

AN ECHO TO A PEOPLE'S CULTURE: KEN WALIBORA'S *KIDAGAA KIMEMWOZEA*
AS A REPRESENTATION OF THE KENYAN SOCIO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Martin Kimathi Muthee

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2017

Committee:

Jeremy Wallach, Advisor

Esther Clinton

Kristen Rudisill

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ABSTRACT

Jeremy Wallach, Advisor

Kenya boasts of its high production of popular culture materials. Music, TV shows, movies, popular fiction and now, in this social media age, memes, GIFs and short video clips. All these are tailored to respond to the prevailing social, economic and political conditions in the country. While they are mostly humorous and entertaining, the primary goal of many of these popular culture artefacts is to critique contemporary Kenya.

Despite its consumption though, popular culture has remained highly undervalued and unappreciated as a tool for cultural, social and political transformation. Many Kenyans consume popular culture texts solely for entertainment purposes. Popular fiction, since it is studied and examined in Kenya's exam-oriented schools, is arguably the only form of popular culture that is seen as a means to an end – passing one's exams. This end however, is hardly what authors usually have in mind when they produce the texts, considering their contents.

This thesis examines *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, a Swahili novel by Ken Walibora, as a representation and critique of postcolonial Kenya's social, cultural and political situation. Exploring the political leadership of postcolonial Kenya, class dynamics and relations as well as gender issues, I argue that Walibora's novel does not only expose the Kenyan bourgeoisie's cunningness in their oppression of the proletarians and the male ruse to dominate their female counterparts, but it also proposes excellent paths of emancipation for the proletarians and women, and should thus be given scholarly attention.

To my Mum, Dad, and Dr. Esther Clinton.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I grew up in Kenya, I witnessed the government providing relief food to poor drought stricken citizens during the dry seasons and coming to the aid of others whose homes and property were submerged in floods during the rainy ones. Year after year, “*Serikali, saidia*” (“Government, please help”) became the mantra for poor Kenyans who seemingly depended on the all-powerful government to solve their problems. One question lingered in my mind throughout – Why couldn’t the government, with all its machinery, provide a permanent solution to the citizens so they could live comfortable, more fulfilled lives? This question remained unanswered until I came to the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University. Through the profound scholarship offered in the department, I have come to learn about the complex class relationships that inform canny practices by the bourgeoisie, disguised as kind gestures to keep the proletarians dependent on them, oppressed and under their control. This knowledge is what informed this study.

Therefore, I would like to register my sincere gratitude to the Department of Popular Culture for the perceptive scholarship it has provided me and does for many other students. I am immensely grateful to Dr. Esther Clinton for working day and night to refine my writing and analytical skills as well as Dr. Jeremy Wallach and Dr. Kristen Rudisill, for their continued mentorship, guidance, encouragement and immense support throughout my MA scholarship and for supporting and guiding me as I wrote my thesis. Their enlightening comments on my work, as well as the courses they taught in the department, were greatly instrumental in helping put my ideas together.

Moreover, I thank my family, through whose constant encouragement I was able to overcome emotional obstacles. I thank my father Stanley Muthee and my mother Mary Muthee, for their endless prayers and inspiration and for constantly encouraging me to get education, the

access of which was limited to them, and for always supporting me morally and materially to achieve my dreams. I thank my sister Pauline Nkirote and her husband, Festus Mule, as well as my two brothers, Joshua Muchui and Nicholas Mugambi, for trusting in me, supporting my decisions and praying for me to achieve them. I am also grateful to my cousin, Bassanio Mwenda, for his encouragement of me ever since I joined high school and his prayers throughout, especially during the time I was writing my thesis.

I also heartily thank Steve, Carol, David and Margaret, my American family, for walking with me throughout my time at Bowling Green, their tremendous support and concern in my graduate studies and for hosting me during the last days of my time at BGSU when my lease expired before I was done with this thesis.

Finally, words are not enough to express my gratitude to my wife, Serah Wanjiru Kimathi, for her unconditional love, help, and support during not only my thesis writing process but also the two years of my MA studies as well as during my undergraduate studies and the transition period in between. I appreciate her patience, kindness and encouragement through all the challenges I experienced, despite being herself a graduate student with her fair share of hardships.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the production of numerous popular culture texts in their various forms (movies, TV shows, books, songs, etc.) in Kenya, there has not been enough analysis of these texts in terms of what they mean to Kenyan society. Such analyses would go a long way in helping audiences to better understand their society and deal with the critique presented by the texts' producers appropriately. Many scholars of popular culture focus on the production of popular texts, but only a handful, mostly in the last two decades, have paid attention to their interpretation in Kenya. The reason for this avoidance could be fear of the tyrannical leadership that was in the country from independence up to after the turn of the millennium, as many of these texts are critical of the government. Due to this avoidance, popular culture texts in Kenya are consumed without being taken seriously by many citizens. Owing to the fictional creativity connected with popular texts, many Kenyans dismiss them as merely geared towards entertainment, and often parents and teachers discourage children from their consumption, asking them to focus on "more important things" such as education. For example, when I was in high school, our teachers used to encourage us to only read assigned books, especially when it came to creative writing. Scholars also tend to give little consideration to these materials.

I contend that, contrary to this belief, *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, a piece of popular culture, represents and is critical of Kenya's political leadership, which has embraced the colonial masters' attitudes towards the citizenry, and the citizens who have accepted this as normal and alright. I also argue that social relations in the book between the haves and the have-nots and between men and women represent social relations between Kenyans of high social classes and their counterparts in the lower classes and between Kenyan men and women respectively.

My choice of Kenya is primarily informed by the fact that I am a Kenyan citizen who, after reading *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, (and other similar texts) realized that though free of

physical foreign colonial power, the country has not realized the ideals envisioned by her freedom fighters. This knowledge of Kenya, mainly acquired during my stay in the country for over two and half decades, and heightened by studying postcolonial literature, makes me recognize the major role that this text has played in representing and critiquing Kenyan society.

In “What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?”, Stuart Hall argues that popular culture represents not only the desires and aspirations of a society but also its reality. Essentially, Hall’s argument is that popular culture is a true and valid representation of prevailing situations in the society. He posits that the role of popular culture in representing and even shaping the direction a society takes cannot be ignored. He is critical of cultural critics, particularly in America, who frequently have what he refers to as a “nothing ever changes, the system always wins” attitude (p. 107). According to his argument, this sort of attitude is a hindrance to the development of cultural strategies that can make a difference. He is of the opinion that forgetting the position of popular culture poses a problem. His interest is “cultural strategies that can make a difference... those that can shift the dispositions of power” (p. 107). Hall writes:

Popular culture carries that affirmative ring because of the prominence of the word “popular.” And in one sense, popular culture always has its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, the traditions of the people. It has connections with local hopes and local aspirations, local tragedies and local scenarios that are everyday practices and the everyday experiences of ordinary folks (1993, pp. 107-108).

Though Hall would be hesitant to only celebrate popular culture, his argument here illustrates how effective a tool popular culture is in not only representing a people and its culture but also in shaping them: he sees it as a site for alternative traditions, different and countering the dominant ones. Ignoring this is a mistake that could cost a society a great opportunity of making a difference. The assumption, harbored by many cultural critics in several societies, that it is not

possible to change the system and that everything remains the same, sets a dangerous precedent. In light of Hall's argument, I argue that an evaluation of Kenyan popular culture is critical, both to Kenyans and to Popular Culture scholars.

I also argue that the analysis of these texts is important because they reflect and represent the culture within which they are produced. The popular culture of a society is a representation of that society. Various forms of popular culture embody not only the desires and fantasies of the society that produces them but also the reality of that society. According to Stuart Hall, a people's popular culture is always based in their experiences, their pleasures, their memories and their traditions. He writes:

Popular culture... is a theatre for popular desires, a theatre for popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message but to ourselves for the first time (Hall, 1993, p. 113).

In Kenya, popular culture in its various forms plays a significant role in representing Kenyan society's cultural and political realities. Yet, as I mentioned above, few scholars have acknowledged this fact. For this reason, this thesis analyzes a 2012 Swahili novel, *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* by Ken Walibora (I will discuss my rationale for selecting this book in more detail in a later section of this introduction), to demonstrate how popular culture plays this important function in the East African republic. With this analysis, I hope to demonstrate that though popular culture may be entertaining, it has a bigger and more critical role in Kenyan society, and is therefore worth studying and analyzing. Though arguments about the general importance of popular culture have been successfully made in other places, they need to be pointed out (albeit briefly) in this study for Kenyans' sake, since the study is deliberately Kenya-focused and centered.

Before getting into an analysis of the text, I want to momentarily dwell on a general discussion of fiction, the popular culture category in which *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* falls. This brief discussion considers the relationship between fact/reality and fiction, therefore making my analysis of the fictional text in relation to Kenyan social and political realities credible.

In his analysis of the writing of Michel Houellebecq, a French novelist, Svend Brinkmann (2009) concludes that literary fiction represents the struggles, the experiences, the history, the language, the prevailing conditions, and the ideals of a people. Brinkmann (2009), in this analysis, contends that Houellebecq enables his readers to get a deep understanding of contemporary social life. He further argues that we can learn about human lives, their experiences and their sufferings, from Houellebecq as much as we can from more traditional forms of empirical research (p. 1391). Further, seeking to show the validity of fiction in representing reality, Brinkmann asserts that what we write is fiction in the sense of having been fashioned by us. Although he was writing specifically about elite literature, his argument applies as well or perhaps even better to popular culture texts.

Brinkmann's argument shows that fiction is not as unanchored in reality as people often think because imaginatively created fiction is based on the prevailing realities in society. Fiction is written (as all art is created) in a particular context from a particular viewpoint. Brinkmann's reasoning can be viewed as a caution to Kenyans' dismissal of popular fiction as just fiction and unimportant. Even though his philosophy may be European, some Kenyan scholars have shown a close relationship between Kenyan popular fiction and reality in Kenyan society and even other African nations. Tom Odhiambo, for instance, has authored quite a few articles examining several of these texts in different ways that evince this relationship between fact and fiction. In "Sexual Anxieties and Rampant Masculinities in Postcolonial Kenyan Literature", for example, Odhiambo examines ten different novels and concludes that postcolonial Kenyan literature

suggests that, after independence, urban working Kenyan men indulged in hedonistic pursuits to perform their new-found freedom, often to the detriment of their own lives and those of their families (p. 651). In “Kenyan Popular Fiction in English and the Melodramas of the Underdogs” Odhiambo studies seven more novels to examine the battle over resources between the poor and the rich in Kenya, while Tirop Simatei in “Colonial Violence, Postcolonial Violations: Violence, Landscape and Memory in Kenyan Fiction” examines five other novels that reveal connections between colonial violence, the violent responses to it, and infringements of citizens’ rights in postcolonial Kenya.

Svend Brinkmann is specific in his discussion of fiction’s representation of social reality. His essay, “Literature as Qualitative Inquiry: The Novelist as Researcher”, analyzes the fictional work of French novelist Michel Houellebecq, and shows that fiction can be as good as traditional techniques of empirical qualitative research in addressing real issues experienced in contemporary human lives. In his quest to elucidate fiction’s ability to reflect reality, Brinkmann, who – as a student of psychology – studied qualitative sociology and ethnography (Brinkmann, 2009), explores fiction as a praxis of carrying out qualitative social and human examination. After thoroughly exploring Houellebecq’s fiction, Brinkmann observes that literary fiction can teach us as much about reality as traditional forms of empirical research can. His careful, critical and in-depth analysis of the French novelist’s style and themes leads him to conclude that what is considered fiction in literature is actually based in the factual. He goes into depth to show the socially constructed nature of the boundary between fact and fiction, which according to Rosenblatt (2002), who he also references, has blurred in the postmodern epoch.

Hall and Brinkmann are among the strong voices that view popular culture texts as major representations of human’s contemporary reality. Taking a similar stand, I demonstrate that Swahili fictional literature plays this important role in Kenya. Brinkmann’s specificity in

discussing this role in his detailed analysis of Houellebecq's fictional work corresponds to my own discussion of Walibora's *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* as a depiction of Kenya.

Considering the above observations, it is correct to posit that societies often see reflections of their realities in their fiction. This reflection usually shows both the positive and the negative aspects of a society. Positive representation could be read as a compliment by the authors, who often act as critics of their own societies. Negative representation, on the other hand, would be a call for the society to work on and embrace change. Other than Walibora, other authors of fiction in Kenya such as Meja Mwangi, K.W. Wamitila and John Habwe, realizing the potential of their work to model a dream society by providing a mirror to the prevailing situations in the country, write about Kenya's political, social and even economic conditions. Based on the above discussion, as well as my own personal experience as a Kenyan scholar of Swahili literature, I am convinced that the work done by these fictional authors represents Kenya and is important not only in educating non-Kenyans about Kenya but also, and more importantly, in enlightening Kenyans about themselves. As Hall states, it is in popular culture that "we discover and play with identifications of ourselves and that we are represented not only to the audience out there... but also to ourselves for the first time" (p. 113). In other words, representations of a people through popular culture make them more aware of their situation, their struggles, their plight and the possibilities that surround them. In this sense, popular culture allows people to see themselves more clearly, thus giving them a chance to right the wrongs that they may see.

Postcolonial Kenya sees itself in Swahili fiction, more than in any other form of popular culture. Many of the other forms of popular culture in the East African nation emphasize specific aspects of the society while hardly dealing with others. Most TV shows, for instance, pay attention to social issues and fail to address issues pertaining to politics. This leaves fiction as the

most significant single form of popular culture that addresses society more holistically. The fact that fiction achieves this rather holistic representation, coupled with my background in Swahili scholarship, inform my choice of fiction as the popular culture form to be analyzed in this study.

To put this study in context, it is important for me to discuss my personal background and the history and society of Kenya, my country of origin. I was born in Meru, a county in the Eastern region of Kenya, in the late 1980s. This was during the reign of the second president of the country, Daniel Moi, whose rule was considered dictatorial by Kenyans and foreigners alike. I went to primary and secondary school in Meru and later earned a Bachelor of Education at the University of Nairobi (located in the country's capital), where I studied Swahili language and literature. A year before my admission to university, the country had gone into elections with the main contenders being Mwai Kibaki (from the Kikuyu ethnic community) and Raila Odinga (from the Luo ethnic community). The latter lost to the former, but many critics from within the country and outside believed that the election had been rigged. Odinga, who did not concede, called for mass protests that quickly turned violent and escalated into ethnically targeted violence. This led to skirmishes in many parts of the country, leaving thousands dead and tens of thousands displaced from their homes. These clashes, now famously referred to as the 2007/2008 post-election violence, lasted from late December 2007 to February 2008, when a power sharing deal between Kibaki and Odinga was brokered in talks mediated by former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan.

Kenya has had four presidents and basically two political regimes since it gained independence from Great Britain in 1963. The first regime, which lasted from 1963 to 1992, was characterized by dictatorial leadership and the rule of a single political party. The second one is said to have started in 1992, after a constitutional amendment that allowed multiparty democracy ushered in what came to be known as the second liberation. It was, however, not until 2002,

when the third president of Kenya took the reins of power, that the gains of this second liberation were felt; political leaders and critics spoke more freely without fear of assassination and intimidation, and media freedom was guaranteed and not controlled by the government (as was the case previously) – Kenya was becoming a democracy. Parliamentary and presidential elections, however, if the 2007 general election is anything to go by, did not get any freer or fairer. Socially, Kenyans have, since independence, known two major divisions: extremely wealthy Kenyans who lead affluent lives, occupy major leadership positions and own the country's means of production on one hand, and poorer, struggling and disenfranchised Kenyans, on the other. The reality of the Kenyan political and social situation is well captured in Ken Walibora's Swahili novel, *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*.

The Author: Ken Waliaula Walibora

Since in my analysis I will be referring to the author in his capacity as author and to his scholarship, that I contend has influenced themes and the style of this novel, it is important for me to give some background about him. Walibora holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Cultural Studies from Ohio State University, two MAs in Comparative Cultural Studies and African American and African Studies, both from Ohio State University, and a BA in Literature and Swahili Studies from University of Nairobi, Kenya. He is the author of *Narrating Prison Experience: Human Rights, Self, Society, and Political Incarceration in Africa*, a 2013 book that uses prison narratives from Kenya to demonstrate how writing constitutes a reaffirmation of self and nation for political prisoners. He has also authored many articles, book chapters, book reviews and numerous Swahili novels and short stories. According to his resume, Walibora's teaching and research interests include Swahili Language and Literatures; mass media; African, African American, and Caribbean Literatures; Anglophone Literatures; World Literatures in English; Postcolonial Literatures; Literary Theory, and Culture; Narrative theory; Trauma Theory;

Cultural Theory and Life Writing; Memory; Translation Studies; and World Literature

(<https://wisc.academia.edu/KenWaliboraWaliaula/CurriculumVitae>).

The Text: *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*

The title *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* is a Swahili saying meaning “matters have gotten out of hand.” The novel is one of the most articulate popular Swahili fictional texts to deal with the social and political situation of postcolonial Kenya. It is set in a fictional country known as Tomoko which, like Kenya, is a former British colony. The country of Tomoko is grappling with dictatorial governance and unequal distribution of resources among its citizens. In the forward to the novel, F.E.M.K. Senkoro, professor of Swahili Literature at the University of Dar es Salaam describes it as, “a story of a people seeking and finding themselves and realizing that their mistakes are connected to every despotic leader ...whom they themselves have given the mandate to rule them” (Walibora, 2012, p. vi).

In the book, Walibora describes the literal and figurative journeys of his main characters (a young man whose name, Amani, means “peace” in Swahili, and a sixteen-year-old girl named Imani, which is Swahili for “faith”) as well as the country’s social and political journey under totalitarianism. Through the dictatorial leadership of King Nasaba Bora of Sokomoko (a fictional region in the now independent nation of Tomoko), the author outlines the despotic nature of the country’s regime, its effects on the citizens, the citizens’ responses and what seems like a gradual liberation of the region through the efforts of learned youngsters who include the despotic ruler’s son. Amani and Imani, who are both extremely poor, travel to Sokomoko in search of jobs in hopes of earning a livelihood after both lose their families and family property in unclear circumstances. Imani and her family have been forcefully evicted from their piece of land by unknown people who claim that “the owner” needs the land. Amani, on the other hand, has lost all his family members in assassinations and his only surviving uncle is imprisoned for a crime

he did not commit – the murder of his father, Amani’s grandfather. Amani intends his journey to Sokomoko to help him find answers to the many questions about his life – his grandfather’s actual assassin, the people responsible for the loss of his family property, and the theft of his intellectual property; he has evidence that he is likely to get these answers in Sokomoko.

On his journey, Amani sits next to a lake and starts reading the introduction of the manuscript of a book he once wrote but that was rejected by the publisher, only for him to read this very book published under a different author’s name. Imani, who has lost hope in life and is determined to commit suicide by drowning herself in the lake, meets him reading the manuscript and is attracted to his voice. She hides behind him so as to listen to him unnoticed, but is disappointed when he bitterly throws the manuscript into the lake. Her reaction to this disappointment draws his attention and he notices her for the first time. After a short conversation, Imani abandons her suicide plans and decides to join Amani on his journey to Sokomoko. On arrival, they each land poor service jobs and join a multitude of other citizens, young and old, who are leading lives similar to those of slaves. Nasaba Bora, the despotic king of Sokomoko, employs Amani as his herd-boy, while Imani is employed by the king’s brother, Majisifu, a famous teacher and author, to take care of his disabled kids. In contrast to their employees, the two employers are wealthy and lead affluent lives and are known all over the country and beyond. The resemblances between Tomoko and Kenya in terms of political neocolonialism, gender disparities and big inequalities between the rich and the poor, coupled with the author’s Kenyan roots as well as his interests in post colonialism (as evidenced in Mwangi E. 2010, and Walibora’s own works, both fictional and scholarly), indicate that the text represents postcolonial Kenya.

The novel fails to capture the full picture of Kenya in some ways, though. One major topic it avoids is ethnicity, a factor that comes into play in a huge manner in Kenyan social and

political interactions. Political leadership in the country, for instance, is highly determined by the contenders' tribes. National political leaders rely on the backing of their tribesmen and seek to form alliances with influential leaders from other ethnicities to ensure they clinch seats of power. This brews hatred between members of different ethnicities and sometimes leads to ethnically-based violence. During the 2007/2008 post-election violence, for instance, Kenyans were divided along ethnic lines. The two major factions were Kikuyus and Luos (the ethnic communities of Kibaki and Odinga, the two major contenders).

Walibora probably deliberately eschewed this theme because many Kenyans and sociopolitical critics view social injustices as being propagated by the bourgeoisie against the proletariat and subaltern, regardless of ethnic backgrounds, and think that ethnicity is only utilized by the bourgeoisie to this end. Those who hold this view think political leaders present themselves to citizens as enemies, which in turn makes their loyal followers (from their shared ethnic backgrounds) view each other as adversaries as well; this strategy enables the leaders to divide and rule the citizens. Subscribers to this point of view, observing the cordial relationship that leaders – who are often opposed to each other in public – have with each other on a personal level, use the Swahili saying, *Wapiganapo fahali wawili, ziумiаzo ni nyasi* (“When two bulls fight, it is the grass under their feet that gets hurt”) to point out that citizens are the ones who lose the most when there is political war between the leaders – leaders lose little to nothing (often they gain much) but citizens always lose much – lives, property, etc. It is also not lost on anyone that when leaders are accused of crimes such as corruption, they go back to their gullible tribesmen claiming that their enemies are biased against them, hence galvanizing support from the already brainwashed, ignorant supporters, a fact that makes it hard to fight those leaders without stimulating ethnic animosity. Many of Walibora's texts, *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* included, suggest that he subscribes to the belief that it is class, not ethnicity, that matters in Kenya.

Understanding this may help us fathom why the author avoids the discussion of ethnicity – even though it is used by political demagogues as explained, to him it is a non-issue because the real issue is the division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, regardless of their ethnicities. The two are the real enemies of each other.

Research Justification

I chose to study *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* for several reasons. As demonstrated above, the book holistically represents Kenya's social and political situation, a fact that, as I argued earlier, is important for any society – not only does the society present itself to others through popular texts, but it also sees its reflection and becomes more aware of its own character, which may lead to a desire to amend unpleasant situations or uphold gratifying ones. *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* is therefore an important text for Kenyans in that it addresses pertinent issues in the country, thereby providing citizens with an opportunity to see their country more clearly and more conscientiously. Moreover, this book tells the Kenyan story in a more comprehensive manner than any other single piece of popular culture. As I mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction, apart from popular fiction, many of Kenya's other forms of popular culture focus on specific aspects of Kenyan society and neglect others. This book though, as mentioned earlier, is deliberately silent on ethnicity. This silence is significant and will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.

It may be argued though, that this book is more elite than it is popular since it is assigned and studied in schools. However, taking into consideration the fluidity of the boundary between the various categories of popular culture, this argument would not hold water. As Russel Nye (1970) posits, popular culture is too broad to be defined clearly. He contends that one must mark its boundaries with proper elasticity in order to work with it. According to him, most though not all popular culture scholars “would agree that ‘popular culture’ describes those productions, both

artistic and commercial, designed for mass consumption, which appeal to and express the tastes and understanding of the majority of the public, free of control by minority standards” (pp. 21-22). Walibora’s intentional use of Swahili language, a native language for some Kenyans and one known to all of them since it is the national language, and hence the language of everyday life, makes the text accessible to the majority of the Kenyan public. In addition, the text employs styles such as the use of proverbs and sayings (as evidenced in the title), a strategy of communication that is popular throughout the country among people of all walks of life, not only in Swahili but also in other native languages. This makes it suitable for expressing the tastes and understanding of the public. Furthermore, the very fact that it is studied in school means it is mass produced to cater for all the students that need it each year to prepare for their exams, a factor that has made it one of the most pirated books in Kenya, as the *Standard* newspaper reported on 14th February 2017. The notion that this text is elite rather than popular would be incorrect, considering these facts.

Besides, it expresses the masses’ tastes and understandings and, by criticizing and mocking the bourgeoisie while sympathizing with and praising the proletariat, the book distances itself from the elite and seeks to identify more with popular culture. In this book, faults of leaders and people with positions of responsibility lead them to destruction; King Nasaba Bora is rejected by everyone, including his own family, and ends up committing suicide. The bourgeoisie are ridiculed and end up in shame or in regret; the famous teacher and author, Majisifu, is humiliated after he is invited for a public lecture on his new book but is unable to answer some critical questions about it, since he had stolen the book manuscript and published it as his own after it was given to him by a publishing company for editing and proofreading. On the other hand, the book gives the proletariat hope; even though they have been suffering under dictatorial rule due to their own choices, the poor masses have a chance to make a better choice

when King Nasaba Bora commits suicide. The poor unknown author who wrote the manuscript that Majisifu published as his own also gets a reprieve when he is exposed – he stands a better chance of being published since it has now come to public notice that some editors steal their clients' manuscripts. The fact that the text addresses these issues, and in this manner, gives it relevance not only inside but also outside the educational context. This also qualifies it as the “site of alternative traditions” that Nye (1970, p. 108) describes popular culture as.

It may seem confusing though that the government would allow a book that is critical of it to be studied in schools. Two factors may explain why the government lets this happen: first, the educational system is so exam oriented that Kenyan students study solely for the purpose of passing the exams. Because of this, students tend to be ignorant of deeper issues expressed in this book (and other similar texts). I taught Swahili language and literature for several years in Kenya and it was frustrating to see that students cared very little about the deeper meaning of messages in such texts; all they cared for was the superficial information that would enable them to pass exams. This basically leads to rote learning. The government thus sees little risk in letting them study this text. Secondly, though the text addresses real issues affecting Kenyan society, it has a fictional setting and fictional characters. This either makes the government think it is just that (fictional), or makes the government confident that the book will be read as just that (fictional) and therefore not addressing anything real.

By analyzing Walibora's *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* I intend to demonstrate the central role of popular culture. Popular culture in Kenya, though a big factor in people's everyday lives, has not been taken seriously, especially in academic circles; many understand it to be solely for entertainment purposes as earlier mentioned and its allocation to be studied in school is just a fulfillment of curriculum requirements and not a means to provoke thought (as explained above, the education system barely allows room for thought provocation). Pointing out the important

issues that popular culture addresses in the country will hopefully make Kenyans more attentive to these issues.

Literature Review

Having shown the effectiveness of popular culture, particularly fiction, in representing a society's reality, I now want to delve into some concepts that guide my textual analysis. As mentioned earlier, Walibora's novel is a critical exploration of postcolonial Kenya's political and social atmosphere. As such, my examination of these issues will be guided by the ideas of postcolonial social, political and economic theorists. A group of such theorists, the Frankfurt School, critiqued modernity and capitalist society. The Frankfurt School's theory of modern capitalism contends that contemporary capitalism has overcome discrepancies and crises it once faced and has acquired new and exceptional powers of stability and continuity. Walibora's critique of Kenya corresponds with the Frankfurt school's criticism of modern capitalism. The affluence and economic growth among some of Tomoko's residents on the one hand and the harrowing poverty of the rest on the other, directly relates to the Kenyan situation where a handful of powerful individuals run the government, own the means of production and lead luxurious lives, while their fellow countrymen live in dire poverty.

Postcolonial scholars, including Walibora (2013), have demonstrated that previously colonized nations like Kenya are often currently ruled by those who took leadership from the colonial regime in a manner similar to that of the colonial administration. Walibora's narration of the events leading to King Nasaba Bora's current state of affluence, shows that the king, who had been a freedom fighter, grabbed land, organized assassinations of individuals and carried out several other dubious activities to acquire his wealth and status. *Unmasking the African Dictator*, a series of essays by different African authors with the central argument that independent Africa is still facing the problems it did during the colonial era, and that these problems are now

perpetuated by the people in power in different nations of the continent, prove that Kenya's situation is no different than that of Tomoko in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*. *Not Yet Uhuru, the Autobiography of Oginga Odinga*, Kenya's first vice president, is another work that demonstrates the resemblance of Kenya and Tomoko. The autobiography's title, "Not yet Uhuru" ("uhuru" is Swahili for "independence") alludes to the notion that Kenya is still colonized. Odinga, who fell out with the founding president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, over differences in governance principles, argues that colonial rule is still at play in Kenyan politics. This, again, shows that the illusion of political freedom painted in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* is a reality experienced in Kenya.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, one of the books that Amani reads in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, by critiquing nationalism and imperialism, discusses both personal and social mental health. Fanon argues that the use of language helps to construct imperialist identities (such as colonizer and colonized so as to teach and psychologically fashion the native and the colonist into their respective roles as slave and master), and discusses the role of intellectuals in a revolution. Walibora in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* explores the struggles of the proletariat and the subalterns in Tomoko and strategies employed by the ruling class to keep them in their subservient positions. He goes a step further to suggest a path towards emancipation for the proletariat through revolution led by proletarian intellectuals, like Amani, and bourgeoisie intellectuals who sympathize with the proletariat, like Madhubuti, the king's son. This situation described by Walibora corresponds to the relationship of Kenya's bourgeoisie and proletariat. The proletariat serve the bourgeoisie and refer to them as "wakubwa" ("mighty ones") or "waheshimiwa" ("honorable ones"), terms coined by the ruling class themselves to customize their rule. Some of these terms are used as titles by law. For instance, members of parliament

always have a “honorable” preceding their names (e.g. Honorable James Orengo) and this is protected by an act of parliament.

In the chapters that follow, I will specifically detail how *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* represents Kenya. Chapter One utilizes the ideas of Louis Althusser about State Apparatuses to analyze political leadership in the text as representative of the same in Kenya. It compares issues pertaining to leadership and governance in Sokomoko with those in Kenya. The second chapter is a discussion about class. I argue, as Walibora implicitly does, that Kenya’s real cause of division is not ethnicity, as many think and as the ruling class wants to make citizens believe, but rather class. The last chapter is concerned with feminism. It analyzes gender relations and reveals the struggles that women go through in their daily lives as they interact with men both at home and at work. My primary data includes information obtained from newspaper reports, government and non-governmental organization statistics – both Kenyan and international – as well as my own knowledge of the country. I also utilize reports by various commissions of inquiry (formed by the government of Kenya but seldom acted on upon completion) for information.

CHAPTER I: IS IT YET UHURU?

Introduction

In discussing the State, Louis Althusser, who bases his argument in Marxist theory, differentiates between two types of State Apparatuses: The Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), “which function massively and predominantly by ideology” (Althusser in Durham and Kellner, 2012, p. 81) and the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), which “function massively and predominantly by repression” (p. 81). Althusser argues that the ISAs and the RSAs are utilized by the ruling class to advance their agenda in the state in the rule of their subjects.

Walibora’s narration of leadership and governance in the fictional state of Tomoko, a metaphorical representation of postcolonial Kenya, shows a near perfect use of the two State Apparatuses identified by Althusser. In this chapter, I allude to the title and use the ideas of Oginga Odinga (1967) in *Not Yet Uhuru: The Autobiography of Oginga Odinga*, to argue that Kenya, though independent of colonial rule as we know it, is still not free of colonialism: Her postcolonial leaders have adopted the governance style of the colonizer, perfected it and are the new colonial powers of their own people. (Uhuru is Swahili for “freedom” or “independence”). Worse still, Kenyans seemingly either see little problem with this or cannot fathom a way out of their mess. Using Althusser’s ideas, therefore, I analyze the use of ISAs and RSAs by the political leadership in Tomoko, the fictional country about which Walibora writes in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, as a representation and critique of similar situations in Kenya.

Several factors inform my conclusion that Tomoko is a metaphor for Kenya. Both are former British colonies, and the leaders who were involved in the fight for independence, basically those that received some form of Western education, are the ones that took up leadership once independence was realized in both countries. As a newly independent nation whose government has just assumed office, Tomoko faces many challenges, many of which are

created by its very leaders. This situation is quite similar to that of Kenya from the years following independence up to the present time. Though changing to a certain degree in terms of people at the helm of leadership and policies of leadership, the state of affairs remains the same in terms of the problems that citizens go through because of their leaders' styles of leadership. Walibora paints a similar scenario about Tomoko – especially when the King dies and an acting one is appointed – by, among other things, making this comment: “... *Wakazi wa Sokomoko wakafika kumlaki dikteta mpya aliyechukua pahala pa yule aliyetokomea...*” {“Residents of Sokomoko arrived to welcome the new dictator, who had taken the place of the one who had disappeared” (p. 155)}.

By making this statement, the author suggests that, though a different person has taken the kingship, the situation has not necessarily changed. He suggests that the new king is a dictator just like the former one, a fact that does not signify any hope for a better future for the residents. Such a situation has been witnessed in Kenya with every transition of power since independence. The end of the KANU (Kenya African National Union) era in 2002 was seen by many as a new, hopeful start, and it was a defining moment in many ways for Kenya. For the first time in the history of independent Kenya, Kenyans were united against KANU and all the ills it had propagated in the country (Wainanina 2007). Mwai Kibaki and his National Alliance of Kenya (NAK), a coalition of 14 political parties that united in opposition to the KANU government prior to the 2002 elections, and Raila Odinga's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a group of KANU dissidents, united (Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, 2003) to form a coalition so strong that it garnered 62% of the votes against KANU's 31% (Anderson, 2003). Binyavanga Wainaina in “Generation Kenya”, an article published in July 2007 in *Vanity Fair*, a popular culture, fashion, and current affairs magazine published by

Condé Nast in the United States, explains the mood that engulfed the young nation during that period:

In the months building up to the elections, we began to trust one another. Everywhere I went, I heard the same words. Roads. A new constitution. Taps. Water. Electricity. Education. The usual tribal chauvinism and crude political sycophancy vanished. Nations are mythical creatures, gaseous, and sometimes poisonous. But they start to solidify when diverse people have moments when aspirations coincide (Wainaina, 2007, p. 84).

While the NARC government under President Kibaki led Kenya into tremendous economic growth, created excellent local and international business spaces, and gave Kenyans incredible democratic space (Wainaina, 2007, Otieno, 2005, Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, 2003), it was rocked by massive corruption scandals, nepotism and other incidents of impropriety (Otieno, 2005). The coalition partners fell out when, after three years, President Kibaki failed to honor his pre-election Memorandum of Understanding with Odinga, a situation that divided the country along ethnic lines (Kibaki's Kikuyu community and allied ethnicities versus Odinga's Luo community and allied ethnicities), and ultimately threw the people into the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence, the worst incident of ethnic violence and bloodshed ever witnessed in the country (Daily Nation, January 7, 2017).

Similar optimism and hope to that of 2002 was witnessed in the country after the promulgation of the new constitution in 2010, that "addresses political patronage, gender disparity, negative ethnicity and land grabbing; issues which have afflicted Kenya since independence" (Degadjor, 2010). However, the government has not been committed to the implementation of the constitution, as indicated by political appointments, government spending and activities between the executive and other arms of government. For example, legislators allied to the ruling party, who are the majority in the national assembly, have always supported

the government executive position even when it is in violation of the constitution, while the whole parliament, which is male dominated, has failed to enact laws to allow for equitable female representation in parliament, a provision of the constitution. The situation is so recurrent that many Kenyans now have little hope for change, even coining the phrase “different monkeys, same forest” in both Swahili and English, to point out that postcolonial leaders, though different, have similar characteristics – selfishness and greed.

Walibora’s statement about the new king evinces more information on his part than on the part of the residents of Sokomoko, whom he is discussing. This extra knowledge, in my opinion (informed by the side-by-side analysis of *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* and postcolonial Kenya, as well as a study of the author), is derived from the author’s own life experience. He is describing, or rather representing in a fictional text, a situation he is already familiar with.

In this chapter, I argue that the political leadership of Tomoko, specifically Sokomoko as portrayed in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, represents postcolonial Kenya. Focusing on the post-independence leadership of Sokomoko region in Tomoko, I draw similarities between the fictional region and Kenya in their uses of State Apparatuses, to show how colonial rule is adopted from their former colonial masters and perpetuated in the independent nations. Walibora’s discussion of Sokomoko rather than all of Tomoko while representing Kenya is a strategic choice: Walibora intends to compare the use of RSAs in Kenya to their use in monarchies. He therefore creates Sokomoko, a monarchy inside Tomoko, for this purpose. He also intends to disguise his condemnation of the Kenyan “monarchs” who have terrorized, incarcerated and even assassinated authors such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o (Walibora, 2013) for addressing the topics Walibora is addressing.

This chapter is divided into two sections; the first showing the use of RSAs in maintaining colonial-like rule in the independent states, and the second detailing the use of ISAs to the same end. It must be remembered that, as Althusser writes:

every State Apparatus, whether Repressive or Ideological, “functions” both by violence and ideology, but with one very important distinction which makes it imperative not to confuse the ISAs with the RSAs. This is the fact that RSAs function massively and predominantly by repression while functioning secondarily by ideology... In the same way, but inversely, ... the ISAs function massively and predominantly by Ideology but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, ... this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic (Althusser in Durham and Kellner, 2012, p. 81).

Because of this, in the sections that analyze the use of the two different State Apparatuses neither acts in isolation from the other. Each section has further thematic subdivisions. Under the use of RSAs, thematic subsections addressing corruption as a means of coercion, abuse of the judiciary, nepotism, and dictatorship are discussed, while under ISAs thematic subsections detail political sycophancy and the use of language to advance selfish government agendas.

The Use of RSAs

Bribery and Corruption

The King of Sokomoko, Nasaba Bora, has acquired virtually all his property through unjust means, primarily corruption. The king’s name in Swahili means “the perfect ancestry”. This is significant in relation to Kenyan postcolonial leadership – the founding president, Jomo Kenyatta (a Kikuyu) was succeeded by his then vice president, Daniel Moi (a Kalenjin) upon his death. Moi ruled for 24 years and unsuccessfully rooted for the election of Uhuru Kenyatta, Jomo Kenyatta’s son. Kibaki (a Kikuyu) was elected against Moi’s wish but failed to honor the Memorandum of Understanding he had signed with Raila Odinga (a Luo) to create the position

of a prime minister, which would have given Odinga (and by extension the Luo community) more power in Kenyan political leadership. Upon the retirement of Kibaki, whose second bid Uhuru Kenyatta rooted for, Uhuru was elected president, deputized by William Ruto (a Kalenjin) with a promise to back Ruto's presidential ambitions once Kenyatta's two terms are completed. Kenyan presidency has thus been bouncing between the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin communities since independence, and as this discussion implies, the two communities intend to keep it that way by supporting each other and blocking other communities from accessing it.

Before becoming king of Sokomoko, Nasaba Bora, who has been educated by missionaries, was secretary to one of the colonial-era missionaries. After independence, he was employed in the Ministry of Lands, where the author says that he learned a lot about bribery and corruption. Corruption is a widespread problem in independent Tomoko. Walibora describes it as an incurable disease whose "symptoms include hiding people's documents" (p. 13) in government offices, a strategy that is widely understood by residents to be aimed at communicating with clients to grease the officers' palms. Walibora goes on to explain that someone suffering from this disease does not shy away from stealing even from the poorest of the poor.

These events are reminiscent of the situation that Kenya has found herself in for almost the entire half a century that she has been a republic. Corruption has been a major challenge for the young nation. Every government that has ruled Kenya since independence has had several corruption scandals. From the Goldenberg scandal in the 1990s, the Anglo-leasing one in early 2000s, and the NYS one in 2014, to mention just a few, the political class has robbed Kenyans mercilessly for as long as the country has been independent. Just like King Nasaba Bora of Tomoko, many Kenyan leaders since independence have acquired tremendous wealth through corruption. The country has continuously performed poorly in corruption perception indexes

despite the creation of government agencies to fight this menace. According to a 2016 Corruption Perception Index released by the global anti-corruption watchdog, Transparency International, Kenya was ranked at position 145 out of 176 countries (*Daily Nation*, 25 Jan 2017). Officers in the public sector rarely offer services to citizens before getting a bribe, sometimes pretending to have misplaced important documents; a strategy many Kenyans understand to mean *Toa Kitu Kidogo*, commonly abbreviated as TKK, which is Swahili for “Give me a bribe.” Once someone understands this coded message and gives the officers a bribe, the “misplaced” documents miraculously resurface and services are offered. This trend is so common in the country that songs have been composed about it, skits written to ridicule it, demonstrations held against it, and terms such as TKK created to refer to it. Many Kenyans have lost hope of ever defeating corruption, and some have even accepted it as Kenyans’ nature!

When the government of independent Tomoko, through the Ministry of Lands and Residence, sets out to settle Africans in the formerly white settler farms, Nasaba Bora, who works in the ministry, forges documents in preparation to acquire the property. Legal documents show that a two-hundred-and-seventy-acre piece of land and the house on it, property in which he is interested and which he ends up getting for himself, belongs to Chichiri Hamadi, Amani’s grandfather, who is a professor teaching abroad in London and who had earlier bought the land on loan. When he gets back home, Nasaba Bora arranges his assassination to ensure that he is not a stumbling block in his plan and then has Amani’s uncle blamed and jailed for the murder. To achieve all this, the king hires the services of thugs and bribes several people, including the police, court officials and even judges.

King Nasaba Bora’s actions are similar to frequent happenings in independent Kenya. After independence, most of the land that belonged to white settlers during the colonial era was transferred to Kenyans on a willing buyer/willing seller principle, with loans being given to

Kenyans who qualified (Leo, 1989). This strategy was arrived at by the colonial government in conjunction with the incoming Kenyan government in a bid to ensure that white settlers would be compensated if they chose to leave the country. More conniving was the fact that the strategy was aimed at benefitting the bourgeoisie Kenyans, precisely the political class. The bourgeoisie were virtually the only people with the financial capacity to buy the property; most of the rest of the Kenyans who lost their land to white settlers had little to no resources. This is because they had been forced to work in the settler farms for meagre earnings. Buying their land back was impossible, as Syagga reveals, in a 2011 report by the Society for International Development:

... politicians with power and money and loyalists who had made their fortunes by being close to the colonial government, as well as businessmen with liquid cash, managed to acquire thousands of acres. The process created a new African elite, which left the penniless scrapping for tiny pieces of land (Syagga, 2011, 10).

It was not a fair deal, as the land had been forcefully taken from poor Kenyans during colonialism – it was not bought from them and it would therefore be unjust and immoral to sell them their own land.

Walibora writes that King Nasaba Bora got not only the hundred-and-seventy-acre piece of land and the house on it but also several other huge and prime pieces of land through his political influence. A similar scenario has been recorded with Kenyan postcolonial political leaders. According to *thisisafrika.me*, a website that is dedicated to political and cultural issues in Africa, a 2014 survey found that major political families own 50% of Kenya's wealth, with land ownership providing the core of this wealth. While this is the case, many Kenyans, essentially those that reside in slums, own no land at all. A report by the Society for International Development, an international network of individuals and organizations founded in 1957 to promote social justice and foster democratic participation in the development process, reveals a

precedent set by the first president of independent Kenya that resembles Nasaba Bora's schemes of property acquisition. The report notes that a Million-Acre Settlement Scheme meant for the settlement of poor displaced peasants after independence was up for grabs by government officials when President Kenyatta, in early 1964, ordered "that all colonial farmhouses together with 100 acres surrounding the farmhouses be reserved for 'prominent people' alongside poor farmers in the settlement schemes" (Syagga, 2011, 11). The report further notes that "the idea of farmhouses and the 100 acres, called the 'Z plots,'... became an avenue for politicians to settle their kin and kith and get choice land for themselves" (p. 11). Walibora in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* addresses similar schemes executed by King Nasaba Bora. For instance, writing about strategies through which the king provides for his family, he illustrates how he uses his position to force citizens to pay for his son's education abroad. The author emphasizes that the king makes even those who have very little to spare contribute towards this, arguing that he is the king and a king is a great person. This is furthered by his use of public resources. A case in point is Balozi (a Swahili name that translates to "ambassador" – its significance is discussed in a later section of this chapter), King Nasaba Bora's confidant and loyal spokesman. For his loyalty, the king uses public resources to reward him, a situation that is comparable to President Kenyatta's order mentioned above, in which, as Syagga elaborates, the "prominent people" benefited at the expense of poor Kenyans.

Referencing the *Daily Nation* newspaper, Syagga elaborates how some of the most influential government personalities in newly independent Kenya got land fraudulently after the president's order. Syagga writes:

On 23 April 1965, Dr. Julius Kiano, then Commerce and Industry minister, wrote a confidential letter to the Ministry of Lands permanent secretary, Peter Shiyuka, asking to be allocated a farm house in Dundori that had previously belonged to a Mr. Fitzmaurice,

a white settler. Dr. Kiano wanted to purchase the “main house, the guest house and dairy premises together with approximately 100 acres around it”, not for his own use but to settle his sister, Mrs. Penina Waithira. On 18 May 1965, Martin Shikuku, then MP for Butere, asked the Minister for Lands to be allocated for Fraser’s house in the Kiminini Scheme [sic]. On his part, former President Moi (then a cabinet minister) in 1966 applied to get Gunson’s house within the Perkera Scheme in Eldama Ravine. By July 1966, there were 296 plots excised and allocated to personalities including President Kenyatta, Minister Jackson Angaine, Assistant Minister Mwai Kibaki and Permanent Secretary Robert Ouko, among others (Syagga, 2011, 11).

The meaning of the king’s name, Nasaba Bora (“the perfect ancestry”), as explained earlier, can also be applied to the ruling class in light of their acquisition of property using their position and power. Several wealthy Kenyans and high-ranking government officials have been linked with land-grabbing even in very recent times. 2015, for instance, opened with allegations of one of the highest-ranking politicians attempting to grab a piece of a public primary school in Nairobi (Citizen TV, Kenya, 2nd June). Land has been described by many as an emotional issue in Kenya. Many argue that the ethnic animosity between the communities of Kenya has been actually a struggle for land ownership or against land-grabbing (Syagga, 2011). In late 2008, the *Daily Nation*, a national newspaper in the country, cited a secret land deal between Kenyatta (the first president of independent Kenya) and the British government as the genesis of the unequal distribution of land among Kenyans and, consequently, a cause of social and political instability. The pact, reportedly, was an agreement that Kenyatta would not interfere with skewed land distribution after independence; in return, the British government would pave the way for him to be president. Kenyatta later extracted a similar pledge from his successor, former President Daniel Arap Moi (hence creating “the perfect ancestry”). The newspaper further reports that this

information is contained in the secret papers of the late Sir Michael Blundell, a white settler leader who acted as the liaison between Kenyatta and the British government in sealing the deal, and that it is corroborated in the secret notes of Kenya's second vice-president, the late Joseph Murumbi, deposited at the Kenya National Archives (Daily Nation Sep 20, 2008).

The land question haunts the country to this day, an entire generation after Kenyatta's death and long after Moi left office. Earlier in 2008, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, Kenya was engulfed in Post-Election Violence (PEV), the worst incident of bloodshed, displacements and destruction of property ever witnessed in the country since independence. Although the justification for it was the disputed 2007 presidential election results, many political analysts and commissions of inquiry formed to look into this and other post-election chaos, most notably the Akiwumi commission (1999), deduce that the underlying issue is historical disputes, especially on the land issue; what has come to be commonly referred to as "historical land injustices" (Syagga, 2011). This situation is very similar to the one that Walibora describes where Nasaba Bora forcibly acquires land and assassinates owners to make sure he has no obstacle.

Walibora illustrates how King Nasaba Bora evicts Imani's family from their piece of land and even murders people in the family who oppose his plan. Amani has been faced with similar circumstances, and in fact his journey to Sokomoko is geared towards unearthing the truth about this situation. Reading this novel, it would be difficult for anyone who is familiar with the land question in Kenya and the entanglement of political leaders in the whole issue not to think of it. There are numerous documented cases of Kenyan families that have been dispossessed of their land through fraud and corruption. This has led to landlessness and the squatter phenomenon (Syagga, 2011), hence slum settlements as well as the internally displaced persons' scenario, especially arising from the 2007/2008 PEV.

Towards the end of *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, Amani saves the king from thugs who have waylaid him with the intention of killing him for grabbing their families' lands and assassinating members of their families. Amani knows one of the thugs personally, having had spent time with him in prison when, in the past, he (Amani) had been accused of and jailed for political incitement as a university student. He uses his acquaintance with him to beg him and his colleagues to leave the king alone, stating that spilling people's blood is not beneficial. The thugs oblige and Amani accompanies the king to his home upon his request, where he asks Amani what he would like for a reward for saving his life. Amani responds that he wants to know the source of the king's tremendous wealth, especially his prime, huge pieces of land. At this, the king confesses and gives Amani all the documents – both forged and original. Filled with guilt due to Amani's goodness to him, he then leaves all these with Amani and is found many days later having committed suicide. Meanwhile, Amani returns the pieces of land to their rightful owners, including himself and his jailed uncle (the only surviving descendants of Chichiri Hamadi, Amani's grandfather). In consultation with his uncle, Amani donates 100 of the 270 acres to poor residents of Sokomoko.

This simplistic resolution to the land issue is probably only possible in imagination and therefore fiction. However, through it, Walibora proposes a solution to the unresolved land issues in Kenya. As already discussed, ethnic violence is mostly a fight for land. The ruling political class disguises this fact and fuels it with ethnic hate for two reasons: (i) conceal from their poor disenfranchised followers the fact that they (the leaders) are actually the ones who have grabbed and are keeping their land and (ii) continue getting the support of their followers who they deceive to think that their leaders are heroes and that people from other communities are their enemies and should be fought. Through the waylaying of Nasaba Bora, Walibora points out that the leaders are the actual enemies of the people but is quick to bring Amani to the king's rescue

to communicate that the land issues should not be resolved through violence but rather through peaceful (remember “Amani” is Swahili for “peace”) and lawful procedures. He also proposes that citizens who possess huge tracks of land should donate part of them to those who have none by making Amani share part of his recovered 270-acre piece.

Use of Courts

The court system is another aspect of independent Tomoko that resembles postcolonial Kenya. It is so corrupt that the author compares getting justice in a Tomoko court of law with playing a game of luck like cards or the lottery. This scenario, though fictional in the text, is a reality in postcolonial Kenya. Since the promulgation and adoption of a new constitution in August 2010, various reforms have been put in place in the Kenyan judiciary, a fact that has led to more awareness of the bribery and corruption that had been practiced with impunity by this arm of government for a long time. Dr. Willy Mutunga, the first Chief Justice of Kenya under the new constitution, instituted several measures to fight corruption in the judiciary, one of which was having workshops on how to go about it. During one such workshop in 2015, one of the presenters explained that types of corruption in the judiciary included bribery given in the form of money, land, livestock, building materials, fuel, fundraising contributions as well as sexual favors, with exchange of money being the most prevalent form of corruption (Osaleh, 2015).

Though the measures put in place by the new constitution and the efforts of the former Chief Justice to fight this menace have not brought corruption in the judiciary to an end, they have led to its decrease. Unfortunately, it has also evolved and become harder to fight. Corruption deals are now more sophisticated in execution and cover-up. For instance, the better part of 2016 saw a case in which the current governor of Nairobi County allegedly gave 202 million Kenya shillings (approximately \$1.9 million US) as a bribe to a now retired Associate Justice of Kenya’s Supreme Court in a bid to have him rule in his favor in a case challenging the

legitimacy of his election as governor (Standard, Jan. 26, 2016). After months of investigation on the taxpayers' payroll, the tribunal investigating the matter ended up dropping the inquiry when the Judge retired, saying that it lacked the legal mandate to continue with the investigations after his retirement (Daily Nation, June 27, 2016), an outcome that left the judge and the governor free, though guilty in the eyes of many. This is one among many such cases involving high profile Kenyans who, after accusations of wrongdoing, are investigated for several months and eventually acquitted, which means that no one is held responsible for wrongs already committed.

In contrast, Kenyan proletarians are speedily prosecuted any time they commit or are thought to have committed a crime. Kenyan prisons contain many persons who have been charged with different crimes – from petty theft to murder, sometimes without enough investigation – none belongs to the wealthier class. In situations where a wealthy person is in a court case against a poor one, the wealthy one almost always wins the case, or the case just disappears. This has led to a phenomenon of contrast between wealthy and poor Kenyans, with the terms “big fish” and “small fish” being employed towards the two classes; the big fish (the bourgeoisie) use their resources and power to influence the course of justice, while the small fish (the proletariat) get no justice. Justice in Kenyan courts is therefore seen to be biased and distorted, a situation similar to the one described by Walibora.

Nepotism

Nasaba Bora's kingship results from his relationship with leaders in the newly independent nation, Tomoko; it is not a consequence of his competence. The author states that the fact that the District Commissioner is a member of Nasaba Bora's extended family is the only reason why Nasaba Bora is crowned King of Sokomoko province in Tomoko. This shows that there is nepotism in the government of independent Tomoko, an eventuality that has been witnessed in Kenya since independence. The practice is so rampant that a common question for a

person seeking an employment opportunity would be “whom do you know?” rather than “what do you know?” In the wake of the nation’s over 40% unemployment rate (Trading Economics, 2017), to be sure of job opportunities, young people from wealthy families attend college to study courses that align them with institutions in which family members or friends work or have connections. Government officers make way for relatives, friends and fellow tribesmen to occupy positions of leadership and employment opportunities in the country, regardless of their competence. This has come to be known as “tribalism”, as leaders have been known to favor their tribesmen over the years. Writing for *openDemocracy*, Alan E. Masakhalia (2011) reports that the British “brought with them the principle of divide and rule” when they came to Kenya. To achieve this, they exaggerated distinctions between different communities/tribes, prompting clashes whereby tribes distrusted and fought one another. Unfortunately, this policy was adopted by Kenyan leaders after independence and the state of suspicion between communities continued until 1963,

when independence was realized, at which point tribal suspicions shot up as the two major parties KADU (Kenya African Democratic Union) and KANU (Kenya African National Union) began squabbling over power. KANU was largely dominated by two tribes, the Kikuyu and the Luo. KADU on the other hand was a coalition of all the other small Kenyan tribes that feared being dominated by the Kikuyu/Luo alliance under KANU” (para 4).

Masakhalia continues to report that KANU won and embraced a unitary government with Jomo Kenyatta (a Kikuyu) as the president and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga (a Luo) as the vice president. Kenyatta’s administration started favoring people from the Kikuyu community. This was manifested through government expenditure on social infrastructure in regions occupied by Kikuyu, corruption deals that assisted fellow tribesmen, and privileged access for fellow

tribesmen to job opportunities in government and parastatals (organizations or industries with some political authority that serve the state indirectly, in Kenya and some other African countries). Conversely, the Luo, despite having the vice presidency, were discriminated against, as were many other communities. Their complaints elicited intimidation and even assassinations. In due course, Odinga was pushed out of government and detained, while Tom Mboya, another Luo who was serving the government as a minister, was assassinated. This trend set a dangerous precedent in the young nation as the colonial divide and rule policy was persistently adopted by each subsequent government and negative tribalism solidified. The Kenyatta and Moi (Kenyatta's successor) era (1963-2002) was full of incidents of tribal favoritism, discrimination of communities whose leaders were opposed to the government, as well as detention without trial and numerous assassinations of government opponents and critics; another characteristic of King Nasaba Bora's rule in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*.

Incidents of tribalism and assassinations are still witnessed today in Kenya. 2002 was seen by many as a new beginning in Kenya when the third president of the republic, Mwai Kibaki (a Kikuyu) teamed up with Raila Odinga, Oginga Odinga's son (a Luo) to defeat the KANU regime. Many saw it as an opportunity to heal the divided nation. Their unity was, however, short-lived as President Kibaki failed to honor a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between his party and Odinga's before election on how the two would share power (Badejo, 2006). For a second time in the history of Kenya, a Kikuyu betrayed a Luo, with the full attention of the nation. As Badejo illustrates in *Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics*, it did not end with just the betrayal between the two – it went on with the president appointing people whom he deemed loyal to him (and especially from the Kikuyu community) to important cabinet positions while sidelining Odinga and his followers by giving them few and insignificant positions in cabinet, as opposed to the 50/50 power sharing formula as had been

agreed in the MOU. In the eyes of many, this was tantamount to a betrayal of the Luo by the Kikuyu rather than simply that of Odinga by Kibaki. Just like in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea's* Tomoko, Kenya was treated to a high degree of nepotism for the two terms of Kibaki's presidency and continues to be, even after the promulgation of a new constitution which, among other progressive provisions, has put in place measures to ensure that government employment is balanced among the different communities in the country. Surveys on government employment continue to show that the number of government employees from the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities, the communities that the current president and his deputy belong to, are much higher in comparison to employees from other communities (Kenya Today, Sep. 9, 2015).

In Walibora's novel, Mwalimu Majisifu, the king's brother, gets a job as a teacher after being sacked from his previous one for drunkenness, just because he is known to the powers that be and not because he deserves this position. He is an alcoholic and does not work responsibly in any of the several positions he held prior to his career as a teacher, yet he is still entrusted with schoolchildren, a position he abuses. He skips school several times but he is still able to keep his job in spite of his failure to work diligently. Explaining this situation, Walibora states:

“Alipovuliwa mbeleko, hakuvuliwa akesha, maana zimwi likujualo halikuli ukakwisha” {“when he was sacked, he was not completely dismissed, for an ogre that knows you, consumes you not completely” (p. 28)}. This proverb, “An ogre that knows you, consumes you not completely” is used here to mean that since Majisifu is known to the powers that be, he does not face the full consequences of his failure to work diligently; instead he is left to continue drawing a salary at the expense of the poor school kids he is supposed to be teaching.

Another incident of nepotism is demonstrated when King Nasaba Bora is upset after the Independence Day celebrations because his picture does not appear on the national newspaper, a fact that makes him nostalgic for the days when his brother was the newspaper's editor because

then he could appear in the paper any time he wanted. The favoritism witnessed in the relationship between the king and his brother reflects post-independence Kenyan society. Several incompetent and even irresponsible employees continue working in their positions just because they are known to the authorities. Moreover, the media is largely seen as independent, but there is still a lot of influence on how some media houses cover stories of prominent government personalities.

King Nasaba Bora bribes officials in the army to create a job vacancy for his son Madhubuti, who has been studying in Russia. By the time Madhubuti lands back in the country, he already has a position in the country's Air Force, without an interview. Even though Madhubuti – who has decided to fight all forms of injustice in his country, to benefit no more from his father's corruption and to ultimately lead a revolution against bad governance – rejects this job to the dismay of his father, his father's actions are reminiscent of Kenya's corrupt system, which gives unfair advantages to wealthy undeserving Kenyans while denying poor qualified citizens chances for self-development. I have witnessed this in person: when it was time to attend college, those of us who were from humble backgrounds had to think very carefully when making course choices because the job market after college had little space for people who could not bribe their way through. Our humble backgrounds did not allow us to just follow our passions – we had to choose courses whose skills had a relatively high demand in the job market. This was not the case for the wealthy, though. They could choose whatever courses they wanted for themselves and find jobs immediately when they were done with college, after greasing a few hands.

Oligarchy

Tomoko is in a state of oligarchy. Very few people (those in government and a handful who are wealthy) control and benefit from the country's resources. Fao, Amani's friend, is not so

talented academically. His parents pay bribes to get other people to do the national primary and secondary school examinations for him and then, through bribery, Fao is funded using poor students' government bursary to study abroad, even though his own parents are wealthy enough to afford his education. Walibora causes Mwalimu Majisifu, the king's brother, to start seeing the country differently after his humiliation in Mkokotoni, where he is invited to give a public speech on his authorship, an incident that ends up exposing his secret – that he is not actually an author but a manuscript thief. Through this exposure, Walibora brings him to his senses and makes him regret his unkind actions, thus giving the reader his perspective (the author's) on the relationship between the few rich and the multitude of poor citizens. Mwalimu Majisifu pities all the oppressed people, including those from whom he has stolen intellectual property, and those oppressed by other people in privileged positions like him. The author, explaining Majisifu's state, comments, "*Alihurumia wote wanaoteseka na kudhilika katika jamii nzima ya binadamu kutokana na kengo, adha, dhuluma na ukatili wa wenzao wachache.*" {"He pitied all those who were suffering in the whole human society due to oppression, cruelty, abuse and the deception of a few of their fellow humans" (p. 136)}.

Walibora's use of these two wealthy individuals represents the oligarchy of Kenya. Fao's family reflects the tendencies of wealthy households in postcolonial Kenya. The bourgeoisie in the country put minimal effort toward the pursuit of life goals but still get whatever they want through corruption. Government funds, set aside to help less economically endowed citizens, are mishandled by those in charge and end up benefitting the rich, who could have afforded the cost without government aid. Like Majisifu and Fao's parents, the few wealthy people in Kenya who have all they need use their power and positions to enrich themselves more while leaving the poor to suffer in poverty. Public services such as health and education, upon which the masses rely, are of poor quality due to negligence. The wealthy can afford these services in private

facilities or even abroad. For instance, as of March 2, 2017, Kenyan public hospital doctors were on the 89th day of a strike, demanding a pay raise, better working conditions, medicine and equipment in public hospitals. The government maintained a hard position on what it could do about this situation while poor Kenyans, some known to me, kept dying due to lack of medical attention. Meanwhile, government officials kept flying out of the country for medical attention – for instance, one of the governors flew to South Africa for treatment of a minor injury sustained during a political confrontation (Standard, Nov. 9, 2016) – utilizing their ridiculously high medical coverage paid for through taxpayers' money. As this happened the rate of inflation shot up to an all-time high of 9.04% (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, March 2017), leaving ordinary citizens in distress.

The Nasaba Bora dispensary is another good reflection of the embezzlement of funds in Sokomoko that Walibora uses to represent the Kenyan situation. The dispensary is built using a grant from the British government. The funds were meant for a big hospital. However, once the funds' managers, of whom King Nasaba Bora is one, get them, they take a huge percentage for themselves, leaving very little for the construction of the hospital; only enough for a dispensary. Many institutions like schools and hospitals funded through donor funds in Kenya have seen a similar fate.

Dictatorship

Despotic rule is another phenomenon that characterizes politics in Sokomoko. On becoming king, Nasaba Bora, rather than acquiring respect through good governance, forces his subjects to recognize his authority and to respect him. He wants to be viewed as powerful and influential. Walibora describes him as follows:

Ulimi wake haukutoa tu amrisho, karipio na matusi, ulimi huo ulitoa cheche za moto.

Almuradi aliyoyarithi toka kwa Bwana wake Mzungu yalikuwa mengi, hayahesabiki.

Alipunja na kudhulumu na yote hayo yalikuwa ni halali kwake. {His tongue spat out orders, condemnation and curses. Evidently, he inherited uncountable traits from his master the colonizer. He stole from and oppressed his subjects and all that was legal to him (p. 14)}.

His subjects feel the burden of oppression but fear complaining openly. They are so afraid of him and his leadership; the author exaggerates the extent of their fear by stating that they are afraid of even being afraid! They therefore complain in hiding, which makes no difference, a fact that the author brings out using the Swahili proverb *Dua la kuku halimpati mwewe* (“A hen’s prayer does no harm to a hawk”). The author uses this proverb to critique the people’s silent suffering. It is aimed at communicating that complaining in hiding is useless as it does not help to improve their lives.

Since independence, Kenya has experienced a great deal of tyrannical rule. Like King Nasaba Bora, the first two presidents of Kenya ruled the country in a dictatorial manner. Under the two men, citizens lost many basic rights, including that of free association and free speech. Many people who were opposed to their rule were detained without trial, while others were assassinated. The leaders also made Kenya a single-party state which – coupled with their use of force, threats and intimidation – strengthened their rule and suffocated dissenting voices (Badejo, 2006, Walibora 2013). Ordinary citizens and leaders supported their rule not because they were happy with it but because they feared for their safety (Walibora, 2013). Their rule was no different from that of the colonial regime and, like the fictional Nasaba Bora, the leaders had inherited several tendencies from their colonial masters. Although dictatorial rule has been considerably contained by the 2010 constitution, under which the country is currently operating, and multi-party democracy has been reestablished, the control of the legislature by the executive – since the majority of the legislators are from the ruling party (a situation that is now commonly

known as the tyranny of numbers in Kenya, what Amukowa (2013) refers to as “Dictatorial Democracy”) – is reminiscent of the tyrannical rule of the first two presidents and by extension colonial rule.

When Amani finds a baby on his doorstep and takes it to the king’s house, the king does not want to listen to him about the issue. He decides that Amani is the baby’s father simply because it was abandoned at his doorstep and no one else’s. He states that it is a straightforward case and interrogates the matter no further. We later learn that the baby’s father is the king himself – it is a product of his promiscuity and, to hide this, he and his secret lover, a schoolgirl, abandon the baby at Amani’s doorstep after its birth. The author notes that in several instances the king makes unjust judgments that favor him, no matter what the effect may be on other people. His oppressed subjects are so afraid of him that they cannot utter a word against his tyrannical leadership and therefore what he says or decides remains. This, again, is reminiscent of Kenya under Kenyatta and Moi, whose utterances were just like law since the president was above the constitution then. Anyone who dared contradict these two would face detention or even murder, as earlier mentioned. In today’s Kenya, with the tyranny of numbers, the country can still not be said to be fully free of dictatorship.

The author’s description of Amani’s situation when he is forced to raise a baby even though he does not know its parents or even its origin, is a metaphor for Kenya under despotic leadership. He names the kid “Uhuru”, which is Swahili for freedom. The author comments that this name is unfit for the kid because both the kid and its foster father are not free to make choices about their lives – the kid is forced into the world at a time when its biological parents are not ready for it, which makes them abandon it at Amani’s doorstep, while Amani’s role as a foster father is also forced; he does not freely make this choice. In coming up with this scenario, the author seems to be critiquing the idea of Kenya’s independence and the legitimacy of its

postcolonial leaders. Though the child is named Uhuru (freedom), he is actually not free, a likeness he seems to have with Kenyans, who have acquired independence yet continue to experience what they used to during colonial times. Amani's foster fatherhood is presented as illegitimate, just like the neocolonial leadership of independent Kenya – that it goes against the very values fought for during colonialism – is perceived.

The baby that Amani is forced to raise dies from pneumonia, which is common in infants, after nurses decline to treat the poor baby at the Nasaba Bora dispensary, casually stating that it is a holiday and they cannot work. Amani and Imani, having no other option, decide to walk back to Amani's shanty with the ailing baby only for him to die in their hands as they walk back. Astonishingly, the two are arrested and remanded without trial for the kid's "murder" on King Nasaba Bora's orders, a scenario that is reminiscent of detention without trial in Kenya (Walibora, 2013, Odinga 1967). The king uses policemen to control the people of Sokomoko. Through them he forces the people to attend his meetings and oppresses those who are opposed to his rule or his policies. Amani and Imani are imprisoned after the baby, Uhuru, whom the king had secretly abandoned at Amani's doorstep, dies in their hands. Matuko Weye, a madman who speaks openly about the king's bad rule, is also imprisoned. These are examples of pure and direct use of RSAs.

Many social amenities and institutions in Sokomoko are named after the king – dispensaries, bridges, schools, stadiums, etc. It is ironic though that these institutions are of very low standards and do not offer the services they are supposed to be offering to citizens sufficiently. It is an employment of ISAs to make the presence of the king almost ubiquitous. DJ, one of the herd boys in Sokomoko, and a friend that Amani and Imani make on their first day in the region, informs them that the chances of survival for patients at the Nasaba Bora dispensary are slim. This is confirmed when Uhuru dies after nurses at the dispensary decline to offer any

services to remedy his situation. The Kenyan situation is similar. Several hospitals, airports, schools, stadiums, institutions of higher learning and even roads are named after the first two presidents of Kenya. Delivery of services in most of these institutions, however, is substandard save for the airports (used by affluent people and foreigners).

After his high school education, King Nasaba Bora's son does well on the final exam and every resident – including those who have very little – is forced to contribute money and resources to enable him to pursue his studies abroad. This corresponds to the Kenyan situation where legislators award themselves hefty paychecks and allowances at the expense of poor Kenyans, a good number of whom earn less than a dollar per day. According to a December 2016 article published by the Standard Newspaper, Kenyan MPs are among the best paid legislators in the world, earning \$75,000 annually, yet Kenya is a developing nation whose citizens' average annual income is approximately \$1,800. The newspaper reports that a study by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority and IMF found that a Kenyan MP's salary, minus allowances, is 76 times Kenya's GDP per capita of Sh. 84,624 (\$822 US). On top of their high income, the MPs receive a one-off car grant of about \$48,590, and medical coverage of over \$97,181 as well as armed guards, a diplomatic passport, access to airport VIP lounges and a hefty send-off package at the end of each term (Standard Newspaper, Dec. 21, 2016). This last detail was passed and implemented despite protests from human rights activists in the country. Like the king of Sokomoko, the legislators abuse their power to benefit their own selves and their families.

The Use of ISAs

Strata According to Political Ranking

Walibora recounts a number of incidents that show that the political class in Sokomoko occupies a privileged stratum in the society, while ordinary citizens belong in lower classes where life is full of struggle and a lack of free will. One such incident is during Independence Day celebrations. Ordinary citizens arrive at the venue at nine o'clock, the official time for the start of the ceremony. Some of them are there voluntarily, but the majority have been forced to attend by the king's policemen. It is very sunny and hot; they sweat under the sun for over two hours before the political leaders, without whom the ceremony cannot go on, make their first appearance at the venue. For the leaders, a tent has been erected to shelter them from the hot sun. The king arrives in his car with his family, and security men rush to open the doors of his car for them to alight as the crowd cheers. The leaders are seated in chairs under the tent while the ordinary citizens sit on the ground – never mind whether there is grass where one sits or not. Sometime after the king's speech, it starts raining heavily. Some citizens try to seek shelter under the leaders' tent but they are kept at bay on the king's orders. Such happenings are the order of the day during national holidays in Kenya. Leaders get preferential treatment at the expense of citizens, while most of these very citizens cannot afford some of the most basic necessities. Worse still, citizens are made to endure harsh conditions, such as extreme weather, unnecessarily as they wait for leaders to address them. The long wait under such conditions seems to be a reminder to them that they belong to the downtrodden class that has no rights, since even the speeches delivered at such times do not address most of their needs.

Another comparison Walibora makes between leaders and citizens is their disparate living conditions. King Nasaba Bora and his family live in a thirteen-roomed mansion hardly comparable to the mud-walled shanties with leaky grass-thatched roofs that house their servants

like Amani. Even the king's grave, which he asks Amani to dig so he could be buried there once he is dead, is better than most of his citizen's houses. All its walls are cemented and its top is covered with a cement slab. A similar incongruence characterizes Kenyans' living conditions. Political leaders live in big, luxurious, modern houses in rich suburbs, worth between millions and billions of Kenya shillings, while ordinary citizens live in poor, insecure neighborhoods which lack even basic facilities like sanitation. Nairobi is, for instance, home to one of the largest slums in the world, Kibera slum, where families live in tiny shelters, yet still has several affluent suburbs such as Karen, Muthaiga and Kileleshwa, where bourgeoisie leaders reside.

Political Hypocrisy/Sycophancy

Other than inequality, Walibora addresses sycophancy by some of the junior leaders in Sokomoko, another easy comparison to the Kenyan situation. Balozi, a great confidant of the king's, is the Master of Ceremony at all events that the king hosts. His name is Swahili for "ambassador". This name is significant in that it connotes the representation he gives the king; one similar to that of an ambassador of his country to a foreign one. As the following discussion shows, Balozi is a perfect mouthpiece for the tyrannical king, and he is perfect at utilizing his talk to manipulate the people of Sokomoko and blind them about the oppression they suffer. During these events, he sings false praises to the king to keep his job and escape his wrath. For instance, to appease the crowd after waiting for the king and other leaders for more than two hours after the official start time of Independence Day celebrations, he says, "Since getting independence we have never allowed time to rule us, we rule time. This is Africa, we are never scared by the passage of time. We are free to just wait..." (p. 67). This is a psychological game he plays on citizens in order to exonerate the leaders. Moreover, before welcoming the king to deliver the president's speech, Balozi makes a short speech in which he reminds the attendees of the struggles and difficulties that the country went through to gain its independence from

colonial rule. He enumerates undesirable experiences that citizens went through under the colonial regime, as well as the difficult events that engulfed the freedom fighters, including imprisonment and death, for the sake of freedom. Balozi's speech shows the height of political hypocrisy and sycophancy. Despite the country's bad governance and bad living conditions for many people, Balozi praises the leadership of Tomoko and of King Nasaba Bora. Contrary to reality, he says that the efforts of the freedom fighters did not go to waste and that the blood that was shed was not shed for nothing. Observing that the colonizer has been kicked out, he emphasizes that the people of Tomoko are happily governing themselves, led by their wise and able leaders whom they love and honor for their selfless and patriotic leadership. After this speech, he leads the people in a lengthy clapping session to welcome the king to deliver his speech.

Junior leaders in Kenya frequently behave in a similar manner, sometimes even holding press conferences to feed the public with outright lies about how good the government is to them and how much it cares for their needs, when their impunity from charges of corruption is evident to everyone.

Language Use

Walibora illustrates the fact that language use in Tomoko promotes neocolonialism. During Independence Day celebrations, King Nasaba Bora reads the president's speech in English. Very few people in the congregation understand what the speech is all about since the majority do not speak or understand the English language. The author comments, "*Umati... ulisikiliza kwa makini Kiingereza cha Mtemi Nasaba Bora kilichokuwa usiku wa giza. Kila mtu alihisi kageuzwa na hotuba ya Mtemi akawa mbumbumbu mzungu wa reli.*" {"The crowd listened keenly to King Nasaba Bora's English, which was a dark night to them. Everyone felt that the speech had turned them into the most stupid being ever thought of" (p. 69)}. By calling

the English language a dark night, the author alludes to a Swahili proverb that translates to “What is unknown to you, is a dark night” meaning that something that one does not have an idea of is only comparable to a dark night where one can see completely nothing. He is communicating the fact that, to the people of Sokomoko, what the king is saying does not make the slightest sense. The author adds that the people felt like the most stupid creatures to illustrate their ignorance of the fact that the knowledge of English language is not equivalent to cleverness.

Leaders in independent Kenya, like in Tomoko, prefer using the English language while addressing citizens even though not everyone understands English. This is despite the fact that Swahili is known and spoken by virtually every Kenyan. Kenyans, just like the people of Sokomoko, generally associate English with knowledge and cleverness. This shows the internalized notion that everything from the colonizer is superior to whatever belongs to the colonized.

The author notes that one of the elderly ladies in the audience is astonished by how keenly the audience listens to the king’s lengthy speech even though no one understands a word in English. She murmurs: “*Jua litatua kama bado tunasikiliza hizi fwot fwot hizi!*” {“The sun will melt us to death while still listening to these fwot fwot” (p. 70)}. The term “fwot fwot” is a creation of the author to show that the elderly lady has no idea of what is being said. She proceeds to whisper to a middle-aged man asking, “what is the mighty one saying?” The man responds that he has no clue and then adds, “*Huoni tulivyonyamaza ji, hatujui wapi pa kushangilia wapi pa kunyamazia*” {“Can’t you see how silent we are? We do not know what to celebrate and/or what not to in the speech” (p. 70)}. The lady then wonders why the king would not read the speech’s Swahili translation, to which the man responds that the king is following the example of the president, who is currently delivering the same speech in the capital city to a similar audience in English. In dissatisfaction, the lady murmurs that it would have been better if

she were left to go to her small farm to tend to her crops. This is the last thing she says, as one of the security guards turns and eyes her threateningly. Interestingly, when the speech is over, the lady and the rest of the audience clap at length. At this point, the author asks readers to determine whether this clapping is a sign of thankfulness for a wonderful speech or relief at the end of a boring and tiring speech. Of course, we cannot miss the previously discussed silent suffering of the people, even while they pretend to be contented in fear of tyrannical rule, a situation that does them so much more harm than good.

The author, through this elderly lady, critiques the use of English by leaders in independent Tomoko while addressing an audience that hardly understands a word in the language. Her conversation with the middle-aged man informs us that this is the reality in the whole country. Like Tomoko, postcolonial Kenya has prioritized the use of English. It was the sole official language in the country until 2010, when Swahili was given the same status alongside English. In parliament, all members, except a few from the coast (who at times use Swahili), use English in their debates. During national holidays, leaders address citizens in English. In schools, English is the language of instruction at all levels. Primary and high school kids are severely punished and humiliated for speaking in their mother tongues. When I was in primary school, one of the punishments meted on someone who used his/her mother tongue was to be forced to hang a sign on his/her neck that read “I AM A FOOL” in bold capital letters, and carry it around all day. Yet we all spoke the same mother tongue, having been born and brought up in the same community. While promotion of English – a world lingua franca – in Kenya and other postcolonial nations is important, the effect of these actions on the natives has been seeing all their languages as inferior to English, and associating the knowledge of English with cleverness and academic prowess and its lack with failure and folly, an outcome Walibora illustrates in Sokomoko.

Conclusion

Writing about fictional occurrences similar to those witnessed in his own society, I find Walibora to be not merely creative but representational and critical. As demonstrated throughout this chapter through the side-by-side analysis of actions in Walibora's *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* with those in postcolonial Kenya, the fictional accounts of political leadership in Tomoko resemble and serve as criticism to those of postcolonial Kenya. This is also emphasized by the fact that Amani reads books that address post-colonialism in Africa. For instance, after reading Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony*, he, in a discussion with Madhubuti, the king's son, tells him that leaders of free Africa who took over power at the end of the colonial regime are betrayers who have inherited every bad trait of the colonial powers. He sarcastically expounds that their greatest achievement is exploiting the poor. Madhubuti agrees with him, adding that that is the tragedy of free Africa.

To Amani's surprise, Madhubuti criticizes his father's leadership, saying that he is a good example of the leaders that Fanon and Mbembe are talking about in their respective texts. He states that African leaders such as his father are experts in forcefully taking their subjects' property, enriching themselves using public resources and legalizing what is illegal for their own personal benefit while having it remain illegal for their citizens. Amani and Madhubuti then team up to enlighten the people on the importance of actively but peacefully refusing bad governance. When at long last the king commits suicide and another one is sent to Sokomoko in an acting capacity, Walibora comments that the residents gathered to welcome their new dictator. Through this comment, Walibora points to the unresolved vicious cycle of Kenya's metamorphosing neocolonialism. He, however, leaves this new king in an acting capacity to illustrate the potential that Kenyans have every election year to elect leaders that truly care about their needs. It is a

message to them that the situation they are in is in their hands, and they have the capacity to transform it.

CHAPTER II: THE WANJIKU VERSUS THE BOURGEOISIE

Introduction

“Wanjiku” is a female name from the Kikuyu community. It is, however, used in Kenya to refer to the common disenfranchised citizen. Synonymous with “common mwananchi” (mwananchi is Swahili for “citizen”), the term was first used in this sense by retired President Daniel Moi in the 1990s in a debate regarding constitutional review, responding to agitation by activists for the inclusion of the views of common citizens in the constitutional review process (Standard Newspaper, March 29, 2014). Since then, the term has been used to refer to this class of citizens regardless of ethnicity and/or gender. This chapter uses this term to refer to the economically disadvantaged Kenyans whose rights are ignored and violated by the ruling bourgeoisie.

In the Introduction section of this thesis, I indicated that Walibora avoids the discussion of ethnicity, despite the fact that Kenya is made up of over forty-three ethnic groups. As I also explained, though many people view ethnicity as a major challenge in the country, many others do not share this perspective. While they agree that ethnicity poses a divisive problem in Kenya as a nation, they view ethnic tension in the country as created by the ruling class as a strategy to divide the citizens so that they can easily rule them, a stratagem adopted from the colonial masters. For those who hold the latter perspective, (Walibora, 2013; Miguel, 2006) ethnicity is therefore not the root cause of division; class is. Many (see Kiai, 2011; Masakhalia, 2011; Okong’o, 2008) have explicitly argued that Kenya is made up not of forty-three tribes but just two – the wealthy and the poor. Of course, the word “tribe” is used here differently from the manner in which it is usually used, and this is deliberate. Many people view ethnicity as a serious cause of division in Kenya. A deeper look at the country’s social-political atmosphere though reveals that political demagogues (from across Kenya’s ethnic divisions), all who are among the

bourgeoisie, are usually friends and support each other on a personal level. Publicly, they present themselves as nemeses and portray their tribal backgrounds as the reason for their antagonism. Their followers from their ethnic backgrounds, falling for their ruse, view people from other ethnicities as adversaries. In light of this, critics who view class as the cause of division interpret ethnic animosity as illusory, arguing that the real groups that should be opposed to each other are the poor and the wealthy. This point of view is now widespread in Kenya as Kiai (2011) shows.

Walibora, judging from this text and his other fictional and academic works, holds this latter view. He, therefore, deliberately avoids discussing ethnicity in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, instead portraying the division between the bourgeoisie and Wanjiku as the real division that should concern Kenyans. This chapter analyzes the general everyday life of characters in Walibora's *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, and how their economic statuses and uses of language are used to represent and critique class in Kenya.

Poverty and Wealth

Walibora's description of Amani and Imani reveals that they are extremely poor. Amani, who is dressed in a button-less shirt and an old, worn out pair of shorts with patches, carries a small bag that contains all his belongings. Imani, on the other hand, is dressed in an old, tattered, yellow dress – the only one she owns, which she sews every time it gets torn. We also learn that her family had been too poor to afford her education, so she and her siblings had dropped out of school when their parents could no longer afford to pay their fees. These two characters' experience is similar to that of the majority of the people in Tomoko, who lack basic facilities such as food, clothing and shelter, therefore experiencing utmost suffering. At River Kiberenge, for instance, Amani and Imani meet some very poor kids whose "rags" (as the author terms their tattered clothes, [p. 5]) are placed on one side of the river, as they swim in the river while they wait for their employers' cattle to finish drinking. DJ, one of these herd boys, is unhealthily thin.

He exhibits symptoms of Kwashiorkor (a condition of severe protein–energy malnutrition that is prevalent in some parts of Kenya and other developing countries) – reddened hair, a protruding stomach and a thin, sickly body frame. Moreover, he, like all his fellow herd boys, has only one piece of clothing – a pair of shorts. When this pair of shorts is consumed by one of the bulls in the herd as he and his colleagues try unsuccessfully to wrestle the bull and retrieve the shorts, he is so distraught that he sheds tears since he does not have the means of acquiring another one.

While these and many other citizens wallow in poverty, there are a few very wealthy citizens in Tomoko who own hundreds of acres of land, several herds of cattle and have so much money. They employ impoverished people like Amani and Imani to take care of their property and exploit them in the process by paying them low wages, only enough to allow them to survive. The landowners' children get the best education locally and abroad. Some of them, however, not knowing what it is like to lack, take the opportunities they have for granted and get involved in destructive habits such as drug abuse and premature sexual relationships, and end up dropping out of school. Ben Bella, for instance, one of the rich kids, smokes marijuana and finally drops out of school. The wealthy parents either oversee or know people who manage the distribution of resources set aside to assist poor students, but use them for selfish ends. Fao, a young man with whom Amani once schooled, is lucky to have such parents. Because of their wealth, they have tremendous influence, a factor that gets Fao a poor students' scholarship to study abroad despite being from a wealthy family. This exploitation of the poor and selfish management of resources results in unequal distribution of wealth between the oppressed proletariat and the unjust bourgeoisie.

The society Walibora constructs is a representation and critique of independent Kenya. Like the people of Sokomoko, the majority of Kenyans are poor and exploited. Various statistics show that though there is a group of super-wealthy individuals in the country (for instance on

March 22nd 2016, the *Standard* newspaper reported that there were 8,500 Kenyans worth at least \$10 million), there is also an alarmingly high number of extremely poor citizens. Quoting a study by the Institute of Security Studies, for example, *Daily Nation* newspaper reported on February 18th, 2015 that Kenya had been “ranked 6th among top 10 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with large populations living in extreme poverty”, with over 18 million Kenyans – out of an estimated total of 46 million – living below the poverty line (a bit more than one third of all Kenyans). This corroborates a 2016 report by the World Bank that stated that only 8,000 Kenyans (less than one percent of the total population) were estimated to own 62 percent of the country’s wealth.

Walibora depicts this disparity in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*.

With a high unemployment rate, poor Kenyans often work for the wealthy folks who control the country’s means of production. The wealthy own bars and restaurants, shopping malls, car wash joints, public transport vehicles, media companies and other means of production where they employ some poorer Kenyans and underpay them to maximize their personal profit. Moreover, like in Sokomoko, poverty hinders many Kenyans’ ability to attain educations. Gill Miller and Elizabeth Elman (2013), in a study conducted in two counties in Kenya, a rural one and an urban one, reveal that “pupils with educated parents, good-quality housing and more possession often gain better grades than those from poorer backgrounds” (Miller & Elman, 2013, p. 25). Apart from performance, access to education and the quality of available education are also affected by one’s economic background. Enrolment in primary school increased in 2003 when Free Primary Education (FPE) was introduced in the country, showing that many Kenyans could formerly not afford the cost of education. Moreover, embezzlement and misallocation of education funds by those in charge characterizes Kenyan society, a factor that, like in Sokomoko, disadvantages less fortunate citizens (UNESCO, 2005).

Wealthy Kenyans give Wanjiku little room to develop. Few meaningful economic and welfare opportunities and facilities are available to the poor. Even the little they have is often cruelly snatched away. A good example of this is the government's habit of grabbing public property, e.g. school land, and land owned by poor people (as shown in the previous chapter), as well as mismanagement of the public health sector which serves the Wanjiku and lacks basic laboratory equipment and medicine. Doctors working in public hospitals own private clinics to which they smuggle medicine and equipment from the public government hospitals, leaving the poor at the mercy of diseases. *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* shows similar events, where rich and powerful people like the king deprive the poor of the few resources they have. For instance, donors' money meant for the construction of a hospital in Sokomoko is squandered by the king and his bourgeoisie allies, leaving enough for only a dispensary. From the helpless suffering of the people of Sokomoko at the hands of their powerful king, I infer that the consumption of DJ's pair of shorts by the strong bull, as the boys unsuccessfully and helplessly struggle to rescue the shorts, is a metaphor for the king's tendency to grab his poor citizens' meagre property. The king, like the bull, is powerful and unstoppable while the poor residents, like DJ, are weak and helpless.

The poverty experienced by Tomoko citizens is further illustrated when Amani, who becomes a great friend to DJ, seeking to ensure that he (DJ) eats when he is admitted to the dispensary after a dog-bite, goes to great lengths to prepare him chapati (Swahili for "chapatti"), a Kenyan delicacy made from wheat flour that is very rare among the poor because it is expensive – it should be noted that bread is not ordinary food for especially poor Kenyans. Many prefer direct farm produce such as sweet potatoes to bread, as their supply is higher, hence they are cheaper. While chapati is a common Indian bread, in Kenya it is an occasional delicacy that is made during special events like Christmas and when one has a special guest. Chapati is so

expensive and therefore so rare among poor Kenyans that the author describes it as “*chakula ambacho huliwa na wanyonge kwa nadra kama jua kupatwa*” {“food that is as rare to the poor as the eclipse of the sun is” (p. 111)}.

Walibora goes to great lengths to describe the poverty experienced in Sokomoko as well as the tremendous affluence of a few residents, which, as illustrated above, are critical of contemporary Kenyan class divisions. His emphasis on the suffering and oppression of the poor by the wealthy and his total silence on the issue of ethnicity which critics perceive as a major cause for division in Kenya, communicates the fact that in his estimation, class is what actually divides Kenyans and the bourgeoisie are willing to go as far as they can to maintain the status quo.

Social Stratification

As a result of the disparity between the rich and the poor in Sokomoko as in Kenya, the society becomes stratified. As seen above, this disparity is intentional – the bourgeoisie do as much as they can to ensure the proletarians remain in the lower stratum. The author explains that the Sokomoko area had been set aside for only white settlers during the colonial era. The settlers owned huge pieces of land on which they grew several types of cash crops as well as food crops. Shanties where black workers from other parts of the country stayed stood on the edges of these huge pieces of land. These black workers were not allowed to own anything in Sokomoko. Even outside Sokomoko, black Africans could neither grow cash crops nor rear animals that were not indigenous. After independence, wealthy citizens acquired for themselves the settler farms on which they employed people from the lower classes. Sokomoko thus became characterized by huge luxurious houses where wealthy people like the king lived. For instance, the author describes Majisifu’s house as having all kinds of luxury items – couches, cupboards, and several other luxuries, as well as modern items for entertainment. In his kitchen, the fridge is full of all

kinds of luxury alcoholic drinks – beer, wine, vodka and spirits, as well as nonalcoholic ones. All his utensils and kitchen appliances are described as being of high quality and very expensive.

In contrast to their wealthy employers, the author describes Amani and Imani as being among the luckiest poverty-stricken citizens for getting menial jobs with little pay and little honor. He states that the two are among the paupers who work undesirable jobs such as sweeping, cleaning, babysitting and the like. Amani is a herd boy for King Nasaba Bora, while Imani works as a house help with the king's brother's family. The author comments that the two and others with similar jobs pretend that they are comfortable with their jobs and that their meagre earnings are enough for their needs, otherwise they would be reminded of the uncountable number of unemployed citizens. Moreover, their residences are in sharp contrast with those of their wealthy employers. Amani is housed in a shanty made of mud walls and roofed with grass. The floor is earthen and is plastered with cow dung. The door to the shanty is made of old tins, and old tires act as the hinges. His bed is half broken while his blanket is old and tattered. There are several rats in his shanty that keep disturbing, sometimes even biting, him.

Amani does not want to talk about his past. He tells Imani that the past of low class people like himself is not of any importance. In response to Imani's advice that one should not demean themselves even if other people do demean them, Amani says that as much as that may be true, some people like himself have nothing, that life has made them nothing and therefore they are automatically lowly. That for him and his kind, injustice begins the moment they are born into the world and pursues them till the day they die. He adds that free Africa has very few powerful individuals and so many poor and powerless ones – the few powerful ones trod on the rights of the powerless without a second thought and without any fear. Through this conversation, readers can see Walibora's criticism of government systems in independent Africa

that ensure the low class remain as such while the bourgeoisie get wealthier by exploiting and oppressing them.

The portrayal of the huge discrepancy between the everyday lives of the wealthy and the poor depicts Kenya's wide gap between rich powerful individuals and those in lower social classes. Many slum dwellings are next to rich suburbs. Some of the slum residents provide cheap labor to the rich suburbanites. While the rich can afford the lifestyles they desire, the poor who live next to them and some of whom work for them are unable to afford even the most basic necessities. With a 40% rate of unemployment (World Bank, 2011) in the country, many of the poor are jobless and exploited.

Language Part I: Sheng'

In *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, young characters, especially those from cities, use Sheng', a slang that combines English and Swahili as well as coming up with its own vocabulary, in their communication. One such person is DJ, one of the herd boys in the Sokomoko region who is originally from Madongopomoka, a slum in Songoa, the capital city of Tomoko. Like in Tomoko, Sheng' is common among Kenyan youth and is rampant in, though not limited to, urban areas. According to Prof. Alamin Mazrui (1995), the slang developed during the colonial era, in Eastlands, a largely slum dwelling in Nairobi, that was:

reserved for natives some of who came as temporary migrant workers, and some as desperate seekers of livelihood all being the direct victims of the mass appropriation of agricultural land by British settlers. Many of these urban migrants had already been exposed to some English when they were resident laborers or squatters in British appropriated farms or in other circumstances; and Swahili was already well spread in the urban areas of Kenya. The ethno-linguistically heterogenous population of African juveniles who were hit by harsh conditions of unemployment, therefore, found the "trans-

ethnic” Swahili and English languages to be a readily available linguistic combination upon which could be developed a slang to cater for the multi-ethnic underworld into which they had been forced (Mazrui, 1995, p. 173).

Mazrui goes on to detail how Sheng’ went on to develop into a slang of lower class urban youth but since “class formation in Kenya is relatively a fluid phenomenon whose social solidification is yet to be fully realized”, Mazrui states, “the social boundaries of the wider Sheng’ ingroup are still ‘soft’ and highly accommodative of outgoing members”, hence the acquisition of Sheng’ by Kenyan middle class youth (pp. 172-173). While today Sheng’ is used by a majority of Kenyans regardless of social status, the slang is still associated with the lower class and especially those who live in slums, which makes sense considering its origins. Its use by the bourgeoisie, is an effort to concur and rule the Wanjiku. Politicians, for example, try to incorporate Sheng’ vocabulary in especially their campaign speeches, something they rarely do when not campaigning.

Further, the politics of language surrounding the use of the slang vis-à-vis the use of English and/or Swahili (as discussed in the following paragraphs) points us in the same direction. Amani dislikes Sheng’ because of its interference with Standard Swahili, which he believes should be spoken by every person in Tomoko. At first, he corrects everyone that he hears speaking in this slang which he finds disgusting, believing that it is like *ngoma ya vijana, haikeshi* {“youth’s dance that does not go on all night long” – an allusion to a Swahili proverb that is used to talk about something that does not last long (p. 5)}, but then realizes that he has been wrong all along when he finds out that more and more people – even those who are not so young – are using it, including some radio stations and tabloids. He therefore decides to stop correcting people, now being of the view that everyone has the freedom to do whatever they like. Mwalimu Majisifu, a Swahili teacher and author, is nicknamed “*Askari polisi wa sarufi*” (the

grammar policeman) for his behavior of correcting people, students and non-students alike, whenever he thinks they are making grammatical mistakes, both in public and in private. Unlike Amani, he continues to believe that everyone should stick to standard Swahili because Sheng' could influence the "purity" of the Swahili language.

Sheng', being a slang that is mostly associated with people in the lower class, is viewed by the bourgeoisie as a threat because of its increasing popularity which may signify unity among the Wanjiku. Attitudes towards Sheng', similar to the ones exhibited by both Amani and Mwalimu Majisifu in the text, are characteristic of many Kenyans today. The bourgeoisie, through ISAs, especially school, seem to have succeeded in convincing Kenyans that Sheng' should be fought. As a high school Swahili teacher, I used to discourage my students from using this slang, as did my colleagues, especially those who taught languages. We would even punish students for using it because we believed that it would affect what we saw and had been taught to us as "proper language" – standard Swahili and English. However, like Amani I have had a change of perspective with time, and today, even though I still believe Sheng' could interfere with the learning and use of standard Swahili, I also think the two can coexist, aid in communication and even enrich Kenyan culture, besides possibly being a uniting tool for the Wanjiku. I, as several of my colleagues did, also realized that it would be hard to fight Sheng' as it is being used by more and more people, with some even popularizing it intentionally. For example, there are national FM radio stations such as Ghetto FM, whose sole broadcast language is Sheng', another similarity between Kenya and Tomoko.

Mazrui (1995) also notes that "there is a section of Kenyan linguists who, seemingly informed by a rather narrow and puritanical brand of nationalism, have assumed an overly anti-Sheng' position" (p. 170), an attitude similar to that of Mwalimu Majisifu. The argument that Sheng' is less nationalist than Swahili might make sense to some extent since Swahili is the

national language and one of the official languages, and it is known to and spoken by almost every Kenyan. English, on the other hand, is not only foreign but also, though official too, understood and spoken by a lesser number of Kenyans, mostly the elite. It would be incorrect to argue that English and Swahili are nationalist while Sheng' isn't, since Sheng' is primarily a combination of the two. This claim, therefore, is a strategy of the bourgeoisie to fight the slang, which at the moment is the only tangible unifying factor among the Wanjiku.

Mazrui (1995) further explains that one linguist was quoted in the *Sunday Nation* newspaper of August 23, 1987, in a feature article titled "Can Sheng' Stand the Test of Time?" as having said that "Sheng' is merely a linguistic 'contortion' of a sort which should be discouraged in favor of (the standardized variety of) the national language, Swahili" (p. 170). The article's title suggests a notion similar to Amani's – that Sheng' would not last long. Such efforts have been common in Kenya and have been adopted by especially language teachers, who have fallen for the cunningness of the bourgeoisie. Fortunately, though, Sheng' has remained so attractive and even trendy that these efforts have only served to make it even more popular. Its association with urban identity and the young generation has seen it gain popularity with trendy and influential musicians which adds to its attraction.

Language Part II: General Language Use

Characters in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, typically those that belong to the lower class, use language in a manner that is considered customarily normal among the poor in Kenya. When Amani visits DJ in the dispensary where he is admitted after being bitten by the king's dog, he wishes him a quick recovery, to which DJ responds, "*Nimepoa bwana. Hamna wasiwasi...*" {"I will be okay, buddy. No worries..." (p. 110)}. This is despite DJ being in great pain and having little hope of healing since the dispensary is run down and neglected. Responses such as DJ's characterize everyday Kenyan relations among the poor. The Wanjiku rarely use terms such as

“great” or “wonderful” to describe their situations for obvious reasons. But they also avoid negativity and therefore terms such as “bad” or “awful” are not common, possibly because it is obvious that their life is not so great and anyone can see that. Because of their deplorable living conditions from which they have no escape, they tend to use language in a manner that is comforting to sanitize the agony they endure daily. The response to the “How are you?” greeting, for example, is always “fine/good/okay”, no matter what one may be going through.

Other than DJ, Imani also uses language in this manner. She visits Amani (who is later admitted to the dispensary after a beating from his employer, the king, which leaves him unconscious) in the dispensary regularly. When one day during a visit Imani realizes he has regained consciousness, even though he is still unable to speak, she is so happy and says to herself, “*Leo hali yake haijambo, hata kama haijambo ya Kiswahili*” {“Today his condition is fine, even though it is the Swahili ‘fine’” (p. 132)}. The decision by the author to include this soliloquy, especially with the statement “even though it is the Swahili ‘fine’” is intended to communicate the culture of these characters to the reader, rather than Amani’s health status. It is also a comment on Kenyan proletarians’ language use, as explained above. Moreover, the fact that Amani, who is “fine”, is admitted to the dispensary after a beating from his bourgeois employer is a pointer that the misery that the Wanjiku suffer is instigated by the bourgeoisie.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine is another practice shared by the people of Sokomoko and Kenyans. After being bitten by the king’s dog and spending several weeks in the dispensary without healing, DJ gives up on modern medicine and decides to seek traditional remedy. He leaves the dispensary secretly and goes to a friend of his who is also a herd boy like himself and who has inherited traditional medicine skills from his parents. It is here that he fully recovers and goes on with his work as a herd boy. Even though Kenyans have largely embraced modern medicine,

traditional treatment has been and continues to be part of many Kenyan communities. Like in Sokomoko, the practice is passed on from generation to generation; parents who practice the profession teach their children who teach their children and the practice is thus perpetuated (Chege et al, 2015). Practitioners are able to treat several ailments at cheap prices.

Traditional medicine in Kenya however, like in Sokomoko, is uncommon among the bourgeoisie. Both the practitioners and their clients are primarily from the lower class. The wealthy, being able to afford the well-equipped private health care in and out of the country, do neither rely on the broken public health sector, nor do they seek the services of traditional uneducated medicine practitioners. Additionally, they are able to afford quality educations that lead to professional white-collar careers for their children. The poor, on the other hand, can afford neither good educations nor quality healthcare. Since the public health sector is run down, thanks to the bourgeoisie, while the private sector is too expensive, the poor are left with only the option of traditional medicine. Their children, unable to pursue professional education at expensive tertiary institutions, inherit various skills from them, some of them the practice of traditional medicine.

It is noteworthy too, that when DJ's health continues to deteriorate at the public dispensary in Sokomoko, he opts to seek traditional medicine and this works. He fully recovers and resumes work. With this, the author critiques the reliance on the inadequate provisions of the ruling class by the Wanjiku. He proposes alternatives to these provisions and communicates that alternative approaches are at their disposal.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the gap between the haves and the have nots. Walibora views the cause of division in Kenya not as ethnically based, as some critics and especially the ruling class argue, but as class based. This view is held by many other critics and is gaining popularity,

especially among university students and other educated young people. The ruling class, however, wants citizens to continue believing that their ethnic differences divide them as, by doing this, they easily rule them and maintain their rule and class. This is the reason why they fight any attempt by the Wanjiku to unite. A good example of such a fight is the one against Sheng', a slang (or a language) that originated from slum dwellings and has always been associated with the poor.

While many postcolonial critiques heap all the blame on the colonizer, Walibora's critique of Kenya is different. He recognizes the role of the colonizer in the situation that Kenya finds herself today, but he also thinks that Kenyans, both leaders and citizens, are to blame for the continuation of this situation. Leaders for adopting the colonial power's style of ruling and citizens for continually electing the same leaders under whom they have faced oppression. He does, however, see light at the end of the tunnel. The avoidance of bourgeoisie "solutions" (which are actually compounded problems) to proletarian problems by the proletariat, by for instance opting for traditional medicine rather than the run down public health facilities and the unity of the Wanjiku through a common language – Sheng' – are aspects of society that the author celebrates. He sees these as some of the ways through which the Wanjiku could achieve liberation.

CHAPTER III: DOES HER SUCCESS THREATEN HIS?

Introduction

In this chapter, I employ Spivak's ideas about the ability of the subaltern to speak, to examine the experiences and social roles of women and girls in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* in relation to the same in Kenya. In her examination of the validity of Western representations of the Other, Spivak (2012) proposes that the discursive institutions that regulate writing about the Other do not consider postcolonial or feminist scrutiny because critical thinking about the Other tends to articulate its relation to the other with hegemonic vocabulary. Similarly, patriarchal societies abide by patriarchal rules in their description and/or treatment of society members, a fact that makes women a subaltern category.

Kidagaa Kimemwozea shows gender inequality both implicitly and explicitly: women have less influence and position in the leadership of social institutions such as the family and the government. They also suffer violence at the hands of men and are blamed for both their mistakes as well as those of the men in their lives. As victims of patriarchy, they are discriminated against, objectified and stereotyped. Patriarchal tendencies and beliefs in men's superiority over women seem to be engrained in the minds of society members and are seemingly taken for granted. Most women in the text hardly question these beliefs. They approach life passively; theirs is a world constructed for and by men – they only act in manners acceptable to men because, for them, that is what is normal. In her article "Radical Feminism", Bonnie Kreps (in McCann & Kim, 2003), explaining how patriarchy works, states that:

man has consistently defined woman not in terms of herself but in relation to him. She is not regarded as an autonomous being; rather, he is the subject, he is Absolute – she is the Other... In accepting the traditional view of herself as secondary and inferior, woman has provided justification for the charge of inferiority (p. 45).

A few women in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* nonetheless express their discomfort with patriarchy, at times subtly and giving up too quickly – seemingly realizing that they cannot fight “the normal” way of life. However, there are some who go against all these odds, persistently defying the system and end up changing the whole society through their daily actions.

This chapter is an analysis of the character and actions of men vis-à-vis women in the text as a metaphor for hope, for Kenyan society, of winning the war against patriarchy. Even though the author does not show total liberation, he enumerates several incidents of female characters’ refusal to act according to society’s patriarchal prescriptions, as well as male characters’ sympathy and understanding of their female counterparts’ plight. However, he also delineates instances of little or lack of action by women in the face of oppression by patriarchal men as well as the actions of oppressive male characters who seem to view women as just objects for their use and pleasure, rather than fellow humans. The depiction of these two sides of the society in the text is representative and critical of Kenya: while Kenyan society remains largely patriarchal, there have been many substantial efforts by both men and women to give equal rights to both genders. Moreover, women who would have been otherwise dismissed as subaltern (and therefore unable to speak, to use Spivak’s terms) because of the intensity of patriarchal propensities in their communities, have defied all these odds and achieved unparalleled liberation and independence from men in their lives and their community traditions in general, who and which, have been the cause of untold misery for such women for generations.

The two sides of Walibora’s narration, which as I argue accurately represent the two sides of the Kenyan gender divide, each inform one of the two sections into which this chapter is divided. In the first section, “Strength of a Woman”, I discuss the struggle and resilience of Imani, a sixteen-year-old female character in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, as well as the actions of other characters against traditions that hurt the society. I then analyze these side-by-side with

similar actions by Kenyans, male and female, in the fight for gender equality. Some of the female Kenyans whose actions I examine do not only fight for the rights of women but also those of the society in general. In their fight, they encounter tremendous opposition from men, essentially because of their gender. It is this gender-based opposition of women by men (and at times by fellow women) in Kenya that Walibora critiques. He also celebrates women and men who stand against such opposition, thus envisioning a society where no one is supported or opposed based on just their gender. The second section, “Women as a Subaltern Category”, is an examination of some of the women in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, who do little to nothing to resist their husbands’ oppression, basically because they feel helpless against them, due to the patriarchal inclinations of their society. A similar group of Kenyan women is analyzed side-by-side with them to bring out the representation and critique I argue this book makes of the country’s gender relations.

Strength of a Woman

Citizen TV, Kenya, an East African regional television channel, runs a weekly news segment dubbed “Strength of a Woman” in which they feature outstanding women in business, art, music, leadership, media and other aspects of society. By showcasing the exceptional work and efforts of such women, the news segment is aimed at educating viewers that women can and do positively impact society, and as such, they need not only society’s attention but also its support. The title of this section of my thesis is inspired by this news segment.

In *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, Imani, a young teenage woman, is the first person to ever break the dreaded taboo of drinking water from River Kiberenge. The author explains that the people of Sokomoko had stopped drinking water from this river when an epileptic, many years earlier, had drowned in it while trying to bathe. Residents had searched for his body in the river

but could not find it and had taken this as a message from the gods that they should not drink the water any longer. It had become a taboo.

Imani and Amani arrive at the bank of the River Kiberenge in Sokomoko, tired and thirsty, having walked through the wilderness for two days and a night, feeding only on wild fruits. DJ, a herd boy employee to one of the wealthy residents of Sokomoko, and his colleague herd boys are tending their employers' cattle at the river when the pair arrives. They are immensely shocked and alarmed to see Imani drinking from the forbidden river. Warning her, DJ states that it is perilous and inappropriate to drink water from River Kiberenge. The author does not reveal whether Imani had prior knowledge of the taboo. At her age, it is probably the first time in her life that she is in Sokomoko, which would mean that she possibly does not know the customs of the region. The reader may consequently assume that she drinks water from River Kiberenge, not with the intention of breaking the taboo, but just to quench her thirst. It is therefore shocking to hear her defiantly respond that it is usual for even the inappropriate to be made appropriate in Tomoko; that numerous illegal acts, including violently grabbing other people's property from them and murder, are commonly "legalized" and that all this depends on who the doer and the recipient of the actions are, not the legality or illegality of these actions. Having said this, she continues drinking the water and, upon satisfaction, invites Amani to quench his thirst as well, to which he obliges. Imani's action becomes the end of the taboo after she and Amani do not die from drinking the water, as is expected. This incident is told many generations later as a story of bravery and daring to be different.

Imani's reaction demonstrates that she dares to be different and that she is not afraid of initiating transformation. This is the author's celebration of bravery. The author strategically places Imani in her role to communicate the power and ability of women in a society that takes females for granted. His use of her as the instrument of this tremendous change is a deliberate

decision intended to point out not only the potential that women have in daring to be brave enough to be different from the society-prescribed “place of a woman” but also the ideal woman in the patriarchal Kenyan society.

Changing people’s perception of the old taboo is not the only thing that Imani does. After settling in Sokomoko, she is hired to look after Mwalimu Majisifu’s disabled children. Mwalimu Majisifu, the famous teacher and author who is also the king’s brother, hates his children for their disability and views himself as unlucky and his wife as cursed for giving birth to four disabled kids. The couple hides the kids every time they have a visitor to avoid shame, which shows that parents of disabled children in this society are stigmatized and that disabled people are looked down upon. Every person that Majisifu and his wife employs treats their kids as second-class humans. Imani, however, considers and treats them like any other human beings. She is kind and humane to them, in a manner that not even their own parents have ever been before. Her sincere love and care for them changes the view of the Majisifus, as well as that of many other people, about the disabled.

With this depiction of the female character Imani, Walibora communicates the fact that women can make a big difference even while performing roles that have been traditionally considered feminine. He positions Imani in a difficult place where several people who came before her, including the children’s own parents, failed, and describes her performance as excellent. While this narration is fictional and sometimes in fictional narrations authors create scenarios that are almost magical and depict actions that could be easier said than done, it is not a far-fetched imagination. It is a near-perfect metaphorical representation of some Kenyan women who have made incredible decisions to defy and have ultimately defeated the enslaving chains of patriarchy, albeit through untold pain and misery in the difficult patriarchal Kenyan environment. Some of these women have greatly transformed Kenyan society, making it more tolerable for

other women, and have gained national and international recognition. An excellent example is Nobel Laureate, the late Prof. Wangari Muta Maathai.

Maathai, though educated during the difficult time of the violent Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, and at a time when women's position in the society was virtually non-existent, "was the first woman in East and Central Africa to receive a doctoral degree – a significant achievement that went largely unnoticed" (Maathai, 2006, p. 113). She taught at the University of Nairobi between 1966 and 1982, within which time she rose through the ranks to become a senior lecturer, then chair of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy, and finally an Associate Professor in the department (by 1977), positions that had previously never been held by any African woman. During this time, she campaigned and fought for the acceptance of female staff as equal members of the academic staff and for them to be given equal benefits as their male colleagues. In her memoir, *Unbowed*, she notes that she enjoyed teaching but disliked the discrimination she and her female colleagues faced at the university. While male professors were getting benefits such as housing, education allowances for their kids and health insurance allowances for their families (on top of their basic salaries), female professors only took home the basic salary, a fact that meant senior female professors earned much less than their junior male counterparts. Maathai teamed up with an African American colleague to fight for equal benefits for women, going as far as trying to turn the academic staff association of the university, to which they had been elected as officials, into a union in order to negotiate for benefits. During this time and up until 2002, the president of the country was the chancellor of all universities. Thus, a case against the university was a case against the president, and bearing in mind the dictatorship in Kenya at this moment in time (as described in Chapter One of this thesis), it was easy for the courts to dismiss the case. Maathai and her colleague did not relent though and, to use her own words, the university decided to treat the two like "honorary male professors" (Maathai, 2006, p. 116) by

giving them what they were asking for, but this concession was not extended to other female staff. This did not stop them from campaigning against this and advising their female colleagues not to accept the terms. Sadly, the other female colleagues refused to join the struggle, many saying that their husbands had advised them against it. To worsen matters, there were women that were opposed to their fight and portrayed them as women who did not want to live with their husbands. Amidst all these struggles though, Maathai kept the fight on and it bore fruit – many of her demands for equal benefits were later met (Maathai, 2006).

Maathai's fight for women's rights was not only at the university. She also faced problems for her gender on a personal level. For instance, while her husband was supportive of her struggles at first, he later filed for a divorce, terming her (as the press reported) "too educated, too strong, too successful, ... too hard to control" (p. 146). Maathai notes that she does not recall her ex-husband saying this and that this was the press's expression of what they perceived his sentiments to be. This shows the vilification she underwent as a woman from the press and society, which assumed (and continue to) that if a marriage failed, it was a woman's fault (p. 146). The court ruled in his favor and later, in an interview, Maathai commented that the judge was either incompetent or corrupt, a comment that saw her charged with and jailed for contempt of court. Her lawyer was able to get her out. Her trouble was not over, though, as her ex-husband demanded that she drop his surname (Mathai). "I remember thinking to myself", Maathai writes in her memoir, *Unbowed*, "I am not an object, the name of which can change with every new owner'. And I had resisted adopting his name in the first place! As a way to deal with my terrible feelings of rejection, I got the idea of adding another 'a' to Mathai and to write it as it is pronounced in Kikuyu. And so, I became Maathai... Henceforth only I would define who I was: Wangari Muta Maathai" (Maathai, 2006, p. 147).

Politically, she faced tremendous opposition from President Daniel Moi as the vice chairperson of the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK). When it became apparent that she was going to win chairpersonship, Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (Swahili for “Women’s Development”), a member organization which represented a majority of Kenya’s rural women and whose leader was close to President Moi, withdrew from the NCWK. This weakened NCWK and, although she won, Maendeleo Ya Wanawake got the lion’s share of the government’s financial support for women’s programs in the country, and NCWK was left virtually bankrupt. In 1982, Maathai decided to run for election in her home region for the parliamentary seat. Her intent was to hold the government accountable for their vilification of her and other women and to further women’s cause in general. As required by law, she resigned from her position with the University of Nairobi. The committee that was charged with overseeing the election, however, declared her ineligible to run for office since she had not re-registered as a voter in the previous presidential election. Maathai knew that this was not a requirement by law and brought the matter to court. She realized too late that the ruling party was fighting her – the court was to meet in Nairobi at 9 am, and if she received a favorable ruling, was required to present her candidacy papers in Nyeri (her home region, which is over two and half hours drive from Nairobi) by noon that day. The judge disqualified her, a verdict she terms “a miscarriage of justice” (p. 161). She requested her job back at the university but she was denied this and even evicted from university housing since she was no longer a staff member.

Maathai also founded the Green Belt Movement, an initiative to counter problems that had been brought about by deforestation, as people after independence sought to plant exotic trees for timber and cash crops rather than food crops. The movement started as a tree planting organization and grew into an environment conserving NGO and later one that was concerned

with other matters that affected the society – it developed to include not only environmental conservation but also poverty alleviation, finding local solutions to local problems rather than waiting on a government that did not seem to care, women’s and human rights education and advocacy and, eventually, democracy advocacy. During local meetings, Maathai emphasized the use of native languages in speaking and writing so that those who were not very fluent in English or Swahili would not shy away from speaking. Over the years, the Green Belt Movement provided employment opportunities to many women and eventually men, and grew into the rest of Africa and beyond. At first it was run by the NCWK, but as it expanded and got more recognition from around the world, the government demanded that it run separately and independently, hoping to divide and ruin (Walibora uses the term “divide and ruin” in his 2014 book, *Narrating Prison Experience: Human Rights, Self, Society, and Political Incarceration in Africa*), as it had done when it forced the division of NCWK and Maendeleo ya Wanawake. In her memoir, Maathai explains why the government was against the Green Belt Movement:

They soon realized that unlike some other women’s organizations in Kenya, the Green Belt Movement was not organizing women for the purposes of advancing the government agenda, whatever that might be. We were organizing women (and men) to do things for themselves that, in most cases, the government had no interest in doing (p. 180).

Through the Green Belt Movement, Maathai literally enabled the subaltern to speak.

Maathai has not been the only woman whose efforts have had great social, cultural, political and even economic impacts on her community and Kenya generally. Former minister for justice and constitutional affairs, Martha Karua; Judge of the Court of Appeal, Lady Justice Martha Koome; and Margaret Kenyatta, the current first lady, are among a host of strong-willed, educated Kenyan women whose actions have had a great impact on the lives of Kenyan women and Kenyans in general. The less elite women of Kenya are not left behind in making Kenya a

better place either. Samburu community, for instance, though one of the most conservative communities in Kenya, is home to extremely revolutionary yet not so educated women who have defied their husbands, separated from them and even built their own matriarchal villages away from them. According to *Broadly*, a website and digital video channel that represents various women's experiences through documentary film, the women, in resistance to violence against women such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), wife battering and early forced marriages, joined forces to build a haven for themselves. They are led by Rebecca Lolosoli, a survivor of violence, whose vocal advocacy for women's rights angered local men who beat her till she was hospitalized, something that her own husband did not protest against. This made her leave him and lead numerous other women who had been victims of men's violence in an exodus from their matrimonial homes to establish a village where no men were allowed.

The women in this new village, which they named Umoja (Swahili for "unity"), built their own houses and started small businesses such as selling jewelry to tourists along the roadside. This gave independence and self-reliance to the once downtrodden, voiceless, subordinate women who owned nothing and were even considered their husbands' property; another case of subalterns achieving the ability to speak. Men are allowed in Umoja village only if they play by the rules set by the women and do not try to dominate the women. This way, any woman in the village who wants to have children is able to do that. *Broadly* reports that quite a few other villages similar to Umoja have since been established in the region.

It is important to also note that though men have been the perpetrators of violence against women in Kenya, as in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, a good number of them believe in gender equality and are involved in efforts to foster it. In the text, Madhubuti, King Nasaba Bora's son, writes his father a letter before leaving Russia where he has been studying, and signs it using his mother's name as his surname instead of his father's. While he does this in resistance to his father's bad

governance, it shows that he respects his mother and does not think of her as any less of a person due to her gender. Amani too is depicted as someone who respects the position of women and even advocates for their rights on top of believing in their ability to lead and bring about positive change. For instance, he thinks that women who date married men (like Lowela, King Nasaba Bora's girlfriend) are an insult to womenfolk. He also involves Imani in his revolutionary activities despite her gender and tender age.

Many Kenyan men have also advocated for gender equality in the country. Retired President Mwai Kibaki was not only outspoken about this, but his government also introduced numerous measures aimed at ensuring women ceased to be a marginalized group in Kenya. For example, the constitution of Kenya 2010, which is one of the Kibaki government's major landmarks, and which he championed, having promised to deliver a new, fairer and more realistic constitution in his election campaign, illegalizes all forms of discrimination against minority groups (including women) and gives more room and a fairly even ground for women to participate in leadership, business and other aspects of society which were not formerly available to them. For instance, it introduced the position of Woman Representative to be elected to the national assembly and represent each of the forty-seven counties in the country. Chapter 6, article 27 of the constitution provides that:

- (i) Women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres and
- (ii) Neither the State nor any individual shall discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, color, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth.

To give full effect to realization of these rights, the constitution goes ahead to state that:

the State shall take legislative and other measures, redress any disadvantage suffered by individuals or groups because of past discrimination and directs that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender (Constitution of Kenya 2010, Chapter 6, Article 27, Clauses 3-8).

Kibaki also appointed many women, including Wangari Maathai, to his cabinet after winning the 2002 presidential elections, long before the new constitution was even drafted.

Moreover, Maathai notes in her memoir that she never got any criticism from her male colleagues at the University of Nairobi when she raised issues of gender discrimination against which she was fighting and that many of them were involved in advocating for a staff union that would help fight for these rights. She also states that she knew they would have agreed that there was no reason she was supposed to receive less money than her [male] technician.

Imani, thus, is a depiction of Kenyan women who have, in various instances, defied the “normal” and even gone ahead to redefine it, thus changing the whole society. She is a metaphor for women like Wangari Maathai and Rebecca Lolosoli, whose actions in the midst of immeasurable pain, loss and misery have brought change that would not have existed even in the imaginations of those who complacently agreed with those who took patriarchal inclinations of the society as the norm.

Women as a Subaltern Category

There are women in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* who, unlike Imani, seem to have accepted and embraced Kreps’ (in McCann & Kim) description of men’s definition of them – a definition not in terms of themselves (women), but in relation to them (men). This sort of definition, as Kreps states, does not regard women as autonomous beings; “rather, he is the subject, he is

Absolute – she is the Other... In accepting the traditional view of herself as secondary and inferior, woman has provided justification for the charge of inferiority” (McCann & Kim, 2003, p. 45). While Kreps was writing about the Canadian experience of women, her analysis is as true of the patriarchal society that Walibora constructs as it is for Kenya. Social roles in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, like in Kenya, are enforced according to one’s gender, with women being assigned roles that are seen as support roles, such as cooking and cleaning, while men perform the ones that are seen to be more of lead roles, such as providing food and shelter for the family.

This section examines two such women in the text, not to belittle or blame them, but to shed light on Walibora’s depiction of the plight of many Kenyan women who unfortunately suffer oppression under patriarchal systems, and more often than not, have no option but endure the torment since they live in a world constructed by and for men. In a society like the one described by Walibora, women’s passivity gives patriarchy room to thrive.

Mwalimu Majisifu evidently cares very little about his wife’s feelings and what she thinks of him. This is seen especially from his behavior as a drunkard, which is almost all he does despite Dora’s (his wife) resulting frustration. He neglects his job as a teacher and does not assist her in anything around the house in spite of the big responsibility of taking care of their disabled kids. On top of this, he insults her for speaking against his laziness and drunkenness or even responding to him; he believes that women should not talk back to men just because they are women. Moreover, he blames her for their disabled children – according to him, it is her fault that she gave birth to children with disabilities.

Majisifu hates his wife for giving birth to their physically and mentally disabled children. The couple has four kids who are all living with disability: a seventeen-year-old girl and a sixteen-year-old boy, who are both mentally challenged; and their last born, two-year-old twins who have a walking disability. He believes that it is Dora’s fault that the kids are disabled. The

author shows this through Majisifu's thoughts. He writes: *Akamchukia mkewe pia kwa kumzalia masimbi hayo. Lazima mwanamke huyu kafanya madhambi huko kwao alikotokea ndiyo maana kanizalia mashata haya ya binadamu. Mwanamke mjalaana asiyejua kuzaa wana ila hunikopolea masimbi na mashata tu!* {"He hated his wife for giving birth to those 'left-overs' for him. She must have committed some very grave sins before she got married; that's why she gives birth to these 'left-over' human beings! A cursed woman who knows not how to give birth to proper kids but rather keeps giving birth to 'left-overs' for me!" (p. 30)}.

The complete detailed translation of the terms *masimbi* and *mashata* (which are synonyms) would be "the dirty left-overs of food or drink that are not fit for consumption and should be thrown away". In East Africa, traditional liquor such as Chang'aa in Kenya and Waragi in Uganda, involves a sieving process where the sieved byproducts are thrown away since they are unsuitable for consumption. These would be perfect examples of *masimbi/mashata*. Moreover, in East Africa and specifically in Kenya, left-overs are looked down upon. The term is used not to mean food that is left in pots or serving dishes after people have had their fill during a meal, but specifically food that has been left on the plate after people are unable to finish what was served for them or what they served for themselves. Such food is usually thrown away and destitute families are commonly known to feed on it in dumpsters. Eating left-overs therefore connotes poverty and dirt.

Apart from demonstrating disrespect for human life, Majisifu's language use in the above soliloquy shows great disdain and contempt for his wife for something that is out of her control. His hatred and disrespect for her, which on several occasions leads to him insulting and humiliating her would, in well-reasoned circumstances, be intolerable. One would wonder why Dora is still married to and staying with him.

Note also that Majisifu talks about his wife “giving birth for him”. This suggests that giving birth is a service that a wife does for the husband. That he blames her for giving birth to disabled children suggests that she is not doing it the right way and that it is solely her fault.

Like Dora, Zuhura, King Nasaba Bora’s wife, stays married to her husband despite the ill treatment she receives from him. The king is contemptuous and disrespectful towards her and he disregards her advice. For instance, on one occasion when DJ, a neighbor’s herd boy, brings a message for the king and is bitten by one of the king’s dogs, Zuhura implores her husband to pay for the boy’s hospital bill, to which he responds that it is the boy’s problem not his, adding that the boy is disrespectful because he had previously asked him to free Amani and Imani (who are in prison on the king’s orders). Zuhura too thinks that the two should be released since they are innocent and this infuriates him. He orders her to shut up in the middle of her speech, commenting that she is speaking like a foolish woman. Apart from such verbal disrespect, the king also batters his wife. The author reveals that the couple’s bedroom mirror has several cracks and this is a result of a fight between the two one night.

On top of insults and battering, Zuhura tolerates years of psychological torture from her husband, who clearly does not care about her well-being. He is a tough and dictatorial husband who pays little attention to her conjugal needs. Explaining Zuhura’s suffering due to this, the author writes:

Bi Zuhura alipojilaza katika kitanda chao... alitafunwa na ukiwa na jakamoyo. Mume ajaye usiku wa manane au jogoo la kwanza na kujibwaga kitandani kama gogo la mti ni mume gani? Enzi na jaha aliyokuwa nayo mumewe haikumpunguzia Bi Zuhura uchu aliokuwa nao. Aliwaonea gere wanawake wengine katika eneo la Sokomoko waliovaa rinda moja Januari mosi hata Januari mosi, lakini ambao walishinda pamoja na waume zao na kukesha nao na kugandiana kwa mapenzi yasiyojua kufa. {“Whenever Ms.

Zuhura lay on their bed... loneliness and solitude gnawed into her. What sort of a husband comes home in the dead of the night or in the wee hours of the morning and drops on the bed like a tree log? The high position and unmatched wealth that her husband had did not lessen Ms. Zuhura's desire. She envied other women in Sokomoko who wore the same dress from 1st of January to 1st of January, but who spent days and nights with their husbands and stuck with them in love that did not know death" (p. 90)}.

Meanwhile, King Nasaba Bora goes out every single day and comes back home very late at night. His daily excuse is that he has been resolving a land dispute case. Zuhura has grave misgivings about his behavior and, true to her suspicions, the king is promiscuous. He has a secret lover who is a high school student and with whom he has a baby. This is the baby that the two abandon on Amani's doorstep, and on whose death's account Amani and Imani are jailed. Despite her suspicions, though, Zuhura is afraid to voice them or ask for explanations about her husband's daily tardiness and failure to meet her matrimonial needs, because she knows that his reaction would be to dismiss her concerns and possibly punish her for it. Her passivity is further brought out when the author states that she has given up asking for such explanations since she has learnt that nothing she says is going to change her husband; yet she remains in this marriage. She consequently suffers in silence believing that, as a wife, she ought to be submissive to her husband no matter what. Her silent agony is made clear when the author quotes Ms. Tamari, a Taarab (Swahili traditional music popular on the Coast of Kenya and Tanzania) singer, to express her thoughts and longing: "... *wanaume wangewastahi wanawake kidogo, wawaone kama abiria wenzao katika mashua ya maisha, dunia ingekuwa pahala pema zaidi pa kuishi...*" {"If only men respected women just a little, and considered them fellow passengers in the 'boat of life', the world would be a better place to live" (p. 91)}.

The lifestyles of King Nasaba Bora and Zuhura, his wife, are informed by patriarchy. Both seemingly believe that they should live on the king's terms, whether that is comfortable for Zuhura or not: as long as the king is happy, then all is right in their marriage.

As discussed above, despite the ill treatment from her husband, Zuhura holds on to her marriage. On the other hand, despite his infidelity and taking his wife for granted, the king batters and ends up giving Zuhura a divorce once he suspects her of unfaithfulness. The divorce is a great relief for Zuhura, who, due to her status as a woman in this patriarchal society, has no say in her marriage; she cannot decide to get a divorce and, if and when her husband decides, she cannot say no to it. So, her husband's dismissal of her is finally a good excuse to quit the union. For her, marriage has been like a prison. Zuhura's family welcomes her warmly and accepts her back. This shows that some people in this highly patriarchal society have been liberated from the traditional worldview that women should stick with their husbands no matter what.

The author's celebration of the end of Zuhura's abusive marriage indicates that his ideal society is one where women are liberated from patriarchal tendencies, where they can make decisions about their life based on what is pleasant to them. A reaction like the one Zuhura gets from her family is traditionally unusual for many communities in Kenya. Being highly patriarchal, many Kenyan communities would not support a decision for separation between a husband and wife. In cases where women are unable to tolerate marriage any longer, many go back to their parents' homes. This is because women living alone (rather than with their parents or husbands) are viewed as inappropriate and rebellious. Moreover, until recently, women in Kenya have been highly dependent on their parents or husbands, as most of them would not get enough education (since educating a girl child was not taken seriously by many communities for a long time; some still do not). Without education in postcolonial Kenya, it is difficult for someone to comfortably take care of her needs, a fact that makes it hard for women to depend on

themselves adequately. When they quit marriage and go back to their parents, they are seldom received in the manner the author describes for Zuhura because they and their parents would be judged and stigmatized. This would lead some parents to take their daughters back to their abusive husbands. In a documentary titled “The Land of No Men: Inside Kenya's Women-Only Village”, *Broadly*, a website and digital video channel that represents various experiences by women through documentary film, reports about the dissatisfaction of men after their wives deserted them and built their own village to escape their mistreatment. One of the men who was interviewed in the documentary said that he was certain that if Umoja (the village the women who fled their husbands built) did not exist he could still have his wife. This is because, prior to the establishment of the village, his wife would always run to her father and mother, who would in turn bring her back to him. He explains that no matter what happens, a wife is supposed to go back to her husband, with the elders advising that the dispute should be solved traditionally. Even in the event of a husband kicking the wife out himself, as in Zuhura’s situation, the wife’s parents would usually insist on a reconciliation. They would make arrangements for meetings between them and the husband’s parents and probably other elders to seek a solution.

Even though these practices have been completely terminated in some communities and are dying off in many others, they still persist among some, alongside worse traditions such as genital mutilation and marrying girls off once they reach puberty. Ironically, in some of the communities where such practices persist, it is men, often not even related to the girls’ families, who make the decision and not the girls themselves. For instance, among the Kuria, as *The Guardian* reported on 24th December 2016, hundreds of girls underwent Female Genital Mutilation despite the practice being outlawed in Kenya. The paper reported that “groups of men, some armed, were going door to door harassing families of uncircumcised girls” (*The*

Guardian, Dec. 24, 2016). Having one of the highest FGM rates among Kenyans, the people of the Kurian community continue to hold onto this practice despite campaigns by both national and international agencies against it. Their elders (a term used in Kenya to refer solely to male persons who have advanced in age) are the major force behind the practice, as they attend campaign workshops just for the sake of it. They collude with the circumcisers, who give them a share of the money they are paid once they circumcise, and this has made it hard to convince the elders to stop. Like in other Kenyan communities, elders among the Kuria are considered authorities and are regarded with respect and esteem, which explains why the community listens to and obeys them.

While it is true that female circumcision has been a traditional practice among some communities in Kenya (and other places), this act has also been proved to cause health complications for those who have undergone it. For instance, it has been seen to result in complications during childbirth later in life, and sometimes death during the operation due to bleeding. Moreover, other than cultural lessons such as how to behave in adult life as a female member of one's community (which can be taught without necessarily undergoing the cut), the practice is not known for any benefit. In addition, in many cases it happens without the consent of the girls involved. In the case of the Kuria, for example, the elders decide for them and those who do not agree to it are forced through harassment of their families. Such injustices call for radical actions by both men and women. While Walibora does not address all of these directly, he highlights the plight of women such as Zuhura and Dora and the difficulties that are inflicted on them by men, thus drawing attention to problems experienced by women in Kenya.

Fran Hosken (1981), writing about the relationship between human rights and female genital mutilation in Africa and the Middle East, contends that the goal of FGM is to mutilate the woman's sexual pleasure and satisfaction, hence controlling her sexuality and reproductive

potential. She posits that “male sexual politics share the same political goal: to assure female dependence and subservience by any and all means” (Hosken, 1981, p. 14). In *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, as in Kenya, women are seen to be under male control through practices women do not necessarily agree to but which are forced on them.

Conclusion

The two sections of this chapter reveal that female oppression is perpetrated by their male counterparts as a tool of control and dominance. The practices are presented as natural and “just the way it is and has been”; as common sense, making it difficult to question them. I argue that the taboo in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* is a metaphor for, among other illegalities, practices that are used as tools of oppression and control of women by men, such as Female Genital Mutilation, wife battering, early and forced marriages, polygamy and the reasoning that men should earn more than women do. I arrive at this argument in light of a number of factors. For one, Imani’s response after being warned for breaking it, is that “in Tomoko [read Kenya], even the illegal is legalized, depending on who the doer and the recipient of the action is and not the legality or the illegality of the action in question” (p. 6). Moreover, the taboo is broken by Imani, a woman, suggesting that women should stand up for their rights and question the “common sense” practices that oppress them and keep them under male control.

In “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, Chandra Mohanty explains that “defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into ‘objects-who-defend-themselves’, men into ‘subjects-who-perpetrate-violence’ and society into powerless [read: women] and powerful [read: men] groups of people” (Durham and Kellner, 2012, p. 351). This sort of division, represented in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, is a reality that Kenya is grappling with. The discussion of the difficulties under which Wangari Maathai found herself as an educated university professor and politician, as well as less educated women such as Rebecca

Lolosoli and her counterparts in Umoja village, together with the not so optimistic stories of women who continue to suffer (such as those who are forced to undergo FGM in communities such as the Kuria community), illustrate that Kenyan society has to theorize and interpret male violence within its context as a country so as to understand and effectively organize for change.

Through Dora and Zuhura, Walibora demonstrates that the silence of women in the face of mistreatment is due to their inability to speak or act. When women are oppressed by their husbands, society sees no problem. In fact, in many communities in Kenya, wife battering was traditionally allowed as a “disciplinary measure”. Some men (and communities in general) still believe in this. That is the reason why, when oppressed women go back to their parents, they are likely to be taken back. As they are disempowered due to their lack of education and inability to own anything, they are highly dependent and hence cannot rely on themselves for survival. This is seen in the Kenyan examples discussed here and is a case of the subalterns’ inability to speak.

It is also important to point out that, though the success and progress of women is perceived as a threat to that of men, in reality it is not. Imani and Amani work together and the result is a more hopeful society. Maathai also explains in her memoir that when she got a salary raise while she was working at the University of Nairobi, she and her husband were able to live a better life; for instance, they bought a house more easily and were able to afford their children better education.

CONCLUSION

Over time there have been numerous productions of various forms of popular culture texts in Kenya. Music, TV shows, movies, and recently clips and memes on social media all characterize the nation's everyday social life. Many of these are tooled and retooled, appropriated and applied to critique society. Mocking or satirizing individuals, social institutions such as the church, and even the government, has been a primary focus of many of these popular cultural texts. These texts usually incorporate comic effects to sanitize the gravity of the matters they address while at the same time attracting the attention of the target audience. *The XYZ show*, which has aired on different national TV channels since 2009 for example, is a satirical puppet show that ridicules political activities and choices by high ranking politicians such as the president. It utilizes puppets and mimics the voices and actions in current Kenyan politics in an exaggerated and humorous manner. The aim is to humorously expose the rampant corruption and mismanagement of the country. Despite the exposure though, the concerned parties have only increased the rate at which they commit the offences for which they are satirized, while still gaining popularity among Kenyans. This makes one wonder why such candid criticism and exposure does not at least change the mind of citizens about the leaders that they elect.

Authors of fiction such as Walibora have also added their voice by authoring books and short stories that critique the social evils that are perpetuated by the Kenyan postcolonial leadership. The fictional nature of the texts however has meant they are taken less seriously than they should be. The Kenyan system of education has not helped either. Being highly exam oriented, the system mostly promotes rote learning and, despite the fact that such books are assigned to be studied in schools, Kenyan students have been slow in seeing the criticism leveled against the country's leadership. I remember how frustrated I would feel when I, as a Swahili Literature teacher, realized that my students worried so much about the content of these books

but cared very little about the meaning of this content. But then when I reflected back to my days as a high school student, I became aware of the fact that I had not been any different.

Noteworthy, though, is the freedom that is currently enjoyed in the country today, the development of which Walibora traces in his fictional country, Tomoko. While in the early years of independence in Kenya authors and other creators of popular culture that criticized the government were incarcerated, tortured and even assassinated, a factor that saw many of them either silenced or go to exile, today critics have more room to come up with texts that are critical of the government and other social systems without much fear of government intimidation.

Walibora's *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* attempts to not only expose and critique evils perpetuated by the government but also answer the question as to why citizens continue electing the same leaders who advance these evils. Through his fictional account of Sokomoko, he demonstrates how the government of independent Kenya uses State Apparatuses to advance its agenda in the country. He reveals the manner in which postcolonial leadership in Kenya has adopted and even perfected the strategies of the colonial powers in ruling the country through the use of both RSAs and ISAs. While the country has evolved from a pure dictatorship to some form of democracy, Walibora's narration corroborates claims by many political analysts (e.g. Amukowa and Atancha, 2013) in Kenya that, rather than being phased out, dictatorship has been metamorphosing. While the current government is democratically elected, it uses its numbers in parliament to dictate its position in the country, a phenomenon that Prof. Mutahi Ngunyi (2013) refers to as the tyranny of numbers. Though Ngunyi (2013) does not apply this term to connote gender representation and legislation, it is applicable in that having more male legislators than female ones, many legislations that deal with gender in the Kenyan parliament favor men.

Walibora brings a new twist into the postcolonial debate. Postcolonial scholars generally blame the colonial powers for the woes of the countries they write about and tend to exonerate

government leaders in such countries. Walibora, though agreeing that the colonial powers are to blame for the systems they put in place in their colonies, views postcolonial leaders in Kenya and other postcolonial African countries as the ones that bear the greatest responsibility for the situations. This is because they have adopted and are perpetuating the leadership styles and policies of the colonizers. They consciously make this choice with the sole aim of benefiting themselves. Nothing illustrates this better than Walibora's silence in *Kidagaa Kimemwozea* about ethnicity, instead choosing to tackle class as the real cause of division in Kenya. Through a detailed analysis of the policies put in place by the ruling class, Walibora emphasizes that the bourgeoisie are out to benefit themselves at the expense of the Wanjiku (the disenfranchised common citizen of low economic class as used in Chapter Two). These policies, which are mainly adopted from the colonial regime, include the divide and rule strategy (or "divide and ruin" as Walibora calls it in his 2013 non-fiction book *Narrating Prison Experience*), through which political demagogues cunningly divide the Wanjiku along ethnic lines to easily manipulate them. This way, they are able to maintain their high class while keeping the Wanjiku under their control and ensuring they remain economically powerless.

Walibora also addresses the position of women in postcolonial Kenya. Women have been discriminated against, taken for granted and even vilified for having positions on matters concerning their rights and/or leadership. For example, as discussed in Chapter Three, Wangari Maathai was persecuted by the government for standing against violation of human rights, victimized by the university for her position against discrimination of women at her work place, and vilified by the media for being a vocal, strong-willed and educated woman (Maathai, 2006). Walibora, through one of his female characters, Imani, demonstrates that given agency, women can make a lot of positive change in society. Through this character, he also celebrates women who, in spite of all the opposition and victimization, go against all the odds to fight not only for

equal treatment of women but also for a generally better society. While many men perceive the success of women as a threat, Walibora shows that it is actually more beneficial to society as a whole if both men and women succeed than if only men do.

Ultimately, Walibora envisions a society where Wanjiku is aware of the ruling class's tricks, particularly designed to divide and rule. Such a society can hope for and achieve change, especially in the wake of Kenya's current progressive constitution, because then Wanjiku can unite against the bourgeoisie who are the minority. He does not have faith in the current leadership in tackling the challenges that Kenya faces. On the contrary, he shows that the leaders are behind the challenges and, since they benefit from the situation, they are not willing to rectify it.

The issues that popular culture addresses in Kenya, as is evident in this analysis of *Kidagaa Kimemwozea*, are of utmost importance. Like everywhere else in the world, popular culture in Kenya plays the important role of being the "theatre... where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message but to ourselves for the first time" (Hall, 1993, p. 113). It is therefore detrimental that Kenyans seem to have only gotten the humorous or entertaining part of popular culture and either ignored or been slow in seeing the critical side of these texts. Walibora is not only critical but he also challenges and proves wrong the "nothing ever changes, the system always wins" (p.105) attitude that Hall (1993) criticizes in "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?", through the success of traditional medicine where modern medicine has failed. While recognizing the power of the bourgeoisie-controlled government system against the Wanjiku, Walibora does not think that the Wanjiku are completely hopeless and helpless. He sees strength in some of their practices and in their possible unity through Sheng' as a language. As we learn from the breaking of the taboo by Imani, a proletarian woman,

and the change of perspective about disabled people that she causes throughout Sokomoko, Walibora also does not think that the problems the Wanjiku face are insurmountable. He however emphasizes that the Wanjiku must rely on themselves rather than the bourgeoisie if they are to achieve liberation. Considering all this, Kenyans ought to pay more attention to popular culture.

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