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Analysis of three novels as representative models of Kenyan Literature's suitability for filmic adaptation

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Abstract

In the multi-media creative space, a close relationship exists between literature and film. Writers and film creators employ their unique skills to make their audience visualize: the former mentally, the latter through audio-visual senses. The distinction between the two media types lies in the perception of the visual image and concept of the mental image, which informs the adaptation of prose fiction, particularly novels. Global and regional level film producers adapt literary works into film, yet in the Kenyan context, a creative disconnect exists between literary works and their film adaptations. Generationally popular Kenyan literary texts are deficiently adapted into Kenyan film. The study evaluated three novels, namely *The River and The Source*, *Striving for the Wind* and *Dust* as representative models of Kenyan Literature's suitability for adaptation. It was guided by the Reader Response Theory, Intertextuality and Adaptation Theory. In view of the qualitative and quantitative nature of the study, a mixed methods research design was employed. The study drew its primary data from Jicho Four Productions' adaptations of Ogola's *The River and the Source*, close reading of Ogola's *The River and the Source*, Mwangi's *Striving for the Wind*, and Owour's *Dust*, alongside semi-structured interviews of fourteen persons purposively sampled from across literature and film industries, utilizing mixed questionnaires. The study finds that Kenyan Literature and Kenyan Film as solid creative pillars exist individually, without a bridge to substantively link them and their audiences. This research is significant as it gives insights to the barriers to adaptations of Kenyan Literature into film, untapped potential of adaptations, internal and external standard-based yardsticks influencing adaptations, and provides a structured outline of stumbling blocks and potential remedies to enable film adaptations of Kenyan Literature to be at par with regional and global counterparts.

Keywords: Kenyan novel, adaptation, film, chronological organization, thematic embodiment, communicability

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1.0 Introduction

Adaptation as a process is, the process of adapting a creative work (i.e., books, films, works of art, etc.) focusing on the unique issues and challenges of bringing two distinctive types of media and persons from different disciplines together to create a successful adaptation. While the nature of adaptation is change, the process to accomplish that transition is complex (Axe, 2016). As such, the viability of adaptations of literary texts into cinematic mediums is influenced and regulated by the following criteria which can be referred to as elements of adaptation, comprising mainly of characterization, chronological organization, thematic embodiment, communicability, relatability, cohesiveness, and vivid representation.

Characterization is defined as a literary device that is used, step-by step, in literature to highlight and explain the details of a character in a story. It is the initial stage in which the writer introduces the character with noticeable emergence (*Literary Devices*, 2023). In alignment with cinematic adaptation, characterization is the introduction of the character which either happens by direct engagement with the character in question or indirect engagement by word of mouth, which usually occurs within the first fifteen minutes of a movie, a period constituted as act one, where all the characters, setting and dramatic conflict are established. Chronological organization is the flow of events, which can occur within real-time within the dimension of the narrative, or can be depicted through disjointed piecemeal segments as more information for understanding is communicated to the viewing audience as time progresses, which is commonly applied to mysteries and suspense dramas. It is on this principle that cinematic adaptation and movies as a whole are normally split into three acts.

Thematic embodiment is the social discourse that the author and cinematographer will want to have around moral and, or immoral beliefs and actions that present real-life existential problems for the current social environment the author engages with at the time of writing. Relating thematic embodiment to a literary example, consider the case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* where alchemy is a precipitating plot point woven in to the narrative to discuss the moral limitations of science as well as the god complex that narcissists and people in positions of power that influence life and death are prone to (Shelley, 2012). It explores the consequences of playing God and the social limitations human kind should impose on itself in the pursuit and utilization of knowledge and technological capability.

Communicability is the ability of the literary text and its cinematic adaptation to have a discourse with the audio-visual senses and emotional responses of the audience. This is captured through the ability of the narrative to create both a picture and mood throughout its progression. Relatability, would be the amount of relevance the narrative has with the audience and the ability of the writer to write from an authentic first hand or second-hand experience, close to home. In this regard, authors and cinematographers are limited to their own personal scope of reference, unless provided with in-depth historical sources that broaden their level of understanding and knowledge as related to the novelty of the story. In respect to Kenyan literature, from the sample study of Kenyan scriptwriters interviewed, it was substantiated that Kenyan Literature is more authentic in telling the Kenyan story without the influence of the Western Gaze, as compared to film, which is limited by funding, which when garnered from the West comes with strings attached.

Cohesiveness constitutes measuring the narrative as holistic entity with a clear beginning, middle and end, that introduces and resolves the uncertainties of the narrative that are of interest to the audience and the characters within the narrative a reasonably expected outcome, taking into consideration the entirety of information provided by the narrative running it's course or a provocative ending serving to destabilize the audience's sense of ease and provoke further discussion of the narratives themes. Vivid representation is the manner in which the narrative presents itself as it goes along and its ability to make use of effect imagery to create a scene and give the audience a captivating or engrossing visual experience. The degree of vivid representation varies in intensity according to the genre of literature, i.e. horror versus comedy, but must always enable the audience to visualize what is transpiring.

The above criteria are further grounded and summarized in the five key elements to a successful

adaptation that Michael Hauge outlines as, an empathetic hero; a clear visible outer motivation that the hero is desperate to achieve by the end of the story; monumental seemingly insurmountable conflict; simplicity, and familiarity (Hauge, 2014). The close reading of all three texts reveals that they resoundingly satisfy these criteria and do so while standing out amongst other books from their peers and the generational period and context within which they were written.

Authors' Background

The three authors whose works are examined in this paper, namely Meja Mwangi, Margaret Ogola, and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, are quintessential figures within the Kenyan literary landscape. Their work embodies the spirit of different generations but regardless of this segmenting factor have been able to transcend demographic boundaries and appeal to mature readers of all ages. Meja Mwangi is one of Kenya's most renowned writers having achieved fame locally and internationally with his multiple works, satisfying the unique niche of intertwining social conditions and Kenyan history through humorous lenses emboldened with undisputable relevant and eye-opening satire capturing the spirit and paradigms that have shaped and influenced Kenya and its citizenry for better or worse. As one of Kenya's most prolific writers with thirty-four books published as indicated by his website, his prowess is further enhanced by the fact that he cannot be said to have had a bad book, substantiated by the level of familiarisation and appreciation that literary enthusiasts among the sample study made note of.

Margaret Ogola stands among the founding generation of Kenyan-African writers as one of its greatest champions on the strength of *The River and The Source* (1994) and its follow up, *I swear by Apollo* (2002). Her other works include *Place of Destiny* (2005), *Mandate of the People* (2012) and *Cardinal Otunga: A Gift of Grace* (1999), the autobiography of Cardinal Otunga. Margaret Ogola's literary works will stand the test of time as timeless treasures among the Kenyan Literary scene. In its ode to Ogola who passed on in 2011, in 2017, the Standard Media paid homage to all she achieved as a writer and in her other careers. If she had been a full-time writer, it is undeniable that she would have added many more great novels to her bibliography. Ogola was not a fulltime writer, but a paediatrician, the medical director of Cottolengo Hospice for HIV/AIDS orphans (Nairobi Reporter, 2017).

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, the author of *Dust* (2014) and *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019), follows her two forebearers as one of the most renowned faces of the post millennium generation of Kenyan writers. She introduced herself to the world through her first book, *Dust*. Its description highlights the novelty of the book and Owuor's work. *Dust* brings together the shards of a family's and nation's shared history, which gradually become clear, and are exorcised. Written in prose of arresting power, Owuor's debut novel is a stunningly original work of art.

Summary of *The River and The Source*

The first book evaluated by close reading was Margaret Ogola's, *The River and The Source*. The novel is a well-grounded and paced, generation-spanning introspective and retrospective narrative on the position of Kenyan women, as an anchor holding in place the meandering ship of cultural lineage and progression over the immediate pre-colonial period, colonial period and independence era, difficult waters that women have helped Kenya manoeuvre through. It is a feminist ode, without the current day antagonism that has crept into western fuelled "feminism," contrary to the progressiveness and harmony *The River and The Source* adopts as a key face value.

As a literary text *The River and The Source* is a centrepiece in the Kenyan literary landscape, the novel having been recognized by every single interviewee within the study sample population. Through the founding character of its narrative, introduced as Adoyo Obanda Akelo Akoko, truncated to Akoko thereafter, we meet a woman who straddles three eras, pre-colonialist, colonialist and the pre-independence period and by growing and adapting through all three, manifests as the epitome of feminist representation, which the other female characters that follow are compared and contrasted in

their own right to provide the same within their own time frame and circumstances. Her central vitality to the entire story and other characters intertwined in it is summed up in her endearing introspective memoir of thoughts that foreshadow her passing, as she mulls her current state of old age, “Akoko, now a very old lady nearing eighty was not at all well. She was weak and got breathless at the slightest exertion. Her ankles were constantly swollen and every once in a while, her heart would do a strange flutter dance within her rib cage – almost like the flutter of a bird trying to break free. Her eyes were dimmed by cataracts, but her hearing was surprisingly good, and wonder of wonders, her spirit was still bright and strong within that broken body. She had lived her life in one long passionate giving of herself and now it was twilight and the end was near – so near that sometime she felt it to be a mere heartbeat away with only her soft fluttering breath between this one and the next” (Ogola, 1994, p. 132).

The female characters that follow predominately use her life as a compass of direction, alongside the men who either first-hand or second-hand come to know of Akoko, following alongside the numerous women who spring from her very existence. Her hallmark fortitude and pioneering spirit becomes the familial trait that carries the linear progression of families across the changing social, political and religious landscape that follows in her wake. The strong characterization of the combined main and minor characters (roughly thirty in total) provides a strong launching pad through which chronological organization, thematic embodiment, communicability, relatability, cohesiveness, and vivid representation are achieved, across the decades the narrative spans, and within the periods of the story’s time frame wisely packages the central themes of the story, including traditionalism, cohesion of nuclear families, within the sense of the African extended family structure, community relations, transitional educationalism, religion, discipline, hard work, marital relations and the intertwined physical and mental well-being of the individual and society, upon which mortality in the traditional and modern African sense is hinged.

Summary of *Striving for the Wind*

Striving for the Wind (Mwangi, 1990) shows how the post colonialism, period or the African post-modernism period (as it should more aptly be titled, in respect to the progressive development of African literature in relation to the world), shows how Western capitalist ideology and systems have influenced the social identity of persons and the landscape and to what degree and extent, where others succeed while revelling in others misfortunes, specific characters attempt to act as stop gap measures and other characters work against a reality that they have no power to ultimately affect and change, while others are indifferent and completely attached to the existence of modern times. The relationship between animals and their human counterparts is also explored on multiple levels and without the heightened use of anthropomorphic devices which would situate the adaptation of *Striving for the Wind* right alongside other integrated stories of man and non-human associations like the celebrated Canadian TV series, *The Littlest Hobo* (1979), based on a super-intelligent dog who exhibits high intelligence akin to Confucius, Judah’s inseparable four-legged road companion (McGowan, 1979).

The character cast of *Striving for the Wind* tackle social change and the sense of identity within the shifting landscape through a micro and macro lens that shows the interconnectivity of the village the story is set in, despite the obstinate attempts of several characters to remove themselves from comparison against those they deem inferior to them, led in chief by Baba Pesa and the Members of Tajiri bar, who have a skewed value system and set of priorities. Given the time or its original publication, it draws similarities to American Sitcoms like *Different Strokes*, *Who’s the Boss*, *Facts of Life* and the Australian sitcom *Home and Away*, which aired during the late 1970s to late 1980s, covering societal stigmas and moral dilemmas as well as strife caused by stratification which, particularly resonated with the Kenyan audience of the nineteen-nineties. A close representation of this locally would be the Kenyan television series *Mother-in-Law* (2006), but it would not encompass the rural-urban middle ground a lot of Kenya finds itself in. With characters that transect and embody all demographics of Kenyan society from the

time of its writing until now, there is no better source for Kenyan cinematic drama.

Striving for the Wind (Mwangi, 1990) features Baba Pesa, a man who by proximity to wealth more so than hard work, centres himself at the hierarchy of importance within his locale, Kambi. Mama Pesa is the woman of goodwill who balances the modernity her family has sprouted from while trying to maintain good cultural relations with her neighbours while also exhibiting her own value through what she believes as influencing the spiritual redemption of her husband and wayward son Juda. Juda is a son who despite his high level of education is disillusioned with the world of academia and pretentious occupations that he finds poisonous to his spirit, which he counters by a kind of vagabond life maintained through crafty dealings with other local notables within the Kambi social order, each achieving their legend of notoriety in their own right. Her other son, Elija tries to emulate the tyrannical hostility of his father. “Elija is a good boy,” said Mama Baru. “Juda is a good boy too, but Elija is very hard working. Elija’s like his father; he does not have any kindness in his heart. He will grow up to be a monster, like his father.” “Ithe wa mbecha ni ngui ya mundu,” Juda heard Mama

Chuma says, “Baba Pesa is a beast of a man” (Mwangi, 1990, p. 8). The other family member Penina, the reclusive boarding school student carries on a Juliet and Romeo affair with the Baru’s son Moses, which does not end in bloodshed, given the cultural sensitivities of the environment Mwangi spins his tale in, but has romantic drama nevertheless. More complicated liaisons are found by the lack of propriety on Baba Pesa’s part resulting in an attempted assault on Mama Baru, his neighbour’s wife, and the scandalous impregnation of the Baru’s high school daughter by the same culprit, achieved so on the promises of a lavish lifestyle full of splendid gifts and false promises, which mirrors the current sponsor pandemic which seemingly has become an accepted paradigm among certain circles. The dichotomy of the rich man (Baba Pesa) and poor man (Baba Baru) living a stone throw away from each other also mirrors the geographical reality of lavish estates and slums adjacent to one another, and the fact that no matter how hard some people work, the lack of resources will always be their stumbling block within the confines of living an existence of integrity. Through the main and minor characters and the micro-narratives that transpire within the bigger narrative, Meja’s novel satisfies all the creative criteria needed for adaptation checkpoints, characterization, chronological organization, thematic embodiment, communicability, relatability, cohesiveness, and vivid representation.

Other characters are cleverly and stylistic sprinkled throughout the narrative preventing any dull monotony and moving along the creative sequence of events within one of Mwangi’s best works, which Mutiso the all-seeing goat-herdsman would fantastically double as both a character and narrator of the story if it is ever adapted into Kenyan Cinema.

Summary of *Dust*

Dust (Owuor, 2014) tells the tale of a generational mystery, tied into the greater mystique of the wild Kenyan frontier, further isolated by political occurrences, incidences and detrimental paradigms of thought creating large scale feelings of division and abandonment by the government that impacts both societies and individuals collectively. It is this experience that the book narrates through its literary tapestry. The novel presents parts of Kenya as a wild west frontier full of danger and mystique, situated in a harsh environment where interesting characters, introduced and captured through a Kenyan-African lens, embody certain aspects of the environment created, and into which a stranger with an unknown connection to the local people and land we explore inserts himself as the narrative unfolds. The people as well as the landscape are all presented as beautiful and untamed in their own right and dead set on the pursuit of self-determination and their own vision of a happy ending despite the hostility of the environment and the clash of pursuits at odds with each other.

Dust also explores the voice of the generations that span the timeline within which the narrative unfolds and what they sacrifice and commit to, in order to have that voice. “It was only when a locust whirred over a pale brown anthill that Nyipir realized that in that epoch of silence, he had spoken,

and by speaking he had made himself a sacrifice. He got a confirmation within five days. *Citing Acting Inspector Nyipir Oganda for indiscipline, insubordination, and criminal activity, failure to protect citizens, stealing police equipment and stock, absconding from duty; protracting military conflict... Verdict: dishonourable discharge.* That was 1969, the year Tom Mboya was murdered, and Nyipir lost Kenya. Often, for him, it was still 1969 (Owuor, 2014, p. 288). Taking its narrative into account *Dust* provides the optimal opportunity for a cinematic lens to explore the weight past generations of Kenyans carry over the course of the tribulations they have experienced as a compelling theme, allowing side satisfying the other previously noted criteria for adaptations.

Another key theme, potentially related to the dark side of Kenya's history is the occurrence of extrajudicial killings of young men and how family's cope with the lost and besmirching of the victim's identities which has become more prevalent or recognized with the existence of smart phone cameras and social media, as is the case of the Kianjokoma brothers, and other victims like Willy Kimani whose execution is featured on the investigative documentary series, *The Last Door*. It is a fear many Kenyans live with and is characterised in *Dust* by the character of Justina who fears the choice between maintaining silence under the threat of police or the life of her son, a vulnerable state that Arabel is also forced to reconcile herself to, despite her moral stance in believing in justice for her brother.

Problem Statement

The quantity and quality of Kenyan literary texts in existence, coupled with the technical and creative skills of Kenyan Filmmakers makes Kenya a fertile ground for literary text to film adaptations, yet text to film adaptations remain largely unexploited, with little explanation as to why. This signifies the existence of the creative disconnect between Kenyan Literature and Kenyan Film, requiring an interrogation of the formal deficiencies in the creation of adaptations against existing adaptations and adaptation yardsticks, both classical and contemporary. Researching the problem this creative disconnect presents, will enable authors and filmmakers explore collaboration, given the diverse and voluminous contingent of Kenyan Literature available, to provide, develop and enhance possible solutions to the deficiency in adaptations of Kenyan Literature into Kenyan Film to address this unexplained misalignment, unaddressed by previous studies, to effectively raise Kenya at par with regional and global counterparts. This study analysed three novels, namely *The River and The Source*, *Striving for the Wind* and *Dust*, as representative models of Kenyan Literature's suitability for adaptation.

2.0 Methodology

The study was conducted in Kenya to examine the creative disconnect between Kenyan Literature and Kenyan Film. It adopted correlational mixed method research design. The study looked at cinematic productions outside of literature source material, to ascertain what merited their production over that of Kenyan literary adaptations as cinema. The *Target Population* comprised three specifically selected texts selected, two similarly selected film adaptations, specific Kenyan creatives involved in the Kenyan literary and film industries, alongside consumer audience representatives, and representatives of government film regulator bodies. Purposive sampling was used to select Margaret Ogola's, *The River and The Source* (1994), Meja Mwangi's *Striving for the Wind* (1990) and Yvonne Adhiambo Owour's *Dust* (2014). The selected film for close observation included cinematic adaptations of Margaret Ogola's, *The River and The Source* (2020) by Set Books Kenya. The selection by purposive sampling of the interviewees from the Kenyan Creatives, Kenyan Audience, and Film regulators target populations was informed by their industry positions, recognized works and level of material knowledge and community engagement regarding Film and Literary artwork production and consumption. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, mixed questionnaires, and naturalistic observation. Data was cleaned and analysed through diagnostic, prescriptive and statistical analyses.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The study evaluated three novels, namely *The River and The Source*, *Striving for the Wind* and *Dust* as representative models of Kenyan Literature's suitability for adaptation. To begin with, the deficiency of audience interest in respect to Kenyan Literature that Kenyan filmmaking stumbles over requires determining whether Kenyan Literature has sufficient visibility and makes a good enough product to turn into film which influences audience marketability. With filmmaking being a business pegged on return on investment, all three books are globally recognized and a centrepiece of the Kenyan Literary landscape. In the case of *The River and The Source*, the popularity and familiarity of the text to the Kenyan literary and film audiences, cannot be disputed, given its uptake as a repeat KCSE set book and accolades earned having won the Jomo Kenyatta Literature Prize and the Commonwealth Writers best first book prize in Africa in 1995. The collective responses of the sample population interviewees, specifically literary and film enthusiast, all indicated familiarity with the multi-award-winning text which was also promulgated as a secondary school set book in the late 1990s.

With popular audience interest and awareness not being a concern, productive capability was the next deficiency factor the study deconstructed, with logistical realities coming into play, with Kenyan Film being subject to minimalist economies of scale. On the basis of scale and structure is the novel adaptable to film? The answer is yes. Chronologically, the story is split up into four parts, which allow for easy alignment with the three-act structure of cinematic storytelling. The chronology of the story makes it a period piece and this in itself manifests and adaptive deficiency in any potential production. Is there enough historical record to develop the landscape, lifestyles and social makeup of the village society within which Akoko's narrative begins with current contemporary knowledge despite advanced capabilities?

As depicted by the 1980s TV series *Shaka Zulu* (Sinclair, 1986), getting historical representation and embodiment right is a monumental affair, and with current filmmakers being mostly forward looking do we have enough historical information pools and consultant experts to bring Akoko's world to life? The answer to this would be no. There however exists a work around through advancement in technologies that were not available at the time of the book's release. Modern film technology has also developed to the point that period piece epics can be made through the use of devices like green screen and video-editing special effects. Furthermore, with *The River and the Source*, despite the large cast of characters that would have to be incorporated into the screenplay adaptation of the text, the characters interact in close quarter environments that minimize extravagant production costs or large-scale enactments. The question becomes then whether Kenya has enough sufficiently developed green screen video editing experts to make this a reality? This again is a questionable status quo.

This brings us to the deficiency of the talent pool. In addition, to the craftsmanship and set design, the production would require a large talent pool that would have to be engaged as a period piece would make production of the novel adaptation materially heavy, and as such increase the cost of production., presenting a budgetary challenge. The scale of the cast as well, the main cast, notwithstanding the extras manifests a daunting challenge. With *The River and The Source* having thirty central characters, each with a captivating arc, are there enough actors to do all of the characters, particularly the main character justice? On the basis of information from filmmaker respondents the answer is no. Despite the rich characterization and ease of identification that Kenyans attached themselves to the story by, giving its massive success as a set book and literary masterpiece, as was the case with Sembene Ousmane's celebrated novel *Xala*, it is easily foreseeable that the adaptation could be a monumental shift in a negative direction given the skill and experience required to direct the adaptation of the novel, and the high risk of losing vitality in on screen translation (Sembene, 1975). Finding a Kenyan actress would be able to do justice to the iconic central character, Adoyo Obanda Akelo Akoko is also a question of concern with respect to talent level versus community representation? In addition, in comparison to the long development period that global films undergo to prepare their selected actors to portray their

characters, Kenyan film does not ascribe to the same level of pre-production.

According to the Nashville Film Institute (2023), pre-production normally takes...three to seven months. Kenyan films do not engage in similar production periods. Funding as the filmmakers interviewed have attested to limits adaptations specifically, and filmmaking in Kenya in general. The KFCB Official clearly indicated that Kenyan films are budgetary limited and have minimal budgets without external or governmental support. The cost of production, due to the scale of production the adaption of the book into film would necessitate is a point driven home by interview respondents representing the KFCB. The interview respondent from the KFCB also stated that obtaining the necessary intellectual property rights for adaptation of the book, would also pose a legal and economic hurdle, as it does for other famous Kenyan books. Other respondents within the film industry also alluded to this stumbling book and prominent barrier.

The next adaptation deficiency is the ability of Kenyan audiences to embrace dark negativities in local movies, especially adaptations of Kenyan novels. With the adaptations of Kenyan novels, one would also have to consider the dark side as much as the positive side of the historic narrative. However, when it comes to Kenyan film, audiences gravitate to films that have positive upward spins and tend to divest from those burdened with negativity, even though audiences are desensitized when it comes to viewing global films of such nature, especially with period pieces, in accordance with the perspective view that the story is being told through. Adaptations of Kenyan and African figures and stories tend to gloss over the dark episodes of narrative, focusing instead on the best and brightest moments of the narrative, especially in the case of biographical adaptations like Mandela and others. Winnie Mandela's affairs are glossed over, as well as the violent acts Mandela had a direct hand in planning and executing. Would the adaptation avoid this pitfall, given audience's sensibility against seeing dark points of narratives on screen, the dark point in *The River and The Source* being Becky whose fortune and misfortune alongside that of the other characters is vividly represented by the conversation between the sisters-in-law, Vera and Wandia. "However now that you bring the matter up, I must tell you I have some disquiet about Becky. I think she has lost a significant amount of weight. Have you noticed?" What are you suggesting?" asked Vera, horror written all over her face. "Well according to you she is promiscuous." "What a terrible word." "I know. But I think we have more cause for worry than you suspect" (Ogola, 1994, p. 262).

In addition, the themes of the book, while wholly endorsed in textual form, given the current social climate and political sensitivities may not be as well received on screen. With *The River and the Source* being the quintessential successful textualization of Kenyan-led and Kenyan based feminism and the embracement of modernity infused with Pan-Africanism roots, these themes may be deemed as rooted in a time gone by, *Dust* and *Striving For The Wind* however do not share the same characterization of its themes.

Striving for the Wind, on the basis of its rural-urban and social class polarization, is essentially a timeless Kenyan tale in that it fits into the persistent social structure that has maintained or been maintained throughout the 1980s to 2000s. In the case of *Striving for The Wind* and *Dust*, the potential adaptation of these two books fall right in line from a production point with films like *Supa Modo* or *Nairobi Half-Life*. They are both tangible tales that will not need much convincing for the public to buy into the narratives that they put forward.

In respect to balancing out against Adaptation deficiencies, *Striving for the Wind* is a literary work that transcends the pre-existing deficiencies. In respect to audience interest, *Striving for the Wind* is essentially a family drama depicting the transitional burden many families experience under the weight of the transitional tension between cultural roots and modernity, rural identity and urbanization. *Striving for the Wind* is highly communicable and relatable with audiences, the book having sold a high volume of copies making it one of Meja Mwangi's top four most popular books. *Striving for the Wind*, at the time it was written would make an excellent period piece and can for the most part be situated

anywhere in Kenya in urban centre adjacent countryside.

It sheds light on the harshness of economic pursuits and their impact on the determinant value of one's social standing and worth in the capitalist society Kenya's soul is struggling under, and would connect to audiences in the same fashion as the Black American sitcom 227 did in the 1980s. One facet to be highlighted is the fact that all the characters are heroes in their own story and while some villainous acts do occur, perpetrated mostly by one specific character, the character is not overly villainous, such that they are a villain to everyone, but more so lost and flawed. In addition, *Striving for the Wind* as a cinematic adaptation would manifest as a cultural centrepiece, providing a means of therapeutic relief as well as critical self-examination in the same manner that popular shows like the Australian sitcom, *Neighbours* as well as *Home and Away* and the Spanish soap opera *No-One But You* in the 1990s did. Sitcoms are conceptualized with the intent to be mirror images of societal problems and how to tackle and deal with the repercussions of them, the human internalization of these depictions giving them value which is the basic tenet of reader response theory. There is no better platform for the actualization and manifestation of Reader Response Theory than the live screen adaptation of quality works like Meja Mwangi's *Striving for the Wind* and the other study texts.

In terms of productive capability, the environment and settings that *Striving for the Wind* would take place in already exist within Kenya. Considering the talent pool required, in respect to its characterization, *Striving for the Wind* has unique but relatable characters that draw parallels to the many social demographic personas that currently exist in Kenyan society, Judah being a prime example. The necessary cast required would be playing everyday characters that already exist among the many personas of Kenyan citizenry. These two productive realities would minimize the budgetary requirements and further enhance the potential adaptability of *Striving for the Wind*. In addition being an immersive literary experience that brings to life Kambi Village and vivid characters that cover, embody and act out the social stratifications and strife that is prevalent in Kenya today, the cast would be able to draw from real life experiences. It is undoubtedly an extremely relatable adaptation to undertake, the only question being how well it would align with the cinematic elements of adaptation, as outlined by Hauge (2014) and assessed through personal experience within the film industry while engaging in film production and interviewing prominent participants in the film industry.

Striving for the Wind is very closely aligned to the narrative outcome of the movie *Supa Modo* which was fantastically received by Kenyan audiences, depicting difficult parenting in a socially disadvantage disposition and the corresponding risks children encounter that can be fatal as was the case in both *Striving for the Wind* and *Supa Modo*. Chronologically, *Striving for the Wind* unwinds over a sequence of days that reflect both routine occurrences within the normal order of Kambi (as a face of Kenyan society) as well as extraordinary incidents that break the monotony of organized village life that is the background of the story. Thematically, none of the themes of *Striving for the Wind* would go against Kenyan sensitivities, and it captures the generational clash between youth and elevated age-sets, the economic clash between rich and poor, and the level of morality that both sets oscillate between.

Dust stands as the most modernity influenced book out of the three, and focuses intensely on the machine of modernity and western civilization within the African context and how it relates to governance, social identity and politics that are underpinned by family relations and the peril and insecurity of being under and within state run institutions, which is heavily oxymoronic in its depiction of the sense of insecurity precipitated by security organs. This subject matter makes it as relatable a narrative as the other two on the basis of this regard with a strong capability to capture audience interest. It delivers strong characterization through a kaleidoscope of memories centred around mostly absent characters who form the spine of the story are relived through characters tied to them, these three characters being Moses Odidi Oganda, Hugh Bolton and Akai Lokorijom who have a spectral presence aligned to a past that mysteriously connects to everyone else. In depicting the individual perspectives and experiences of the multiple characters, DUST weighs the weight of their social functions in relation

to the characters that bind the narrative together and the journey of life within that framework. It is through this structured segmentation that *Dust* solidifies a cohesive, relatable and thematic narrative that aligns with the Kenyan experience and easily communicates the experience of the past dark history and its influence on the present. In addition, the setting of *Dust* provides for an engaging visual background supplied by the natural terrain that the story is centred in, showing an unseen side of Kenya, not usually captured in Cinematic storytelling.

Dust as a potential adaptation would not be limited by the concerns of talent pool, budget and craftsmanship as it is set within condensed locations and timeframes. *Dust's* narrative is centred around ten main characters with a commiserate number of supporting characters, who interact within pre-existing environments and habitations already found in Kenya and not requiring any heavy outlay of recreation. What maybe a stumbling block for the adaptation of *Dust* would be social stigmas and sensitivities. *Dust* juxtaposes as a theme the danger of seeking personal validation or value externally from aloof romantic interests and the perils of seeking one's place in the world against a corrosively corrupt system, which the book exhibits in its opening captured in the death of the lynchpin character Moses Odidi Oganda whose demise sets the story in motion. Kenya's social structure seems to go against externally admitting the existence of its problems while internally struggling against them like Sisyphus. Audiences may not be so inclined to see a visceral representation of their existing plight and historical trauma carried as baggage.

In addition, *Dust* explores sexual politics within the taboo framework of rigid morality that frowns upon it, and the tightrope balancing act between being liberated and chastised as morally unacceptable, which is also a paradox that Kenya finds itself in simultaneously fighting rape culture, yet seemingly glorifying sponsor culture. Furthermore, *Dust* rekindles the memory of the community impact of the murder of Tom Mboya and the aftermath of the 1982 coup.

Out of the three novels selected for the sample study, only *The River and The Source* has been integrated into stage play in its entirety and cinematically only partially. Despite thespian interest in the source material, the partial adaptation of the source text into film invokes parallels to the adaptation of Sembene Ousmane's *Xala* released in 1975, which was defunct of vitality and predominately monotone in its cinematic depiction. One would have expected a vibrant depiction of suspense and social turmoil as captured by the 2010 film *Viva Riva* brought to life by Djo Tunda Wa Munga, who the film critic Roger Ebert lauds without hesitation. The Film's writer-director, Djo Tunda Wa Munga, ingeniously entwines the generic plot with a riot of local atmosphere: street life, homes, dance clubs, whorehouses, warehouses, cops and robbers, connivers and stoolies, torture and mayhem. It is a true achievement, I suppose, to make a Congolese feature that is the rival or superior of any hard-boiled Western Film (Ebert, 2011).

We do not get to see the cultural counterpart to this in the adaptation of *The River and The Source* that would have embodied the social environment at the time the story is set. We also are not treated with the display of geographical markers that would align the adaption to the relevant geographical setting. The cinematic representation of *The River and The Source* falls way short of validating the national stature and global quality that *The River and The Source* embodies for both Kenyan and African literature. We do not see the vibrancy of the central character Adoyo Obanda Akelo Akoko. A character that could easily be brought to life by the likes of Lupita Nyong'o, alongside other characters like Wandia who could also be easily bright to life by actors like Melissa Kiplagat or Nini Wacera among others. While the source material of *The River and The Source* is a richly endowed textual narrative, with fantastic characters, the cinematic adaptation is anything but, perhaps due to the lack of development of cinematic prowess at the time of adaptation. However, as current day Kenyan films show, that is no longer the reality.

The adaptation fails to capture the strength and majesty put forward by the characters, both individually and collectively, as well as the vividness of the captivating scenes that the author developed

through imagery. Again, a replication of Sembene Ousmane's unsatisfactory adaptation of *Xala* comes to mind. That is however not to say that an adaptation can be successful given the progression in technical capabilities and human talent within the thespian industry in Kenya, with almost 20 years passing since the book was first published and six years and three years respectively since minimalist adaptations by Swakana Arts production and Set Books Kenya.

4.0 Conclusion

The study has illuminated that the creative deficiency is a systemic problem while also simultaneously a great opportunity to expand the Kenyan story and provide heightened synergy for creative production and promotion through synergy between Kenyan Literature and Kenyan Film. However, it is not something that can be undertaken creatively, but must be actioned through joint action of bodies like the Kenya Literature Bureau, Kenyan Film Commission and independent book and film festivals and players to ensure and further the possibility that the best of Kenyan Literature from across the three generations outlined, Pan-African, Post-modern and Contemporary periods within the context of the Kenyan experience get made into the best of Kenyan Film.

5.0 Recommendations

The creative disconnect between Kenyan Literature and Kenyan Film is a cross industry problem that must be addressed by a cross-industry engagement. The preliminary step is to establish a rating directory that rates and popularizes the most successful books from the aforementioned Pan-African, post-modern and contemporary periods. The rating directory would operate as an initiative aligned with government creative registers of literature, in conjunction with independent Kenyan book festivals like Storymoja, Macondo Literary Festival, Nairobi book festival, and the most popular book stores that actively promote Kenyan books and engage with Kenyan audiences.

This rating office would then be charged with evaluating the literary content and film worthiness of popular traditional and independently published books, and the forward a periodic agreed upon prescribed list of books for consideration to the relevant film bodies which would consist of the Kenya film commission in tandem with non-governmental bodies within the film sector like the Kenya Scriptwriters Guild, the Producers Guild of Kenya and the Association of Animation artists.

Once viable books are selected through the selection framework, the next step would be to perform pre-production assessments and engage in sourcing of preliminary funding and budgetary analysis. Funding can be sought through call outs as well as creative competitions, similar to the Kalasha Script writing contest promoted by the Kenya Film Commission.

The above media measures would enhance the amount and quality of Kenyan literary adaptations into Kenyan film and serve to bring Kenya up to a par level with regional counterparts in Africa and international counterparts around the globe, effectively eliminating the creative disconnect between Kenyan Literature and Kenyan Film.

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