



**MOI UNIVERSITY  
AFRICAN CLUSTER CENTRE**



# **KENYAN CINEMA SYMPOSIUM, MOI UNIVERSITY**

Arts and Aesthetics Research Section

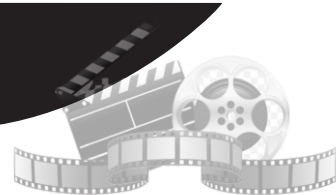
## **THEME**

Reimagining Kenyan Film:  
Technologies, Aesthetics, Traditions, Publics  
and Meanings

5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> November 2020

# **Book of Abstracts**



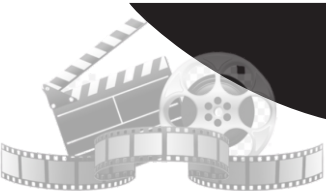


## Moi University African Cluster Centre - Profile

This workshop is just one of the many planned research activities of the Moi African Cluster Centre of Excellence in African studies for the year 2020. The Moi University African Cluster Centre (Moi-ACC) is housed in the School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS) of Moi University. The overriding objectives of the Moi University School of Arts and Social Sciences are to offer interdisciplinary teaching and research in the broad field of African studies and to act as the center where all other Africa-focused scholarship in Moi University coalesce. Within the context of these objectives, and building on the very strong tradition of exploring and interrogating diverse ways of knowing Africa that has developed in the School in the three and a half decades of its existence, the Moi-ACC is envisioned as a hub of outstanding inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary research and conversations that contribute to the greater understanding of Africa in ways that enable the addressing of significant issues affecting the continent. At Moi-ACC research is carried out under the following sections: Affiliations, Arts and Aesthetics, Mobilities, Moralities, Knowledges and Learning. The research projects that are currently on-going in these sections are: Regional integration in Eastern and Southern Africa: An appraisal of the frameworks for interactive markets, effective governance and human rights protection; East African Asian Writing and the Emergence of a Diasporic Subjectivity; Framing Identities from Human Agency Mobility on the Kenya-Uganda Highway; Changing Life Projects: African Identities, Moralities and Wellbeing; Pots, Fire and Gourds: A (Re)presentation of African Knowledge Systems; and Mediated and Mediatization of Islamic Knowledge in Kenya: Educational Institutions, Media Technologies and Performative Aesthetics.

**Prof. Dr. Peter Simatei**  
**Director,**  
**Moi African Cluster Centre.**





## PROGRAMME

| DAY 1         |   |   |
|---------------|---|---|
| 8:30 – 9:00   | Registration  |   |
|               | <b>Session 1</b> <b>Chair:</b> Christopher Odhiambo   |   |
| 9:00 – 10:00  | Keynote Address   | Prof Isaac Kosgey (Moi University)                |
| 10:00 – 11:00 | Keynote Address   | Dr Edwin Nyutho (The University of Nairobi)       |
| 11:00 – 11:15 | <b>Health Break</b>   |   |
|               | <b>Session 2</b> <b>Chair:</b> Rosemary Nyaale-Kowuor   |   |
| 11:20 – 11:40 | The Uncanny in the Re-imagination of Post-Colonial Kenyan Nation: A Watching and “Reading” of Two Films- <i>Malooned</i> and <i>Ni Sisi</i>                   | Christopher Odhiambo (Moi University)             |
| 11:40 – 12:00 | Re-imagining Kenyan Cinema: VIUSASA and Gikuyu Video Comedy Shows   | Samuel M. Ndogo (Moi University)                  |
| 12:00-12:20   | Plato is Risen: Kenyan Cinema and the Censor’s Big Stick  | Wesonga Robert (University of Kabianga)           |
| 12:20 – 12:35 | <b>Q &amp; A</b>  |   |
|               | <b>Session 3</b> <b>Chair:</b> Raphael Ogutu  |   |
| 12:35– 12:55  | Representation of Urban Geographies: Nairobi City in Kenyan Film  | Charles Kebaya (Machakos University)              |
| 12:55 – 13:15 | A Body of Social Justice Work: Judy Kibinge in Interview  | Jacqueline Ojiambo (RAF International University) |
| 13:15-13:35   | Potential of Fourth Cinema Aesthetics in East Africa  | Cosmas Bii (Moi University)                       |
| 13:35 – 13:50 | <b>Q &amp; A</b>  |   |
| 13:50-14:45   | <b>Health Break</b>   |   |
|               | <b>Session 4</b> <b>Chair:</b> Jacqueline Ojiambo   |   |
| 14:45 – 15:05 | The Moral Dilemma in Kenyan Film: Visualizing Narrative Strands Dealing with Moral Issues in Selected Kenyan Films  | Susan Gitimu (Kenyatta University)                |
| 15:05 – 15:25 | Performing Identities in Emerging Kenyan Screen Stories: Readings on Meanings of “man” in Machawood Festival’s <i>Wakamba Forever</i> and <i>Love Daggers</i> | Fredrick Mbogo (Technical University of Kenya)    |
| 15:25 – 15:45 | Kenya National Drama and Film Festival and the Quest for Kenyan Cinema  | Evans O. Mugarizi (Moi University)                |
| 15:45 – 16:00 | <b>Q &amp; A</b>  |   |
|               | <b>Session 5</b> <b>Chair:</b> Christopher Odhiambo   |   |
| 16:00 – 16:20 | The Anatomy of Animation Films in Kenya   | Raphael Ogutu (Nazerene University)               |
| 16:20 – 16:40 | Directing for the Screen: Perspectives of Two Kenyan Film Makers  | Rosemary Nyaale-Kowuor (Daystar University)       |
| 16:40 – 17:00 | Independent Film Making: Taking Charge of Content, Production and Distribution  | Emma Ngare (Moi University)                       |
| 17:00-17:15   | <b>Q&amp;A</b>  |   |
| 17:15 – 18:00 | <b>Film</b>   | Cosmas Bii (Moi University)                       |
| 18:00 –       | <b>Health Break</b>   |   |
| DAY 2         |   |   |
|               | <b>Session 6</b> <b>Chair:</b> Samuel M. Ndogo  |   |
| 09:20 – 09:40 | Witnessing Familial Atrocities in Kenyan Documentaries  | Wafula Yenjela (South Eastern Kenya University)   |
| 09:40 – 10:20 | “The Beast and the Hunter”: Interrogating the Conflict between Elephants and Humans Through Film in Meru County   | Anthony Mukasa (Chuka University)                 |
| 10:20 – 10:35 | <b>Q &amp; A</b>  |   |
| 10:35-11:00   | <b>Health Break</b>   |   |
| 11:00-12:30   | Plenary –Way Forward<br>Closing Remarks   | Participants &<br>Conveners                       |
| 12:30-14:00   | <b>Health Break</b>   |   |
| 14:00 – 15:30 | Mentoring Session   |   |





## ABSTRACTS

### Plato is Risen: Kenyan Cinema and the Censor's Big Stick

*Robert Wesonga*

*University of Kabianga*

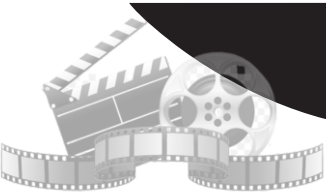
**A**s the first sustained and systematic critic of the arts, Plato wrote treatises in which he dismissed the importance of art in society. However, in a series of contradictions, he also claimed that literature, or art for that matter, had essences that made it harmful, and that if it was not checked, then it would jeopardize the welfare of the state. Right then, in Greece of antiquity, censorship was born, and has since remained, attending to art in various styles and magnitudes. With its growth in bounds and leaps, Kenyan cinema, like every other form of art, has not escaped the censor's big stick. Within Kenya, the debate over which films are fit, and which are not for public consumption has been a polarizing one. It has most often pitted the liberals who advocate for the need to allow free access to content, and the conservatives who opine that the Kenyan society will be much the worse if some films are permitted. This chapter aims to interrogate Kenyan cinema, in the light of the longstanding tradition of censorship. Such films as Wanuri Kahiu's *Rafiki* and *Otto*, *The Blood Bath* shall be used as case studies in shaping the debate here. The chapter shall appropriate the classical and neo-classical theories of art in making sense of the arguments. In terms of methodology, arguments and counter-arguments in this chapter will be subjected to descriptive analysis.

### Independent Film Making: Taking Charge of Content, Production and Distribution

*Emma Ngare*

*Moi University*

**T**here exists huge potential in independent film industry right from content development, production and distribution of independent films. Huge gains reaped in countries like US, UK, China, Brazil and India could also translate in emerging and developing countries. Nigeria is an example in the African continent. Kenya's film industry is developing rapidly especially enabled by the digital technology which has facilitated short film production using easily obtainable gadgets like mobile phones. Emerging independent film makers can potentially utilize myriad platforms opened up by technology and especially the internet and that they need not heavily rely on the mainstream distribution channels for release and dissemination of their content. The future indeed lies with efforts to promote and strengthen independent film making in Kenya, in the continent and globally.



## Performing Identities in Emerging Kenyan Screen Stories: Readings on Meanings of “man” in Machawood Festival's *Wakamba Forever* and *Love Daggers*

Fredrick Mbogo

Technical University of Kenya

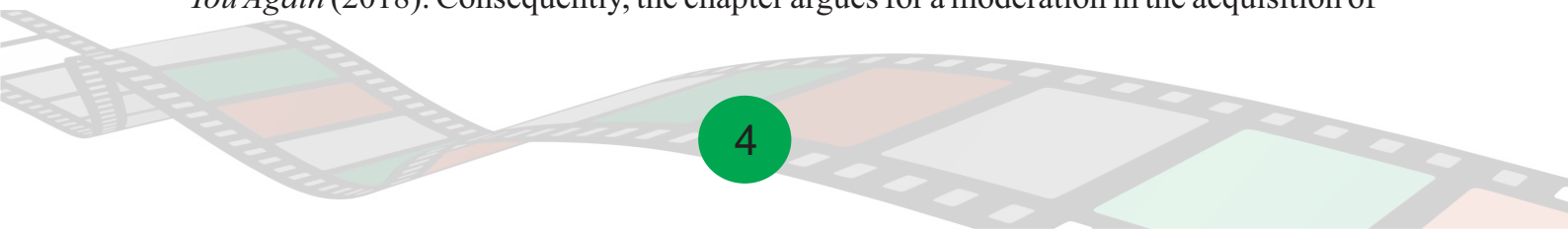
**T**his paper is interested in how *Wakamba Forever* (2018) and *Love Daggers* (2019), both winners at Machawood Festival, suggest ways of looking at the “performance” of men on screen in Kenya. The paper acknowledges Machawood Festival as an important avenue for the growth of film in Kenya by encouraging the development of local or “original” stories. Yet, while the winning films at Machawood lead us to new insights about the local, they also rehash grand narratives, especially about the how of, and to, being a man. This paper argues that parody, as an approach in film making, especially with *Wakamba Forever*, offers an opportunity to question perceptions of the performance of man. Identities being fluid, argues the paper, are fraught with moments of self-introspection where the question of how to perform gender, or man as this paper investigates, is always under review. Both *Wakamba Forever* and *Love Daggers* are set within fast changing locales; where urbanization and cosmopolitanism are an increasing reality, and where dominant ideas on culture, and politics and therefore identities, are being questioned. How is man to behave within these new realities, especially given the traditional patriarchal set up that constantly reminds us of its presence? The nature of storytelling in film will be analyzed particularly in how the semiotics of the body interact with speech and silence in negotiating meanings of being man. Masculinity and its many forms, in these films, it is argued, is explored as an important tool in competition for power. Yet, power's sense of fluidity frequently undermines a unified idea of what it might mean to be a man.

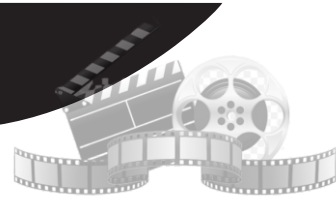
## The Moral Dilemma in Kenyan Film: Visualizing Narrative Strands Dealing with Moral Issues in Selected Kenyan Films

Susan Gitimu

Kenyatta University

**K**enyan films have been accused of several offences. Despite having poor story lines, Kenyan films have been accused of threatening the moral fabric of the Kenyan society with films of obscene thematic pre-occupations. In the last few years, we have seen films banned for threatening the moral fabric and going against the Kenyan law. A deeper understanding of the mechanisms responsible for visualizing narrative strands dealing with moral issues and actions could help elucidate such complicated social issues. Using rhetorical criticism, the chapter examines how film-makers treat morality and how this contributes to our moral education in Kenya. The chapter examines four recently produced feature films *18 Hours* (2017), *Disconnect* (2018), *Family Meeting* (2019), and *You Again* (2018). Consequently, the chapter argues for a moderation in the acquisition of





of western cultures as way of attracting a film audience. The intention is not to suppress immoral conducts in the Kenyan society but to portray them with the mindset of condemnation.

## Potential of Fourth Cinema Aesthetics in East Africa

*Cosmas Bii*

*Moi University*

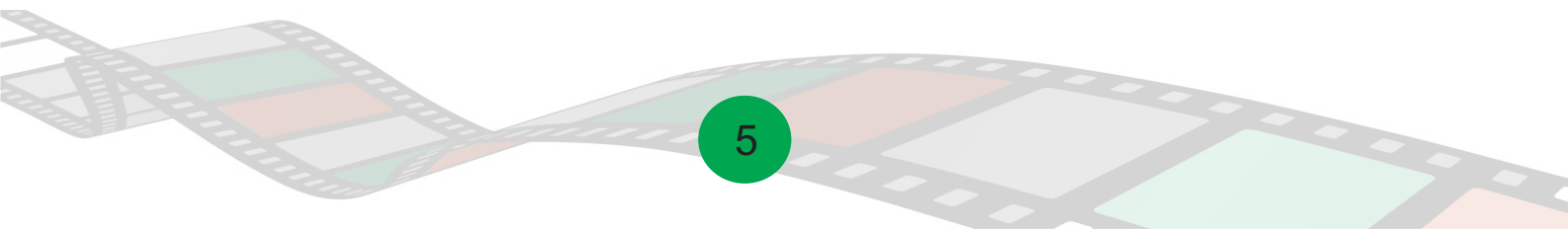
**T**his paper explores the problematic of establishment of a sustainable cinematic practice in East Africa. This is done through a historical contextualisation of cinema; it's rationale for establishment and its practice since cinema's introduction in the region. The paper borrows from the Fourth Cinema tradition to argue that audience segmentation seem to hold potential for a vibrant cinematic tradition in the region; segmentation that is based on communal and consequently linguistic segmentation. Fourth cinema holds potential in the face of hegemonic practices by established traditions such as Hollywood, Nollywood, Bollywood among other cinema traditions in the region.

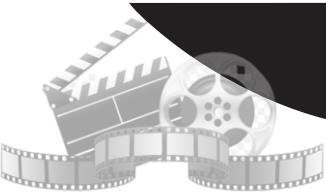
## Representation of Urban Geographies: Nairobi City in Kenyan Film

*Charles Kebaya*

*Machakos University*

**C**inematic representations of urban spaces and most importantly, of city culture, is often manifested in and visibilized through popular cultural productions. City culture is embodied in popular art forms such as film, photography, dance, music, and fashion among others, which present the city as an imagined space for performance and display. Whereas the city is integral in understanding manifestations of social change, film plays a role in foregrounding and reflecting its social transformations overtime. Anchored on the multi-disciplinary triad of the cultural production of place, space and meaning, this article explores figurations of everyday life in Nairobi city as mediated through film using two films: *Nairobi Half-life*, *Ndoto za Elibidi (Dreams of Elibidi)* and *Rafiki (A Friend)*. The paper argues that the production and consumption of urban cinematic geographies is, in different ways, tied to shifting urban cultures and lived experiences within the city. The article further shows how space in film is used as a narrative devise to depict emerging socio-cultural issues in Nairobi city space. Thus, the paper contributes to emerging trends on how urban practices influence popular consciousness and adds to the growing lore of urban scholarship in Kenya.





## Directing for the Screen: Perspectives of Two Kenyan Film Makers

Rosemary Nyaole-Kowuor

Daystar University

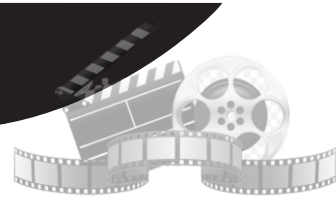
**T**he real success of any film is to be able to make money out of it; and to be able to comfortably make a living from the films that you make. Generally, with less money going to independent filmmakers, the competition to be selective gets more difficult, global independent filmmakers are having this big conversation on how to make money, how do they continue being productive, being creative, how do they monetize opportunities on the internet? Will people really pay for things online under the big banner like *Netflix* and even the Kenyan version, *Viusasa*, that collect lots and lots of content? In this chapter, I will take the reader through a turbulent, but breath-taking journey, with renowned Kenyan filmmakers, Bob Nyanja and Judy Kibinge. You will walk with me along their re-emergence path after significant 'failure' and their decisions that led them to success. Bob and Judy not only view film as a source of entertainment; but also as a potential platform for addressing social issues that resonate with our hearts. This is evident in their award winning films, notably *Killer Necklace* and *Malooned*. We will tap into their wealth of knowledge in dealing with a myriad of challenges facing Kenyan filmmakers. Most exciting, we will delve into their practical strategies for navigating the emotional rollercoaster of the Kenyan film industry: how they have been dealing with the flop of a producer cut; balancing the public smile with the private tears; and re-imagining themselves as the director they have always wanted to be.

## The Anatomy of Animation Films in Kenya

Raphael Nakhumbi Ogutu

Nazerene University

**T**his study dissects animation films in Kenya mainly in terms of manner. The study focuses on the substance of animation films and communicative strategies employed in 2D and 3D animation films in Kenya. The study examines the techniques employed by selected Kenyan animators and the nexus between technique and message. Films selected for this study are: *The legends of Ngong hills film* (Bunitv 2011), films sampled from *Tinga Tinga tales series: why lion roars, why chicken pecks the ground and why lizard hides under the rocks* (Homeboyz Animation- first episode 2011), *Greedy lords of the Jungle*, *Africa's next top poet*, *Shadowboxing*, *Driving test*, *Miss match*, *Lunchtime woes*, *Savannah drama*, *Two olds* (RECON-Digital 2009-2012), and *Wageuzi Battle 2012* (Afrikana Digital 2011). The study employed a qualitative study design that comprised: library research, thematic content analysis of selected films, focus group discussions and interviews with various respondents. The triangulation approach guided data collection for focus group discussions, interviews as well as content analysis of the selected films. Three theoretical perspectives, Social Cognitive Theory, the Conventionalist theory of pictorial representation, and the Neo-representation theory guided the analysis of this study.



## A Body of Social Justice Work: Judy Kibinge in Interview

Jacqueline Ojiambo

RAF International University

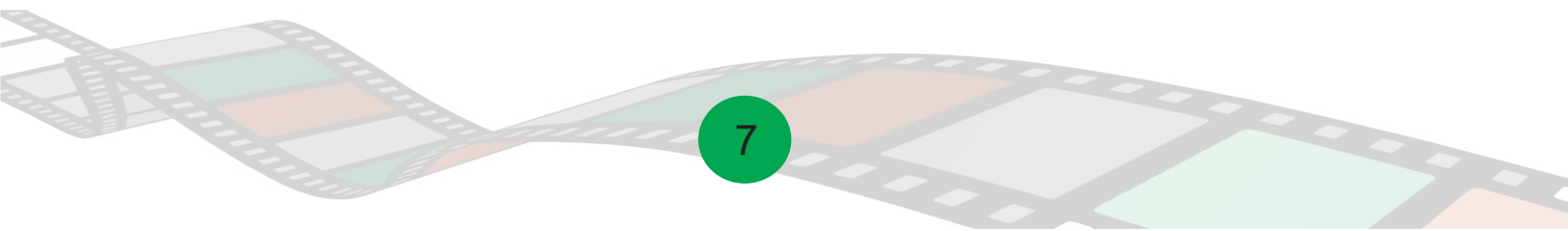
**J**udy Kibinge is one of Kenya's outstanding film directors. The award-winning and critically acclaimed filmmaker's work includes both fiction films and documentaries. Some of her notable works include *Scarred: The Anatomy of Massacre* (2015), *Something Necessary* (2013), *Dangerous Affair* (2002), and *Project Daddy* (2004). Her films focus on social issues but also demonstrate a commitment to reflecting the social-political climate of the day. This chapter aims to take the director's objectives and agendas into consideration in order to understand her creative choices. I engaged the filmmaker in a detailed discussion of her films and the personal realities and political and theoretical currents that have shaped her body of work. This chapter aims to situate Kibinge's works in their specific social, cultural and political contexts so that audiences and critics appreciate and evaluate these films on their own terms.

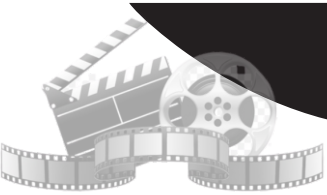
## Witnessing Familial Atrocities in Kenyan Documentaries

Wafula Yenjela

South Eastern Kenya University

**T**his chapter reads Kenya Television Network's documentaries *Casefiles: My Family Forgive Me* and *Casefiles: Who Killed University Student Mercy Keino?* Through media witnessing, these two documentaries translate the two familial tragedies into national tragedies. The two documentaries represent atrocities enabled by family members. Here, the family is examined as a space that is no longer a domestic fortress against politically instigated uncertainties but a traumatic theatre. While Mercy Keino is killed on a night out in *Who Killed University Student Mercy Keino?* a close family member is linked to her tragedy, thereby transforming into a symbol of the enormous familial loss. In *My Family Forgive Me*, a lawyer Paul Magu exterminates his wife and two children before committing suicide. In reading these documentaries, I examine how media witnessing of familial trauma translates to national trauma.





## “The Beast and the Hunter”: Interrogating the Conflict between Elephants and Humans through Film in Meru County

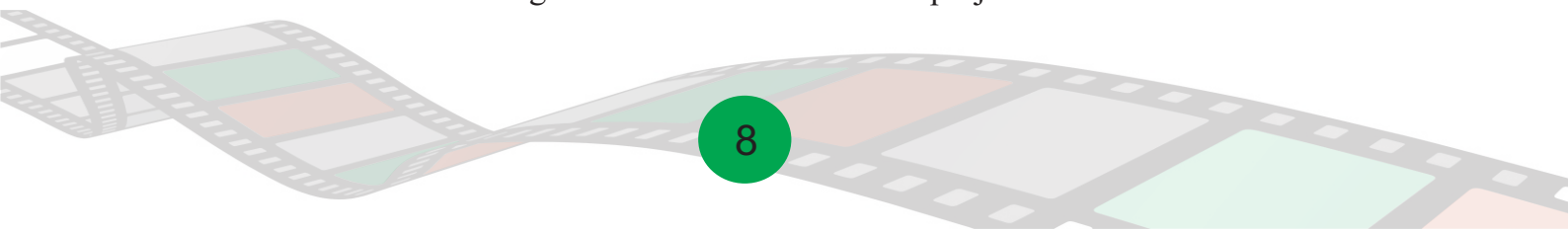
*Anthony Mukasa Mate  
Chuka University*

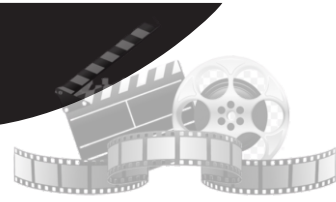
**T**his paper examines how film is used as a tool of sensitization on the wildlife-human conflict in Meru County, Kenya. Meru County is an area that has had perennial wildlife-human conflict for a long time with serious ramifications on both humans and the environment. The study interrogates the use of film documentary to illustrate the above conflict. The paper adopts an ecocriticism which is an interdisciplinary approach that links literature to the natural environment. Thus the literary critic meets with the environmentalist. We argue that film goes beyond entertainment and plays an active role in trying to help mitigate a conflict that has led to the destruction of the environment. It is this paper's contention that nature or ecological issues in literature especially in film studies in Africa has not received much criticism, thus the paper seeks to break new ground in filling this lacuna. Moreover, ecocriticism presents a paradigm shift in the analyzing of literature from the traditional approaches. Hence the paper seeks to bring to fore new dimensions in analysis of literature and in particular film studies. Furthermore, there is the lacuna in the criticism of film in Kenya that this paper seeks to fill. The paper points out that literature does not operate in a vacuum but it is intricately linked/interconnected to all life forms in the environment. The paper examines how the film frames the constructions of the conflict between wildlife and humans and possible solutions or ecojustice. Thus we seek to examine the use of film documentary through eco-critical lens with these questions in mind. How is the setting of the film documentary related to the environment? How is the Wildlife-human conflict as a representation of popular culture? What is the representations of animals in the film in relations to humans? What is the influence of metaphors and representation of land in the film in relation to the human-wildlife conflict?

## The Uncanny in the Re-imagination of Post-colonial Kenyan Nation: A Watching and “Reading” of Two Films - *Malooned* and *Ni Sisi*

*Christopher Odhiambo Joseph  
Moi University*

**T**his article is a function of a watching and 'reading' of the deployment of the uncanny in the re-imagination of the postcolonial Kenyan nation as framed within two filmic texts: *Malooned* and *Ni Sisi*. The article demonstrates the inherent vast potentials and possibilities in the uncanny as a mode of rendering experiences as well as a critical premise of unsettling avowed ethnic entitlements through a conscious simultaneous projection and deconstruction of





ethnic stereotypes and myths of domination and subordination. But more important, the article focuses on how this play of deconstructing ethnic myths and stereotypes of domination and subordination participate in interpreting and understanding the nuanced imagining of citizenships and the project of nationhood.

## The Kenya National Drama and Film Festival and the Quest for a National Cinema

*Evans Odali Mugarizi*

*Moi University*

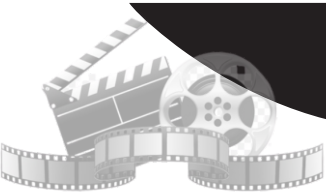
**T**his paper attempts to interrogate the Ministry of Education's aspiration to use the Kenya National Drama and Film Festival as a stepping stone to establish a Kenyan cinema culture. The KNDFFF whose inception dates back to the colonial period in 1959 had a singular objective; to socialize British children born away from home and non-British students in the colony into Western culture. The target was to enhance English language proficiency among Kenyan students to socialize children of colonial settlers in the British culture. Thus only English plays were to be staged. But soon there emerged revolt among Kenyan students agitating for performances that would give them identity; addressing African specifically Kenyan issues in local languages. Thus what started as a co-curricular activity morphed into a space for fighting for and asserting of identity. Ideally it had become a site for decolonization. Students at Alliance High wrote plays in Kiswahili. This was followed by other schools writing plays in vernacular. When the festival got its first black director of English and Drama at the Ministry headquarters, it expanded in the number of institutions taking part and genres being performed to include poetry, dance (both cultural and modern), mime, film and spoken word. The final level of performance for the festival also moved from being localized at the Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi to rotational hosting, initially moving from province to province and now region to region. This assumption is perhaps it is the powerful Kenyanisation drive demonstrated by youthful students participating in the drama festival that Ministry wishes to leverage on to achieve the development of what can be defined as a Kenyan film.

## Re-imagining Kenyan Cinema: *Viusasa* and Gikuyu Video Comedy Shows

*Samuel Ndogo*

*Moi University*

**T**his paper examines the growth of vernacular comedy and the rise of new media platforms in Kenya. Specific focus are short comedy shows performed in Gikuyu language and which are accessible to audiences on social media platform known as *Viusasa*. The paper tries to link the popularity of these comedy shows to the advancement in telephone industry. *Viusasa* is a coinage from the English word “view” (Swahilinised to read “viu”) and the



Swahili word “sasa” meaning “now”. Additionally, Viusasa is exclusively a Kenyan video-on-demand platform that offers diverse entertainment as well as information video content in English, Swahili and vernacular languages, Kenyan music at the convenience of the audience on mobile phone devices anywhere and at any time. I draw examples from various Gikuyu comedians such as Machang'i, Mwalimu Stano, and Githingithia among others to demonstrate how Kenyan stories are told in hilarious ways, adding flavour to the everyday experiences. The mundane therefore becomes an avenue through which we can understand what it means to be Kenyan as well as reimagine Kenyan cinema.



The Moi University African Cluster Centre (Moi-ACC) is a node in the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence (“Africa Multiple”), a transnational project whose overarching aim is to reconfigure African Studies. “Africa Multiple” – its other nodes are in the University of Bayreuth, Germany, University Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Burkina Faso, University of Lagos, Nigeria, and Rhodes University, South Africa – is a platform for scholars to undertake research and engage in conversations that contribute to the greater understanding of Africa in ways that enable the addressing of significant issues affecting the continent's peoples. The present workshop joins in the general effort with its examination of music even as it deploys it to explore cultural identity from diverse disciplinary perspectives.

## **MOI UNIVERSITY AFRICAN CLUSTER CENTRE**

