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Marginality, subversion and the performativity of declining masculinity in selected Kenyan feature films by women filmmakers

Gloria Kemunto Mokaya, Charles Kebaya and Larry Ndivo
Department of Linguistics and Languages, Machakos University, Kenya
Correspondence: gkemunto1@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5547-9755

Abstract
Borne out of the need to understand the performance of masculinity in film, this article explores practices and notions of masculinity in the Kenyan society as represented in feature films. It seeks to understand both men's and women's perceptions of masculinity and how, in defining, enacting and performing them, they evoke social expectations, personal agency, and cultural subversions. Specifically, the article shows how feature films represent marginality and reconfigure declining trends of masculinity in society today. Thus, the article probes two questions; where are real men? and how is masculinity performed in contexts where the 'conventional' artefacts of masculinity are not readily available to men? Raewyn Connell's theorization of hegemonic masculinity guided analyses and interpretations of findings in this article. Using two feature films by women filmmakers, *Dangerous Affair* (2002) and *Soul Boy* (2010), the paper shows how men are fashioning and working out masculine identities and selves away from the reveled mythic figurations of masculinity which, largely due to shifting contexts, appear elusive to them. It also reveals that marginalized men's experiences with masculinity are unique, because context undermines the everyday ways they express themselves as dominant females emerge.

Keywords: masculinity, declining masculinity, performance, marginality, subversion, feature film

Public Interest Statement

The current academic literature on masculinity continues to draw from social constructionist perspectives of gender (Lock & Strong, 2010; Steinfeldt et al., 2011). The view of gender, and indeed masculinity, as a socially-constructed phenomenon emerged in response to the limitations of essentialism or biological determinism and the socialization or sex role perspectives of masculinity, in particular, and gender, in general. While recognizing the social roots of masculinity, this article investigates how feature films define, enact and perform the shifting constructions and practices of masculinity in the contemporary Kenyan Society. It shows that, while socialization is important in behavior and value formation, individuals are also active producers of their social world in the contexts in which they live. They are not just passive consumers and bearers of cultural practices but they configure and re-configure themselves based on a range of intersecting factors including peer pressure, socio-economic status, global practices, and sexual preferences and orientations.

Introduction

In Kenya, research on the social construction of masculinity exists in the form of analysis of media and literary representations of manliness as well as social science and historical investigations of ethnic masculinities. Media and literary research on masculinity in Kenya has relied on popular music, books, films, TV shows and dramas in Kenya to clarify constructions of manhood in the country. For instance, focusing on a body of literary texts produced in Nairobi between 1960 and 1990 called the Spear Books, Granqvist (2006) argues that new masculinities have emerged at the crossroads of local impressions of the status of the man, the legacy of colonialism, and the impacts of modernity and globalization. He notes that post-colonial masculinities in Kenya-and which these artistic productions so powerfully attest to- reflect politics of gender and the emasculating influence, violence, and punishing uncertainties of the African postcolonial city which turns men into "boys-who-never-grow-up". He concludes that there is an order which venerates violent masculinity in the modern Kenyan city, and that this order is produced by the country's violent colonial past as a segregated city and its postcolonial and international claims for recognition.

Analyzing the *XYZ* show, Peck (2013) reveals that masculinity is a central theme in the popular discourses that circulate in Kenya. Peck maintains that postcolonial discourses of political power have coalesced around the figure of the *mzee*, or male elder. Efforts to challenge male leaders using the XYZ show are effected through socially-othered selves like rap artists and feminized males that ultimately reinforce elder masculinity as a normative attribute of political leadership. The show's puppets who are cast as wife, homosexuals and hip hop artists point to wider anxieties about a social order hinged on heterosexual patriarchal normativity. The show's interest in disempowered men, liberated and disrespectful urban women, and loss of traditional values and norms borrow heavily from male-privileging norms that maintain hierarchal power and support a notion of proper social order framed in masculine terms.

Tom Odhiambo's (2007, 2011) analysis of fictionalized postcolonial masculinities in Kenya shows that independence unleashed freedoms and liberties that had been inconceivable to a majority of native Africans during the colonial era. These freedoms radically altered relationships, especially between men and women. Kenyan men's rapid ascendancy to political positions and power in the aftermath of colonialism rapidly masculinized the public and domestic space. Odhiambo maintained that men's role in the independence struggles in Kenya led to their perception as conquerors of the colonial establishment; a mentality which they promptly transferred into the social fabric of independent Kenya by projecting their sexuality and virility in dominating their womenfolk. Urban working men's hedonistic pursuits, primarily sex, Odhiambo submitted, are performances of their new-found freedom and power in the postcolonial period.

Ethnic masculinities and changing male identities also form key issues of research in Kenya. The extant literature shows that while circumcision, marriage, maintenance of independent residence, ownership of one's own herd of cattle, and successfully rustling cattle etc. were the key terms around which masculinity was constructed in many indigenous cultures in Kenya, these are rapidly changing in the face of globalization, transformation, urbanization, and other processes. In Kenyatta's, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), the social production of manliness in traditional Kikuyu culture is addressed. Kenyatta shows that the transition from boyhood to manhood was marked through ritual circumcision that sought to toughen boys into daredevil warriors. Among the Luo, Blommaert (2010), show that building a simba (hut) signified manhood. Adult Luo males who have not built a simba are not respected.

Hodgson's (1999) analysis of changing masculinities among the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania showed that the pursuit of pastoralism and cultural authenticity was, until recently considered ideal for Maasai men. From an early age, boys are taught to take risks and endure physical hardship, hunger, circumcision and derision as they are toughened into 'real' men. For instance, newly circumcised young boys were responsible for protecting settlements and livestock from attackers and wild animals. They stole livestock from neighboring ethnic groups, which swelled their pride and prestige. Maasai men who did not live up to the norm of pastoral masculinity were traditionally called *ormeek*. Such men attended school, were Christians, or lived in the cities. Essentially, *ormeek* was a ridiculed and derided masculine identity in the traditional Maasai worldview. However, given changing political and economic situations of the Maasai, *ormeek* men have become far better positioned and situated to adapt, survive, and prosper than their uneducated counterparts. In this context, *ormeek* masculinity has supplanted pastoral masculinity as the most valued version of masculinity among Masaai.

The reconstruction of indigenous Kenyan masculinities in the face of economic change is also the theme of Meiu's (2009) study of Samburu men. With the growth of the Kenyan tourism industry in the 1980s, numerous young Samburu men migrated seasonally to coastal tourist resorts seeking to gain materially from and participate in the socio-economy of tourism. Many of these men developed sexual relationships with white female, and sometimes, male tourists, rapidly accumulating wealth, and forming a new social group within their home communities. Meiu shows how these men, referred to as "Mombasa morans", embodied newer versions of masculinities fashioned in the nexus of local warrior masculinity, desire, tourism, the appeal of exoticism, and globalization.

In his study of agricultural labor migration in Western Kenya during British colonial rule, Ocobock (2013) showed that decisions to leave home for work and wages, overtime, were conflated with maturity and masculinity. Ocobock's analysis revealed the different competing and complementary roles played by different nodes of authority of fathers, employers, colonial officials, and young men to produce new identities of manhood. Early on, the British endeavored to lure young men into the labor market. District officials and chiefs manipulated initiation practices to ritually redefine age at which boys became men so that they might leave home to labor or work. Ultimately, labor migration and wage-earning became integral to their age-defined masculinity and as a platform for earning one's manhood (Ocobock, 2010, 2013).

Borne out of the need to understand the performance of masculinity in film, this article broadens the understanding of men in Kenya as portrayed in feature films. Additionally, it shows how feature films represent marginality and reconfigure declining trends of masculinity in the Kenyan society today. Previous research in Kenya has ignored processes whereby contexts and men's everyday socio-economic life influence notions, idiosyncrasies, understandings, and practices of manliness as well as men's perceptions of their place and role in society.

Brief Overview of Selected Feature Films

***Dangerous Affair* (2002) by Judy Kibinge**

Dangerous Affair (2002), directed by Judy Kibinge, revolves around the life of Kui, a young woman,

who has returned to Kenya from New York where she has been working as a banker. While changing her car tyre, she meets Murags, who is fascinated by Kui's act. Murags offers to buy her a drink. Kui not only turns him down but also splashes muddy water on him. Although Murags' ego is bruised, Kui's act draws him towards her as is evidenced by how he affectionately describes her to his friends over drinks. Kui is "nasty…awfully hot on the road…in a RAV 4" (Kibinge 2002, 00:07:07). On learning of Kui's "virginity", Murags make it his mission to deflower her within a week. After reestablishing contact, Kui swears that she can only give up her "virginity" to a man who marries her. To bolster his chances of getting married to Kui, he cuts his drinking and chasing after women. However, this does not last long with the re-entry of Rose, his old love. Consequently, Murags nearly boycotts his wedding to Kui. His father coerces him to turn-up for the wedding, which he does with little enthusiasm. The marriage between Murags and Kui develops cracks immediately after their wedding as Kui takes control of their home. Kui's pregnancy and arrival of their first baby drives a wedge further into the couples' strained relationship even as Murags' maintains a clandestine affair with Rose. Their secret affair is unearthed by Rose's husband, Jimmy, an act that sparks a series of incidents in the couples' lives. While Kui moves back to her father's house, Rose's father takes away her children as a punishment for destroying her marriage. Murags, who does not have a 'real' job, moves in with Rose as his divorce processes begin.

***Soul Boy (2010)* directed by Hawa Eussman**

Based on Nyawawa myth from among the Luo community, *Soul Boy* (2010) recounts tribulations of the protagonist, Abila, as he embarks on a journey to save his father's lost soul. The myth tells of evil spirits inhabiting the waters of Lake Victoria. Sometimes during evaporation, these spirits escape into the clouds and travel to the foothills of the lake. It is believed that these evil spirits bring misfortunes to a family they call on. Similarly, residents of Kibera Slum in Nairobi, the setting of the film, employ the myth to explain bodies of dead men found along the shores of Nairobi River during El Nino rains. In the film, Nyawawa is represented by a grotesque woman with a hoofed foot wearing a blue gown. Her mysteriousness is further augmented by her solitude and claim of being many things. When Abila's father, fails to open his shop one morning due to a terrible hangover, he tells Abila that his soul has been taken. On his way from her mother's work place, Abila confronts a man, Macharia, who previously worked as their watchman but was later laid off. Macharia tells him that his father was strangled and dragged to the dam by the dreaded and feared Nyawawa. Equipped with this knowledge, Abila fears for his father and decides to trace Nyawawa with the help of a young girl, Shiku. While facing Nyawawa, Abila resents her claim that only a fellow man can rescue his father's soul, "not just a mere boy" (Eussman 2010, 00:17:31). She tells Abi that his father has no qualms to confront his flaws. Instead, Abila has to do so. Consequently, Nyawawa assigns Abila seven tasks, which if successfully executed; his father's soul would be restored. After his last task, Abila returns home to a jovial father tending to customers in his shop, his soul has been restored, just as Nyawawa had promised.

Conceptualizing the study of Masculinity in Kenyan Feature Film

Essentially, masculinity can be viewed as a process that is endlessly under production—practice, processing, and transformation. Connell writes that masculinity is social, only coming 'into existence as people act" (2005:154) and only meaningful within a specific culture (Connell, 2011). It is not an unchanging value or attribute, but a malleable trait that is constructed and reconstructed through ideology, control, performance, language and related aspects and in relationships with other people (Connell, 2005, 2011; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Masculinity is thus neither shaped wholly by social structures, historical practices, and cultural scripts, nor by predetermined genetic and psychological makeup. It is a product of societal institutions, history as well as personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural practices (Connell, 2005).

Underlying hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical construct is the assumption that societies strongly encourage their men to express a particular kind of masculinity (Connell, 2005). This version of masculinity is not necessarily the most prevalent form of male expression and may not be normally distributed in the population. But it is the most socially-endorsed or valued. Hegemonic masculinity versions are often normative and dynamic, legitimated through discourse, ideology and practices (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Connell describes some key ways in which hegemonic masculinity is socially constructed or produced; namely as a form of ideology and part of language, discourse and everyday practice. As a form of ideology, masculinity is produced through a series of beliefs that groups buy into and that influences how they go about or live their lives. He argues that different social groups, contexts, and institution have self-interest in masculinity and the way men express themselves. These institutions and groups motivate men into behaving along particular ideals and standards. The state often needs soldiers to protect it and so promotes a military version of masculinity. Businesses need capitalistic masculinity to make money, and so construct versions of ideal manliness.

Language is key to the development, maintenance, negotiation and circulation of different masculine identities (Connell, 2005). Currently, there is growing consensus that language lies at the heart of understanding men and masculinity, with writers such as (Johnson & Meinhof, 1997), maintaining that masculinity (and gender more generally) is something fashioned in and through language and discourse. Language remains the repository of assumptions about gender and thus key to understanding its contextual interface and intersections with race, class, dis/ability, sexuality and other forms of identities. The propagation of masculinity through language forms, including imageries, adverts, TV, billboards, films myths, stories, discourse and practices is an established research theme in gender studies (Kiesling, 2007).

Ideas of masculinity are often expressed and articulated through spoken and unspoken language. Connell (2011) argues that particular linguistic devices are often used to display different masculinities. Masculinity is therefore the product of a range of ways of speaking that denote a social hierarchy. Speakers select from this repertoire depending on the speech activity and their interlocutors. He holds that masculine identity is a performance that is contextually meaningful in immediate speech events and invokes cultural knowledge of gender and social structures.

The process by which masculinities are produced and reproduced is multifaceted and so are the implications of masculinities on men's relationships and forms of civic engagement. Connell (2005) notes that central to the making of the masculine gender is an active process of negotiations with social situations and constructing ways of living in them. Masculine identity is therefore not the product, simply, of passive socialization; it involves vigorous engagement with social reality and situations. This implies that the processes of change that men and masculinities undergo are as a result of social situations and contexts.

Connel (2011) aptly drives home the unfixed nature of masculinity by noting that there is no single model of response that everyman 'turns to in order to define their masculinity or imitate it when they want to act masculine.' Put differently, men are simultaneously agents and subjects. They are acted upon by the context of their lives and also act upon the very structures and systems within which they exist. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have thus noted that masculinities are largely configurations of practices that are only accomplished in social action and that differ markedly across social settings. Connell (2005) notes that central to the making of the masculine gender is an active process of negotiating with social situations and constructing ways of existing in them. Men do or perform masculinity, and they invoke social expectations, personal agency, cultural and other resources to do so.

Connell's notion that the forms of masculinity are determined by context and prevailing cultural values forms the fulcrum for analysis and interpretations of the selected films under study. This article shows how feature filmmakers use various characters to manifest declining practices of masculinity as

represented in the marginalized and subordinate forms of masculinity. This paper takes cognizant of the fact that the concept of masculinity is relational, showing that women participate in the construction of masculinity as much as men do. It therefore, indicates that the pursuit of gender equality is increasingly gaining ground with more and more women in gainful employment and positions of power than men.

Representation of Marginalization of Men through Feature Film

Haywood and Johansson (2017) posit that marginalization describes the position of individuals, groups or populations outside of "mainstream society", living at the margins of those in the centre of power, of cultural dominance and economical and social welfare' (p.5). This implies that marginalized masculinity is framed through the dominant cultural logic of difference and how such processes of difference are experienced. This framing becomes apparent in the feature films where characters such as Jimmy and Abila's father in *Dangerous Affair* and *Soul Boy* are framed in reference to the dominant practices in society. Jimmy, for instance, is juxtaposed with the dominant masculine, Murags, and found to be lacking in all spheres of life. In a scene during Murags' wedding, he acts like a clown. His conduct and mannerism during Murags' wedding not only embarrassed his wife but also portray him as coarse, hence his marginality. This explains why his wife, Rose, denigrates him.

Marginalized masculinity is characterized by lack of access to social, economic and cultural opportunities and resources. Haywood and Johansson (2017) note due to the lack of these essential and basic resources, marginalized masculines are faced with a wide range of issues such as high levels of poverty, low educational opportunities and poor access to health, social welfare and proper housing provision. Haywood and Johansson (2017) further opine that men may be marginalized because of their social, economic and cultural location rather than the version of manhood in which they invest and perform. This is evident in the situation that Abila's father in *Soul Boy* finds himself in. He has to raise his family in Kibera, a slum area, because that is the location where he can afford housing and provide for his family. However, he is not able to sustain his family and pay rent promptly because he spends the meager profits he makes from the shop in gambling and drinks. The tribulations that Abila has to go through are occasioned by his father's inadequacies. Therefore, in this sense, marginalization is caused by the structural organization of social and economic relationships that affect men.

Marginalized masculinities are deficient of heteronormative markers of authority in society such as wealth, material opulence and responsibility. As a result, marginalized men shy away or hibernate from the limelight to avoid public scrutiny and scorn. Jimmy, in *Dangerous Affair*, lacks markers of authority in society. Consequently, he prefers to stay at home, largely in bed. In one scene, he jumps out of bed after his wife has left to see off their children to school. He goes to the refrigerator and picks a can of beer and cleans a dirty spoon using the edge of his shirt before using it. Further, he regresses into heavy drinking, playing and dancing to loud music while his wife struggles to help their children do their homework. All these portray him as callous, objectionable and reckless.

Jimmy's marginalization is rendered not only by his callousness but also his powerlessness to provide for his family. Rose, his wife, has been forced to shoulder the responsibility of providing for the family. On many occasions, she beseeches Jimmy to make himself worthwhile by looking for a job but her pleadings fall on deaf ears. Even the children are alarmed by his state. In one scene, their son whispers to his sister, "daddy is always sleeping" (Kibinge 2002, 00:12:52). This situation forces Rose to go to seek solutions to her marital problems. In one scene, Rose is shown in a company of men playing pool at Njugunas' joint while they suggest possible solutions for her marital issues. In this regard, Jimmy is portrayed as living under the shadow of his wife for he is not man enough to provide for his family. Jimmy's marginalization is further amplified when his virility is put into sharp focus by his wife. Rose is erotic and enjoys sexual contact more than society expects her. However, her erotic desires are largely unattained in her marriage. Rather than subserviently submitting to her unfulfilling marriage, she seeks her sexual satisfaction outside marriage. She, thus, enters into a relationship with Murags and takes

charge of the extra-marital affair. Rose's sexual aggressiveness makes her indispensable to Murags, and eventually, they both break their marriages so as to stay together. Consequently, Jimmy is made to endure the indignity of his wife's extra-marital affair with Murags. When he confronts them together in a lodging, Rose humiliates him further by choosing Murags over him. This is the lowest level of Jimmy's marginalization because he is not only inadequate but symbolically castrated.

Marginal masculinities compensate for their inability to use their power engaging in deviant activities such as violence and deviant behaviour. Haywood and Johansson (2017) opine that because of their disadvantaged positions, socially, economically and culturally, marginalised masculines often engage in physical violence conduct and criminal activities like theft and fighting in order to exert their power. Pierre Bourdieu lists physical violence (especially in acts of revenge), as the first and foremost duty of a 'real man' (p.51). In *Dangerous Affair*, Jimmy physically assaults his wife, Rose, on the first night she spends out with Murags. He not only results to violence when he tries to beat his wife to submission when she spends a night out at her lover's house but also avenging her inability to recognize him as man enough. Moreover, he exposes his inadequacies as man as he does not possess the power to restrict his wife's movements and particularly her association to Murags, her lover. He, therefore, opts to continuously stalk and watch over her when she goes to work.

Marginalised masculinities overindulge in alcohol, drugs and substance abuse as a coping mechanism for their deficiencies. Roger Horrocks (1994) observes that though alcohol is a masculine affair, masculine social pressure such as social status in society has exacerbated and reinforced risky drinking behaviours among men. Risky drinking is witnessed among marginalised men who feel vulnerable and use alcohol to suppress their emotions and feign normalcy. Jimmy and Abila's father in *Dangerous Affair* and *Soul Boy* overindulge in alcoholism to hide their inadequacies. Staring at the eminent closer of his shop as a result of accumulated rent, Abila's father in *Soul Boy* drains himself in alcohol. He only regains his sense after Abila has rescued his soul. Unable to withstand humiliation from his wife Rose, cuckolded husband, Jimmy, spends most of his time drinking and dancing to hide is emotions and vulnerability.

Figurations of Subordinate Masculinity through Feature Film

Bruce (2010) avers that subordinate masculinities occur when some of the characteristics attributed to idealized masculinity dislodge from the male body-type that society and culture privilege. Rogan (2015, 33) characterizes subordinate masculinity as effeminate as it lacks the authentic masculine ideals and therefore, perceived as inferior to the reigning masculinity. Subordinate masculinities are controlled and subjugated by other masculine practices. Kamangu, in *Soul Boy*, exhibits attributes of subordinate masculinity. He cannot be able to carry out his orders to his tenants without enlisting the services of his gang. His safety and wellbeing in the slum are dependent on his gang. Also, the survival of his businesses in the slum is sustained by his gang. This observation is in tandem with Bruce (2010)'s postulations on manifestations of subordinate masculinities in society. Bruce avers that subordinate masculinity exists in a hierarchal structure comprising subgroups upon which masculine ideals are performed and meted out. In the subgroups, there are members who are high up in the hierarchy while others are at the lower level of the hierarchy. This explains the kind of engagement that exists between Kamangu and his gang. Subordinate masculines are depicted as malleable, vacillating and naive. Bruce (2010) avers that concepts of maleness and masculinity have been shifting over time. Due to the changing socio-cultural environment, idealized phallocentric practices have lost their social privilege as more and more men lose their phallic authority, maleness and cultural identity. As a result, men take new forms of masculinity such as subordinate masculinity. This situation is evident in the demeanor of Kui's father in *Dangerous Affair*. Besides keeping no boundaries, Kui helps foreground her father as a subordinate masculine. During her marriage negotiations, Kui tersely interrupts a serious conversation between her kinsmen and her husband-to-be. She plants a kiss on her father's forehead before pulling him out of the conversation.

She holds her father's hand as she leads him away, an act which leaves Murags' mother and aunt baffled away. While introducing him to Murags and his friends, she keeps caressing and hugging him. The father is a feeble subordinate masculine who is overpowered by his strong-willed daughter. He does not rein in or reprimand his daughter over her skimpy dressing. The traditional woman is expected to dress modestly and preserve her body wholly for her man. Therefore, any form of exposure goes against societal expectations and is always rebuked. Kui dresses in a skirt and a crop-top which exposes a good part of her waist and stomach. Consequently, Murags' mother describes her as one who has no shame and the kind that does not listen to advice. She feels that her son is getting himself in trouble by marrying a woman as such. Therefore, Kui's father waning authority and subordination is evident throughout the film.

Configurations of Declining Masculinity in society through Feature Film

In their interpersonal lives, men are expected to be "bread-winners" (Connell 2005, 29-35), bringing home a working wage to support their wives and children, and in sex, virility, potency and conquest are idealized. However, in the feature films, the filmmakers have shown that these practices are fast fading in a society that is agile and adapting to global forms of socialization through the reconfiguration of characters such as Jimmy in *Dangerous Affair*, and Abila's father in *Soul Boy.* In this regard, feature films present alternative modes of being and in a sense repudiate traditional practices of masculinity. Murray (2002) posits that a film is analysed both as a vehicle of representation and in the context of its production, distribution, and reception, "it can be a valuable source for both history and historiography" (Murray, 2002, 41- 42). This inherent transference of representation makes film a very powerful tool for social influence and change. The feature films, therefore, explicate ways in which diegetic discourses mirror social discourses in society. For instance, by depicting Jimmy in *Dangerous Affair* and Abila's father in *Soul Boy* as liabilities to their families, the filmmakers not only reconfigure but also spur a social conversation regarding masculinity in society today.

The extent to which film spurs and influences social consciousness is well documented. Sutherland and Feltey (2010) argue that "movies are a particularly important vehicle for the transmission of cultural norms and understandings" (p.36). Peck (2005, 744) affirms this supposition when he asserts that "fictional media sources, including film and television, may have persuasive effects on public attitudes and beliefs, especially through their depiction of popular cultural embodiments", a fact conceded by Appel (2008) who also notes the role of film in negotiating cultural experiences. The filmmakers invite us to reflect on the helplessness both Jimmy in *Dangerous Affair* and Abila's father in *Soul Boy* find themselves and, in the process, urge us to reconsider prevailing socio-cultural practices. The duo's girth signifies failure to uphold the strictures of masculinity, connoting emasculating qualities such as weakness and loss of control. For instance, the loss of control is witnessed in Jimmy's act of beating up his wife after she spends a night out with her lover and is further amplified by his acts of policing his wife even when she is at her work place. Noticeably, by resigning his fate to his son, Abila's father has lost his status as well. Abila must step up and conquer his fear for him to save his family. In this regard, the filmmakers prod for socio-cultural change as they not only reconfigure hegemonic practices but also shift focus to alternative ways of being thereby showing that society cannot rely on hegemonic practices for its continuity.

In portraying Jimmy in *Dangerous Affair* and Abila's father in *Soul Boy* as subdued and incapable masculines, the filmmakers nudge the audience to reflect on the so called "alpha male" status in society. Through these two characters, the filmmakers have opened up a social conversation predicated on the changing cultural times, and, at a subliminal level, influences behavioural change among audiences in Kenya. The characters thus become sites for multiple contradictory readings of what the filmmakers portend. On the one hand, the audience is sympathetic of their state as subdued men, an unsettling situation by any standards. On the other hand, their state engenders a potential redefinition of masculinity, or at

least, a prospective movement towards its reconfiguration. Perhaps, this later realization is manifested at the final scene of *Soul Boy* where all forms of masculinity are in constellation as the characters converge. The implication of this is that the filmmaker provides a social praxis between feature film and cultural practices which enable film to play an active role in the reconstruction of societal issues in a manner particular to its form.

It cannot be gainsaid that the female filmmakers are urging for the need to rethink the image and status accorded to the alpha male in society. In *Dangerous Affair*, for instance, the filmmaker's diegesis presents us with the lethargy of hegemonic masculinity through the protagonist. Murags is struggling with his routinized morning grooming ritual and a myriad of internal voices which foreshadow his overall indifference towards intimacy. The film shows a close-up of his hand switching on a hoary telephone answering-machine which plays back recorded messages from his string of girlfriends. The film then cuts to the next scene of him grooming with an accustomed nonchalance that betrays his inattentiveness to the answering-machine. We can infer that he is deliberately ignoring the callers or merely passing time by listening to their excruciating naggings. Sheila earnestly implores him to prove his loyalty, unlike "the other guys"; Njeri reminds him of their upcoming date "to the movies"; and Ciru reprimands him for not calling. But of all the messages, the fourth and fifth are perhaps the most unsettling ones to him. The fourth anonymous caller teases thus: "Murags, I know you are there, pick up; we had such a good time last weekend…". Murags seems nonchalant and carries on unperturbed, a situation which is unsettling. By juxtaposing the "then and now" binary in this scene, the filmmaker shows the incongruity and unsustainability of hegemonic practices in society.

The fourth message, informing Murags of Rose's return to town, jolts him to a halt on his way out and arouses his interest. He hesitates and trails her voice back to the answering-machine, but eventually shrugs and heads out. Essentially, Murags' indifference is presented as the inevitable collapse of an inherently unstable and unsuitable mode of masculinity, showing that hegemonic masculinity is an impossible ideal which collapses under the weight of its own contradictions. Hence, Murags' insatiable desire to conquer many women collapses with his pursuit for Kui and the return of Rose. The unsustainability of his desire is dealt another blow when Kui insists that they will only have sex on their wedding night. Murags' self-centered objective exposes fundamental contradictions at the core of the construction of hegemonic masculinity, which is that it is founded on the fear of failure to conquer, devalue and displace own feelings, an emotion that is itself antithetical to hegemonic masculinity. Thus, in order to prove his prowess, Murags wagers with his friend Otile to bed Kui within a week. However, he is left trapped in an inescapable double-blind because his objective is at variance with Kui's and that his social standing is at risk if he opens up and admits his failure to his friend, Otile. The filmmaker, therefore, shows that it is not only self-denial that these alpha men practice through the performance of their masculinity but the failure to admit that the centre can no longer hold. In essence, Murags' failure is widely projected as a metaphoric failure of hegemonic masculinity hence the need for an alternative mode which requires an absolute abjuration of the self and the unachievable requirements in hegemonic practices.

It is imperative to note that *Dangerous Affair* not only reformulates the domains of sex, intimacy and marriage as shifting, but also loose, temporary, and contradictory at times. Murags' charged virility and insatiable desire are emblematic of declining masculinities as a result of social upheavals that characterize contemporary society. Murags, and all the male characters in the film, reckon with a threatening loss of patriarchal power and authority. Thus, the performance of sexual wildness and virile masculinities foregrounds an internalized fear of failure or inadequacy in the male character. This profound internal fear is concretized in Murags' hesitation to get married up to his wedding day, and in the noncommittal heterosexual relationships of his male friends. The internal fear and feeling of inadequacy are inherently evident in Jimmy, Rose's cuckolded husband. Jimmy endures the indignity of his wife's public affair with Murags. His insecurities as an "inadequate" man are further compounded

by his joblessness, hence inability provide for his family.

Through Murags' and Rose's escapades, the filmmaker calls into question the reified institution of marriage and its foundational hegemonic requirements. The film's narrative not only permits repose but also produces a thought-provoking reflective film experience that foregrounds possibilities for rebirth and agency. Murags' and Rose's extra-marital affair rouses both parties to profound dissatisfaction in their marriages. Caught up in hegemonic unions, they both long for intimacy and love. But as social pariahs, Murags and Rose can only fulfill their repressed sexual desires outside the confines of marriage. Thus, the film disrupts the continuity of "intimacy" and "security" of married life by showing the mistrust and suspicion of marital infidelity. Thus, the filmmaker reconfigures marriage partnerships as a modern 'transactional economy' that defies hegemonic practices in their quest for personal fulfillment and satisfaction. In this way, feature films play an actively role in transmitting cultural ideas which "contribute to the social reproduction of (our) society" (Sutherland and Feltey, 2010, 36). This social reproduction through films is essentially a reconfiguration of ideologies, which is made possible by the film's "role in the battle for control of the mind's eye" (Ross S. J., 2001, 82). The allusion to the mind's eye suggests the film's capacity to influence not just emotionally, but also socially. Such an enormous influence is what this chapter shows as a reconfiguration of hegemonic practices, or simply, a social influence whose end is behavioural change.

The female feature filmmakers have also shown that the enduring conventional view of women in most African societies as belonging to "the hearth", is no longer tenable in the contemporary Kenyan urban social context. Female characters such as Kui and Rose in *Dangerous Affair* break away from prescribed domesticity and mingle in the public sphere alongside their male counterparts. Caught up in the cusps of enduring social conventions and a profound yearning for freedom, these female characters continually transgress and obscure rigid social binaries. Rather than subserviently submitting to patriarchal domination, they are active participants in shaping and transforming the discourses, trajectories and outcomes of their lives and those of others as well. For example, on the one hand, Kui and Rose in *Dangerous Affair* refuse to be consigned to unhappy, unfulfilling marriages and leave their matrimonial homes at the slight sign of insecurity and discomfort. On the other hand, Nyawawa in *Soul Boy* is feared female among men in the slum. She subverts cultural expectations by the manner in which she controls and subjugates men who desire her. These women characters, therefore, reconstruct hegemonic practices in society and re-inscribe their bodies with personal freedom and agency. They reclaim control not only over their lives and bodies, but also of their sexuality.

Conclusion

This article has established that there is a tremendous decline of the hegemonic model hence the question "where are the real men?" The decline of the hegemonic masculinity is occasioned by inherent contradictions and unsustainable requirements, internal fears, self-denials, feelings of inadequacy, and the need to conform to emerging and contemporary practices in society among various characters depicted. The filmmakers relied on varying contexts and nature of characterization to bring to the fore emerging forms of being away from the hegemonic model. Additionally, the filmmakers reconstruct hegemonic practices that governed sex, intimacy and marriage to conform to the agile contemporary society and to fit into the desires, tastes and preferences of the actors involved. Thus, marriages and related partnerships are reconstructed to adapt to the dictates of the modern 'transactional economy' in order to meet the need for personal fulfillment and satisfaction. In this way, the female filmmakers essentially reconfigure socio-cultural ideologies in society thereby showing the power of film to influence not just emotionally, but also socially.

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Biographies
Gloria Kemunto Mokaya is a Master of Arts in Literature finalist at Machakos University. She has co-authored peer-reviewed articles such as "Integrating riddles as instructional resource in the Competency-Based Curriculum for Early Years Education in Kenya" (2022) and "Queer Sexualities and the Reconstruction of Alternative Modes of Being in the Kenyan Society in the Film Rafiki" (2022). She is also the co-author of a book; *A Premier Guide to The Samaritan and Fathers of Nations* (Royallite Publishers). Currently, Gloria is researching on "Representations of Hegemonic Masculinity in Feature Films by Kenyan Women Filmmakers". Her research interests are in Literature and Film.

Charles Kebaya teaches Literature at Machakos University.

Larry Ndivo is a senior lecturer and teaches Literature at Machakos University.

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