

## Film as an Artefact: Confronting Kenya's History through the Kitchen Toto and Nairobi Half Life

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### Abstract

Films are important sites to access materials about a community's history and heritage. This paper, from an Afrocentric point of view and guided by post-colonial literary criticism, interrogates the two films; Nairobi Half Life and The Kitchen Toto with a view to establish the extent to which filmic representations can reflect the society. It looks at how the forces that were /are present in colonial and post-colonial Kenya have been developed in the two films. The paper, specifically looks at the issues of governance and identity in the Kenyan society and focuses on how the forces present in the colonial and post-colonial Kenyan government divided people in terms of 'us' and the 'other' (colonizer-colonized in The Kitchen Toto and haves and have-nots in Nairobi Half Life) with the process of 'othering' resulting into alienation and loss of identity. It traces the protagonists' conscious struggle and move to relocate themselves from the strictures and imprisoning experiences of 'othering', appraising the protagonist's denial of this alienation in his acceptance of homecoming. Thus the issue the study tackles is that of Kenyans loss, the subsequent alienation from their culture and their own selves and the struggle to reclaim these selves once the realization of that loss is made. The paper lays bare social issues such as how socio-economic issues can contribute to one becoming a criminal; in Nairobi Half Life, and how a specific class/group of people in the society can be 'criminalized' in The Kitchen Toto. The conclusion reveals that the protagonists find their identity and fulfilment in the totality of their religions, culture ancestral heritage and a sense of belonging. The paper is based on the argument that films mirror the society.

## 1.0 Introduction

Until recently, film in Kenya has been marked by external filmmakers using Kenya as a location to tell their own stories. Today Kenyan films made by Kenyans redefine Kenya; telling Kenyan stories, reflecting the Kenyan life, culture, values and making statements about the Kenyan society. This paper examines *The Kitchen Toto* as a complex cultural, historical and political formation with substantial ties to Kenyan history and to colonial ideology which 'robbed' Kenyans of their identity and defined them as the 'other', and looks at subsequent reclamation of Kenyan identity through the struggle for independence. In *Nairobi Half Life* the paper examines the failure of the postcolonial regime to uphold the principles that drove Kenya to independence: equal opportunities, equal distribution of wealth, jobs and employments among others. It reflects how the post-colonial Kenyan government has, again, redefined people in terms of 'us' and the 'other' which has robbed scores of Kenyans of a sense of belonging; 'Us' in the post-colonial Kenya being those who belong- in terms of material wealth, and power. While the protagonists in *The Kitchen Toto* struggle for independence, those in *Nairobi Half Life* move from rural to urban areas in search of a better life.

## Results and discussions

Re-creating the past: Film as a Historical Artifact Defining an artifact as an object that can be studied to learn about how things happened in the past, *The Kitchen Toto* and *Nairobi Half Life* can be viewed as artifacts of the colonial and post-colonial Kenya respectively. Colonialism played a key role in bringing a sense of alienation and disorder to not only Kenya but also other countries where imperialists ruled. *The Kitchen Toto* speaks extensively about the Kenyan history during the colonial period. It foregrounds the identity crisis that ensued with colonial oppression. It addresses problems of isolation, frustration and negation of an individual. Through the young Mwangi, the film foregrounds the pain and loneliness Kenyans experienced within the colonial situation. Working on both the individual and the collective levels, the film presents a true picture of life in the colonial Kenya where thousands died either in the hands of colonialists or their fellow Kenyans in an attempt to reclaim their land, dignity and regain their lost identity. The colonialists' assumption of their own superiority, over the original inhabitants of the lands they invaded resulted into an identity loss for their subjects. The colonialists believed that only the European culture was civilized, sophisticated and 'metropolitan' while the natives were savage, barbaric, backward and undeveloped. The colonizers therefore disrupted the customs, religions and morals of their subjects. They saw themselves as the centre around which the rest of the universe should revolve and defined the indigenous Africans as the 'other'. The effect of the 'othering' was to impose western values on the African which lead to a subsequent loss of his African heritage and identity. Their homelessness, alienation and rejection thus become the motivating factors for homecoming.

Culture and religion entails a community's identity. The colonialists invading the African's culture and imposing Christianity was thus a dislocation and destruction of the Africans' identity. More than just opening up personal experiences of the characters, *The Kitchen Toto* foregrounds the clash between Kenya and the western world in terms of religion and culture. It is a historical and political story set in the 1950s Kenya when colonization by British government officials was well underway. Kenya in the 1950s was a place of increasing tension and dramatic political, economic, and social changes. During this period, there was a wave of the Mau Mau blowing through Kenya which was by then a British colony. Conflicts between the emergent Mau Mau and the colonialists were fast developing, their seeds being in the colonial pattern of social and economic developments. Kenyans' political disillusionment gave way to series of conflicts which gave rise to the Mau Mau uprising. It all begun with a conference which was convened in Berlin in 1884-1885 to partition Africa in an attempt to settle the territorial disputes arising from the Congo region and other parts of Africa. The conference ushered in a period of heightened colonial activity by European powers which eliminated or overrode most existing forms of African autonomy and self-governance. East Africa was consequently divided into territories influenced by European powers and Kenya became a British colony. The British government founded the East African protectorate in 1885 and soon after opened the fertile highlands to white settlers. This was followed by cruel evictions of the Africans from their lands to give room for the white settlers. The Africans thus lost their land to the white settlers and became squatters in their own land. In October 1947 for example, the colonial government brutally evicted African squatters from the olenguruone settlement scheme and forcefully settled them at the semi-arid Yatta region of Machakos. The Africans lost houses, livestock and unharvested crops. Poor living and working conditions followed as the landless Africans were now forced to work for the Britons in their farms in order to raise money to pay taxes to the government. Working on the white farms was not fun either; the Africans working on the farms were mistreated. They had pathetic living and working conditions in the white settler farms where they provided labour; their huts were dilapidated, they wore tartans and although they were provided with food, it was usually posho (maize), as a result they suffered malnutrition and were severely punished at the slightest excuse and even killed by their employers. On 5<sup>th</sup> Sept 1947, for example, a number of African workers were massacred following a strike at the uplands Bacon factory which provoked the urge of retaliation. The killers were not punished. The Africans were further forced to endure harsh colonial economic policies such as taxation, forced labour and low wages which were oppressive to the Africans who suffered heavily under these policies. Besides the Europeans missionaries condemned the African cultures as being barbaric, backward and savagely. One of these cultures was the female circumcision among the people of central Kenya which created resentment among the natives and roused deep hostility. Furthermore the Africans suffered racial discrimination in their own land. The discrimination extended to the African ex-soldiers who took part in World War II and

came back to nothing while their white counterparts were rewarded by being given lands; from which blacks were evicted. These changes, among others, set the stage for the Mau Mau uprising. When the uprising began, it got support from the urban unemployed Africans, many who were disillusioned World War II ex soldiers. The officials of the central committee coordinated the movement while also organizing for oath taking. The oath was mainly for two reasons: first to ensure that the members remained loyal and honest and could be relied on to keep the secret of the movement and secondly to inspire courage and unite the members to one cause. Betrayal of the oath would lead to instant death and any contrary behavior was dealt with harshly by the Mau Mau.

*The Kitchen Toto* enters deeply into this drama of conflicts in the 1950s Kenya, with the conflict between the colonialists and the Mau Mau and conflicts amongst the natives being the riding force that propels the plot. The focus of the film is not on the violence by the Mau Mau but the socio-economic and political scenario paralyzing the Kenyan situation at the time. The film conjures a densely woven tale of hidden agendas, betrayal and sacrifice, that is both a deeply personal story and emblematic of the problems that Kenya went through in its struggle for freedom. Through the horrifying dilemma of the young Mwangi, viewers witness the plight of thousands of Kenyans who were trapped in the crossfire of a brutal struggle that would eventually claim several lives. The film lays bare the flipside on whites' high society world and makes a powerful statement about racial inequality and social injustices associated with colonialism. It reveals how Europe's struggle to control the 'New World' came with plundering of both natural and human resources leaving the natives of the 'New World' poor. While the whites lived in affluent houses, colonial ideology of white superiority and black inferiority subjected the natives to poverty and pathetic living conditions. In *The Kitchen Toto*, Bwana John's workers; the natives, do not share the mansion with their white master, they live in a separate mud walled thatched hut with huge gaping holes. They have no furniture and are forced to spend the night on the floor with nothing to cover themselves with. The 'servants' quarters' is nothing but a space to lay one's head.



Fig 3.1 Bwana John's servants' quarters



Fig 3.2 Bwana John, the white police commandant's house

Through the young Mwangi, the film enables the viewers to enter into the natives' minds to understand the devastating effects of the social conditions the natives were subjected to by the colonialists. Mwangi becomes a kitchen toto (a native young servant) at a very tender age after his father is murdered by the Mau Mau, who later forced him to take an oath to liberate his country from colonialism. As a Kitchen toto, he is subjected to endless racism by the whites. Mwangi is caught with failure, inadequacy, shame, and fear pervading his life. He lacks any control over his own existence or direction. He feels trapped inside himself, unable to acknowledge the misery he feels without risking his job which his family depends on. He feels helpless that at his age and having already been circumcised he cannot do anything to help himself and his family. When these feelings; of shame and fear overwhelm him, he lashes out with the only weapon at his disposal; hatred, which confirms the whites' definition of Africans as savages. A day after Mwangi spent a night in the cold forest tied to a tree by one of the white settlers; the Grahams go for a picnic and take with them Mwangi and the servants to serve snacks and drinks. When Mwangi sees the white man who tied him to a tree for allegedly trace passing into his territory, he spits in the sandwich before he serves it to him. Through the young Mwangi's action, viewers can learn that even the Mau Mau militants were not born violent criminals. They were products of social injustices of the British colonial system and the racism that suffuse it.



Fig 3.13 Mwangi spitting in a sandwich before serving it to the white man

The innocent Mwangi's mind turns to hatred after he is subjected to inhuman treatment by the Whiteman. The exploration of the young Mwangi's psychological corruption gives a new perspective on the oppressive effect colonialism and the subsequent racism had on the black population in the 1950s Kenya. Their psychological damage resulted from the constant barrage of colonial ideologies and the racial oppression they faced. The blacks lived in cramped and squalid conditions, enduring socially enforced poverty and having



little opportunity for success. Their resulting attitude toward whites was a volatile combination of powerful anger and powerful fear. Mau Mau was thus a product of the colonial system. They conceived of “whiteness” not as individuals but as an overpowering and hostile force set against them and that had to be overcome. As such they did everything they could to fight the colonialists. This included ‘forcing’ their fellow blacks to take oath of secrecy and union against the white man and mercilessly punishing any betrayal. It is on these grounds that Mwangi’s father, a clergy man, and Mugo, the white police commandant’s cook are brutally murdered. Mwangi’s father, is murdered for preaching against taking of ‘thenge’ oath and asking his congregation to denounce the oath while Mugo is hanged for failing to behead the white police commandant. The Killing of a white man or his black collaborators does not evoke guilt in the Mau Mau. Their brutal murder of Mwangi’s father and the subsequent torching of his home and later the murder of the cook are both brutal and cold blooded. The film does not spare any of these gruesome cruel details nor does it bring out the Mau Mau as traditional heroes. Instead the film emphasizes the extreme pain and rage the Mau Mau feels which make them capable of such terrible acts as murdering their own in cold blood. By explicitly showing the brutal acts, the film shows that the Mau Mau are not a moral innocent. They are not presented as people to be admired, but as frightening and upsetting figures created by colonialism. Given the social conditions in which the blacks must live, the Mau Mau are what one might expect them to be—violent, hateful, and resentful; made by the colonialism. Confronted by racism and oppression and left with very few options in their lives, these men displayed increasingly antisocial and violent behavior, and were, in effect, disasters waiting to happen. The film illustrates the ways in which white racism forced blacks into a pressured, and therefore dangerous, state of mind. Colonialism destroyed their innocence, awakening within them the capability to murder: The Mau Mau’s killing of Mwangi’s father and the cook was thus not an act against an individual, but a defense against the colonial world in which they lived. It is a denial of the colonial social order, white supremacy, which was founded upon an ideological concept of black savagery and inherent black inferiority manifested by colonial occupation. Mau Mau in this light is certainly a reaction against colonialism. The hate and fear the white society bred into the blacks thus became an inextricable part of their personality, and essentially their only way of living. Thus the Mau Mau’s descent into criminality and violence is an inherently colonial story.

The conflict between Africa and the west due to colonialism alienated the Africans from their cultural roots and their own identity. In *The kitchen Toto* colonialism coupled with Christianity dislocated Kenyans from the realities of their cultural and religious historical experiences. Blacks were beset with the hardship of economic oppression and forced to act subserviently before their oppressors. In Africa masculinity is divine and gender hierarchy was in such a way that men held a superior position to women. Gender roles were clearly defined and men were considered heads of families while women carried out domestic chores such as cooking, fetching water etc. In such a society a man

cooking and serving a woman is a humiliation too grave. In *The Kitchen Toto* colonialism reduced fully grown circumcised kikuyu men like Mugo and Mwangi to cooking for a woman and serving her tea in her bedroom; a psychological humiliation too deep to bear. Given such conditions, it becomes inevitable that the blacks will react with violence and hatred. The Mau Mau movement was thus instinctive and inevitable.



Fig 3.14 Mugo serving Mrs. Graham tea in her bedroom

The destruction of the means to self esteem and identity, as seen through Mwangi, left some Kenyans at cross roads. Mwangi is alienated and the confusing experience of mixing the two cultures incapacitates him. He is thrown in to confusion by the west imposing its culture on to his African culture. He is trapped between these conflicts unable to decide whether to place his loyalty with the British whose money supports his family or with the Kikuyu rebels, the people of his tribe. At one point he assists the Mau Mau to escape when they are rounded by Mr. Graham's soldiers, at another he tries to save Mrs. Graham from the Mau Maus and later attempts to save Graham's baby. His indecision proves fatal; he dies in the hands of his own master having been rejected by both his master and the people of his tribe. Through this, the film metaphorically describes a sense of loss which eventually alienated and estranged Kenyans from their culture. The colonized people thus ended up having conflicts with themselves. The Mau Mau therefore thus decided to resolve this dilemma by making an arduous pilgrimage that would liberate Kenya from the alienating influences of the new culture. The "initiation" in to the new culture and new identity as 'civilized' was a painful experience for the Africans. For Mwangi, he had to be scrubbed and disinfected before being ushered into 'civilization'. When he, together with his mother and siblings arrive at the white police commandant's compound to look for a job, they are not allowed to step inside the house- for fear that being blacks, they might dirty or contaminate the house. Edward, Bwana John's son orders them to go and wait behind the kitchen as he calls his mother. Upon his being hired as a kitchen toto, Mwangi is not allowed to step into main house until he is 'clean'. Mugo, one of the native workers is ordered to wash, scrub and disinfect Mwangi before he is allowed into the house. For For a 12 year old circumcised Kikuyu boy to be bathed naked in full view of everyone including a white woman was a great humiliation. It was the price he had to pay to be forgiven his blackness. As he is scrubbed "clean" he cries out of shame and humiliation. The humiliation he endures makes him aware of how powerless the Africans

are under the white colonial rule. The knowledge of his family's situation does not allow him to rebel and run away from the humiliation to which the colonialist subjected him. All he can do is cry. His tears and the new attire; a uniform that he is given upon being hired become the symbols of the pain involved in losing his original identity for a new identity as civilized. Thus Kenyans painfully got a new identity in the process losing his original identity and religion. It is this pain that triggers his realization that he has to reclaim his true self, thus he has to fight against the alienation engendered by his sojourn in the new culture and return to her ancestral experiences and true identity. The Mau Mau thus made a strong statement seeking a return to their Africanness. The Mau Mau rebellion thus was a cry of fulfillment and a relocation from the strictures of colonialism which alienated the Kenyan from his own self and cultural identity and reality of his ancestral people.



Fig 3.7 Mugo scrubbing Mwangi as Mrs. Graham pours disinfectant into the water

The Mau Mau's struggle for independence in *The kitchen Toto* is a motif of homecoming. Upon realization that colonialism and Christianity is responsible for Kenyans' alienation from their identity culture and land, the Mau Mau attempts to reclaim their true selves by fighting against the alienation and return to their reality. They attempt to make a fulfillment within the cultural and religious sphere of their ancestral people by administering a traditional oath. In strong terms, the Mau Mau's rejected and denied the colonialists' superiority and struggled home to their own identity and tradition. They fought Christianity and colonialism which was the source of their alienation and which underlined the cultural forces out to destroy their cultural identity. Another idea that emerges from *The Kitchen Toto* is the terrible inequity of the colonial justice system. Mwangi is judged as a criminal and a kidnapper; his case is decided before it even goes to court: in the vicious cycle of racism, a black man found with a white baby is guilty of kidnap regardless of the factual circumstances of the incident. Mwangi is a kidnapper, a Mau Mau collaborator, and a traitor; none of which he was. He receives neither a fair trial nor an opportunity to defend himself. The whites thus attempt to reshape Mwangi's identity, and by extension the blacks identity, as criminals. *The Kitchen Toto* mirrors the Kenyan society as it was during the colonial period. The film does not 'faulty' the white high society and idealizes Kenyans as most colonial writings do, instead it lays bare the ills of both the societies during the time. The film shows how the white colonialists mistreated the blacks as well as how the blacks themselves killed one another. Mwangi's family is one of the native families



who turned against itself. Mwangi's father, a clergy man, is brutally murdered by his own brother, a Mau Mau, for collaborating with the whites. Mugo, a white police officer's cook is hanged for failing to collaborate with the Mau Mau in murdering the white man. Mwangi's family serves as a metaphor for Kenya; a family whose members failure to understand one another tears apart and destroys their lives. The film provides a graphic picture of a nation whose members prepare for a bloody power struggle and will stop at nothing in their struggle to overthrow the colonialists. It gives an honest representation of the colonial Kenya. The films greatest achievement is its ability to portray the colonizer-colonized in human terms rather than as mere political caricatures and stereotypes. The film has succeeded in showing that though the colonialists imposed themselves killing scores of Africans, the Africans themselves were not angels either. They were divided amongst themselves, betrayed one another and took part in the killing of their own. The whites too killed their fellow whites. Edward Graham, for example, accidentally kills his own mother in an attempt to fight the Mau Mau just as the Mau Mau kill Mugo and Mwangi's father.

The film is ideological and political; inevitably a historical formation and demonstrates that Kenyan experience is historical, formed through the experience of colonialism. The brutal murders by the mau mau are thus brought out in the film as behavioral conditioning that developed in response to colonial domination such. The protagonist and main character of *The Kitchen Toto*, Mwangi is the focus of the film and the embodiment of its main theme; the effect of colonialism on the psychological state of its black victims. The twelve -year-old black boy shows how the black colonial subjects lived a life defined by fear and anger. Mwangi is limited by the fact that he has not attained sufficient education due to colonial practices that forced him to live in poverty. Furthermore, he is subjected to endless racism that portrays whites as sophisticated and blacks as either subservient or savage. Colonialism thus suffocated the black's making them react with violence. *The Kitchen Toto speaks of the psychological effects of Colonialism and racism on the colonized.* It is a powerful statement about racial inequality and social injustices associated with colonialism, so deep that it becomes nearly impossible to determine where moral and societal expectations end and conditioning begins. The narrative is an illustration of the harsh reality of the colonial injustices in Kenya and the subsequent struggle for independence. Colonization came with colonial ideology which perpetuated colonial subjugation of the natives leading to massive human suffering in a once peaceful continent. *Nairobi Half life* foregrounds how the post colonial Kenyan government has 'redefined' people in terms of us and the other; 'us' being those who belong; in terms of material wealth, power and 'correct tribe'. Understanding of Kenya's colonial history is necessary in understanding the present day Kenya. In 1963, Kenya gained its independence from the British and effectively became a republic the following year. The country's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, a Kikuyu, took over property that belonged to wealthy white settlers and redistributed it amongst Kenyans, favoring the Kikuyu in particular. Although he claimed that the country had achieved "political stability"

by strengthening its economy through tourism and other reforms, underlying social tensions between the Kikuyu and other minority groups remained. After independence there was rapid population growth, combined with the migration of people from rural areas to the cities, which contributed to high rates of unemployment as well as lawlessness and disorder in urban areas. In 1978, after Kenyatta died, Daniel arap Moi began his infamous 24-year siege of power. Over the subsequent decades, economic growth declined and dropped under 4%, a dramatic drop from the growth rate of 6% during the early years of Kenyatta's presidency. According to Robert Shaw, a Nairobi economist quoted by the BBC, "From the 1990s, economic growth and the standard of living have declined or stagnated.... Moi's government promised many things but did very little - especially in the department of good governance." As a result, many families fell below the poverty line, and the economic stagnation contributed to an already growing dissatisfaction aggravated by government inefficiency, corruption and ethnic tensions. The said Kenya's post colonial disillusionments set the stage for the themes foregrounded in *Nairobi Half Life*. Set in 2012 Kenya, the film majorly deals with the twin theme of crime and violence. This is attributed to the fact that the prevalence of crime and violence in postcolonial Kenya parallels a history of crime and violence that is generally attributed to the youth in postcolonial Africa. According to Tom Odhiambo (2007): The prevalence of juvenile delinquents in their works and the related acts of violence and criminality could be read as indicators of the failure of the postcolonial Kenyan State to 'include' their young men (and women) into the mainstream of society--- there is a correlation between marginalization of the youth in society and their adoption of anti-social behavior as strategies to access material resources (134). Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin suggested that delinquency can result from differential opportunity for lower class youth. Such youths may be tempted to take up criminal activities, choosing an illegitimate path that provides them more lucrative economic benefits than conventional, over legal options such as minimum wage-paying jobs available to them. Criminal activities thus become 'imaginary solutions' to the problem of belonging to a subordinate class.

*Nairobi Half Life* examines the failure of the postcolonial regime to uphold the principles that drove Kenya to independence: equal opportunities, equal distribution of wealth, jobs and employments among others. In the film, the rural folks have been left behind in terms of development, as a result they move to the cities in search for a better life making the cities crowded, in turn lack of jobs and proper housing sets in. As the city gets more and more crowded, lawlessness sets in and the police fail to maintain law and prevent crime; they instead take part in crime by protecting the criminals. The film seems to be asking a philosophical question "What happens when the criminal is not the 'enemy without', but the regime itself" The film is an allegory of the post colonial Kenya, with the main character representing the rural folk and their move towards the city of lights in search of better life, revealing the problems inherent in the post colonial governance. It represents societies that have recently emerged from colonialism and describes the way these societies function in the post- colonial order. The film foregrounds the fact that

though imperialism has passed and the colonies have attained an independent status, these nations of the third world face a lot of economic, social and political problems such as bad governance, rural-urban migration, corruption, poverty, crime and violence, among others. The themes in *Nairobi Half Life* reflect the predicament of man in the present day cities. It throws light on the Post- colonial and post- imperial realities that have shaped the contemporary societies and provides important insights relating to them leading to a better understanding of the problems that are faced by the post- imperial generations.

The film deals with crime in the Kenyan urban areas and argues that crime can be learned through association. Interacting with antisocial peers is a major cause of criminal behaviour in the society. When criminal subcultures exist, many individuals can learn associatively to commit crime and crime rates may increase in those specific locations. Mwas, an innocent young man aspires to become an actor. Obsessed by his quest to become an actor, he sets out to the city of opportunities; just like many young stars who see Nairobi as a city of opportunities. He is robbed of all that he had just as he lands in the 'City of Lights'. Confused and distraught, after his robbery, he paces aimlessly along the city and lands in the hands of the Nairobi city council officials, who mistakenly arrests him and throws him in the police cell for allegedly hawking. While in the police cell, he meets Oti, one of Nairobi's street smart gang members who introduce him to his gang upon leaving central police. As Mwas lives with Oti and his gang, he learns about the crime culture in Nairobi thereby becoming a criminal by association. Mwas becomes so perfect that he even initiates his small snatch and run gang into car-jacking and robbery with violence. In the film, Nairobi city is shown as more complicated than an outsider might assume. The film gives a discourse of Nairobi city showing how social and economic conditions can reinforce crime culture in the society. Societal factors such as poverty are shown to predispose people to crime. Those who fail to get employment find refuge in the hands of other jobless Kenyans. The film depicts the disastrous effects poverty has upon the society. It shows how poverty in the land reflects on the mind. It exposes men's vulnerability in the face of poverty leaving them desperate, absurd, and resigned to fate, low self esteem, and loss of social order. The effect of poverty manifests itself in behaviours such as adoption of deviant sub cultural norms which may include toughness and disrespect for authority. Criminal acts may result when youths conform to norms of the deviant subculture. Albert K. Cohen (1997) in sub cultural theory suggests that delinquency among lower class youths is a reaction against the social norms of the middle class. Some youths, especially from poorer areas where opportunities are scarce, might fragment away from the mainstream to form their own values and meanings about life. Finding life difficult in Nairobi, Oti and his friends form a sub-group which specializes in stealing motor vehicle spare parts. While the men try to survive by becoming criminals, the girls go to an extent of 'selling' themselves for as low as 20 shillings so as to earn a living.

As Mwas continues living in the poverty stricken crowded slum with his gangster friends, morality becomes increasingly ambiguous and complex. Through Mwas' life in the

city the film suggests that in a world complicated by poverty, and a failed system, it is not simple to identify right and wrong. Mwas's actions do not represent a moral action; by all standards he is a criminal. However, though a criminal the film imply that he is not fully to blame for his actions. Though Mwas make a conscious choice to join Oti and his gang thereby becoming a criminal, the mindset in which he makes these choices has been shaped by the social structure; poverty coupled with desperation that the society help to perpetuate. Mwas goes to town an innocent boy in search of his dream of becoming an actor but ends up on the streets miserable, jobless and homeless. Sociological factors such as social services gap between the rural and urban areas contribute to people leaving their rural homes to search for opportunities in the city. Social services facilities such as theatres are located in urban areas and as such for Mwas to become an actor he has to move from his home village to the city. With increase of population in the urban areas comes decrease in employment, housing and transport among others. The resultant joblessness and shuttered dreams provide a fertile ground for criminal activities. The desperation that sets in with joblessness and homelessness coupled with social strain on individuals to achieve upward financial mobility causes those individuals to act out in ways that are illegal when legal means to achieve upward mobility are not available to them. Mwas' gang composes of jobless urban residents whose places in the society are determined by forces almost completely beyond their control. A long-standing unequal division of wealth has trapped them within a disadvantaged class. They lack opportunity to get meaningful employment as Oti says '*hii ni Nairobi huwezi mek bila connection*' This is Nairobi, you cannot make it without connections. Poverty is thus a trap determined by forces almost completely beyond the ordinary citizens' control. Chicago School sociologists adopted a social ecology approach to studying cities, and postulated that urban neighborhoods with high levels of poverty often experience breakdown in the social structure and institutions such as family and school. This results in social disorganization, which reduces the ability of these institutions to control behavior and create an environment ripe for deviant behavior.

Naturally most people buy into the dream of becoming successful, rich and powerful and it becomes a powerful psychological motivation. If the social structure of opportunities is unequal and prevents the majority from realizing the dream, some of them will turn to illegitimate means (crime) in order to realize it. Others will retreat or drop out into deviant subcultures such as gang members, urban homeless drunks and drug abusers. Mwas dreams of becoming an actor, just as Daddy M dreams of living big. He acts out scenes from the movies he is selling until he comes across the vultures; a theatre group from Nairobi, and sets out to Nairobi to achieve his dream. When he ends up on the streets homeless and frustrated in Nairobi, he seeks refuge from a gang who readily accept him. Many times young people who are threatened by their environment, attacked or hurt and need protection often readily find it offered in the street gangs. They then learn the techniques of crime under the tutorage of the gang around them.

*Nairobi Half Life* depicts a justice system so undermined by corruption that the concept of law and justice holds little meaning. The film examines the post colonial Kenyan criminal justice system and finds it wanting, most notably in how the police handle the criminals. In the first place, Mwasn an innocent boy is jailed by the county council of Nairobi for a 'crime' he does not commit, which succeeds only in turning a well-meaning boy into a menace to society. His well meant journey to Nairobi is ironically reversed when he comes out of the cell a criminal, showing how the society can make criminals out of innocent citizens. The police fail to maintain law and order and instead of apprehending the criminals take part in crime by sharing in the criminals' loot and in turn offering them protection from the law. The police get a percentage of whatever the robbers make. While they protect the criminals, they make untrue identifications to deceive the public about unsolved crime cases as revealed by Oti to Mwas when they are locked up in a secret hideout by the police. This satirizes the police force and shows how in a corrupt system decision can be formed on the flimsy basis of circumstantial evidence and unreliable witnesses. Justice in the post colonial Kenya, then, is shown to be unjust and unable to grasp the truth of the situation. It is also unable to reform the criminal, who is likely to respond to the reinforcement and protection from the police/ by becoming more of a criminal and further alienating themselves from the society. The likelihood of being caught, through surveillance, police or security guard presence is effective in reducing crime. When criminals see that the benefits of their crime outweigh the cost such as the probability of apprehension, conviction and punishment, their criminality is reinforced. In Nairobi, the police reinforce crime by failing to apprehend the criminals and share in their loot.

The society in *Nairobi Half Life* is built on different class structures i.e. the high social class and the low social class. Those in the high social class live affluently, drive big cars and fight to maintain their social status as the low in the society fight to survive. Ruth and Amina, for example, sell their bodies in the brothel for as low as twenty shillings in order to survive. Others like Mwas having failed to make it in the village sets out to Nairobi to forge a living. He ends up on the streets of Nairobi jobless and homeless forcing him to join a gang which specializes in snatching motor vehicle parts, both for a sense of belonging and to earn a living. *Nairobi Half Life* holds a mirror against the post colonial Kenyan society and exposes the social order in the post colonial society. The film further shows how certain facilities, such as theatres, are only accessible to the urban residents. For Mwas to achieve his dream of becoming an actor, he had to move from his rural home to Nairobi. At the national level there is joblessness, especially amongst the youth which increases the rate of delinquency. The film gives a discourse of the city showing how social and economic conditions can reinforce crime culture in the society. Societal factors such as poverty are shown to predispose people to crime. Adolphe Quetelet, (2003) made use of data and statistical analysis to gain insight into the relationship between crime and sociological factors. He found that age, gender, poverty, education, and alcohol consumption were factors related to crime. Mwas who aspires to



become an actor cannot achieve his dream in the village since there are no theatres in the village. He has to move to the city as revealed in the conversation between him and Jose.

**Mwas: Naeza kuwaje actor?**

*(How can I become an actor)*

**Jose: Aa uko poa, uko poa. Noma ni uko ocha**

*(You are ok. The problem is that you are in the rural area)*

**Mwas: Aaaa, naeza kuja Nairobi**

*(I can come to Nairobi)*

**Jose: Alafu?**

*(Then?)*

**Mwas: Can you help me?**

Since there are no theatres in his rural village, Mwas goes to Nairobi to jump start his acting career. In Nairobi, he suffers assorted misfortunes and finds refuge in the hands of other jobless youths. Since Mwas and his friends were jobless they were disposed to poverty and poor living conditions in one of the slums in Nairobi. The film takes viewers into the epicenter of life in Nairobi city slums and presents them with a picture of poverty and misery in the slum. The gang live in very pathetic conditions; they share a small room where each member has only a space enough to spread his bedding on the floor. While the men try to survive by becoming criminals, the girls go to an extent of 'selling' themselves for as low as 20 shillings as revealed in the conversation between Mwas and one of the girls at the brothel.

**Ruth: Mwas**

**Mwas: Eeee**

**Ruth: Wasemaje leo? Si uniamulie soo na nitakuguzisha vizuri hata....**(interrupted by Mwas) *(What do you say. Give me one hundred shillings and I'll do you so well, you won't be able to say no)*

**Mwas: Aaii zii**

**Ruth: Kuwa mnyonge.. Soo tu. Haya basi tufanye 50 bob basi na nitakufanyia stylezinge hata we hujawai kucheki. Za kucome, zile mbaya. (Mwas not concentrating. Amina is heard screaming as she is whipped by her client) Si 50 ni sawa, hako ka 50? (Mwas is quiet) Mbao. Blue nao ni mwisho na mi nakuambia hata Kesho utacome.** *(Dont be so mean, only one hundred shillings. Ok let's make it fifty shillings then and I'll give you imported styles, styles you've never seen before. Twenty shillings then. Twenty is the last price, and I tell you I know you will come again)* (Amina screams again and Mwas runs to her aid, leaving the girl)

The film depicts the disastrous effects that poverty has upon the society. It shows how poverty in the land reflects on the mind. It exposes men's vulnerability in the face of

poverty leaving them desperate, absurd, and resigned to fate, low self esteem, and loss of social order. The effect of poverty manifests itself in all spheres; to begin with adoption of deviant sub cultural norms which may include toughness and disrespect for authority. Criminal acts result when youths conform to norms of the deviant subculture. Albert K. Cohen (1997) in sub cultural theory suggests that delinquency among lower class youths is a reaction against the social norms of the middle class. Some youths, especially from poorer areas where opportunities are scarce, might fragment away from the mainstream to form their own values and meanings about life. Finding life difficult, Oti and his friends form a sub-group; a gang which specializes in stealing motor vehicle spare parts.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has demonstrated that *The kitchen Toto* and *Nairobi Half Life* mirror the Kenyan society and reflect the destruction of the Kenyan 'identity' by different forms of governance. The films have also traced the Kenyans' subsequent journeys to homecoming upon realization of the alienation and estrangement. Christianity and the western culture presented African religion and culture as backward and unsuitable for the very same societies who had evolved them in *The Kitchen Toto* just as the post colonial government has unequally distributed wealth, leaving some areas out in the development process resulting into a dislocation of individuals from their realities in *Nairobi Half Life*. Homecoming in the two films is a reconstitution of their dislocated selves from the different predicaments they encounter. In making a homecoming, Kenyans during the colonial period struggled to overthrow the white colonialists which act as avenues through which the return to their identity is achieved, while the post colonial Kenyans move from the rural to urban centres for a better life and to have a sense of belonging. Homecoming therefore implies a move towards reclaiming an identity or a sense of belonging.

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