have used figural counter-pointing. In the former, Mavitu's actions and demeanor are compared and contrasted with Sakina's. While Mavitu is struggling to preserve and maintain his prescribed and hereditary identity of patriarch and husband, Sakina has just found out what she should have done long time ago to construct a positive self and gender identity – get a good education and rebel against the traditional, prescribed identity imposed upon her by tradition and patriarchy.

Kipacha's *Wasia wa Baba* uses metaphor to create images of a father imparting the ingredients for construction of positive gender identities. Culture and religion can be used to assert positive gender identities. Salamah's *Usia wa Mama* uses figural counterpointing as Furaha is pitted against Chaurembo her mother. Irony and sarcasm are used well to differentiate 'negative' identity (Chaurembo) and 'positive' identity (Furaha).

In this sense Wamitila's *Kachukua Hatua Nyingine* resembles Momanyi's *Ngome ya Nafsi* in narration, suspense and finally both the writers seem to suggest woman's positive self and gender identity can only be constructed by rebelling against insensitive and debilitating cultural practices. On the other hand, Kipacha's *Wasia wa Baba* and Salamah's *Usia wa Mama* insist on the fact that conformity to good cultural practices and religion are sure ingredients to the construction of women's 'positive' personal and gender identities.

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