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# Understanding and Improving Outcomes for Students in an Underserved Secondary School in Kenya: A School-Community-University Partnership

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## Abstract

Although universities are positioned to lead change, specifically by improving educational systems, there is no evidence of universities in Kenya engaging with schools. Concurrently, the quality of education in Kenya is declining. This article explores the problem of disparities, poor educational outcomes, and ways to improve education at an underserved secondary school over the course of a three-year participatory action research project. Qualitative design was used to gather data through interviews, focus group discussions, and document analyses. Data were analyzed utilizing constant comparison technique and ecological and sociocultural theories. Emerging themes included: disparities and poor academic outcomes; focus on external rather than internal locus of control; absolute power and authority; isolation that is breaking systems and institutional thinking; and partnership infused new knowledge for improvement.

*Keywords*: partnerships, secondary schools, ecological and sociocultural theories

## INTRODUCTION

School improvement has been conceptualized as a process that involves creating a vision, using school data to plan strategies that align with the vision, and acting on the strategies (Bryk et al., 2010). This article documents the outcomes of a three-year holistic participatory action research (PAR) project that explored the problem of disparities and poor educational outcomes in a Kenyan secondary school. A holistic approach views the system as networks of interactions that influence each other in a complex way (Shaked & Schechter, 2018). A school-community-university partnership (SCUP) was created to undertake the study. According McLaughlin et al. (2017), partnerships have been used to tackle vexing issues in education. Specifically, "highly structured, intentionally formed collaborations among education professionals, researchers, and designers" have been used to address high leverage practical problems (Russell et al., 2017, p.1). They have advanced processes of systematic learning, accumulation of new knowledge, and dissemination. The diverse composition of partnerships instigates understanding of complex problems from multiple perspectives, while harnessing local collective intelligence for contextual learning and improvement. Russell et al. (2017) argue that while educational reforms anywhere are slow to respond to change forces, innovations have produced minimal improvements because of non-systematic practices dominated by management. In contrast, partnerships that comprise supportive communities of multiple institutions and people with varying knowledge, talents, skills are more able to simultaneously identify problems and interventions (McLaughlin et al., 2017). Not without challenges, McLaughlin et al. (2017) found that despite their appeal, "the challenges of creating and sustaining collaborative, productive school-university partnerships are formidable" (p. 90). In this research, a partnership was set up in an underserved Kenyan secondary school for the purpose

of facilitating self-study and proposing context-specific solutions.

Self-study was intended to uncover school contextual factors contributing to disparities and poor academic outcomes in the national examination, Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), and to generate contextualized approaches for improvement. The KCSE exam is a high stakes summative evaluation of students' academic performance at the end of four years of secondary education. The KCSE outcomes have far reaching implications for students, their families, communities, and the nation. When schools fail, communities fail. Since 2016, half of secondary school students taking the KCSE scored grades of D and below, limiting their opportunities to access professional career programs or jobs (Wanzala, 2018). In 2016 and 2017, 295,463 of 571,161 students and 350,467 of 610,359 respectively, scored the grades of D and below. Besides limiting opportunities, such outcomes violate the rights of citizenship, which begin with ensuring equitable access to quality educational outcomes (Freire, 2002).

Despite heavy investment in education (10% of GDP and 20% share of total government expenditure) and poor outcomes (Republic of Kenya, 2019), governmental reforms in education have continued to focus on re-structuring, teacher salaries, free education, and school governance (Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR), 2008). Absent from reforms are progressive pedagogies, a focus on student's rights, professional development for teachers, and support for the democratic leadership that would likely improve outcomes (IPAR, 2008; Lawrence & Orodho, 2014), hence the need to investigate these areas.

**Related literature**

In Kenya, interactions among government policies, social factors, and school factors have produced a system of education that is characterized by disparities in resources and educational outcomes (Onsomu et al., 2005). Students attending national schools qualify for higher education at rates of 90–100%, while those attending sub-county schools qualify at 0–11% (Glennerster et al., 2011). In a tiered structure of national, county and sub-county secondary schools, national schools are at the top, well-funded, fully staffed, and admit the highest performing students from primary schools. Between 2016 and 2017, most of the 50% of students scoring grades D and below were girls, students from poverty, and/or those attending poorly resourced sub-county public schools (Wanzala, 2017, 2018). Despite these findings, academic outcomes are rarely challenged and/or investigated for purposes of fairness in resource allocation and improvement. Government responses have excluded research and "infrastructure focusing explicitly on improving teaching and learning … and strengthening the institutional arrangements in which educators and students carry out their work" (Bryk, 2015, p. 467). Kenya government-initiated school reforms are typically modest and vary greatly in their impact. For example, while free education had positive impacts on student achievement in regions with established schools, it was detrimental in regions with few schools because of overcrowding and lack of resources (Sawamura & Sifuna, 2008; Sifuna, 2005, 2007). Limited efforts have been applied to understand how schools work, why schools do not produce desired academic results, and how to improve educational outcomes. This is reminiscent of claims that government efforts tend to move rapidly with little knowledge of their effects or piloting to understand the effects of reforms (Bryk, 2015). To diversify knowledge input, research suggests that partnerships that engage communities in identifying systemic problems of practice and solutions over a sustained period are more likely to improve the school outcomes (McLaughlin et al., 2017).

**Theoretical framework**

Educational outcomes depend on interactions among overlapping systems in and outside of school (Luter & Kronick, 2017). This assumption is consistent with ecological and sociocultural theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Rogoff, 2003; Spencer, 2006). The ecological approach proposes that student and school outcomes depend on multiple layers of context, including the individual, family, school, community, and society at large. Sociocultural theory argues that cultural artifacts, local practices, and activities in which individuals participate (Lantolf et al., 2015) mediate human functioning. While ecological theory provides context, sociocultural theory provides medium for interactions. Sociocultural interactions mediate contextual circumstances. Thus, the nexus between ecological and sociocultural explains the whole. For example, negative sociocultural experiences have been found to "account for deviant behaviors that result when individuals cannot develop interpersonal relationships" (Barnard, 2006, p. 70) in their ecological environment. In this context, such individuals are likely to experience low self-esteem and/or lack social interest that in turn, impact performance. Thus, together, these theories suggest that "context offers affordances and constraints for particular kinds of development" or outcomes (Nasir et al., 2011, p. 1759). What is perceived as an individual mind is, in reality, a web of exchanges and transformations within a context (Frielick, 2004). The "dialogical processes of language and communication between teachers, students and the subject within the nested contexts can be seen as the pathways in which the process of information exchange and transformation occurs" (Frielick, 2004, p. 330). In this case, not only are "children's developmental patterns influenced by interactions …, [but] children can also actively shape the environment" (Luter & Kronick, 2017, p. 120).

Ecological and sociocultural theories postulate that school context and interaction have influence on the quality of academic, psychological, and social outcomes. Lawrence and Orotho (2014) found that poor performance in Kenyan schools was explained by examining the school context, especially those with "inadequate human and physical resources, with most district schools lacking the critical human and instructional resources" (p. 69). Not considered in this research and others (IPAR, 2008) are the intensities of impact created by the intersections of systems, specifically when there are financial, social, knowledge, or leadership deficits in the systems. In other words, optimum performance among students and schools require adequacy and interdependent functionality of the interlocking systems. It is within this context that a partnership and participatory action research was used (a) to identify factors leading to disparities and poor student and school outcomes, and (b) for possible solutions.

**METHODS**

Over three years, a school-community-university partnership (SCUP) was formed at a secondary school in Kenya. Participatory action research (PAR) was utilized to implement the research study project. PAR was preferred for its collaborative "strategy in which research and action are closely linked" (Whyte, 1991, p. 8). Through the partnership, PAR engaged members of the school community from all ranks in research design, data gathering, and data analysis. According to Call-Cummings and Martinez (2017), PAR produces authentic knowledge in an inclusive way and has the "potential to empower those involved in it" (p. 564). Creswell (2012) found collaboration to be critical in collecting, analyzing data, and enhancing accuracy. The SCUP team used a qualitative approach to collect data. The 5Whys questioning technique (Serrat, 2009) enabled respondents to think beyond the obvious, especially in relation to issues they had become accustomed to and normalized. The repeated questioning in the 5Whys provided the opportunity for systematic

questioning and thinking or responding to the same question in-depth. As participants' answers revealed more of their in-depth knowledge and concerns about the topics that arose, the inquiry led them to dig deeper into causes and contributing factors (Hibino et al., 2018).

Qualitative data were gathered through observations, focus group discussions, and interviews with students, teachers, school administrators, and members of the school community. Eighteen teachers, 30 students, 10 staff members, 2 administrators, 4 members of Board of Governors (BoG), 3 parents, and 2 government officials provided that data. Of eight focus group discussions, five involved students (two with each gender, one with both male and female students), two involved teachers, and one with staff. Each focus group had a minimum of six and maximum of eight participants. Three interviews were conducted with the school principal, one with the school matron (in charge of the boarding section), two with senior teachers, and one with the chair of BoG. Focus group discussions and interviews lasted between two and three hours and focused on: 1) the day-to-day operations at the school; 2) factors influencing school, class, and individual student outcomes; and 3) how the school could reach the desired goals or vision.

Documentary materials from the school and government offices were analyzed. They included school records, minutes from meetings, photographs, memos, contracts, and reports from government officials. Qualitative data were analyzed utilizing a constant comparison technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process allowed for iterative development of codes by comparing new data to existing data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007) and theories. In addition, deductive (based on theoretical frameworks) and inductive reasoning (allowing for new themes to emerge) were utilized (Creswell, 2012).

**The school-community-university partnership**

The PAR started with formation of the partnership (SCUP) that involved faculty and researchers from a Kenyan University, faculty and researchers from a North American University, and Khalston Secondary School (KSS), a pseudonym. The SCUP included an experienced researcher and professor, two teachers, two students, a member of the Parent Teachers Association (PTA), a school representative, a County Department of Education (for advisory) representative, a community representative, and a graduate research assistant (Doctoral student and educator). The group selected one of the teachers as the team leader. For one month, researchers reviewed relevant literature that confirmed: significant disparities in school inputs and outcomes among Kenyan secondary schools; poor performance in underserved schools; limited interventions at school and governmental levels; the lack of human resource and effective school management; and the detrimental impact of poverty (IPAR, 2008; Lawrence & Orodho, 2014; Ministry of State for Planning, 2012; Onsomu et al., 2005; Republic of Kenya, 2005; Wasonga, 2013;). Based on Bryk's (2015) suggestion, the team developed a community that shared their innermost concerns and goals: common theoretical and structural understandings of the project; a guide for partnership; processes and norms governing interactions among individuals in the partnership, including roles and responsibilities; evidentiary standards for warranting claims (data); and technical resources and communication mechanisms necessary to accelerate wide learning networks. The teachers agreed to not share the information generated in the project against students involved in the SCUP. The SCUP team organized a 2-hour meeting twice a week for three weeks to explain the expectations, duties, responsibilities, and ethos for the project.

The SCUP worked with KSS for three years continuously, studying the school context, inputs, processes, and outcomes (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). This focused on the

multilayered complex factors that affect students' interpersonal and institutional connections (Nasir et al., 2011), developing tools for data collection and collecting data that informed identification of issues and possible solution approaches (Langley et al., 2009; Lewis 2015). The three-year period provided time to understand the school's context, develop working relationships, build trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and initiate ideas for improvement.

**Study context: Khalston secondary school**

Pseudonyms were used to hide the identities of the school and respondents. Khalston Secondary School (KSS), a sub-county school, provided a relatively open and conducive environment for the purposes of this PAR project. At the time of study, the school had a population of 570 students (220 females and 350 males), 32 teachers and 20 staff members. Members of the SCUP visited the school on five occasions as a group over a period of two years. The graduate research assistant and the main researcher from a North American university spent one day (on different days) every week for a total of twelve weeks over two years to observe the day-to-day operations of the school, including class observations, faculty meetings, condition of facilities, and co-curricular activities. Researchers engaged with teachers, students, staff, and visitors including parents, vendors, and other members of administration consistently. On invitation, SCUP members attended three Friday morning school assemblies to share information about the project.

KSS is a co-ed school that had been in operation for over 25 years at the time of this study. The school was founded by a priest in the 1990s to serve children in this remote, sparsely populated area in western Kenya. Most parents could not send their sons and daughters to same sex boarding secondary schools that are the norm. Most of the children born in this area did not attend secondary school, and as Mr. Mzalendo (a pseudonym), the current principal, noted, they were "simply wasted." However, KSS did not become the magical place the community expected. Performance in the summative national examinations was dismal (averaging 2–3.5 out of possible 12 points), with girls scoring in the bottom half (averaging 1–1.5 points). The community proposed turning the day school into a boarding facility, at least for the examination of the senior class. Discussions around the issue at the time indicated that the long periods of time and energy spent walking to and from school, and the poor conditions in many homes prevented learners from devoting time to school tasks, especially for girls who spent inordinate amounts of time on home chores (e.g., cleaning, cooking, or caring for younger siblings). The major challenge was funding to build boarding facilities. The Kenyan Government's policy requires that parents cover the cost of school buildings while the Government provides teachers (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

At the time of this study, there was a modern dormitory for girls, which was built to accommodate up to 60 students and without indoor plumbing. However, there were over 100 girls sleeping on three decker beds and bathing outside in the open air. The boys' modern dormitory was under construction. There were three dilapidated dormitories built of bricks and rusted corrugated iron sheets. The dormitories were overcrowded with relatively small windows, most of which had broken glass. Outhouses (toilets) were in extreme state of disrepair, posing both health and physical risks to the students. Like the girls, boys bathed outside. The school had a borehole with a water pump, not big enough to pump water to the dormitories, kitchen, or the teachers' houses. Without access to a proper dining facility, students picked up food from the kitchen and took what they could find available to their classrooms, dormitories or ate under a tree shade. The principal's office and teachers' lounge were housed in a small, old and rugged building that was too tiny to accommodate them. Mostly, the teachers sat outside on verandas to grade papers.

Classrooms were overcrowded to the extent that a quarter of the students from each class, specifically in compulsory lessons like languages and math, listened to the teacher through the classroom windows. For example, classrooms that were built for about 40 students, had 65. The only laboratory for the whole school was modern and fairly well-equipped. The greatest asset for this school was their teachers. Although the teacher-to-student ratio was 1 to 60, relatively speaking, they had a large number of qualified dedicated teachers. In terms of housing, teachers lived in substandard homes made from old rusted corrugated iron sheets from bottom to top, which were cold at night and hot in the day. While school administrators occupied the only four modern houses in the school compound, some teachers commuted from distant towns, and others from nearby town centers.

The challenges in this school were not unique. In talking to teachers, they found themselves spending inordinate amount of time resolving issues of boy-girl relationships. With 570 students of which 220 were girls in their teen age years and a community where talk about sexuality is a taboo, it was not surprising that teachers had to play the role of mediators. Amenities were inadequate. There were four toilets for 220 girls and about 20 minutes for bathroom breaks, which were against government recommended ratios of one toilet to every 25 girls and one toilet to 30 boys (Republic of Kenya, 2008). A disproportionate number of girls were always late returning to class from bathroom breaks, and disproportionately exposed to corporal punishment for not managing to return to class as quickly as the boys.

Students at KSS were active in co-curricular activities. There was a large playing ground for soccer, netball, athletics, and other small-scale games like throw and catch. Students made impressive shows at local, county, and national competitions in co-curricular activities including music, debate, and soccer. They also had a significant presence in academic symposia that were organized locally and countywide. For many of the students, school was the place of promise, inspiration, and their hopes for a better future, and they wanted to do things that were meaningful in spite of the limitations of the physical plants.

**FINDINGS**

Findings were based on analysis of qualitative data, analyzed collaboratively by members of the SCUP under the guidance of the researchers. Insights from teachers and students on the team helped in resolving conflicting narratives, idiosyncrasies, and unfamiliar contexts. Emerging themes included: disparities and poor academic outcomes; focus on external rather than internal locus of control; absolute power and authority; isolation that is breaking systems functioning and institutional thinking; and co-created knowledge for improvement.

*Disparities and poor academic performance*

Performance in the KCSE at KSS was wanting. For three years, including one year during this project, the mean grade for the school ranged between 3.0 and 5.6 of a possible 12 points. Boys performed significantly better than girls, especially in science-related subjects. Three years data revealed a maximum of three girls in the top 50 of 140 students in senior examination class. The mean entry behavior for boys was higher and they also made higher gains on their entry behavior (qualifying score on primary examination) compared to girls. The majority of the girls lost value on entry behavior. In 2017, two girls (0.8%) against 15 boys (12%), out of 43 girls and 80 boys, respectively, scored grades high enough to join university. A look at every class list of grades indicated that over 95% of girls were in the bottom half.

Discussions relating to the causes of poor performance produced the following reasons: inadequate sleep, poor comprehension, poor attitudes towards science subjects, home environment, poor study skills, boy-girl relationships, laziness, fear of teachers and the principal, harsh prefects, lack of confidence, poor time management, peer pressure, stress, lack of study materials, testing without teaching, and discrimination.

The performance of girls was brought up often as the factor, "gravity" pulling down the school mean grade without consideration for context (poverty, facilities) or mediating factors (relationships). When the SCUP team raised the issue of poor performance among girls at meetings with various stakeholders (teachers, principal, members of the BoG, students), respondents shifted the blame. According to the girls, teachers spent more time working with boys because they assumed girls are not at high academic levels, especially in sciences. Teachers blamed variation on boy-girl relationships, lack of focus or interest in school, and poor upbringing at home; and school administrators blamed it on a lack of discipline. One teacher made the following observation:

> I will lie if I say that these girls are here to study. Some of them are here to get husbands and they will tell you that there is a man studying hard for them. So, why should they? Time dedicated to help them is time wasted.

A female teacher, who first narrated how difficult it was for her in school, added, "Many of these girls are damaged already. They come with low grades and it only gets worse. It does not help that they spend too much time trying to look beautiful. That is why we need [same] sex schools." In the boys' focus group discussion, the consensus was that girls are weak academically and are more worried about their looks than on academics. They also indicated that teachers often humiliated girls or girls were embarrassed, specifically during menstruation and fell sick or did not come to class because of the lack of sanitary pads. "Lack of discipline" was a phrase used often by the principal and members of the BoG in describing students. The phrase seemed to provide a convenient way to avoid explanations. Generally, discussions about boys tended to be global and more forgiving (e.g., "they have goals," "they just need a place to sleep," and "boys will be boys"), while the discussion about girls tended to be more specific and incriminating, revealing demeaning attitudes (e.g., "they are concerned about looks," "they are stubborn," "they do not like sciences," "they are weak" or "they get emotional"). The data indicated that poor performance and disparities were normalized, explained, and unquestioned.

*Focus on external rather than internal locus of control*

There was tendency to put blame on "others" (e.g., government, parents, teachers, students, or political leaders) for not doing enough to improve school and student outcomes, and hence absolving everyone directly involved in the school off responsibility or accountability. "We cannot control what happens after we teach," a teacher claimed. The inability to look inward as individuals were repeated mantras at every level, students, teachers, school administrators, parents and government officials. Neither community members nor professional educators recognized the interconnections between what they do and student/school outcomes; instead, data shows every constituent abdicating responsibilities. County education officials attributed poor performance to school principals, admonishing them for inadequate facilities, learning materials, few teachers, or a lack of fields for games; things that were out of their control to provide. One school inspector stated:

> We visit schools and tell principals what they need to do, but they don't. Principals do not keep schools in good shape and do not monitor teachers. Teachers are always absent. How can students do well with low teacher attendance and inadequate facilities? Some schools have no labs for science, what is the principal doing?

Document analysis indicated that county level school inspectors visited schools regularly to ensure that: schools are managed effectively, there is suitability and availability of teaching and learning resources, health and hygiene conditions are adequate, the status of buildings is up to code, and the school functions appropriately. However, structural improvements at KSS have neither matched increased demand of the student population nor significantly impacted academic outcomes.

The school administrator referenced county officials as "tax collectors," who they say are insincere during visits. According to this administrator:

> When you see them [county officials] at the gate, prepare money. And if you do not, then you and your school are in trouble. They will go to the extent of initiating disciplinary actions or your transfer to a smaller school.

Administrators also accused students of laxity and indiscipline, while chastising parents for not helping their children or paying fees on time. Teachers had the most to say about students, imputing poor performance to students' negative attitudes towards learning (particularly girls), stupidity, poor upbringing at home, poverty, lack of role models, naivety and lack of exposure, and laziness. One teacher said:

> These young students do not have role models and some have negative role models. What I mean is [that] without people to show them the right way, they are lost. And that is not the job of a teacher. Our job is to impart knowledge.

When asked, "Why do you think there are no role models?" A male teacher responded that most students came from homes where their parents did not have secondary education and were mostly poor. This teacher made the following remarks:

> With no ability to be the right models, most of their mothers got married too young and expect their children to do the same. As teachers, we are also busy with our lives and the best we can do is tell them what to do. Stupid ones don't listen.

Students blamed teachers, the government, and politicians for their poor performance. In a focus group discussion, students expressed dissatisfaction with conditions of learning, living, and mistreatment by teachers. One student said, "Instead of lighting fire in us, they extinguish it by making you feel small, like you do not matter, and you can never be better than them." Several students indicated that teachers were only concerned with teaching, but not students' feelings, life circumstances or learning. Students claimed many of them sleep in class as they were often tired due to inadequate sleep and overcrowding everywhere (classrooms, dormitories). They expressed disappointment with the government and politicians for not funding schools adequately, while engaging in a lot of corruption and making policies that do not focus on helping students, especially those from indigence. In a focus group, students affirmed this sentiment:

> We are sent home a lot for fees. I personally can be away from school for a quarter of the term as I have to stay home until my Dad gets money. And by the time I get to school, we are sent back [home again] because I still owe back fees.

Students complained about politicians who do not pay due attention to the plight of students, specifically the low academic outcomes in recent years. Students felt that while teachers and principals were pernicious and not held to account, students were censured. Data indicated that blame was externalized, making it difficult to initiate and implement interventions without somebody feeling targeted. For example, when it was suggested that teachers focus on learning rather than testing, teachers objected, claiming that they were not the cause of poor performance. Any suggestions from the non-teaching staff or students, especially on matters relating to teaching, was undermined by teachers, who considered themselves the only authority and absolved themselves off blame for the learners' poor performance.

*Absolute power and authority*

The hierarchical school system exacerbated the misuse of power and authority by school leaders and teachers. Paradoxically, parents condoned absolute exercise of power and authority as necessary and inevitable in managing schools. Members of the community assumed that students can only learn in an environment where discipline and power over students is supreme. Teachers/principals/prefects were not only found to exercise absolute power, caning and surveilling over students' daily activities, but also lacked empathy and compassion. Students' statements to this effect included: "teachers are rough, tough, and harsh"; "we are mistreated and harassed by teachers"; "they teach without giving proper instructions and guidance on assignments and if you fail, they cane and so we fear"; "I fear some of the teachers because they threaten when they teach"; "I fear to fail in math"; "we sleep at 11.00pm and have to wake up by 4.00am to go for studies, and if you are late the teacher or prefect will be waiting with a cane, or a slap"; and "sleeping in class is a crime." All these views were contextualized by one students' comment, "Teachers do not care about students or students' needs. Their words and actions are demeaning. You are only as good as you perform on tests." Students exemplified pervasive fear, a feeling that foretold deprivation and academic failure. Teachers and staff registered a similar fear from their bosses. The SCUP team found that everyone acted out of fear of their superiors rather than exercise good conscience. Every single infraction was dealt with severe punishment, ranging from caning, hard labor, suspension, to expulsion among students, firing for workers under the BoG, and employer discipline among teachers.

In the classrooms, authoritarianism was exercised through teaching pedagogies that were teacher centered (e.g., lectures, assignments, readings, note taking, homework, testing without critical thinking, student engagement, or active learning). One teacher explained that students were discouraged from talking to each other and were removed from class for "talking when they were not talked to." Teachers asked rhetorical questions, admonished students for poor responses, and used derogative language in addressing students (e.g., "stupid," "lazy," "failure" and "uncultured"). Teachers rarely acknowledged students' efforts and, whenever they did, it was in reference to high performing boys. Unquestioned power and authority thwarted the students' egos, inhibiting their opportunities to learn, interact, or ask questions. Due to this hierarchical authoritarianism, subject matter seemed esoteric, hardly related to students' reality and, therefore, difficult to conceptualize, according to the students. When teachers were asked why they would not engage each other in professional development, one responded, "It is above my pay scale," meaning knowledge can only come from those with higher ranks, not lower. Due to the power differential, there was underutilization of multiple types of knowledge found in the different levels of school hierarchy, undervaluing and subjugating subordinates' knowledge.

*Isolation that is breaking systems functioning and institutional thinking*

KSS, like an island, is isolated and operates as a gated entity with limited outside input. External interactions were limited to vendors, legal guardians, and education-related government offices. Despite scathing reports from school inspectors, there was minimal engagement with external entities to generate ideas for change or improvement. The SCUP team visited the County Education Office to review reports on school inspections. Access to five years of documentation indicated that the school was always in violation of the majority of safety and physical indicators, like school grounds, infrastructure, finances, health and hygiene, food safety, teaching and learning environment, and school management (Republic of Kenya, 2008). This information was not shared with school leadership team, teachers, or parents. The reports looked the same from year to year with no evidence of change in school improvement or subsequent reports. A member of the BoG interviewed claimed that they are briefed, but have no details of the report. And if they did, "there are no resources for changes anyway." Parents interviewed did not know the members of the BoG. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) was considered a rubber stamp entity that endorsed the BoG demands, but not involved in generating ideas to develop the school. According to one parent:

> PTA members are selected for their ability to stamp whatever the school wants. They come up with levies like tuition fee, bus fee, teacher motivation, and then they plan on how to get a few parents to make noise at PTA meetings, and claim parents wanted it when parents do not even understand it. I never know what is going on in school, there is no genuine participation. Go to any school and you will find this practice and it hurts poor parents.

Similarly, teachers, like the parents, had limited interactions with members of the BoG, and when they did, it was not on the same level as those in charge. One teacher said, "We are to the BoG what students are to us." In private, teachers intimated that the members of BoG were compromised, lacked experience in educational issues, and rarely interacted with them to gain or create institutional knowledge. Data indicated that members of the BoG were professionals in other fields, with excellent ideas that hardly surfaced in meetings out of fear of rejection or being booted off the Board. Their engagement was dominated by overseeing financial matters and school construction projects, "raising money from parents in terms of fees and levies," "banking and ensuring money is used well," and "paying salaries."

Knowledge and practices in different parts and levels of the school system were not coordinated for purposes of school-wide institutionalization or utilization. Institutional knowledge resided in school administrators and a few members of the BoG. Data indicated that teachers had no knowledge of school operations other than going to class. Every decision needed the principal's seal of approval. For instance, despite having cleared his child in every department, a parent was compelled to return twice to the school, for the same reason, because only the principal has the power to sign a student's clearance form. Whenever a principal was transferred, a teacher bemoaned that nobody knew "where things were, what he was doing and how." Many significant decisions about construction, school fees, and purchases were made at ad-hoc meetings without input from teachers, parents, or community leaders. This compartmentalization meant that actions were taken in isolation without consideration for their impact on other aspects of the school. Novel ideas were often abandoned because of personality differences, allegiances, or personal interests, disregarding the benefits they might provide to the school. Based on our data, an incoming principal could fire teachers in order to hire their preferred instructors, change vendors because of personal interests and benefits, abandon on-going building projects, or fire contractors to accommodate cronies. Conclusion from this research did not reveal any explicit policies and

governmental actions that guided the schools' processes, held leaders to account, or deterred corruption. School administrators and the BoG were left to act on behalf of the school's interest. Teachers and staff alike, who were employed and paid by the BoG, abandoned their professionalism for cronyism. These behaviors were sustained by the dearth of efforts to institutionalize organizational values, ideologies, or policies and processes that outlive leaders with no indication of a common purpose. The impact of these actions was evidenced in the lack of improvement in student outcomes and disgruntled employees.

*Co-created knowledge for improvement*

It took over one year to establish the SCUP at KSS and to develop trustworthy working relationships. On-going collaboration among members of the SCUP, in collaboration with school staff, co-created practical, effective, and sometimes very simple improvement strategies. The SCUP strategically shifted discussions from seeking explanations to poor performance to eliciting actionable alternatives and new ideas. The use of the question, "What about?" followed by a suggestion, provoked and stimulated discussions. A snowball of ideas and criticisms followed, which helped the SCUP team discern what was acceptable, possible, and doable. For example, teachers defended the lecture method as the most appropriate way of teaching. When asked, "What about having students read and discuss topics and share their understanding and opinions in class?" This questioning technique created opportunities for teachers to think about alternative methods of teaching, elicited greater variation of ideas for intervention, and provided insights of their thought processes. It was important for stakeholders (teachers in this case) to realize they had essential ideas that would create improvement. The SCUP focused on low cost ideas, which were within the powers of the principal, teachers, and students, to implement and held promise for improving the school's outcomes, without involving radical changes to the operations of the institution. Consequently, four doable ideas emerged from our discussions with teachers and students: a) developing resiliency among students, b) improving living conditions, c) professional development on active learning and the importance of voice/democracy, and d) finding alternatives to corporal punishment.

 a) *Developing resiliency among students:* Both boys and girls had low self-esteem and self-worth, and low expectations, while teachers demonstrated little to no empathy. Students' latent aspirations, hopes, and promise were often thwarted by fear of their teachers and school administration. Effects on girls were more deleterious because of their vulnerability in a co-ed school, especially from male students and teachers. Despite the hardships associated with school and home conditions, students understood the need to excel and were eager to do well. These two factors aligned with their need to develop resiliency and ability to overcome adversity. The SCUP team collaborated with a professor of guidance and counseling to provide resources to build resilience. Opportunities to engage in extra-curriculum activities were enhanced by expanding and initiating new programs. Such programs included problem solving activities and games, resolving conflicts, peer-to-peer counseling, entrepreneurship projects to develop creativity, motivation workshops, peer tutoring in academic subjects, discussions of sexuality and personal hygiene, and educational and co-curricular trips. Teachers were encouraged to form student clubs based on their interests by providing students a variety of activities from which to choose, a move that was empowering.

b) *Improving living conditions:* Unhygienic conditions, including inadequate ablution blocks, dirty dormitories and classrooms, and inadequate and poorly prepared food, needed urgent attention. The SCUP, in discussions with the school administration, explained the debilitating impacts of the

living conditions as expressed by students. After further discussions, students offered to help with cleaning, the principal ensured supply of cleaning materials, and the BoG agreed to finance the construction of ten additional modern toilets (five for girls and five for boys). This action minimized the issue of lateness and punishment after bathroom breaks, specifically a positive outcome for the girls. Students appreciated their cleaner environment and worked to maintain it. Similarly, the discussions with the kitchen staff, led to improved services in food preparation and service, especially taking into consideration younger and female students in a culture where the 'survival for the fittest' reigns. Food portions were also increased and rationed. Furthermore, considering the consequences of sleep deprivation, students were allowed to sleep for at least seven hours (10.00pm – 5.00am).

*c) Professional development on active learning and the importance of voice/democracy:* Expertise in the SCUP team was used to organize professional development sessions for administrators and teachers. Three gatherings were organized with the BoG, the principal, and teachers as participants and resource persons. This was intended to develop trust and appreciation of knowledge and skills within the group. Researchers assembled reading materials and videos based on prioritized topics that included resilience, active learning, democratic governance, and the role of teachers as models. A schedule was presented that included selected topics. Teachers prepared and showcased exemplary lessons from which all could learn. This process transformed teachers from recyclers to creators of new knowledge, and extended into the classrooms. This harnessed and underutilized talent among teachers inspired and motivated those who were reluctant to become engaged. As an outcome, teachers started visiting each other's classrooms, after attending a workshop on a "flipped classroom." This approach was a framed model in a collaborative concert between a professor of education and one of the school's teachers. Teachers were encouraged to offer constructive criticism, and learn from each other's successes and pitfalls. Finally, a follow-up was facilitated to assess and evaluate the effects of professional development.

*d) Finding alternatives to corporal punishment:* The SCUP team confirmed from focus group discussions and interviews that corporal punishment was the default form of discipline. Corporal punishment not only inflicted undue pain, but it is also illegal in Kenya. This type of punishment was considered disproportionate to the infractions committed and dehumanized students. Although, some teachers claimed that it worked. The SCUP team suggested and invited a professional educator and/or counselor to provide workshops on alternatives to corporal punishment. However, on-going actions, including better food services, increased number of toilets, cleanliness, and increased communication about learning expectations, resulted in fewer infractions and minimum cases of corporal punishment. This was evidenced in the interconnections between conducive conditions of learning and living, and student behavior.

## DISCUSSION

This study found gaps in the functioning of interlocking systems as explained by ecological and sociocultural theories. Poor learning conditions, failure of county governments to follow up on infractions, inability of the school community to provide sufficient support to meet both academic and affective schooling needs, and teacher centered teaching, together had a significant bearing on the school's operation and the students' academic outcomes. In isolation, these factors may not have impact, but in combination, they can debilitate. This study found an absence of institutionalized and systemic approaches to teaching and learning, which have been found to breach success in schools (Bryk et al., 2010; Jarrett et al., 2010; Lawrence & Orodho, 2014). Ad-

hoc actions and reactions noted at KSS compartmentalized problems and decisions impairing coherence, cohesion and common purpose.

Public secondary boarding schools in Kenya are underfunded, with government policies diametrically opposed to physical and human resource needs. The 100% transition to secondary school policy revealed an increase in student population without increases in infrastructure (Otieno & Ochieng, 2020; Republic of Kenya, 2019), leading to a spike in indiscipline and a slump in educational outcomes. This breakdown in the system's interlocking parts, among other things, violate the students' rights of access to quality educational outcomes (Freire, 2002). Meanwhile, the idea of shifting blame contradicts ecological and sociocultural theories. Amutabi (2002) found that students are blamed and vilified by the media, parents, politicians, scholars, and the public for problems in schools, while the "autocratic nature of the institutions and structure under which they operate are often ignored" (p. 159). Absolute power with impunity is condoned and used without accountability, responsibility, and consideration for impacts on subordinates. As this study suggests, research has associated absolute power with subordination and poor performance amongst students and teachers (Amutabi, 2002; Cooper, 2014).

How do students and teachers overcome these circumstances? Participatory action research goes beyond the very act of doing research, but incorporates practice. In this study, researchers also focused on actionable solution approaches. For example, how to empower and enable students to determine their destiny as it was clear the system was broken and not in their favor. Of the four solution approaches developed in the period of this research project (i.e., developing resilience, improving living conditions, professional development, and alternative to corporal punishment), developing resilience was the most salient as it focused on what students could do for themselves. Resilience is a "human capacity to face, overcome, and even be strengthened by experiences of adversity" (Grotberg, 1997, p. 2), which includes, but not limited to: autonomy, trust, having a sense of belonging, achievement orientation, self-esteem, empathy, locus of control, creativity, persistence, communication, problem-solving, and intellectual and emotional skills. According to Grotberg (1997), resilience enables students and teachers to face adversity, while maintaining normal development, promoting growth beyond the present level of functioning, and anticipating adversity. The SCUP contended that building resilience among teachers and students at KSS would empower them to recognize and play their role in the school system, while noting the values of the system as a whole rather than its parts; therefore, engendering the spirit of collaboration and partnership for the common good of the institution.

**CONCLUSION**

Overall, the findings of this study indicated that schools are systems within systems and their success depend on how well the ecological and sociocultural systems work to reinforce each other positively. At KSS, although the students' performances were negatively impacted by various challenges (e.g., internal interactions at the school, community and individual factors), they were normalized to the detriment of the school's learning outcomes. Often, normalization of the aforementioned factors can blind institutions; therefore, there is need to disrupt this normalization through outside consultation and partnerships (like SCUP) in the following ways: 1) recognizing assumptions and issues that are normalized and not discussed for change; 2) noticing divergent and unequal experiences and outcomes; and 3) repurposing old and generating new ideas for improvement. The partnership co-created at KSS inspired teachers to develop new critical thinking skills, through collaboration, and harnessed pertinent knowledge amongst school employees and

students, which then was posed to enhance the institutional success in general. Consequently, there is a great potential for Kenyan public schools, communities, and universities to collaborate in exploring, implementing, and sustaining practices that promote student learning and achievement.

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# The Influence of National Sovereignty on Kenya-Uganda Economic and Political Relations

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## Abstract

National sovereignty, as a concept, is a riddle given that it has problems in the context of reality and its facade generally evinced by its incongruous features. It is constricted by national self-determination, international law, and international organizations. As a theory, it was espoused by Jean Bodin (1530–1596) in an attempt to theorize on the center of power in society. Bodin provides a basis for justification of totalitarianism and expansionist attitudes of the state. National sovereignty led to the emergence of the state as supreme power that was later concretized by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. As a concept, national sovereignty espouses the state as a distinct political entity. States are mandated to formulate policies that enable them to relate with each other based on specific protocols. International protocols are recognized by states to perform specific functions on behalf of its members. They serve as neutral arbiters to harmonize divergent policies that emerge from partner states. Kenya-Uganda relations have been under great influence of complex issues of national sovereignty that this article seeks to unpack and explore with a view to examining their impact on the economic and political relations between the two countries.

*Keywords*: national sovereignty, Lake Victoria, political conflict, Kenya, Uganda

## INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of sovereignty evolved and authoritatively took shape following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. It retained from its history two essential characteristics: internal supremacy and external independence. A sovereign state is one which exercises undivided authority over all persons and property within its borders and is independent of direct control of another power. Sovereignty is the supreme power by which any state is governed. In its sphere of operation, there is no power within the state which might compete with it. This was concretized by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The United Nations (UN) has upheld the concept of sovereignty on the basis that no state or group of states has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, in the internal or external affairs of any other state. Consequently, armed intervention and all forms of interference are violations of national sovereignty under international law. Every state has an inalienable right to choose its political, economic, social, and cultural systems without interference in any form by another state (United Nations General Assembly, 1970).

Going by the above provisions of the UN, sovereignty is the inherent supremacy of the State in its territory and independence in international relations. It is the property and the State's ability to independently, without external interference, determine its internal and external policies provided that it upholds the respect for civil and human rights, protection of minority rights, and respect for international law (Gevorgyan, 2014). Nevertheless, a sovereign state is unlikely to

remain the main focus of political authority and community in future. It is challenged by constellations of authority, which transcend the divide between the domestic and international spheres. Despite the fact that there exists a number of challenges, the State is still a source of reference in most of the issues pertaining to the formulation of most of the domestic and foreign policies (Bartelson, 2006).

There is a general consensus among scholars of international politics that this sovereignty, as vested in the state in the 17th century, makes it to be a central power whose authority was unchallengeable within the territory and from without (Morgenthau & Thompson, 2004). Although other players have emerged in international politics, the state still remains the major player. States, therefore, shape global policy in line with their national interests. According to Morgenthau and Thompson, a state that attempts to assert its authority over another is considered an imperial power. An example where imperialism was demonstrated in Europe was in 1850s when the kingdom of Piedmont under Cavour attempted to dominate the Italian peninsular. Similarly, the intervention of several European powers in the Balkans between 1912 and 1923 was that each power aspired to entrench its hegemony in the region. There exist two types of imperialism in the world, military and economic (Morgenthau & Thompson, 2004).

In exploring the principle of national sovereignty and its impact on Kenya-Uganda relations, this article utilizes data from fieldwork that was conducted between 2015 and 2019 on the border region of Lake Victoria. A review of related literature was done and corroborated with primary data. Data was collected from knowledgeable respondents in the fields of diplomacy and international relations, political science, and history. The original pool of respondents was 16 of which 8 were targeted from each country. Eleven respondents were interviewed of which 7 were Kenyans and 4 Ugandans. The sampling of respondents was both by purposive and snowball techniques. Purposive sampling technique was intentional and justified for its application, given the objective of the study to establish empirical knowledge and to elucidate specific concepts on the subject under investigation. Snowballing was more convenient as the researchers obtained referrals or nominations of other respondents from the initial group. The study used interview guides and research questionnaires for collection of data that was analyzed and corroborated with the body of existing literature. The following three interview questions were utilized:

a) How does national sovereignty determine Kenya-Uganda volume of trade?
b) In which way does national sovereignty influence Kenya-Uganda political relations?
c) How does national sovereignty contribute to dispute settlement between Kenya and Uganda?

The study also used the following research questionnaire:

i) Does national sovereignty affect Kenya-Uganda volume of trade?
    yes_____      no_____      don't know_____
ii) Does national sovereignty influence Kenya-Uganda marine border surveillance?
    yes_____      no_____      don't know_____
iii) Does national sovereignty influence the process of Kenya-Uganda cross-border movement?
    yes_____      no_____      don't know_____

The study utilized descriptive data analysis in an attempt to answer questions on how and why national sovereignty influences inter-state economic and political relations. The suitability of descriptive data analysis is that it is flexible and facilitates the evaluation of data from various sources, turning it into viable and valuable insights when dealing with complex concepts of the modern polity.

**The influence of national sovereignty on Kenya-Uganda trade ties**

The concept of sovereignty revolves around the country's right to determine how to contact its affairs without external influence. Each country decides how to relate with others based on its national interests. National interests are well understood and quantified in terms of economic expansion, security, and political alignment of the state in the community of nations. Both Kenya and Uganda are economic and political partners in the East African Community (EAC) and, as sovereign independent states, each decides how to conduct its international affairs without external interference.

Cross-border issues between Kenya and Uganda are well understood under the analysis of the colonial rule and its influence on the African continent. However, cross-border trade activities between Kenya and Uganda through Lake Victoria have always been in existence. Apart from fishing, trade activities take place between the people of the two countries and even beyond. Exports from Kenya, through Lake Victoria, include petroleum products and construction materials (such as cement, steel, iron sheets, steel structures, and poles). The destinations of these products from Kenya pass through the Kisumu port to Uganda, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Rwanda. This makes Kisumu a very important linkage town to the landlocked neighboring countries. Kenya imports commodities (such as maize, millet, sorghum, beans, cotton seed cake, green grams, sesame, peanuts, bananas, and fruits) from Uganda through Lake Victoria (Labu, 2012).

Even though there are strong bilateral economic ties between Kenya and Uganda, national sovereignty addresses itself to geopolitical issues that raise the concerns of who takes ownership of the territories in Lake Victoria. This problem has strained the countries' diplomatic relations. The territorial disputes can cause war that can be disastrous to the economies of the two countries. This calls for a neutral arbiter, especially the EAC, the African Union (AU), or UN, to assist the countries resolve such disputes (Labu, 2012).

The idea of globalization in the international arena emphasizes interdependence of states and as such no one country can operate in isolation. In view of this, globalization enables states to solve socio-economic and political problems through collective efforts to a greater point of restricting national sovereignty. Therefore, globalization articulates the need to increase mutual cooperation amongst states. Arising from the complex issues of globalization, on the basis that no state can stand on its own, the fish trade has evolved into several channels between Kenya and Uganda. The fish export industry in Kenya is complex and has evolved over the years, extending its tentacles beyond its borders to Uganda and Tanzania. For example, a fish factory in Kenya can own and control other enterprises that relate to fish supply, transport, distribution, and export. Thus, a strategic consideration of factories, like the aforementioned, operating in other countries in the East African region (such as Uganda and Tanzania) was to overcome the problem of fish shortage or supply through outsourcing (Abila, 2003).

Bilateral trade between Kenya and Uganda has, in most cases, favored Kenya for many years. In March 2004, the EAC member states signed the Customs Union. The protocol came into existence in 2005 after ratification by member states. The objectives of the Customs Union include furthering liberalization of intra-regional trade in goods, enhancing domestic, cross-border and foreign investment, and promoting economic development and industrial diversification. The establishment of the EAC protocols clearly outlines benefits for economic cooperation between member states. Protocols were meant to put in place the best practices for partner states. National

interests have, however, scuttled efforts to fully operationalize the customs protocol as the states move to protect local industries where national sovereignty overrides regionalism. It is essential to note that sovereignty issues over the ownership of territories and control of fishing grounds in Lake Victoria has, to a large extent, adversely affected small scale fish trade in Kenya. The artisanal or informal fish trade sector that deals with traditional fish processing subsector has been weakened by the dispute. In this sector, fish is smoked or deep fried before it goes to the local market and is dominated by women, but has declined because of fish shortage (Abila, 2003). Most female traders have either left the trade or idle around processing the little fish they can get.

**Influence of national sovereignty on Kenya-Uganda political relations**

The territorial dispute between Kenya and Uganda in Lake Victoria raises sovereignty issues. The Migingo Island dispute came to the fore in 2009, although Kenya has also occupied and exercised sovereignty over the island since 1926. Historically, Uganda annexed eight islands in Lake Victoria, which were previously part of Kenya. For example, in the early 1970's, President Idi Amin of Uganda seized Sigulu Island, which is the largest and most important of the islands with a population of over 10,000 people mainly of Bunyala, Suba, and Luo origin. These residents from Sigulu Island have been naturalized to become Ugandans. They have their representatives in the Ugandan government as well as other local authorities in Samia, Bugwe, and Bugiri districts of Eastern Uganda. The government of Kenya did not launch any diplomatic protest following the annexation (Muchege, 2017).

Kenya's foreign policy is based on benign diplomacy, cleverly calculated towards economic dominance of the entire Eastern Africa region. Its diplomacy is strategic for the country's economic advancement. For this reason, the Kenyan government does not want to destabilize the region because it could be the greatest loser. Kenya benefits immensely from the Ugandan market, which is its greatest consumer of the country's manufactured goods. The contemporary world economic system has influenced states to embark on developing cordial relations in order to facilitate trade or their economic advancement. Their main focus is usually to open up new opportunities for trade, growth and investment in the world market. States use diplomatic networks to provide commercial intelligence, tourism, marketing, business links and assistance. Expansion of international trade influences cross-border movement of people (Lee & Hocking, 2010).

Kenya's reaction to Uganda military activities in Lake Victoria has been exercised with a lot of restraint to avert war. Kenya has borrowed heavily from the 1947 United States (U.S.) policy of containment towards the Soviet Union. Containment policy was designed as a long term, patient, but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. The U.S. worked on strategies that would eventually lead to the breakup or gradual mellowing of the Soviet power (Lee & Hocking, 2010). Kenya's strategic importance to the world and her role as a regional economic hub has made the country to restrain its action against Uganda to avert war. Kenya is a focus point regionally and globally, thus the country's stability is of paramount importance. As a regional economic hub, Kenya is a major transport, financial center, and a host of headquarters for numerous international organizations that have vested interests in the Greater Horn of Africa region. The country cannot afford to go to war based on the adverse results that such an act could generate.

Conflicts in the Great Lakes region have always been the result of a multiplicity of actors and complexity of their interests. In this region, there exists visible and real actors to the dispute

that are relatively easy to identify. On the other hand, there are also a number of actors that lurk in the background, but actively work in the foreground. These types of actors have a deliberate strategy of deception with the intention to intensify conflicts for the purpose of promoting their interests (Baregu, 2011). Powerful economic and political actors with hidden vested interests in the Great Lakes region work to subvert peace. Some of these actors are intelligence and security service organizations, secret service organizations, arms merchants, money launderers, smugglers, drug dealers, private military, security companies, warlords, and lords of poverty who in this context are perpetrators of violence. One cannot rule out the possibility that one or even more of these actors have a hand in the current Migingo Island dispute between Kenya and Uganda in Lake Victoria. Their aim is to protect their short-term economic interests, as well as geopolitical interests at the expense of regional stability (Baregu, 2011).

Uganda's military deployment in the Lake region is a display of the classical realist school of thought, which implies that the military can be deployed by the state to prove its preponderance, symbolize its independence and legitimize its sovereignty in the eyes of its competitors (Morgenthau & Thompson, 2004).To that effect, Uganda has demonstrated its readiness to go to war over disputed territories or it is a strategy to serve as a deterrent measure to scare off Kenyan fishers in order to protect its territorial waters from external interference.

On its part, Kenya has responded towards Uganda with a lot of restraint based on the country's national, regional, and global mutual interests. There are longstanding global mutual interests in the region and wide-ranging cooperation on economic and security issues that guide Kenya's foreign policy in relation to its neighbors. Kenya is a fastest growing business, financial, and transportation hub for the Eastern Africa region. Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, is also a host to several international agencies. The U.S. investments and bilateral trade in Kenya are important elements in its strategic interests in Kenya's security and stability. This commitment is reflected in the countries' partnership in regional and security issues. The U.S. has four security objectives in Kenya: to professionalize the Kenyan military forces, to enhance its counterterrorism and border security capabilities, to increase maritime security awareness, and to improve peace keeping capabilities (Bureau of African Affairs, 2020).

As a regional economic hub, Kenya's gross domestic product (GDP) is approximately 43% of the East Africa region and the country is always cautious of its stability. To help enhance its regional economic preeminence, Kenya is committed to developing infrastructure to link the countries in the region. Most of the massive infrastructure terminates at the borders with Kenya's neighbors and the economic outlook not only signals a regional power, but also a renaissance. Kenya has developed an advanced financial system with open and robust markets, but Uganda still remains its largest export partner. Political economists argue that although Kenya's economy is powerful, its military power is weak. A robust economy requires an equally powerful defense and deterrence capability. Since Kenya has positioned itself to become a regional economic hub, its military power becomes an aspect of both geopolitical and geostrategic relevance (Goldman, 2016).

Kenya's foreign policy has been that of peaceful coexistence with her neighbors. The country still emphasizes the Organization of African Union's (OAU) principle of non-interference with internal affairs of other states (Chemiati, 2013). The country has never engaged in subversive activities to destabilize its neighbors. Kenya has served as a mediator in regional conflicts and has always strongly believed in peaceful settlement of disputes by means of mediation, negotiation, conciliation, and arbitration. This is also in line with the OAU principle that emphasizes respect

for sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states and inalienable right to independent existence (Alwanga & Nyanchoga, 2010).

Practical demonstrations that project Kenya as a leading model in the search for peace in Africa are the country's peace initiatives in the following countries: Mozambique in the 1990s reconciled the government and the rebel group under the umbrella of Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998, and the diplomatic row between Uganda and Sudan on counter-accusations that each of the states sponsored subversive elements that operated from their respective territories to topple the government of the concerned country. Under the leadership of President Moi, Kenya made several attempts to reconcile different Somalia factions after the overthrow of President Mohammed Siad Barre. Kenya also helped to broker a ceasefire between President Tito Okello of Uganda and the then rebel leader Yoweri Museveni of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in the 1980s. History has presented Kenya as a regional peace broker, and that is why the country prefers a peaceful and amicable settlement to the Migingo Island dispute with Uganda (Chemiati, 2013).

At the time of independence, Uganda borrowed heavily from Mwalimu Julius Nyerere of Tanzania's *Ujamaa* type of economic and political ideology that drew heavily from the Marxist-Leninist ideology. *Ujamaa* was a form of African socialism that blended socialist principles with a distinctly communitarian understanding of African societies, a strong commitment to egalitarian societies. It was to form a bedrock of instituting a profound social change directed and shaped by the state. At the heart of *Ujamaa*, emphasis was placed on self-reliance, total participation of all in developing the nation, communal labor, communal ownership of land, nationalization in the private sector and provision of public services (Jennings, 2017).

When Dr. Milton Obote seized power and become president by means of a civilian coup in 1966 and used the military to depose Sir Edward Mutesa, he introduced a new economic and political blueprint through *The Common Man's Charter.* The policy document was meant to transform Uganda into a socialist state. The document was released in 1969 and placed emphasis on nationalism and socialism, revealing that the socio-economic problems Uganda faced then resulted from capitalism, entrenched interests of the rich, the educated, foreign influence, and feudalism (Aseka, 2005). Even when Yoweri Museveni became president in 1986, he and most of the NRM loyalists soon began to talk about launching a Ugandan 'revolution'. The ensuing radical populism more or less convinced Washington that NRM was a Marxist regime. Uganda was viewed to be in alliance with the then Eastern bloc and other global south radical leaders such as Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, and Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya (Okoth, 1995).

**National sovereignty and its influence on Kenya-Uganda marine border surveillance**

Borders are perceived to be vulnerable and prone to terrorist attacks, illegal cross-border movements and immigration. In Europe, effective border control and surveillance are a matter of uttermost importance to concerned countries. In the same vein, the U.S. has maintained a high-level border surveillance along its border with Mexico by the deployment of its military. The U.S. has considered this strategy necessary and a valuable deterrent against incoming illegal migrants. The military has assisted the U.S. government to deter unlawful cross-border movement and entry, but require immigrants to use designated border crossings (Essendorfer et al., 2009; Shinkman, 2018).

National sovereignty issues have contributed to territorial claims and disputes being

witnessed in various parts of the world. Most of the disputes are unresolved and have been there for quite a long period. Unresolved territorial disputes can substantially increase corruption risks in the region. Examples are the unresolved territorial disputes over secession of the territory of the former Soviet Union (e.g., Nagorno-Karabakh claimed by Azerbaijan and Armenia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia). The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict erupted in 1994 over control of oil resources. Azerbaijan produces about 800,000 barrels of oil per day, and it is a significant exporter of oil and gas to Central Asia and Europe (Global Conflict Tracker, 2021).

Similarly, the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is a notable example of corruption in the defense circles. Principal factors that increase corruption risks for defense and security establishments in regions with unresolved territorial disputes include increased military expenditure, reduced transparency, creation of legal grey zones, and unregulated paramilitary formations. Accordingly, an ideology of national survival emerges that generates a high level of public support for the military, leading to tolerance of corrupt activities as the price to pay for national security (Tagarev et al., 2010). Unresolved territorial disputes are characterized by competitiveness, mistrust, and militarization, which make arms race the usual practice for each of the conflicting sides. The conflict over the disputed territory of Kashmir helped to drive India to be the second largest importer of arms in the world. Pakistan on the other hand allocates the largest portion of its state budget to defense, and both countries have developed nuclear arsenals (Tagarev et al., 2010).

The foregoing cases from around the world illustrate the fact that the Kenya-Uganda dispute over Migingo is not a unique case. The same kinds of dynamics are at play in the latter dispute as well. For instance, in 2001, the Uganda government strengthened monitoring, surveillance, and control on Lake Victoria. This made it more difficult for Kenyan fishers to fish in Ugandan waters, and also made it difficult for Ugandan fishers to smuggle and sell fish in Kenyan landing sites. Kenyan fishers have complained that measures imposed by Ugandan authorities were impromptu and implemented without prior notice to prepare and adjust their operations. Uganda uses Special Revenue Protection Service (SRPS), which in most cases extort money from fishers and involve the use of excessive force (Heck et al., 2004).

The Kenya-Uganda border dispute in Lake Victoria is mirrored in a different perspective, focusing on resource struggle, but cannot escape the assertion raised by Tagarev et al. (2010). The Migingo Island dispute came to limelight in 2008 through media highlights when Uganda authorities started to harass Kenyan fishers. These fishers invited the Uganda military, who are known to use high speed boats to enforce the law on tax compliance, to provide security and deal with piracy that had become rampant on the Lake.

## National sovereignty and its influence on cross-border movement

The colonial interlude in Africa led to the creation of artificial borders for the benefit of European powers. Colonialism has been referred to as the highest stage of capitalism. Capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism are terms that share concepts such as political and cultural domination, and economic exploitation. The starting point was the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which set the rules for colonial occupation. The 1886 Anglo-German Agreement and other inter-European arrangements were instrumental in erecting artificial boundaries around Kenya. In 1894 and 1895, Britain declared protectorate status over Uganda and Kenya respectively (Ndege, 2009).

The Kenya-Uganda boundaries were demarcated without consulting the local people. The demarcation process, which brought together numerous independent communities into one territorial entity that has now espoused the concept of sovereignty, has caused multiple challenges as far as state building is concerned on the African continent. Both the colonial and post-colonial states found it a daunting task to weld these communities into one nation-state (Ndege, 2009). Conventionally, most of the cross-border movements are motivated by enhanced economic opportunities, although there are other factors such as social and cultural forces involving cross-border communities. Kenya has a considerable proportion of skilled professionals who migrate to other countries for better opportunities. East African countries have a long history of cross-border movement of people because of their geographical proximity (Odipo et al., 2015).

The territorial dispute between Kenya and Uganda in Lake Victoria affects cross-border movement of people between the two states, especially the fishing fraternity. Both countries subscribe to the EAC protocol that provides for free movement of people in the region, but that does not avert the responsibility to comply with relevant state policies or tax measures. National sovereignty supersedes regional integration, making Uganda's activities in Lake Victoria, to a large extent, about state interests that override the spirit of EAC.

Historically, national sovereignty issues were complicated by the transfer of territories from eastern Uganda to Kenya in 1902 by the Foreign Office Superintendent of African protectorates, Sir Clement Hill. This territorial transfer between Kenya and Uganda had unclear boundaries from eastern Uganda. Sir Hill's decision to transfer territories to Kenya was to create a region that was administratively manageable because Uganda's infrastructure was inadequate and could not provide a smooth link to coordinate with the East Africa Protectorate (Ogalo & Ndeda, 2016).

The boundary around Lake Victoria was arbitrary, given that its description was based on its natural features according to the records from the British Order in Council (1926):

> [C]ommencing in the waters of Lake Victoria on the parallel $1^0$ south latitude, at a point due south of the westernmost point of Pyramid Island; thence the boundary follows a straight line due north to that point; thence continuing by a straight line northerly to the most westerly point of Illemba Island; thence by a straight line, still northerly, to the most westerly point of Kiringiti Island; thence by a straight line, still northerly, to the most westerly point of Mageta Island; thence by straight line north-westerly to the most southerly point of Sumba Island; thence by the south-western and western shores of that island to its most northerly point; thence by a straight line north-easterly to the center of the mouth of the Sio River.

This description illustrates that colonialists relied heavily on lakes in the region and the $30^0$ E Meridian to define boundaries in East Africa. The Kenya-Uganda border used natural features and latitude $1^0$ south. They used pillars on land and islands in Lake Victoria as markers. Features of this nature cannot provide precise boundary delimitation between states in the Lake (Okumu, 2010). Hence, the Lake Victoria boundary between Kenya and Uganda is not clearly demarcated and, therefore, difficult for one to realize which side of the country one is traversing when in the Lake. This is one factor that causes Kenyan fishers to trespass to the Uganda side of the Lake without notice, leading to the violation of immigration regulations. It is clear that the colonial partition of East Africa substantively contributed to the evolution of the territorial dispute in Lake Victoria between Kenya and Uganda (Okumu, 2010).

The Migingo fishers from Kenya do not put much importance on international boundaries in Lake Victoria because they do not know their location and do not care to find out. Kenyan fishers strongly believe that Migingo Island is in Kenya and, therefore, they do not cross any international boundary for fishing or to buy fish (Heck et al., 2004). The current dispute between Kenya and Uganda in Lake Victoria is thus about shared resources, revolving around the struggle for control of fishing grounds (Le Billon & Duffy, 2018).

Kenya and Uganda have been compelled to accept the 1926 British Order in Council, the 1995 Uganda Constitution, and the 1963 Kenya Constitution as primary documents of reference when dealing with the Lake Victoria disputed territories. Both countries dispute facts pertaining to the exact location of the 'westernmost' point of any given island as described by the 1926 British Order in Council. As suggested earlier, the boundary descriptions and locations are quite arbitrary and complex to comprehend. The use of rivers and thalwegs to describe an international boundary has caused the emergence of disputes because rivers are prone to change course. For example, the use of River Sio, as one of the features in the demarcation of the Kenya-Uganda southern border, was not reliable. Again, there have been arguments that the British used the word 'Migingo' as a generic name to describe an undifferentiated chain of islands, which until recently were specifically differentiated as Migingo, Ugingo, Usingo, and Pyramid (Rossi, 2016).

It is out of these technical flaws committed by the colonial border demarcation that Ugandan surveyors have disputed Kenya's territorial claims over Migingo Island. Because of its pyramid shape, Ugandans claim that Usingo Island, which lies east of Migingo, is Pyramid Island as referenced in the 1926 British Order in Council. This claim has led to disagreements between Kenya and Uganda surveyors as to which of the three islands referenced in the colonial boundary documents is Pyramid Island (Rossi, 2016).

**National sovereignty and its influence on Kenya-Uganda dispute settlement**

Uganda's military activities in Lake Victoria between 2008 and 2009 almost led Kenya and Uganda into war. High level diplomatic discussions between the presidents of these states produced a fragile arrangement, allowing routine fishing activities to continue under joint police supervision. Consequently, a Joint Technical Committee (JTC) of experts was mandated to evaluate the disputed border. Unfortunately, surveying work stalled when the joint verification team disagreed on methodology. Ugandan experts withdrew from the exercise, leading to the collapse of the initiative (Rossi, 2016). The establishment of the committee of experts to resolve this dispute was an initiative by the competing parties themselves, which was an acceptable practice in international conflict management. An attempt by both parties to resolve the dispute in Lake Victoria did not hold because of sovereignty concerns, especially of competing national interests. These two nations' vested interests contributed to the collapse of the JTC initiative for peaceful settlement of the dispute. Although State interests override the quest for regional integration, they tend to disregard international cooperation. As long as there is no violation of any citizen's rights, the international community cannot intervene in the Lake Victoria dispute, unless the parties themselves refer the matter to an international agency for settlement.

A number of countries have referred territorial disputes to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or other international agencies for settlement. For example, one notable dispute is the conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi peninsula. This border issue has been a bone of contention dating back to 1913 during the colonial period. The discovery that Bakassi Peninsula harbors important deposits of oil and gas reserves triggered hostilities and military confrontations

between these two countries (Baye, 2010). In the case of Kenya and Uganda, the EAC would have served as an alternative to resolve their dispute, but it has no institutional capacity. Compared to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has resolved many conflicts that emerged among West Africa states, EAC has no military wing to enforce decisions that require military action.

There is still a strong wave of nationalism in each of the countries of East Africa. Nationalism is still strong against regionalism in East Africa. Pertinent issues have emerged with reference to the extent by which people from East Africa have been involved in the integration process. Operations of the EAC make it a club of ruling political elites, who at most are concerned with the preservation of their political power. A critical examination of the selection process of representatives to the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) is flawed and alienates citizens. The selection of the EALA members is undertaken by leadership of political parties or leaders of the respective East African Countries (Adar et al., 2020). The lack of a strong agency or weak institutional capacity is part of the problem facing Africa. In 2011, the Council of Ministers directed the secretariat to commission an institutional review based on its increased mandate since the Permanent Tripartite Commission was formed in 1993. Several years on, the review is yet to be completed due to changing policy positions and lack of member state agreements on recommended institutional arrangements (Vanheukelom et al., 2016).

Since attaining political independence, most African states have focused on political consolidation and state building, which has evolved into the centralization of state authority, codified national identity, and unity. Porous and peripheral borders that were created by colonialists have posed a great challenge to the spirit of Pan-Africanism. The commitment to Pan-African ideals by African states only matter in contexts where they do not conflict with national interests (Rossi, 2016). Uganda, for instance, has a history of military intervention in some states of the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. Uganda's intervention in DRC, Rwanda, Central Africa Republic, South Sudan, and Somalia has been considered on a number of factors. President Yoweri Museveni's personal political interests have driven him to influence and manipulate regional politics, including overstaying in office. Therefore, he is under pressure from the west to relinquish his power. He is a shrewd leader who manipulates regional politics for his survival, and tactfully uses regional instability as a bargaining chip when negotiating with western powers (Bauer, 2013).

Soldiers benefit from these military deployments because they are paid handsomely in form of Euros or U.S. dollars. Most soldiers have built good permanent houses from the proceeds of war. The soldiers have been accused of engaging in illegal activities while on such missions. For instance, they smuggle minerals and timber from DRC. Since 1990s, Uganda has been accused of robbing DRC of its minerals, and in 2005 the ICJ ordered Kampala to compensate Kinshasa. The ICJ found the Ugandan state guilty of plundering natural resources during its five-year occupation of northern DRC (Rossi, 2016).

Conflicts are waged in disguise to protect national interests, when in real sense the process is manipulated by individuals in the military or strategic political positions to gain access to valuable resources for self-enrichment (Le Billon & Duffy, 2018). In the New World Order, the struggle for natural resources among states has increased their vulnerability to armed conflict by weakening the ability of political institutions to peacefully resolve disputes. Contrary to the belief that abundant resources aid economic growth, Le Billon and Duffy argue, empirical evidence suggests that countries that depend on the export of primary commodities are at a higher risk of

going to war over the extraction of such resources along the common border. The notion of resource curse that underpins both armed conflict and political instability in many oil producing countries of the Middle East, or even those in the scarce cropland regions of the Great Lakes is a clear indicator that there is a serious problem confronting Kenya and Uganda (Le Billon & Duffy, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

National sovereignty is a key factor that largely dictates a State's choice on the way to relate with others in the community of nations. It addresses itself to geopolitical issues, regional power dynamics, and domestic affairs of the State. The competition for territories by States has led to strained relations that eventually affect their economic and political ties. Contemporary diplomacy focuses on the advancement of the economic interests of the State. Kenya's diplomatic considerations over Uganda are strategic on economic advancement. Kenya benefits immensely from Uganda's market, which is the largest consumer of Kenya's manufactured goods. Moreover, Kenya's geostrategic importance has made the country to downplay the Lake Victoria dispute and adopted an appeasement policy towards Uganda's aggression. Kenya is a regional economic hub with immense western vested interests while Uganda's policy is largely driven by the country's internal political dynamics.

Economic ties between Kenya and Uganda have greatly shaped the countries' economic and political relations, despite the push and pull factors that exist in their relations. Both countries have a symbiotic relationship and cannot exist without the other. Kenya provides access route to Uganda's export and import traffic. Similarly, Uganda provides a large regional market for Kenya's manufactured goods. Territorial disputes between the two countries are deeply rooted in the colonial legacy stemming from the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. The partition of Africa, which split many communities, was done with total disregard of the existing socio-economic and cultural ties amongst African societies. After independence, many African countries have and continue to grapple with the problem of political consolidation. Poorly or unclearly demarcated borders between African countries have caused numerous territorial disputes in the continent. The disputed border between Kenya and Uganda around Lake Victoria has led to claims and counterclaims over territorial sovereignty.

The aspect of national sovereignty explicitly emerges in relation to how each State attempts to protect its national interests at the expense of regional cooperation. Both Kenya and Uganda are members of the EAC whose protocols provide for free movement of people and goods across the region. However, most of the policies of the EAC have not been fully harmonized by member states. The slow pace that has caused non-implementation of some EAC protocols is as a result of national interest invoked by sovereignty issues as discussed in this article.

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# On Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Political Theatre: An Artist's Conflict with the State over Performance Space

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## Abstract

The problem with Kenya as a post-colony was (and is) simply a problem of leadership. Censorship and oppression of native artists who criticize the government has continued to haunt us, even after Kenya's independence in 1963. Kenya's post-independence national leaders use state power to control and silence artistic voices that question and threaten their political ambitions. These leaders exert oppression and brutality to artistic voices that express dissatisfaction with their leadership. To this day, limitations of native artists' social, political, and economic rights are ghosts that continue to infest postcolonial Kenya. So, what should an artist do in such situations? What power does the artist have on (or over) the performance space? This article argues that Ngugi's conflict with postcolonial Kenyan regimes was a question of power and control of the performance space. The article interrogates how Ngugi's plays, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want,* advocate for a socio-political and cultural change against the oppressive postcolonial native bourgeoisie, and the struggle of the peasantry for a new economic, cultural, and political order. The objective of this article is to examine Kenya's history on the performance space, how this history informs Ngugi's artistic works, and how it envisions the future.

***Keywords:*** Kenyan literature, neocolonialism, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, performance space, politics, postcolonialism, theatre

*"We believe that good theatre is that which is on the side of the people, that which, without making mistakes and weaknesses, give people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation" (*Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Michere Githae Mugo, *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi)*

*"Theatre is a weapon ... a weapon for liberation" (*Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed)*

I begin this study with two quotations. The first is from Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer and academician, currently a Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine. The second is from Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theatre practitioner, drama theorist, political activist, and founder of the *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Both writers speak to the central argument of this article: Ngugi's use of dramaturgy to engage in aesthetics of resistance as a means for political freedom. He is an artist whose drama continues to play a major role in the fight against oppression and exploitation that the neocolonial Kenyan leaders exert on the populace. His works advocate for a political and social change against the neocolonial native bourgeoisie, and they encompass the struggle of workers and peasant farmers for a new economic, cultural, and political order in Kenya as a post-colony. Ngugi's political theatre is anchored on an

activist's postulation that for a socio-political and cultural change to occur in Kenya, there is a need for the workers and peasant farmers to participate actively in the call for that change. He sides with the peasants and workers in their class and political struggle. Ngugi's work is greatly influenced by Frantz Fanon's "analysis of the creation of a national bourgeoisie" in the post-colony as Robert Fox (2003) argues in "Engaging Ngugi" (p. 118). However, as I argue in this article, Ngugi's use of art to fight for political freedom engages Friedrick Schiller's (1794) theory of art, serving as a tool for political freedom and emancipation of the artist's society (p. 26). In two of his plays, which this article engages, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want*, Ngugi grapples with the questions of socio-political courage, patriotism, heritage, and the return of the land grabbed by the native bourgeoisie who took over power after Kenya's independence in 1963. Due to the sensitivity of his call for socio-political and cultural change, Ngugi faced a lot of opposition from the government in the production and performance of the mentioned plays because of their activist nature; provocative and subversive language, and subject matter which called on the populace to participate in action and demand for their rights from the State. The State, therefore, stopped the performance of these plays in Kenya and banned Ngugi's own founded Kimiriithu Education and Cultural Centre for political reasons (Van der Smith, 2007, p. 92). Kimiriithu Education Center provided a stage on which Ngugi and the State enacted their power. According to Fox (2003), the "arrogant and repressive regime closed down the cultural center [as] people's theatre [to show] its power and threaten the collective efforts that Ngugi had inspired" (p. 118) among the peasant workers. Therefore, the questions that this article engages include: What power does Ngugi as an artist or a native intellectual have on (or over) Kenya's performance space? And how does he use artistic power to resist and engage in Kenya's oppressive neocolonial politics? My objective in this essay is to examine Ngugi's conflict with postcolonial Kenyan regimes and the tensions of power and control of the performance space. Additionally, I will interrogate Ngugi's art, especially in the production and the performance of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want*, and his advocacy for a sociopolitical and cultural change against Kenya's oppressive postcolonial native bourgeoisie. Finally, I will examine Kenya's history on performance space, how this history informs Ngugi's artistic works, and its impact on the future. I argue that Ngugi's conflict with the postcolonial Kenyan regimes was a question of power and control of the performance space. Despite the dangers that come with such advances, Ngugi uses the artistic power that he holds over the performance space through his open-air theatre to call for socio-political and cultural change against the neocolonial native bourgeoisie. As Schiller argues in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, "political emancipation transcends the limitations set by the conditions of [the artist's] time" (Grossmann, 1968, p. 31–32). Hence, Ngugi had to overcome the political dangers and threats of the State to meaningfully and successfully use his art to engage in and inform Kenya's neocolonial politics. In other words, Ngugi had to "dissociate his intellect from the political feelings and intuitions of his time to arrive at a discursive understanding and knowledge [of the issues affecting the people] …, surrender the wholeness of being, and pursue the truth" about the struggles of the Kenyan people (Schiller, 1794, p. 12).

The tragedy with Kenya as a post-colony was (and is) simply a failure of leadership. Censorship and oppression of native artists and intellectuals who criticize the government are ghosts that continue to haunt us even after Kenya's independence in 1963. Kenya's post-independence national leaders are often concerned with acquiring and retaining power than enhancing a conducive environment for building a national culture. These leaders use state power to control and silence artistic and intellectual voices that question and threaten their political agendas on the performance space. As Brown (2004) explains, "Ngugi's art was at war—in more

than a metaphorical way—with the ruling regimes" because of the anxieties of the regimes (p. 56). It is these anxieties that cause the State to exert oppression and brutality to artistic voices that express dissatisfaction with the ruling regimes. It is retrogressive that the limitations of anti-government artists' social, political, and economic rights are ghosts that have continued to haunt postcolonial Kenya even after the country acquired its "freedom" from its colonial masters. While the State continues to victimize him and consider him as its political enemy, Ngugi has continued to use art to immerse himself in the struggles of "dispossessed" Kenyan peasant farmers (Magel, 1983, p. 239). As Schiller (1794) cautions that the artist should "live in their time but not be creatures and products of it" (p. 16); therefore, Ngugi has remained "true and faithful to the critical standards of his time" by using art to educate the populace and speak truth to power to restore the prevailing waves of oppression and exploitation (Schiller, 1794, p. 12).

On December 31, 1977, Ngugi was arrested and detained without trial by President Jomo Kenyatta's government for his involvement in the production of the play *I Will Marry When I Want* (Lovesey, 2002, p. 148). Ngugi's arrest and imprisonment without trial was an indirect consequence of his art that engaged with people's theater—popular (and often protested) theatre that allowed the workers and peasants participation to strengthen solidarity and call for social-political freedom and change. He took theatre to the people, developed it with them, and made real-life theatre that merged the existing traditions with a new local theatre aesthetics by the people and for the people. The production and performance of this play portrayed the way of life in the post-colony where people made theatre vibrant and alive in their call for change.

*I Will Marry When I Want* was produced and performed by local peasant farmers and one of its main themes is the ridicule of the neocolonial ruling class for colluding with the former colonists to grab land from Kenyan peasants. The play was produced in Gikuyu—Ngugi's native language—thus it was well-received by the local audience. This play achieved popularity among the people, prompting the State to stop its performance on claims that it was stirring hostility between sections of the community. In the play, Kiguunda, a farm laborer who works for a wealthy African landowner, Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru and his wife Jezebel, lives with his wife, Wangeci, and their daughter Gathoni, in a small shack. Kiguunda brings the news that his employer will be visiting them at home and Wangeci starts to cook for their important guests. While trying to come up with a reason for the visit, Wangeci concludes that John (Kioi and Jezebel's son), who is currently taking Gathoni out, wants to marry her and his parents, therefore, are coming over to discuss the matter. Little do they know the agony that this dubious 'love' affair would cause. Their neighbors, Gicaamba and Njooki, come over for a visit, and Njooki observes that the idea of a wedding between Gathoni and John cannot materialize. Gicaamba becomes very vocal about the current system of economic and political oppression and exploitation of workers by the landlords and factory owners. His political views make a huge impression on Kiguunda.

Soon thereafter, the Kioi's arrive accompanied by their friends, the Ndugires (husband and wife, Samuel, and Helen). The visitors start an impromptu spiritual witnessing, which disturbs their hosts. Kioi asks Kiguunda and Wangeci to stop living in sin and get a Christian wedding. Consequently, Kiguunda chases them out of his house and Wangeci is upset because she feels that it prevented them from stating the real reason for their visit: the relationship between their daughter Gathoni and John, and the wedding. Ignoring the warnings of their neighbors, Kiguunda and Wangeci decide to have a proper Christian wedding for themselves in hopes that it would open the door for a wedding between John and Gathoni. The couple need money for their wedding and hence Kiguunda mortgages his farm, unaware that that was Kioi's plan from the beginning; to get

their land. Gathoni becomes pregnant with John's baby, but he refuses to marry her and abandons her. This forces Kiguunda and Wangeci to call off their wedding. In a fury, Kiguunda threatens Kioi, and Jezebel shoots at Kiguunda. Kiguunda is unable to pay his mortgage because he lost his job at Kioi's farm, the bank thus forecloses Kiguunda's only valuable possession, the land. He, Wangeci, and Gathoni are left desolate, without a roof over their heads after Kioi gets their land. Kioi and his business partner, Ikuua Nditika, intend to erect an insecticide factory in collaboration with Western partners on the grabbed land. At the end of the play, Gicaamba calls for the community to unite against this imperial economic and political power.

This play offers an accurate representation of the sociopolitical reality that faced the peasantry in postcolonial Kenya. The play depicts the proletarianization of the workers and peasant farmers by the native bourgeoisie and it highlights the continuous need to resist the oppressive and exploitative neocolonial regimes. In this play, Ngugi shows how Kiguunda's family, poor peasants who have supplemented their lives on a one and a half-acre piece of land by selling their labor to a rich Kenyan bourgeoisie, is finally deprived of his small land by a collaboration between the native landlords or businessmen and the colonists. Through this play, Ngugi calls on the peasants to unite and stand together to fight for the right to own their lands. As Gicaamba calls out, "[d]evelopment will come from our unity. Unity is our strength and wealth." If workers and peasant farmers unite and demand their rights, "[a] day will come when, if a bean falls on the ground, it will be split equally among us" (Thiong'o & Mirii, 1982, p. 115). According to Nicholas Brown (1999), Ngugi's *I Will Marry When I Want* critiques Kenya's neocolonial present. He argues that "fifty years later [after the Mau Mau uprising] … landless peasants were still a source of cheap labor [and this situation] remained as [a] powerful reminder of how little had changed with the end of direct European colonialism" (p. 64). It is this neocolonial situation that provides the setting for Ngugi to engage the peasant farmers in the aesthetics of resistance and call for change in the social and political fabric of Kenya's postcolonial society.

Ngugi uses this play to call for the economic and political freedom of Kenyan workers and peasant farmers. The play begins as a critique of the poor working conditions of peasant farmers on the grabbed lands owned by the new Kenyan ruling class in collaboration with their European counterparts. The Kenyan landowners were not any different from the colonists—they both exploited and oppressed peasant farmers who worked on the very lands grabbed from them. Kiguunda laments, "[o]ur family land has been given to homeguards. Today, I am just a labourer on farms owned by Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru" (p. 28–29). Gicaamba also expresses the plight and frustrations of the peasant farmers as he explains "[w]e are the people who cultivate and plant, [b]ut we are not the people who harvest! The owners of these companies are real scorpions. They only know…[t]o oppress workers, [t]o take away their rights, [and] to suck their blood" (p. 33). He adds that "week after week, [they make] shoes worth millions, [yet they] are given a mere two hundred shillings [as the] rest is sent to Europe" (p. 34). Because of the suffering that these workers go through, they organize a strike, but it does not come until everyone has taken an oath to fully participate in the call for change (p. 69).

In the play, Ngugi emphasizes the importance of unity and commitment to the success of the freedom of the workers by enacting an oath administered to the striking workers of the factories. Therefore, this play is a protest of the then-current conditions of the working class. It is a call for revolutionary action against the exploitation of the present moment as well as envisioning a future in which this condition will not repeat itself. Gicaamba comments at the end of the play that "[a] day will come when [i]f a bean falls on the ground, [i]t will be split equally among us.

For---…The trumpet [o]f all workers have been blown [t]o wake all the peasants [t]o wake all the poor [and] to wake all the masses" (p. 115). According to Brown (1999), the elision in the above passage illustrates a break between the colonial and postcolonial conditions of the peasant workers (p. 66). However, the ellipses could also be seen as Ngugi's vision of the change that will come when and after the peasants unite and collectively demand change from the new ruling class.

It was because of this play's call for the workers' unity that the ruling regime under President Jomo Kenyatta and Vice President Daniel arap Moi came up with a law that forbade people to sing and dance in public in a gathering of over five people. The law stated that "more than five people were deemed to constitute a public gathering that needed a license" (Brown, 1999, p. 66). This same license was withdrawn from Ngugi's Kamiriithu people's theatre by the government in 1977 to end public performances of *I Will Marry When I Want* on grounds of "public security." Since the play was produced and performed by peasant farmers in an "open-air theatre," the rehearsals were public, and when the play was finally performed in October 1977, its large audience attracted so much attention that threatened the KANU government to shut it down and withdrew its license after only seven performances to bring back what the government termed as "public order" (Van der Smith, 2007, p. 111). Ngugi himself was arrested that night and detained for a year without trial in Kamiti Maximum Prison. He was detained because he had written and enacted certain truths about Kenya's neocolonial political class on the performance space. His aesthetics engaged the welfare of the Kenyan populace who had painfully fought for independence only to end up politically, culturally, and economically bound by new chains of imperialism. *I Will Marry When I Want*—which was written in Gikuyu language, Ngugi's vernacular—was an attempt to awaken the masses regarding the imperialism of the then ruling regime. However, the government was threatened by an awakened populace participating in the performance space. The real power of performance lies where the people reside (people's theatre), and this space is where real politics of performance space occurs between the State and the artist. This space is where the artist's power of performance lies, and which the repressive machine of the State often targets.

Ngugi explains that "his imprisonment is not a personal affair. It's part of a wider history of attempts to bring the Kenyan people in a reactionary culture of silence and fear, and of the Kenyan people's fierce struggle against them to create a people's revolutionary culture of outspoken courage and patriotic heroism" (Van der Smith, 2007, p. 110). He sees his arrest and detainment as a conflict between him and the State over the performance space. While the State enacts its power by articulating laws that regulate the citizen's action on the performance space, the artist's power of performance serves to give the citizens power. Ngugi uses art to call on the masses to use their power on stage to collectively demand change and freedom from the oppression and exploitation of the ruling class. In I *Will Marry When I Want,* Gicaamba voices that "[w]ithout workers, [t]here is no property, there is no wealth. The labor of our hands is the real wealth of the country. The blood of the worker … [i]s the true creator of the wealth of the nation" (p. 38). It is this self-consciousness activism that the play engages with peasant farmers and workers who are also the target audience of the State's regulatory power.

The State often tries to regulate the artist on the performance space by controlling the content of the artist through censorship. As the artist tries to use the stage for human action, the State wants to use this space to control human action. The State fears that the artist's work, like Ngugi's if allowed to get to the audience, will create tension and disorder and, therefore, tries (if possible) to control the artist's access to the performance space and his work from getting into the citizen's hands—the artist's audience. Ngugi argues that censorship is a State's attempt to starve

the artist's imagination. He adds that the State "don't want you to imagine the possibilities of a different future. They want you to think this is the best possible world" (Inani, 2018, Interview Question 1). However, the artist must remain steadfast in resisting every attempt by the State to woo him. Yielding to these pressures is a pathway for the artist to join the State in starving the imagination of many of the masses for a completely liberated nation. The artist must continue using art to offer hope and call on the people to actively participate in resistance to the State's oppression and exploitation. As Schiller (1794) argues, even in hostile environments, the artist should use art to harmonize the reason and imagination of the populace for an optimistic future; thus, the artist's work should enlighten the masses and act as the voice of reason on the political scene (p. 13). Imprisoning an artist is a means of controlling what happens in the performance space. The government wants to initiate fear in the artist and the audience against expressing any dissatisfaction with the ruling regime. Furthermore, the imprisonment of an artist is geared towards converting the artist into a passive onlooker to the State's injustices by inculcating in him (or her) the fear of speaking against the State.

Ngugi was detained by the Kenyan regimes for unmasking the evils of the neocolonial ruling class. He uses art to speak to (and about) Kenyan workers and peasant farmers and engages in their struggle for social-political, and economic freedom. By detaining him, the State machinery aims to control the artist's mind and create in him a docile body that can be regulated by its power. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault (1995) argues that the State uses social institutions like the prison as administrative and political spaces to discipline and monitor the subject's body for physical and psychological control as well as manipulating it to self-regulate (p. 137). Therefore, the State denies the artist the performance space by preventing their contact with the masses and tries to coax the artist, through threats and fear, to abandon the course. However, in most cases, the artist resists such advances from the State and continues to write even to a wider national audience. This kind of resistance frustrates the State, and it often reacts with the brutal treatment of the artist. Consequently, the artist may be imprisoned or tortured by the State. At this point, the artist must make a choice, either to abandon truth and liberate themselves by bowing to the State's threats and intimidation or continue the struggles for the people. For Ngugi, as Oliver Lovesey (2002) postulates, his experience with the people's theatre hardened him to a point of no return (p. 141). Although his detention was devastating, it was a transforming experience that authorized him as people's spokesperson against the injustices of the neocolonial regime. Ngugi's detention was a moment of realization that he is part of the living history of struggle and that his life in Kamiti Maximum prison was "a crash course in State terror" and as Foucault puts it, an allegory of the State's "panoptic gaze" on the work of the artist (pp. 219–222).

Sometimes, instead of torture, the State tries to entice the artist to come to its side. This can be achieved by the State promising the artist a lucrative government position or even through monetary bribery. The artist can be given money and forever silenced from speaking against the State's injustices. Instead of keeping the artist outside the State's surveillance, the regime wants to bring them closer where their action is controlled and monitored more easily. Nevertheless, before they are released, the State asks the artist to disregard whatever they said before to annul it. If they agree to this scheme, the artist will be released, but, if not, he/she is tortured in attempts to subjugate their mind. As noted earlier, Foucault emphasizes that the State uses coercion and manipulation to attain the docility of the subject's body and mind (p. 135) because these two are the reservoirs of the artist's power and knowledge. Once the State has control of the artist's body and mind, it bends his/her will into submission to its power. But would it? Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* could help to contextualize this question.

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* centers around a legendary Mau-Mau leader, general Dedan Kimathi, and his leading role in the revolutionary struggle for Kenya's liberation. Kimathi is portrayed as a compassionate man. The play is a courtroom drama that realigns the Kenyan history of 1956, a time when Kenya was fighting for its independence from the British. According to Okunoye (2001), Ngugi was compelled to liberate Kimathi from political and literary interment to ensure that he and his heroism as a martyr of Kenyan nationalism will live forever in the collective psyche of his people (pp. 225–226). Therefore, through the play, Kimathi becomes a metaphor for the history of the struggle of Kenya's oppressed people. Ngugi and Mugo use this play to refashion and reconstruct the historical distortions, the biased and deliberate misconceptions, and the misrepresentations of Kenyan history by the colonist's earlier narratives. In this play, Ngugi and Mugo reconstruct the Kenyan people's heritage by establishing Kimathi's centrality to the Mau-Mau liberation movement and his influence in Kenya's struggle for independence. Furthermore, they abandon realistic and poetic descriptions for allegory, symbolism, metaphors, and biblical allusions to transmit their radical message: the increased radicalization of their aesthetic practice, anti-colonial political and cultural resistance, as well as aesthetics of resistance (Fox, 2003, p. 117). As Magel (1983) argues, in "Symbolism, and Regeneration in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*," Ngugi and Mugo establish Kimathi as the "armed resistance of the movement [and] hence embodying the peasants' armed resistance to British colonial oppression" (pp. 241–42). Through this play, Ngugi and Mugo incorporate the people's hope for political and cultural freedom as well as profound respect and love for a fearless and indomitable leader—one with the physical and intellectual strength, and the ability to endure pain and suffering in the struggle for freedom.

Ngugi and Mugo posit that the struggle of the people against oppression will continue until total freedom has been achieved. Kimathi tells his enemies that the Kenyan people will never surrender to oppression and exploitation: "For four hundred years the oppressor [h]as exploited and tortured our people. For four hundred years we have risen and fought against oppression, against humiliation, against the enslavement of body, mind, and soul. Our people will never surrender" (p. 58). For Ngugi and Mugo, the frustration of the hopes held by Kenyan independence generated a nostalgic reflection on the heroism of Dedan Kimathi. The fruits of independence were only being enjoyed by a few in the government while the masses who fought selflessly for freedom were left languishing in poverty (Okunoye, 2001, p. 233). As the leaders kept enriching themselves, the working class and the peasants continued to live in poverty. These frustrations created in the peasants' solidarity are an aftermath of their exposure to oppression and exploitation, which threatens the State most.

Thus, Ngugi and Mugo present Kimathi as a political prisoner in pre-independent Kenya. During his temptations and trial, Kimathi is forced to undergo humiliations as the State attempts to divert him from his duty of leading the Mau-Mau movement, which championed the struggle for Kenya's freedom from the British (p. 230). Additionally, Ngugi and Mugo celebrate Kimathi as a martyred redeemer who should be remembered as a cultural and political symbol of freedom. In the first section, the play presents the story of how a nameless female peasant activist, Woman, attempts to help the imprisoned Dedan Kimathi. In the process, two youths are won over to join the movement in the fight for freedom. In the final scene, they make their brave act by committing to the objectives of the movement. In the second section, the play contains Kimathi's temptations. He is tempted with bribes by various characters including natives who collaborated with the colonists. They all try to lure Kimathi into betraying the struggle. The temptations show how the colonists, the native bourgeoisie, and the collaborators—businessmen, politicians, and religious

leaders betray Kenyan people. Kimathi resists all these temptations, and the perpetrators of his imprisonment are left with no option other than assassinating him. In this play, Ngugi and Mugo highlight the responsibilities which the leader of the revolution faced towards his duty of leading the people in the fight for freedom; such is the work of the artist. He resists the State's plot to make him succumb to its power.

Arguably, Kimathi's resistance refutes the manipulative advances of colonialist sympathizers and collaborators while in prison who promise him lucrative prizes if he agrees to side with the government. The bankers, businessmen, clergy, and Kenyan politicians attempt to compromise his standby extending to him the benefits they received from their collaboration with the State. He calls them "Lawyers, Liars, Bankers, Owners of property" and tells them "Time is money, [m]oney is justice, [j]ustice is money, [m]oneyed justice, [t]hirty pieces of silver. Judases. Traitors" (pp. 32–33). Kimathi's refusal to yield to the temptations of the neocolonial compromisers alludes to the artist's refusal to join the State regime in exploiting and oppressing the masses. The neocolonial regime under the leadership of President Kenyatta often told the masses to forgive and forget the past. However, according to Simatei (1999), Ngugi believes that building the nation in independent Kenya was never to involve repression of that historical consciousness, which had given rise to the very idea of the nation in the first place. He thinks that "writing details" about the contributions and tribulations of individual fighters is very necessary "so that later generations may think about them and honor them" (p. 157).

Ngugi and Mugo advocate for national rebirth and refashioning in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi.* These playwrights call for a cultural and political liberation of the people of Kenya as they emphasize the need for the deconstruction of colonial and neocolonial systems of oppression and exploitation in the post-colony. To attain this end, they call for the organization of Kenyan peasants and workers. In the first movement of the play, the masses are led to sing, "Away with oppression, [u]nchain the people! Away with exploitation, [u]nchain the people!" a rant that is directed towards the oppressive regime that is in power (p. 5). In the third movement, Ngugi and Mugo reiterate Kimathi's loathing for the oppressors, as he calls upon his people to unite. Kimathi urges the people in the struggle that "We must kill the lie/ That black people never invented anything/ Lay forever to rest that inferiority complex/ Implanted in our minds by centuries of oppression./ Rise, Rise workers, and peasants of Kenya …" (p. 68). He commits himself to the struggle and tells the colonist:

> My life is our people/ Struggling/ Fighting/ Not like you to maintain/ Slavery/ Oppression/ Exploitation/ But/ To end slavery, exploitation,/ Modern cannibalism …/ Go back to your masters/ and tell them:/ Kimathi will never sell Kenya/ to the British or to any other Breed of man-eaters, now or in the years to come. (pp. 35–36)

Ngugi and Mugo do not offer a quick and easy solution to the oppression and exploitation that the masses were going through. However, through this play, they stir up the people's consciousness to seek freedom and demand justice and accountability.

Even when the artist is imprisoned, the performance space is never left empty. As the State continues to use its power to control the artist's mind and body on the performance space through the prison surveillance system, the artist continues to engage the masses through the aesthetics of resistance. As Schiller (1794) reasons:

> The political legislator may place their empire under an interdict, but he cannot reign there. He can proscribe the friend of truth, but truth subsists; he can degrade the artist, but he

cannot change art. [A]rtists show themselves occupied in letting down the truth. They are swallowed up in it; but, thanks to their essential vigor and indestructible life, the true and the beautiful make a victorious fight and issue triumphant from the abyss. (p. 15)

The artist may continue to write prison narratives while incarcerated for an anxious and eager audience outside the prison walls. Once the narratives are released to the outside audience, readers get to understand the pains and struggles of the artist behind the prison walls because of their collective fight for freedom. The artist also explains the deplorable living conditions and the inhumane torture individuals face in a State regulated prison. The artist, therefore, gets sympathy from the audience. Sometimes, the artist's detention and torture attract both national and international attention. The citizens who form the artist's audience begin to demonstrate for the release of the prisoner artist. Through this, the artist uses art to engage in both national and international politics. His artistic voice joins that of the masses and collectively channels a path for political and cultural freedom of the people.

Outside prison walls, the public exerts pressure on the State to release the imprisoned artist. Similarly, human rights organizations, both locally and internationally, will pressure the State for the artist's release. Therefore, the State may succumb to both national and international pressure to release the artist from detention. Such is the case in Ngugi's *The Prison Memoirs* (2018) in which he explains that he wrote the memoir as a letter to the friends of Kenya and democracy who fought tirelessly for his release. He states that he received overwhelming support from ordinary people, peasants, workers, and students who often filled the streets demonstrating for his release. He also received support from writers, humanistic organizations, progressive intellectuals, and democratic-minded individuals across the globe. The State, therefore, released him in December 1978. However, the State never wants the artist to continue causing tension in its territorial space. When Ngugi was released from prison in 1978, his contract to teach in the English department at the University of Nairobi was terminated (Lacey, 2004). He continued with his involvement with the peasant villagers who ceaselessly engaged with his work before and during his detention. In June 1982, he launched the English versions of *I Will Marry When I Want*. This play made the State organize a plan to force him outside the Kenyan territorial space. The State initiated difficult living conditions for him within national boundaries. For a long time, Ngugi lived under constant fear, threat of arrest, or detention for refusing to collaborate with the government. While he had gone to London to give a public lecture, he received news that the State was planning to arrest him upon his return. He, therefore, decided to stay in exile in London where he continued with his writing and teaching. He routinely used public lectures, interviews, and symposiums to tell the world about the neocolonial dictatorship in Kenya as it was in most neo-colonies. In 1987, he moved to the U.S. and settled at the University of New York as a professor of Comparative Literature and Performance Studies.

When the artist realizes that his life is in danger and the State is never going to give him peace of mind to continue educating the masses and rallying them against the State's injustice, the artist runs away to exile. In *Detained*, Ngugi notes, "[o]ne of the terrible things in the modern world is that writers have to emigrate to another nation to be able to comment on what is going on in their own country of origin" (Brown, 2004, p. 139). So, for Ngugi to talk freely about the injustices, oppression, and exploitations going on in Kenya, he had to flee the country. As an artist, Ngugi hopes that the conditions in exile will allow him to keep writing works that help to fight State injustices in his motherland. Perhaps, the artist understands that it is better to keep the fight while alive and away from the motherland than dying during the revolution. That is why the artist

continues fighting the injustices in the mother country while outside his national territorial space.

However, exile becomes another prison for the artist, like Ngugi, because of being locked outside the territorial performance space. In this case, Ngugi cannot fully interact with the peasant workers at home for whom he is fighting, and they cannot interact with him either. That lack of interaction makes it difficult for the artist to connect with his audience. In an interview about the artist's status in exile, Ngugi states that the artist needs contact with the place of his imagination (Rodrigues, 2004, p. 163). He claims he misses out a lot on his language and content by not interacting with locals in Kenya who speak the Gikuyu language. Rodrigues (2004) also explains that foreign memory often keeps the artist in dilemma about the language and content to use in his works (p. 163). Despite this alienation, Ngugi holds that he has no bitterness or desire for vengeance despite his forceful ejection to exile. In an interview with the *Nation Newspaper* in Kenya in April 2018, Ngugi stated that in the situation of Kenya as a post-colony, the only vengeance is to strive for a positive change against the negative forces of yesterday. According to Schiller, the suffering of the artist at a distant place outside his national territory only makes him stronger. Exile gives the artist an "ennobling character" which provides the necessity for the artist "to seek for this end an instrument that the State does not furnish and to open sources that would have preserved themselves pure amid political corruption" (p. 14) Schiller further ascertains that outside the national territory, the artist continues "to come to the maturity of his age and when he has become a man, he returns as a stranger of his own century, not, gladden it by his appearance but rather, to cleanse and to purify it" (p. 14) He in fact explains:

> [L]et it nourish him …, and suffer him to grow up and arrive at virility ... When he has attained manhood, let him come back, presenting a face strange to his own age; let him come, not to delight it with his apparition, but rather to purify it … He will, indeed, receive his matter from the present time, but he will borrow the form from a nobler time and even beyond all time, from the essential, absolute, immutable unity. There, issuing from the pure ether of its heavenly nature flows the source of all [art], which was never tainted by the corruption of generations or of ages, which roll along far beneath it in dark eddies. (p. 15)

While in exile, the artist keeps challenging the State's absolute power by writing works that attack the injustices going on back home. Lovesey (2002) writes in her article that "[i]n exile since 1982, Ngugi has agitated for the release of political prisoners, and in the late eighties, he chaired Umoja, an umbrella group of radical Kenyan organizations" (p. 141). Accordingly, Fredrick Schiller explains that the artist must continue "direct[ing] his gaze upwards, to the dignity of calling and the universal law, not downwards towards fortune and the needs of daily life" (p. 16). While the artist continues to produce the ideal out of what is possible and necessary, the global audience gets to know more of what is happening within the territorial space of the artist's country, and the global audience continues to contest against the artist's mother State leadership. In an interview in India, while attending the international conference on the Nationality Question, Ngugi puts it that the struggle should always continue, and the artist should not be made to accept and believe that things will never change (Rao, 1999, p. 162). The State also continues with the attempts to control the artist's work even while in exile to bring him back into its panoptic gaze. In 1984, when Ngugi directed the production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* at the African Centre and the Commonwealth Institute in London, the Kenyan government under the leadership of President Moi sought to have the performances stopped through the British government, but it failed. At the same time, efforts by Ngugi's son, Ngugi wa Mirii to create another community center in Zimbabwe where he was exiled, too, was threatened by the State through the Zimbabwean

government. President Moi wanted to bring Ngugi back under the State's surveillance, but he refused. This refusal angered the State and the artist was banned from ever returning to the motherland; however, it was not until 2004, after President Moi was out of power, that he returned to give public lectures. Ngugi holds that Kenya is his country of origin, for better or worse, and that it is for him and everybody else to make it the Kenya that it can be.

Sometimes, the State may even plot to assassinate the artist whether in exile or within its territory. Often, the State might want to get rid of an artist for a continued activist's works that the State views as "a thorn in its flesh." While explaining the possible reasons for his detention, Ngugi states that other people requested his permanent silencing, but it was quashed for 'national stability. The State views assassination as a permanent solution to the artist's threat to its power. However, Ngugi asserts that this is a terrorist act that can only lead to the psychological siege of the whole nation. In 2004, when Ngugi and his wife returned to Kenya, he was attacked while at a hotel by unknown people. His wife was raped and the money and other properties in his possession were taken away (Lacey, 2004). Although president Moi was out of power, this attack was linked to Ngugi's works and the motive behind it could have been to eliminate him. Schiller alludes that during such a time of the assault, the artist should continue expressing "the truth and silently project it into the infinity of time [and space] … with steadfast courage." He comments that by "notwithstanding the resistance of time, the artist can satisfy the noble longing of his heart…[and] prove to the people that it is not through cowardice that submits to [the] sufferings." As he continues to participate in the freedom struggles with the people back home, Schiller asks the artist to:

> See them in thought such as they ought to be when must act upon them; but see them as they are when tempted to act for them … to owe their suffrage to their dignity; but to make them happy keep an account of their unworthiness. Thus, on the one hand, the nobleness of heart will kindle theirs, and, on the other, the end will not be reduced to nothingness by their unworthiness. The gravity of principles will keep them … but in play, they will still endure. (pp. 16–17)

In conclusion, Ngugi's conflict with the postcolonial Kenyan regimes was a political conflict on and over the performance space. Ngugi's art was a threat to the State's power and, hence, it tried all it could to control his performance power. Ngugi's decision to take theatre to the people, by writing in the Gikuyu language and involving the peasant farmers in the production of some of his plays, made him a great political enemy of the State. He used political theatre to sensitize the masses about the injustices of the neocolonial regimes and this placed him at loggerheads with the State. His artistic political attack of the colonialists, who were great allies to the Kenyan bourgeoisie and took over power after independence, made Ngugi an even greater enemy. The State, therefore, tried to censor his work, but these attempts failed. His detention at Kamiti Maximum prison was a way of using the State's political power to control his artistic power on the performance space. The State wanted to show him that it has more political power than his performance power and that there was no way it would leave him to continue tarnishing its name to the local and global audience. The State continued making Ngugi's living conditions unbearable and forced him into exile, but he has continued to engage in poetics of resistance, rallying the masses to keep the struggle on until Kenya gets liberated completely from the shackles of colonialism and neocolonialism. Therefore, it is not lost on us, as native intellectuals and artists, to continue using our work, research, and knowledge to bring about positive social, economic, and political conditions for people in our motherland regardless of the setbacks we experience along the way.

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# Media Representations of Women Politicians in Kenya: Lesson from 2017 General Elections

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## Abstract

In the past fifteen years, there has been a pattern of slow progress in the rise of women leaders across the globe. Partly, this situation is due to the media's ability to enhance or hinder women's political leadership, making symbolic media annihilation an area of concern for contemporary studies on women and politics. The goal of this study was to assess the visibility and invisibility of female politicians in the media and their implications in the run up to Kenya's 2017 General Elections and what can be learned as the country prepares for the 2022 General Elections. The specific objective was to establish the type of frames used by the media to represent female politicians running for office in Kenya's 2017 General Elections and to ascertain whether such frames contribute to their symbolic annihilation. This study used content from two major television networks in Kenya. Two transcripts of the 9 o'clock news interviews on Women in Politics were obtained and subjected to content and qualitative data analysis. The findings indicate that the media used gendered frames when interviewing female politicians, which reduced their visibility and viability. These findings could be an eye opener on the role of media in influencing the success or the failure of female politicians and how women can exploit any opportunities therein to secure positions of political leadership. In addition, the findings might contribute to knowledge that can help to re-theorize modern social and gender media policies and legal frameworks.

*Keywords:* gender, elections, media coverage, framing, women, Kenya

## INTRODUCTION

There is notable improvement in women presence in national leadership positions worldwide; however, the number of female leaders is still low in Kenya's political arena. This is attributed to many factors, including poor financial support, and cultural and societal variables, which make women politically insubordinate and less likely to attract media coverage. The latter is the focus of this study in which media coverage is operationalized in terms of Tuchman's omission concept, condemnation, and trivialization. The media is recognized as a holder of power, but with a social responsibility to respect and promote gender equality. As such, the media is expected to provide equal space to both men and women candidates and thereby promoting equal gender access to political power.

Nevertheless, several studies have found discrepancies in how female and male candidate speeches are, inter alia, reported and quoted in the media (Gidengil & Everitt, 1999, 2003; Norris,

1997; Voronova, 2014). Other studies (e.g., Tuchman, 1978) have indicated that female politicians suffer more from symbolic annihilation in media representation than their male counterparts do. Sometimes, this marginalization takes place with the connivance of women themselves, even though this feeds into the sexist media's representation of women in politics. Consequently, this non-neutral media stance shifts attention from the female aspirants' message to their experiences (e.g., drawing on feminine attributes in their struggle to pursue or maintain power), and thereby eliciting negative attention from voters.

Feminist textual analysis has for years been concerned with how women are represented in the media. To this end, feminist scholars have examined women's marginalization and trivialization in the media in terms of both quantity and quality of their interviews. The Global Media Monitoring Project, for instance, has indicated that the major issue affecting female politicians is their lack of adequate coverage or public appearances, unlike their male counterparts who dominate the news cycle as subjects and source of election stories. Whereas photographs of women political candidates are common, their professional experience is seldom the subject of focus and, as such, their expertise or opinions are rarely publicized. Ironically, the media often highlights their femininity and routinely questions their viability as candidates. Since media fails to perceive women politicians as newsworthy, this reduces their visibility as candidates.

There is concern that the media bias facing women in politics comes from the use of traditional frames built around the dominance of men in politics, making women outsiders. Some feminist scholars have also pointed to a new trend where women contribute to the media's trivialization and symbolic annihilation of fellow female candidates (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003).

**Women, media and politics**

A study by Benwell (2003) noted that the work of philosopher Judith Butler (1993) "revolutionized" language and gender studies. Butler's key contention is that gender is not a stable pre-discursive entity that is inherent in individuals, but rather constituted, mobilized and negotiated through the enactment of discourse. Is it possible then that the media is perpetuating stereotypes about female political candidates by trivializing them? (Tuchman, 1978). The absence of women in top national leadership positions remain to be tested. Limited evidence from Norris' (1997) study of women worldwide suggests that they receive less media coverage than their immediate male predecessors do. For instance, a number of studies (Devitt, 2002; Spears et al., 2000) have indicated that the major issue affecting women political candidates is their lack of public appearance or media coverage. These studies confirmed that male politicians dominate as subjects and sources of election stories. The 1995 GMMP research suggested that, in a day, 17% and 83% of women and men, respectively, were the news subjects on radio, television and newspapers. In 2000, five years later, the GMMP results had hardly changed. Women's news coverage in world media in a day was 18% compared to men's 82% (Spears et al., 2000).

To promote gender equality to power, the news media, given its social responsibility, should provide equal access and space to both male and female political candidates (Voronova, 2014). Yet, previous research shows that political news coverage is characterized by gendered mediation, gender imbalance, stereotypes, and lack of discussion on gender inequality (Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). The constructed gendered roles of women as mothers, daughters and wives have consequences for female political participation. Furthermore, according to the International Federation of Women Lawyers of Kenya (FIDA, 2018, p. 38), women candidates in Kenya have long received less coverage than men because they lack resources to gain access into the media.

However, when they attract the attention of the media, women are negatively framed compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, the media often stereotypes, stigmatizes and intimidates them and, therefore, reduces their visibility.

Gallagher (2001, p. 83) states that one of the battles in the struggle to tear down current gender-based divisions in the public and private arenas is to change media perceptions on the newsworthiness of female politicians around the world. Studies by Kahn (1992, 1994) and Kahn and Goldenberg (1991) examined U.S. newspaper coverage of female candidates for political office in 1980's. They established that in the U.S. Senate and Gubernatorial races, between 1982 and 1988, news media gave female candidates less coverage time than their male counterparts. Kahn noted that the press not only stereotyped female candidates by highlighting their femininity, but also questioned their viability. Similarly, Norris (1997), in her study of international women leaders, concluded that women were less visible in the news than male leaders, underrepresented (quantitatively) and marginalized (qualitatively) compared to men. In a *HuffPost* report on women in politics, Bahadur (2013) noted that media coverage of female candidates for elected office included more discussion on their character traits. These issues are of global concern and have serious implications for women participation in leadership and government.

Political media coverage, using gender specific lenses, frame female candidates negatively (Jamieson, 1995) and, conversely, men are more likely to be described in gender-neutral terms. Norris (1997) noted that news frames always use women politicians' gender as their primary descriptor and, as outsiders, serve as agents for change. The female politicians' leadership capabilities and experiences are always undervalued and their qualifications evaluated relative to past male political leaders.

Stereotypically masculine imagery, which typically convey power, strength, virility, athleticism, and competitiveness, predominates metaphors for men. Whereas, the depiction of female politicians relies on sex-based stereotypes, such as spinsters, superwoman, one of the boys, witches, or Cinderella (Norris, 1997). Gendered mediation alerts us to the reality that far from being gender-neutral, conventional news frames treat the male as normative (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). Moreover, "news reports favor a "masculine narrative" that constructs politics in stereotypically masculine terms" (Rakow & Kranich, 1991, p. 8).

In investigating the representation of men and women politicians in Kenya during elections, this research focused on audiovisual media (i.e., television). Interviews on Citizen Television and Nation Television (NTV), out of a total of four, were selected, evaluated, and analyzed based on how they framed female politicians during the 2017 General Elections. Two interview transcripts were purposely selected for content analysis specifically focusing on female politicians' coverage and representation in election programs. Focus was placed on special ways in which stereotypes or conventional frames were used in the interview process to disadvantage female candidates. For example (a) how specific questions were structured, (b) differential reporting for male and female speeches (e.g., paraphrasing, transitivity, quotations backed by reasoning), (c) use of gender distinctions and stereotyping through masculine imagery, and (d) archetypal or clichéd images of women and gendered descriptive terms (e.g., age, physical appearance, marital status and explicit gender marking).

Paraphrasing involves putting a passage from source material into one's own words, which maybe shorter or condensed than the original text. Transitivity refers to how grammatical resources (e.g., agency deletion, negative/positive representation of actors, foregrounding/backgrounding, or

nominalization) are used by the media. Quotations involve using the speaker's actual words; however, there is a tendency for the media to paraphrase direct quotations, and hence reducing the impact of the speaker's message.

## METHODS

A combination of content and qualitative analysis was done. Content analysis involved identifying lexicon or words used by anchors, and candidates in NTV and Citizen news interviews on coverage of the election campaign. This task was performed by the researchers, using transcripts of the interviews. The lexicon was identified on the basis of gender distinctions and gender stereotyping through masculine imagery (e.g., competitiveness, power, virility and strength), archetypal or clichéd images of women (e.g., beauty, submissiveness, nurturance, and cooperation) and gendered descriptive terms (e.g., age, physical appearance, marital status and explicit gender marking). In order to obtain the effect of the lexicon, qualitative analysis, which involved a focus on stereotypes and conventional frames, was employed. Interpretation and explanation of the findings was done in the context of gender social role theory (Mallon, 2003) and framing theory and gender (Cappella & Jameison, 1997; Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). The gender social role theory posits that each social role is a set of rights, duties, and expectations. Mallon (2003) suggested that people accept their everyday activity based on their socially prescribed gender roles. The model is based on the observation that people behave in a predictable way, and that an individual's behavior is context specific, based on social position and other factors. The theory posits the following propositions about social behavior that: the division of labor in society takes the form of interaction among heterogeneous specialized positions that we call roles; social roles include appropriate and permitted forms of behavior, guided by commonly known social norms, which determine expectations; and these roles are occupied by individuals called actors and when they approve a social role (i.e., consider it legitimate and constructive), they can incur costs to conform or punish those who violate the norm. Contrarily, framing and gender theory looks into how media constructs can be likened to the frames of a house that provide the structure around which everything else fits, and influencing the overall style of the construction (Tankard, 2001). The approach offers a new and more nuanced way of understanding gendered media representations, which partially supplants the traditional preoccupation with negative news coverage of women (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996).

### Media framing of female politicians

Framing involves stereotypes or conventional frames that reveal gender distinctions. For instance, media can choose what aspects to highlight, draw attention to, or leave out. Unfortunately, in most cases, the media is often preoccupied with the maternal and familial statuses of women politicians, consistent with the concepts of trivialization and condemnation; yet, equivalent criteria are not often applied or used to judge male politicians. Whereas gendered mediation is a concept that recognizes that far from being gender-neutral, conventional news frames treat the male as the norm. Thus, the media transcripts below will be followed by an analysis on framing and gendered mediation.

### Sample 1

*This program aired on May 26, 2016 on Citizen Television during the 9:00pm News segment on "Women in Leadership" by Lilian Muli. The female politician interviewed was Nazlin Omar, a*

*presidential aspirant in the 2017 General Elections in Kenya. The runtime for this interview is 19:22 minutes and can be accessed at  https://youtu.be/G4drXvVDkUc?t=104.*

*Muli:* (opening remarks). So, the 2017 General Elections is expected to be one of the most hotly contested and a woman who does not shy away from the big race has thrown her weight in the race. Rather, [she] has thrown her weight in the ring. Nazlin Omar is seeking to unseat the incumbent Head of State. She is the only female presidential aspirant this year in the August polls and she is with us in the studio on "Women in Leadership."  Thank you very much for joining us Nazlin.

*Nazlin:* Thank you for inviting me. I am honored to be here.

*Muli:* Always very gorgeous, stylish, Chanel bag … (*both laugh*).

*Nazlin*: And look who is talking (*laughs*). This is an icon of beauty and style (*both laugh*).

*Muli:* Let's get to business Nazlin. We will be talking about fashion later. So, you vied for presidency in 2007 against then President Mwai Kibaki. What has motivated your attempt this time round?

*Nazlin*: Uhm … I think as we keep on [*pause*] from one election to the next, Kenya keeps on breaking as a nation. As a people, we keep on breaking apart ... whether it is tribalism or this gross corruption, mass theft of public funds, extreme impunity, [and] bad leadership. It has been the case for the last 54 years from independence … And one day, we will all have to stand before the majestic tribunal of God Almighty. And hereafter, explain to Him what did we do as leaders. Did we try to make a difference in people's lives? And that is what I am all about … I think the same reasons last time when I vied would have been the same reasons if I were to vie in 2013, but I underwent a lot of gross persecutions unheard of. Maybe we can talk about it a bit later in the program. I think God has just lifted me from the ashes of persecution, gross targeted and systematic political persecution.  And I am back on the ground and … (*overlap from Muli*).

*Muli:* So … so! When I listen to what you went through, was it because you were a woman? Or was it because, perhaps, uhm. You were not as prominent as we know the narrative in this country is: that this is usually a two-horse race … uhm.  Why the persecution? Why, why the injustice towards you and what exactly was that? (*overlap in talking together with Muli*).

*Nazlin:* I think (*overlap from Muli*) it was very important [to note] there would be no prosecution. I mean, I think being very vocal of … uhm. I am in headlines every other day [on the] front-page cover and I think part of the media were compromised. Perhaps, to black me out for a certain time, I went through gross persecution, I was arrested for allegedly stealing my own … vehicles … So, after even terminating the case against me, when I was giving my evidence in the magistrate's criminal court, the AG [Attorney General] misused the Constitution provision of terminating cases *nolle prosequi*. I think you remember that was used in the old Constitution, just for political purposes. So, I was not able to present my evidence and then they withheld my cars and I was arrested for four days, kept in detention for four days without food, without access to relatives, hospital, doctor, nobody! I remember when I was presented to court, I was vomiting in court. I was actually throwing up on tissue papers. That sick! And I was lying on the floor; it was really terrible … (*interjection from Muli*).

*Muli:* And at that time, people labelled you and thought you were a bit cuckoo. People said Nazlin is a crazy wild cat (*overlap from Muli as Nazlin responds*).

*Nazlin:* Yes! Because you have been arrested and all that stuff. So, these were the sensations they were paying some poison pens or journalists to write some wrong things about me, but at least God is great. Because there is law in this country, and eventually I sued them. I took the police, the director of public prosecution, [and] the state to court, and I continued the matter there. It is doing very well.  The files disappeared, my files disappeared, including my matrimonial files, but they came back eventually. After a lot of fighting, writing petitions to the chief justice, complaining here and there until it actually grew wings and flew back into the judiciary … now my files are back.  Thank God! And then, in 2012 March, it was broad daylight [when] police raided my premises in Garden Estate and took away my five truckloads, including my dogs, four dogs. Everything taken … why would they take your dogs? Everything was taken away. This all evidence [is] before court (*overlap from Muli*—Right) … I proved to the court that there was persecution. There is targeted systematic cartels working on this, and guess what? The DPP representative, the Director of Criminal Investigations representative, I mean, these are State Counsel coming to court and conceding to my application, shocking the court and the court enters consent orders to protect me. Absolute immunity to me, my children, my servants and agents …

*Muli:* So, you went through a lot Nazlin and this time round fast forward to 2017, you are running as an independent.

*Nazlin:* Yes. Just one more thing, in 2013. I did not run because my name had been maliciously entered in the criminal records [Muli *sighs*]. They branded me as a criminal [and] I had no charges, they terminated charges against me, but they called me a criminal, and they entered my name in the register of criminals. Actually, I was surprised this time [round] they gave it to me and clean record and I wondered why they did that … For the last [*sighs*], since 2009, they have done that. So, back to 2013 and 2017, we are here now. And since 2015 May, I have sent circulars all over Kenya and, so far, as I speak, I have written endorsement from Imams throughout Kenya because I wanted to seek their support back, but 1,800 Imams in Kenya have endorsed my bid to run for the Presidency of the Republic of Kenya [Muli *sighs*] … Through that system, they have backed me and I have worked with about 700 pastors, a few of them are bishops and reverends, as well, who have endorsed me again to run for [the] presidency. I have hosted them several times at my residence … And as we speak, I think God is working in His own miraculous ways. Because, over the last month and half, I have founded the caucus for independent candidates of Kenya and who have appointed me as the president in writing on mandate. And we are above 2,000 members, written registered members. So, this is the only organized body of independent candidates in Kenya (*overlap from Muli*).

*Muli:* So, you chose to go as an independent instead of getting the support of perhaps the bigger party.

*Nazlin:* I don't want to be sucked up into these parties. Let me tell you Lilian, and Kenyans will agree with me. Parties have demarcated Kenyans on ethnic lines. If you look at all the parties, they have some ethnic basis around them. Every party has some ethnic base around them. The two or three kingpins that dominate their party allegedly claim that they are bringing their tribal vote in there. So, I think and when you look at parliament, good laws do not pass, [but] bad laws pass because tribal votes gather together or partisan votes gather together to support. They fall blindly onto their party leaders, onto their party interests. So, I would like to tell Kenyans, and they know me, I am not a politician. I am into this for good governance, which is separate from politics. Politics is dirty.  Politics is where you go to Parliament and if that bill is good for the nation, you will break it down because you do not want it to pass because it will give the regime some power.

I think those kinds of things, I really want Kenyans to rise above that and say even, I would really advise Kenyans: You vote for me great, if you do not and want to vote for Raila, or you are going to vote for Uhuru or … I would rather you still go to the MCA's [Members of County Assembly] and MPs who really make a difference and the Women Reps, for example, look at them as individuals [and] ignore the parties.

*Muli:* Right! And, you know, let us talk about the IEBC [Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission] and this week you came out very prominently during the pre-nomination meeting where you accused the IEBC of planning to lock out independent candidates out of the August polls. Uhm, you, of course, today got a reprieve because the High Court has ruled in your favor as independent in certain sections of the elections act. But let us talk about some of the issues that you were not happy about, such as the disqualification criteria, such as university degrees being, you know, a qualification criterion for anybody that is a presidential aspirant. Do you have a university degree?

*Nazlin:* No, I do not and I have been very honest about it. I have committed my life for the sake of others. And I have been so busy on the ground. I have got several global acclamations and nominations, global awards. I would welcome Kenyans to visit my website at nazlinomar.com and this is what the world has said about me. My website is all about what the world has said about Nazlin Omar from Kenya, all over the world.  So, my work takes me globally as well on peace, HIV/Aids, women, gender, good governance, democracy, human rights, social justice.… If you look at my school leaving certificate, which I have attached for delivery to the IEBC on Monday, you can see clearly even in school I have a commendable school leaving certificate … *(she goes ahead to list her school accolades*).  So, I have done so much work … The Constitution Article 137 clause B is clear. You are qualified to run for presidency, if you are qualified to be a Member of Parliament. MPs have passed the qualification criteria for presidency. The MPs of today do not need degrees, until after this election. So, today an MP without a degree can run for presidency.[1]

*Muli:* … Had you been able to secure these signatures prior to this?

*Nazlin:*  I have covered over twenty counties already. And one of the reasons I went to court against IEBC is that I wrote letters to IEBC from last year and I have sent agents to IEBC. Eventually, I sat with Mr. Chebukati in his office on the 19th April, with other letters.[2]

*Muli:* You are going back to court. The narrative in this country has been and particularly this time round is that this is a two-horse race. We know that the NASA flag bearer is Raila Odinga, a seasoned politician, and of course the incumbent, President Uhuru Kenyatta, and therefore there is a general feeling that the independents stand very little chance against these two giants, for lack of a better word, because number one, you have a low popularity and secondly because of your late entry into this race.

*Nazlin:* It is not a late entry, I think may be Citizen did not capture me earlier. And I have been here I think for the last two weeks. I appreciate and thank Citizen so much for quite extensive coverage you have given me. I declared my bid in May last year … My bid on Facebook trended, Lilian. It trended! And it trended and trended until Facebook send me a warming and then it blacked me out and it gave me a suspension for two weeks … what I have done is I am engaged

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[1] Some content of Nazlin's interview in this section was purposefully omitted in which she discussed the relevancy of degree requirements.

[2] Some of the content of Nazlin's interview where she elaborates on her meeting with Mr. Chebukati on the issue of signatures has been purposefully omitted; however, she thanked the courts for ruling in her favor.

with Kenyans directly on Facebook. When I realized there is a media blackout more or less, I just focus so much on social media, I went viral on social media.

*Muli:* Is it a powerful. Is social media powerful enough to front your agenda?

*Nazlin:* Extremely powerful. That is just one of my multi-pronged approach. When I trended, the trending actually got the attention of K24 TV and they invited me on Capital Talk for half an hour … So, I have declared my bid from last year May. One year now. It is not that I have come into the race last minute. And it is not easy to be able to mobilize 700 pastors [and] 2,000 Imams to back you. Clearly, I have been on the ground, I have been talking to them. I have been receiving these delegations all over Kenya, they have been collecting the signatures for me without much resources, my matrimonial case has not ended so I do not have access to my matrimonial….

*Muli:* Talking about your matrimonial case, now that you are likely to be the mother of this nation, should you be the first female President of the Republic of Kenya, your home situation, your matrimonial case, what was the situation with that, and where do things currently stand?

*Nazlin:* Well, we are separated clearly for five, six years almost now, five and half to six years….

*Muli:* Tell the people of Kenya why you should be their president.

*Nazlin:* First of all, thank you. I think what you have just heard about a two horse-race, that these two are the most popular, I do not believe that … [they] have been rejected by the people… I have been endorsed from Nyanza and Western … (*she continues to explain in detail her bid for presidency and justifies her qualification through several endorsements, including Imams, pastors and other Kenyans. She also castigates other contesters who have been engaged in corruption*).

*Muli:* This is Nazlin Omar, the very stylish … Thank you very much for joining us.


**Analysis**

In her interview with Lilian Muli, Nazlin Omar discusses the challenges she faced in her bid for presidency in Kenya. She openly brings out the pertinent issues of tribalism, corruption, bad leadership and extreme impunity, which face the country. To some extent, she attributes her political woes to her domestic challenges used by the media to frustrate her political ambition. She also points out that these challenges stem from her domestic court cases that later dimmed her desire to vie for the presidency. From her interview with Lilian Muli, she discusses challenges female politicians face in their bid to vie for top positions in politics, which leaves them with no option, but to run as independent candidates. However, independent candidates equally face challenges of registration, particularly from voters and, to some extent, the unfavorable election laws.

Framing in Sample 1 is evidenced in gender distinctions and stereotyping, gendered descriptive terms, and explicit gender markings. First, gender distinction, evidenced in the reference to one's sex, is described as a hindrance. For instance, Muli questions the leadership capabilities and experiences of the female aspirant. The reference to male personalities (e.g., Raila Odinga), expressions (like seasoned politician), or images (like giants, two-horse race) imply the unlikelihood of the female aspirant to win a race. The two main aspirants in both 2013 and 2017 general elections were male: Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta. Furthermore, the description of male aspirants as being seasoned politicians and giants, automatically, depicts female candidates as weak. In addition, Muli seems to suggest that Nazlin, as a presidential aspirant, is less popular

and not strategic as reflected in her late entrance into the race. These descriptions clearly indicate that the leadership capabilities of female politicians are undervalued. Their qualifications are often measured against those of seasoned male politicians who have a history in leadership.

Secondly, media presenters describe female politicians through gendered descriptive terms. In Sample 1, this stereotyping is evidenced through the use of archetypal or clichéd images of women. For instance, Nazlin is described as being stylish, looking very young, and her marital status as the focus of the discussion. In the course of her interview, Muli even asks Nazlin, "When I listen to what you went through, was it because you were a woman? Or was it because, perhaps, uhm. You are not as prominent …?" The persecution of Nazlin, based on her identity as a woman, is in itself stereotypical. In politics, male politicians, like women, are not immune to political assaults. However, the use of gendered terms is stereotypical and unmarked or normalized for women. For instance, Muli's reference to Nazlin as "always very gorgeous, stylish" draws attention to her beauty as opposed to her intellect or leadership qualities. Moreover, the use of less flattering, clichéd and image centric language as illustrated in Muli's expressed sentiments, "we will be talking about fashion later," shifts the discussion from a political interview to fashion. It is unlikely Muli would have used a similar language while interviewing a male politician. The media also portrays women politicians as negatively aggressive. This view is illustrated in Muli's remark that "people said Nazlin is a crazy wild cat," hence questioning her ability to lead. The reference of the term "people" referenced here further indicates that a majority of voters perceive her as being combative and unfeminine, therefore, unacceptable.

The focus on the aspirant's marital status by Muli is gendered. Through her interviewing style, Muli not only questions and undermines Nazlin's leadership ability, but also her tone seems grossly inappropriate. "Talking about your matrimonial case, now that you are likely to be the mother of this nation, should you be the first female President of the Republic of Kenya, your home situation, your matrimonial case, what was the situation with that, and where do things currently stand?" This excerpt reflects a line of questioning that is negative and offensive, which she wound not use while interviewing male politicians. As a woman, Nazlin is forced to elaborate on her status. Sex-based terms (e.g., "mother" or "first female") stereotype the aspirant in feminized frames and consistent with the concepts of trivialization and condemnation (Tuchman 1978; Fountaine & McGregor, 2001).

Thirdly, Muli's opening remarks for her segment fronts a gendered trope. Her comment below highlights and emphasizes Nazlin's femininity as being more important than her leadership skills.

[T]he 2017 General Elections is expected to be one of the most hotly contested and a woman who does not shy away from the big race has thrown her weight in the race. Rather, [she] has thrown her weight in the ring. Nazlin Omar is seeking to unseat the incumbent Head of State. She is the only female presidential aspirant.

In this context, if Nazlin were male, the opening gender marking would not have occurred. Muli's use of the phrase "only female presidential aspirant" emphasizes Nazlin's feminine image. Additionally, the use of the expression like she has "thrown her weight in the race" and "thrown her weight in the ring" conjure a stereotypical male domain in politics rather than a fair competitive space. This highlights a pre-determined male race that points to her pre-destined defeat.

The framing of the female aspirant in Sample 1 further points to gendered mediation. There is evidence of the use of conventional news frames, which treat male candidates as normative.

Muli, in this interview, seems to favor a masculine narrative even though she is a woman. For instance, she alludes to the fact that presidential elections in Kenya are usually a "two-horse race." The term "horse" is a masculine metaphor for power or strength, which promotes a masculine political image and narrative. The number "two" metaphorically constructs a space for only "two seasoned politicians," who are also male. Muli later clarifies this as a race between Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta. "[T]he NASA flag bearer is Raila Odinga, a seasoned politician, and of course the incumbent, President Uhuru Kenyatta." This qualification of Raila as "a seasoned politician" and the incumbent Uhuru, indicates that both men are politicians. In contrast, Nazlin understands the game of politics as "a two-horse race" and the men are better positioned to win. The implication behind the incumbent aspirant is that he has power, money and a competitive edge over other aspirants, including the female competitor who lacks resources. Therefore, "the two-horse race" supports the status quo and constructs politics in stereotypically masculine terms (Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). The use of the word "giant" is gendered in its reference to the likes of Raila and Uhuru and depicts the female candidate in a non-starter position. While the term "low popularity" implies the female aspirant is unseasoned in politics and, therefore, her vehicle in the race (Independent Party) lacks popularity compared to the two famous parties: NASA (Raila Odinga) and Jubilee (Uhuru Kenyatta).

The media coverage of female aspirants is also wanting. Mainstream media did not cover Nazlin's presidential bid despite declaring her candidacy a year earlier. She, thus, had to resort to social media channels like Facebook to engage with voters one-on-one. Nazlin notes, "It is not a late entry, I think may be Citizen did not capture me earlier ... I declared my bid in May last year … My bid on Facebook trended, Lilian. It trended! ... I am engaged with Kenyans directly on Facebook." While the visibility of women on social media has increased, structural systematic gendering of women in politics takes place daily on television, radio broadcasts, and in the print media (Fountainne & McGregor, 2001). Instances of omission, trivialization and condemnation continue despite greater political gains by women. Their marginalization and trivialization, in terms of quantity and quality coverage in mainstream media stations, has occasioned women candidates' overreliance on social media channels. This symbolic female annihilation (Tuchman, 1978) involves media practices whereby women's experiences are constantly effaced, illustrative of gendered mediation. In terms of quantity of time, Nazlin was given less coverage, if not blacked out altogether.

As demonstrated in Sample 1, there is also the tendency for women themselves to contribute to their trivialization and symbolic annihilation (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003). What this means is that they do not wait for the media or presenter to trivialize or condemn them, but they do it themselves. For instance, Nazlin draws on her feminine attributes in her quest for power by providing detailed, but counterproductive account of her marital status and ongoing divorce case, which evokes mixed feelings. Despite years of a stable marital status, Nazlin's narration of her troubled marriage only serves to trivialize her experiences and presidential bid. As Fountaine & McGregor (2001) have observed, women political candidates are often condemned by the media for their marital status. For these reasons, the media frequently trivializes their parenthood for political gain as outlined in Tuchman's symbolic annihilation.

Moreover, Muli, an anchorwoman, engages in framing, which undermines Nazlin's candidacy. Her line of questioning borders on the use of conventional news frames that treat male politicians favorably and as norm. In addition, the language she uses creates an impression that female candidates cannot outdo men in politics. This conclusion is based on her stereotypical

presentation of the female candidate as a mother burdened by domestic woes that might impact her performance if elected into office. Most importantly, we need to recognize that media personnel have been socialized into prevailing cultural norms and values to the extent that they also engage in gendered framing and mediation regardless of their gender.

**Sample 2**

*This program aired on April 30, 2017 on NTV during the 9:00pm News segment on "Women in Politics" by Larry Madowo. The female politicians interviewed were Susan Kihika (vying to be the senator of Nakuru County) and Dr. Joyce Laboso (seeking to be the governor of Bomet County). The runtime for this interview is 14:51 minutes and can be accessed at* [https://youtu.be/K9c9Y-qsCBc](https://youtu.be/K9c9Y-qsCBc).

*Madowo*: I am now joined in the studio by two ladies who are on the verge of making history: Susan Kihika is the speaker in the Nakuru County Assembly and she has just won the Jubilee nominations for Senate. So, you could be the first woman senator in Nakuru County. Congratulations on winning that.

*Kihika:* Thank you.

*Madowo*: And Dr. Joyce Laboso is the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and just won the Jubilee nominations there for governor. So, you could be one of the first female governors in the County, in the country, actually.

*Laboso*: Okay, thank you.

*Madowo:* Congratulations to you both.

*Kihika and Laboso*: Thank you.

*Madowo*: It must have been a very difficult campaign, but you both had such convincing wins. You had something like over 200,000 votes

*Kihika*: 270,000.

*Madowo*: Two hundred and seventeen thousand votes is unheard of in a nomination. How did that happen?

*Kihika*: I guess the people of Nakuru County were ready for change and they thought and believed that I am the best person to take up the mantle and bring the change that they need.

*Madowo (addressing Laboso)*: You also had a convincing defeat and your opponent conceded, which is something that is rare. A lot of politicians have been going about saying, no, no, no, it was not free and fair, [but] in your case, they agreed she beat me.

*Laboso*: Yes.  Because I think we had a very free and fair nominations and we are happy that the party decided to cancel what had happened on Friday … So, with the Monday elections that were held, it was clear that I had really won that election in a free and fair way. I do really want to also say thank you for my opponent or my competitor because by conceding also it really showed a gentleman way of doing mature politics.

*Madowo:* I wish more people … haven't done that, and this is not just in Jubilee [but] in ODM as well, in smaller parties [and] we were just talking about the Wiper situation where there is a tussle, the one Wiper chairman even resigned. Why is it that politicians do not agree when they are

defeated? I start with you Dr. Laboso because you have been here longer. You have been in politics longer.

*Laboso* (*laughs*): That is true. I think a lot of the time it is the amount of effort that you put into the campaigns. It is really grueling, and many many times, you really do put your best. You are down even financially, morally, physically, and by the time a result comes that is not favorable to you, sometimes it is not easy to take it. So, it is understandable. Then again, many times, you find that maybe when there are malpractices, when clearly there has been maybe vote stuffing, or things have not gone quiet right and with all that you have gone through, it is sometimes difficult not to concede easily. But like I said, when the process is very clear, all of us had our various [and] different tallying centers. I am talking about the case of Bomet. So, you know, by the time we were coming to that hall, all of us already had our own results from our own tallying centers. So, it was difficult for anybody to say anything else.

*Madowo:* Alright. That is out of the situation Susan that there is. I think the Jubilee appeals tribunal today was dealing with something like 55 different appeal cases.

Kihika: 400 actually.

*Madowo:* Nearly 400 different appeal cases. So, are you surprised by how many people are just contesting the losses?

*Kihika:* Actually, considering that we had about 8,000 candidates, if the people contesting are about 400, I don't think in the scheme of things that [that is] really a very big percentage. But, at the same time, like Dr. Laboso said, I mean as politicians, you put so much into it, so much resources. You invest so much emotions and everything and you have supporters every day telling you, you know, we are ahead. So, at the end of the day, sometimes when the results come out, maybe people feel that they did not lose, even though the process was fair. At the same time, too, you have people who have very, very thin margins; they have lost by a very thin margin, and maybe they also feel that the process may not have been as fair. Granted, I do feel that this time, really the Jubilee party really tried to have very, very, very fair and open nominations, but I am not surprised by the number.

*Madowo:* Okay. Dr. Laboso, the two-thirds gender bill did not sail through this house that you were part of. Why was that?

*Laboso*: We really tried. We tried as a house. We tried as members of KEWOPA, which is the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association. We tried through even the civil society. You know, holding several different forums with our male counterparts. You know, trying to really get them through the fact that this was not about us. You know, asking for more seats, but it was in the Constitution. It was a requirement and it was only parliament that was supposed to pass that legislation. It could not come from anywhere else, otherwise it would have happened, but anyway we did not succeed with this one.

*Madowo*: Why? Is it male chauvinism?

*Laboso*: Uhm (*pause*). Yes. I can put it down to that because one they thought already there are enough women in parliament. Some of them even complained the perfumes are too much, you know! … some things which you really feel should not really count, and ooh there we are already giving them enough problems; those of us who are there. So, it boils down to male chauvinism and maybe still that perception that politics really is a male world. It is for the men. It is not a game for women.

*Madowo:* This is the world Susan you are going into, from making laws in the county. Now, you are going to be making laws at the national level, but she [Laboso] says there is obvious sexism among the male MPs and senators.

*Kihika*: No. I agree. I mean, just the nature of politics seems to be very, very male dominated. And even as we go to the next level, meaning, for example, for me from the county assembly into the senate, I am expecting that. But, at the same time, I don't think we should shy away from doing it. Eventually, we must do it. So, many of us that we no longer require, have that requirement because it seems it is hard to get it to pass. And I think, maybe the positive side of it is having failed to go through. A lot of us women are now really understanding that it is *gonna* be hard to get this given to us, not that we just want it given to us, but that we must fight it out with our male counterparts. And that is what we are doing.

*Madowo:* In the last election, there were a lot of women, who were running for seats other than women representatives, who complained that their opponents, the male opponents said "*Tumewapatia ile ya wanawake. Mbona wanataka hizi zingine?*" (We have given them a women's position. Why do they want other positions?). Did you experience that?

*Kihika*: A lot of it actually. I actually really did experience it. And a lot of my … the people that I was competing with for the senate seat were males, and the theory of what they were using was saying that for me, I have a reserved seat, which is the women rep seat. So, then, I should give way and cede the senate seat to a male. But obviously, when we have a population that sometimes does not understand that the other seats are open to all of us, and only the women rep one is open to the women, for affirmative action purposes, then it becomes a bit of a problem. But what we have done is [that] we have done a lot of civic education as we move around campaigning. But it is a big problem.

*Madowo:* You laughed [to Laboso] when I asked that. Did you also hear that?

*Laboso* (*Laughs*): Oh yes! But like you said, I have been here longer in politics and we have spent a lot of time really telling [the] electorate [that] this is an affirmative action seat. It is because over the years, despite education, we are represented in all the other spheres. Whether it is in private sector, in business, in education, in whichever sector except the political arena. And that this was affirmative action that we have struggled over the years. We have never gone beyond 20%. In fact, this is probably the highest that we have gone to 20% of elected. You know, actually elected plus even the affirmative action. We still haven't managed to reach the 30%. So, we are still below 30 percent.

*Madowo:* Alright

*Laboso:* So, really, Yes. You get those kinds of comments, but I do not get as much as I have said because I have been there longer. And, I have been explaining myself that, that is not a seat that I want to go for … or that I am interested in. Because I think there are more deserving people who have not been in politics that can be able to benefit from that seat.

*Madowo:* The battle for you is coming Dr. Laboso in August when you face Isaac Ruto.

*Laboso*: Yes. I am not looking at it as a bigger battle than what I have come from because this one was a real battle because I know that Bomet is a Jubilee zone. It is 100% Jubilee. And, I knew that this was almost the final. It doesn't matter whether it is Isaac Ruto or any other Ruto. Well, not any other Ruto, the one I am fully behind is the Deputy President, who is in the presidency and who is in Jubilee….

*Madowo:* But Isaac Ruto is an incumbent. He is a party leader. He is a NASA Principal.

*Laboso*: Aah, you give him all the accolades you want to accord to him and, you know, yesterday we learnt about his new position in the NASA coalition. Some people are calling it an Assistant Minister. Others are calling it, you know, all sorts of names because it does not exist in the Constitution. And having all that fought so hard [*pause*] to come and be given a position that does not exist in the Constitution, that is up to him. But I keep saying, I am not fighting Isaac Ruto. I am going out to the people of Bomet to sell my policies, to sell myself to them. It is up to Isaac Ruto to go and do the same thing. Sell his NASA to the people of Bomet. And I can assure you, they are not about to buy it because [when you] look at all voting patterns, of the Kipsigis from when they started voting. And I can assure you, this is not going to be a very different one, particularly when they have one of their own as the number two person in the country, who is just about to also ascend to the presidency. They are not going to leave or cede that position and go to a number five or a number nothing because we don't know what that position is.

*Madowo:* Alright, Susan Kihika, a question for you from Kennedy Mwaniki: "Susan Kihika's campaign was high profile, where did she get the funds and she is an MCA and a speaker of the County Assembly. Somebody else mentioned here that it is rumored you have spent as much as 500 million shillings."

*Kihika*: Oh my God! I wish, I mean, I don't know, Larry. Why I keep getting this question of finances? And again, I have said, I believe the reason it keeps coming up is because I am a woman. I don't believe that I have spent any more than my male counterparts, but, at the same time, I think when the males are able to spend that, then it seems normal. It seems okay! But when a woman is able to come out there and give as good as the men are giving, then there has to be questions to it. So, anyway, five hundred [million] is ludicrous. There is no such kind of money spent. But, at the same time, I have a lot of friends, who believe in me. And I was able to get them to come together and fundraise for me to be able to put [up] a formidable campaign. So that I am able to not only do a mediocre average campaign, but to be able to do better than those that I was fighting against and then come out on top.

*Madowo:* So, you think there is double standard here?

*Kihika*: Absolutely. I believe.

*Madowo:* Because there is one tabloid that even claimed you have a sponsor that is paying for all of this.

*Laboso:* (*Expresses surprise*)

*Kihika*: Larry, I mean, I really dislike that! Uhm. Again, I think it is a double standard. Again, the reason that it is happening is because I am a woman. Why is it that … why can't it be my partner or my boyfriend? Why would it have to be a sponsor? Just simply because I am a woman. Why aren't we hearing who their wives or girlfriends are? Because they are men and that is okay. You know, so I think there is a lot double standard in politics, but it is not going to deter me. I am doing everything I can to win the seat. I have come this far. I had 270,000 and my closest competitor had 49,000. So, clearly, I am doing something right. But I am also pushing forward so that I am also successful come August. And so that eventually and I hope and pray that this double standard ends at some point.

*Madowo*: Alright, I am out of time, but really quick somebody, B. M. Muriithi, wanted me to ask both of you: "What do you think of the fact that neither NASA nor Jubilee has a woman in their

top leadership?" Dr. Laboso first.

*Laboso*: I cannot talk for Jubilee. They may not have now, but I can assure you that Jubilee has been very practical in the way they support the women. I can tell you that my party supported us even in the last election. In 2013, we had the highest number of women in parliament. Twelve or is it thirteen out of the sixteen came from Jubilee. So, I can tell you that Jubilee not only says that they support women, they actually go out of their way to do it.

*Madowo:* Susan really quick.

*Kihika*: And I think actually we have seen the commitment from Jubilee in trying to get the women to get real positions. And just us sitting here is an example of that. We have seen even from the Jubilee nominations the number of women who have been nominated for Governor, which we have not seen that yet in NASA, I believe. But, I was a bit disappointed to see five principles in NASA without one woman out of the five. And I am glad, and I am happy, that our party leaders really walk the talk and it is not just talk, but they have helped us women rise to the top.

*Madowo:* Alright. I have to leave it there. Thank you both for coming in. We appreciate your time. All the best in August.

*Kihika* and *Laboso*: Thank you


**Analysis**

In Sample 2, feminization is the dominant strategy used by the presenter, Larry Madowo, as he engages two women aspirants: Susan Kihika and Dr. Joyce Laboso. From the beginning of his interview, Madowo employs feminized tropes to portray the women as unique candidates who are set to vie for top leadership positions, senatorial and gubernatorial. He alludes to how uncommon it is for a woman to garner over 270,000 votes in a nomination. He questions the aspirants to explain and justify how it happened, "Two hundred and seventeen thousand votes is unheard of in a nomination. How did that happen?" Madowo's frames the question in a manner that seems to challenge the validity of their successful nomination. He derides the female's win and the men who strangely conceded their defeat. "You also had a convincing defeat and your opponent conceded, which is something that is rare … [but] in your case, they agreed…." Such perceptions devalue women because it appears that it is not norm for a man to concede defeat, especially if the opponent is a woman. This example illustrates the feminized framing in the media.

Madowo also introduces the two-thirds gender bill and questions how it could not pass in parliament, yet women, like Dr. Laboso, were members of parliament. In this case, he seems to suggest that women are their own enemies when it comes to issues that concern them in parliament. Further, he questions as to whether male chauvinism was the real reason behind the unsuccessful gender bill, a fact Laboso confirms in her response:

> [Men] thought already there are enough women in parliament. Some of them even complained the perfumes are too much, you know! … We are already giving them enough problems; those of us who are there. So, it boils down to male chauvinism and maybe still that perception that politics really is a male world. It is for the men. It is not a game for women.

Laboso elaborates on how male chauvinism is rife in parliament. Male parliamentarians discriminate against their female counterparts by highlighting their femininity, including the use

of perfumes, stereotyping of women as problematic, and promoting the perception that there are already enough women in parliament, and that politics is not for women. Such descriptions are negative and undermine women's success in the political arena.

Madowo further demonstrates his gendered views when he claims that women have a reserved position, Women Representative, and tasks Laboso and Kihika to justify why they are vying for other elective positions. "In the last election, there were a lot of women, who were running for seats other than women representatives, who complained that their opponents, the male opponents, said "*Tumewapatia ile ya wanawake. Mbona wanataka hizi zingine?"* (We have given them a women's position. Why do they want other positions?). The women confirmed that the Constitution does not preclude them from running for other political offices. The Women Representative position is an affirmative action aimed to boost their representation in parliament.

Further, Madowo, questions the women's viability as candidates by comparing them to their male competitors and past leaders. For example, he asks Laboso, "The battle for you is coming Dr. Laboso in August when you face Isaac Ruto." Madowo sees Ruto as a force to reckon with when it comes to politics and this could be a challenge for Laboso. He further suggests that Ruto cannot be defeated and heaps all manner of accolades on him thereby devaluing the woman aspirant. "But Isaac Ruto is an incumbent. He is a party leader. He is a NASA Principal." This characterization of Ruto diminishes Laboso's ability to win.

The use of clichéd images, which construct women as financially incapable of financing their own run for office, is sexist. For instance, Madowo reads a commentary from a viewer who questions the money source Susan Kihika was using in her campaigns. "Susan Kihika, a question for you from Kennedy Mwaniki [is] '… where did she get the funds? … It is rumored you have spent as much as 500 million shillings.'" Mwaniki's comment seems to suggest that, as norm, women cannot have enough campaign money to run for a political office. If they do, then, the money must be from a male sponsor, a term in Kenyan context that demeans women by casting them as gold diggers. Kihika, in her defense, embraces her professionalism; she has her own money and willing friends who have been supporting her financially. Madowo then brings up the issue of "sponsor," which refers to a man who meets the financial needs of a woman, to whom he is not married, in exchange of sexual favors. He further harangues her when he reads, "Because there is one tabloid that even claimed you have a sponsor that is paying for all of this." This remark is a very archetypal marking, portraying women aspirants as sexual objects who depend on men for financial support. This negative framing hampers women's bid for political offices as illustrated by the fact that in 2017, Kenya's political parties did not have any female presidential candidate. This marginalization is highly gendered and consistent with the trivialization and condemnation of women political candidates (Tuchman, 1978).

**CONCLUSION**

As demonstrated in this article, media framing of female candidates hinders women's chances of electoral success. The media's preoccupation with the maternal and familial statuses of women politicians trivializes and condemns them to defeat. In addition, their stereotypical female framing with clichéd images of women as mothers, beautiful, and stylish connects women more to their physical features and appearances rather than to their professional attributes and qualifications for office. This further reduces and questions their ability to run for office or lead, hence hindering their electoral chances of success. From this article's findings, we can conclude that the press

considers politics to be a male domain and relies on masculine language to describe it. The news interviews featured herein, therefore, have a masculine narrative that actively perpetuates the masculine conception of politics and politicians, which works against women candidates.

The findings of this study have many implications. First, they could help the media to re-evaluate its unfair treatment of female politicians. Secondly, they could help us to understand the role of the media in maintaining society's male dominated political power structures. Thirdly, they could also contribute to knowledge theory besides helping to guide contemporary journalism education. Moreover, the article can help female political candidates to engage more effectively with the media and to help correct negative images on women's roles in politics and public affairs. Finally, the article could promote a more balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women in the media.

Although there has been some visible progress of women representation in the media, their portrayal still remains negative, sexist, and often their concerns are overlooked. This shortcoming can be attributed to the inadequate training of journalists and managers, and a limited number of women decision makers in the media. This article, therefore, calls for Kenyans to address and eradicate "sexism" in society as a means to promote gender equality in its media.

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# Short Stories

# Enemy of the People

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"Omosh, stop. Stop, will you? Stop, Omosh. Will you stop, Omosh?" The Governor of Bichibichi County pleads with the Minister for Finance, as he pulls away his new creamy chocolate Galaxy S7 Samsung tablet. Their feet swish dryly across the smooth floor tiles as they scramble for the phone. In the first quiver of the morning sunshine, these two are really plunged in a milieu of melee.

"So, I am a 'nobody' to you. Perhaps, you don't trust me. I won't tell anyone. I swear." Omosh stabs his finger on the floor, then licks it as an assurance of a deal done. Honorable Gentleman Bazu manages to snatch back his tablet. His eyes are still fixated on Omosh.

"Spies are all over. Even friends can be traitors," Bazu says. "Last week alone, three ministers were fired because of allegations of corruption. Close friends, who spied on their secret projects and reported them to the Director of Criminal Investigations, betrayed them. I don't want this. Of course, I trust you. But if you betray me, you will have gained no ticket to heaven. You are a smart thief just like me!" Silence follows.

"I can feel it."

"What?"

"Fear is delicious when death is near."

"And death isn't delicious when fear is near!"

"Exactly!"

Bazu scrolls through photos in his gallery.

"This is the thing," Omosh says, beholding one of the photos Bazu shows him. He takes the tablet in his hands and studies the photo more keenly. His voice is tremulous. Delicious jets of anxiety massage his mind. He bites his lower lip. Sweat scrawls out of his wiry hands.

"Impeccable!" Omosh's voice scrapes out.

"Of course!"

"How did you manage to build this palace … He! He! He!"

"Come over!" Bazu takes Omosh by hand. "Last time you told me it cost you fifty million Ricafan shillings to build this palace. Where did you say you got your money?"

"That Dispensary on the left of my compound … That, take a closer look."

He points towards it from the window. Bazu's eyes follows Omosh's finger to his pointing.

"I was in charge of its renovations and expansions. It was supposed to be a 'Level Five' Hospital. The government allocated seventy million for that purpose. I used my wisdom and managed to renovate and expand it at a cost of twenty million Ricafan shillings only! The rest… As they say, is history."

"Sure, you told me this good news last year when we met for your birthday."

"What about you? Your house has mesmerized me for a while now. I used to think I have the most palatial home, but yours is at another level in size and perfection. The tiles in this photo were imported from France. The roofing materials were from Italy. The glasses of the windows were from America. I cannot detail even the design itself. It is heaven on earth. Its grills are gold coated. Each aspect of it is a manifestation of the crude wealth soaking our nation. Congratulations! It is the best palace I have ever seen!"

"Thank you for your kind words. In my case …" he scrolls the tablet and displays another photo of his house, with the neighboring road clearly captured.

"This road was meant to be tarmacked. It is fifty kilometers long. Two hundred million was allocated to this project. Out of my wisdom, I built the palace you see in the picture. At least, I now own a palace like you. It cost me one hundred and fifty million to build. The other fifty million was used to coat murram on the road."

"Congratulations!"

"Thank you …"

"How can you spend fifty million on murram?"

"Ah! I spent only two million. I kept the rest of it in my house for each day I have beggars at my gate. A good number of them come. Some are students who want me to clear their school fees. They complain that the bursaries are not sufficient. Out of my wisdom, I organize fundraisings and people contribute, but I ensure I give twice as much as them. Come to my place, students from campus sing my name."

"You are a rabbit!"

"Some of the beggars are elderly. I bought some millet that I fermented. I feed them on porridge each day they visit me at dawn. I give them a few cents to go look after themselves as they wait for their deaths."

"You are a man of the people!"

"For pregnant women, I buy them a few items when they go into the labor rooms."

"Wow!"

"Since last week, unfortunately, I have realized my money is getting depleted. With an election coming next month, I will have to sell my car and use the money to nest my name in their hearts."

"I tell you, you are the wisest man I have ever met."

"I am humbled bro!"

As the men talk, Sophy, Omosh's wife, walks into the room and serves them breakfast. On the table, there is a pink thermos flask of boiled milk. Some tea bags, coffee, and chocolate tins elbow each other on the brown tray. Hot cakes, oven fresh, sit in the middle of the table. Their sweet aroma fills the air.

"Good morning," she says. "Welcome to breakfast!" she adds with a smile and leaves the room.

"Oh, thank you!" the two exclaim as though on cue.

"It is self-service! We are men!" Omosh says.

"Alright. Where do we wash our hands?" Bazu asks.

"Follow me," Omosh says. He rises and heads to the sink in the next room to his right.

When they return to the table, they relish their breakfast for about five minutes.

"What a wonderful meal! We must build our bodies with these fruits of our independence," claims Bazu.

"No objection!"

"Are we attending today's meeting?"

As Omosh is about to respond, there is a knock at the door. "Come in!" he says.

Sophy enters. She draws Omosh aside and softly whispers something into his ear. He smiles. She patiently waits for his feedback.

"Now, who is that coming to see me at this time?" Omosh says with irritation. "I'm about to leave for the meeting."

Sophy waits patiently for his response. Flip flop! Flip flop … A woman pops into the sitting room breathing heavily.

"Onarepo! Pris. My son is dying. He akstentary hit his arm wit a brant opchect wair digging in the farm. I haf tried ooro the haps I know. Pat no rikafary. He needs the tokta. Pat poor me, no cent. Onarepo, pris help. He is a form four candidate. Pris, onarepo, haf massi on him. I wir do anyting you want, pat pris, help my son, he is dying, pris onarepo …"

"I am sorry," Omosh says, but he does not mean it. His eyes betray him as though detached from the distressing news.

Sophy covers her eyes to restrain her tears. Bazu pulls Omosh aside.

"Bro, this is a bucket of votes. I came with my limousine. Let us rush her son to the hospital. The villagers will be glad to hear you have helped their son. You could offer to pay his hospital bill. When you stand for the presidential office as you are planning, you can count on their votes…"

Immediately, they leave the sitting room. As they step outside, they meet several villagers who need Omosh's help. He hands his wife a bundle of notes to distribute to them.

"Let Kevo collect your identity cards and help you register as new members to our party. We need to recruit more members to our party. *Everyone* should belong to the Ricafa of Today (ROT) party," Bazu pleads.

"I cannot and I will not do that," Kevo shouts in protest. "It will be a violation of their freedom. Let those who wish to belong to this party do so without any compulsion. Do you want these people to belong to you because you have fed them on fermented porridge and given them some tokenism?"

"This is the problem with our universities today. Students go there and become stupid. This boy doesn't understand that I am your man. And it is my duty to take care of you as I am doing now," Omosh says.

"Don't mind him," Bazu shouts, his eyes are scarlet red.

"If it is philanthropy, let it be one of empowering people to be free and autonomous. Not what you are doing. We want better roads, better schools, better hospitals, better pay for our tea and coffee …" Kevo yells, jerking forward in confronting Omosh.

Everyone is afraid. Omosh swings his hand to slap Kevo, but Kevo folds his into a tight fist ready to receive Omosh's blow.

"Wait a minute!" Bazu intervenes and pulls Kevo aside. Omosh's slap nearly licks Kevo cheek.

Leaning forward, Bazu whispers gently into Kevo's left ear, "This is the *big* man. You need him today and tomorrow. Don't annoy him. Just walk away. He could shoot you, you know!"

Then, he turns to Omosh, "Forgive him. He doesn't know what he is saying. He will understand in due time. Let us rush the sick boy to the hospital!"

"Get out of my compound, you enemy of progress!" Omosh orders Kevo, who gives in to his command without a word. The crowd watches this exchange in silence. Kevo storms out of the gate and disappears. His mind is filled with rage, as he contemplates what to do next: *I will roast him at that meeting today.*

"Let's all converge for the meeting at eleven o'clock," Omosh reminds the crowd.

"Yeees!" they all shout in unison.

Omosh, Bazu, and the woman enter an air-conditioned limousine. As they rush to her home, their limousine is stuck in the mud. The trio disembark it while the guards remain behind to keep an eye on it, protect it from would be thieves. Omosh, Bazu and the woman hire two motorbikes instead. When they arrive at the woman's home, they pick-up her sick son and dash to the Bichibichi Dispensary.

After meeting with the receptionist, a nurse tells them that the doctor is not around because he had been urgently called to join fellow doctors in their demonstrations for a better pay. The men and woman looked at each other in dismay. Omosh wonders why he didn't know about this. He remembers Dawa Safi Hospital in Bichibichi town, a private hospital about ten kilometers away.

Before they can decide on what to do, Omosh receives a phone call.

"Hello sir! … It is time … shall we go ahead and start the meeting or put it off?"

"Continue as planned," Omosh yells into the receiver. "We are on our way. Sorry for the delay."

Before they leave, Omosh advices the woman to take her son to Dawa Safi Hospital and gives her a wad of notes to pay for her son's treatment. She is glad. Her son smiles. Omosh and Bazu board one of the two motorbikes. They must get to their limousine first before going to the meeting. The woman and her son head to the hospital using another motorbike.

Along the way, Omosh and Bazu solicit the help of a few strong men to rescue their stuck limousine. After that, their drive to the meeting is slow, but steady paced because of the previous day's downpour. The road to Mamboleo Stadium, with its yawning chasms and potholes, splash mud on their creamy limousine. Upon arrival, the crowd jubilantly welcomes Omosh and his other officials. As the people surround their vehicle, he doles out brand new notes to those near him.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" the master of ceremony bellows, trying to calm down the excited crowd. "Ladies and gentlemen, let's all rise and welcome our guest of honor: The Honorable Gentleman, Francis Mokua (Omosh). I see he is accompanied with our beloved Governor, Honorable Gentleman Erick Biringi (Bazu)." The men walk on the red carpet to the podium.

Omosh is upbeat. This is a moment for him to make his case for his presidential candidacy and to sound the trumpet about his manifesto on building a 'bottoms-up' economy. By now, everyone is standing up. The volleys of applause sustain the grins of these two men. Bazu takes the microphone and congratulates the people for coming. He then welcomes Omosh. Omosh steps forward to speak.

"My noble friend, Bazu, fellow officials, ladies and gentlemen … good afternoon!" he bellows.

"Good afternoon, Big Man!" the crowd thunders.

"Today, I was really touched," Omosh says. There is a sparkle in his eyes. "My people, let me tell you!" he adds. "A woman came to my house seeking my help this morning. She had a sick son."

He falls silent and allows a brief murmur from the crowd to follow. "I took her and her son in person to our dispensary here! Do you know what happened?" he asks. He doesn't wait for their response. "The doctor was not there! My people … You see, the modern disease of demonstrations …"

The crowd is silent, absorbing Omosh's message.

"The boy's mother took him to another hospital. I paid for his hospital bill−twenty thousand shillings. I am still willing to assist if need be." He pauses, takes a deep breath and scans his audience.

"My people, it is time for change. And I have a good plan of a 'bottom-up' economy. Using this strategy, my government will engage the 'hustlers' to build a 'hustler nation' that is sensitive to the needs of the economically struggling citizens. Your needs are what I esteem most. This is why, for example, I took the initiative to paint the gate of our Bichibichi Dispensary, which was horrible before I came into office as the Member of Parliament …"

"We want a well-equipped modern hospital! Not paints and gates …" Kevo explodes from the crowd.

"Of course, I was coming to that point. I have a mega plan to eradicate corruption in this community. Without it, our hospital cannot receive the modern equipment it deserves. Without it, our roads cannot also be built."

"Nooo! … What have you done so far to eradicate corruption?" Kevo challenges him and the crowd breaks into laughter, applauding the speaker.

"Look, I want to be your next President," Omosh says. "I have served you as a Finance Minister for long and I understand how to run a nation. Many people strongly support my ambition and decision to be your next President. As president, all thieves will be imprisoned!"

Hearing this, Kevo remembers how his sister came home late, on her birthday last month after a celebration in Bichibichi town with Bazu. She brought home a heavy shopping bag as a gift from him. She said that when Bazu was drunk, he explained how Omosh looted the money meant

to build the local hospital.

Kevo whispers gently to those around him, "Let the intellectual and moral faculties of mankind be declared impotent, if you still believe in the empty words of Omosh. Omosh is the hyena we hear about in our folklores. He has stolen money from the people and plans to loot more. Omosh is a liar."

A searing silence follows.

"Honorable Omosh! Rumor has it that you were involved in the theft scandal of the money that was meant to build our hospital …" Kevo challenges.

"Thief! Thief! Thief!" the crowd retorts.

"My people, if I were corrupt, I would not have opened my mouth to condemn corruption," Omosh says in his defense. He pauses for a second before speaking again.

"Can a person cut the hand that feeds him?" he adds. "Those rumors are delicious lies cooked up by my competitors who think by tainting my name, they will change your views of me. That by calling me a thief, you will run away from me." Omosh pauses once more and wipes tears from his eyes.

"Omosh is our man! Viva Omosh! Viva Omosh!" a few voices sing his praises. The rest click and mutter against Omosh.

"My people! …. Don't be deceived by my enemies. They are the enemies of the people. I have your success in my heart. I know you need a better affordable education for your children."

"Yeees!" the crowd roars in unison.

"I know you need better roads"

"Yeees!"

"I know you deserve better hospitals, with modern equipment!"

"Yeees!"

"This will be good for our health. We will not need to travel far to get medical attention. Our expecting mothers will find assistance right here in our local hospital! That is a promise I hope to keep!"

"Wooow!"

"I will create jobs for our idle youth by inviting investors to our nation to open up industries that will use our agricultural produce as raw materials: Our bananas, sisal, pyrethrum, coffee, tea. All of them will find a global market with better pay."

"Amazing. Omosh you're a man of the people!"

"I will build giant dams for irrigation and generate hydroelectric power that will even be sold to our neighboring nations."

"You indeed will be our president, Omosh!"

"I have been keenly watching our leaders and I can tell you that they are disgusting. They are corrupt. They are thieves. They think only of themselves. That is why our local hospital is now in decay and not modernized. That is why our roads are still horrible. That is why our bursary

budgets are too small. That is why our youths are jobless …"

"But you have been with them, *SIR*," Kevo interjects. "Twice, have you not served as the Finance Minister? Haven't you?"

Omosh is tongue-tied. The crowd laughs loudly and claps sporadically.

"My people, it is true I have been a Finance Minister, but I haven't served you as President," Omosh says. He sucks in a large clump of air, adjusts his navy-blue suit, made in Italy and awkwardly taps the podium. His eyebrows are wrinkled and his forehead creased in rage.

"You arrived here ten minutes ago in your air-conditioned limousine. You strutted on this red carpet to the podium. Your wife, with her milky skin and golden hair, sat beside you. Bazu, our Governor, stabs his forehead with his finger asleep. Have you seen our rags? Do you know how we are dragging our lives as a burden? Your presence made us collect the crumbs of our dead happiness …" Kevo shouts in tears. The crowd claps for him again.

"Calm down young man," Omosh says. His patience is tested as rage boils within. "We are here to join hands and build our nation …" he growls.

"Your presence here is a scandal. We don't want to hear your sweet lies. We want to see progress. We want to see our society developed. We need better actions, not sweet words deficient of commitment," Kevo insists.

"Tell him!" the crowd roars in unison.

"He is mad. He can't understand what a manifesto is! Guards! Take him to the mental hospital!" Omosh barks. The guards grab Kevo and drag him aside for interrogation.

Meanwhile, the youths, who had dropped out of school for lack of school fees, flock in Mamboleo Stadium in droves. They are jobless and hopeless. Some of their parents are arriving as well. They are in rags and most emaciated because of malnutrition. Pain and sorrow crisscross their faces. Among them are many who cannot afford three meals a day. Some have not eaten since morning. They long for a leader who can wisely emancipate them by good government policies. They are tired of the current corrupt regime.

"This village, Mamboleo, has no hospital. No electricity. No internet. Dear citizens of Ricafa, Ricafa is rotten in underdevelopment, greed and corruption … even our political party is rotten … ROT …" Kevo says in protest. The guards apprehend him with their guns cocked.

"Leave him alone! Leave him alone! Leave him alone!" the crowd cries.

Beste, the village mad woman takes them by surprise with a huge clod of soil in her right hand. She throws it to the podium and strikes Omosh. Some particles fall on Bazu who ducks them to no avail.

"*Sitiubiti*!" she shouts and runs away. "Rif my son free … do you want to kir him as you …"

Before she can finish her sentence, the guards whisper something into Kevo's ear without blinking and command him to leave the meeting. He takes off like someone who has fifteen lungs and joins his mad mother. The crowd follows them with their vacant eyes. He is their last hope on earth and now no more. Somewhere in Beste's heart, out of the depths of her flesh, blood and bone, she unconsciously invokes justice to reign for her murdered husband. For he had opposed the area

Governor's decision to construct a dumpsite across River Mogusi. Yet, this river serves the natives with drinking water. The murderers injected Beste with mercury in the head. She has never been sane again. She has two children: Kevo and Joyce. Both of them were at school when this tragedy took place, three years ago.

Right now, the woman who had taken her son to the hospital for treatment arrives in tears to the meeting. Kevo and his mother have long gone. The guards, like poster boards, stand still.

"My son … my son is deti … Onarepo! Pris teki tis your money. I nefa spent it. My dear son, as we araift osibito, they tacht him, ten seit he is deti … Uuuuuiiii … Uuuuuiiii … Uuuuuiiii … my son is deti …" she cries.

The crowd calms down to listen to the woman's lament, but for a brief moment before they break into revolt.

"He has deti on my way to osibito. Pad roads. And the osibito … far away … my son is deti … Onarepo! Pris teki tis your money. They tacht him, ten seit he is deti … Uuuuuiiii … Uuuuuiiii … Uuuuuiiii … my son is deti …" she adds.

Bazu stands up to the rowdy jeering of the crowd.

"You must resign! Enough is enough Omosh! Omosh must go! Omosh must go!" the embittered crowd roars.

Bazu sees the woman penetrating the crowd, heading towards the podium. He tries to alert Omosh as she approaches in tears. Omosh switches off the microphone and turns aside to Bazu:

"Bazu, stop. Stop, will you? Stop, Bazu. Will you stop, Bazu?" Pleads Omosh with his friend who is calling his attention to the woman. "I can deeply feel it. I can deeply feel it. I must resign. Enough is enough."

# The Bottom Line

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She let out a piercing sarcastic chuckle. The dim-lit bedroom absorbed the earsplitting cackles under inevitable compulsion. The yellow bulb at the ceiling cast yellow streaks that adorned the pretty pair in sallow complexions. The two sat fronting each other, with Fresha in a melancholic mood. The visitor's face carried beams of uncommon mirth. From her luxuriant cheeks down to lips and back, Madame Florina was splendid. Clad in a dazzling see-through dress, Fresha could see the perfect curves of her waist. As she reclined on her chair, Fresha beheld the most gorgeous damsel on this part of Nairobi. Madame's body exuded a bewitching scent that confronted the gloom in the room.

Perhaps, her coming would help abate Fresha's foul mood that had lasted for weeks.

"It is shocking how a graduate should turn into a sad thing," Madame announced.

"Sorry …" Fresha said.

"Great academic qualifications … but so miserable!"

"It's the sorrow of missing him … and the pandemic."  Fresha sat up and rose from her seat.

"It's shocking, Fresha, isn't it?"

"But nothing goes my way … I love him, but he's poor … The pandemic has made it worse."

"You're an idiot, Fresha!"

This was a resounding harangue from Madame. Fresha winced, but controlled herself.

"Weigh your words."

"It's a fact. I speak the truth and shame the devil!" Madame chortled and squirmed in her seat.

 "Truth is also relative," declared Fresha.

"What's that?" Madame asked with airs of ignorance.

"I mean, sometimes you should appreciate individual differences. Truth to you may be lies to me. Handsome to you …"

"Phew! I' am tired of pep talk! Books have ruined you and I'm sorry to say that you'll never be happy!"

"All right, what are major attributes of a fiancé in your opinion?" asked Fresha

"A rich man."

"Is money everything?"

"Good heavens, it is the *only* thing!"

"I doubt," Fresha's said in a calm voice.

"Don't pretend, wench," Madame made an affront.

"I am no wench like you … Humankind needs ideals?"

"Do you dress ideals? Do you travel by wisdom or car?"

"My dear cousin, knowledge, integrity, wisdom are all recipes for success ... including love and marriage."

"Bullshit!" thundered Madame.

"Uncultured woman!" screamed Fresha.

"Deuce, integrity … wisdom … no longer matter! You will die poor?"

"What …?"

The room teemed with shouts and gasps. While outside, a heavy mist crawled. The yellow bulb flickered on and off under the impending darkness. Madame Florina, without notice, sprang to her feet and picked-up her splendid handbag. With a "dignified" forthrightness, she snarled, "I clink my liaisons and I rustle my religion. I clink my business, I rustle my path in life."

She strutted outside to her classy yellow Prado, drew the door ajar, entered and slammed it shut. She thrusted the key into the ignition and turned it on. The car chortled its way out of the compound. Instead of wasting her precious time with "a miserable thing like Fresha," she would rather secure another lucrative deal with her business partner. With Mulosi Mogeni on her side, her account would burst with more millions than idle chatting in the company of "intellectuals on the verge of starvation." Madame stepped on the accelerator as she went into her characteristic musing. She pitied the Freshas of this world. Educated they were, but Madame's father owned fifty times more in property than they ever could. '*Survival was the way, especially being streetwise,*' she thought. Education is a pile of abstracts that yielded nothing more, but indigence.

With the advent of COVID-19 pandemic, Fresha and her colleagues, after years of teaching in private schools, were rendered jobless. Some had no means of livelihood. Eugene, Fresha's boyfriend, joined *Kazi Mtaani,* a government initiative to assist "the poorest of the poor to eke a living." Wataka, Eugene's elder brother, a role model, a graduate student at Millenia University, joined "the destitute" to clear bushes in town for a meager daily wage of three hundred shillings now that all universities had been shut down. '*Heck! Of what use is knowledge if all one possesses is poverty*? *Of what use is integrity if everything one has in inventory are papers?'*

"Intelligentsia, integrity and wisdom are nothing more, but mere prattles," Madame muttered. Folks wasted time pursuing naught at the expense of what really mattered in life. After all, her father had neither acquired "big degrees" nor bragged about "powerful morals." Through aggressiveness and survival tactics*,* he vanquished poverty and set his family on a path to "success." For him, one can say ignorance was strength. The less one knew, the happier one became.

Unlike Fresha, Florina knew to be sane demanded toiling hard for something, clinging onto something benevolent and tangible. She did not need to submerge the self into the abstracts—integrity, scholarship, virtue or propriety. Had she stuck onto these things, she might have missed pertinent points. Her father's path had taught her volumes and trained her well. The young Florina had grown-up to appreciate pragmatism, but detested rhetoric. Psychoanalysis, democracy,

individuality, integrity and many prattles did not bring food onto her table. Going after such ideals was a futile pursuit; therefore, she embraced utilitarianism as her life's philosophy. Her body craved bacon, milk, Danish pudding, English pastry, hamburger and other delicacies characteristic for a sophisticated girl.

It is no wonder her family was the most respected in and around Makombe Estate. Their lush mansion was a living evidence of their material success. It proclaimed affluence and splendor. The intelligentsia's attention to details gave them ability to describe virtually anything; yet, they could not describe her father's complicated mansion.

One evening, as Florina returned home, negotiating a corner towards the gate to her father's mansion, six rotund masked men jumped in front of her car. She slammed on her breaks as her car came to a screeching halt. She nearly flew out of its front window shield.

The men roughly accosted her. "Hands up!" one growled.

It was a confounding moment and experience. She threw her hands up in the air.

"Out of the car!" a voice growled.

She hopped out of the car with her hands aloft. The burglars tied her hands to the back, dragged her into the hedge at the lush gate, jumped into her car, and sped off.

After some neighbors untied her, Madame dashed into their living room only to stumble upon a lifeless body of her father, Mwangi Kamau. The sight of his blood everywhere filled her with fright. It was on the walls, the sofa and the flower vases. For a brief moment, audible silence reigned supreme against the encroaching chill and despair. To her dying day, Madame Florina could never forget the tiniest details of that day. A moment that marked the darkest page in her autobiography.

As she examined her father's body, she saw five bullet wounds gaping on his belly. There was also a small note adjacent to his shoulder that read:

Gluttonous and cruel accomplice
Corrupt and unscrupulous in corruption
How could you enjoy proceeds of ARVs alone?
Yours is ours to fulfill our dreams
Your comrades in *murkidom*

Before this fateful day, Madame Florina knew her father, who was a clinical officer at Makina Government Hospital, had resigned his position to venture into business. Soon, thereafter, he opened a small Makombe Pharmacy opposite the hospital, which enabled him to obtain cheaply government drugs from clever pharmacists. He then sold them at exorbitant prices for profit. Before long, his colleague introduced him to a senior government officer who had access to a government medical warehouse. The man could make away with tons of medical supplies, fake records and hand the stocks to Mwangi. Mwangi, in return, opened new markets in neighboring countries—Uganda and Tanzania—where he travelled to sell the purloined merchandise and shared the booty with his associate. As luck would have it, her father's wealth flourished. He expanded from owning one to twenty pharmacies scattered all over the country. With advice from Rahab, Florina's mother, Mwangi diversified his investments to real estate, farming and transport industry. He later linked-up with other partners and with their twenty minibuses, they started plying the Nakuru-Nairobi highway. All the while, Fresha's father, Mwangi's elder brother, John

Kamau could not afford a car even with his two degrees.

The period succeeding her father's demise sowed surprises in the Mwangi home. What a harrowing experience for young Florina! First, her father's leadership and smartness had left a void her mother Rahab and sister, Valentine, could not fill. Second, were the apprehensions regarding the enemies' next move, which soon became the routine. Third, was the president's pledge to fight corruption in every sector of his government. Valentine's arrest, a year before receiving millions from her boyfriend at the National Youth Service, had cost his father a fortune on a court pending case. These recent events almost prompted Madame Florina to doubt her utilitarian philosophy. Was Fresha's perspective the bottom line of life? Would her life be better off had she sought knowledge and wisdom like Fresha? No. The quest for wisdom was a search for eternal poverty. In her mind's eye, one's love of money was the bottom line of life. Like her father, Florina would seek for it in whichever way humanly possible.

To the best of her recollection, half of her father's enterprises were joint ventures. Given his tragic end, the Mwangi's had to brace themselves for peril. Flexibility of the law, notwithstanding, Madame Florina could not hazard legal redress in this marshland for survival. The rule of the jungle pervaded everything. Any move she could dare make meant danger for her and her siblings.

On her father's burial day, somebody dropped off leaflets that read: "Keep off the buses. Keep off the pharmacies in Eastlands. Remain in your greedy house. Obey or die!" This signaled apparent poverty and misery that now knocked at Mwangi's homestead. Florina and her siblings had no choice, but to keep away from their very fountain of happiness. She could not deny that now Fresha and his poor father were far ahead of them.

For young Florina, this was a death from life. She had lost a father, a mentor and her model in life, a man who had fanned her passion for fine living. Soon though and coincidentally, fate flung a fine pilot Madame's way; and she, the belle of Makombe Estate, fell in love. Although in her past, under her father's tutelage, he had adulterated her attitude towards love. She never saw any possibilities for it. When the cruel pangs of scarcity reached their lawn, she had no choice, but rise up to combat them, clinging onto her father's advice: *Daughter, learn to survive*!

The young man, Suleiman Mahbad Mahfouz, loved her after all. His fondles for her were the props of her life. With the sensitive delicacy of youth, Florina worshipped the ground upon which he walked. Mahfouz was a young Egyptian pilot who drew Florina away from her sexual purity and gave her a preamble to sensuality. He showered her with cascades of passion. With kisses and flatters, he replanted and tended the tree of her self-worth and love. The young Florina had never before known a man so caring. Their liaison was hot and quick. For he had mastered the art of "loving" a girl. He spoke the right words, chose right rendezvous, and touched her in the right places. Soon, Florina realized that discipline had denied her the pleasures that heralded true happiness. Every date they had, gave her premises for levity. Mahfouz chattered her out of loneliness and pulled her into a marriage bed with promises of eternal bliss. As she signed her civil marriage certificate, Florina beheld a brilliant future. Irrevocably in love, she could not see the thorns in her path that embittered most marriages. With brilliant hopes, she had given her life to Mahfouz to enjoy the grapes of this eternal orchard, but had abandoned restraints to the likes of Fresha, who were destined to marry no one.

Two months crawled past. Before long, her hopes capsized, crushing into tittles. Mahfouz turned against the very maxims of courtesy that characterized the man she had loved. Even tears

could not alter him. He became callous. He trounced on her pleas and entreaties, turning Florina into an idle spectator in her very own life. She saw the tree, which had sheltered her loneliness, wilt, fall, and wither. Men had rights after all … The right to go out and have as many lovers as possible. They had an innate ability to make love without any emotional attachment. For women, only sluts afforded such vices. Mahfouz, her once dear darling man, transformed overnight into a beast. Exploiting the liberties of his sex, he came into the house with gorgeous girls to have his sweet moments with them. Her attempts to criticize him were met with hostile glares that killed the spirit she had taken years to nurture.

"Hell! You're just one of them!" he had exploded more than once. Madame Florina became helpless and unable to confront him. A man as strange as Mahfouz could do anything. The dreadful anxieties and disquiets eroded the least commendations she had cultivated about men. Thus, Madame Florina swore never to get married again; instead, she resolved to become a paranoid single woman.

Perhaps, Mahbad Mahfouz had just been friendly, but not a friend. Had Madame been a humble woman, Fresha could have given her a piece of advice. Fresha knew it well ... That compatibility was beyond airs. That marriage based solely on physical attraction certainly led to tears. She knew this truth from the onset about Madame's marriage to Mahfouz. That it was based on his tall handsome Egyptian looks, his richness and his romantic-mere tags. That this type of marriage was flawed all along and destined for failure.

For Fresha, a friend was someone you developed a past, a present and together you build a future. It had to be someone who knew you, cared about you, and would be there for you. Unfortunately, Mahfouz fell short of this first test. Another thing Florina ought to have known was the internal energy magnetism. The two lovers had to be attracted to each other's internal energy. She had loved his career. What talents or professions did Mahfouz admire in her? There was a vacuum on this point. Not only that, but also their career goals and creative energy levels were inconsistent, making her marriage a farce and unsustainable.

To escape her shackles of marriage, Madame had picked a full briefcase of money from Mahfouz's safe and fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Her father's tutelage was not for nothing after all. Her *street wisdom* had begun. Like a chick, she had emerged from an incubator to perfect her purpose in the world. Six months later, she transformed herself into a *real* architect of survival and Mahfouz had given up on his chase of her. Henceforth, a new Florina was born. Influenced by Belgian acquaintances in the DRC, she assumed the title of Madame. It signified her new ability to distinguish the real from the fake. The real being the material value of every endeavor, but the thrill to fight back at men overwhelmed any other urge. Madame Florina resolved to perfect her father's business acumen, shred society's sexual blueprint and design her sensuality.

She trounced on men in vengeance and, at the same time, traced her father's networks to sell stolen medical supplies to survive. She could not idle in despair waiting for society or Fresha's "God's blessing" to shape her fate. She was the master of her own happiness and *Lord* of her soul. Obviously, the right to express her emotional, sexual and career preferences lay in her hands. Madame became so aggressive in networking and sensual matters. Four months after her break-up with Mahfouz, she established fifty brothels, half in Kenya and half abroad. Twenty pharmacies followed suit, overflowing with medical drugs from half of her father's networks. She afforded all possibilities and allured all manner of men, including some of her father's enemies. She was sexy,

confident, sophisticated, and charming. They bowed to her wishes and, at cheap prices, poured government supplies into her pharmacies. Free government condoms flowed into her brothels to give her and her clients much-needed protection against sexually transmitted diseases. Hundreds of men who had been intimate with her consistently wished to have her for a wife. The quality of her intimacy with them was exceptional, but the spiteful attitude she held towards marriage send them packing

It was medieval. It was novelty. Madame Florina claimed to be the epitome of economically and sexually liberated generation of women, a strange breed fashioned with novelties of financial and sexual equality. No more heartbreak! She was not prepared for any relationship that inclined towards marriage. She knew men were only out and out for a good time. So, would she butt with a cash tag? If she was a slut, they were studs. Like most men, she would not wait for an opportunity to present itself. She would go out for what she wanted. She proposed and seduced, used and dumped. Men could afford it after all. The fear of being slandered vaporized and male visitors never missed in her compound.

Splendid cars frequented her parking lot. In fact, a lush BMW had remained permanently parked. Fresha had only shaken her head in amazement. Like father like daughter. Madame Florina could not be poor. More than a dozen times, Fresha had spotted her in queer zones at the wee hours of the night. In quick glances, she had once read *Mahfouz Club and Restaurant.* She had not delved deeper into the matter. She knew better to mind her business. At Madame's age and class, her cousin Fresha could not do anything to remedy the situation. She left her cousin to her own devices and fate.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the president gave a directive to close all entertainment joints. '*What idiocy!*' Madame thought. She could not carry on with her favorite business as usual. *'Like father, like daughter,'* she smiled as she drove to Mogeni's home, her business partner. With him, they had exported the first consignment to a neighboring country. He had deposited twenty million shillings into her account. As "fools" whined about the devastating impact of the pandemic, the "wise" took advantage of it simply to make a fortune.

"*Gota*!" said Mogeni, upon her arrival.

"*Gota*," Florina said.

"Welcome. Wow … Gorgeous!" Mogeni said, ogling her from head to toe as he led her into the house.

"My weakness? Thanks …  *Mpango?"* she said, sitting in his spacious lounge.

The pink flowers on his glass table and purple carpet appealed to her sensibilities. Meanwhile, the mongrel in its cage near the gate did not stop barking. It threatened to break its chains as though Madame had come to kill its master.

"You won't give me a kiss today?" he said. "I hope you know I love you."

"Oh, Mogeni! We have always done business."

"I agree, but we should think about taking our relationship to the next level," he said.

She detested this. Her liaisons did not entertain feelings, but she did not want to upset him.

"We will talk, Mogy," she said with a wink. "How is the deal?"

"A hundred liters of reagents were sent to your labs at the City Centre. You can start testing."

"Mogy, a hundred are barely enough!"

"The reagents are very expensive. If we steal in huge quantities, the minister will realize," he said. "Fake it," he added.

"What do you mean?"

"Use water and fake the reports."

"I see."

"With the pandemic, many rich people can't travel abroad without COVID-19 certificates."

"We can charge 5K per test."

"Hey! How about 10K?"

"I will use my influence to direct stranded truck drivers there."

"Thanks, hun."

"Happy to hear that, *honey* ... That is how you should always call me," he said, grinning ear-to-ear.

"The sanitizers?"

"The grant from China?"

"Yes, hun."

"I have hundreds of thousands of liters at our warehouse."

"That is why I like you."

"Say, 'I love you!'"

She winked at him.

"Hope your guy is ready to purchase."

"I called him yesterday. He liked our terms."

"Ha!" he chuckled. "These Kenyan beggars will not see a drop of free sanitizer!"

"Let them die like rats," Madame scowled.

"As we bank millions per week," he kissed her on the cheek.

"I will accompany Ouma in the truck to Dar."

"We have turned the pandemic from lemon to lemonade, *gota*!"

Her palm met his in the air. She allowed him to kiss her again and lead her to the bed in which he had thrice taken her.

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Madame Florina's journey to Dar es Salaam was a "success." There was nothing as lucrative as selling obtained sanitizers at a hundred shillings per liter. The Chinese government had offered

millions of liters to bolster the government's efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, but Mogeni and other clever officers at the ministry of health had diverted it to a private warehouse. The first batch of exports included facemasks from which they had made a fortune. Madame Florina had made a similar fortune from sanitizers and now her focus was on ten new laboratories.

*'I hate this president,'* Florina thought as she went around inspecting the nurses. *'I voted for him, but he has caused 'us' many losses.'* Why would he close down bars and clubs? She would rather die of the virus than live a pauper's life like Eugene and Fresha! Why would the president restrict access to reagents? Mogeni's attempts to access them remained futile. Long winding queues formed near the laboratory, of men and women of substance. They wore facemasks in keeping with the new COVID-19 mandate. Madame rarely wore a facemask as it prevented people from seeing her lipstick. *'Each of these masks, queuing is worth 10K. That is something,'* she thought.

With Mogeni, they had instructed the medical laboratory professionals to alternate patient results. The mantra was *AR, BW. CR, DW.* These acronyms simply meant patient A (with reagent), patient B (without), patient C (with reagent), and D (without) to have as many tests as possible. With Mogeni and other partners in the background, official rubberstamps from the ministry of health were availed to ratify all medical reports. As the queues elongated, a tumult broke at the reception where reports were being issued. Florina with her bodyguard marched to the scene without the protective gear, a facemask.

"This report is counterfeit!" a man thundered.

"Why do you think so?" Florina asked.

"I have no sense of taste. How can I be negative?" the man complained.

Hearing this, people on the queues retreated and fled in different directions. Madame Florina rummaged her handbag for the facemask and fumbled for words to explain.

"I have no sense of taste. I have difficulty in breathing!" the man insisted. "I can't be negative."

"That is what you think, but the report tells the authentic state of your health," Florina said.

Meanwhile, the shrill of an approaching ambulance rent the air. Someone had called the COVID-19 Rapid Response Team to the scene. Before Florina could address her staff, ten men in personal protective gear shoved her, the bodyguard, and the man into a government ambulance, while the police marched their way into her laboratories.

Madame Florina found herself in an "untidy public hospital," which she had oftentimes held in contempt because poor people were there. She had once asked Fresha why she went to such places to meet the destitute, risking infection of every kind of disease. The men pushed her, her bodyguard, and the man into separate rooms. Despite her determined resistance, her samples were taken for testing.

"I can't be positive! I am well … Why do you insist on locking me in here? Am I an animal?" she screamed, but her screams fell onto deaf ears.

"The man in whose presence you stood and conversed without a face mask has no sense of taste. You have to be tested," the medical laboratory professional said firmly.

For the first time, Madame Florina found herself in a duel with the virus. She no longer

saw it as a money-making venture. On the wall, she could see a poster with measures of curbing the virus: *Wash your hands with soap, sanitize, wear a facemask*, *keep social distance.* Heck! It reminded her of her entertainment businesses. She cursed the measures and fell asleep.

At midnight, Madame was roused by a severe fever and difficulty in breathing. She sat bolt upright on the edge of her bed and screamed for help. A doctor rushed in to her side and, with the help of a nurse, they carried her to the ventilator room. By the time the report came, Madame had exhibited palpable symptoms of the killer virus.

"You are COVID-19 positive," the doctor told her.

"I got it in your ambulance … No, in this room!" Madame insisted.

"Please calm down. By law, you are required to give us names of those people with whom you have interacted."

"Umm … None," she lied. "Just workers at the laboratory."

She could not bring in Mogeni. She was certain it was "the rude" man who had infected her. On second thought, she recollected the man's name, Antony. She had left her facemask in her handbag to go and manage a scuffle.  When she turned on her phone, an advertisement featuring an American Presidential candidate, Joe Biden, popped up, "Just by wearing this mask, Americans would have saved many lives!" he said. '*Does Biden mean "we" risked many Kenyan lives by selling facemasks meant for them?'* she thought silently, as she listened to the sound of her ventilator. Suddenly, a power blackout struck. Her ventilator stopped. She felt as though something was suffocating her. Madame struggled and rose. She threw away the insertions in her nose as if they were the cause of her breathing difficulties. The doctor appeared in her room as Madame collapsed on the cold floor. She stretched her hands as if to reach out for oxygen, but all was in vain. It was not something that could be grabbed. Darkness became more pervasive in the room as the doctor bent to resuscitate her.

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Though Fresha's engagement to Eugene was not the best, her parents approved his integrity. The lovebirds avoided excesses and exhibited exceptional humility and contentment. John Kamau, whose financial standing had changed exponentially, took Eugene away from *Kazi Mtaani* and advanced him a hundred thousand shillings loan to start a retail shop. Eugene promised to repay the loan in time. In their shop, Eugene and Fresha nurtured their relationship as they sold supplies to customers. One evening, Fresha felt the need to peruse the day's newspaper. She rushed out of the gate and bought one from a nearby vendor. On the front page, a picture of Florina was splashed with the caption: "Corona Virus Deals Blow to a COVID-19 Millionaire." The article read:

> A middle-aged woman, Madame Florina, has died of COVID-19 after she was picked and quarantined while talking to a suspected COVID-19 patient at her medical laboratory. The woman was picked-up when a COVID-19 Rapid Response Team and Police received a report of counterfeit COVID-19 tests at her laboratories. She was suspected of running a fleet of laboratories that forged coronavirus tests at ten thousand Kenya shillings. Antony Wekesa, who had been given a false report, raised the matter at the laboratory, claiming his symptoms contradicted the laboratory's negative report. The clients had fled the scene and reported to the authorities. At least ten people who had interacted with Antony at the laboratory tested positive, including Madame Florina. While Antony and six of his patients are in Intensive Care Unit, Florina succumbed to the virus during a power outage that

disabled her ventilator. Police investigations have unearthed a syndicate behind Florina that runs multi-million-dollar contraband in medical drugs. In the past five months, Florina, with her business partners, sold more than half a million facemasks and a million liters of sanitizers from China to neighboring countries. Worse still, she owns hundreds of brothels in Kenya running many shifts of prostitutes. Madame Florina has had an enormously lucrative business selling a variety of pleasures and banking thousands of shillings per week.

When she finished reading the article, Fresha shook her head in dismay. '*The foundation of a house is undoubtedly crucial,*' she thought. Corruption had bounty harvest that did not last. On receiving the sad news, Fresha's father approved her marriage to Eugene, a poor young man from another community. Although their belief systems were distinct, they would rather toil with challenges of cultural hybridity than end-up with a daughter like Florina. John Kamau was ashamed of being mentioned as Florina's kinsfolk. She had died many years before her death. As for Fresha, she knew money is not the only thing in life, and it will never be!

**Glossary**

*Gota*: A slung term for "high five," or a casual greeting among acquaintances.

*Kazi Mtaani*: A menial work program launched by President Kenyatta during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide employment to the youth.

*Mpango*: A Swahili term often used between acquaintances to inquire about the next plan of action.

*Murkidom*: A coined term from the words "murky" and "kingdom" to mean a kingdom of murky business.

# Poetry

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## Me

The waves rush for the shores,
Where they can wet the dry sand,
They gather up their strength,
Marshal every ounce of vigor,
And when momentum is sufficient,
Lunge angrily at the unmoving beach.

Day in, day out, She comes,
Involuntarily, unable to stop Herself,
She must feel useful, or She dies.
She must be on the move, or She withers.
Where would She store her strength?
Where would She take her bulky mass?

And so, every day without fail,
The waves rush for the shores,
For in movement, they find purpose.
In fine splashes, do they find happiness,
In the eyes of those who stare out to sea,
Do they find reason to come back again?

Like the ocean waves each day,
I walk to the beach to discover,
The reason I am alive today.
As my life's storms repeatedly come,
Ceaselessly attempting to squash my dreams,
So, do the waves … every day.

To calm me!

## Death or Life?

The white powder beckons,
Its smile so warm and inviting,
The pull too much to resist.
Every tiny particle is a promise,
A promise to numb every pain,
Pain that has brought me here,
Here – Where numbness is the only way not to die.

I sniff, the tears falling with abandon,
I close my eyes, shutting out the dazzling beauty.
I bite my lower lip, to replace the pain of longing.
Images swim behind my eyes,
Eyes that are sore with tears,
Tears that empty me off all feelings,
Feelings – That I struggle to keep.

Still – The white powder frantically waves,
Still – The painful yearning comes at me,
Still – The forlorn figure of my mother stares me down,
Down where highs have dumped my body,
This body that's no longer attractive to men,
Men that now have beautiful, picturesque families,
Families that I once dreamt of too.

I reach out to take it,
Bereft of all resistance,
I sniff … once, twice …
The die is cast.
I'm dying.


**My Papa**

Bleep! Bleep! Bleep! Bleep!
The sounds bounced off the white walls,
Monotonous, boring,
Like Father Paul's Sunday sermons.
Shades of blue, pink, yellow …
There are too many colors.
Was it a rainbow? One? Two?
Why were the colors mixed up?
Did colors speak?
Their voices sound strangled.

There it goes again,
The axe that keeps splitting,
Splitting wood in my head.
Why can't Mama stop it,
The way she stopped Tommy from beating me?
Why did Papa leave?
Maybe Mama is tired …
He would have helped Mama.
The axe must be so blunt,
That's why it hasn't finished cutting wood.

When I grow up,
I'll never leave Mama,
Or my little brother Foxy.
If Papa hadn't left us,
I wouldn't have run after him,
Then, I wouldn't have tripped,
Then, that big, blue, monster bike,
With Mama's fat, ugly boyfriend on it,
Wouldn't have hit me on the head.


**The Wait**

I watched them lower her,
Lower, and lower, and lower,
Down into the brown, wet earth,
I willed her to wake up,
To prove all these people wrong.
I cried and shouted and screamed,
But no sound came.

They weren't very careful,
Why then would the rope slip?
Why then would she tumble,
And fall with that cold, faint thud?
Was she really there,
Watching them do that to her?

If she were,
They would be more careful.
She would have put her hands on her tiny hips,
She would have opened her mouth,
The words would have tumble out,
With the speed of the thrashings on my buttocks.

If she were,
She would have held me in her arms,
Wiped away the tears on my face,
Fumbled for a handkerchief in her purse,
And pushed it into my clenched fist,
Cooing her love into my ears.

And so, I turned away from them,
Pushing through the solemn crowd,
Walked straight past my grandmother,
Ignoring her alarmed look,

Headed for my mother's bedroom.
My mind was made up.
I would lie on her bed,
Until she came back to me.

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## Arsonists' Minutes of Glory: School Burning

I remember when …
every Monday, without fail,
in primary, come rain or shine
we walked to school barefooted
our toes dew bitten or heels mud caked
lugging firewood twice my size—
fuel for cooking our meals—
with grace and diligence,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when …
monthly, without fail,
we took maize and beans to school
from which our lunch was made—
a succotash meal loaded with weevils and sand
that repulsed and riled my sensibilities;
it tamed our pangs of hunger
as we sought our mind's food
too precious than silver or gold,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when …
every Friday, without fail,
we hauled cow dung to school
squatted and smeared our classrooms
and squirmed at the mushiness of dung
and its chillness between our fingers
as we curved patterns on all floors
and stayed out all day long
as we waited for them to dry
making some of us loathe school,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when …
daily, without fail,
we cut grass and trimmed school hedges
swept and cleaned our latrines—
whose pungent smell made me gag
as a sea of maggots claimed its ownership—

to ensure as anything assured can be
they fit modest utility standards
unaware these vexations built character,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when …
occasionally, naughty pupils
as mischievous as he goats
wiped their asses on toilet walls
or sprayed floors with their diarrhea
as if blind and couldn't aim in the hole
and the teacher on duty, without our regard,
enforced the law and forced our cleaning;
we tip-toed over it, to keep clean our bare feet
curling-up our lips to cover our noses
hopeful we would keep the stench away
as giant blue flies buzzed over it nonstop
like buzzards on a carcass or bees on nectar,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when …
being young was a joyous affair
when any tomfoolery wasn't tolerated
when adults, kin or not, justly punished us
lest they spare the rod and spoil the child!
when Nature and all its glory and gore
was all there was for our being
from which the promise of youth was made!
no electronic gadgets to cloud our minds
or disconnect us from being truly alive,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when …
the winds of change, twister like, passed
savagely sweeping everything in its path;
goodness fell to the wayside as if built on sand
and we, unknowingly, reneged on ourselves
and each, allowing the fog of individualism
to plant its fat feet in our hearts
and clouded our minds with gook
forever blinding our eyes from one truth:
of our duty to each other and ourselves
fruitful food that molded and grounded us,
yet, now meant nothing, useless as saltless ash

I remember when ...
as though it were yesterday
my yesteryears of high school
burnt on my mind like tattoos
curved on my flesh, seething in my now
like waves of an angry sea
of how we hauled bucket loads of water,
broom in hand, scrubbed latrines till they sparkled
brushed bathroom floors until they glistened
against dimmed dormitory lights
and never thought anything of it
that these chores paled to our fruits of study,
but never once did we complain!

I remember when …
as though it were yesterday—
one high school day—
when the sun glistened
like dew on an early Morn
and as arsonists' hands
nearly derailed our study
striking matches to buildings and cane!
plumes of smoke oozed
from shuttered windows
like water from a busted dam
and spiraled up into empty space
and vanished like the students' dreams
differed in the wake of the mayhem

I remember now …
as the sadness of that time come back
flames like meteor lights erupted
and wind fanned, crackled like firecrackers
birthing gigantic pandemonium
and forced our expulsion
summoned GSU men's batons,
without mercy, lacerated our flesh
a painful penalty to the innocent
but for the guilty, meant minutes of glory
than the bread that bred the riot

Yet, today, at this dark hour …
my memories of youth, with time,
like flickering light on a flint, have faded,
but my heart still bleeds my sadness
as I watch students with dismay

trigger happy strike matches to their dorms
claiming the filthiness of their latrines
as just cause for their mayhem
as though they were handicapped
unable to scrub clean their own filth
their hands too clean to be tarnished
unaware time lost now is forever

I remember then …
today, at this dark hour,
flickering tongues of flames
leaping room-to-room lick rooftops
hissing and dancing in an unforgiving wind
reduce school buildings to ashes and rubble
as onlookers, muted and shell-shocked, watch
the arsonists' hands reap havoc on society
while *they* gloat seeing the fruits of their labor
knowing no firetrucks exit to douse the inferno
unaware when the dust settles
and life returns to normalcy
they will, for their sins, pay due penalty
and justice will, impartially, be exacted
for the guilty and innocent shall in blood pay

I remember when …
as though it were yesterday
when Mama told me:
> *Child … when bulls fight*
> *the grass suffers!*
today, arsonists have exacted their rage
and revenge; oblivious innocent minds
have recoiled upon themselves
some having paid in blood and life
making me wonder: what now?

Yet, I wonder if …
the arsonists' calamitous hands,
aren't a far cry to long borne injustice,
of administrators turning a blind eye
to the students' pleas for change?
I remember when …

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## Changing Dreams

### I

Twenty-five years in Kenya
I dreamt in Swahili and in English, sometimes
I saw hazy images of a three-year-old me in Eastleigh
Walking towards Swahili speaking veiled Somali women
Smelling the fresh homemade spaghetti and oud

### II

Ten years in America
My dreams are like silent movies
I neither speak Swahili nor do I speak English
But understand those voiceless moving silhouettes in my dreams
I worry about my dreams
What language do you speak in your dreams?

### III

Sixteen years in America
I can hear my voice in my dreams
I can see blurred images too
I speak English with these ephemeral beings
I worry about having dreams with those who don't speak English
Hoping for silence not to stifle our conversations
Hoping for a chance to speak in their language fluently

### IV

Seventeen years in America
I want to dream in English and other languages
To see full images of those in my dreams
To hear myself and others speak in languages we understand
I want to understand the meaning of my dreams
I want to remember the words of my dreams when I wake up

## My Mother's Falls

my mother, once strong
tall and healthy
is growing old, weak and ailing,
but still wants to live her life like before

this morning she called me

she said her back is aching
her voice had lost its energy and rigor of her motherness

she has fallen twice recently
the first time while in the garden
the second time in the same garden
both times while jumping across a distance she underestimated

she complained about becoming shorter
she also lamented about her inability to estimate distance
her falls worry me and make me uncomfortable
we agreed she jumps no more

in our silence we spoke to each other
fearing a fall that could lead to death
i sternly warned her against any jumping
then we said goodbye and hoped for no more falls


**Finding Freedom**

Grandma never ate the gizzard
Mama never ate the gizzard
Aunt never ate the gizzard
I choose to eat the gizzard
Women are not supposed to eat it
Only men can eat it
They take turns to eat it
If Baba is not around to eat it
My five brothers will eat it
      If brother one is not around to eat it
      Brother two will eat it
           If brother three is not around to eat it
           Brother four will eat it
               If brother four is not around to eat it
               Brother five will eat it
My turn to eat the gizzard will never come
Alas! Now, away from home
I can buy, cook and eat it
I can order it from restaurants
I can eat it in private and in public spaces
I can eat it anywhere and everywhere
This delicacy that I am forbidden to eat
It is crunchy and tasty
It is my turn to eat it
I have had enough of the gizzard
My appetite and excitement have waned
I choose not to eat the gizzard

# Opinion Piece

# Child Sexual Abuse Survivors and the Street Kids: A Social Commentary on Resilience after Abuse in a Kenyan Orphanage

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## Abstract

This opinion piece explains how Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is applied to support sexually abused survivors' resilience in Kenyan orphanages. Literature promotes the use of SEL interventions for school-aged children who have severe abuse experiences, both for coping mechanism and building resilience. SEL may be applied by social workers and educators to stimulate resilience in school-aged children who live in orphanages and are dealing with child sexual abuse (CSA) related trauma (e.g., emotional regulation, denying or delaying disclosure, bouncing back after abuse, etc.). I write this piece based on my 5 years' experience working as a Child Welfare Specialist in the U.S., over 10 years of running a children's home in Kenya, and a college professor of psychology. I am also inspired by the recommendations' section of my unpublished PhD dissertation where I spent over 4,000 hours listening to survivors' stories of sexually abused children in Kenya. Practical evidence shows that kids who come to the children's home after having gone through abuse, are more likely to bounce back if they participate in SEL activities. Finally, this opinion piece recommends the use of SEL in Kenyan orphanages, schools, and hospitals to effectively support children of trauma, in developing positive coping skills, resilience and academic achievement.

***Keywords*:** Social Emotional Learning, education, sexual abuse, orphanages, street children, abuse, trauma, resilience

## INTRODUCTION

The news of COVID-19's impact on healthcare and economy in many countries overwhelmed the global news channels. While in Kenya, however, another pandemic was also trending, a sudden rise in teenage pregnancies. Muturi's (2021) article published in the National Council for Population and Development revealed that 445 high school girls, who were pregnant, failed to take their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations while others took their examinations from maternity wards around the country. Although the news on pregnancy has stirred many conversations in the country, little direction, pointing to the likely source of this epidemic, is yet to be determined.

Let's call a spade a spade! Unless we can admit that the teens, who become pregnant, are children, we will never be able to confront adequately the issue of child sexual abuse (CSA), which is part of the root cause for the surging rate of teen pregnancy. The literature on CSA confirms that survivors are more compelled to tell their stories if people showed interest in listening to and believing in their stories (Brennan & McElvaney, 2020). The notion of being believed was a

common theme when I interviewed survivors for my dissertation. Additionally, my experience as a psychology professor and my extensive work with vulnerable children, provides a theoretical foundation and authority to categorize the recent teen pregnancy crisis in Kenya under child sexual abuse. Given the large number of girls to become pregnant around the same time, COVID-19 pandemic might have been a catalyst. Arguably, though, school lockdown might have provided perpetrators easy access to school-aged girls, who were left home without any parental supervision; however, the pandemic cannot bare the entire blame for this rise in teenage pregnancies.

This opinion piece acknowledges that nonprofit charitable organizations shoulder a significant burden in effort to rescue neglected and abused children in Kenya. While these organizations establish institutions to shelter rescued children, most of the social workers and children's home caregivers are overwhelmed by the demands of their care. Street kids seldom have all their basic and emotional needs met; hence, children's home workers must utilize whatever resources they have in bolstering the role of a caregiver and educator to facilitate these survivors' successful rehabilitation.

## Child sexual abuse

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is categorized as a form of child abuse and is one of the most confusing and perplexing problems facing many societies in the world, including Kenya. According to the World Health Organization (2003), CSA is defined as "the involvement of a child in a sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society" (p. 75). CSA is linked to survivor's inability to regulate their emotions (Brennan & McElvaney, 2020); hence, a major issue in Kenya where survivors need resources to navigate the effects of the abuse, especially children who face unique hardships and abandonment in orphanages and in the streets.

Would you know how to rehabilitate a CSA survivor who lives in a children's home because he or she has been abandoned by the society? Would you know how to deal with a child that is exhibiting trauma symptoms in the classroom? Not every school-aged teacher, social worker, or caregiver is well equipped to do so, especially in a developing country like Kenya, where neglected children and CSA survivors leave the streets and go straight into a children's home – commonly known as an orphanage. These kids are not only abandoned and in need of basic needs, but are also most likely to exhibit Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Hébert & Amédée, 2020). It always requires the survivors to go through intense counseling sessions to help them deal with trauma and new environment adjustment issues.

## Life in the streets

In Kenya alone, it is estimated that over 40,000 children occupy charitable children's homes while over 250,000 children inhabit the streets (Goodman et al., 2016). Most children who are abused end up in the streets or in confined institutions (e.g., children's homes). The number of abused and neglected children has consistently increased as the population of Kenya increases (Goodman et al., 2017). Why do children run into the streets? A study done by Sitienei and Pillay (2019) established that Kenyan street children previously faced painful encounters that resulted from parental death or divorce. Sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and other traumatic experiences also force children to run away from their homes. Other children are abandoned in the streets

because their parents and relatives are unable to provide for them. While in rare occasions (e.g., war or tribal clashes) families and children flee war zones, others are displaced by the chaos that follow. As a result of their displacement, or sometimes after parental deaths or injuries, most of these children end up homeless, forcing them to move to the streets in search of food and shelter. Those children who live in dangerous environments (e.g., slums, the streets 24/7, or return home in the evening after rummaging through the dumpsters or begging passersby for food) are more likely to be abused as compared to their counterparts who live in safe neighborhoods. For those in unsafe neighborhoods, teenage girls are naturally at risk of sexual abuse, which may be attributed to the high rates of teenage pregnancies in the country. Female survivors of CSA often report being overpowered by older male perpetrators. Consistent with CSA research, most of them report that they feared telling anyone about the abuse, especially if the perpetrators were their caregivers and had threatened to withdraw economic support if they reported the incident (Tener et al., 2021).

Children who face horrendous childhood experiences grow up with the trauma and the symptomatic stigma of abuse and are highly likely to develop fear, anxiety, rage, and anguish (Jackson et al., 2015; Karakurt & Silver, 2014). Those who end up in the streets are always searching for something to calm their fears and numb pain (e.g., male street children in Kenya resort to sniffing an inhalant known as *glue*). Glue is cheap and sold to street children in small water bottles since continuous sniffing of the substance presents an escape from poverty and memories of abuse. This is merely a temporary solution to mask these teens emotional deprivation, but does not erase their experienced past trauma of abuse. It is, hence, paramount for the government to establish programs to provide rescue and rehabilitation to these troubled children before they reach adulthood. Such programs might save the younger street children who are more prone to abuse from their older counterparts and are sometimes trafficked for sex or drug cartels. It is important to note that abused street children, who reach maturity while still living in the streets, may end up marrying each other, perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty and abuse for their offspring.

## Children's homes and orphanages

The lack of a commitment from the Kenyan government to provide a permanent solution for street children is daunting. Existing government policies and programs are also not adequate to provide effective rehabilitation for street children; yet, there is an annual budget dedicated to the department for street families. From a practitioner's point of view, Kenya has a long way to go when it comes to eradicating child abuse and neglect. Luckily, non-profit and community-based organizations have for many years made significant efforts to bridge this gap. Thus, well-wishers, not the government, establish a majority of the children's homes in Kenya.

Children who have suffered from abuse and neglect-related trauma have difficulties regulating their emotions; hence, their maladaptive behavior is likely be interpreted as violence towards adults and peers (Brennan & McElvaney, 2020). While living in the streets, they are used to talking back and dependent on a stimulant addiction (glue) for survival. Due to lack of adult supervision and nurturance, most of them have developed defiance and anti-social coping skills such as fight or flight responses. These children lack self-control and are always getting in trouble for not following the rules. These kinds of behavior are expected and normal based on the type of trauma they may have endured before their rescue (Zhang et al., 2021).

**How survivors adjust in a children's home: A case study of Upendo**

Trauma is often a consequence of abuse and negative experiences for a child prior to joining a children's home. Sometimes, younger kids cope and bounce back faster than older ones. The duration of these negative events, especially before they join a children's home, may interfere with their coping mechanism and hinder the caregiver's rehabilitation efforts. Research is clear that children who have faced adversity, such as CSA, deal with widespread trauma. Also, events that happened to them prior to joining a home make children resist changes regardless of whether those changes are meant for their benefit, resulting in maladaptation. For instance, I have participated on numerous occasions in the rescue of children from abusive homes, and I understand that abuse trauma is detrimental to a child's cognitive development. This is because normal brain growth does not occur in a similar fashion for children who have experienced emotional, sexual, and physical violence. However, all types of violence are associated with undesirable physical and mental health, which affect their ability to learn (Zheng et al., 2019).

The severity of abused children's maladaptive behavior is what inspired me to develop programs in support of the survivors' transition from dangerous environment into the children's home and later into the classroom for formal education. These hands-on experiences compel me to share about the rising emotional and physical needs for vulnerable children, especially CSA survivors. Children of trauma have many reasons for exhibiting maladaptive behaviors. Firstly, they are attempting to communicate their needs, but they do not know any other way (Regan, 2020). Trauma with comorbid trust and attachment issues amongst abused and neglected children is quite normal in children's home. Those who come from abuse have difficulties forming relationships with adults and peers. They need guidance in developing positive coping skills, which requires social workers to provide a conducive environment supporting the attachment aware intervention for the children (Little & Maunder, 2021). On many occasions, social workers and caregivers have scarcity of resources for meeting the needs of newly rescued children. Sometimes, they lack proper training and this impedes their understanding of the symptoms associated with the intervention strategies.

Upendo Children's Home, for example, founded in 2013, is an institution whose mission is to provide the basic needs for rescued children. My 20 years of experience, working with abused and neglected children and anecdotal stories from Upendo Children's Home, suggests that perpetrators usually threaten their victims, making them adopt a culture of secrecy. Prior to abuse, survivors are socialized not to express themselves, "children are supposed to be seen and not heard." This coded messaging forces survivors to silence themselves and hence refusing or delaying disclosure after abuse as supported by CSA literature (Tashjian, et al., 2016; Malloy et al., 2011). Some of the survivors refuse to speak out because it is part of their culture and serves as their coping strategy. This lack of disclosure or delay results from lack of emotional support from trusted adults. Girls who are sexually abused end up pregnant because they fail to let someone know immediately after it happens. This delay or denial hinders them from accessing rape intervention. Abused children who are unable to regulate emotions not only deal with depression, but also tend to develop maladaptive behavior and negative coping skills, deterring their ability to bounce back after experiencing childhood traumatic events (Townsend, 2016).

Due to past painful experiences of abuse and neglect, survivors come to the children's home while dealing with PTSD, pain of neglect, emotional and physical scars and with extremely limited social or cognitive skills. Often, PTSD and depression are some of the confirmed symptoms displayed by children who have suffered from sexual abuse and other types of abuses

(Ulibarri et al., 2015).

**Resilience and social emotional learning**

Resilience is a process that allows an individual to positively cope and adapt to a new behavior after adversity (Egeland et al., 1993). Like adults, children must be supported with resources that enable them to overcome stressful events (e.g., sexual abuse, abandonment, neglect, displacement, etc.). Otherwise, stress can complicate their healing process or adjusting into a new environment, which may impinge on their ability to learn. In a country, like Kenya, where social services are limited for disadvantaged children, formal education can be the only alternative tool to equip and prepare them for a better future.

Prior to their rescue, most abused and neglected children spent their past either begging for food in the street or rummaging through trashcans. Because society already ostracizes street children and continuously refers to them as pick-pockets (Kilbride et al., 2000), this causes them to suffer from low self-esteem and self-hate. Since these children live in the streets, they do not receive any formal or informal education. Whenever social workers take the CSA survivors to the local government hospitals, it is evident that medical providers lack proper medical equipment, therapeutic skills, and training to offer them adequate therapy and intervention.

Besides the lack of resources and training at the hospital, survivors, who end up in the children's homes, lack the ability to communicate or tell their abuse stories. When compared to those who have been in the children's home longer, newcomers often display heightened levels of stress, shyness, and unwillingness to speak without numerous prompts. They also exhibit major difficulties in expressing and regulating their emotions. This is a common phenomenon that is consistent with literature. The depressive symptoms (e.g., stress, fear, shame) are common indicators for CSA survivors (Blair & Raver, 2012).

At Upendo Children's Home, we apply Social Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies to meet the needs of abused and neglected children who have agreed to stay at the home. It is notable that the faster CSA survivors adjust in the children's home and are exposed to SEL activities (e.g., play, songs, art, poetry, etc.), the more they are able to articulate their emotions. In theory, *Child Play* is regarded as the primary language for children. At the Upendo Children's Home, play is routinely introduced in form of SEL activities. The goal is to help those survivors of abuse and neglect to cope with trauma as well as build resilience. Caregivers and counselors are encouraged to utilize SEL techniques. Consequently, other children's homes can replicate most of the SEL activities by using cheap and locally available materials, which have been successful at Upendo.

In Kenya, like most developing countries, caregivers in orphanages and poverty-stricken communities have none or extremely limited funds to buy activity items (like playdough, coloring pens, paper, toys, etc.). For example: mixing dirt with water serves as a better alternative for making a cost-free playdough; children are encouraged to use sticks to draw on the ground; and they also use black charcoal from burned firewood to draw on the wall whenever they need to express their emotions. All these ideas are categorized as art. Unlike in developed countries where teachers and students can afford store-bought jump ropes, caregivers and teachers in Kenyan orphanages may use sisal ropes or vines from trees to teach various rhythmic chants or songs with repetitive words. Survivors are advised to utilize the stories and songs they hear from adults, but they may insert their own words to describe their past. All these are therapeutic strategies that help children cope with the past traumatic events.

How well or fast the children adjust to their new environment depends on the personal items they are able to bring into the children's home (e.g., something that reminds them about their "good" side of family, siblings coming to live together, or a distant relative coming for supervised visitation). Most importantly, having well trained workers and caregivers is one of the most vital components that support children in coping with abuse trauma. At Upendo, workers are trained to observe any indicators of trauma, utilize SEL strategies to distract children who exhibit heightened emotions and redirect them if they continue to display maladaptive behavior like talking back, substance abuse, running away, or violence.

Rescuing children early enough before the abuse intensifies allows them to adjust faster when they enter the children's home. Such children are less likely to be depressed, easy to warm up when offered help, and develop peer relationships faster. They are able to bounce back faster when compared to children who were in abuse for prolonged period. Additionally, children that come into the home with major illnesses (e.g., HIV, allergies, or disabilities) are slower to warm up or take longer to form attachment with caregivers and other children. When it is time to introduce them into a classroom setting, children who had any form of education prior to coming to the children's home adjust faster. While those with severe trauma and illnesses tend to have multiple absences, which then inhibits their learning and, consequently, causes them to be retained in one grade. Other children drop out of school because of their inability to cope.

## Advocacy for resources in Kenyan children's homes and other institutions

It is inspiring to know that SEL activities are effective in supporting CSA survivors and other street children who had formerly experienced other forms of abuse. Moreover, this is an effort to advocate for more resources for abused and neglected children, especially those in the streets and orphanages. Children's homes caregivers and teachers need more resources, like SEL activities, to support school-aged survivors' informal and formal education. This population of children face eminent risk of high childhood stress and maladaptive behavior in adolescence and adulthood. In addition, research promotes the use of SEL interventions for pre-school children who have severe abuse experiences, both as a coping mechanism and a means to build resilience (Evans & Kim, 2013).

Social workers and caregivers in children's homes have innovative ways to recycle textbooks and writing materials, which they utilize to prepare children for formal learning as part of their transition. Since the government leaves the responsibility of rehabilitating and providing education to children's homes, extra attention and resources must be spared for preparing former street children for both their social emotional development and academic success.

Attempting to help children of trauma, while trying to facilitate the development of positive coping skills, requires the survivors to wait for an extended period before they can join their peers in the formal classrooms. During their wait period, workers gradually introduce SEL opportunities to newcomers. Even though a few of the children do regress after starting school, SEL strategies, if effectively applied in the children's home, prove to be invaluable in helping children to follow rules and routines as part of their transition from the streets or abuse environment. This approach is meant to support in development of more positive and adaptive coping skills. Consequently, at Upendo Children's Home, as rehabilitation occurs, children join their peers in public schools where they continue to adopt new prosocial skills, form relationships, and follow a considered structured routine, resulting in major strides towards their recovery and resilience.

There is a dire need to create awareness in Kenyan hospitals, schools, and orphanages regarding the need for children to express their emotions and narrate their own stories. Allowing sexually abused children to tell their stories not only boost their self-esteem, but it also empowers them since they know a trusted adult validates their pain. Observations from Upendo Children's Home, after extended use of SEL activities, confirm that survivors like to be encouraged to describe their abuse as part of their coping mechanism. Thus, SEL activities promote these children's language and cognitive skills, academic development and success, and also boosts their self-esteem and, hence, preparing them for more formal education and future challenges (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016). Since the introduction of SEL activities, Upendo has produced top scholars who have achieved extremely high scores in KCSE and secured their seats in public colleges. These observations are an encouragement to the educators of abused and neglected children. Even though not widely researched, the results from Upendo seem to suggest that the high academic achievement of its children emanates from the survivors' ability to act responsibly, obey rules, develop relationships with peers and adults, and have a positive outlook and a willingness to adopt more positive behaviors. Development of positive skills amongst the CSA survivors and other street children can be attributed to the efforts of caregivers and educators in providing SEL activities that enable children to build resilience and success.

In the children's home, repeated SEL activities, especially during social play, continue to help children become more confident in narrating their past while role-playing with other peers, caregivers, or counselors. As supported by research, when social workers redirect the children while showing empathy, they start to master self-control and emotional regulation, thereby decreasing their anger and crying (Little & Maunder, 2021). The SEL strategies in the children's home have promoted the development of positive coping skills, allowing them to become more adjusted in their new environment while positively dealing with their traumatic events. Contrarily, due to a lack of such interventions in the formal schools, children who were removed from their caregivers displayed similar maladaptive behavior just like those who came straight from the streets.

At Upendo, social workers have been using art and craft, music, dances, and other play activities to help children build relationships with each other and develop conflict resolution skills. These skills have helped them to learn how to regulate their emotions and reduce maladaptive behaviors. Instead of screaming, yelling, talking back, self-harm and etcetera, they have learned to use words more when they want to communicate their emotions and needs. For those suffering from addiction, distraction with activities (such as taking care of chicken, gardening, and playing soccer) help to reduce chances of retreating to substance abuse. The caregivers have been keen on applying various SEL strategies in promoting social emotional and cognitive development amongst survivors.

It is worth mentioning that the benefits of using SEL activities is not widely common in Kenya, hence should be promoted in formal school settings. Just like the street children, CSA survivors removed from their caregivers and placed in children homes need to be oriented in the use of SEL and learn to narrate their personal stories, especially if required to testify in a courtroom for their abuse trials. In so doing, these children become their own advocates, which is a major advantage in promoting their positive skills, confidence and social esteem. In addition, children who are removed from their caregivers not only display various maladaptive behaviors, but also express having negative sensations (such as shame, anger, and fear), while most of them are completely unable to state their emotions without help. Whereas these survivors did not have

positive coping skills, medical providers and social workers lacked skills, training and knowledge in guiding the children on how to narrate their stories. Inability to regulate emotions is consistent with the literature (Blair & Raver 2012). Often, most survivors refuse to name their abusers, or when and where the abuse happened; thereby, causing delay in receiving help from the medical providers or justice. At Upendo children's home, CSA survivors and former street children have bounced back and gained confidence to where they even tour USA as a dance group. They have been conditioned to show off their talents, act and narrate their past stories. This outcome has been made possible through teamwork, allowing kids to lead the way while adults strive to meet their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Whenever a child displays a maladaptive behavior, caregivers and teachers engage the child in art or play therapy to empower or distract him or her.

When children express anger through aggression and "talking back," it is the responsibility of the caregiver to prepare them for formal school readiness. Engaging in SEL activities gives survivors the ability to regulate emotions and leads to development of additional coping skills, which also contribute to their school readiness and achievement (Fung et al., 2020). At Upendo, children learn to regulate emotions using drama and poetry during role-play activities. Essentially, this role-playing helps them to develop empathy and emotional maturity even as they progress to adulthood and beyond schooling. However, besides SEL, teachers and caregivers are generally encouraged to teach children other important language acquisition skills (e.g., singing, acting, dancing, writing, reciting, reading). Songs not only help one to learn a language, but also provides an individual the opportunity to understand and express his or her emotions. Allowing kids to lead songs and acting roles, Upendo caregivers provide them with opportunities for developing autonomy and independence.

**CONCLUSION**

The children at Upendo, who participated in SEL activities displayed fewer depressive symptoms and less antisocial behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, school dropout, and aggression), and tended to overcome these challenges. What has emerged from taking care of rescued children at Upendo is that many factors (e.g., illness, length of abuse, sibling separation, or age of the child) interfere with their ability to bounce back. As long as they have a conducive and a healthy environment, exposed to age-appropriate opportunities for treatment, receive regular counseling, participate in structured and consistent activities, nurturance, advocacy, and positive caregiving support, these children seem to thrive in almost all aspects of their lives. They perform better on schoolwork, develop healthy relationships, and tend to stay out of trouble, both inside and outside the children's home. Therefore, for orphanages, schools, and hospitals to effectively support children of trauma, enabling them to develop positive coping skills, resilience and academic achievement, practitioners must emphasize the importance of SEL in institutions that support child development and health.

**Recommendations for researchers and practitioners**

Social issues affecting children, who have suffered from abuse as discussed above, are drawn from various areas, including social work, early childhood education, child advocacy, and etcetera. Despite limited resources and harsh working conditions, caregivers and educators achieve optimistic results when they rehabilitate survivors and street children, while offering feasible transition into an academic achievement and championing their psychological and spiritual needs. These observations provide sufficient background to recommend that the Kenyan government

recognize the relentless work done by both formal and informal educators, caregivers, practitioners, and policy makers who work with extremely limited resources in children's homes and orphanages. Hence, more resources and supportive policies are required for any SEL efforts to enhance children's resilience and academic success.

To bridge the gaps between research and practice, a multidirectional approach is recommended for caregivers, social workers, policy makers, researchers, and educators. If these groups work together, they can establish empirical data that fully investigate issues affecting CSA and street children. New research might increase a caregiver's understanding of how CSA survivors can benefit from SEL activities, particularly their resilience and academic achievement. Empirical evidence should also support the need for designing programs and strategies that can address issues faced by caregivers and teachers, while attempting to rehabilitate survivors for school readiness. Finally, the SEL model proposed in this is essay is not meant to provide answers to all the challenges faced by CSA and street survivors, but rather a framework upon which future research can be grounded.

As a matter of pragmatics, practitioners, who work with vulnerable children, must be properly trained on how to identify and disclose cases of abuse, including the use of SEL, which encourages survivors to disclose their cases of abuse and enhance their positive coping mechanism and probability to bounce back.

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# Book Review
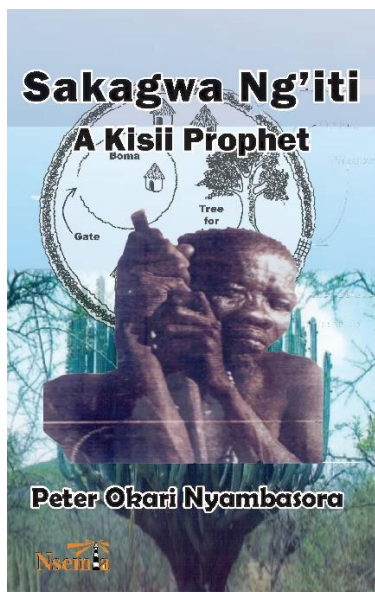
**Sakagwa Ng'iti: A Kisii Prophet**

By Peter O. Nyambasora

Nsemia Publishers, 2021

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For the last decade, scholars and cultural enthusiasts have been doing meticulous research to document the history of the Gusii people. To date, there is little documented history of this culture save for the late historian, Prof. William Robert Ochieng's book, *A Pre-colonial History of the Gusii of Western Kenya from AD 1500–1914.* This work is based on his doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Nairobi in 1971, which remains the most authoritative reference source about the history of the Gusii culture. However, with the publication of Enock Matundura's *Kivuli cha Sakawa* (2010), John S. Akama's two books: *The Gusii of Kenya: Social, Economic, Political & Judicial Perspectives* (2012*)* and *The Untold Story: Gusii Survival Techniques and Resistance to the Establishment of British Colonial Rule* (2018), and Peter O. Nyambasora's *Sakagwa Ng'iti: A Kisii Prophet* (2021), translated into English by Kefa Otiso as *Sakagwa's Ghost,* there has been a resurgence of interest in documenting the history and culture of the Gusii people. A common thread amongst these latest works is the writers' effort to persistently dig into the life of Sakagwa Ng'iti, the Gusii cultural hero born at the turn of the 19th Century from western Kenya. They concur with Ochieng's assertion that Sakagwa Ng'iti exerted substantial influence on Gusii society and beyond in the latter part of 1800s. Sakagwa epitomized many things: a medicine man, a rainmaker, a seer or prophet, and a strategist who helped his community to counter and neutralize external aggression from the Maasai, Kipsigis, and other neighboring communities.

*Sakagwa Ng'iti: A Kisii Prophet[1],* by Peter Nyambasora, chronicles the life history of Sakagwa, a cultural hero of the Gusii people. The book is divided into seven intertwined chapters. In Chapter 1, the writer gives an in-depth analysis of the environment, sociopolitical, and economic setting in which Sakagwa was born. The 1830s–1880s was a turbulent period for the Abagusii community because it was facing triple threats: death from disease and famine, death from war, and looming assimilation from the Kipsigis and Luo communities. In Chapter 2, Nyambasora provides a candid explanation of Sakagwa's family genealogy, dating back to the progenitor of

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[1] A review of this book first appeared in the *Saturday Nation*, September 17, 2021 under the title 'Book sheds new light on Abagusii Hero Sakagwa.'

Omogusii, whose brothers were likely the ancestors of Abasuba, Abakuria, Avaloogoli, and among others. He further suggests that Sakagwa was the only son of his father, Ng'iti and his heir apparent. He was born at a place called Getwanyansi, in Manga area, present day Kisii County.

Chapter 3 is the major cog in Nyambasora's book, capturing the life of Sakagwa and the multifaceted roles he played as a cultural hero in his community: a medicine man, rainmaker, diviner, community sage, and prophet. Noteworthy in this section is how Nyambasora discusses Sakagwa's major prophesies, which eventually came to pass when he was alive and long after he had died. For example, Sakagwa is said to have called a group of Kisii elders to Getembe (Kisii town) where he prophesied by action, "It is reported that, one day he collected a lot of rats and carried them in baskets to the central place in Getembe, the site where the District Commissioner's offices were later built. Here, he opened the baskets containing the rodents. All the rats scampered to different directions (*sic*). He told the elders that *'Amandegere naame Gusii. Ore n'abamura n'ayae'* (edible mushrooms shall sprout in Gusii and only those with sons shall eat them)." In this apparent 'prophesy,' Nyambasora suggests that Sakagwa's emphasis was on the value of educating children so as to secure employment.

This work, being a biographical treatise, Chapters 4–7 are about Sakagwa's life trajectory from birth to 'death' and the mystery surrounding the disappearance of his body after burial. However, Chapters 6 and 7, particularly, make Nyambasora's work stand out against any other documented literature on this cultural hero's life. The writer gives a candid exploration of the theories surrounding the controversial 'death' of this hero before solving the so called 'Sakagwa conundrum,' which has surrounded the prophet's death for decades. For example, Ochieng's 1971 doctoral research at the University of Nairobi (*A Traditional History of the Gusii of Western Kenya from AD 1500–1914*) does not account for the 'mysterious' disappearance of Sakagwa's body after his burial. Similarly, neither do any other books nor literature written about Sakagwa contain this groundbreaking insight. For the first time, Sakagwa's enthusiasts, historians, anthropologists, and those interested in this cultural hero's life, will find this tantalizing detail in Nyambasora's grounding breaking book on *Sakagwa Ng'iti: A Kisii Prophet.*

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