



Emerging Trends in Oral Traditions (Literature) and Indigenous Languages Research in Kenya

A multi-disciplinary workshop convened by Kipchumba Foundation in collaboration with Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA) [housed at the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi], Wednesday-Saturday 22-25 May 2013 at A.I.C. Guest House-Tot, Elgeyo Marakwet County

Oral traditions and indigenous languages form the basis of Kenyan identities, whether ethnic, political or otherwise. Research in these areas has been unsteady. It started with the accounts of colonial administrators that helped them to define and manage their subjects. In some respects their efforts were complemented by those of colonial era anthropologists. In post-independent Kenya oral traditions and indigenous languages research took more of a structured arrangement under different disciplines and theoretical grounding. There were folkloric/anthropological leanings, literary/oral literature, historical and linguistic approaches. However, collections of oral traditions are mostly through oral literature. They include *Oral Literature of the Maasai* (Kipury), *Oral Literature of the Abaluhya* (Nandwa), *Oral Literature of the Mbeere* (Chesaina), *Oral Literature of the Kalenjin* (Chesaina), *Oral Literature of the Luo* (Miruka), *Oral Literature of the Kikuyu* (Kabira), etc.

That was possible until 1990s before the advent and rampancy of use of computer technology that has brought forth new forms and means of appreciating oral traditions and indigenous languages.

In the 2000s there has been systematic digitalization of oral traditions and corruption/ modification of indigenous languages by addition of new vocabulary or word structures. Such changes in the realization of oral tradition modes and

indigenous language forms have not been tracked adequately. However, efforts as are being made possible by the workshop have been replicated elsewhere. For instance, UNESCO (2002) project in southern Africa has produced a compendium that is an invaluable reference.

In a nutshell, this workshop, through a platform of master's and doctoral students, lecturers, researchers, and oral artists/performers in relevant fields aims at taking stock of studies in oral traditions/ literature and indigenous languages in Kenya, projecting trends and suggesting ways of enhancing such kind of scholarly engagements.

During the workshop, participants participates in a mock fieldwork which not only provided an opportunity for a practical experience in related researches but was also a moment of experiencing the rich cultural landscape of the Marakwet and the Pokot communities.

Themes

The workshop organizers welcomed presentations in the general realm of oral traditions/ literature and indigenous languages in Kenya, especially along the following thematic areas:

- Emergent methods and methodology in oral traditions/ literature and indigenous languages inquiry
- Consent, copyright, and ethics in related researches
- Oral performance, oral testimony, and oral history research
- Cyberspace and technology-mediated oralities
- New genres of oral traditions/ literature
- Inter-relationship of disciplines with respect to oral traditions/ literature and indigenous languages research
- Peace and national dialogue through oral traditions/ literature and indigenous languages