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How to become a Kisii folktale: Generic features of moralizing narratives among the Gusii people of Kenya

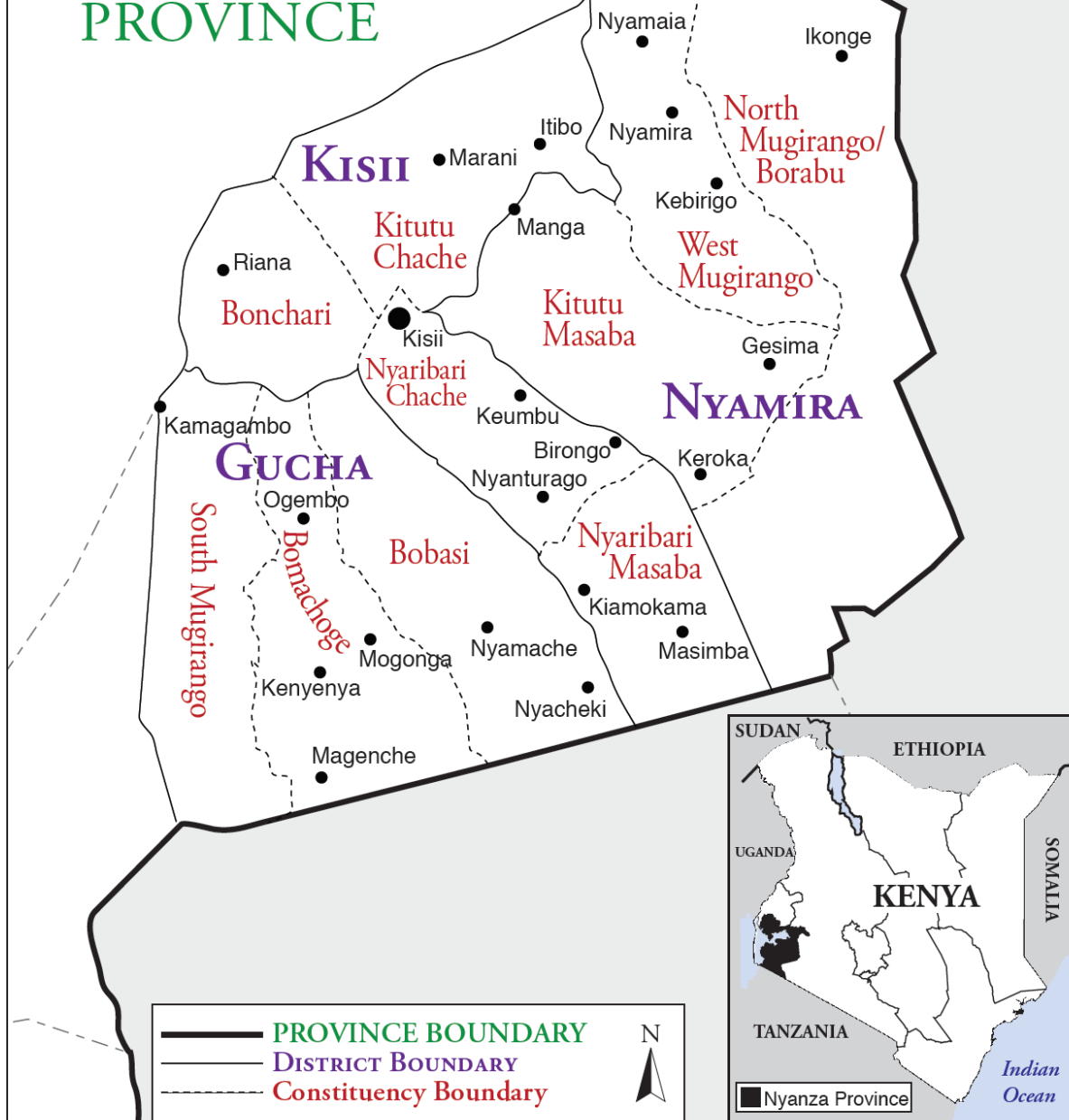
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Districts in Nyanza Province Where Ekegusii Is Spoken

NYANZA PROVINCE



Generic features of Kisii folktales

- Minimizing intertextual gaps
- Constructed as traditional / ancient
- Invoke moralizing characters
- Downplaying the self

Example 1: *Okang'ombe, Ogansona, n'Okanda* (Kennedy Bosire) 

Cow, Flea, & Jigger

mogano ngóóchá índé

karε

karε karε karε

ókang'ombé

no:

ógansoná

n'ókandá

bikagenda óbókɔ

May I, Story, come?

Long ago,

long, long, long ago,

Cow,

and

Flea

and Jigger

set out to their in-laws.

Example 2: *Omoiseke osookerete chiseese* (Helen Makana)



A girl who got married to dogs

mogano ngóóchá índé

mogano ínchúó

ómoiséké

n'áaréngé

ósóokéréte chíséésé

ómoiséké óyo

ékeró asóokérá chíséésé

táatágete ábaíbórí báye
bagenda óróró

May I, Story, come?

Story, come.

A girl

was there

who was married to dogs.

This girl,

when she got married to dogs,

she didn't want her parents to
go there.



Example 3: *Okando n'Okanyang'au* (Helen Makana)

Lion and Hyena

mogano ngóóchá índé

mogano ínychúó

éndo y'áarengé

n'ényang'aaú

éndo éye ígo yáare kógenda

y'áásíméká

chínchúgú

May I, Story, come?

Story, come.

There was a lion
and a hyena.

This lion used to go and plant,
ground nuts.

Example 4: *Abaana batano banyorete chinkenene* (Helen Makana) 

Five girls go picking mulberries

mogano ngóochá inde

mogano ínchúó

ábááná báaréngé bátáno

ábááná ába bátáno

bakagenda gotwá chínkenene

ékeró bááchíá gótwá chínkenene

bagaíká igá ariá áasé chínkenene

bakamányá kónyóórá chínkenene

chiriá échíré chimbese

bagachááká íngóténya báarengε

bagatényá

May I, Story, come?

Story, come.

There were five children.

These five children,
they went to pick mulberries.

When they went to pick
mulberries,

they reached there where the
mulberries were,

they found that the mulberries
were not ripe.

They started fetching firewood.

Minimizing Intertextual Gaps

- length (3-5 minutes)
- opening call-and-response
- exaggerated prosody
- reference to (and reliance on) characters that appear in other stories
- story structure (introduction of characters)
- linguistic features (anthropomorphic prefix)
- songs as plot devices

Constructing Tradition & Authority

- lexical / grammatical means (*karε* 'long ago'; far past tense)
- references to items and customs from historical Gusii society
- avoidance of references to modern items

Invocation of Moralizing Characters

- anthropomorphizing prefix
- characters have a large intertextual reach
- create a set of expectations as to how characters will behave
 - this expectation allows listeners to interpret the character's actions

Downplaying the Role of the Narrator

- personification of the story
 - use of first person when talking about the story
 - vocative form of 'story'
- strict avoidance of first-person statements or metacommentary
- strict avoidance of self-correction (only restarts are used for repairs)
- focus on proper performance (breathing, full repetition of songs, exaggerated prosody)

Conclusion

- Text-as-object: Emphasizes relationship between audience and larger set of cultural norms and traditions
- Strategies for emphasizing text-as-object:
 - minimizing intertextual gaps
 - frame stories in the distant past to imbue them with authority
 - invoke culturally-recognized characters that index certain moral stances
 - engage in a process of self-erasure
- In emphasizing the text as a highly entextualized, reified cultural object, speakers accomplish the more fundamental task of social action.