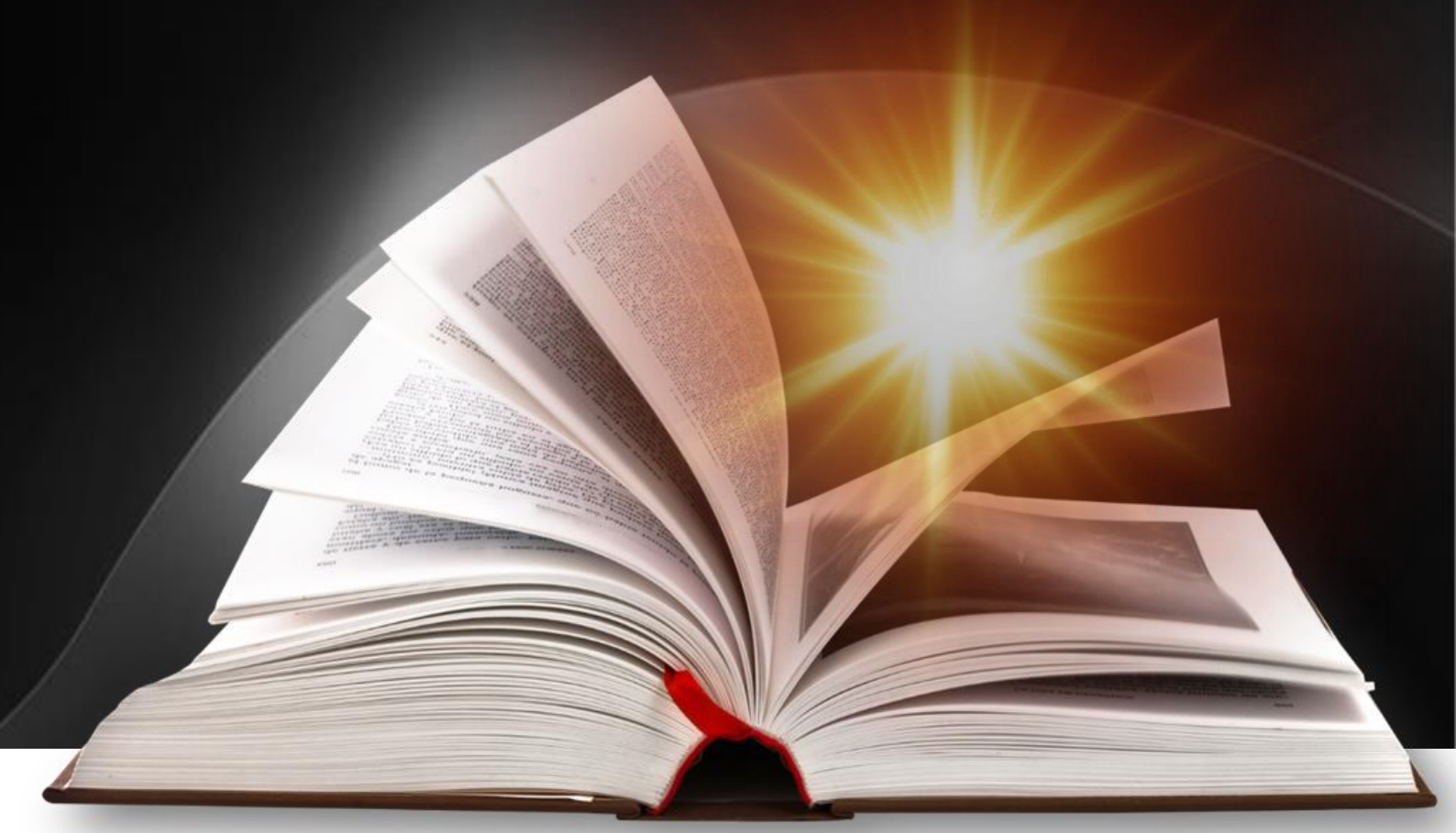
ISSN
: 2790-6248
: 2790-6256

# Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse

- Pan African Youth Journal -



Volume 3, n°3, Sept - Déc 2024

EDITIONS LUMUMBA
Un nouvel élan de l'édition africaine

Association Panafricaine pour l'Encadrement et la Formation de la Jeunesse

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# Male and female leadership: journey as metaphor reading of "Mwindo Epic"

[Leadership masculin et féminin : une Lecture de l'épopée de Mwindo selon la théorie du voyage comme métaphore]

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ISSN
: 2790-6248
: 2790-6256

# Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse

## - Pan African Youth Journal -

**DOI** : https://doi.org/10.58610/RPJ.2790.6248.6256.31

Editions Lumumba I Afriscience I Association Panafricaine pour l'Encadrement et la Formation de la Jeunesse

EDITIONS LUMUMBA
Un nouvel élan de l'édition africaine

**Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse (RPJ)**
ISSN : 2790-6248
e-ISSN : 2790-6256
© Editions Lumumba - APANAEFJ
Bibliothèque Nationale du Congo I Ordonnance loi n° 89-010
du 11 janvier 1989 – Permis d'implantation n° BNC/DPHK/08/2022

Afrindala Group

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# Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse

## — RPJ —

## - Pan African Youth Journal –

Revue scientifique internationale, interdisciplinaire et interactive

Périodicité : avril, août et décembre
Prix du numéro : 45 USD
Abonnement annuel : 100 USD
Version numérique disponible sur : www.afriscience.org

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Imprimé en République Démocratique du Congo

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Site web : www.editionslumumba.com
Siège : 10, avenue de la Moto croisement boulevard M'siri, ville de Lubumbashi, RD Congo

# Editorial

**Chères lectrices, chers lecteurs,**

C'est avec une ferveur renouvelée et un sens aigu de notre responsabilité intellectuelle que nous vous convions à franchir les portes de cet espace unique, dédié à la célébration de l'intelligence et de la créativité africaines dans toute leur splendeur. La **Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse (RPJ)** se positionne ici comme un carrefour où se croisent réflexion académique et innovation pragmatique, dans une quête inlassable de réponses aux défis multiformes de notre époque.

Dans un monde en constante mutation, cette revue se veut une boussole, orientant les esprits curieux vers des territoires inexplorés de la pensée critique. Chaque article, chaque réflexion, chaque témoignage publié dans ces pages transcende les barrières géographiques et culturelles, tissant une toile intellectuelle où l'Afrique dialogue avec le reste du monde. Loin des visions simplistes et uniformisantes, cette revue offre une lecture plurielle et nuancée, où la diversité des perspectives est érigée en moteur de compréhension et de transformation.

Ce numéro particulier s'inscrit dans une dynamique audacieuse : celle de faire rayonner non seulement l'ingéniosité scientifique, mais également la richesse des expériences humaines qui en sont le socle. À travers des contributions d'une rigueur exemplaire, nos auteurs dévoilent des idées qui jaillissent des contextes de résilience et d'espoir, et qui trouvent leur force dans l'intersection de disciplines, de cultures et de visions. Ces pages témoignent d'une Afrique en mouvement, une Afrique créative et porteuse de solutions pour un avenir plus inclusif et durable.

Loin d'être un simple réceptacle de savoirs, cette revue est un espace vivant, animé par une communauté d'auteurs, de chercheurs et de penseurs qui s'engagent à poser des jalons pour le développement scientifique et social. Ensemble, ils bâtissent des ponts entre l'universel et le particulier, entre le local et le global, démontrant que l'innovation africaine est non seulement pertinente, mais essentielle à l'évolution des sociétés contemporaines.

Notre comité éditorial, appuyé par une équipe scientifique d'excellence, veille à garantir une qualité irréprochable à chaque publication. Ce travail collaboratif, empreint de rigueur et d'éthique, reflète notre ambition de faire de la RPJ un vecteur de transformation sociale et une tribune où les voix africaines s'expriment avec force et conviction. Chaque numéro est une invitation à repenser les paradigmes dominants, à déconstruire les stéréotypes, et à envisager de nouvelles façons de concevoir le rôle de l'Afrique dans le monde.

Alors que vous parcourez ces pages, nous espérons que vous serez saisi(e)s par l'ampleur des idées, la profondeur des analyses et la portée des visions qui y sont présentées. Plus qu'une lecture, cette revue est une expérience, une immersion dans un univers où la science et la pensée critique façonnent les contours d'un avenir prometteur.

**Plongez dans cette aventure intellectuelle, où l'Afrique se réinvente et inspire le monde.** Ensemble, poursuivons le rêve d'un continent qui, par sa richesse intellectuelle et sa créativité, se hisse au rang des acteurs incontournables de la réflexion mondiale.

Bonne lecture et bienvenue dans cet univers d'idées, d'innovations et de découvertes !

**L'équipe éditoriale**

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# JEUNESSE & EDUCATAION

Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse
Revue scientifique internationale
ISSN : 2790-6248 I e-ISSN : 2790-6256
Editions Lumumba
Un nouvel élan de l'édition africaine
Email : contact@editionslumumba.com
Afriscience
African Scientific Universe

# Male and female leadership: journey as metaphor reading of "Mwindo Epic"

[Leadership masculin et féminin : une Lecture de l'épopée de Mwindo selon la théorie du voyage comme métaphore]

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## Abstract

'The Mwindo Epic' is a significant source of inspiration in both Congolese and global cultures about leadership, showcasing the dedication of leaders to their communities' well-being over personal gain. Using Daniel P.Kunene's Journey as a metaphor theory, this paper illustrates Mwindo's leadership through three profound travels before achieving peace and harmony among people and their relationship with nature, thanks to his talents, wisdom, and various supporters (both living and inanimate). Above all, his aunt Iyangura plays a crucial role, mentoring him and actively seeking solutions to their community's pressing issues. Such is a true expression of female leadership. This analysis sustains that 'The Mwindo Epic' revises Kunene's original theory, which depicted a hero's journey as a two-part quest of leaving and returning home, by instead revealing a trip divided into three significant journeys toward a common goal. Thus, this timeless narrative serves as a reminder to contemporary Congolese and African leaders in particular that a leader's quest for solutions should prioritize the welfare of his/her community or nation rather than just family interests, as exemplified by Mwindo and Iyangura's leadership.

**Keywords** : Mwindo Epic, harmony, peace, male leadership, female leadership, Nyanga people

## Resumé

'L'épopée de Mwindo' est une source d'inspiration importante dans la culture congolaise et globale à propos du leadership. Elle insinue l'engagement des leaders vis-à-vis du bien-être de leurs communautés que de leurs intérêts personnels. En utilisant la théorie du voyage comme métaphore de Daniel P. Kunene, ce texte illustre le leadership de Mwindo à travers trois profond voyages avant de ramener la paix et l'harmonie entre les peuples et leurs relations d'avec la nature, cela grâce à ses talents, sa sagesse et différents adjuvants (vivants et non vivants). Au-delà de tout, sa tente Iyangura a joué un rôle crucial, celui de le coacher et de s'impliquer activement à ses côtés dans la recherche des solutions aux problèmes cruciaux de leur communauté. C'est là la vraie expression d'un leadership féminin. Cette

analyse soutient que 'L'épopée de Mwindo' revisite la théorie originale de Kunene qui n'envisage qu'un voyage d'aller-retour du héros. Elle révèle au contraire un déplacement entrepris en trois voyages importants pour atteindre le seul but. Ainsi, cette épopée atemporelle sert de rappel aux contemporains congolais et africains en particulier que la recherche des solutions d'un leader devrait prioriser le bien être de sa communauté ou sa nation au lieu des intérêts familiaux seulement, tel qu'illustré par le leadership de Mwindo et Iyngura.

**Mots-clés** : Epopee de Mwindo, l'harmonie, la paix , le leadership masculin, le leadership feminine, Les Banyanga

# 0. Introduction

Since its inception, structuralism has influenced more than one field. Literary criticism has benefitted from it and uses it as a reading tool to access deep, meaningful lines that would, otherwise, stay isolated. Structuralism readily reveals the unity of a text. Its primary task is to seek generally established principles in a work of literature (Rice & Waugh, 1992, p. 23). In these veins, Daniel P. Kunene's literary theory, known as "Journey as a metaphor" helped him to pinpoint structural patterns based on journey motifs most frequent in early (African) oral narratives before joining written ones. The journey motifs consist of "Departure, Foreign Sojourn, Return and consequences of the return" (Kunene, 1985, p.189). These motifs imbue that a hero undertakes a journey from his home to a foreign place for different reasons, essentially when facing violence, injustice, challenges, and death threats. When sufficiently empowered in the world out there, the hero may decide to go back home, face danger and dangerous people, and reestablish order, harmony, and eventually take the leadership of his community for facing existentialist challenges. The hero is presented as a physically and psychologically grown-up character after undergoing multiple impediments both on his ways out from his community and back to his homeland. Heroines facing similar conditions go through the same treatments and reach the same results, for on both their ways they receive the assistance of helpers. However, the assistance depends much on the hero or heroine capacity to go through an easy personality trial[1].

In the present paper, I would like to use Kunene's reading tool for a structuralist analysis of the "Mwindo Epic" of the Nyanga people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to unveil both traditional male and female leadership which had co-existed for years at the service of African communities. While male leadership is stressed through Mwindo, the hero, female leadership is conveyed differently from female characters who appear as either his helpers or opponents. Thus, after a summary of the epic, I will

[1] Daniel P. Kunene is not the only scholar who has developed a structuralist tool for the analysis of literary texts. Joseph Campbell (1949) has developed his tool for the understanding of myths; Claude Bremond ( 1973) has instead developed a tool mostly applied to written narratives. Vladimir Propp (1926) also developed one similar to Kunene's but dealing mainly with Russian folklore...

discuss successively the narrative's journey motives, male and female leaderships before providing a conclusion.

Kunene's structuralist theory would doubtlessly lead to an analysis of "The Mwindo Epic" in a way that facilitates the comprehension of the foremost three journeys that the central character Mwindo undertakes before bringing back harmony to his community. The same structuralist overlook will shed light on the nature within which the Nyanga have lived for centuries while succeeding in the building of a communion that reinforced the foundations of their social and philosophical constructions, the backbone of their society, artistic expressions, various rituals, and different relations with animals, plants, spirits and other natural forces.

Also, the three journeys singled out and taken together can be seen through "a few fundamental assumptions that are shared by almost all varieties of structuralism and to illustrate, or at least suggest, their relevance to literary criticism" (Smithson, 1975, p.145). Kunene should then find a place in long traditions of textual analysis marked with famous names for which "Accordingly, using the theories of Jean Piaget, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michael Lane, and Roland Barthes … defining principles of structuralism… as means of literary criticism" (Smithson, 1975, p. 145). Beyond technical aspects and comparison of structuralist theoreticians, Kunene's "Journey as a Metaphor" is instead expected to offer readers and critics of the "Mwindo Epic" the best understanding of a narrative translated in English but getting deep in the Nyanga cultural traditions. The "Mwindo Epic" offers an opportunity to find out how different oral traditions participate in social life and how the community looks at an oral genre for the foundations of its existence, and the continuation of successful communications with the entire world.

Beforehand, it is can be pointed out that this epic is not only an oral production but a performance that lasts several days. It puts on scenes a performer from the royal court who works with a team involved in drumming, clothing the principal actor, singing, performing different dances and choreographies, and acting as additional characters who take part in the various performances included in the same epic. The public has not only the opportunity to see the same performances through years with slight differences due to seasonal oral productions and the capacity of the main narrator, but it also participates in all performances offering collective conscious memories dug from distant history. Historical and social data have been passing from one generation to another while keeping existing social relations and identities. The public is not passive at all and instead participates in the artistic creativity. It participates as a chorus with responses to songs, praises, incantations, beating hands, rhythmic performed dancing steps leading to shaking the entire body and giving it a dancing language. The Mwindo Epic performance may sometimes go during one week time as the narrative comes with metanarratives and cultural remembrances reinforced throughout years. The entire village gathers under the moonlight for the commemoration of the Nyanga historical growth. They

commemorate its heroes who led to construction of a nation, and the justification of social bonds and identities[1].

## 1. A summary of the "*Mwindo Epic*"

It is the epic of a small man, "Born-Ready-To-Walk-and-Talk." The narrative does not talk of him as a dwarf but instead insists on his capacity to do extraordinary things from the time he is born (and he could already help his mother before his death). He gets at will from his mother's womb and helps her with domestic work she cannot perform as her belly gets bigger day after day. Also, finally, after exceeding the regular pregnancy time in his mother's womb, the little man decides to be born in the way of his own to the amazement and surprise of the middle women. He is born through his mother's thumb and without any assistance.

From this birth, he can face any challenge and operate miracles that will escort him through his entire life. He thus faces his father who had ordered his seven wives not to give birth to a son and shows through his quick and appropriate responses that his father cannot be as strong as the newly born Mwindo filled with ancestral and spiritual forces beyond human consideration. When finally imprisoned in a drum, and drowned in the river, he is still able to move to the surface, sings, alerts everybody from Tobondo, and reveals his father's injustice, and irresponsibility in trying all possible means to kill his unique son. Even though still blocked in the drum, he decides to move to the source of the river and face "Kinkunduri" the Crab and other water creatures, fight them, and then get on his way to his aunt Iyangura down the river forcing aside any kind of resistance, and admiration from all the forces sent to kill him.

Mwindo meets strong resistance as he comes closer and closer to his aunt's place. After his aunt opens the drum and gets him out, he has to face strong violence. Under the recommendation of Mukiti, his aunt's husband and a water monster, a substantial barrier surrounds his aunt's house. Nobody can have access to Iyangura without running through a terrible fighter and bodyguard Kasiyembe. However, the "Little-One-Born-Ready-to-Walk–and-To-Talk" has many different sources of power among which Thunder, and "Katee," the Hedgehog. They offer their support to the small man who finally reaches Iyangura's home, and takes his revenge over Mukiti and his assistants. Iyangura's guards and husband are saved in extremis thanks to her intervention and mercy request addressed Mwindo.

When ready to go back to Tobondo to avenge the humiliation he suffered from Shemwindo, Mwindo goes with his aunt, his uncles, and many other people ready to help him fight the king. Once close to Tubondo, they have an opportunity to see Mwindo operate another miracle. Foodstuffs, cattle,

[1] Daniel Biebuyck recorded in 1969 the most used version which was translated and published. Daniel Biebuyck and Kahombo C. Mateene (Ed. and Tr.). The Mwindo Epic from the Banyanga (Congo Republic). Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969. Professors Daniel P. Biebuyck and Kahombo C. Mateene have collaborated for many years in their studies of the Nyanga and other people living in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo such as the Lega.

and all facilities leave Tobondo and become theirs in the valley as they are waiting for the right strategic time to launch their attack on Tobondo. Unfortunately, his uncles who engage first in the fight are all killed except for only one survivor who comes back to give the information to Mwindo.

Mwindo is therefore forced to go and fight alone. The challenge is crucial even though his uncles had taken care of him, forged his body, and made a metallic armor. The battle is indeed very fierce. With the assistance of Thunder, he has the victory, but Tobondo is full of corpses. However, that is not yet the end as he still needs to run after his father who has found refuge in the underground by passing through a fern plant. In the underground, Mwindo has to face different characters – Moesa, Ntumba, and She-Borongo – all unwilling to let him catch his father. Finally, Mwindo's friends, Kantori and Kahongo inform him of the place where to find Shemwindo. Mwindo runs towards his father and takes by surprise the audience because he welcomes him as his father, and Shemwindo is also very happy to finally meet his son. They go back together, and a big feast is organized to welcome Mwindo.

His aunt calls for a meeting that condemns Shemwindo for expelling and intending to kill Mwindo at his birth. She also decides to divide the kingdom into two so that Mwindo can have his power to govern independently from his father. When they gather to celebrate this event, four Pygmies offer to go for hunting. Unfortunately, a Dragon they fail to kill swallows three of them. The survivor comes back to report the sad event. Mwindo with the help of his Tchonga kills the monster.

When the monster's belly is open, those who were swallowed and more other people come out. When Dragon's eyes are pieced, more than one hundred people come out. The village celebrates and roasts the monster. However when eyes are roasted the smell and smoke reach Dragon's world in the heaven "Mwanya." Mwindo gets very annoyed because he had a pact of friendship and non-aggression with Dragon. From the above in "Mwanya," decision is taken to arrest Mwindo manu military, bring him for punishment to the celestial world for teaching him how he should behave. Stars, Moon and Sun punish Mwindo for killing Dragon and teach him to respect animal world life.

His father Shemwindo, his aunt Iyangura and family who saw Thunder take Mwindo to the sky organized mourning because they could not guess what would happen. After Mwindo has undergone enough suffering, Thunder brings him back. The stay in Thunder's world has changed Mwindo, he is a new man and has new principles for social life, and his government. At the same time, he now gives much respect to animals. People can no longer kill them at will. They need special permissions to put an end to the life of another creature.

This narrative develops in parallel another story, i.e., the story of Iyangura, thus, making use of the literary technique that presents at the same time more than one story within a narrative. Contrary to Mwindo's, her story shows from the very beginning a grown-up Iyangura, a gorgeous woman, the young sister to the king of Tobondo, Shemwindo. There is a gentleman,

Mukiti, thinking about marrying her and who decides to come and ask for her hand. As soon as he arrives, there is a thunder coup that reveals a kind of long-hidden love. They automatically fall in each other's arms in the presence of elders and all present people without any fear of local customs that forbid such conduct.

Their behavior goes against local customs for they are not supposed to meet and kiss in public especially since the gentleman has not yet gone through the marital process obligations. By their action, they give a proof that they love each other, thus placing common customs in the second position. Otherwise, Iyangura goes far than expected, she gets ready to spend the first night with her beloved and puts red powder on her body in order to mean that the couple can freely have intercourse. She can even get pregnant.

Both the above plots are the primary material this article uses. They help demonstrate Nyanga's men strategy to maximize their power over the parochial society, but also to offer a possibility that African women can use in order to determine their particular understanding of feminism and gender formulated from often misinterpreted African customs and their application for a fair society. It is indeed necessary to know men's strategies in order to find out how to change or adapt them to a context that leaves wide-open women's visions. This particular epic if approached from gender perspectives constructs a strategy that will permit a new vision of African feminism and gender.

## 2. The Mwindo Epic" 's structuralist main comprehension lines

Mwindo undertakes different journeys: to Mukiti's village, to Sheburungu through Muisa, and to the Sky. I do not minimize his journey in the forest where he goes for fighting the Dragon. Each of these journeys has its particularities. Before Mwindo undertakes his first journey, the narrator describes the violence that prevails and does not leave him any choice but to run away. Shemwindo, Mwindo's father, attempts his son's life and thus pushes him on the road: "Shemwindo threw the spear into the house six times, and each time it hit nothing but the pole" (p.245)[1]. After the failure of the first death attempt, Shemwindo ordered his counselors to bury Mwindo, and "they carried him gently, as a baby should be handled, and went to bury him" (p. 245). It is under such conditions that Mwindo was forced to disappear from his father's sight. The apparent hatred here above described is a result of a long process within Shemwindo's polygamy. He had ordered his seven wives never to give birth to a male child who could pretend to the throne. Unfortunately, his youngest wife and the most beloved seemed to have disobeyed him.

Consequently, her child, Mwindo, was shamelessly attacked with the clear intention to kill him. Definitely, from the very beginning of the epic

[1] As pointed earlier in the summary, in the epic, Mwindo is just born, but is already able to walk, talk, sing, and avoid death.

(narrative), Mwindo's dangerous life represents two kinds of transgression. First, his father goes against nature in asking his wives never to give birth to a male child. The second kind of transgression seems to come from a child whose life goes against natural and daily expectations. He speaks as soon as he is born, resists against attacks, and fights his enemies (Seydou, 1983, p. 64).

As a matter of fact, despite being a child, Mwindo stands for "a Supernatural Machine" (Konate, 2009, p. 413). It is one of the main characteristics of an epic whose hero is a supernatural being whose actions are far beyond what most people can do, for his simple words produce miracles. Concerning the unusual and unnatural order forcing women to give birth only to male children, Mwindo stands for a special being, for "the hero is an instrument of destiny not only its object but also its subject" (Kunene, 1991, p. 208). Even though he seems to undergo much suffering, injustice, and paternal hatred, Mwindo does not give up or succumb to any violence. He survives any violence and keeps moving ahead. In this vein, Somet (2020) clearly puts forward that Mwindo will not be defeated by any of his opponent, for he knows everyone's name. So, he is not perceived as a « stranger » (p.117)

On the same day his father decides to get him buried, as soon as it is night, within an impressive colorful rainbow, Mwindo "emerged from the grave and sneaked into his mother's house" (p. 246). He was once again victorious, and his father was furious about such an outcome. Also, Shemwindo instructed his counselors to put Mwindo in a freshly made drum and drown him in the deepest part of the river. As Shemwindo does not seem to stop his attacks somewhere until he gets his son's head, Mwindo is not left with many choices if he wishes to survive. That is when he thinks about the only possible alternative for maximum protection: his aunt, Iyangura. He immediately decides to use his extraordinary energies to go down the river and meet Inyangura, her aunt. That departure starting point coincides with A1 step (or Mwindo's first journey) that reveals that there is disharmony in Mwindo's community. There is much violence that targets Mwindo. He cannot stand his father's brutality and has to run away. Sorrowfully, Mwindo reveals the reason and the end purpose of his departure in this song:

> I am saying farewell to Shemwindo!
> I am saying farewell to Shemwindo!
> I shall die, O Bira!
> My little father threw me into the drum!
> I shall die Mwindo!...
> I shall not die, while that little one survives!
> The little one is joining Inyangura,
> The little one is joining Inyangura,
> Inyangura, the sister of Shemwindo. (p. 248)

Through repetition, Mwindo announces his departure and destination. This stage corresponds to the first journey A – B. As a mature traveler, he encounters many hindrances all along his way. However, whoever he meets, he persuades him/her to leave him alone. Despite being naturally powerful,

Mwindo still thinks he needs his aunt's protection and assistance. He urgently wants to meet her (p. 250). Mungai, Ntsuka, Kirunguba, Mushonda fishes, Musoka (Mukiti's sister), Mukiti, Kashiyembe… were among his opponents who try their best to stop him from reaching his aunt. He all defeats them with extraordinary powers. Magic powers help to get victories over his strong enemies. All along his journey, he can also count on the assistance of powerful allies. A few examples illustrate how Mwindo's partners rescue him. Mukei, the Hedgehog, digs a tunnel that permits to bypass Mwindo's enemies. Master Spider constructs bridges for Mwindo… (pp.253-255). However, despite the significant assistance he gets from his allies, Mwindo needs his aunt Inyangura. Also, she is finally the only one who frees him from the drum where he was imprisoned. She welcomes him, gives him his first body care, and offers him shelter and food. When the boy gets stronger and stronger, and when his justified anger against his father stabilizes, his aunt decides to lead him through specific training. It includes different modules related to war strategies, fighting enemies, country management, religious respect and observation of rituals (in harmony with different deities), construction of social networks with neighbors, and management of different resources, initiation to royal leadership, and advice for the continuation of his mission and work with other leaders.

The leadership as mentioned earlier becomes quite significant when the reading reveals Mwindo's level of anger and will to punish his father for the mistreatment and suffering endured, as implicitly noted in these words, "I shall not die, while that little one survives!" These words imply that the hero intends to go back to Tubondo and fight his father. In Daniel P. Kunene's terminology, this first journey to his aunt would be treated as not leading to a permanent exile. In such departure, the "return is strongly suggested as a possible future consequence of the circumstances existing at the conclusion of the story" (Kunene, 1985, p. 192). Through the following paragraph, Kunene develops more the reasons of the hero's departure and both his physical and psychological conditions that he needs to address:

> The protagonist faced with A1 may do one of two things: either he engages in what may be termed internal resistance, that is, fighting the evil from within, or he departs with the purpose of finding the means of resolving the conflict (which we refer to as external mobilization) or going into permanent exile. In either case, the search is conceptualized as moving the character from Point A towards Point B (place of foreign sojourn) (Kunene, 1986, p. 14)

Mwindo goes successfully through different trials that he is exposed to all along his Foreign Sojourn. As most trials and military training take place in Inyangura's dwelling, Kunene's general presentation of the theory would locate there the ending point of the first journey, i.e., B. As soon as Mwindo reaches that location, he tells his aunt his intention to return to Tubondo to fight his father (p. 257). However, Inyangura's dwelling as Mwindo's end of the first journey can also be considered as a turning point that permits self-assessment, and the necessity to get training from Iyangura. The training

may indeed seem strange as male initiation always comes from experienced men well known in the community. However, as pointed out earlier, Mwindo is an exceptional being, a hero whose powers come from various and unexpected sources. His empowerment stands for the "Consequence of the Departure." Running away from his father was running to getting whatever he missed for rightly dealing with his father's injustice and cruelty. Also, once he gets his aunt's assistance, Mwindo strongly expresses his newly acquired power in the following song lines that mark his resolution to take vengeance for the dishonor he underwent:

> I am going with the aunt.
> The little one has slept, all prepared for the journey.
> O my father, the little One set out right after awakening.
> I warn you, we are already underway (p. 257).

The hero reveals his unconsciousness state that characterizes all different scenes he went on all along the scenes he underwent before reaching his aunt. The antithesis expressed through sleeping and awakening (as noted in this first journey) is not meaningless. On the contrary, it altogether confirms Kunene's assumption that "The hero falls into a state of unconsciousness or deep sleep. This may also involve the hero being engulfed or entombed in a hole or a ditch" (Kunene, 1985, p. 192). The same case happens to Mwindo. All along his first journey, he travels confined in a drum before he wakes up. I could even look at the drum as a continuation of a given pregnancy for he needs a wise woman to deliver him, and cuts the ropes that strangely resemble umbilical cords. It is as if he is born with his aunt's assistance. She takes him out of the drum and takes care of him. It is with his freedom from the drum that ends his first journey.

As for the Return and the Consequences of the Return, Mwindo is observed on his way back home. Nevertheless, he is no longer alone. His aunt and her servants, his maternal uncles from Yana village, and many volunteers have decided to escort Mwindo and lead him to the victory. His uncles have properly armed him to face any fighting challenge, and escape from any attack. As magic powers are still a part of his achievements, used to consolidate his empowerment, Mwindo uses them to change the social order. For instance, he decides to deprive Tubondo of all goods and foodstuffs. On his order, Tubondo's goods and foodstuffs leave and move to the place where Mwindo and his followers are waiting for the right moment to launch their attack. From the moment, all goods and foodstuffs are gone, Tubondo is left in a situation that cannot last; it cannot resist a severe attack. Tubondo Community becomes powerless.

To achieve the above, when he reached Tubondo, he took his scepter and called on his friend Nkuba to send lightning to the community and kill people. At the same time, Mwindo ordered the Sky to save anyone killed and made him/her part of Inyagura's fighters. The narrator depicts the scene in these words, "From the Sky where dwells Nkuba, seven lightning flashes came descending on Tubondo…Tubondo turned in the dust, and dust rose up (p. 265). Thus, Tubondo becomes A2 in Kunene's apprehension since Mwindo

reveals himself as a serious traveler who intends "to reorganize the world according to his specification" (Kunene, 1985, p. 191).

The second journey leads Mwindo to Muisa's place. It is worth pointing out that this journey is still within the first one. Its reason should be found in Shemwindo's running away for refuge to Sheburungu via Muisa's dwelling. After waking up all his maternal uncles, Mwindo tells them: "Let's search out Shemwindo where he headed to Muisa's" (p. 266). In the new underground journey to Sheburungu, Mwindo experiences many obstacles. Fortunately, he successfully goes through all comprehensive tests he undertakes. His wisdom, magic, Kahindo, Nkuba, Inyangura and the rope's power in Tubondo, Kahungu, Sheburungu's children…all assist him on his way to get Shemwindo. Once he reaches Sheburungu's location for a new Foreign Sojourn, once again Mwindo goes through different trials before getting face to face with his father. Here is how their meeting goes without any violence contrary to what could be expected: "O my father, are you here?" They profusely embraced each other, abundantly exchanged civilities, behaved as family members who missed each other much and did not have a chance to know each other better. After the peaceful father-son-father talk that, for no discernible reason, omitted everything that had happened, i.e., the horrible experience that Mwindo had gone through, respectfully the son said goodbye to Sheburungu. On his return, he stopped wherever he had fought and taken all challenges he was exposed to prove he was mighty. At the same time, he took the opportunity to express gratitude to the auxiliaries who had facilitated him to go through difficult situations, and survive. Also, he was particularly grateful to Ntumba and Muisa for their presence and assistance when he was desperate, and his enemies seemed incomparably powerful (pp. 276-278).

The above situation depicting Mwindo's meeting with Shemwindo seems unreal and ironic, and contrary to what was known about the boy from his bizarre birth incomparable with any other family history. Also, when he reaches Tubondo, he brings transformations with him, an exemplary leadership respectful of family values, and birthrights to all children, male and female. Mwindo pays respect and honor to his father. With his magic powers, Mwindo wakes up all the dead (each one in his/her former position with all their properties). Thanks to this resurrection operation, Tubondo lives again; his full of vibrant people deal with their daily occupations. They have gone back to their customs with much respect for rituals and the chain of being referring to the creator, ancestors, leaders, elders, initiation companions, juniors, and nature in its diversity.

Shemwindo, who has also been transformed, breaks his previous decision about keeping the throne to himself. He hands over the royal power. His son will reign peacefully for long years at the great satisfaction of his people. He also manages his relations with the spirituality in paying respect to gods and ancestors. Finally, Mwindo has learned how human society cannot be imagined without nature. Apart from respecting human beings' lives, Mwindo understands that nature and all its components including living animals, insects, trees and many other plants, waters, mountains, rocks, winds, stars,

the sun, and the moon, are all parts of their society. They all deserve their spaces to lead their life and cooperation with other world members (pp. 285-289).

Mwindo's third journey departs from Tubondo that was so far in peace. However, when he killed the Dragon, things quickly changed. Logically, Mwindo seems to have done the right thing in killing the Dragon. Mwindo's wrong judgment had brought social disharmony. As pointed out earlier in the documentation of the "Journey as a Metaphor," disharmony necessarily obliges the hero to get into a journey outside of the homeland. This time, Tubondo could be represented as A". By killing the Dragon, Mwindo has somehow broken the social equilibrium even though it had swallowed three pygmies, three hunters from the village. The pigmies were accused of the killing of a pig. The changes he had gone through should have taught Mwindo to behave peacefully and never impose death penalty. According to the transformations he went through and the lessons he had received, Mwindo had to keep in mind that even the Dragon has the right to live.

I denote this stage (A1"). The hero is taken up to Star via Nkuba, Rain, Moon, and Sun in their respective dwellings. Star's dwelling in the Sky can be regarded as the location for "Foreign Sojourn," i.e., (B"). Here is how the narrator describes what happens: "Nkuba said to Mwindo: 'I come to take you, my friend, since you dared to kill Dragon, for Dragon, too was my friend. So you know that you are doing wrong'" (p. 291). This is not like other departures. When he had to engage in journeys in the past, the choice came from him, and he was somehow prepared to facing different challenges. This time, things are different ; it is a forced departure. From Nkuba's statement here above given, it is as Mwindo has shown that the training he had received was not enough or that he has not fully respected it. It is also as if Mwindo has not reached the needed maturity to engage in his functions fully. It is exactly the hero's case that Kunene associates with lack of responsibility due to immaturity or young age as the following lines explain, "Where the protagonist is still too young to understand what is going on, those who are responsible for fleeing with him to a place of safety act on his behalf…" (Kunene, 1985, p.189). This quotation informs the reader that Mwindo is taken so that he may have the opportunity to pursue his training and education. The primary objective of the training was about making of him a good leader.

For lack of conformity to his training and taken lessons, Mwindo is, this time, punished in different ways as he acknowledges: "This time I am in trouble every way" (p. 291). When he reaches B", Mwindo is trained to look at life as a whole, consider both humans and non-humans. Here, he has learned to look differently at life. When he has reached the expected level of training, he receives the last recommendations to put in practice when he goes back home. The narrator documents the scene preceding Mwindo's return and gives more details in the following lines:

> All- Nkuba, Rain, Sun, Star – all those gave Mwindo but one message: 'We have respect for you, just that much. Otherwise, you will vanish right here. You Mwindo you are ordered to go

> back. Never a day should you kill an animal of the forest or of the village or even an insect like a centipede. If one day we learn the news that you begin to kill anything of these forbidden things, then you will die, then your people will never see you again'(p. 292).

Through the above clear instructions given to Mwindo, it is evident that animals, other creatures that fill the world and the symbols of non-humans should not be minimized, abused, or killed. The epic becomes the restoration tool of local traditions and ancestral values that Mwindo and all the population have to keep alive. Such a prescription denotes the harmonious coming together of humans and non-humans that Mwepu (2019) terms as "the celebration of sameness", "the fair-living-together". In the same veins, Kwadwo Osei-Nyame writes in reference to Chinua Achebe: "Discussing the use of African literature as a mode of restoring value within his traditional society, Achebe observes that "any presence [within his culture] which is ignored, denigrated, denied acknowledgment" may become a "focus for anxiety and disruption" (Osei-Nyame, 1999, p. 154). Thus, the epic can be perceived as a social tool put at the center of the community for its permanent education and different considerations regarding social, political cultural relations, constructions, and identities.

Once the training is over, Mwindo is perceived at Star's turning point. He is with Nkuba with whom he returns to Tubondo. Back to Tubondo, his return is celebrated in a big feast that lasts many days and nights. During these days and nights of celebration, Mwindo counts what he saw, heard, and learned in the Sky, but he could not reveal all his training secrets. Mwindo's return to A2" or Tubondo coincides with the end of the long epic that leads to the understanding of the harmony that should prevail in the kingdom. The narrator concludes with words inviting everybody to socialize and work for a peaceful environment where everybody feels home and nature stays at the center of the universe :

> May you grow many foods and many crops,
> May you leave in good houses, may you moreover leave in beautiful village.
> Don't quarrel one another (…)
> Accept the chief, fear him. May he also fear you.
> May you agree with one another, all together, no enmity in the land nor too much hate.
> May you bring forth tall and short children – in so doing you will bring them forth for the chief (p. 294).

Thus, the completion of Mwindo's third journey brings back harmony in the local community, and between the local populations and other creatures found in the world. Because of the harmony managed again, the narrator acknowledges how Mwindo's fame went increasingly all the time.

With the use of Kunene's "Journey as a Metaphor" as the main tool for the comprehension of the "Mwindo Epic," I have been able to subdivide the epic into three important journeys. Each of them was related with a part of the

entire narrative subdivided in logical sequences whose whole succession makes the epic. The sequential presentation facilitated following Mwindo's challenges, personal growth, access to power, and personal leadership. The narrative discloses the ideal king's (leader's) duty to preserve constructive tolerance and "to secure and maintain the prosperity of his people" (Raglan, p.1937, p. 151) in making the right decision and avoiding selfish maneuvers that would be contrary to the noble mission among the Nyanga. Therefore, I can represent Mwindo's three different journeys, within a single journey toward Tobondo's permanent harmony, in the following chart:

**First journey**

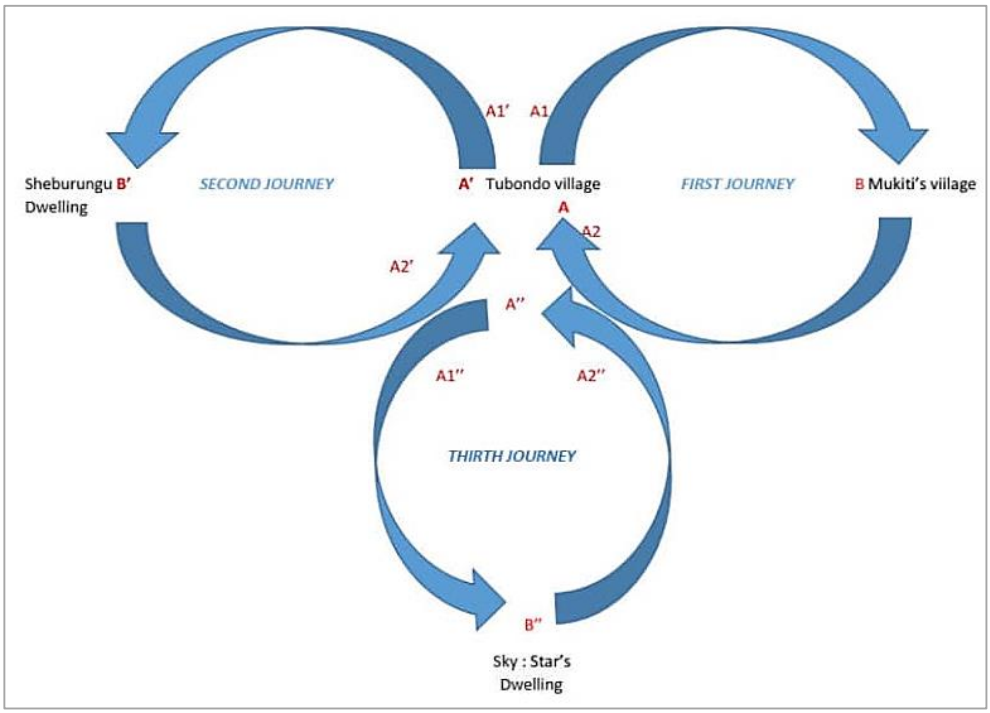
**A**= **A1** and A2, and **B** (**A**: Tobondo village; **A1**: Mwindo departure due to his attempts to be killed; **B**: Mukiti's village, and **A2**: Mwindo's arrival in Tubondo with Inyangura).

**Second Journey**

**A'**= **A1'**and **A2'**, and **B'** (**A'**: Tubondo village; **A1'**: Mwindo's departure due to Shemwindo's fly; **B'**: Sheburungu's dwelling, and **A2'**: Mwindo's arrival in Tubondo with Shemwindo and his enthronement).

**Third journey**

**A''** = **A1''**and **A2''**, and B" (**A''**: Tubondo village during Mwindo reign; **A1''**: The Dragon's death after killing Pygmies; **B''**: Star's dwelling in the Sky, and **A2''**: Mwindo's arrival in Tubondo with Nkuba that leads to permanent harmony)




The journey motifs as perceived in "The Mwindo Epic" do not precisely match Kunene's journey as a metaphor structuralist pattern. It is instead a reading tool that has permitted the distinction of successive sequences that build up

the epic, and the three main journeys. Thanks to Kunene's reading tool, Mwindo can be followed all along different activities that have led him to become an excellent leader. The same journeys have disclosed how the Nyanga's cultural life, selected evening entertainments, and religion work together for the construction of their society and identities (Geertz, 1966, 1977).

The reading has reached a level that permits to understand that the Nyanga epic is not only performed for pleasure all along many nights. The epic is a cultural resource that gives the reader an opportunity to get in Nyanga's customs and traditions. That would mean that the epic is the primary curriculum used to make sure the Nyanga preserve their traditions. Apart from the royal leadership whose best characteristics have been documented in the above paragraphs, we could now raise questions regarding men and women's leadership. That would thus concur with Deme's understanding of epics in these words: "Epics generally serve as living testimonies and references of acceptance by a given group of past traditional practices, and the performance is intended to transmit and reinforce such ideologies" (Konate, 2009, p.404).

## 3. Male and female Leaderships in Tobondo Village: A social construct for today's society

Potocco (2009, p. 2) highlights the fact that the elusive relation between literature and its social position is reflected through the imaginary presentation that the narrative shares with the readers. Through its imaginary presentation, the narrative shares with the reader the ideology going on inherited from a distant past or documented from modernity and its impositions. Also, the reading of the Mwindo Epic portrays men and women within their society where they fill different social functions, quite often under the strong leadership of men. Women's participation is often kept silent despite its significant contributions. In many cases, like in the case of Shemwindo's wives, women are perceived under the full authority of men who decide. Sometimes, male decisions could be considered immoral or even amoral. That is the case of a decision that asks women only to give birth to male children. It is a field where women cannot control, and refusing male children cannot be imagined as such.

The Mwindo Epic opens on a strange situation as Shemwindo gives an abnormal order to his seven spouses. He orders them not to give birth to a male child when they get pregnant. From the seven wives, his preferred one stays pregnant far behind any normal duration. She becomes a source of hilarity and mockery for everybody, thus somehow changing her status of a preferred woman to a risible one. When she finally gives birth in the conditions here above described, the child is a boy, and the once preferred woman cannot avoid Shemwindo's anger openly expressed through several attempts to kill the precociously mature boy fortunately that many hidden forces help. Somet (2020), who compared two epics (Mwindo Epic and Setne Khaemwaset and the wonders of his son Siousir) from an Egyptologist perspective, states that already at birth , Mwindo "… was already endowed

with exceptional powers that enabled him to challenge the laws of nature…" (p.109).

This first point clearly shows that everything coming from Nyanga men – let us say from men in general – may not necessarily be a great thought, responding to natural needs, and showing respect for women's social status. Indeed, asking his wives to decide on children's sex is not normal at all. The example is undoubted to be replaced in the context of an epic but still offers a metaphorical opportunity to see how silly can some parochial obligations be. It is such a situation that shows how some men intends to put women in uncomfortable situations and make them responsible for things that are beyond their control. Men would use their absolute authority to force nature and people to stick to their visions and positions without necessarily taking into account social implications.

To reinforce the nature of male decisions, Tobondo men are organized in a large hierarchy that includes different advisers, all men, at the service of the king. In this precise case, the advisers fail to guide Shemwindo in the right way. They let him take one of the worst decisions aiming at killing his son. The same kind of hierarchy is also observable in other kingdoms that Moesa, Ntumba, and She-Borongo lead. Everywhere men are social decision-makers, and social leaders, and organize many things in their way and interests.

Men are also responsible for most rituals; they are shown taking decisions on Iyangura's wedding process and getting the bride price from Mukiti. Late in the narrative, Shemwindo gives Mwindo a spiritual woman supposed to be in the king's bed on the enthronement day, and she is left to go by herself in the village. There, she gets another man curiously from the same family as the king, and with whom she can get children. This image clearly shows how women can be passed around, and how their primary role is turning around childbirth. In other places, men are shown hunting and bringing food to their household. They also have taken the bread provider image, as life providers, everybody should follow and obey.

The female images here above described regarding men's capacity to use women and silence their rights have gone for ages in many societies around the world. Men's socio-political roles have been reinforced all along history especially all along the colonial era often fortifying male orientated local traditions, and works. Since the colonial times, the church and religion, for instance, have been present all over Sub-Saharan Africa in general and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in particular. The Roman Catholic mission was already in Africa in the late fifteenth century (Kaputu, 2005, pp. 77-78). More than four hundred Portuguese missionaries (including Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans, Carmelites, and Capuchins) accompanied the European conquest of Sub-Saharan Africa.

The social promotion of women was not considered a priority at all; the missions presumed male superiority. In the late nineteenth century, there was a proliferation of Catholic missionary activities, including a dramatic increase from 1865 to 1880. Many missions were officially charged with helping strengthen the new colonial powers, in part through programs of

"education" aimed at replacing traditional worship. The economic system, which had survived for centuries in Africa, was brought to an end, to the benefit of the colonizers. The indigenous population was used as a workforce in a system which threatened their community survival, but which curiously empowered men, thus reinforcing their previous status of breadwinners and ritual organizers. Traditional religious sentiments were attacked and silenced, but only to offer new ones promoting men.

Without any pretention to elaborate the comparison between Mwindo to Shemwindo's leadership, it is logical to assert that Shemwindo's dictatorship, tyranny, hatred, revenge, family sequestration and throne confiscation are expressions of the lack of a clear vision and objectives for his own family and society; that is why, they have led to self-destruction and community's fall. Whereas Mwindow's sense of justice, forgiveness, equity, respect of social and naturel norms, services to others, open-mindedness, inclusiveness, restoration, etc. enlighten his clear vision of the society he wants to build together with his people, a society that respect both men, women, young and old, including other natural beings.

Despite the confirmed dominant male power, what the Mwindo Epic offers all the same is an opportunity to look at Nyanga's women through the character of Iyangura, Kahendo and up to a given level Shemwindo's seven wives. For instance, all along the epic, Iyangura does play the first role, but she is the one with whom the narrative could not be and could lead Mwindo to exceptional leadership. Her personality pushes the reader to question how gender perspectives work in a place where men seem to have all powers. Wherever sojourn Mwindo undertakes, he is seen being trained as a sign of empowerment, and at return home, he empowers others. That is the role of a true leader not only to set vision, determine objectives to reach and shape strategies, but also to motivate others to embrace his/ her vision and empower them to get there. Both Mwindo and Inyangura reflect fundamental traits of a successful leadership as prescribed by Cora, Isak, Avery, Olanite and Barnty (2024).

It is visible that Iyangura takes initiatives, and does not care much about local customs that engulf her development either in Tubondo or in Mukiti's villages. It is seen when her family, men, and women escort her to her new place after Mukiti has brought the entire bride price, she is transported according to customs. Iyangura manages her life in her own style different from her home and Mukiti's traditions, and still finds an opportunity to feed her husband and show her love. When Mwindo reaches his aunt's place, Mukiti has passed an interdiction for nobody to come closer to Iyangura. However, warned that there is a strange phenomenon, somebody speaking from a drum and calling her name, Iyangura goes and frees Mwindo. She opens the drums with a knife. Later on, she also decides that Mwindo cannot kill Mukiti, Kasiyembe or other people. She asks courageously Mwindo to resuscitate them. Finally, Mwindo leaves Mukiti's house and she escorts him everywhere reminding him of his responsibility. She mainly reminds him again and again that he cannot reign over a country without any people if all are killed. She has a vision of the community's management. She knows

different responsibilities of a leaders, and she tries by her own to transmit these to the young Mwindo and her surroundings. She is an empowered and empowering woman who takes care of the community's welfare. All these aspects among others are true expressions of a strong and visionary female leadership.

Later on, Iyangura condemns Shemwindo for his violence and attempts to get rid of his son. She presides over the meeting that divides the country and makes sure that father and son live in peace as two neighboring kings sharing the same ancestral values that put men and women, living and dead creatures at the center of their world visions, philosophy, religion, cultural and artistic creativities. When everything is clean and acceptable, when both new kingdoms are in peace, Iyangura leaves Tubondo and goes back to her kingdom where Mukiti has been peacefully waiting for her. Iyangura's freedom, responsibility, and understanding even though somehow limited are also reflected in Moesa's daughter, Kahendo. She is also able to address Mwindo and remind him that he cannot leave Moesa dead. Besides, she decides without anybody's influence to reveal her father's dangerous secrets because she does not accept his purposeful use of tricky language full of traps in order to kill Mwindo. Even though Iyangura leaves for her kingdom, her influence seems to remain the pillar around which Tubondo's governance is built.

Fretz (1987) research results in another part of the Democratic Republic of Congo has gone through similar situations in the lands that the Chokwe inhabit in Zambia, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Women do not get into a competition with men. They do not stand up for facing men, challenging them, and force them to pay attention to female contributions in their society. They keep silent but act and silently impose their social perceptions that give another leadership vision. Iyangura, even though she is a princess, she does not have a power that forces obedience and respect from everybody. She is, first of all, a woman whose life is instead perceived first through her capacity as a married woman, responsible for her household. However, at the same time she serves her household, she is the one who can offer Mwindo the most important pieces of advice and training for becoming a good leader. The same roles that Iyangura plays in the narrative are also perceptible in many Congolese ethnic groups. For instance according to oral tradition, in Bazela[1] traditions, there were female categories, such as "Bimbela", "Ba Na Nfumu", The first were old/adult women trainers during Kisungu initiation who handled successfully numerous pieces of training related to different aspects of live that young becoming women ought to cope with for stable and prosperous society. Thanks to their pieces of training, strong and stable families were made, as sources of stable societies. The second were either kings or chiefs' wives or their old or young sisters who deserved the power and respect of everyone, including the king himself. They were either first or better the last advisers that the king had

[1] One native Bantu ethnic group of Haut-Katanga Province who settle for centuries in Dizela land in Kyona-Ngoy and Kyona-Nzini sectors, respectively in Mitwaba and Pweto territories.

to consult before taking a sound decision. They were even the keepers of the throne secrets; that is way, they were even called "Ba Namanga".

Women play an essential role in their society. They are the guardians of their traditions. All along the Mwindo Epic, Iyangura leading the fighting males to understand what their ancestors expect from them. Above all, she pushes both men to see that leaders are public servants. That is why they should first of all accept that the leaders are not eternal.

On the contrary, they must make sure that new generations can continue the work they have started. By asking Mwindo to bring back to life the dead people, Iyangura gives a same about power. It is not about power for power's sake, but rather for serving people, and pleasing ancestors and gods.

Iyangura does two more things. It is life right, she insists on the necessity to respect life. Human beings may be good or bad; the leaders do not have the right to kill or punish with death those who would misbehave. Life is to be respected, and the leaders should give good examples. The second thing she underlines is about the way leaders should live. They cannot manage their village and people as if they cannot be controlled. Moral values and the perception of ancestors and gods should lead them to be aware of the fact that their actions are followed. Even if their people cannot react directly, it is essential they keep in mind that whatever wrong they do to their people will be punished. Through the image of Iyangura, it can be assumed that even though they are not very much visible on the front of their daily social life, Nyanga women are significant and build up the backbone of their society. And Inyangura's action and attitude toward leadership reflects what OK and Eniola (2024) denote as a balanced leadership which takes into account both male and female perspectives. And it is such a leadership on which today and future generations need to rely.

# 4. Conclusion

"The Mwindo Epic" reflects the original myth or ritual patterns in Raglan's understanding. It insinuates the leaders' permanent quest for lasting solutions for their people and the survival of their community. The harmony that reigns in Tubondo village is the results of the sacrifices and the choices that successive leaders have had to take throughout many years. Both male and female leaderships have been discussed respectively through Mwindo and Shemwindo, and Iyangura and Kahendo. They played significant roles in the reconstruction of their communities.

Tubondo's society can be perceived through different perspectives, but the most significant we have found came from the use of Kunene's reading tool: journey as a metaphor.

Kunene's tool offers a possibility that can be used for the comprehension of oral narratives. As a reading tool, it does not have to be reproduced precisely in the same worlds. It instead gives the prominent orientations to follow the understanding of the main contents of oral narratives. Also, Mwindo Epic narrative structure does not entirely match Kunene's simple journey as a structural metaphor pattern. On the contrary, it generates intertwined

journeys with single journey producing others. However, the extension of Kunene's theory to African oral narratives illustrates and justifies the dynamism of structuralism. It is indeed a technique that underlines the importance of sequences whose totality builds up the narrative and the entire story shared with the public.

The use of Kunene's theory "the Journey as Metaphor" has allowed the achievement of significant objectives. First of all, it was possible to subdivide the narrative into three important journeys that reflect the hero's central questions and personal growth. Secondly, journeys have clearly shown that they are not only about moving from one place to another but that they reflect the physical and psychological growth of the hero's personality. Leaders are exposed to different situations that force them to look differently at their life and at their responsibilities towards human communities. Thirdly, the same journeys have demonstrated how the Nyanga community does not only include living humans but also deities and nature. Nyanga's gods play different roles and are expected to contribute in different ways to the wellbeing of human community. They are perceived in relations that define social life and the construction of social communities. Nature is also a part of the human community and has to be treated fairly. It includes spirits, evil and good, but it also includes forests with living trees, mountains, and water streams. The epic shows that nature is also to be given respect, love and gratitude, for humans and non-humans are but one.

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Tél. : 00243 90 433 70 19
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www.editionslumumba.com

Imprimé en République démocratique du Congo

©Edition Lumumba, décembre 2024

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Revue scientifique internationale, interdisciplinaire et interactive

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