

Review Essay and Book Reviews
Review Essay

An Emic Reading of *Drums of Death* by Chris Lukorito Wanjala, 2009

By R.M. Wafula

Introduction

Chris L. Wanjala is known more for being a literary critic than an author of imaginative literature, the fact that he has edited *Faces at Cross Roads* (1971) and *Attachments to the Sun* (1980) notwithstanding. The emergence of *Drums of Death* would, therefore, obviously interest interactants of Wanjala as a literary critic. For unlike authors like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and S.A Mohamed whose output of creative works is in equal measure to their critical musings, Wanjala has a stronger proclivity towards literary criticism than creative writing. A rudimentary reading of *Drums of Death*, especially its first part clearly demonstrates that the author's critical impulse far overrides his creative inspiration (*Drums*, 3). This, however, is not the place to discuss the merits and demerits of Wanjala, the writer-critic.

Emic and Etic Readings

My principal concern in this discussion is to demonstrate that authors who use their folklore to mold their works are more often than not better understood and appreciated through emic readings. An emic reading is to some degree antithetical to an etic study of a literary text. Both approaches are adapted from linguistic studies of language. Whereas emic readings in their original standard guise emphasize individual languages' phonological or phonemic systems, etic ones on the other hand focus on the phonetics of the languages involved.

The proponent of the emic- etic approach to the study of language and culture was Kenneth L. Pike, a structural linguist. Pike introduced the terms emic and etic in 1954 using them dichotomously. For him, an emic account comes from within the culture, while an etic one is a description of a behavior by an observer that can be applied to other cultures. The terms, points out Pike, are analogous references to a raw generalized classification on the one hand (etic) and the more specific, systemic analysis on the other (emic). Later Pike (1982, 1983, 1987, 1993) developed the emic- etic dichotomy into a theoretical framework called tagmemics, which processes language and culture from the observer's point of view. Thomas Lindof (2008) clarifies this when he states:

:Emic and etic describe two broad approaches to analyzing language and culture. The emic- etic duality has influenced ways in which fields as diverse as personality psychology, consumer behavior, organizational science and intercultural communication study cultural systems.The term emic adapted from phonemics-conveys the idea that only members of a culture possess valid knowledge of their own language usage..... an emic unit is any physical or mental

item regarded as meaningful, real, accurate, appropriate, coherent or relevant by the culture members themselves (1).

Translated into literary study, an emic view privileges an insider understands of the expressions and artifacts of a particular people over and above the outsider's understanding of the same.

That is not to say that there are no points of intersection between the emic and the etic categories of reading and interpretation. Intersections do exist and they form an increasing continuum of emphasis and intensity between the universal and the particular in literature and culture. The point of this discussion is that some creative works lend themselves more to emic readings than etic ones depending on how alienated they are from the notion that an imaginative work is a self-contained entity. If this be the case, an insider's insight into a work can lead to a richer understanding of the said work because the reader would be furnished with a more reliable and unwritten subtext to supplement the actual text being read. As has been shown in the preceding pages, to make a claim for an emic study is not stating anything new; scholars of linguistics, folklore and oral literature have in the past evaluated the advantages and the disadvantages of the emic and the etic approaches to their fields.

In written literature, however, the approaches have been rarely applied and exploited fully. To foreground an emic study of a written text is to deny that imaginative literature is wholly autonomous. It is to admit that an appraisal of a work of art that is not contextually bound in a very direct and immediate way denies that work the interpretive depth and richness that it deserves. It is to move away from formalist and poststructuralist notions like those posited by Roland Barthes (1994) who argues that no sooner has the author created her or his work than they die, for the work attains an own self-sustaining life. An emic study is contextualist, it is particularistic and it is sensitive to the unique cultural inflections of the work being read.

Central to an emic reading of a literary text is the notion of the tagmeme. According to Pike and Pike (1983:7), a tagmeme is a special kind of emic unit which combines paradigmatic, syntagmatic, pragmatic and cohesion features. Paradigmatic features are demonstrated by classes, syntagmatic features by position, pragmatic features by purpose and cohesion features are demonstrated by the knowledge and experiences of the individuals concerned. A tagmeme is, therefore, an emic unit in the context at various hierarchical levels. Specifically, an emic unit is a physical or a mental item or system treated by insiders as relevant to their system of behavior.

Drums of Death and Emic Readings

An emic reading is relevant to the critical appreciation of Wanjala's *Drums of Death* because in creating the work, the author makes some assumptions which are comprehensible and sensible to the reader who is conversant with Bukusu culture, history, folklore and contemporary politics. For the reader who is furnished with Bukusu emic knowledge, spots of indeterminacy which may arise in *Drums of Death* wherever the reader's justifiable impulse to imagine surpasses the evidence actually provided by the text may be easier to erase. In some instances, these spots of the Bukusu way of life are so intertwined and elliptically rendered that they pass for very obscure textual webs. Moreover, there are mentifacts and translations of Bukusu idiomatic expressions, innuendos, maxims and proverbial statements whose home environments are too thin to enable the reader who is not immersed in Bukusu culture to understand them meaningfully. By adopting an emic reading, the reader becomes privileged for she or he is privy

to strategies of understanding and knowing that are not readily accessible to every other reader and is endowed with the facility of writing between the author's lines more accurately than the etic reader. An emic approach approximates to and favors what reader-response literary critics would call the ideal reader (Wolfgang Iser, 1974, 1978).

In proposing an emic reading of *Drums of Death*, I also concur with the researches of Ruth Finnegan in oral literature (1992) in which she proposes that in a text that is overly oral and communally produced, meaning can be gleaned not only from the text at hand but also from a multiplicity of voices. Besides looking at the voice of the composer or poet, the participants help to form the work and mediate its meaning and the dynamics through which it occurs. Likewise, for the reading of *Drums of Death* to be worthwhile, the reader who happens to be a participant in the events that feed and refurbish the action of the novel albeit marginally cannot afford to be dispassionate and value-free. Such a reader may be more conversant with the inspiration that underlie the creative process of the work than an outsider and therefore, relate to the work in a very personal way.

The Setting and Characterization of *Drums of Death*

Drums of Death is set in Nambayi. Nambayi is the traditional name of the geographical location of the present day larger Bungoma district. The action of the story also reveals that Nambayi is actually connected through synecdoche with Kimilili constituency and the larger Bungoma district in particular, and the Republic of Kenya in general. Although the area described by the author is inhabited by many ethnic communities, the Bukusu are the majority and have dominated the parliamentary politics of the area. From the political perspective, the main actors in Nambayi are Thawako and Mothendu. These are opposing and antagonistic competitors for political and cultural leadership of Nambayi. Although the writer is not sympathetic with Thawako's quasi-socialist policies, neither is he any kinder to Mothendu's elitist and capitalist approach to politics.

Furthermore, the writer appears to distance himself from Mothendu because the latter plunges into politics carelessly, enlisting the support of Thawako's opportunistic wife without due regard to the danger he exposes himself to. Nassio is the name Thawako's wife. The name is derived from a Bukusu folktale in which a girl who is waiting for her brother to return from the mission of practicing the art of blacksmithing is devoured by an ogre. In the novel, "Nassio" rhymes with "Wasio", a proverbial bird in Bukusu folklore which is reputed for scavenging. The Nassio of *Drums of Death* preys on men till they are moribund and dead (Thawako) or dead (Mothendu and Thituma). Nassio is very much like the femme fatale in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*. Ihuoma leads to the death of all the men she interacts and shares a life with.

Through Thawako and Mothendu, Wanjala lampoons the Nambayi elite in particular and the Sibala (Kenyan) aristocracy in general in the way they involve themselves in the political processes of their country. They not only engage in literally buying political power; they also compound this by allegorizing the conquest of their political adversaries through the conquest of their women. Thawako, Mothendu and Thituma are ambitious, opportunistic and callous. Ironically, these attempts to conquer women lead to the nemesis of main political actors in Nambayi.

Feminization of Political Power in *Drums of Death*

That Wanjala uses the figure of a woman to signify destructive forces in the dispensation of political power is not in doubt. It is, in any event, a motif that exists in Bukusu folklore. However, this need not be the case all the time. In point of fact, feminization of power by men, be it political power or otherwise, among the Bambayi (Bukusu) is a norm. Nassio advises Mothendu; “in the campaign, you will be called Mothendu, the pet name given to you by your mother” (*Drums* 7). Moreover, we are given to understand that:

Mothendu was better known by his mother’s name than his father’s. Like all male children in Nambayi, he praised himself and invoked his mother’s name. Children in Nambayi were surer of the women who had brought them into the world than the men who had fathered them (*Drums* 15).

The author’s recording that Mothendu praises himself and invokes his mother’s name is correct in general terms. But it is not accurate. Male children usually praise themselves by invoking their mothers’ names or their mothers’ clans whenever they perform tasks that call for bravery, courage and ingenuity. On the other hand, female children praise themselves by invoking their fathers’ names or their fathers’ clans. So, the author’s syllogistic argument that “the male child praises himself by invoking his mother’s name because he is surer of the woman who has brought him into the world” is defective and fallacious. The invocation of the father figure and the mother figure is applicable to the girl child and the boy child respectively. It is true that children (and not necessarily male children) would trust their mothers than their fathers as far as their procreation is concerned. But that would be a citation for another context.

Feminization of politics is symbolized most profusely by what the author refers to as “the personality stick”. We are told that, “Mothendu had a special rod, a *kiboko*, which he would use to *penetrate* the politics of Nambayi” (4). The author uses the words “rod” and “penetrate” significantly. Here, political power is described in terms of an entity that has to be penetrated for the would-be politician to gain entry into the club. Among Bambayi (Bukusu), prospective politicians approach the electorate the way a man who wants to get married traditionally approaches his prospective bride. The entire lexicon that the prospector mobilizes and applies is seductive and invokes marital obligations and responsibilities. “The special rod” quoted above resonates very well with the epistemological awareness of the Bambayi.

If the pursuit of a political office is couched in a feminized vocabulary, the defection from one political party to another is also depicted in feminized terms. Seeking political power in Nambayi is as dangerous as courting a feared woman. Of Nassio, Wanjala writes:

Mothendu was courting a woman who was feared in Gogotha’s home. In the village, Mothendu had gathered that Gogothi had renounced her as his daughter-in-law. He had asked her to pack up her belongings and move out. He told Thawako that he did not want to see Nassio in his home again (13-14).

Part of the reason why Nassio is being disowned is that she has an affair with Mothendu. More fundamentally, it is because she has defected from Thawako’s party. Defection from a party is symbolic of and analogous to a divorce in the marital sense.

Self-mockery as an Act of Absolution

Above all, through criticizing the political elite of his constituency, Wanjala engages in serious self-mockery. Wanjala is self-critical for participating in the very political processes he loathes. The author is part of the political elite of his landscape. For a reader with emic apparatus and knowledge, the author's portrayal of Mothendu is a rite of passage, a remorseful act, a kind of self-purgation for the acts he has abated in real life but which he has savagely attacked in fiction. The author is not just a dancer from the margins of the arena, he is not just a neutral chronicler of the mores of his people; he has actually participated actively in the creation and memory of those mores. Consequently and subsequently, Mothendu's suffering in *Drums of Death* is vicarious; he is the fictional sufferer for many an elite, including the author, who have committed errors of commission and omission against the people of Nambayi. Through turning against the self in fiction, the author hopes to be granted an absolution from the harshly judgmental and an unsympathetic world.

It is instructive to note that although there are more than fifty clans among the Bukusu, the author dramatizes the struggle for power between only two sub-clans of the larger Sirikwa clan. Ironically, the Kwangwa sub-clan is the writer's own, effectively making Mothendu his mouthpiece to some degree. Like the author, Mothendu is a literary artist who freely refers to Lord Byron, Christopher Okigbo, William Blake and William Wordsworth (*Drums* 3). On one of his electioneering trails, Mothendu stops at Ning'e secondary school. A school teacher is heard to say in reference to Mothendu, "I read his book, *An Introduction to African Literature*, when I was a First Year student of English" (*Drums* 15-16). The title referred to by the teacher is clearly a parody of *Standpoints on African Literature* (1973), a publication on literary criticism edited by Wanjala (read Mothendu) and popular with undergraduate students of Kenyan public universities. This movement from the creative to the critical attitude and vice-versa is part of the author's reality as a critic who has virtually relied on imaginative minds to build his scholarly stature. It enables the author of *Drums of Death* to assume a fluid persona that allows for both imagination and criticism. Moreover, since authorial commentary is not sufficiently comprehensive, it leaves loose ends which call for filling in. The process of filling in becomes especially challenging in case the anecdotes being narrated are based on peculiar cultural practices.

Besides the author of *Drums of Death* bearing a striking inter-textual relation with one of the leading characters in the novel, he refers again and again to the prophetic figures that happen to be part of his ancestral lineage. Just as the great and fictional Wachiye wa Naumbwa is the ancestor of Mothendu, the same prophetic figure is the historical ancestor to the author of *Drums of Death*. It would require an insider's awareness to capture these obscure allusions and cross-references aptly. Wanjala is intimately tied up with Mothendu such that part of Mothendu's fictional life is Wanjala's own factual biographical sketch. This does not mean, as I shall show later, that Mothendu does not personify other political figures that have traversed the landscape and attempted to control the political shrines of Nambayi.

Beliefs and Superstitions

Wanjala's use of Bukusu belief systems and superstitions to illustrate how these inform the controlling themes of his novel needs more than regarding *Drums of Death* as a self-contained whole. The reader requires to be furnished with the cultural configurations within the

broader context of Bukusu society to apprehend the significance these beliefs and superstitions. One of the reasons why Mothendu would like to go to parliament is “to correct the myth once and for all that the first son of a widowed woman would not make a leader” (2). Wanjala mentions this belief in passing without exerting any effort to elaborate it within the context of his narrative.

The first son of a widowed woman commonly referred to as “Omukhala mwandu” in Bukusu lore does not relate to parliamentary contests spoken of by the author alone; it also relates to an entire network of social and familial relationships. Within the family circle; “Omukhala mwandu” is said to take away blessings from other male children. As a result he is avoided, feared and often excluded from mainstream activities of the family and the clan. As a matter of fact, the man who marries a widow wishes that at best the first child he begets is a girl. At worst, if the child happens to be a son, he should be a stillborn or die in infancy or youth. Since these anthropological details seriously affect the fortunes of one the protagonists of the novel, their knowledge enrich the reader’s awareness of the intricate machinations at play in Nambayi politics. The tragic element of *Drums of Death* is that notwithstanding the fact that the author, and by extension, his protagonist are bent on debunking beliefs that detract people from exploiting their highest possible potential, Mothendu ultimately succumbs to the superstitions that surround “Omukhala mwandu”. Towards the end of the novel, Mothendu exposes himself to very dangerous circumstances and naively falls prey to an assassin’s axe. This is aggravated by the tragic flaw that bedevils his life; he runs around and has an open affair with the opportunistic wife of the incumbent Member of Parliament. An emic reading of the novel would reveal much more with regard to this aspect of the novel than conventional, formal and etic readings.

Types

There is no gainsaying the fact that *Drums of Death* is fictional. That granted, any historical person who has intensely gotten involved in the politics of Kimilili, the larger Bungoma district and Kenya is readily bound to identify typical characters found in the regions and the idiomatic expressions commonly employed by the politician and the citizenry to demonstrate, reinforce or justify their knowledge. The personalities that the author has used to dissect and analyze the political terrain of the former Bungoma East Constituency, which now comprises Bungoma North (Kimilili) and Bungoma East (Webuye), are identifiable in real space and time. Although the figures are depicted as in a dream, condensed, sometimes deliberately slanted for artistic purposes singly or severally, and exhibiting certain transmogrified traits, they are without a doubt identified as Masinde Muliro, Mark Barasa, Charles Wasike Binyenya, Elijah Mwangale and Mukhisa Kituyi. In some cases one fictional character is a crystallized figure of several historical characters. A case in point is Mwangale, Binyenya and Kituyi. Mothendu and to some degree Thituma in the novel appear to be a condensation of these characters.

Wanjala cleverly gives rough and fleeting sketches of these characters to the extent that an etic reading of the novel would fail to situate them in their proper perspective. Muliro is remotely referred to as “kuka”, literally translated as “grandfather”. The author says of “kuka”: “Kuka... launched himself into leadership through a project. He took Bambayi to Masamba” (*Drums* 5). To the best knowledge of the inhabitants of the former North Kavirondo, the politician who encourages people to move to the settlement schemes is Masinde Muliro. Without

Muliro's personal effort and involvement, not many people from the Western Province of Kenya would have inhabited the present day Bungoma North and the larger Trans Nzioa districts.

Thawako is the fictional name for Mark Barasa. This is shown in the way he is described:

This constituency is led by a former intermediate school- teacher. What can he offer the electorate, nay this country in terms of progress? Nambayi requires an engineer, a literary critic an anthropologist or a lawyer. Thawako is a cheap politician. He was the chairman of the popular Rhinoceros Football Club. He failed dismally and his services terminated (*Drums* 42-43).

The reference to a former intermediate school teacher appears to have happened around 1969, the year Elijah Mwangale made a debut into the then Bungoma East politics. Mark Barasa, the then Member of Parliament was said to have scant formal learning. On the other hand, the portrayal of Charles Wasike Binyenya, Elijah Wasike Mwangale and Mukhisa Kituyi is conflated and condensed. All of them have university degrees. Two of them (Mwangale and Kituyi) use the lion as their electoral symbol and electioneer on the platform of change. Their rhetorical emphases are of course different. For one, "Bubwami nibwo kimiandu" (power is wealth) is the clarion call. For the other, "Khwenya chenji" (we want change) is the electioneering catchword. Perhaps, due to the fact that Charles Wasike Binyenya peters out after the first attempt at politics, the memory of his campaign manifesto is equally remote. By conflating and condensing the various political figures that have influenced the politics of Nambayi, the author is arguing that though they represent different generations and come from distinctive backgrounds, these politicians fundamentally hold the same warped vision for the area they purport to represent. They are a common stereotype of the failed leadership of the African continent.

On joining politics, all leaders of Nambayi call for unity for there are many clans in Nambayi. For the politicians, the surface appearance of their messages is to call for unity as a strategy of fostering development. To the contrary, most of them use divisive strategies such as kinship differences, material and intellectual poverty of the electorate to sustain their power. In the novel, Mothendu and Thawako are the personification of this doublespeak. We are given to understand that an Assistant Chief tells Mothendu a story about the white man who intends to appoint a leader for the Bambayi after the Chetambe war. Namachanja is appointed because he accepts to take care of all the refugees without discriminating them on the basis of clan or other criteria. Namachanja is depicted as a typical role model to whom the shortsighted leaders of Nambayi pay lip service without capturing the genuine spirit of his leadership qualities. An emic reading of this incident demands that the author at this juncture should explore and identify a multiplicity of desirable leadership qualities that Bambayi leaders should emulate and domesticate. This would pit the likes of Thawako and Mothendu against Namachanja and give reason for a glimmer of hope in a world that is overly pessimistic. As the situation appears now, hope in Nambayi exists only in a distant remote sense.

Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions that preponderate in the novel also require a context bound reading to be understood and appreciated. Generically, an idiom is a phrase or a sentence whose meaning is not clear from the meaning of its individual words and which must be learned as a whole unit. To

demonstrate that he understands the mentality of the Nambayi electorate, Mothendu applies the idiom “swear by the circumciser’s knife” (*Drums* 11). “Swearing by the circumciser’s knife” is an expressive oath among Bambayi (Bukusu) that is indexical and symbolic of total refusal or total affirmation as circumstances may dictate. Even as Mothendu is vigorously electioneering, he is very wary of the Bambayi pride and self-assurance. It is not easy to buy one into voting for a politician just because the voter is economically disadvantaged:

A man in Nambayi may be poor. His buttocks may be showing *as his pair of shorts or trousers are irreparably torn and he may have no underpants on* (emphasis mine). But he stands there and says he does not want to vote for a candidate who will clothe him, give him food and provide him with shelter (*Drums* 11)

It is this pride of Bambayi that has often led to their determination to deny very affluent politicians the chance to win parliamentary seats. Another idiom that is found in the novel and which the author employs rather obscurely is “closed door.” Wanjala uses this idiom in a political context. In the Bukusu lore, however, it is strictly used to educate male initiates in regard to the man-woman relationship in the community. The “open door” is a psycho-analytic reference to the condition of an unmarried woman. She is like an open door and a man may try his luck at wooing her. If the woman is married, however, the circumciser (the person who advises initiates about adult life) compares the married woman to a closed door. The initiate is henceforth admonished never to seduce her for the consequences for the act could come swiftly and harshly.

The author’s application of this idiom is at best far-fetched and at worst obscurantist. It does not advance the cause that his protagonists are making at the point they employ it. But it is obscurely associated with the affair that goes on between Mothendu and Nassio that eventually leads to the annihilation of Mothendu. What baffles the emic reader is whether or not Mothendu is versed in the culture of his people with regard to the man-woman relationship. So long as the elusive contest for Nassio is an allegorical expression of the political contest between Thawako and Mothendu, the affair between Mothendu and Nassio is tenable. Should the relationship be mimetic as it appears in some episodes, however, then Mothendu is the unfortunate victim of the curse that befalls “Omukhala mwandu”. The point is that the idea underlying the idiom “closed door” is not very well brought out by the author from a didactic perspective.

Contrary to the idiom referred to above, the idiom “to shit on one’s legs” is aptly employed by the writer to underline a character’s self-assertion or even self-doubt. In her complaint about how she is being treated casually by Mothendu, Nassio points out:

You do not tell me what is at the bottom of your heart.
You only smile and make sarcastic remarks about me.
Have I shat on my legs? (*Drums* 34)

Shitting on one’s legs is a most humiliating act one can do to oneself in Bambayi (Bukusu) culture. A complaint or a rejoinder such as is quoted above is given by a deeply wounded and offended individual who may not even be aware of the reason why he or she is being derided. It is an appeal by the offended individual to be taken seriously and with dignity.

Finally, it is a taboo among Bambayi for children to wear clothes of their senior, especially their parents and their grandparents (while they are still alive) unless the clothes are voluntarily offered. In competitive politics, this is even more pronounced for it is totally unacceptable for a junior to sit on a stool reserved for seniors. Thawako is angry with Mothendu's emergence into the politics of Nambayi and hence his stinging attacks on his person:

His dad had not reached the age of puberty when I joined politics and represented this country at its first constitutional talks in England. Now children want to try our clothes when we are still alive (*Drums* 49).

This is a literal translation from Lubukusu and it implies that children should not desire positions occupied by adults. Using such vindictive and exclusivist folkloric statements, the adult world effectively shunts the youth away from political participation. But Thawako's words may also embody a genuine concern of an elder who feels disrespected or offended by a younger person's wayward activities. The old man could be complaining that Mothendu has taken over his wife before his very eyes and is, therefore, justified to be avenged.

Proverbs

Proverbial statements are probably the most prolific but also challenging of the Bambayi folklore in *Drums of Death*. The writer's attempt to translate these statements linguistically rather than socio-culturally makes them lose in elegance. One proverb which could have been rendered in a better way is "Ye luswa bera eng'ene", which literally translates as, "that which has a curse is itself slaughtered" (*Drums* 27). Due to the constraints of finding precise English equivalents, the author laboriously translates this proverb dialogically. As a result, the proverb loses in pithiness, power, brevity and succinctness.

Another proverb which is translated rather clumsily is "Sisioo sikhubolela" literally rendered by the author as "Whatever rots has an owner" (*Drums* 17). This proverb is closest to the Kiswahili proverb "Chako ni chako kingawa kidonda." The author's "Whatever rots has an owner" does not bring out the sense that "Even if what belongs to you rots, it still remains yours no matter how others regard it". A more accurate rendition of the proverb would be "What is yours is yours no matter that it is rotten". The emphasis should be put on the sense of the value of the item despite its rotten state.

To be fair to the author, he sometimes puts the proverbs in the mouths of his characters the way those characters apply them in the actual setting in life. He is, in other words, faithful to the diction and realism of his political elite. Proverbs are, as a result piled upon other proverbs for ornamentation rather than for their contribution to the overall development of the plot. In attempting to integrate the proverb, "When a snake attacks you, use the stick nearest to you" into his train of thought and speech for example, Robusto turns it into a rhetorical question and anticipates the crowd's response in the affirmative (*Drums* 28). He does that regardless of whether it would add value to the progression of the plot or not.

Finally, in some cases, the author is unnecessarily loquacious, longwinded and sometimes, futilely self-indulgent in the reconstruction and use of the Bambayi proverb. When Nassio hits out at men who fall in love with socially unsuitable women before they meet their matches later in life, she defends her action of dating Mothendu by arguing: "When you blame

the wildcat, do not forget that the chicken , too, is to blame (*Drums* 39). But instead of ending on this note, the author extends the proverb to an absurd and obscene anecdote:

The wild cat bares its The chicken pecks at thinking it is a grain. The wild cat shuts the and the chicken is caught. The chicken becomes a good meal for the wild cat.

The taboo word that the author has indexed with dashes defies any euphemistic replacement. Only an emic reader can understand what it means. This is quite humorous to such a reader for he or she is able to write between the lines; but it is surely not necessary. Its effect is to reduce the force and the seriousness of the proverb.

Conclusion

The thoughts expressed in this article demonstrate that an emic reading of Chris Wanjala's *Drums of Death* illuminates the strengths and weaknesses of the novel in ways not accessible to etic criticism. An emic critical approach throws light on the otherwise obscure setting, characterization, beliefs, idioms and proverbs that fill the pages of *Drums of Death*. An emic reading thus situates a work of art in a culturally bound context thereby enabling the reader to write between the lines of the novel he is or she is reading.

References

- Alford, Robert, R. (1998). *The Craft of Inquiry: Theories, Methods, Evidence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Barthes, Roland (1994). "The Death of the Author", *Falling Into Theory: Conflicting Ways of Reading Literature*. Ed. David Ritcher. Boston: Bedford Books.
- Bauman, Richard (1986). *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narratives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bentley, Jerry (2004). "Globalizing History and Historicizing Globalization" *Globalizations*. Vol.1 No. 1. Hampshire: Routledge.
- Dundes, Alan. Ed. (1999). *International Folkloristics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Franklin, Karl J. (1991). Review of *Emics and Etics* by Headland , Pike and Harris. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 11: 132-136.
- Finnegan, Ruth (1992). *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*. London: Routledge.
- Foster, Thomas (2003). *How to Read Literature like a Professor*. New York: Quill.

- Furniss, Graham & Liz Gunner (1995). *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hall, Stuart, et al. (1996). *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage Publications
- Headland, Thomas, Pike & Harris ed (1990). *Emics and Etics: The Insider/ Outsider Debate*. Newbury Park CA: Sage Publications.
- Hussey, S.C. (1989). *An Annotated Bibliography of Publications Using Emic/Etic Concepts*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Iser, Wolfgang (1974). *The Implied Reader*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Iser, Wolfgang (1978). *The Act of Reading*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Johnson, Martha (1992). *Capturing Traditional Environmental Knowledge*. Ottawa: Dene Cultural Institute & International Development Research Centre.
- Lindof, Thomas, R (2008). "Emic and Etic Research", *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*.
<http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g97814051>(Accessed January 24, 2009)
- Njogu, Kimani (2008). *Culture, Performance and Identity*. Nairobi: Twaweza Communications.
- Pike, K.L (1982). *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemes*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Pike, K.L & Evelyn Pike (1983). *Text and Tagmeme*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Pike, K.L (1987). "The Relation of Language to the World", *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics*. Vol. 16. 77-98.
- Pike, K. L. (1993). *Talk, Thought and Thing: The Emic Road Towards Conscious Knowledge*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Ritcher, David (1994). *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Ways of Reading Literature*. Boston: Bedford Books.
- Sekoni, Ropo (1994). *Folk Poetics: A socio-semiotic Study of Yoruba Trickster Tales*. Westport: Connecticut: London: Greenwood Press.
- Wanjala, Chris (2009). *Drums of Death*: Nairobi: Africawide Network.

Wanjala, Chris (1980). *For Home and Freedom*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.

Wanjala, Chris (1978) *Season of Harvest*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.

Wanjala, Chris (et al (1978). *Attachments to the Sun*. London: Arnold.

Wanjala, Chris ed. (1978). *Standpoints on African Literature*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.

Wanjala, Chris (1971) *Faces at Cross Roads*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.

By R.M. Wafula

Book Review

Amutabi Nyamanga Maurice (2009) Editor, *Studies in the Economic History of Kenya: Land, Water, Railways, Education, and Entrepreneurship* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press).

Summary

In this work, the authors present a broad and intellectually powered analysis of Kenya's economic experience. The discourse is presented in twenty-one chapters assessing various topical issues centered on land, water, railways, education and entrepreneurship. It is noteworthy that the chronological contextualization of the work is quite admirable because it allows the reader a chance to explore the factors, actors and processes that shaped Kenya's political economy right from the colonial period, through to the post-independence present. The book is divided into four parts. Part One examines purely historical issues with specific reference to the political economy of the Kenya Colony. Herein the authors explore both macro-economic and micro-economic issues in Kenya's colonial economy. Of particular interest are: the colonial infrastructure; the impact of the Great Depression of the 1930s; problems associated with colonial land tenure and micro-economic development associated with the transition from Kenya's pre-colonial period and the impact of the early colonial economy on the same. Part Two of the book presents case studies by several authors who zero-in on a number of topical issues that address human and economic development in Kenya: under-development in Northern Kenya; the role of women groups in Development in Kenya, trade and horticultural commodities in Kenya's urban setting and the place of Kenya's market women in international trade. Part three of the book is specific to key aspects and sectors of Kenya's economy including, the impasse of Kenya's underdevelopment; water and development in Kenya; the fishing industry, the political economy of land clashes, the livestock sector and the intricacies of drought and hunger in post-independence Kenya. Finally, Part Four of the work present incisive debates concerning men's self-help groups; entrepreneurship in Kenya; formal education and economic development; information technology and marketing issues.

Introduction

In a four-page foreword, Professor Robert Maxon underscores the fact that the book provides a fresh impetus to historical studies since it goes beyond the traditional approaches that tended to focus on cash crop production in colonial economies. He contends that not much attention is paid to Kenya's pre-colonial past while only five chapters focus exclusively on the colonial era. Prof. Maxon appears to be quite enticed by the editor's prowess in addressing intellectually stimulating topics including the role of women, Non-Governmental Organizations and the impact of information technology on economic performance. In the next introductory sections of the book, the editor makes a detailed acknowledgement of the contributors and facilitators for the book; before rolling out to the Introduction. In this introduction the editor makes a brief rationale for the book and how the idea behind writing it came about. He clearly spells out the purpose of the book: to address the legacy of colonialism on the economic history of Kenya; the impact of capitalism on the economy of the post-colonial state in Kenya; and, the role played by political,

economic and social classes in the post-colonial state and the subsequent course of political change.

The Colonial Period

In Chapter One John Mwaruvie traces the origins of the railway construction in Kenya. A notable thing about his chapter is that he goes beyond the regular assumption that there is an obvious relationship between railway construction and the agricultural potential of the White Highlands. Instead railway construction had more to do with British military expediency and strategic interests in the greater East Africa Protectorate and further north to the Nile. It was also shaped by divergent interests among settlers. In Chapter Two, Nicholas Makana discusses the impact of the Great Depression on the colonial economy. Falling market prices and increased production costs had weakened the agrarian settler economy. It was against this background that the Colonial Office sought to invigorate African peasant sector in order to insulate the colonial economy and to survive the ravages of the depression. Nonetheless, Martin Shanguhya in Chapter Three; “Land Problems in Kenya: Population explosion and Limits of Agrarian Transformation in Western Kenya, 1920-1950” explains how population growth and demand for land laid the limits to the agrarian transformation of the 1920s through 1940s. Restriction of African populations into reserves and the failure of the colonial state to initiate viable long-term solution to the population dilemma quickly put limits to the commercialization of agriculture. In Chapter Four Timothy Onduru presents the fact that some parts of pre-colonial Kenya were part of the global economy long before colonialism. This is quite informative since many scholars of economic history tend to tie Africa’s economic past to colonialism. Long before colonialism, the Luo of South Nyanza had established trade ties with the Arabs and Swahili. The establishment of colonial offices and infrastructure in the region saw many Africans going out voluntarily on migrant wage labor while many others ventured into commodity production and entrepreneurial activities in order to generate cash to meet colonial demands. In the fifth and final chapter of this section Maurice Amutabi discusses the way colonialism set the pace for the neglect of the Northern Kenya in the post-independence period. Yet Northern Kenya, endowed with untapped land and several major rivers such as Tana, has the potential to feed the entire country and bring a lasting solution to Kenya’s food security problems. Instead subsequent post-independence governments neglected the region’s basic infrastructural needs as well as other social amenities and including health and education. Well, the chapters in this section may seem to be too long and could easily bore the reader; yet without such an exhaustive grasp of issues one cannot quite understand Kenya’s economic experience, both in retrospective and in future terms. Some references in these chapters may appear out-dated in literal terms; yet one cannot overemphasize the importance of such originality of thought.

Women and Development in Kenya

The Chapter by Mary Nyangweso Wangila on women, religion and economic growth is very interesting. It illustrates the place of religion in capitalist development and how this relationship affects women in a male-dominated society such as Kenya’s. She observed rightly that women have been relegated from the mainstream wealth creation a state of affairs that needs reevaluation if the Kenya is to develop economically. In Chapter Seven, Jacinta Ndambuki makes worthy contributions to the discourse of women and development. Of particular interest

are the worthy examination of Akamba women and the dynamics of trade from the pre-colonial past, the effects of colonialism and the present challenges. Using well researched data, the author manages to discuss the importance of women's self-help groups and community-based organizations in the development process. The next chapter by Fabian Kavulani Lukalo-Munoko illustrates how women in rural towns in Kenya play an important role in national economic development. The Gambogi Women Horticultural Traders (GWHT) which is the case under investigation is a critical link between two provinces in Kenya in terms of horticultural supplies. What is outstanding about this chapter is the richness in primary data collected through interviews with women traders. In the last chapter in this part of the book, the author of "Market Women and International Trade in Kenya" Maurice Amutabi interrogates the role of women in commerce, their pivotal contribution in the circulation of goods and services, tastes, fashions, ideas and material practices in Kenya. This chapter summarizes and adds value to the entire section, which is dedicated to the role of women in development in Kenya. The chapter is specifically enriched by a rather exhaustive review of exiting literature on the topic. It is further augmented by case studies of women traders in Nairobi's famous Gikomba and Eastleigh markets. Herein it is revealed that, women traders in Kenya have well established international trade and exchange links which are instrumental in the globalizing world economy.

Resource Availability and Utilization in Post-Independence Kenya

Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o raises the curtain for this part of the book with his extractive state and rentier economy. In this captivating discussion, Nasongo is keen to lay a strong foundation to the arguments by addressing Kenya's colonial and post-independence economic experience. He observes that the colonial economy was basically extractive. But with independence, this extraction changes in shape but not in content; the new post-independence rent-seeking elite perfected this extraction, to the detriment of the economy. The fact that the chapter is quite chronologically up-to-date is quite impressive. The recommendations made on the way forward also make a lot of sense. The chapter by Maurice Amutabi "Water and Development in Kenya: Problems and Potential" is truly timely and informative. At the beginning of the 21st century, the world has come to the realization that water is not an unlimited resource; yet the industrialization process of countries is dependent upon proper access and management of it. The chapter examines water needs and problems in Kenya, before assessing the global context. The case of CARE International in development in Kenya comes in handy in shedding more light on the problem under investigation. From this article, the importance of sustainable water management, which is crucial to Kenya's development in the near and distant future, is underscored. In Chapter Twelve, Peninah Oloo writes on the fishing industry and brings to the fore the fact that Kenya's has a huge potential, which is largely untapped. The information in the chapter offers quite relevant and practical solutions to the food insecurity in the country; in addition to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. She also makes reasonable recommendations on how to mainstream the fishing industry into Kenya's present and future economic development. The joint chapter by Bramwel Mutui and Joshua Kwonyike makes up an interesting post-script to the two preceding chapters by Amutabi and Oloo. It examines yet another vital component of Kenya's agricultural economy- Irrigation. It brings to the spotlight Kenya's food insecurity and poor economic performance, which is hinged upon her overdependence on rain-fed agriculture. The history and management of irrigation schemes in Narok District is discussed. Dating from the 1920s, missionaries in the area established irrigation schemes in Narok. These seemingly

organized ventures ensured steady and sustainable supply of grains and horticultural products. This section of the book is further energized by a chapter that makes a worthy analysis of the political economy of land distribution in Kenya. The chapter by Philip B. Buchere and Fred Jonyo entitled “The Political Economy of Land Clashes in Post-Independence Kenya: The Case of the Ogieks of the Rift Valley Province of Kenya” is a relatively short but punchy account of the nature and dynamics of land politics and the infamous land clashes. They observe that land relations in post independent Kenya pose a serious threat both to human and national security. The Ogiek case clearly puts the issues in perspective. The following chapter, by Maurice Amutabi is a proper elucidation of the state of the livestock sector Kenya. He traces the historical development of the sector and further addresses the problems and challenges that have faced it over the years. Yet the greatest failure in this sector is in the public sector, particularly the parastatal one; which remained in a state of decay and inertia for years. Lack of favorable managerial practices, worsened by politics of patronage and regime survival and sustenance further threw the sector into disarray. The section is closed by a chapter on “The Post Colonial Government and the Political Framing of Drought and Hunger in Kenya” by Eric Otenyo and Esther Mwangi. The chapter takes a critical approach to politics of drought and hunger in Kenya. They trace the history of drought and hunger in Kenya as early as the late 19th century, through to the 20th and the beginning of the 21st. But the inability of subsequent governments to tackle drought and hunger in the country made it a perennial problem. To the authors, proper conceptualization and long-term policy planning is key to the future management of drought and hunger in Kenya. This part of the book may seem too wide and a topic such that on ‘land clashes’ may seem misplaced but in actual fact, these are the intricate ingredients that give a discourse of such magnitude and stature its unity.

Economics, Education, Information Technology and Marketing

This last part of the work is interested in sectors that shape Kenya’s macro-economic performance. These include Economics, Education, Information and Communication Technology and Marketing. Godwin Shiundu in “The Miganda Economy and Men’s Self-Help Groups in Bungoma District, Kenya” attempts to focus on specific facts of the economic history of Bungoma and the way it is influenced by members of specific self-help initiatives. The import of this chapter is to put certain micro-economic issues in perspective and to demonstrate the contributions of the same to macro-economic performance. The chapter by X. N. Iraki blends-in well in the entire section. It addresses Kenya’s informal sector and its metamorphosis over time and space. The author is keen to address the forces that shape the performance of the informal sector in Kenya. An interesting thing about the chapter is the way the author explores the international economic environment and the processes of globalization vis-à-vis micro-economic development in Kenya. The chapter by Jonah Nyaga Kindiki and Ruth Otunga is out to examine a rather obvious sector in development- education. They show how formal education can be used as a versatile tool for economic development. Conversely, left without a proper sense of direction and long sightedness on the part of national leadership, it can lead a country to retardation. One term that caught the reviewer’s eye is that of ‘prismatic society’- a term used to refer to “less than ideal” and one that reiterates the fact that Kenya is undergoing a phase of transformation at this point in history. How this transformation is handled will make or break its development sooner or later. Maurice Nyamanga Amutabi, in chapter twenty tries to grapple with the

challenges faced by the ICT sector in Kenya's development experience. The chapter is a spectacle of ingenuity and academic prowess that interrogates the depth of ICT use and adoption in Kenya. The crux of the discussion is the experience in Kenya's academic fraternity and how it has taken on ITC. To him universities, particularly the public universities need to synchronize and tap on this technology in order to better inform the development process. The last chapter by Eric Otenyo on "The Rise and fall of the Ministry of Supplies and Marketing, 1987-1993" examines the nut and bolts of the supplies and marketing in Kenya's bureaucracy under the former Ministry of Supplies and Marketing. Political interference and poor administrative coordination killed the ministry. Perhaps the author should have made some suggestions on the way forward in order to avoid the chapter being overly descriptive.

Conclusion

Indeed the book is exhaustive. "Studies in the Economic History of Kenya" is a comprehensive work that addresses factors, actors and processes in Kenya's economy and development. Its chapters present a clear, coherent, consistent and cogent flow of ideas. Its content is a worthy account of Kenya's economic problems; a timely appraisal of prevailing conditions and a valid, relevant and reliable prologue to future prospects in Kenya's political economy.

Reviewed by Mumo Nzau
Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA)

