

## Filmmaking in Kenya: The Voyage

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### Abstract

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World over, there is a new trajectory that apprehends the significance of filmmaking and forward-looking nations have swiftly embedded film in their national culture and psyche, with the resultant effect of tremendous socio-economic and political development. Veritably, all the developed nations and emerging economies in the world have strong and vibrant filmmaking policies. China, Brazil, India and South Africa are cases in point. Little wonder huge fiscal and personnel resources have been allocated by respective governments to document and archive films not only made within their boundaries but also from without. Whether factual or fiction, films have been used in diverse fields and disciplines - in science, humanities or/and arts - as a credible source of information, innovation as well as a premise to come up with administrative and political policies. Conversely, Africa fares rather badly in documentation in almost all fronts, a fact largely attributed to oral tradition as a mode of passing and preserving information. The African people's origin, movement, lifestyle, medicine, industry, agriculture, arts, architecture, geography, culture, religion, socio-political structure, commerce, warfare are some of the areas that are worst affected – inadequately documented. This cheerless picture quickly solidifies the myth that Africa and its inhabitants never existed until the coming of foreigners; be they Europeans or Asians. The Kenya filmmaking industry is one such casualty. Very little effort has been directed towards coming up with a compilation of filmmaking in Kenya. Until recently, film training was only offered in vocational colleges. Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC), started in 1976, was solely technically oriented. The overwhelming interest in filmmaking was noticed by universities in Kenya who have since opened film production departments to tap into the increasing numbers of film students trooping out of the country for further studies. The number of film scholars has begun to swell and it is expected that intellectual publications on film and cinema will ameliorate as well. This paper endeavors to lay the groundwork for such a discourse. Rudimentary in structure and form, the genesis of filmmaking in Kenya is to be traced and tracked from pre to post independence, all the way to the postmodern Kenya. The guiding framework is to be hinged on the 5W'sH of journalism; who made the films, Where, When and what they are about. How and why portions are delved into later on. Acknowledging the enormity of the task at hand, a careful sampling of notable films across the Kenya cinema spectrum were picked and highlighted to paint a vivid picture and to be inclusive as much as possible.

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### The Colonial Era 1900-1962

The first traces of filmmaking in Kenya in the early 1900s were characterized by the coming of missionaries, game hunters and colonial administrators. Though serving different purposes, the landing of the film camera on the Kenyan soil marked a radical shift in the social and cultural structure of Kenya's society. Once far off boundaries and geographical phenomena were bridged, as vividly captured and reproduced on celluloid through the lens. Social and political structures were bent at best and broken at worst with the introduction of cinema. Being a social event happening in a confined environment that was to be paid for in advance introduced a commercial and reclusive aspect in leisure and entertainment hitherto free, communal and utilitarian in the African context.

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Indeed, the first cameras to land in Africa, Kenya in particular, were of explorers, tourists and game and trophy hunters who wished to record their escapades for private consumption. One such case is Theodore Roosevelt, the 26<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America president between September 14, 1901 and March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1909. Enchanted by the wildlife, flora and fauna in Kenya during his holidays in Kenya, he opted to take a five-month expedition to the hinterland. He wished to preserve the whole trip and in came Cherry Keaton, a British wildlife photographer who was well versed with the terrain. The footage from the entire trip was compiled and the resultant product was titled *TR in Africa*, perhaps becoming the first documentary film to be produced not only in Kenya but in film history, since the first film cameras were invented in the 1890s by the Lumiere brothers in France. *Africa Speaks*, made in 1920s, is an East and Central Africa expedition documentary transcending the geographical boundaries that opened territories not seen before by fellow Africans and foreigners. Shooting the teeming wildlife with guns and cameras, the trip started from Kenya's coast city of Mombasa, crossed over to Uganda, proceeded to Congo and finally settled in Nigeria. *Trader Horn*, a Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) production shot in 1931 tells the story of animal trophy business that was thriving in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, becoming probably the first commercially viable feature film in Kenya. Serious poaching in the latter days that is threatening the extinction of some animal species like elephants and rhinoceros could have been contained had the government policy makers in the above mentioned countries treated this movie as a forewarning of worse things to come. The British government, in an effort to acculturate the Africans, came up with a project of making educational films whose thematic areas included hygiene, crop and animal husbandry and commerce. Established in 1935, the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BECE) program carried out massive campaigns in the above mentioned fields, all geared towards propagating the superiority of the European culture and lifestyle while degrading Africa's in the process. The after-effect dubbed 'Short, Sharp, Shock' by the British administrators had far-reaching ramifications that still linger on up to date in Kenya's national psyche. BECE was later disbanded, creating room for the formation of the African Film Unit in 1939.

*Stanley and Livingstone* is a 1939 docudrama inspired by real happenings in Africa around 1850s. This is a story of Stanley, a journalist assigned by the '**New York Times**' newspaper to track Dr. David Livingstone, a lone missionary in the heart of Africa spreading the gospel and treating the sick. The purported snobishness, brutality and misconceptions of an average white man towards and about Africans, represented by Stanley is contrasted by the humane, bonhomie and spiritual consciousness that Dr. Livingstone exudes that makes him connect with the natives despite their different backgrounds and upbringing. Dr. Livingstone attempts to educate the ignorant and arrogant Stanley on the need to demystify the long held myth by the West about Africa being a vast dark and blank continent. Converting the natives to Christianity aside, his mission is to fill in the blanks by documenting the wildlife, geography, flora and fauna as he visits all the parishes he has set up across the villages. Against all persuasions from Stanley for the frail, weak and sickly Dr. Livingstone to go back to civilization with him, Stanley finally bids Livingstone farewell and goes back from the 'jungle' with a human soul; sensible, sensitive, generous and forgiving as attested by the gift he gives Bongo, a native he caught perusing and stealing from his bag the very same item. Dr. David Livingstone eventually died of malaria and dysentery on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1873.

*The Snows of Kilimanjaro* is a 1952 **20<sup>th</sup> Century** production that was shot in Kenya, with the high hippopotami population in the lake possibly pointing to Lake Naivasha as one of the locations. Played by Gregory Peck, Harry Street, a novelist, lies in bed gravely wounded from an African hunting accident, feverishly reflecting on what he perceives as his failures at love and writing. Through his delirium, he recalls his one true love, Cynthia Green, whom he lost because of his obsession for roaming the world in search of stories for his novels. Though dead, Cynthia continues to haunt Street's thoughts. In spite of one successful novel after another, Street feels he has compromised his talent to ensure the success of his books, making him a failure in his own eyes. His neglected wife Helen, who tends to his septic wound from a thorn prick, listens to his ranting, endures his talk of lost love, and tries to restore in him the will to fight his illness until help arrives. Her devotion to him makes him finally realize that he is not a failure. With his realization of a chance for love and happiness with Helen, he regains his will to live. This story looks at internal reflection, self-inadequacy and worries of a man in a near death experience replaying his life in the African jungle through dramatic flashbacks depicting captivating wildlife and interaction with the locals in Swahili, a native language widely spoken in East Africa, as they take boat rides and long treks up the Kilimanjaro, the tallest mountain with a snow cap in the equator.

Street gets hurt by hippos while trying to rescue one of the boatmen who fell in the water and got mauled by hippos. He reminisces his randy youthful days with women, going to war in Spain in a huff after his lover pours vitriol on his pathetic writing ambitions where he is shot in the foot for disobeying orders of the troop commander for opting to stay with the wounded American woman soldier instead of joining the battle front; all in the quest to find contentment and acceptance. Released in 1952, *Men Against the Sun* is an adventure story revolving around the building of the East African railway, famously branded 'the lunatic express', at the turn of the century. It is a story of a group of white railway builders and the many huddles that beset them, including that of the two man-eating lions of Tsavo. John Bentley, as a surveyor, and Zena Marshall, playing the role of a doctor, inject some romance to the otherwise slow, narrative exposition. *Mugamb* followed soon after in 1953. It tells of a love story in the jungle. Victor Marswell runs a big game trapping company in Kenya capturing live animals for zoos, circuses and animal trainers and doubles up as a tour guide. He returns from safari to find that the attractive Honey Bear Kelly, who was invited by an Indian Maharajah who had since left Marswell's camp the week before. The hard-living Marswell and the seductive Kelly develop an instant attraction for each other. Soon Linda Nordley and her scientist husband Donald Nordley arrive for a safari. Marswell yet again finds himself strangely attracted to the beautiful blonde Mrs. Nordley and those feelings are reciprocated. The result is a love triangle with all of the mixed, raw emotions that forms the ingredients of a romantic drama. When Mr. and Mrs. Nordley show up for their gorilla documenting safari, Mrs. Nordley is smitten with Marswell. As they all set off on safari to find gorillas for Donald Nordley's research, tensions rise as both women desire Marswell. The two men and women have some difficulty containing these emotions to their mutual satisfaction, but eventually succeed.

## 2. The Independence Era 1963- 1972

### Re-Engineering the Kenyan Mind

Of all the colonial masters scavenging for a piece of Africa after the 1885 Berlin conference in Germany, the British were the worst. While the Belgians, French, Portuguese and Germans were more interested in resources, the British had weird concerns. Top on the British colonizers' list of priority in their quest to dominate Kenya was to obliterate the African culture, it seems. Without culture, like a seed without an embryo, Kenyans would lose their soul, dignity and identity. Anything with an African tag would be frowned upon while embracing everything North without question, a trend we continue to experience up to date, filmmaking included. There are many locally produced films that are able to keep theatre halls at full capacity and TV stations running with local content yet the audiences watching local films are fewer while the critiques harsher. Surprisingly many of these movies have won international recognition and awards, a pointer to Kenya's defeatist and self-condemning attitude. Perhaps a look at three of Kenya's most revered nationalists and intellectuals will help elucidate this depressing phenomenon. Each of these three has had a profound impact on their respective stations of professional, public and private lives. Ngugiwa Thiong'o's essay *Decolonizing the Mind* takes a sharp criticism if not laced with skepticism of the rat race that the independent Kenya people and Africans by extension find themselves in. He argues that the Africans, black Africans, are rudderless- wanting to revert to their African identity but not ready to let go the Western colonial ideology and mentality. To him, this oxymoron boils down to the mind; that faculty of the human race so hard to tame or/and comprehend.

Prof. Ali Mazrui, in his book *The Africans; a Triple Heritage*, takes a clinical look at the processes that have gone into reshaping the African people thus giving a vivid (by-) product as manifested in their psyche. He avers that... Inspired by an unprecedented sense of mission and boundless self-confidence, Europeans did not conceal their contempt for African cultures, either centralized or decentralized. The massive cultural arrogance of Europeans was later to influence the indigenous personality of the continent, and create at times schizophrenia among the Westernised Africans (p72) Overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the task ahead to recoup the damage, his clarion call to fellow Africans in his introduction to the book is... I am tempted to say to fellow Africans, facing a series of severe political, economic, social and cultural crises in the 1980s, 'The main thing we need to change is our own changeability.' (p11) Yet man being a habitual being and resistant to change, Kenya's gaining of independence in 1963 and becoming a Republic the following year was to be a litmus test for this axiom. There was a general expectation that Africans would reclaim their identity, values, norms and cultures and reject anything and everything European, having been enslaved, lorded over and dehumanized by the British colonialists. Years later, soon after independence, Kenya's first vice-president, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, observed a damning trend in Kenya's leadership and its national psyche. The European mental malaise and disorder (what Prof. Mazrui called schizophrenia) had caught up with Jomo Kenyatta's capitalistic administration that was in essence neo-imperialist, neo-colonial in word, spirit and action.

In attempting to 'change the changeability', President Kenyatta and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga eventually fell out with the latter being ostracized and branded a communist. The gravity of the situation and the magnitude of the decay are well captured in Odinga's 1967 autobiography, *Not Yet Uhuru*.

#### Internal Reorganization

Allan Root, an accomplished wildlife filmmaker notes in Barasa Nyongesa's film compilation documentary titled *The History of Film in Kenya* that television stations in the 1970s had immense interest in showing wildlife and not the present day obsession with celebrities and showbiz personalities. This is corroborated by films of nature, wildlife, geographic as well as cultural heritage documentaries that were produced during the 1963-1972 decade. On the other hand, the nascent independent Kenya government grabbed the immense influence film has on the population and embarked on making African-empowering programmes to further accelerate the uptake of vacancies left by colonialists and the emerging opportunities countrywide. Top on the list of filmmakers in this decade, both black and white, was to document the history of veteran freedom fighters and all those who contributed to Kenya's attainment of independence. An imperial president at the time, it becomes too obvious why the spotlight focused on Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and the numerous philosophies and policies he introduced and advocated for, overtly or covertly. *The Maasai Heritage* with a working title '*Imaashoi OI Maasae*' meaning 'people of the red ochre' is a 45-minute narrative documentary done in the 1970's depicting the origin, culture, and lifestyle of the Maasai people from the eyes of the Europeans. *The Tender Ones* is a 30-minute documentary by the Film Unit Production on children's growth, development and upbringing in different parts of Kenya. Scripted, produced and directed by Gilbert G. Githere, John Sibi Okumu aka JBO did the narration with accompanying music by Gilbert G. Githere and Francis Njoroge. The crew involved had camera by James Gichinga, film editing by Njeri Murago, sound mixing by David Nyambu and sound operators were Mark Omondi, Joe Mwangi and Herbert Anyanda

*Harambee 'World of Award'* is a 1970s Lion pacesetter Production for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award narrative documentary on presidential awards. Produced by Robert Angell, directed by Stephen Cross and photography by Derek Waterman, the production was meant to showcase the progress the former British colony, Kenya, had made since independence for the Duke of Edinburgh, now the husband to Queen Elizabeth of England. This, perhaps in line with the target audience, explains the white man's voice in the storyline depicting native Africans living in squalor while the whites playing god. *Mzima: Portrait of a Spring* was made and released around 1969-72 by highly decorated filmmakers Alan and Joan Root. It explores the diverse life that flourishes in Kenya's Mzima spring. The stunning cinematography captures the creatures' mutual symbiosis. As the spring water permeates through the volcanic soil of the arid Ukambani Chyulu hills, it forms an oasis for birds, mammals and reptiles deep within Tsavo National Park. Underwater photography captures the aquatic life of the hippopotami where the Roots had a series of freak attacks; with their face masks bitten off, and in Alan's case, a leg nearly amputated. With very few productions during after independence, it appears the government's focus was on indigenizing the socio-economic and political structures that were largely occupied by the now leaving Europeans.

### 3. Post-Independence 1973- 1978

Man has always been fascinated with war, myth and mystery; from the ancient Greco-European mythologies, sea voyages and pirates in the exploration period, World Wars I and II, to the Vietnam and Korean incursions in the 1950s. There was an increasing need and demand for knowledge from the masses both in Kenya and Britain on what happened before and during the independence struggle in Kenya, largely due to the legendary and dramatic nature the conflict took. The aggrieved Africans and the aggressive settlers offered the protagonist and antagonist characters to the elixir (fertile land and freedom) to wage a vicious justifiable war, depending on the side of the divide one looked at it from.

***Black Man's Land Trilogy*** is a three part episodes each running for 60 minutes that were later redone to 30 minutes each to come up with TV series made ostensibly to capture this captivating drama. Made in 1974, it looks at the key players and entities that went into redefining the socio-political divide and defying racial bigotries as laid out by the self-proclaimed superior whites who deemed Africans as non-thinking inferior slaves.

The rise of powerful nationalist movements and the collapse of colonial regimes across much of Africa in the 1950s and 60s did little to alter the dominant cinematic images of the continent. The films remained what they had always been: exotic animals, big game hunters, dashing white settlers, and colorful if not incomprehensible "natives." In 1969, Anthony Howarth, David Koff and Msindo Mwinyipembe set out to address the imbalance. They had first met in Kenya in the mid 1960's when Howarth, a professional magazine photographer, was assembling a photographic biography of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta. Koff, then on the PhD program at the University of California, Berkeley, was an editor at the East African Publishing House, which published the Kenyatta book, *Facing Mount Kenya*. Mwinyipembe was a well-known Ugandan-Tanzanian broadcaster who had worked for the BBC World Service and then had her own programs on Voice of Kenya Radio and Television. With a wealth of still photographic material on hand from the Kenyatta biography and a wide range of personal contacts in Kenya, Howarth, Koff and Mwinyipembe spent the first six months of 1970 filming on the ground and from the air. Their timing was perfect, for there were many Kenyans still alive who not only recalled the early stages of colonial rule in the 1890s and 1900s, but had participated in the local and national resistance to it. Among those interviewed were underground leaders of the "Mau Mau" movement, European settlers and former colonial officials, and members of Kenyatta's family. Kenyatta himself however declined to be interviewed. Upon returning to the UK to edit the material, the filmmakers rummaged through the photographic and film archives of Rhodes House at Oxford University, the Imperial War Museum, the British Museum, Pathe and Movietone newsreels, the BBC and other sources, uncovering and incorporating many previously unseen images of Africa's history into the Trilogy.

They recruited a young Peter Frampton to compose and perform the score for *White Man's Country*, and Keefe West, a shrewd London-based actor, to provide the voice of Kenyatta in the Kenyatta film. Msindo Mwinyipembe did the narration and voice-overs for the entire Trilogy. Most of those interviewed for the Trilogy have died since the films were completed in 1973. But their testimonies, their experiences, and their knowledge are as stirring and authentic today. Little wonder close to half a century later, *The Black Man's Land Trilogy* is still watched in theaters and on television, in classrooms and in libraries, all over the world. *White Man's Country* draws its plot from the late 19th century happenings. Britain, France, Germany and other European states agreed on the division of Africa into a patchwork of colonies, and set about exploring and exploiting their new possessions. Violence was endemic to the process, for how else could the Africans already living there be persuaded to cede their land, labor, property and freedom to foreigners? Colonialism's brutal dialectic of repression and resistance was set in motion, as Africans fought to defend their lives and dignity. They eventually organized national political movements and underground military brigades to win back their rights and freedom. *White Man's Country* combines period photographs and contemporary location footage with the testimony of African and European witnesses, to examine both sides of Europe's "cavalier mission" in Africa. This 1973, 48-minute documentary film, was an Anthony Howarth and David Koff production. Scripted by David Koff, and narrated by Tanzanian born BBC journalist Msindo Mwinyipembe, the crew included photography by Bruce Parsons and Kenya's Mohinder Dhillon, rostrum photography by Lee Pace, sound recordist Ivan Sharrock, dubbing mixer done by Richard King, music by Peter Frampton and edited by Roger Buck.

Second in line was *Mau Mau*. The documentary is anchored from when the British government declared a State of Emergency in Kenya in October 1952 with the sole intention to vanquish the "Mau Mau" uprising. In the war that followed, fewer than 40 of Kenya's 40,000 white settlers were killed while over 15,000 Kenyans lost their lives, with hundreds of thousands more arrested and subjected to a humiliating and often brutal process of "rehabilitation." According to the British Colonial Secretary, Mau Mau was viewed as a "perverted nationalism and a sort of nostalgia for barbarism" whereas Kenyans branded it as Land Freedom Army, an organized political and military response to repression and armed aggression. Using newsreel and previously inaccessible archive footage, and drawing on interviews with participants on both sides, *Mau Mau* examines the myth and the reality of Africa's first modern guerrilla war. Key respondents include Joseph Murumbi, Eliud Mathu, Solomon Memia, Eliud Mutonyi, James Cameron, John Nottingham and Karari Njama. Last in the trilogy was *Kenyatta*, a biographical portrait of Kenya's first president. Jomo Kenyatta's death on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1978 brought to an end his political career that encompassed more than 50 years of African history. Kenyatta, born to Moigoi and Wamboi and later adopted by his uncle Ngengi who inherited Wamboi upon his brother's demise, entered politics in the mid-1920s and then spent 17 years in exile in Europe. It is worth noting that while in London, Kenyatta featured in Alexander Korda's film *Sanders of the River* (1943), as an extra.

He returned to Kenya in 1946, and was elected president of the nationalist movement, the Kenya African Union (KAU). Arrested and imprisoned in 1952 for allegedly leading 'Mau Mau', he was released in 1961 and two years later became Kenya's first Prime Minister. In power, the man whom European settlers had once reviled as "the leader to darkness and death" was eulogized by them as a pillar of stability, while former allies challenged him by creating a left-leaning political opposition. *Kenyatta* weaves archival and contemporary images with interviews from friends and relatives, comrades and opponents, to create a biographical portrait of a key figure in 20th century politics. This 45 minutes documentary on images of colonialism and independence in Kenya about KamauwaNgengi (a corrupted version being Wangigi) alias Jomo Kenyatta attempts to explain the origin of the name Jomo Kenyatta. As the 1914-1918 World War I progressed, able-bodied Kikuyus were forced into work by the British authorities. To avoid this, Kamau moved from Nairobi where he worked as an apprentice carpenter to Narok, living amongst the Maasai and worked as a clerk for an Asian contractor. It was around this time that he took to wearing a traditional beaded belt known as a 'Kenyatta', a Swahili word which means 'light of Kenya'. In 1922 Kamau adopted the name Jomo, a Kikuyu name meaning 'burning spear'. Among those interviewed are Kenya's first and second vice-presidents Oginga Odinga and Josephat Karanja, respectively, Rev. Musa Gitau, Rev. Misheck Murage, James Muigai, his first born son Peter Muigai Kenyatta, his first wife Grace Wahu, Ng'ang'aGoro, Joseph Kang'ethe, Rebecca Njeri, Dinah Stock, T. R. Makonnen, Eliud Mathu, Sir Michael Blundell, Joseph Murumbi, Waruhiultote (General China), Tom Mboya, his personal physician Dr. Njoroge Mungai and Achieng Oneko. The 1974 produced *Boran Herdsmen* is an 18 minutes short film that demonstrates the home grown solutions to the problems associated with the Boranas pastoral lifestyle and over-reliance on cattle for a living. Its sister movie *Boran Women* quickly followed suit to touch on the plight of women too, both made and directed by David MacDougall and James Blue.

*Safari By Balloon*, shot in 1976 by world renowned wildlife filmmaker Allan Root together with his wife Joan captures the picturesque aerial view of mount Kilimanjaro all done with the aid of a hot air balloon, setting the world record in aerial photography at that time. *The Busy Leader* is a 30-minute compilation documentary depicting the commemoration of a decade of the Jomo Kenyatta presidency. Scripted by Sam Kahiga and narrated by Charles Rasugu, the crew included sound by ZakeyHinga and Davis Nyambu with the film editor as Grace Kanyua. The documentary was a collaborative product copyrighted in 1978 by the government owned Voice of Kenya (VOK) now Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) and the newly formed Film Unit Production. *6000km di Paurawas* produced in 1978 and directed by Bitto Abertini in what is arguably the most grueling and thrilling outdoor motor sport in the world that happens in East Africa. Loosely translated, it means 6000 kilometers of racing in Italiano. This movie has two leading characters Joe Massi, one of the best sports car racers at the time and his ex-mentor/driver instructor Stark, vying for a first position at the upcoming safari rally. Joe also happens to have an affair with Stark's wife. Two weeks before the big race, Stark runs Joe off the road, badly injuring him. Joe escapes with his life and lives to race in the rally. The mise-en-scene is stunning, with cars driving through scintillating African trails, stampeding live animals like elephants and giraffes crossing their paths during the race, and at one point in the end, one of the cars carrying Stark and his wife runs into a spectator. Films with strong themes woven into nature and wildlife seem to have been the dominant factor during this period. They were also intended for the white audience and most have never been screened locally to date due to copyright issues.

#### 4. The New Dawn 1979- 1982

Jomo Kenyatta died in his sleep on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1978 at State House, Mombasa. Daniel arap Moi, his long serving vice-president, took office as Kenya's second president and pledged to continue with Kenyatta's good work under a system called *Nyayo*, a Swahili word for 'footsteps'. Kenya had enjoyed tremendous economic growth and infrastructure development since independence, but the tides of tribalism and corruption were overwhelming and threatened to tilt the scale. The change of guard from the late Jomo Kenyatta to Daniel arap Moi did not go down well with Kenyatta's Kikuyu inner circle that saw leadership and power as their birth right. An attempt to overrule the automatic ascendancy of the vice-president to presidency upon the demise of the president by the infamous 'Kiambu Mafia' was thwarted, setting in motion subterranean strife among three most populous communities in Kenya; the Kikuyu, Kalenjin and Luo. During this stint, there was a lull in the performing arts, film included. This could be attributed to the suspicion and tensions that could easily boil over wherever groups of people were gathered, and films are such forms of art that congregate a wide array of people in their making and consumption.

*Kobjes: A Rock for All Seasons*, narrated by David Robb, is a geological documentary of the huge outcroppings of bedrocks, the Kopjes, which protrude like rocky islands in an ocean of grass in the heart of Africa's vast Serengeti plains. They provide shelter and shade for a myriad of plant and animal life. The documentary was produced and directed by world acclaimed wildlife filmmaker Alan Root in 1980 at Serengeti, the borderline between Kenya and Tanzania.

*Opportunity and Not Sympathy* is a 1981 Film Unit Research and Publication documentary in conjunction with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on empowering the blind and physically challenged through vocational training countrywide. Scripted, produced and directed by Kimburi Charles and narrated by Raphael Tuju, the crew consisted of camera operator Fabian Aluoch assisted by James Gichinga, sound operation and mixing by Martin Omondi and film editing by ThianiGakumo. In the same year, *Open Door to Settlement* was produced by the Documentary Film Unit- Research and Publication Production on irrigation projects in the Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL). It was produced, scripted and directed by the late Sao Gamba, narrated by Raphael Tuju, with the crew comprising of cameramen Aluoch Juma and James Gichinga (now deceased - exterminated by flashfloods in April 2013), sound operator John Muthiani, sound mixer Martin Omondi and film editor Gakumo Thiani. The political set up in Africa was experiencing turbulent moments, this time from within. Military coups and junta governments were becoming the norm mostly in Central and West Africa. Like a thunderbolt in the clear blue sky, it happened in the neighbouring Uganda. On 25<sup>th</sup> January 1971, whilst Uganda's president Milton Obote attended a Commonwealth meeting in Singapore, Amin led a coup d'état and took control of the country, declaring himself president. Idi Amin Dada, who became known as the 'Butcher of Uganda' for his brutal, despotic 8-year rule, is possibly the most notorious of all Africa's post-independence dictators.

*The Rise and Fall of Amin* was shot in 1981 in Nairobi, depicting the travesties and terror let loose in Uganda by the tyrannical rule of President Iddi Amin Dada, the third President of Uganda from 1971 to 1979. Directed by Sherad Patel, this biopic about one of Africa's cruelest leaders was a masterpiece that the 2006 high budget Hollywood's remake *The Last King of Scotland* could not match up to in authenticity. What was feared and dreaded all along almost came to pass, with great ramifications thereafter. The 1982 coup attempt in Kenya altered the film landscape. Foreign filmmakers withdrew lined up productions, eroding investor confidence and the once vibrant tourism boom courtesy of the pristine and sublime locations in movies done in Kenya starved the economy the much needed foreign income. The media and all forms of performing, fine and applied arts, literature and critical thinking disciplines in academia were heavily vetted and closely monitored. Those involved or even suspected to be were hounded in jail, some of whom were maimed or lost their lives altogether. The lucky few that lived went underground or fled to exile abroad, where some are living to date. Tribal fissures and suspicions gaped wider, with Kikuyu and Luo scholars, politicians, thespians, playwrights and activists bearing the brunt. Among them were Ngugiwa Thiong'o, Koigiwa Mwere, and the late political satirist Wahome Mutahi.

Of immediate concern to the powers that be was to contain voices of dissent, real or perceived. As a way to monitor and track the socio-political temperature and pulse, it became evident that regulation and censorship of all performing and audio-visual content was to be intensified. It is round about this time the formation of Film Production Department (FPD) now Department of Film Services (DFS) came to be. Likewise, the Kenya Film Censorship Board swung into action. Its mandate was anchored in an Act of parliament - Chapter 222 of the Film and Stage Plays Act that was assented to in November 22, 1962 and operationalized in October 1, 1963. Its core mission was to "provide for controlling of making cinematograph films, for the licensing of stage plays, theatres and cinemas; and for purposes incidental thereto and connected thereof." Hitherto dormant, CAP 222 was powered to full throttle, contributing forthwith to a stunted growth of the film industry. It has since been reformed to Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB), with the core function to monitor, enforce, and rate films before being release to the public for viewing.

## 5. The Re-Awakening 1983-1992

The social construction in Kenya was still radically patriarchal twenty years after independence. There was growing concern that internal politics and parochial strife from a cabal of elites among the dominant ethnic groups jostling for selfish control of public resources was having a devastating impact on the citizens, with women and children most affected. The World Conference On Women, first held in Mexico City from June 19–2 July 1975 and International Women's Year (IWY) were part of a larger United Nations program which developed over the Decade of Women (1976–85), and included the drafting of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); agreed at the second conference in 1979.

The Second Wave of Feminist movements throughout the developed world in the early 1970s, led by Assistant Secretary General for Social and Humanitarian Affairs Helvi Sipilä, finally hit the shores of Africa with a thud. The 1985 third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi, Kenya not only closed the decade of women, but set a series of member state schedules for removal of legislated gender discrimination in national laws by the year 2000. Delegates sought to deepen these advances in legal recognition of female equality and bring them to the developing world, and promote the role of women as an aid for economic development. The conference identified areas of specific interest to address in a bid to uplift the standard and position of women. Of interest to this discourse is the area of communication. Under the section **Equality**, paragraphs 206, 207 and 208 of sub section C titled *Measures for the implementation of the basic strategies at the national level* set out to improve the tainted image of women by giving them maximum public visibility through the mass media under the ambit of Communications; wherein lies filmmaking. By implication, it is in the mid-1980s that a crop of women filmmakers emerged, making a giant step not only regionally but continentally and globally too. In Kenya, the aftershocks of the coup attempt were subsiding, albeit with all the defense mechanisms on high alert. *KolorMask*, a 1983 movie directed by Sao Gamba in conjunction with the defunct Kenya Film Corporation was released. With Njuguna Gitau as the Director of Photography, it is widely acknowledged to be the first all native Kenyan cast and crew film to be produced in Kenya with government funding. It is a story about John Litondo, a village boy educated through hardship by the entire village who goes to study abroad on a scholarship. While abroad, he meets a white girl, Eliza, and they marry after a while of dating and are blessed with two children- a boy and a girl named Toby and Susan respectively. After completing their studies, the Litondos relocate to Kenya to fulfill the promise of helping the community develop, with him now as a medical doctor. All goes well until few years down the line the parents inject a twist to the rosy picture; they insist on their son taking an African wife to be fully recognized and accepted in the community as the tradition and culture demands.

The white wife, Mrs Eliza Litondo, gets wind of this arrangement and objects to the plan, throwing the family unit in disarray. The children, now adults, are not spared either. They lose trust in the parents and community whereby Toby, now a performing artiste, becomes a vagabond and Susan goes berserk. Sao Gamba, being liberal in thought, opted to give this movie a symbolic working title, *KolorMask*. Overall it depicts transcending the color stereotypes that are associated with the black and white skin pigment in the human race. The use of 'K' instead of 'C' was a deliberate choice to 'Kenyanise' the title. As corroborated by Njuguna Gitau in an exclusive April 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 interview, many nouns in Kenya start with letter **K** hence the relevance in context. *Saikati I* (1989) by Anne G. Mungai, was revolutionary. It's a glimpse into the life journey of Saikati, a young Maasai girl who has been betrothed to the chief's son. Rather than get married, Saikati runs away to Nairobi to live with her cousin and pursue her education against her parents' wishes. Nairobi city however proves to be a hard nut to crack and soon Saikati struggles to return home. The opportunity comes when they take a game drive to the Mara, being within her home area. She bids farewell to her cousin and the two white tourists amid strong persuasion to stay on and have fun. *Saikati the Enkabaani* is a captivating 90- minute story of a young Maasai village girl who defies traditional, rigid cultural barriers to become a flying doctor as she tries to strike a balance between traditional laws and modern influences. Enkabaani is a Maasai name for 'healer' and is contextualized in this film to mean 'the flying doctor.' Her worthiness is put to test when her father falls ill and she has to cure him.

The pioneer female filmmaker in Kenya and widely respected in the industry, Anne Mungai made her debut with *Wekesa at Crossroads*, a 60- minute docudrama, in 1986. Apart from *Tough Choices*, and *Promise of Love*, she also wrote and directed other films such *Usilie Mtotowa Africa* which won the American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS) award, Gabriella mistral award and Plan International award. The 1993 *Pongezi*, a 25 minutes documentary and *Root 1*, a 52-minute docudrama produced in 1994 both won the British Council - Kenya award. Other films from her stable include *Hope Beyond Tears*, *Sautiya WatotowaMadianyi*, *Sautiya Watotowa Nyangoma*, and *Counting The Cost*. *In the Shadow of Kilimanjaro* is a 1986 film based on actual events. The film tells the story of an incident in Kenya in 1984 when, due to a severe drought, 90,000 starving baboons went on a murderous rampage, killing humans and animals alike. Written by Jonathon Dabell and directed by Raju Patel, the 97-minutes film turns the tide on the hunters being the hunted. *Kunyonga - Mord in Afrikais* a 1986 German action film with an English translation as *Kunyonga- murder in Africa*. *Kunyonga* is in fact a Swahili word meaning 'to strangle'.

Directed by Hubert Frankand and written by Julia Kent and Ron Williams, this 91-minute feature film thrives on money and murder. Bob Roberts, a press reporter, embarks on a mission with his friend to set free a German industry tycoon's son imprisoned in Kenya for supposedly murdering his girlfriend after love goes sour. *Battle of the Sacred Tree* is a 1995, 82-minute comedy by Wanjiru Kinyanjui that tells the story of an independent woman, Mumbi, who defies social conventions and walks out on her abusive husband, Mwangi. Having paid a high bride price, it was customarily a given that he had the right to regularly beat her. She goes back to her father's home with her little daughter, to the chagrin of her father and consternation of the villagers. As if not enough, she becomes a barmaid in the local drinking den in a bid to fend for herself and daughter. This upsets the whole village and the elders convene a hearing under the *Mugumo*, a sacred tree among the kikuyu, where the whole crisis is to be resolved. The climax of the conflict however emerges when a section of villagers agitate for the felling down of the giant Mugumo tree that has stood long before the arrival of Christianity and believed to hold magical, mythological powers. The falling down of over a century-old mugumo tree in mid-February 2013 in Nyeri was quickly interpreted as a symbolic transition of the Jomo Kenyatta's rule and ushering in his son's- Uhuru Kenyatta's - in the hotly contested 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013 presidential elections that pitted the latter against Raila Odinga, son of Kenya's first vice-president Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. Wanjiru Kinyanjui has produced and directed other films, including *Manga in America* and *Bahati*.

## 6. The Renaissance 1993-2002

The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in September 1995 in Beijing, China. Famously dubbed the Beijing Conference, it championed for **Affirmative Action** in Kenya; deliberate engendering of women in governance, leadership and decision making at domestic, local and national levels. The clamor for multi-party politics and opening up of democratic space filtered through the film sector, making it possible to produce politically- inclined films and documentaries. *The Baisikohs* a 1997, M-Net funded production that was filmed in Athi River, Kenya. The 27-minute short comedy film was written and directed by Ingolowa Keya and produced by Richard Green with Dommie Yambo-Odotte as the executive producer. *The Married Bachelor*, produced in 1998 by Ingolowa Keya, takes a look at life after a failed marriage with a spouse- Matilda, having committed suicide due to endless quarrels and provocations from Denis since learning of a past still birth. Left behind with a young boy child Yona, Denis takes him back to his parents' rural home as he pursues his career as a university lecturer. Yona grows up and attains the age to undergo circumcision, the rite of passage from a boy into a man that happens once in a decade among the Maragoli people in Western Kenya. So engrossed in advancing his career, he fails to heed calls by the elders to attend this all-important ceremony that demands his physical presence. Against custom, little Yona is initiated by the grandfather Agala, and kept in seclusion for healing and mentorship. However, he develops unexplained health complications that are quickly attributed to one thing; Denis' failure to burn Yona's rugs to seal the transition. Because Denis is obstinate in coming home, Yona is ferried to Nairobi with the rugs for burning. Agala supervises the rug-burning ritual but as fate would have it, Agala suffers a fatal heart attack. As opposed to the flopped adaptation of Meja Mwangi's book *Bush Trackers*, this is one successful literary piece on the same working title by Professor Francis Imbuga, now deceased. It highlights the impact absentee fatherhood, so rampant the world over, has on the boy child and the society at large.

*To Walk with Lions* is a 1999 Canadian production filmed in Kenya. It is based on a true life story of George Adamson who spent the sunset years of his life protecting the lions and other wildlife in the Kora National Reserve in Kenya amid rogue poachers and a corrupt government blocking his quest for wildlife preservation. Fitzjohn, acted by John Michie, arrives in Kora, a lion conservancy, to work for two elderly brothers; George and Terrence Adamson. Against George's advice on day one, he is nearly mauled by a lion. On being told his predecessor died in similar circumstances, Fitzjohn contemplates quitting. With a last minute change of heart and a cub brought in from a zoo for him to train and reintroduce into the wild, he soon discovers his life's true calling; to protect the decimating lions. It is a tough battle lasting years as the very custodians entrusted with the survival of the species turn aggressors. As Fitzjohn observes "A ranger may earn Kshs 800 a month but a poacher will pay him 10,000 just to turn his back for a day" as the local government decides that it doesn't really want a game reserve after all. Written by Sharon Buckingham and Keith Ross Leckie and directed by Carl Schultz, this 110 minutes feature film received 5 Oscar nominations in 2001 for Best Achievement in Cinematography going to Jean Lépine, Best Achievement in Music with an Original Score by Alan Reeves, Best Achievement in Sound Editing by Glenn Tussman et al, Best Motion Picture to Pieter Kroonenburg and Julie Allan and finally Ian Bannen bagging Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role. This film received wide TV play within and without Kenya. *Hemingway, the Hunter of Death*, shot in 2001, is set during Kenya's struggle for independence from the British in the late 1950s.

Scientist Ernest Hemingway undertakes to climb Mount Kenya. The Kikuyu natives warn him not to violate the sacred laws of Mwene-Nyaga, the mountain's god, by harming the elephants which ascend its peaks, lest he suffers dire consequences. The expedition consists of the author Alex Smith, British police commissioner, Renata, the photographer and Hemingway's lover, Antonio, Hemingway's godson, a Spanish biologist and frustrated bullfighter as well as Kamau, a Kikuyu tribe member who secretly fights for Kenya's independence with the Mau-Mau rebels. The expedition's progress is antagonized as political and personal forces collide and Hemingway comes face-to-face with his final destiny in facing the decision to shoot the Sacred Elephant that roams the highest peaks of Mount Kenya. The film is an adaptation of a novel by Manuel Zapata Olivella and Luis Zelkowicz and is directed by Sergio Dow. Made in 2002, *Dangerous Affairs* is a film about marriage gone haywire. Kui, a successful banker from New York, is back in Kenya and top on her list is to get married and settled. She meets Murags, a reforming womanizer thinking of raising a family too. Soon after, wedding arrangements are on top gear. Nearing the D-day however, Murags meets his old flame Rose who has just relocated from Mombasa to Nairobi and their past relationship is rekindled, albeit her being married with two children. Against his will, he marries Kui and soon after their short marriage ends in heartaches and divorce. Directed by Judy Kibinge, this film was among the first to bring to Kenya's screens the once hallowed institution of marriage under scrutiny.

### 7. The Post-Modern Era 2003-2013

This decade saw a radical shift to Experimental, also known as *Avant garde* filmmaking style. Animation found its way and acceptance to the Kenyan market and audience alike, further expanding the scope of film genres in Kenya. Furthermore, taboo themes were explored that brought to the surface hitherto whispered issues within the African context. *14 Million Dreams* is a documentary drama addressing the impact the most devastating disease in human history, AIDS, has upon the most vulnerable people in Africa, children. Writer and director Miles Roston presents interviews with five children from Kenya and Malawi surviving on their own after the death of their parents. Against incredible hardship and adverse societal pressures, this is a befitting tribute to human resilience and the selfless adults who have devoted their lives and meager resources to help these children achieve their dreams. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, an estimated 14 million children had been orphaned by AIDS, probably with an upward trend up until now; all things held constant. *Flip Flotsam* follows the working life of the flip-flop (plastic sandals) from production in a Mombasa factory to disposal and eventual rebirth as children's toys. Tens of thousands end up in the sea before landing on Kiwaiyu island's beaches of Lamu where the local women carve and assemble them into children's toys and mobiles. This 26 minutes documentary film was made in Kenya in 2003 by Lucy Bateman, Etienne Oliff with Ian Mganga as the cast. Written and directed by Jane Mugane Munene, the 2003-released *The Price of a Daughter* is an 84-minute drama film that revolves around Naisenya who is pulled out of school at a tender age of 14 for circumcision in preparation to be married off to an elderly man. However, she goes against the culture of the Maasai in a bid to bring change in her community as a nurse. The film revolves around Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a traditional practice that not only has devastating health implications but also hinders the girls' progress. It was during this time that anti-FGM campaigns were gaining momentum across Africa. The film won a special certificate of excellence at the 2003 Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF).

Jane Murage Munene is the producer of *Behind Closed Doors*, a 2002 feature film that voices the violence women undergo silently, with Mrs. Jabali being the centre of the story. Persevering the brutality in a bid to portray a happy marriage, she one day decides to leave when she could not hide it any more. She is however caught packing her bags and beaten to a coma by a humiliated Mr. Jabali after being rejected by her mistress for another man. *Enough is Enough*, a Kibaara M'Kaugi's production in conjunction with Department of Film Services (DFS), was released in June 2005. It looks at the rarely spoken contribution that women played in the fight against colonialism in Kenya. Wamoio Wagakuru, an extra-ordinary 70-year-old grandmother, greatly inspired the Mau-Mau fighters who launched an armed rebellion against British colonialists in the 1950s. Nicknamed Delilah for her sly and conniving tactics, she often spied on her white employers and betrayed them to the Mau-Mau fighters. His other notable work is the award winning *Dunia Ni Mbaya. Chokora*, a derogatory Swahili term meaning 'a scavenger' was produced in 2005. It is a story about Francis, a Kenyan street boy. He is given a second chance when he arrives in a children's home. However, even here he cannot escape the pressures of the street. In its brief 13 minutes, the film immerses one in the emotional turmoil of life on the streets that easily connects with the reality on the ground.

It was written and directed by Joe Cottrell Boyce. *Kibera Kid* is the story of Otieno, a twelve-year-old orphan living in one of the world's largest slums, Kibera. He is under the roof and protection of the Razors, a gang of petty thieves. After a theft gone nasty, Otieno is forced to choose between saving an innocent man's life and the Razors – the only family he knows. This 2006, General Exhibition-rated short film offers a window into a life that is shared by millions of people living in urban slums throughout the world. It has been screened at over 40 film festivals worldwide and won numerous awards including Student Emmy 2007 for best Children's Program category in Hollywood, USA; Best Short Film, Kenya International Film Festival (KIFF) in Nairobi, Kenya; Best Kenyan Children's Film, Lola Film Festival in Nairobi, Kenya; Best Director, Angelus Film Festival, Los Angeles USA; Graduate Student Director Award, Hampton's International Film Festival, New York, USA; Most Innovative Short Film, Real to Reel in Vancouver, Canada; and Best Film for Teenagers, Danville International Children's Film Festival in California, USA. *Me and Mo* is a 2006 nostalgic compilation documentary by Salim Amin, son and only child of Mohamed "Mo" Amin who perished in a tragic air crash in the Indian ocean's Comoro islands from Ethiopia while trying to negotiate with terrorists who had hijacked the plane. Salim undertakes a journey of recollection and reflection into the life of the often absent, globe-trotting father he loved, revered and feared. The 96-minute film is underpinned by extraordinary images from the vast Amin archive - currently available at World Picture Network in New York. It is written and directed by Roger Mills and Murad Rayani. *The Oath*, done in 2005 by Nathan Collett, is set in Kenya in the 1950s during the Mau Mau uprising under British colonialism. The film portrays the struggle between two brothers on opposite sides of the conflict. In *I Want to Be a Pilot*, produced in 2006, we meet 12-year old Omondi; orphaned by AIDS and living in East Africa's largest slum, Nairobi's Kibera. Emerging from his burrow in a garbage dump, he walks through Kibera and confesses that he wants to be a pilot. Gradually, we learn why. Omondi lives in the biggest slum in East Africa. Every day he sees aero planes fly over him from and to the adjacent Wilson airport, strengthening his dream and resolve to become an airline pilot.

*Toto's Journey*, released in 2006, is a two minute short animation film showing man struggling to contain desertification through traditional means of irrigation. Created in 2005 as part of UNESCO's now defunct Africa Animated project and directed by Alfred Muchilwa and Godfrey Semwaiko, it has been cited as 'a pure, unique, almost only example, of how to use the African iconography to tell a relevant African story.' *Gari Letu Manyanga* (Our Souped-up Bus) by George Ngugi King'ara is a 2007 film about a public transport mini bus in Kenya, locally known as 'manyanga'. It looks at the travails of the manyanga crew and passengers in a typical day. It was shot in 2007 on a shoe-string budget. In 2008, Wanuri Kahiu completed her first feature film *From a Whisper* based on the real life events surrounding the August 7 twin bombings of US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998. The film won 5 awards at the Africa Movie Academy Awards including Best Director and Best Picture. *Subira*, translated from Swahili, means patience. It is a story about a girl who wants to break the social norms and boundaries by jumping into the ocean and swim in the open. Implicitly, it takes a look at the place girls and women are relegated to in the suffocating Asian culture as represented by Subira, the lead character. Shot in Lamu around 2008-9, the movie has won awards from Cannes, Zanzibar and Burkina Faso's FESPACO film festival. Written, directed and co-produced by Ravneet Chadha aka 'Sippy', it got positive reviews across the board. Film critic Ogova Ondego back then called it "the most successful movie produced in the history of Kenya". Born in an Indian Sikh business family, Ravneet was groomed to fit in the family template having studied Psychology in her undergraduate and proceeded to Canada for Business studies, defying family and social norms herself.

*Shugais* a three-part television drama produced by MTV in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) as part of MTV's Staying Alive Ignite campaign in 2009. The drama focuses on a group of young friends living in Nairobi, Kenya. As they explore the complexities of love, money and sex, the series shows how some kinds of behavior – including sexual involvement with multiple partners, sexual exploitation, and alcohol abuse – can make young people more vulnerable to HIV. Among the cast is Lupita Nyong'o, Anthony Mwangi, David Omwange, Pepe Haze, Tumisho Masha, Sharon Olage, Eva Kanyang'onda and Nicholas Mutuma. *Pumzi*, Swahili name for breathe, is a 2010 short science fiction film that depicts the lead actress' obsession to give life to a seedling in a harsh, barren and hostile environment by all means possible; through sweat, shading off the sun with her garment, urine and ultimately humus of her decomposed body upon death. The filmmaker, Wanuri Kahiu, avers that the idea behind pumzi is 'to create layers of communication in an afrofuturistic world from the possibilities of the mind therewith.' *Pumzi* won Best Short Film at Cannes Independent Film Festival, May 2010 and took Silver at Carthage Film Festival in Tunisia, October 2010. *Togetherness Supreme* is the story of Kamau, an artist searching for change in the midst of ethnic tension in the slums.

Kamau goes against his father and his Kikuyu tribe to join the other side with his friend Otieno, a Luo. Kamau and Otieno fight for political change for those living in dire poverty. After a disputed presidential election, the slums erupt in violence and Kamau's world is torn apart. Directed by Nathan Collett and based on the 2008 inter-ethnic conflict that almost put the country asunder, this 90-minute, 2010 released feature film is quite moving as it cuts against the social grain of tribalism so endemic and ingrained in Kenya. *Nairobi Half Life*, with an Oscar nomination as well as nine nominations at Africa's most important film event, the African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013 is one movie that has left an indelible mark in Kenya's recent film history. Produced by Ginger Wilson and directed by Tosh Gitonga in 2012, it tells the life of a young, aspiring actor from upcountry Kenya with dreams of becoming a success in the big city. To the chagrin of his brother and parents, he makes his way to Nairobi: the city of opportunity. He lives a double life of an actor by day and a criminal by night. He later comes out of the closet (quite literally on stage) a transformed person. The movie has so far been screened in over 46 theatres across the United States of America, a feat no other Kenyan film has achieved. *Malooned* created a buzz in the local film scene too. Produced in 2010 and directed by Bob Nyanja, this fiction film is a story of romance brewed in a Nairobi washroom after being locked in for the weekend. With a cast of two, a Luogentleman and a Kikuyu lady, ethnic stereotypes, bigotries and politics come to the surface and the two are forced to confront them in the long run, having no escape route. The institution of marriage is brought to the fore as well with a married man cavorting with a bride (none had a phone to link up with colleagues in this day and age? From 2010 onwards, filmmakers started leaning towards extracting stories from real life events. Kenya had gone through one of its worst political crisis in history in 2007 disputed general elections that led to close to 1,300 people dying and hundreds of thousands internally displaced. While the socio-economic and political fronts seemed to be recovering from the extra attention they were accorded, the psychological wounds and trauma were never addressed. It is this lacuna that some filmmakers banked on to open up the wounds afresh for a proper healing process to begin.

*The First Grader* is one such movie that seeks to correct past injustices. This 2010, 103-minute production is a true story of an 84-year-old Kenyan villager and ex Mau Mau freedom fighter who fights for his right to go to school for the first time to get the education he could never afford. Having been relegated to the vagaries of poverty and neglect by successive governments, Maruge takes the bull by the horns by confronting the school administration and powers that be as he marshals the young generation in an uprising that draws its passion and fire from the Mau Mau uprising. In a complex scenario, writer Ann Peacock cleverly intertwines the two eras to give a compelling motive to tackle present day oppression. In the film, Kimani N'gan'ga Maruge, here played by Oliver Litondo, is an 84-year-old man who had never gone to school. He responds to the government's announcement of free universal education by calmly presenting himself at a primary school and demanding to enroll. In his big baggy shorts, Maruge, now deceased, was to get himself an entry in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's oldest primary school pupil. *Something Necessary*, produced in 2012, followed quick on the heels of post-election violence witnessed in Kenya in 2008. Soon after, a referendum on the constitution of Kenya was carried out in 2010 and tribal and sectarian schisms were evident. Directed by Judy Kibinge, this is a movie about the trauma and challenges a Gikuyu woman and her children faces from family, friends and neighbours after the death of her Kalenjin husband during the 2008 post-election violence.

*Something Necessary* is a film about a pivotal period in the life of Anne, a woman struggling to rebuild her life after the civil unrest that swept Kenya following the 2007 elections, claiming the life of her husband, the health of her son and leaving her isolated farm in ruins. Joseph, a troubled young gang member who participated in the countrywide violence is drawn to Anne and her farm seemingly in search of redemption. Both need something that only the other can give to allow them to shed the painful memories of their past and move on – but the big question begging for an answer is, will either of them find it? Directed by Zippy Kimundu, *Burnt Forest* is a short film with a running time of 23 minutes that tackles tribalism as seen through the eyes of a young girl. This film was largely inspired by the post-election violence, with the working title depicting one of the worst affected regions in Kenya. From the same independent filmmaker is the documentary *Give Me Back My Home*, her journey back to back to Burnt Forest after 19 years where her home had been burnt during the 1992 tribal clashes as Kenya was ushering in Multi-partism. *Gun To Tape*, also nominated for best documentary in the 2012 AMAA film festival, is a 30-minute documentary on 800 meters world record holder David Rudisha and Edna Kiplagat's preparations for the 2012 Olympics. The film was produced by Jackie Lebo and directed by David Forbes.

*Yellow Fever* is another 2012 short animated film by Ng'endo Mukii that grapples with the issue of skin bleaching that is rampant with the black race, men and women alike. *Leo*, produced in 2012 and directed by Jinna Mutune, is a feature film about a little boy who believes he is a hero with supernatural abilities which land him to all manner of bullying and torture. He takes other people's problems and pays for it dearly, almost with his life. *Taharuki*, a Swahili word for suspense, is a drama inspired by real life events. The subject matter is the post-election violence experienced in many parts of Kenya, worst in the Rift Valley province. Written and directed by Ekwa Msangi-Omari and co-produced by Kia Barbee, it was shot in Brooklyn New York and released in February 2011 as a prequel to the larger project, "*Sweet Justice*", a full length feature film. Chris Kamau acts the callous child trafficker targeting children from different communities except his, with Miriam Chemmoss acting as Waridi, a passionate woman trying to stop the violence and redeem the ugly incidents by acting as an undercover operative. Gilbert Owuor, playing Kevin Mushana, is a journalist with a mission to unearth the truth and plunges head-first deeper into the turbulent and murky waters of politics than he can swim.

### **The Taboo Subjects: Sex, Aids, Drugs**

*Unseen, Unsung; UNFORGOTTEN* is an Apt Music and Ombogo6 Ltd Production movie that wrestles with the questions of HIV/AIDS, taboos and interracial relationships in a conservative society. Internal struggles with sexuality and love whose impediment is the deadly HIV/AIDS on the part of the white man and the innocent and dare devil love smitten African girl who only sees a passport to good life oblivious of the danger she is flirting with. A 2-hour long feature film, it is about people suffering from HIV/AIDS and how the scourge affects them, their families and friends; in an attempt to show people that HIV is a disease and not a judgment on those who have it -thus breaking the social stigma on those who suffer from this disease. This well scripted and superbly shot film seeks to help combat HIV/AIDS by offering support mechanisms through loving and treating victims with respect and not ridicule. *Mine Only* is a full length feature film produced by KIMC students in 2010. It tackles the controversial gay relationships in a supposedly religious society under the attack of western culture and lifestyles as represented by the postmodern youth gay couple against the strait-jacket old generation society and parents. It was disqualified from the Kalasha awards by a panel of judges who felt it veered towards inducing the youth to homosexuality. *Formula X* is a co-production between Light Media and Serengeti Studio. This medical drama revolves around the vagaries that a young, brilliant scientist with a secret chemical combination that cures a devastating disease, long sought after globally with huge financial fortunes at stake for whoever finds and patents the drug. Set in Nairobi, Kenya, it features Frank as the main character, Lisa his secretary, and a paid criminal named Juma sent to Frank's house by a long time business rival to snatch what is touted as the most expensive vaccine in the medical fraternity. Frank's wife, Cindy, returns home after her business flight is cancelled and finds the trio in the living room.

The confrontation and unfolding drama of betrayal and deceit is told in a fast paced narrative style that reveals the inner chaos of characters seeking love, money, fulfilment and vengeance in a modern, African society. It seems to be inspired by the HIV/AIDS wonder drug Pearl Omega, patented by Professor Arthur Obel that generated a lot of excitement, squabbles included, in the local and international scene. Written and directed by Steve Ominde who also did the screenplay and co-produced by Sagwa Chabeda, *Formula X* features a particularly notable debutant media and business tycoon Chris Kirubi. *Life in D-Major*, written and directed by Angelo Kinyua of BigIdeas takes a rather bizarre outlook of life after death. It is an animation film about a mortuary attendant who has a mental and psychological disorder. He has developed a strong friendship with the corpses, who come to life and interact with him the moment he steps into the mortuary. He develops feelings with a lady corpse and when she insists on leaving him (upon collection by the family for burial), he is depressed and goes into a drinking spree; consuming formalin and dying in the process. Among many other productions by BigIdeas include, *Her Moves His Thoughts*, *After Sour Before Sweet* and *Extracts of Me*. Directed by Donald Akechand produced by Foxhole Entertainment in 2008, *Nangos* is a 'sheng'(a Kenyan slang whose root lingua is Swahili fused with other Kenyan vernacular languages) movie done in Nairobi, Kenya. Made on a shoe string budget, the movie is about some youngsters in the slums who come up with a get rich quick idea involving mobile phones. In their idling corner where they spend the whole day gambling, one of them comes up to his colleague with the news that he has met a broker looking for coltan to be urgently delivered in bulk. Since it's the mineral used to make mobile phones and computers, the two come up with an idea to steal as many phones as possible, known as nangos in their local parlance. There is only one way to meet the needed volumes; though violent robbery in what is called 'ngeta'- arm locking the victim's neck to disable them. It's only when they turn to their mates' phones that they receive their wrath and end up losing the deal.

The two however set them up to the police and they fall out when the broker turns against them. The movie stars Lawrence Masiga, Musa Chacha, Kevin Wamwai, Joram Omollo, Kevin Murungaru, Joe Obonyo, among others. Another notable film in Kenya's scene is *Benta*. Produced in 2007, *Benta* (Janet Karina) grew up in a middle class family with a seemingly bright future until her parents perished in a road accident. At the time, she was only 15 and the middle born of three siblings, when her two brothers and she found themselves orphaned. The presence of the extended family during the funeral of her parents might have given this newly orphaned child a ray of hope, but there was none and matters were further compounded when relatives and auctioneers descended on what was formerly the family home and looted all they could lay their hands on. Like many other orphans, *Benta* and her two brothers, then get kicked out of their home by a ruthless landlord, headed for the slums. Now at 17 years, *Benta* is out of school, her older brother Jim (Melvin Alusa), is unable to get any gainful employment as he bears the stigma of being from the slums and her younger brother Robert (Mike Rewa) needs to complete his education if they are ever to escape the cycle of poverty. As it falls on her to provide for her siblings, she has three choices; to look for a husband, become a prostitute or get a job that has some decency to it. This is how she ends up at the Fulanis, as a domestic help. *The Knife Grinder's Tale* is based on the tragic short story by award winning Kenyan author, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, of a father's journey to understand why his son was pointlessly murdered in the slums of Nairobi. This 15-minutes film was directed by R.L. Hooker and filmed at Lake Magadi, Kenya. *Africa Is a Woman's Name* is a film by Ingrid Sinclair from Zimbabwe, Bridget Pickering from South Africa and Wanjiru Kinyanjui of Kenya. Produced in 2009, this 52-minutes documentary provides an opportunity for three of Africa's leading filmmakers to tell their own country stories through the lives of the powerful women working to create change by profiling three diverse women who eloquently demonstrate the power of women; Amai Rose, a Zimbabwean housewife and businesswoman, Phuti Ragophala, a dedicated school principal in one of South Africa poorest communities, and Njoki Ndung'u, a fervent human rights activist, feminist and currently Kenya's Supreme Court Judge.

*The Dance for Wives* (2009) by Paul Ekuru, is a love story of a photo-journalist named Sangoma Mkenya who falls in love with a fine beautiful lady, Nola Mapenzi. Sangoma's father (David Mulwa) is a wreckless, drunk and irresponsible man. The two court for a while and decide to tie the knot. When Sangoma takes her home for introduction just before their marriage, it emerges that Nola is his sister. How they handle their incestuous past is a huge challenge to handle and live with. Produced in 2011, *The Rugged Priest* is a biopic in memory of the slain vocal catholic priest named father Anthony Kaiser whose body was found dumped along Nakuru – Marigat road in central Rift Valley. His murder remains a mystery and any discussion on the matter remains a taboo topic. When violence breaks out in the heart of the Rift Valley, Kenya, the American Catholic priest goes out of his way to shelter and cater for the displaced; knowing very well that the clashes are politically instigated. This puts him on a collision path with the powers that be. For being a thorn in the flesh, he is transferred to a faraway diocese in Maasai Land, where he sees the poor, weak and defenseless being tormented by the moneyed. He does everything possible to counter the injustices at his own peril. Written and directed by Bob Nyanja, it stars Lwanda Jawar, Oliver Litondo, Serah Ndanu, among others.

*Naliaka Is Going*, produced by Albert Wandago and directed by Brutus Sirucha depicts typical Kenyan problems of poverty, early marriage, education and unemployment. *Naliaka's* journey begins in a village in western Kenya, where *Naliaka* (acted by Benta Ochieng), a 14 year old school girl drops out of school to work as a house help in the city so that she can provide for her poor parents and see her brother through college. A proactive *Naliaka* exploits her employers' absence to secretly learn typewriting. A bright light then shines for *Naliaka* as her employer's children also help her to polish her spoken and written English. Her employers, though perplexed, advise her to travel upcountry to inform her parents of the decision to change jobs. Her father, unimpressed by her idea of looking for a new job, decides to marry her off to a drinking mate against her wish and that of her brother. She eventually runs away from home and hikes a lift back to the city. She meets a corporate executive, Pik (Ken Ambani), who offers to pay for her accommodation. But when Pik makes some sexual advances, *Naliaka* withdraws. However, the story ends on a happy note when Pik secretly organizes for her to get a job in one of the firms he is associated with. Finally, in a dramatic turn of events, they fall in love. Other gender related productions by Albert Wandago are *Metamo*, a full length feature film and *Kenya Women Pioneers*, a documentary that highlights the achievements of Kenyan women. In the same token are *Keeping Safe*, *Peaceful Co-existence*, *Girl Child Song and Poetry*, *Kachinja*, *Feeding the Nation* and *Duogo*.

Produced and directed by Lupita Nyong'o, *In My Genes* is a 2009 documentary with a running time of 78 minutes on stigma borne by albinos. The movie attempts to elucidate salient questions like; how does one live as a 'white' person in a dominantly black society and what does one feel being the most visible person and, probably, one of the most ignored? These questions are rested upon Agnes, an albino woman in Kenya, who feels it daily. Ever since she was born, she has had to deal with the prejudices surrounding albinos. *In My Genes* bears witness to the lives of eight people who suffer discrimination due to a simple genetic anomaly. Released in 2011, *Soul Boy* is a 61- minute Swahili feature film about Abila, a 14 year-old who lives with his parents in Kibera, one of the largest slums in East Africa. One morning the teenager discovers his father ill and delirious, saying someone has stolen his soul. Abila is shocked and confused but wants to help his father and goes in search of the right remedy. Supported by his girlfriend Shiku, he embarks on an adventurous journey that leads him right to the heart of the microcosm that is his hometown. The film has won close to 14 Awards, local and international, in various categories. The film originated in a workshop for young film enthusiasts from Nairobi, guided by German director Tom Tykwer. Director Vibeke Muasya's 2012 comeback with the movie *Lost in Africa* received a lot of local and international attention, largely due to the wave of tourists' kidnapping and piracy in the East African coastline. The movie revolves around 11- year old soccer-loving Simon back in Kenya for holiday with his Danish mother. While playing by the poolside, he kicks the ball over the hotel fence and innocently goes for it. Children in their rounds come across the ball and take off with Simon giving a chase, only to emerge in the biggest slum in East Africa, Kibera. He is mugged and held for ransom. When his mother Susanne places a bounty on his head, Simon suddenly becomes the most sought after boy in the slum as all resources are marshaled to either get him or the bounty. *Shattered* tells the story of a woman, acted by Rita Dominic as KeziahNjema, whose disturbing childhood becomes a traumatic experience that leads to a depressed, self- destructive life she now struggles with despite living in a relatively well off family. *Simiyu Samurai* is a film about a young man who leaves Kenya for Japan to learn ancient martial arts. He later returns to Kenya after a devastating earthquake and causes mayhem in the village upon rogue villagers with his martial arts skills.

## Conclusion

There exist many movies produced in vernacular and foreign languages that have captured minimum or no attention in the Kenyan scene, making it difficult to come up with accurate data. It is worth noting that these vernacular movies have a significant audience that is dedicated to consume the productions, piracy notwithstanding. More often, the production skills and techniques are of substandard quality; from scripting, shooting to editing. From the volumes and figures got in **Riverwood**, it can be inferred that vernacular movies thrive largely on sound concepts and ideas of the stories as well as elaborate distribution channels that the mainstream moviemakers have been unable to perfect. In an interview by World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) uploaded on YouTube on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2010, Wanjiru Kinyanjui, a veteran female filmmaker and lecturer at Multi Media University, Nairobi, concurs that Riverwood- the downtown filmmakers industry- is doing well due to the relevance of the storylines that the target audience identifies with, especially with the stand-up comedies and music videos. In an attempt to exhaustively capture Kenya's entire film terrain, there was need to limit the scope. Jitu Films production, for instance, has numerous short films mostly in vernacular that are difficult to categorise in genre and analyse due to language barriers. It will only be in order then, in furthering a healthy intellectual discourse in future, to acknowledge the existence of such productions and outfits.

While some movies were partially shot in Kenya, the bulk of the storyline and location done abroad, others were entirely shot abroad and inferred to be located in Kenya. An example is *The Man Eaters of Tsavo* that had a historical Kenyan content and context but entirely done in South Africa. *Tomb Raiders*, a Hollywood blockbuster starring Angelina Jolie as Lara Croft was partly shot in Kenya; the Kenya National Archives to be specific. The entry of schools film festival alongside the drama and music festivals has injected the much needed jab to the ailing film industry. In an exclusive interview at the close of a 5- day film training workshop in Lamu in February 1<sup>st</sup> 2013, interesting observations were made. Mr. Edwin Nyutho, a well-respected lecturer, thespian, screen actor and adjudicator in schools drama festivals noted that at the film category debut, the production and interest levels among the participating schools and audience respectively were so high that the category threatens to overshadow all other categories. Indeed, all screening halls enjoyed full house patronage from opening to closing dates. A film titled *Timby* by Elimu Academy was particularly riveting with a timely theme and masterful delivery. It tells the story of a family that lives with past wounds and has to confess as the clock ticks away. The truth comes out when the clock strikes 2013; coinciding with the year Kenya holds its national elections that are always mired in all manner of sleaze and scandals.

Perhaps this development will provide the much needed impetus to set Kenya's film industry on the right orbit in the global galaxy of filmmaking. The court's ruling on April 17<sup>th</sup> 2013 to overturn the disqualification of Butere Girls' play 'Shackles of Doom' on grounds that it propagated tribal prejudice with the use of Kikuyu names, idioms and locations with a storyline depicting allocation of resources and government jobs to the Kikuyu is phenomenal. Not surprising, the chief adjudicator who effected the ban in the Western provincial festival was a Kikuyu; a pointer that the performing arts are still stifled from within. This perhaps marks the genesis for filmmakers to bring to the canvas the past historical happenings and injustices that are deemed anathema, in tandem with the constitution of Kenya that espouses freedom of speech, expression, and association.

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