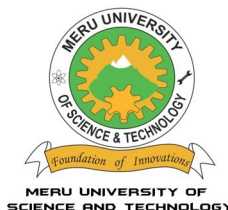




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The male gender construct: film portrayal and gender mainstreaming

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ABSTRACT

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Generally, how men are presented in cinematic medium tells how the representation speaks about them and their societies. The portrayal of men and the attendant representation should be progressive to transform their masculine behaviours and practices. This paper addresses the male gender construct and its attendant masculine representation in the following Kenyan Drama Films: Nairobi Half-life [2020] by Tosh Gitonga, The Village Casanova [2010] by Simon Nduti and Fifty Fifty [2020] by Simon Muiruri. While acknowledging existence of Marginal and Aspirational masculinity in Kenya as described by Izugbara and Egesa [2017], This paper also attempts to glimpse into how they are represented in the chosen films and the attendant consequential societal “boomerang” effect this has on gender mainstreaming. The primary data obtained from thematic analysis of the chosen films unveils masculinities shaped by gender, social and economic status of the men who are shown to ascribe to them. The masculinities of the characters are complex, fluid and driven by their socio-cultural economic perspectives.

They regularly clash with the progressive realities opposing the hegemonic masculine ideals in the fast changing world. The retrogressive masculine connotations ascribed to the men through filmic representation are his major undoing in the modern day gender realignment struggles. Negative portrayal showing men as patriarchal and hegemonic may fuel gender disharmony because cinema has a monumental influence in changing people’s perspectives and attitudes. Representations of Males in less chauvinistic viewpoints are needed to steer the society towards gender equilibrium.

Introduction

Generally, how men are presented in cinematic medium tells how the representation speaks about them and their societies. The portrayal of men and the attendant representation should be progressive to transform their masculine behaviours and practices

Hearn [2004] and Morgan [2014], argue that

normative masculinities are being eroded by socio-cultural currents that drive transformations in Men’s behaviours and practices. These normative masculinities are turned into “dark masculinities” brought about by the harsh social upheavals which drives men to violence, mental instability and states of helplessness. These feelings of disenfranchisement and masculine violence have ag-

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gravated because of the Neo-local and Global Women policies and programmes that have thrust the Women and Girls at the Zenith of Gender equality, Incomes and Education [Silber Schmidt 2001,2005]. Mac an ghail and Haywood [2012], Lomas et al.[2013], argues that these social upheavals have “demasculinised” men and brought feelings of disempowerment. As they respond to these unfavourable social stimuli, they take on behaviours and practices that not only harms them but also harms those around them including Women, Children and fellow Men. The poor and economically disadvantaged Men are therefore “damaged and damage-doing”

According to Adam J [2006], Masculinity is in part, a role play by referencing different models of manhood and cultural stereotypes. Izugbara C. O and Egesa C. P, categories masculinities in slums and poor rural areas in Kenya as both aspirational and marginal. These two types of masculine variants are generally realized because of economic depravity. Due to the societal influences that endangers the “traditional” masculinity, the Men turns to be violent, sexually active and socially deviant to awaken the “Machismo” character in them.

The marginal masculinity is the most dominant in Kenya because of the widely held cultural notion of tying masculinity to economic empowerment and provision capacity both at the family and societal level. These two masculinities both negotiate through economic empowerment, socio-cultural initiatives and media representation that portray masculinity and Male identity progressively.

Therefore, the task of this paper is to explore how Media/Filmic representations in the selected Films act as an arbitrator in the cyclic and fluid World of Masculinities and Gender mainstreaming efforts

Significance of the study and expected outcomes

Gender-based violence, particularly against women and socio-cultural-economic disempowerment remains a major problem in Kenya. While

cases of violence meted to Boys and Men by females are relatively low, Women and Girls bear the greatest socio-economic pain and suffering. However, missing is the prime role/function of the Kenyan male film portrayal in mitigating or exacerbating this unfortunate, dangerous and backward trend. Due to the significance of film being a powerful influence in determining how people relate and behave in the society, it is of great importance to examine how male film portrayal contribute to mitigating or exacerbating the socio-cultural-economic gender disharmony in Kenya.

Research methodology

The research methodology used is the descriptive design where inferences are made using thematic content analysis of the portrayal of masculine characters in the selected Films. The descriptive methodology is preferred because it is an observational approach where the researcher the male character portrayal to describe the occurrence and distribution of the masculinity variable in the Films. The data collection tools used in this study are observations and the case study of the chosen Films.

Hyper- masculinity

Many scholars have noted, men have long been type cast in “instrumental” economically derived positions whereby masculinity, male identity and male role performance all center around work and the benefits accrued in monetary terms, the prestige, power and a feeling of wholesomeness it brings. (Brannon, 1976, Cohen 1987, 1988, Pleck 1979, 1983), have “measured masculinity” by the size of the paycheck. Therefore, in cultures/situations where masculinity is rated through economic independence and provision capacity, poverty and meagre income can attract feelings of exclusion from the dominant gender status and “real Man status”, Cha and Thebaud [2009], Strier [2005],2008 and Barker [2005]. These observations realises the notion that low-income and financial instability may arouse feelings of frustrations and disempowerment in Men. The

attendant attempts to flee and redeem themselves from these societal induced failures makes them embrace and apply “hyper-masculinity” to redeem themselves from the “marginal masculinity” of masculine failure.

In the selected drama Films, Male characters who come from poor backgrounds feel overwhelmed both inside and outside their homes because they are hard-pressed to validate their manhood through “economic performances” despite the lack of a means to earn an income. These Men tend to acquire an “hyper-masculine “status to redeem themselves by being violent, harsh, cruel, alcoholic and hyper-sexual to prop up their flailing masculine status. The violence and cruelty is embraced to signal to the others a “Macho image” that is strong and can resist any forces hell bent on weakening the “Macho Man”. By being tough, emotionless and strong, they are able to retain the lost masculine image brought by socio-economic disruptions. The male characters in the Film Nairobi Half-life, embrace a life of crime to redeem their masculine status snatched away from them by the “jaws” of poverty and lack of a means to earn an income Mwas and crew in Nairobi half-life, Ali, and Juma in Fifty-Fifty and Tumbo in Village Casanova are all driven by Poverty and lack drives their masculinity props via alcoholism. The alcohol intake strengthens their resolve and offers a temporary asylum from the reality of a failing male. This state of hyper-activity brought by the delusions of imbibing alcohol reinstates their lost status as real Men in the eyes of the probing society. The short-lived mental-asylum courtesy of alcohol helps them cope and escape with/the realities of a fast changing World, where the traditional aspects of masculinity are being questioned by the New world order. It is evident in all the films that the socio-economic disruptions have led to the Male characters denied the pre-requisite [resources] to make their patriarchal ideology legitimate. This has led to them being denied access to traditionally ascribed roles/tittles as head of households and breadwinners because they can’t provide for their families nor find a wife to

marry and start a family. Consequently, these Men have embraced strategies to strengthen their identity and failing masculinity by being hyper-sexual [sexually-aggressive]. In the film Fifty-Fifty, Joe and John seduce Women by buying them alcohol to reinvent their failing masculine selves. By doing this, they embrace hyper-sexuality as a prop for a failing male identity inside and outside their homes. In the Film Nairobi Half-life, Mwas who is the Principal character together with his crew use the money they illegally get to seduce women to become real men because they can’t have women of their own. This hyper-sexuality is a means to prop up their fragile masculine character. Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and Francis [2006] argues that poverty and low-incomes have promoted a sense of desperation, powerlessness and inconsequence among Kenyan Men to a point of using escapist strategies like exaggerating masculine behavior and performances to attain the status of “Socially Sanctioned Proper Men”. This strategy is evident in all the Male characters studied in these Films. Violence and alcohol are both used as a toxic mixture of marginal masculinity antidote that enables Men escape questioning from demanding wives who view them as not up to standards in terms of masculinity. This approach by the Women is countered by the Male characters embracing hyper-masculinity to fend off the allusions of Weak Masculinity/Marginal Masculinity. By being violent and drunk, they portray an aura of invincibility and toughness that are associated with hyper-masculinity.

A. Alcoholism and Macho Image as Character Prop

The men in the three films use beer to camouflage their failures as husbands, fathers and leaders of households. This is used as ‘painkiller’ to escape from the real world which stalks them as absentee fathers, uncaring husbands, irresponsible heads of homes and disillusioned men; Beer indulgence offers a temporary accommodation to these haunting failures, which are an open sore painful wound to the men. When the getting gets tough they promptly flirt with beer as the mistress

who welcomes them with open arms to take all their pain away. To their utter surprise the problems still remain no matter how many bottles one has taken or the number of times he has visited the local pub.

This negative portrayal is a bad signal for the social standing of the man in the society. This is because it leads to hasty generalizations which may label all the men in the society as irresponsible alcoholics who can't raise a family. This is because people tend to trust and copy what they see. Therefore, this calls for a fair reflection on the social impacts of these negative depictions. This brings to the fore the urge of a social need to portray upright masculine characters in films.

In the *Film Fifty* Joe is easily lured to the bar when the wife becomes a nuisance to him. Facing harsh questioning and numerous demands from the wife Joe finds a "second woman" in a beer bottle. Joe and John his business associate are seen in an exclusive bar drinking expensive wine and beer. John brags about being the commander in chief because his lady readily obeys him. Joe staggers home with a half-finished bottle of vodka. He goes on to show it off to the maid whom he has lately started seeing because the wife's naggings have become a turn off. This sudden indulgence in binge drinking can be attributed to the problems Joe is facing at home with a harsh and an uncompromising wife, Joe slowly ebbs away towards the bar. Here he finds solace in the bottle together with his comrades and the ever available bar maids who are keen to make a killing from frustrated and disillusioned husbands running away from home.

When John and his girlfriend join Joe for a drinking spree, Joe secretly admires John's girlfriend and even goes to an extent of secretly caressing her thighs. When John and his girlfriend leave, Joe is left lonely and finally the beer gets a toll on him and he collapses on the table. All this strange behaviour is influenced by the problems Joe is experiencing at home. He does this as a means to escape. When he reaches home, he becomes violent after being brought food he doesn't like by his

wife. He even goes ahead and insults the wife. This sudden strange behaviour is a defense tactic employed by Joe to hit back at the wife who has become a sore thumb because of her nagging ways. This is a direct response to the overt questioning of his position as the head of the home. His position has been threatened by the naggings and tongue lashings of his wife. To summon the courage to confront the wife and restore his lost glory as the man of the house, he turns to drinking.

When Joe arrives from work, the wife gives him bottle of vodka to sip as he whiles away time, he is surprised by this act:

I can see what you want me doing(Banging the desk)

Promise you, I will do it ...

This blunt promise emanates from the problems he is experiencing at home. He readily admits to have found a solution to the problems he is experiencing in his family. For sure drinking is the solution according to Joe's statement.

In the film the *Village Casanova*, indulgence in beer has extremely been applied by the men who think that their position as the heads of their respective homes has been endangered. It is also used as a way of hiding their failures as providers, husbands and fathers. All then men struggling desperately to assert their authority in a changing world end up in the bar as their 'mental asylum'. This brief escapist tendency doesn't offer a solution; they soon find out that the problems prevail upon getting sober the following day.

Tumbo uses trickery to get money from the wealthy Kipara pretending the money is to be used to pay for a medical bill of a friend. When Kipara gives Tumbo the money, he shamelessly goes on a drinking spree. This is done in order to escape the gnawing poverty at home. He is a poor man whose laziness can't enable him do something useful in his life with no food and a nagging wife to boot, he quickly falls prey to the beckoning bottle of beer.

Similarly, Saidi indulgence in beer drinking is a

consequence of the nagging of his wife. He staggers home and demands food from Mama Njeri. He mumbles inaudibly:

Ndirenda iriō
(I need food)

He says this despite the fact that he does nothing to bring food to the table. This is because of his portrayal as an irresponsible drunk who can't provide. His masculine power as a provider is being put into question. Here, the director unmasks his masculine impotence. The stark poverty they live in can be seen by the mud houses they possess. He drinks to avoid the quarrels and questions from his wife as to why he can't provide for the family.

Similarly, Juma comes home drunk; he calls his wife Chausiku and starts teasing her:

Juma: *Chausiku Chausiku!*

Chausiku: *eeh!*

Juma: *I keep on calling you Chausiku. Why are you called Chausiku?*
Unamulikanga usiku?
(Do you shine at night?)

He complains why she doesn't welcome him:

Why don't you bring me a seat?

Enquire my whereabouts ...

You know we don't eat in the farm.

This is intended to intimidate her so that he should not be asked about his failures as the head of the family. He tries to convince her about his plans to succeed:

Juma: *I always tell you but you never listen.*
Let me tell you, I have a plan.

Wife: *Nini tena?*
(What?)

She almost hits him to silence him. He has become all talk and no action. When Saidi comes home drunk, he is given an empty plate by the wife. When he inquires he is slapped by Mama Njeri and eventually chased away amid shouts of:

Mbona huwezi kuwa mwanaume kama wengine?
(Why can't you become a man like others?)

The wife is angry because Saidi left twenty shillings week ago and yet he asks for food. He in-

dulges in beer to escape the questioning and the rants of the annoyed and frustrated wife. Ali, Saidi and Juma are seen drinking in the last episodes of the film. They talk about how their wives treat them. This is a testimony of their inability to cater for their homes. They find solace in the brotherhood the beer dens provide. They have become a home away from home. Mama Njeri, Saidi's wife comes and pours all the beer and chases the men out of the bar. She beats her husband and drags him home.

This is because the problems remain because hangovers have never been known to solve problems. This is why Mama Njeri comes for the husband in the bar because his drinking hasn't diminished problems experienced at home. In the Film *Nairobi Half Life* alcohol indulgence is also a cancerous tumor which is eating away at the society and the family at large. Mwangi's father is a sworn alcoholic who arrives home at dusk to quarrel his wife and son.

Atongerira ma ruciu mariku?

(Where are the leaders of tomorrow?)

Urandora ta thinema ira wendagia!

(You are looking at me like the films you sell!)

This is in reference to Mwangi whose only problem was to be around when the father arrived. The fact that he hawks films around the village tells much about his father. After taking him to school, he has no future plans for him. That's why the boy opts to hawk films in the neighborhood though the market is limited probably that's why the father harasses him to intimidate him to forget his failure to take him to a higher institution of learning or find him a better job.

The boys in the slum (Gaza) take to robbing people to make ends meet. The money got is solely spent on drinking sprees. When Mwas and his new-found-friends turn to carjacking, the proceeds they get are used entirely on alcohol. This is probably to help them live in denial because they have turned to crime because they can't make ends meet. Mwas escaped the grinding poverty at home to forge a career as an actor in the city, yet

he has been absorbed by the city gang as a member. The mere thought of him living a double life troubles him a lot. That's why when they are hiding in the container with his co-actor he feels nervous and starts panicking thinking the police have come for him. These feelings of confusion and guilty lead Mwas and his fellow gang members to seek solace in alcohol. This at least helps them forget their problems and plan where to get another meal the next day. After a hard day's work rehearsing at the Kenya National Theatre Mwas and his co-actor decide to go for drinking spree. His character tells him:

Let me go and throw you around at Westie!

They then go to Westland to make merry where they imbibe alcohol and dance the night away to wish away their masculine failures. This is a big aspect of hyper-masculinity employed to exaggerate masculine behaviour and performance in the never ending race to look like socially sanctioned "proper Men".

B. *Egoistic and Gentle Masculinities*

Brannon (1979) et al. argues that male masculinity role performance and identity all Centre around work and the benefits accrued. This gives the overwhelming acceptance of the male as the economic provider and the role model of what others ought to be like, those who fail this test sometimes feel an inkling of a loss of wholeness which results to them showing an indifference to their masculinity and how they relate with women. This results to feelings of a "lesser man" portrayed by being gentle to both sexes.

In the analysis rich men come out as egoistic and are only devoted to their own interests and advancement. They strive to show off their manly character and traditional attitudes – arrogant, chauvinist, conqueror and head. This is because men identify themselves with and derive their self-esteem from performance at work and the benefits accrued from the undertaking at play, (Geotting 1982, Rubin 1979). However, the poor ones are reflected as easily managed, docile, mild, soft and gentle. They almost come out as subser-

vient because of their choking poverty.

In *Fifty Fifty*, Joe who epitomizes richness is reflected as an egoistic muscle man whose only goal is financial success. He has no time for his wife at home. His absence at home coupled with obsession with his business finally becomes his Achilles' heel. He readily dismisses his wife because he is the head of the family and provides everything for his family. Using money and his resources, he egoistically muscles away his wife's complaints to have a maid hired for her. Her complaints are met with manly rebuke and arrogance. The conversation is telling:

Wife: *Money is not everything ...*

Joe: *Why didn't you tell me when I was courting you ...?*

After all you followed me because of it.

During courtship Joe had picked his future wife on a Mercedes Benz. This was a statement that he was a man enough to have acquired such a magnificent car. He tries to show the wife that with all those material possessions – courtesy of a man, she should not be complaining.

Joe's insistence that the wife should shut up and listen to him is mere masculine bullying. This is intended to show who is superior and head of the household. He clearly wants to show his stubborn wife that she is relegated to do household chores. Joe on the other hand should be tasked with working and providing for the family – being the man. This is a clear demarcation of the position of each gender and its roles. When the wife complains that there's much to do in the house, she is stopped by the "bulldozer":

Joe: *Women are supposed to do household chores!*

In another incident, Joe signals a reminder about who calls the shot in the house:

Joe: *You should be very clear and careful, when talking about me and to me, don't raise your voice or shout!*

When the wife proposes that they share work, she is met with a surprised attitude:

Joe: *Don't be ridiculous!*

All these conversations paint Joe as a sworn male chauvinist who will go to any extent to defend his male identity and push for his agenda not to play second fiddle to a 'mere' woman. When his company's financial situation dwindles he directs his anger to the female workers who passively listens to his harangue. He clearly wants to show them he is the king of the 'jungle' he inhabits. He shouts to intimidate them and show off his masculine side. Being the boss, he should have called for a meeting and held a sober discussion. This never happens because to him, they are women and should get orders from a man.

His insinuation that women are sexual objects all adds up to his lopsided view about male superiority – an agenda he zealously pushes throughout the film. The following conversation testifies to this:

Joe: *This is not a brothel. I didn't say you wear such kind of clothes what do I pay you for? Listen when I'm talking!*

John and Joe drink in the company of women to satisfy and nurse their super egos. They put their interests ahead of anything else in the world. They use their money to conquer women and show the 'real man' in them. This is a male tendency to dominate many women as a show of power and influence. John even refers to himself as the commander in chief because his girlfriend faithfully follows him. All this points to male chauvinists ready to sooth their big egos using women and money as an entry point.

Joe's mansion stands out its magnificent, spacious and well secured by a stone fence and an impressive gate. This follows the tendency of wealthy people to erect palaces disguised as houses. This is a masculine tendency to show one's worth and reach. He hasn't been left behind really. The maid, the beggar and the female workers appear gentle, easily managed and benign. This is because they are not economically endowed by appearing otherwise; they would send a wrong signal and face the wrath of their masters. The consequences would be severe and instant.

Joe's wife bullies Katunge, the maid. She even

mispronounces her name intentionally to show her dislike. This snobbishness is meant to show where Katunge belongs – The low class. The harassment and intimidation doesn't break her heart. She humbles herself so as not to lose her job which she desperately needs. This gentleness ensures she remains in the job at all costs. The biting poverty and hardship can only be avoided if she becomes pregnant. She graduates from servant to master in a matter of months. This is because she becomes a co-wife to the devious and nagging wife.

The beggar also appears gentle. This is despite being denied money by Joe. He flatly and arrogantly refuses to give him anything. The beggar is not moved or angered by Joe's nasty comments. He remains silent and waits for the next chance. This harmlessness and gentleness ensures daily donations from people of all walks of life. Joe informs his wife:

Joe: *Anasema Saidia! Saidia!
(He says help! help!)
Ninakamwambia si kila siku.
(I telling you it's not every day.)*

The beggar remains silent despite this rebuke directed at him. The female workers also remain passive even after Joe's intimidating words, being poor, and in need of a job, they can't raise their voice in the presence of their boss. They fear being sacked and the misery it will bring. They have to be gentle and mild even in the face of provocation and harassment. They remain mum as Joe scolds them:

Joe: *This is not a brothel. I didn't say you wear such kind of clothes
What do I pay you for?*

In the village Casanova Kipara's egoistic and masculine tendencies reverberate throughout the film. Kipara has enormous wealth and is influential in the entire village. His wealth and position in the society attributes to his masculinist tendencies of dominating all the women in the village. His vast wealth can be seen as a symbol of his masculine ambitions.

At the construction site, Kipara quarrels his

workers because he is the boss and has the power to hire and fire. His only concern is his building, being the boss he should show the workers who pays the piper, Calls the tune – Having the financial muscle-he commands respect and attention. When he talks, nobody responds. This is evident:

Kipara: *Where are the bricks? Why this wastage? You either show seriousness in work or you go home*
Kazi yako ni gani?
(What is your work?)

Kipara's illicit affairs portray his male Chauvinism and egoistic ways. His lust for women brings to the fore his masculinity and conquering ways. Being a real man and rich to boot he strives to sleep with every woman in the village. His selfishness doesn't allow him to worry about the feelings of the women nor their husbands. This is extreme egoism. To him women are sexual objects and should be conquered using any means. This is extreme egoism. This tendency however leads to his downfall when he is blackmailed by Ali.

When he tries to seduce a young girl, he gets it all wrong. Not only does the girl refuse his advances but disparages him too. His self-centeredness and conquering ways blinds him into seducing school girls old enough to be his daughters. His philosophy is that women are sexual objects who should be conquered by real men like him. Splash some money and voila! They are all over you! This comes out during the conversation with the school girl:

Kipara: *Hizo ni hasira za mkizi, furaha kwa mvuvi! (That is the angers of the fish but happiness for the fisherman!)*
Your problem is money; it will break your pride!

When Kipara goes to see Chausiku, one of his many lovers, he proudly mutters that he is the real Casanova. He acknowledges his superiority over women. No woman can escape his dragnet. In his characteristic masculinity:

Kipara: *I'm the real Casanova (silently)*
Let's elope
I can give you one of my plots in the city.

You look good in that dress; you are a city material.

When Kipara seduces Mrs. Tumbo, he shows how Tumbo is useless and can't provide for this family. He even questions his ability in bed. This is intended to woo Mrs. Tumbo to Kipara who has also brought a paper bag full of items. His sexual egocentric habits also pop out here.

His knack for female dominance can't be revealed. The conversation is telling:

Kipara: *Si nilikwambia nitatimiza haja zako zote.*
(I told you I will satisfy all your needs)
Your husbands are as cold as stone
Very useless ...
Kazi ameshindwa
(He can't perform)

The poor women portray gentle feminities. They are docile and benign. The women despite being married fall prey to Kipara's advances. This is because of their hopelessness and poverty at home. They meekly follow Kipara like sheep trooping to the slaughter house. Their silence and willingness earns them food and money. Their gentleness when being seduced encourages Kipara whose appetite increases day by day. They have to play ball, or else they will starve.

Ali, Tumbo, Saidi and Juma portray gentle masculinities. This is because they don't consider themselves men enough because they can't provide. Even when confronted by their wives they coil in submission and defeat. When Saidi is quarreled by his wife because he can't provide, he rudely intercepts. He fierce wife tries to beat him. He struggles and quickly surrenders to the wife. This is because being poor, he can't control his wife who despises his manhood. This mildness can be attributed to his poor financial form which manifests into low self-esteem. The confrontation is telling.

Wife: *(Raising up) Ni mimi unaongelesha hivyo!*
(You speak to me that way!)

Saidi: *(In submission) No!*

Juma also faces scorn and abuse from his wife because he is poor. He reacts gently to this be-

cause he knows it is his fault. The wife demeans him so much, yet this is met with empty stares and silence. She even wishes why she ever got married to a lazy useless fellow. Juma's ego has gone so down that it can't be easily pricked by those sentiments. He appears gentle and benign in the face of the wife's castigation:

Wife: *Nani hapendi kuolewa na millionaire?*

(Who doesn't want to be married by a millionaire?)

I wish I married a better man!

Ali is never moved by his wife's testimony of seeing Kipara secretly to get money to buy food. Allowing one's wife to sell her body to make ends meet can be regarded as the height of genital masculinity. Demeaning as it may seem it's an answer to acute poverty and hopelessness. This explains why Coast men hire out their wives and daughters to wealthy Europeans who frequent coastal towns. They don't mind their wives and daughters offering sexual services to the rich Europeans as long as there is financial gain. This gentle approach to these immoral and degrading reflected them as meek and helpless. The extremes poverty they live in has drove them into feeble and docile characters.

Ali on his part plots with Chausiku to blackmail Kipara and force him to pay back for using his wife. This docility knowing your wife is being used by another man to get money is shockingly disgusting. Ali bears all this because of his poverty. By giving his wife lee way do all that he comes out as a gentle and easily managed man. He openly confides in his wife:

Ali: *Life is hard, we will go to city*

After he pays the money!

In *Nairobi half-life*, there are subtle references of egoistic masculinism and genital masculinity. This is because there are few characters who are married in the film. However, they come out in the brothel episode and in Mwangi's home. Memorably the brothel incidence stands out because of its explicitly and boldness.

The boys and men who frequent the brothel appear to demean the girls because of their manly

egocentric appetite for sex. They misuse the girls sexually for a few shillings. It doesn't appear like business because of the meagre reward they ask for. It is portrayed like a virgin kingdom to be conquered by a man with a few shillings. The kind of sexual gratification they ask for shows their masculine tendencies. They use their phallic symbols to conquer the kingdom. They symbolize power, masculinity and dominance. Their male organs are sucked for pleasure and sometimes whip the girls to get gratification. This is egocentric maleness at display. They don't care for the girls; they are only after satisfying their sexual appetite.

The poor girls in the brothel are gentle despite being caned and sexually molested. They humbly bargain for sex quoting extra ordinarily low prices as one girl reveals.

Prostitute: *Fanya hata Fifty*

(Give me fifty shillings)

Nitakufanyia mastyle hujaona.

(I will pose in styles you have never seen)

Nakwambia hata kesho utakuja.

(I promise you will come tomorrow!)

They behave like so because it is the only source of livelihood they have. Being gentle and soft to the customers will make them return another day. When Amina is caned by a man for sexual gratification, she shouts in pain. When Mwas rushes to help thinking she is in trouble, she rudely and gently shouts at him:

Amina: *Toka! Toka! Niko job!*

(Get out! get out! I'm doing my job)

Her tenderness despite the agony she is feeling can only attributed to her poor state. Eventually she will earn money from the incident.

Conclusions

From this study, it can be concluded that negative identities have been given to the male characters. The men have been portrayed as drunkards, promiscuous, domineering and violent. These negative identities are not good for the society because it's going to copy what it sees on the screen as well as buttressing the "illusion of reali-

ty” as portrayed in film. This will be done by practicing what is seen as the perfect example of a real man who looks down upon the wife, abuses alcohol and is promiscuous. On the other hand, the film makers condemn and convict the male characters unheard. They are not given any avenue to change themselves or a tone for their sins. This is bad because these makes the men villains in the eyes of the viewer. This negative portrayal is retrogressive in our society which is making gains towards gender equality. Gender activists and other stakeholders are busy fighting the ghost of gender exclusivism because of its backwardness. Buttressing this through visual effects is like killing an idea whose time has come. This is also similar to burying our heads in the sand like the proverbial ostrich. On the other hand, the filmmakers have used the social, cultural and economic aspect as a weapon against gender parity. This is also a wake up call to stop this. Though our Nation is fast tracking on ending disparity based on gender, the filmmakers should desist on taking us back to the old days of yore. Where performance and social standing was based only on the male gender. Patriarchy is fast fading in the modern world. We should celebrate this too in Kenyan cinema. It is a wakeup call to the government to promote equality and pull the citizens out of the yoke of poverty and backward traditions.

Moreover, the filmmakers have used economic empowerment as a tool for domination and character prop for men to appear masculine. This is bad because it sends a clear signal to the community at large that when you have wealth and power your actions and words are law by themselves and that you hold the masculine status. In a country where the political elite are wealthy, this is tantamount to endorsing the status quo of dominion and masculine tag. It also sends a negative signal to the women who barely controls the factors of production. Many women in Kenya don't have access to land, money and patronage which are important to production and acquisition of wealth. This (portrayal) clearly states that men should be the ones in charge of the factors of production

and thus are allowed to use them for” masculine dominion”. It also means that they can plunder the family wealth by being mere custodians as the society ascribes them to be the sole inheritors and custodians of generational/family wealth.

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