

**INTERROGATING THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF ARTIVISM IN THE  
KENYAN SOCIETY THROUGH *THE XYZ SHOW***


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## DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university.


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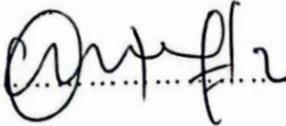
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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the best people in my life: my support system and source of inspiration, my best friend and cheer leader, Sam; my three lovely sons: Glen, Lamech and David; my lovely parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Kimenye. Your prayers and encouragement have brought me this far. This one is for you.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the inter-section between art and politics as exemplified in Godfrey Mwampemba's *The XYZ Show*- a satirical puppet show broadcast online and on Kenyan Television from 2009 up to 2021. Data obtained by watching purposively sampled disparate episodes of the show was interrogated to address the objectives of the study. Textual analysis of these episodes provided primary data, while secondary data was obtained through document analysis of related literature. The data was gathered using structured observation check lists; organised and structured using thematic content analysis. From the analysis thematic strands that addressed the nature of activism in the show, the moral function of activism in the show and the socio-political worldview of activism in Kenya were identified. This study was limited to *The XYZ show* that has its videos on Buni Media's YouTube channel. The show was read as a popular art guided by four of Grace Musila's models of reading African popular culture namely: Politics/ Power/ Agency; Bodies/ Affects; Public Pedagogies/ Techniques of Self; and Audience/ Addressivities. The study proved that *The XYZ show* as a work of art, draws a lot from popular culture and uses wit, irony, and mockery to address crucial political concerns in the contemporary Kenyan society thus offers socio-political critique. It also determined that activism in *The XYZ Show*, speaks truth to power through various strategies; thus, has liberative function. Activism, as a modern strategy for non-violent yet very persuasive activism has attracted the interest of scholars, but the nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show* has not been adequately interrogated in scholarship, hence the need for this study. This study therefore generates new knowledge on the subject of digital activism and specifically on the genre of animated latex puppetry as a political tool in Kenya.



## DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

<b>Activist:</b>	A person who agitates for political / social change through public campaign/ protest campaigning
<b>Activist art:</b>	Works of art that exhibit political activism.
<b>Artivism:</b>	The use of art for political activism.
<b>Artist:</b>	Artists who create/ produce activist art.
<b>Cartoon:</b>	Drawing in newspaper animated images on TV or video intended to be comical.
<b>Humour:</b>	Will be used synonymously with comedy.
<b>Hybrid:</b>	Containing a combination of features/ characteristics.
<b>Latex puppet:</b>	Movable model of a person made out of foam latex/ rubber.
<b>Political activism:</b>	Agitation for political change.
<b>Satire:</b>	Use of humour, irony, exaggeration to ridicule leaders.
<b>Text:</b>	Used synonymously with the <i>XYZ Show</i> .

## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CDF	-	Constituency Development Fund
CGH	-	Chief of Golden Heart
CID	-	Criminal Investigative Department
CORD	-	Coalition for Reforms and Democracy
CRE	-	Christian Religious Education
CSOs	-	Civil Societies Organisation
EACC	-	Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission
EGH	-	Elder of Golden Heart
ICC	-	International Criminal Court
IPO	-	Initial Public Offering
JIAM	-	Jesus Is Alive Ministry
KACC	-	Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission
KDF	-	Kenya Defence Forces
KPH	-	Kilometres Per Hour
KRA	-	Kenya Revenue Authority
MPs	-	Members of Parliament
NACOSTI	-	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
NARC	-	National Rainbow Coalition
ODM	-	Orange Democratic Movement
PEV	-	Post Election Violence
PHD	-	Doctor of Philosophy
PNU	-	Party of National Unity
SRC	-	Salaries and Remuneration Commission

- TA - Textual Analysis
- TV - Television
- UN - United Nations
- VAT - Value Added Tax

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction to the Study

*The XYZ Show* premiered on Citizen TV on 17th May 2009, after two years of struggle to be accepted by TV stations that dismissed it as too political and controversial. The show, influenced by -French Les Guignols de l'info – a satirical puppet show broadcast on the French television channel, makes use of latex puppet technology to create the popular political satire. It is a creation of Godfrey Mwampemba, a renown Kenyan newspaper cartoon columnist, that features puppet characters of well-known political figures in Kenya. Up to date, the show has well over 200 episodes distributed across 14 seasons. According to Buni Media, the show is Africa's first ever animated puppet political satire.

*The XYZ Show* is a popular art production that involves scriptwriters Loi Awat, Titus Maina and Edward Khaemba; animators, puppeteers and voice actors. It is directed by King Muriuki and Abdi Shuria and produced at The Go Down Arts Centre by Buni Media who are also its official distributors. The executive producer is Marie Lora Mungai and Godfrey Mwampemba (Bunimedia).

In an article written by the show's writer, Loi Awat and director, King Muriuki for Nieman Lab, the latter points out that the show is a not-for-profit show funded by donors such as open society, the Hivos Foundation and Lambent Foundation. Muriuki adds that the show's main avenue for broadcast was television. This was strategic since TV by far attracts large audiences from different demographics. However, Muriuki admits that they experienced too much government interference and sometimes they also had problems of self-censorship from broadcasters who found their content too

touchy for many of their audience. The producers therefore found online distribution to be a very important avenue to reach the audience. Muriuki confesses that when they could not get one million viewership on TV, they turned to YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. According to Muriuki, the show has well over ten million views on YouTube and is also on Show Max (Awat and Muriuki). Switching to social media and digital platforms ensured that the show maintained an online presence even long after the episodes were aired.

In a discussion on the art puppets' immense potential as vehicles of artistic expression Enrico Bay posits that modernism created a fertile ground for the discovery of puppet theatre by artists and its recognition as a visual art in its own right (Kordjak 7). Indeed, as a work of art, the puppet was seen to draw a lot from popular culture. Kordjak discusses the puppet as an element of a comprehensively designed stage reality consisting of space, materials, form, movement, light, colours and sound (14). Furthermore, Kordjak points out that due to the wit, irony, and mockery in puppet theatre, it was considered to be a potentially perfect and relatively safe medium of socio-political critique (8). Similar to a children's game, puppet theatre was also seen to provide a convenient space for rejecting certain social tenets, order and established norms of behaviour (11).

On the same breath, in discussing the political dimension and significance of puppets, Dariusz Kosinski argues that the puppet's ability to act as a substitute for the unavailable body of a public personality through its material representation is one of the fundamental properties of a puppet (Kosinski 60). Thus, through puppetry, an image is transformed and used in such a way that it exposes and makes manifest precisely that which the satirist believes the public figure is trying to hide from public view (61). This

leads us to the functionality of puppets since by being reduced to puppets, the criticized person is stripped of power, degraded and belittled (64). This enables puppet producers to exploit all available means to enlighten the public on important aspects such as poor governance, exploitation, and injustice. According to one of the writers of *The XYZ Show*, Loi Awat, the intention of the show is to promote good governance and social justice in Kenya.

Therefore, the producers address serious issues in a comical way without using real people; but using puppets. Their decision to use puppet characters was intentional as it shields the people behind the puppets from attack by the leaders imitated. This is because it would seem trivial to get riled up about a caricature. The cast of *The XYZ Show* is based on real political leaders who are easily identifiable because the puppet characters are made of latex and latex is skin imitating. This gives the show an added layer of humour. (Awat and Muriuki). By reducing these leaders to puppets and displaying them on national television exposes their misdeeds and shortcomings to the public who watch this show. This study has in the chapters ahead determined how this puppet show has been used to reduce our public leaders to public ridicule.

Profound insights on puppetry can be derived in the 2015 Volkenburg Symposium on puppetry. The symposium constituted of a gathering of artists and academics as part of the Chicago International Puppet Theatre Festival. During the symposium, Ellan Van Volkenburg furthered a century-long quest to reframe puppetry as an autonomous art form with a general consensus that puppets are ‘useless’ but in ways that are creatively generative. In the conference, the puppet was discussed as a theatrical creature that exists only in the moment of performance in which the puppet enters ‘a third realm’ called ‘animation.’ There are varied types of puppets: glove puppets, rod puppets, string

puppets, shadow puppets, object theatre or table top puppets and foam/latex puppets (Cohen 258-259).

This thesis is particularly interested in the latex puppets category featured in *The XYZ Show*. According to Bartnikowski, latex is skin imitating therefore conjures up a successful illusion of life on stage giving puppets unexpected realistic gestures or a hint of bodily shape (Bartnikowski 74). In *The XYZ Show*, the latex puppet creators have given the animated puppet characters facial features, voice and mannerisms that make them easily identifiable by the Kenyan audience. This gives the Kenyan audience the privilege to laugh at their leaders who are the key characters in the show.

To achieve this, a lot of artistry is involved in the making of the latex puppets and the actual show. *The XYZ Show* puppeteer Edwin Machuka points out that the process of making a single latex puppet takes between three weeks and a month. The process begins with drawing the characters in 3D. These drawings are cartoon like to make them humorous. A clay mould of these drawings is then made and captured in a glass mould. Finally, details like hair, complexion and eye mechanism are added. A twenty-two-minute show takes a week to put together and the process includes: script writing and brainstorming sessions, pre-production workshops, voice recording, actual shoot, editing, animation and post sound works. (Nation)

*The XYZ Show* has attracted a number of scholars who have examined it from various angles. Rashelle Peck introduces the show as a Kenyan TV show that satirically scrutinizes controversies that surround contemporary political leaders and discusses how the representation of male politicians in *The XYZ Show* serves to attack the politicians' masculinity and in essence question their authority and aptitude (Peck 146).

Peck's discussion informs this study since such masculinities feature in the political decisions of the leaders which ultimately affect Kenya as a country.

In interrogating how *The XYZ Show* re-imagines the Kenyan post-colony, Remmy Barasa draws from Achille Mbebe's theory of the post-colony to describe the XYZ as a popular art form satirizing Kenyan politicians and the misdemeanours of other public figures that has taken over the internet (Barasa 15). In this respect, the puppets feature as effective conveyors of the vulgarity and banality of the post-colony that Mbebe eloquently discusses in his work. Additionally, Barasa asserts that this form of cartoon presents a narrative complete with setting, plot, characters, theme and dramatic style and is therefore worth scholarly focus (19). Barasa's views speak to activism advanced through political puppet comedy.

As illustrated above, activism is a thoroughly researched area. But this study, in reading *The XYZ Show* as a popular art production, interrogated the activist aesthetics therein. The study sought to establish the strategies used in the show, to joke about government and government officials and by extension speak truth to power. It also evaluated the social-political and moral function of the show in the Kenyan context. The study therefore engaged with textual analyses of *The XYZ Show* to determine whether the animated puppet show, a popular art production, performs political activism thus the reference to activism. In the study, artistic activism and activism is used synonymously to refer to non-violent political activism through art.

This introductory section has engaged with fundamental conceptual issues as illustrated above. In the subsequent section, I focus on the background to the study. Thereafter, I outline the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, justification of the study and scope and delimitation of the study.



## 1.2 Background to the study

Right from independence, successive governments in Kenya have not been receptive to civil Society organisations' activities especially those that question the excesses of the government and its ruling elite. The CSOs have had to endure a hostile operating environment in Kenya with the government striving to 'legally' restrict their activism in the country. (Kebaya 3). Artivism – a neologism from art and activism- emerged as a creative and innovative strategy to circumvent this shrinking freedom of political expression as well as to fight for civic space (Yaninke and Hollander 10).

Artivism has been defined variously by different scholars. To begin with, Jose Mesias defines artivism as a neologism from art and activism and argues that artivism is the work of artists who are committed to creative processes of an activist nature but not activists who resort to art as a form of vindication. Further, Mesias asserts that the outcome of artivism is social sensitization towards collectively shared problems and its artistic strategies influence politics (Mesias 20). This definition applies to this study that seeks to establish the intersection between art and politics through *The XYZ Show*.

In discussing artivism in Tunisia, Korpe Tilia states that artivism is “a wide term that stretches from a strategic communication tool and protest, to aesthetic expressions with political under or overtones, commonly inviting the by-passers to see, hear, feel, interpret and be affected” (Korpe 5). In this study, *The XYZ Show* has been discussed as a political satire that employs artistic strategies to communicate political messages. These artistic strategies are discussed in chapter two of this thesis. Further, Artivism as social resistance and the liberative power of artivism in *The XYZ Show*, all that align with Korpe's definition of artivism as a protest tool are discussed in chapter four.

Additionally, Vico Alandro, Dimitrina Semora and Olga Bailey state that “artivism is a 21<sup>st</sup> century culture that is a hybrid form of art and is the current language of independence and freedom that makes use of creativity and artistic creation to arouse social engagement.” They further observe that while the drivers of direct political activism are political activists, artivism is the work of artists who in this thesis will be referred to as artivists. These artivists break the structure of conventional communication, erupting into social space to attract attention and inoculate thoughts in their recipients (Vico, Semora and Bailey 10,13). This thesis interrogates the nature and function of artivism in The XYZ Show with a view to determine how the artists behind this show utilise artivism to satirize the Kenyan state and express dissent against social, political and moral decadence.

For Mokuia Ombati, the Kenyan youth employ art as “weapons of challenging and finally breaking the chain of political elite patronage, hegemony and excesses” (Ombati 210). Moreover, Janer Barsey argues that art forms have historically accompanied movements for social change and have been agents in the production, resistance and re-existence of affectivities (Barsey 21). Similarly, according to Charles Kebaya, the central focus of artivism is the various ways art can be productively and creatively exploited in the fight against political injustices in society (Kebaya 3-4).

Kebaya goes on to postulate that popular art has been at the core of public discourse in Kenya, even during the time when freedom of speech, expression and assembly was stifled by state. This and many other popular arts that have sprung up, have pushed the boundaries, and (re)conceptualized, (re)framed and (re)configured public discourses in Kenyan society, collectively questioning the logic behind exploitation, oppression and other excesses in society. (Kebaya 6-7)

These varied definitions of activism give credence to this study that seeks to situate *The XYZ Show* into artistic and cultural popular productions that re-conceptualize the political over and undertones in Kenya.

Activism brings together diverse creations that take on different forms, be it verbal or visual signs, graffiti maps, installations or performances, all of which have social change as their political purpose (Mekjdian 1). Further, Yaninke and Hollander identify visual arts (that encompasses but not limited to graffiti, murals, photographs and paintings); performing arts (that include songs and / dance, performed poetry and performed theatre); and humour as various strategies for activism and cite various instances when these were effectively utilised for activism. They expose humour and public shaming as powerful tools for activism that foster solidarity and social protest and identify practical humour and satire to be the most common forms of humour used. At this point, they reiterate that the ancient Greeks used humour to mock elites and comment on political developments and that, in the medieval times, humour was used to challenge social hierarchies (Yanineke and Hollander 14,16,26)

Humour is therefore not a new phenomenon in artistic productions and this is the key device that *The XYZ Show* utilizes. Yaninke and Hollander go further to describe instances of the use of practical humour in the articulation of political concerns in Kenya. For example, they describe activists who carried 221 coffins in protest of the members of parliaments' push for state burial for themselves and their family members in January 2012. The MPs had proposed to award themselves millions as a send-off package to the chagrin of the citizens who took to the streets and torched the caskets (Yanineke and Hollander 26).

Kebaya and Ombati also cite another example of practical humour in their discussion of the scenario of the Mpigs whereby a group of activists together with CSOs in Kenya and members of the public on 14th May 2013 organized a successful protest dubbed 'Occupy Parliament.' In this protest, the participants ferried to parliament buildings a lorry full of pigs smeared in blood. The pigs symbolized the Kenyan parliamentarians. Through symbolism and what Kebaya refers to as "grotesque and vulgar aesthetics" (Kebaya 6), the Mpigs' display successfully communicated the activists' chief concerns about the politicians' gluttonous move to increase their salaries despite advice against this by the salaries and remuneration commission. Images of these two incidences had great presence on the internet and social media platforms under the hash tag #Mpigs thus were able to be consumed by a vast majority locally and internationally (Ombati 199).

This display that exposed the legislators to public ridicule was however met with brutality from police and parliament officials who used tear gas, batons and water cannons to disperse the nearly two hundred and fifty protestors. At least ten people were arrested (Aljazeera). This shows that practical humour as used in the Mpig scenario, though a form of activism, has chances of being injurious to those involved as witnessed in the arrests and physical retaliation by the police. The use of puppets for activism as in the case of *The XYZ Show*, shields the activists for there are no real persons to act on. Additionally, as discussed in the introduction, all the work is accomplished in the studio and set therefore the people behind the puppets are shielded.

Besides practical humour, satire, the form of humour that is the focus of this study, has been employed by Gado in *The XYZ Show* to speak out against decadence and corruption amongst the political elite. Satire is found in numerous media including but

not limited to satirical editorial cartoons in newspapers and satirical TV shows that highlight absurdities of politics and political leaders. The best examples of satirical texts in Kenya include Gado cartoons that features in *The Standard* newspaper; television programmes like the Redykyulass Show of the 2000s and *The XYZ Show* broadcast on Citizen, the Kenya Television Network (KTN), KISS TV and NTV. According to Boll Stiftung, South Africa's Trevor Noah comedy show, the political cartoons of Godfrey Mwampemba popularly known as Gado and internationally successful Nollywood films show that satire is alive and vibrant across the African continent (Boll-Stiftung 4).

To add weight to the argument on the political function of cartoons, Hammet posits that political cartoons are windows not only onto experience but are also windows to power and resistance. Political cartoons are used to undermine, unsettle and oppose excesses of power, consumption and authority (Hammet 8). As activist art, cartoons render visible the complexities of power and resistance (Hammet 7). This study determines the intricacies of power and resistance that are espoused in *The XYZ Show*.

The creators of *The XYZ Show* have utilized the art of puppetry and as Callus notes, they draw upon devices that historically appear within cartooning such as caricature, parody, allegory and humour (Callus). *The XYZ Show* is a parody, that deliberately use an animated latex puppet cast that are caricatures of prominent political leaders and other well-known personalities in the country to tell a variety of stories that are a representation of events that took place in the country at different moments. In all the sampled episodes from season one to twelve, the puppets are caricatures of prominent political leaders and other prominent figures in the country. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, there are various types of puppets but the makers of the XYZ puppets choose

latex because they aimed at creating ‘a world that is not the real world but lives right next door to it.’ (Awat and Muriuki)

Therefore, the use of latex -that is skin imitating- has enabled the re-production of analogous visual details of the personas imitated by these puppets. Though the puppets’ visual expression and design which includes facial features and body appearances, mannerisms, speech and character are exaggerated, they are not totally distorted to inhibit recognizability by viewers. This is also made possible by the names of these latex puppets’ cast as the writers refer to them, using either their real names or known nicknames or a corruption of their real names.

In this study, *The XYZ Show* production was read as a work of art guided by the hybrid definition of art by Stephen Davies who proposes that being broad, art be defined using a combination of the functionalism, proceduralist and historical perspectives. Davies considers “a work of art as being about something that embodies its meaning and art work as having a purpose of engaging the audience in an interpretation of the subject that the work of art is about” (Davies 9). Davies’ definition of art contributes to the understanding of activism which has been variously defined by different scholars. What is important, however, is that all the different approaches to definition point to the utilisation of artistic strategies for political motives.

The arguments of the aforementioned scholars in the introduction and background to this study are key as they help in contextualizing the study that aims at interrogating the nature and function of activism in Kenya’s puppet comedy- *The XYZ Show*. Additionally, they also form a basis for the literature reviewed in this study. This study that examines the intersection between art and politics in Kenya through *The XYZ Show*, will in the chapters that follow determine how this popular art production utilizes

artivism to communicate political messages that all point to social resistance to poor governance.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The practice of politics of every society have always intrigued creative artists who in turn have resorted to different media to express their contestations/reservations. This new media has offered alternative modes of expression of activism away from the streets but through art, referred to here as artivism. Thus, over time, artivism in Kenya has become an acceptable new form of non-violent political action and artivists, who choose from the repertoire of media to create artistic tools that have been used for political agenda. Satirical puppet comedy shows like *The XYZ Show* are such media that these artists have chosen to use to express their disgust to political practices in society.

Based on this, this study interrogated the nature and function of artivism in *The XYZ Show*, a political satire that fuses art and politics, entertainment and information, with a view to exposing issues of governance in Kenya. In so doing, the study sought to explain how this artivism speaks truth to power as well as how it re-creates the socio-political worldview of artivism in Kenya. Further, the study attempted to explain the liberative power of artivism in *The XYZ Show* as well as the paradox of satirizing the Kenyan state through the show.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

- (i) To examine the nature of artivism in the political jokes in *The XYZ Show*.
- (ii) To interrogate the function of artivism in *The XYZ Show*.
- (iii) To analyse the socio-political worldview of artivism in Kenya as portrayed in *The XYZ Show*.

## 1.5 Research Questions

The study answered the following questions:

- (i) What is the nature of activism in the political jokes of *The XYZ Show*?
- (ii) What is the moral function of activism in *The XYZ Show*?
- (iii) How does the nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show* impact on the socio-political worldview of activism in Kenya?

## 1.6 Research Assumptions

This study was guided by the assumptions that:

- (i) *The XYZ Show* is activist art thus manifests activist aesthetics.
- (ii) *The XYZ Show* performs political activism through humour.
- (iii) Activism in *The XYZ Show* affects the socio-political worldview of Kenyans.

## 1.7 Justification of the Study

Traditional art forms like drama, poetry and the narrative have, for generations, been utilized in articulating social, political and moral issues to the public. But with the advancement of technology, popular art forms that were initially overlooked in favour of the dominant artistic forms have since gained space for legitimate expression and transmission. As Kebaya in *Popular Art and Reconfiguration of Political Intolerance in Kenya* observes, creative artists use popular spaces to etch out political issues afflicting society (Kebaya 1). This study therefore examines *the XYZ Show* to determine the moral function of the show as it confronts the Kenyan state and leadership through humour.

According to Rashelle Peck, scholars have explored the meaning of influential Kenyan political satirical cartoons like Paul Kemba's *It's a Madd Madd* world; and *Gado*



cartoons. (Peck 22) *The XYZ show* being the first animated puppet satire in Kenya so far has attracted the attention of scholars and various in-depth studies on the show have since been published. However, the nature and function of activism in the show has not been addressed. This study therefore seeks to interrogate activist aesthetics of the show with the aim of answering the research questions.

In discussing *The XYZ Show* and how it re-imagines the Kenyan post-colony, Remmy Barasa points out that political cartoons with puppet characters present a refreshing narrative that is quite different from what traditional print media cartoons have contributed and suggests a study with a wider scope to authenticate the arguments that are advanced in *The XYZ Show* (Barasa 24). This study may not authenticate the arguments advanced in the show, but will interrogate these arguments with a view to establishing their political nature to ascertain if they exhibit activist ideals.

This study is therefore important as it generates knowledge about the nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show* - a text that has been read as a popular art production. Kopania opines that puppet shows have a longer life span than live actors thus puppet shows from several decades can be vivid and attractive to the present-day viewer precisely by reason of their visual aspect forms that can be perceived as stand-alone artworks (Kopania 24). Kopania adds that there has been little research by art historians on the extraordinary role of visual design in puppet theatre to recognize issues related to aesthetics and visual aspects of puppet theatre as a subject on its own. The in-depth analysis of the visual aspects of *The XYZ Show* is outside this study's scope. However, this study discusses art and aesthetics in *The XYZ Show* as well as the strategies used to joke about government and government leaders.

The study thus, offers relevant knowledge on the strategies utilized in *The XYZ Show* to satirize Kenyan politics and leaders. It also adds to the knowledge on the subject of puppet humour and activism as an alternative space for expressing political concerns in Kenya. Since the study is multidisciplinary, it forms a basis for future studies in popular art studies, cultural studies and digital activism.

### **1.8 Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

This study interrogates the nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show* a puppet comedy that first aired on the Citizen TV and later in KTN TV and NTV. The study focuses on purposively sampled disparate episodes of *The XYZ Show* season 1 to 14 available online on YouTube and on the official Buni Media Facebook page. These seasons are selected based on their context of production and thematic content. The study is limited to textual analysis and thematic content analysis of data collected. The data was collected by viewing audio visual content. Therefore, audience research was not utilised as a method. Disparate episodes of *The XYZ Show* were independently and closely read, guided by structured observation checklist and the objective was to identify themes that are analysed to deduce patterns useful in answering the research questions. The study focused on the video texts as a complete work of art with complete meaning and not its genre or process of production.

### **1.9 Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework**

#### **1.9.1 Introduction**

This section gives the review of literature related to this research and the theoretical framework for this study. It highlights the gaps identified in the existing literature reviewed and demonstrates how the current study intends to fill these gaps. The review

focuses on the history of activism, the nature and function of activism, the summary of gaps identified from the reviewed literature and theoretical framework.

### **1.9.2 History of Artivism**

Yaninke and Hollander mention that throughout ages, people have joined forces to protect public interests and make the world fairer, free and equal. Such visions to create an egalitarian world have been pursued via various mechanisms but with various results. In some cases, efforts to create a better world have attracted stringent measures and tactics from governing powers. Despite this, activists circumvent such restrictions by employing creative arsenals to achieve their purpose. In its annual state of civil society report, CIVICUS, *The World Alliance for Citizen Participation* noted that civic space in over 100 countries in the world was shrinking and identified that this was caused by restrictions that came in the forms of ban of public demonstrations, smear campaigns, verbal attacks; detention, disappearance and assassination of activists; restriction of online freedom of expression and access to information (Yaninke and Hollander 14).

To circumvent these restrictions, Yaninke and Hollander note that artists have joined the CSOs to come up with creative and innovative mechanisms to fight for civic rights. This has seen the emergence of artivism. They further add that even when freedom of expression is neither limited nor under direct threat, people still use art as an additional tool in their repertoire of available action thereby expanding their audience scope and space.

Jose Maria Mesias posits that artivism as an artistic process date back to the 1960s but attained its peak worldwide in the 80s and was largely influenced by the success of performance of feminism and queer theory that demanded more efficient

communication strategies within the field of contemporary art. During this era, activists used photographic exhibitions of photo montage and collage to criticize gender stereotypes about employment of women (Mesias 21).

In the same vein, Barsey argues that art forms have historically accompanied movements for social change and cites the Western European perspective of the 1989 fall of communism which collapsed the collectivist vision of society as having been accompanied by the 1990's resurgence of performance, participatory forms and the social immersion of the arts (Barsey 21). This assertion confirms the political function of art in its diversity that is discussed in detail in section 2.4 of this thesis.

Furthermore, while speaking in an East Asian Leadership Camp about activism and creativity in Vietnam, South East Asia, Hong Huang observes that the use of art in activism is less confrontational. Activism therefore is an alternative to the direct activism that most often than not leads to forceful retaliation from the party being criticized or opposed. In most parts of Africa, activism is the choice to evade consequences of direct action like police brutality, killings and arrests for people living under repressive governments. Mohammed El Hachimi discusses the case of Morocco whose youth changed tact to counter the government's harsh reaction to the February 20 Movement (20FM) demonstrations against what they deemed despotism, corruption and social inequality (Hachimi 1).

Hachimi describes how the youth protestors in Morocco were met with excessive force by the police whereby several were arrested and others killed following the 20th February 2011 protests, the date from which the movement 20FM draws its name. Four years later, the youth changed their strategy to adapt to the regime. The 20FM youth movement resorted to using short films, plays and podcasts on social media to pressure

the government and have a say in decision making. Mohammed Tsouli, a humourist in Morocco, launched a famous podcast 'Tsoulime' that broadcasted dozens of videos on YouTube and this revived enthusiasm for political debate and calls for freedom of speech and release of political prisoners. The success of this podcast lay in the ability to mix sarcasm and politics (Hachimi 1-6).

Hachimi writes that to a great extent, Mohammed Tsouli influenced other young people including Mehdi Bousaid who organized dozens of cultural events in Moroccan cities. Mehdi, in justifying his choice of medium, argues that culture is the cornerstone of raising youth awareness and, for that reason, it is hated by politicians who prefer and encourage ignorance in order to protect their interests. Interestingly, this was used to mobilize public opinion and exert pressure on different levels of decision making. For example, in 2013 when a Spanish paedophile was granted royal pardon, youth activists used podcasts and different forms of social media to mobilize Moroccans against the King's decision and this saw the King withdraw the royal pardon (Hachimi 7).

Zakariae Bouhmala writes about activism in Morocco. In interrogating the Moroccan comedy show *The School of The Naughty* opines that satire is one way through which societies can expose flaws in their leaders and their societies. The show that airs on Moroccan channel Le360 criticizes the government of Morocco after the protests of 2011 earlier discussed. In this cartoon show, like many others, humour is a key strategy and the writer asserts that the show itself is proof of the democratic progress in Morocco and as Bouhmala puts it, "to be able to laugh at oneself is a healthy sign of democracy." Bouhmala adds that the animated characters mirror the animated rhetoric of the political class as well as their performances and the audience play an active role in textual interpretation (Bouhmala 61-62). In its discussion of *The XYZ Show* puppet comedy,

this thesis builds on Bouhmala's argument to establish the nature and function of activism.

Closer home in East Africa, activism is not a new phenomenon and has been utilized on various occasions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For instance, Yaninke and Hollander highlight the use of practical humour in activism in the case of Uganda when citizens let loose on the streets of Kampala, piglets painted the colours of the ruling political party, with some wearing hats to mimic their president Yoweri Museveni (Yanineke and Hollander 26). Though this spectacle elicited laughter, the activists' point was passed as they raised attention to the issue of massive unemployment of the youth in Uganda.

In Kenya, activism is at the core of popular art through which activists communicate their social, political, economic and moral concerns. In discussing how the Kenyan comedy reconfigures police atrocities in Kenya, Kebaya examines how Kenyan artists have in their various popular art forms that include music, comedy, jokes, comics and cartoons have in rather "unconventional but innovative and creative ways reconfigured police brutality in Kenya" (Kebaya 4). Key among these is *The Redykyulass Comedy* show that was broadcast on the Kenyan screens in the early 2000s, a political satire that 'foregrounds the excesses of the state during the 14-year reign of President Moi (Kebaya (a)4, 14-15).

Unlike the *Redykyulass Show* that made use of direct impersonation, *The XYZ Show* that came years later in May 2009 uses latex puppets to represent known political personalities in Kenya. Remmy Barasa describes *The XYZ* cartoons as a popular art form; a novel sort of joke cartoon in motion pictures satirizing Kenyan politicians and misdemeanours of other public figures that has taken over the internet. In examining how the show re-imagines the Kenya post-colony, Barasa notes that the latex characters

have updated newspaper cartoons by bringing context closer to the audience (Barasa 19). This immediacy in communicating to the audience informs the selection of the latex puppets as the focus for this study as opposed to editorial cartoons that, as discussed earlier in the background to this study, have received fair attention from scholars. Moreover, this study builds on the knowledge advanced by Barasa but deviates in perspective as it interrogates the nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show*.

Employing insights from such studies, this thesis focuses on *The XYZ Show* to determine the nature and function of activism in the political satire text.

### **1.9.3 Nature of Activism**

This section reviews literature related to the study of nature of activism with a view to locating *The XYZ Show* as an activist medium, thus guide in interrogating its nature. Nature in this study refers to the facets or characteristics of activism key among them the provocative nature and hybridity that characterize activism.

In the textual analyses of *The XYZ Show*, this thesis underscores the existent disparities between activism/ activist art and political art. In a study of activism in The Czech Republic, Kristen Fontaine states that activism is provocative in nature and this is what distinguishes it from political art. Fontaine argues that activist art (activism) sparks discussion surrounding specific issues and attempts to incite change while political art merely comments on a situation (Fontaine 12,15,18). On the same issue, Kebaya reiterates that the art forms have a close-knit relationship to politics but do not expressly have political aims in their representations but still creative artists use popular spaces for artistic expression and institutional critique of various issues such as poor governance among others (Kebaya (c) 1).

The interest to interrogate *The XYZ Show* is sparked by the fact that the show is Africa's first ever puppet satire that draws its content from the Kenyan political sphere and stands out as activist art. As opposed to political art that merely comment on political situations, *The XYZ Show* creatively re-creates and re-presents various political situations in the country thus giving space for critique of various political issues like poor governance, abuse of power and corruption.

Another feature of activism is hybridity as discussed in Mateos and Sedeno. Hybridity occurs as a result of the fusion/ crossbreeding of the political and the artistic and the mixing of forms of discourse or combination of techniques. With all this, activist art operates under the unifying umbrella of the political purpose of art, therefore the hybridity of activist art works without affecting the activist (Mateos and Sedeno 53). This hybridity discussed by Mateos and Sedeno operates in *The XYZ Show*. Since this has not been explored by earlier scholars of the show, this study seeks to identify and explain the various artistic techniques used in the creation of the puppet comedy. The strategies for its production for example puppet art and caricature in the creation of the latex puppets; humour and satire to joke about government and its senior officials thus exposing them to public ridicule; analogy and stereotyping to contextualize the show to the Kenyan political scene, among others. Technology has also been used in the creation and animation of the latex puppets.

On their part, Vico Semova-Jivkova and Bailey posit that activism draws from both the practice of art which gives it its aesthetics and direct political action — a catalyst that drives condemnation of and confrontation of injustice, inequality and emptiness in human development (Vico, Semova-Jivkova and Bailey 12). Further, they point out that activism is the current language of independence and freedom and that the language of



artivism disregards fixed cultural rules and is multiple and generative as it aims at serving socio-political functions. They demonstrate that artists break conventions of art and this has seen the emergence and inclusion of new forms of artistic expressions in their repertoire. As such, artists generate events because they break the structure of conventional communication erupting into social space to attract attention and inoculate thought in their recipients. This they do through “emotionalization, subjectivization and the capture and invasion of spaces” (Vico, Semova-Jivkova and Bailey 12, 13). Arguably, this justifies the emergence of varied popular art forms that artists utilise to propel artivism including but not limited to cartoons and latex puppets.

*The XYZ show* that uses animated latex puppets are a classic example of this repertoire of devices utilised for artivism thus appropriate for this study. As mentioned earlier, several studies have been conducted on *The XYZ Show* but none has explored the artist aesthetic of the show. This study seeks to fill that gap by interrogating the artist aesthetic of the show and explaining how these aid in the communication of the writers’ artist ideas.

Additionally, John Jordan observes that artivism is not a movement but more of an attitude and a practice that exists on the fertile edges between art and activism. As such, it is the opposite of lobbying or protest marches but still an irresistible form of protest (Jordan 1). Similarly, Sarah Mekjdian defines artivism as an artistic process of an activist nature that aims at social transformation in the face of a problem that affects people (Mekjdian 1). It can therefore be argued that artivism by nature is a work of art used by artists as a tool for social and political transformation. This study interrogated the function of artivism in *The XYZ Show* with a view to establish the activist/ political nature and function of the show.

#### **1.9.4 Function of Artivism**

Function, in this study, implies the purpose of artivism or, in other words, what artivism is used for. Mateos and Sedeno posit that the working tool for artivism is social action with its final purpose being to create cognitive and emotional basis for another chain of action and that artivism reaches its peak when it shakes the foundations of a particular symbolic order. Further, in their discussion of video artivism, they postulate that video artivism provides visibility for social representations capable of creating climates in which people are motivated to take part in shared transformation processes and that these practices, by definition, imply changes that “subvert political order: rules, hierarchies and categorizations, an idea linked to the idea of “the distribution of the sensible”” by philosopher Jacques Rancier (Mateos and Sedeno 52-53).

The impact of *The XYZ Show* on Kenya’s symbolic order may not be determined by this study; but Mateos and Sedeno’s argument was significant to my thesis as it enabled the interrogation of activist content in *The XYZ Show*. It also helped in formulating views premised on video artivism in relation to the represented socio-political in *The XYZ Show*.

In discussing the historical use of humorous activism, Marty Branagan points out that “humour has long been used to weaken the power of oppressors and empower resistance” Further, he observes that humour allows for the release of emotions such as rage and frustration for the activist while at the same time providing positive and enjoyable experiences for the audience. Consequently, Branagan asserts, art forms such as satire and cartoons convey a complex argument in a popular and easily digestible way affirming the functionality of these art forms (Branagan 470).

This study adopts Branagan's argument which informs sections of this study that discuss how humour in *The XYZ Show* has been utilized by the activist performer to incite the audience to notice excesses of the leaders. Additionally, Branagan's argument informs sections of this study that discuss how *The XYZ show* satirizes the Kenyan state as well as how activism has been used as a form of civil resistance.

Barasa points out that humour and popular culture often function as a mirror through which the world and its political landscape become envisaged; that satire in political discourse is used to deconstruct the political class together with its policies, institutions and authority, as it makes a statement about society and its debilitating power structure (Barasa 19). This assertion by Barasa informs this study in sections that interrogate how *The XYZ Show* employs humour to expose to society serious social and political ills like corruption, misuse of power, tribalism and negative ethnicity; and inequities committed by senior political leaders.

According to an independent researcher quoted on Buni Media official web page, "one of *The XYZ show's* clearest achievements has been to bring down Kenyan politicians from their cultural pedestals as "elders" and turn them into recipients of legitimate criticism." The idea of elders is enshrined in state honours such as Elder of the Golden Heart (EGH), Chief of the Golden Heart (CGH). These are the highest state honours awarded to those who have won political seats such as Member of Parliament and cabinet minister (EGH) or president (CGH). Through satirical TV shows, fellows with state honours are subjected to ridicule and their follies exposed. In this study, Barasa's claim guides the discussion on how humour in *The XYZ Show* has been used to confront and satirize state and political leadership.

As an activist work, *The XYZ Show* relies heavily on humour not only to castigate the political class but also incite the citizenry to raise questions about its leaders. In explaining how *The XYZ Show* re-imagines the Kenyan post-colony, Barasa concludes that humour offers an opportunity to reflect on important issues as it involves an interaction between the performer and the consumer; that use of latex characters in *The XYZ Show* is a humorous device that involves manipulation of language by a cast of extra-ordinary creations therefore places the viewer to accept amusement and enjoy it (Barasa 22). This argument by Barasa is instrumental to this study that engages in textual analyses of *The XYZ Show*. The researcher in this study is the audience/consumer of the content of the show and their interpretation of the content is key in this study.

Barasa goes further to highlight the significance of cartoons in communication. He argues that there is evidence that cartoons can prick the conscience of even the most hardened politician and cites the scenario in Kenya when President Uhuru Kenyatta and his Deputy William Ruto made public statements that “newspapers were for wrapping meat” in reaction to newspaper editorial cartoons castigating them. Barasa concludes with the claim that a cartoon can speak for ordinary citizens and tries as best as it can to suggest a point of view that might spark debate on a contemporary issue. On the contrary, he observes that despite the popularity of the political latex characters, the degree and nature of this type of satire’s influence is yet to be studied (Barasa 23,20).

Although this study does not focus on the popularity or degree/ impact of activism in *The XYZ Show*, Barasa’s assertion informs the basis for the choice of this study that seeks to develop new knowledge on the socio-political worldview of activism in Kenya. The study attempts to explain the liberative power of activism in *The XYZ Show* as well as the paradox of satirizing the Kenyan state through the show.

### **1.9.5 Summary of Gaps Identified**

From the review of related literature, a number of gaps have been identified for this study. Branagan notes, that art forms such as satire and cartoons convey a complex argument in a popular and easily digestible way affirming the functionality of these art forms. Based on this, this study interrogated *The XYZ Show* to determine the functionality of humour and satirical puppets in activism.

Barasa notes that despite the popularity of the political latex characters, the nature of this type of satire's influence is yet to be studied. This study examined *The XYZ Show* to determine the political/ activist nature of the show that qualifies it as activist art.

Further, Barasa posits that cartoons can speak for ordinary citizens and suggest a point of view that might spark debate on contemporary issues. This study interrogated *The XYZ Show* to determine the functionalism of activism as civil resistance and the liberative power of activism.

### **1.9.6 Theoretical Framework**

This study was grounded on Grace Musila's model of reading African popular culture that she discusses in 'Thirteen ways of reading African Popular Culture.' Musila's perspective, she says, was inspired by a popular children's game cha'mawe that showcases the principals of creativity, play, pleasure, learning and sociality all of which she discusses as key co-ordinates of African popular imaginaries. Borrowing from cha'mawe, Musila proposes thirteen strands useful in the reading of African popular cultural imaginaries as a way of framing the primary co-ordinates that have been foundational in the field and also signals the many combinations possible with the thirteen nodes (Musila 2).

In the same breath, Musila opines that cultural productions are major sites of meaning making thus influential in shaping people's thoughts, values and aspirations. This is because popular cultural formations convene valuable platforms for working through questions of everyday life. She further advises that the entry point in making sense of African popular imaginaries is to ask ourselves what these imaginaries enable (Musila 1). To address the objectives of this study, *The XYZ Show* was read as a popular art with a view to corroborate the artistic aesthetics that make the show politically textured. The following four nodes guided the reading of *The XYZ Show*.

### **I. Politics/ Power/ Agency.**

To begin with, Musila points out that despite anxieties about the forms of agency made possible by popular forms in Africa, their engagement with political questions is beyond question. She adds that popular cultural forms convene communities of dialogue around issues with which they grapple and that this sense of community is livelier on social media and online texts; and because the terrain of popular culture is less policed, it enjoys a scope for constant innovation, experimentation, boundary pushing and contestation of taken-for-granted protocols and social values. (Musila 10). This guided this study that sought to interrogate the nature of activism in *The XYZ Show*. In so doing, the question on whether *The XYZ Show* text utilized artistic strategies for political intent was addressed.

Secondly, Musila opines that the political dimension of popular genres demands contextualized reading to be legible. Therefore, context-sensitive reading of popular art in order to tease out the relationship between the popular art, the historical context, audiences and shift in technological possibilities is proposed (Musila 11). Guided by this tenet, *The XYZ Show* was read and interpreted with close consideration of the socio-

political context of its production. As such, the period of production and the socio-political climate at the time of production of the episodes guided the interpretation of the content.

## **II. Bodies/ Affects**

On this Musila states that most African popular cultural imaginaries are defined by their capacity to generate, sustain or diffuse particular affects all of which have material affect. She adds that audio visual forms are examples of nodes that depend on affect as a currency of exchange circulated through cultural forms and popular genres (Musila 3). These exchanges are anchored in what (Karppi 5) theorise as affective capitalism in reference to the intersection between emotions, value production and everyday life. Musila's argument in this model informed this study that sought to determine the affective power of activism in the *XYZ Show*. This model was key in answering the second and third research questions of this study.

## **III. Public Pedagogies/ Techniques of Self**

Here Musila underscores the edutainment value of performance arts. She observes that edutainment cultures and especially advice genres marshal behaviour change in response to various issues like public health and civic education campaigns. These socialize audiences into curricula of self-management aligned with social conventions by prescribing appropriate norms of conduct (Musila 7). Angela Philips qtd. in (Musila 7) suggests that the porousness of advice genres makes them instrumental in challenging norms; because by listening to what has been 'unsayable' and producing these forbidden discourses bring the 'unsayable' to the realm of 'normal' and 'sayable.' This model guides in the interpretation of the moral power of activism in *The XYZ Show*

and to answer the question whether the show challenges socio-political vices in the country.

Musila also discusses James Yeku's theorization of performative citizenship in reference to the use of digital content to enact political subjectivities that reject, counter and unmask the pretensions of government institutions (Musila 11). This theorization of practices of performative citizenship was key in understanding the socio-political worldview of activism in Kenya as advanced in *The XYZ Show*. Though *The XYZ Show* may not be said to be prescriptive, it advances discourse that aids in self-recognition as it highlights some social and moral dilemmas with a view of challenging them. Therefore, Musila's model of Public Pedagogies guided the reading of *The XYZ Show* to determine the moral lessons drawn from it, thus demonstrating how the show exploits humour for pedagogical purposes.

#### **IV. Audiences / Publics / Addressivities.**

On this, Musila addresses the issue of accessibility of popular arts that has been greatly enabled by digital media. She argues that even publics denied access to newly published content eventually gain access when these material finds its way to open access platforms via semi-legal channels. Online platforms like You tube make it possible for audiences to explore content posted even before their birth (Musila 16). As discussed in the introduction of this work, *The XYZ Show* was broadcast on digital platforms; thus, Musila's proposition was key in theorizing *The XYZ Show* as our target popular art production.



## **1.10 Research Methodology**

### **1.10.1 Introduction**

This section discusses the research methodology used in the study. The sub-sections include the research design, sampling procedure and sample size; data collection methods and tools of data collection; data analysis and presentation; and ethical considerations adhered to in the study.

### **1.10.2 Research Design**

The study adopted a qualitative approach to interpret and explain political activism in *The XYZ Show* text. This was underpinned in (Creswell and Creswell 43) who propose that qualitative research is the best approach in studies involving text and image analysis and those handling audio-visual data such as is the case with this study that involves the analysis of *The XYZ Show* videos. Additionally, (Kothari 31) explains that descriptive research applies best where the researcher needs to give a description of state of affairs as it exists at present. This guided this study that sought to give a description of nature and function of activism as identified from the viewed episodes of *The XYZ Show*.

In this study, the researcher gathered information by physically viewing the sampled *XYZ Show* clips as aired in the sampled episodes. While watching these episodes, a structured observation checklist was used to collect data from the samples. The data was used to develop an in-depth analysis of the samples in line with (Creswell and Creswell 56-57).

### 1.10.3 Target Population

The target population for this study was full episodes of *The XYZ Show* aired between season 1 to season 12 that were available on YouTube.

### 1.10.4 Sample Size

The population for this study (n) is 173 episodes aired from season 1 to 12 of *The XYZ Show* series. The sampling frame consisted of the 173 episodes since the population was finite. A sample of 30 disparate episodes was selected guided by (Bass 210) who recommend small samples (30 or below) for qualitative research. This is because qualitative research demands intensive study and description of the samples. This is further supported in (Kothari 170, 191) who posit that if the population was homogeneous and the nature of study demanded intensive study of the samples, then relatively smaller samples would be adequate as long as it was representative of the population. The sample size of 30 was considered representative of the population thus enough to provide desired information.

The researcher applied the Spearman's rank formula by Charles Spearman. The

formular,  $r_s = 1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{n(n^2-1)}$  was used where:

Where n= number of points in the data

$r_s$  = co-efficient

$d^2$  =square of the difference in the ranks of the two co-ordinates for each point

$\sum d^2$  = Sum of each of these squares

Calculation of the sample size using this formula leads to selection of 30 episodes from season 1 to season 12. This sample size has been worked out with a correlation coefficient of 0.05 equivalent to 5% significance level.

#### **1.10.5 Sampling Procedure**

This study utilised purposive sampling to identify the 30 content-rich samples that were used to provide critical perspective in understanding the nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show*. According to (Creswell and Creswell 307), the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question. Further, purposive sampling as (Kothari 31) points out allows judgement sampling. In this study therefore, the researcher, guided by the research objectives, used own judgement to select the 30 disparate episodes of *The XYZ Show* considered representative of the population. Also, in line with the argument advanced in (Mutai 150), the researcher first identified the characteristics of the population of interest and located individual episodes with those characteristics considered representative of the population.

#### **1.10.6 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The criteria for inclusion and exclusion were guided by the goals of this study. The participants chosen for this study were within season 1 to 12 of the show. Again, the full shows of the episodes included were present on YouTube. Lastly, since the study examines nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show*, it then followed that the content of each disparate episode for this study possess activist aesthetics, one or more strategies of telling jokes to power and political jokes that confront the state and leadership in Kenya.

The samples disqualified from this study lacked one or all the three characteristics identified in the inclusion criteria above.

#### **1.10.7 Data Collection Tools and Methods**

The primary data for this study were obtained from visual analysis that is, interpretation of a television program (Bass 211). This study entailed watching qualitative audio-visual and digital material of *The XYZ Show*. Data was obtained from the samples using a structured observation checklist. The checklist had five main columns which were further sub-divided into sub-columns as highlighted below: demographic information (season and episode number, date aired, title); puppets used (screen name, personality they mimic, physical description, role in the production); dialogue as appears in the text (verbal and non-verbal); event/ situation / setting represented and music used. Qualitative documents relevant to this study that are available in both electronic and print were also reviewed and secondary data obtained was recorded.

#### **1.10.8 Data Analysis and Presentation**

The data collected from the text was analysed following the bottoms up model that proposes six steps in data analysis as defined in (Creswell and Creswell 316-318). The raw data was recorded then organized and prepared for analysis. The preparation included transcription, sorting and typing of the data. The data was then reviewed to identify recurrent themes that were then categorized and coded manually for easy identification.

After coding, the data was analysed and interpreted using qualitative textual analysis (TA); and organised and structured using thematic content analysis. In so doing, relationships between the coded data and notes from the reviewed literature were sought thus refining the categories identified until various thematic strands were identified.

Textual analysis as (Mckee 4) observes can be utilised to understand what meanings audiences make of texts that appear in different forms including but not limited to television programmes, films, newspapers, magazines and radio programmes. Further, Mckee adds that there are large numbers of possible interpretations to a text, some of which were more probable than others in particular circumstances (2).

Therefore, textual analysis was applied in the reading and interpretation of *The XYZ Show* to achieve the research objectives whose concern was to explain the interplay of art and politics in the puppet show. In this study, each sampled episode was read as an independent text/ narrative complete with plot, characters and message that required keen interpretation for its meaning to be realized. In the same breath the researcher understood that there are an infinite number of possible interpretations of any text and each is equally valid as suggested in (Bass 233) and (Fairclough 3). Thus, it is worth noting that the researcher's interpretation of *The XYZ Show* in this study is one of the many possible interpretations that the show can get.

Further, these early scholars on TA go on to state that textual analysis research assumes that meanings do have an effect. Guided by this, the reader attempted to deduce whether *The XYZ Show* reflected social and political events happening at the time of its production; and whether they affected the reader's attitude towards these events and those involved in them. The contextual aspects of the text were therefore key in informing the interpretation of the text.

#### **1.10.9 Ethical Issues**

The researcher ensured that the study satisfied all required ethical standards. Research authorization letter and clearance certificate were acquired from the university and NACOSTI, respectively.

Observance to copyright laws was ensured as no video recordings were extracted or copied. All excerpts were transcribed verbatim and acknowledged accordingly. The videos were watched and the data collected used for the purpose of this study only.

### **1.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter espoused the varied definitions and brands of activism; the nature and function of activism and identified the gaps for this study by reviewing relevant literature. Activism has been discussed as the utilization of popular artistic modes for the expression of activism. Key among these artistic modes is humour and puppet art that combine to make the show satirical.

Further, the chapter has established that, that the need for non-violent political action has seen the emergence activism under which varied popular art forms including but not limited to political cartoons and latex puppets that are the focus of this study. By nature, activism utilizes artistic productions by artists who re-create their socio-political context/s and this is key in making meaning out of activist art.

*The XYZ Show* that uses animated latex puppets, has been discussed in this introductory chapter as a classic example of latex puppets that excellently exhibit activism. The chapter noted that the political power of art in the emerging popular arts gives rise to a new and rich culture of activism. Various scholars engaged with in the literature review underscore the significance of activism which, in the long run, brings about socio-political transformation. This chapter demonstrates that political satire, especially as exhibited in *The XYZ* latex puppets, is a rich area of research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NATURE OF ARTIVISM IN *THE XYZ SHOW*

#### 2.1 Introduction

Artivism as established in the previous chapter, refers to the utilization of popular artistic modes for the expression of activism. Artists embody the fusion/crossbreeding of the political and the artistic and the mixing of forms of discourse or combination of techniques and this has resulted to hybridity in activist art like *The XYZ Show*. In this show for instance, puppet art and humour are the key artistic modes employed. It has also been established that artivism draws from the practice of art that gives it its aesthetics and direct political action (Vico, Semova-Jivkova and Bailey 12).

Therefore, in this chapter, we interrogate *The XYZ Show* with a view to ascertain its artistic aesthetics and political aesthetics. Further, since *The XYZ Show* is a political puppet comedy that heavily relies on humour to castigate the political class, this chapter also discusses the ethos of laughter and the strategies used to satirize those in power. These strategies include stereotyping, derisions, incongruencies, hyperbole and mimicry.

#### 2.2 Art and Aesthetics in *The XYZ Show*

Something is art if it shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals; if it falls under art genre or art form established within an art tradition; or if it is intended by its maker to be art and its maker does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention. Significant aesthetic goals in this case cover more than formal beauty or unity in variety and include expressions of powerful emotions, compelling narrations, realistic and evocative depictions, dexterous or difficult to

realize actions vivid enactments of historical or imagined scenes all executed with exceptional expertise. (Davies 7 -8).

*The XYZ Show*, being a puppet show, utilizes the art of puppetry and animation and as Callus notes, draws upon devices that historically appear within cartooning such as caricature, parody, allegory and humour (Callus). In all the sampled episodes in this study, the puppet characters are caricatures of well-known prominent politicians and government leaders. The physical features of these puppets are exaggerated making them comical. For instance, Uhuru's puppet has excessively thick and dark lips; Ruto's long and pointed nose and Wetangula's exaggerated cheekbones. However, the use of latex has ensured that this exaggeration does not distort their real features; thus, the reader of this text easily identified them and laughed and scoffed at their comical representation. This exposes *The XYZ Show's* intention to expose their victims of criticism in the show.

Further, these puppets are referred to using names that exist in the public domain. For example, Uhuru is referred to as Uhuru or Uhunye - a corruption of Uhuru; former deputy president and now president William Ruto who is referred to variously as Ruto, William, Rutode, or Hustler. The latter is a nickname adapted from his common reference to himself as hustler. The show also features the puppet of former prime minister and the official opposition leader Raila Odinga referred to variously as Raila, Rao, Tinga, Captain and Baba, all of which are political brand names used by the former prime minister. Former Vice president and Wiper leader Kalonzo Musyoka is referred to as Kalonzo; Musalia Mudavadi is referred to as Madvd, and Moses Wetangula, Weta. In this show therefore, the producers intentionally avoid distancing that would have given a multi-dimensional interpretation of the personalities represented by the puppets



when they use easily identifiable facial features, and known names or nicknames for the puppets. This made it easy for the reader to identify regular puppets in the show imitating former presidents Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi, Mwai Kibaki and Uhuru Kenyatta; former deputy president and current president William Ruto; former prime minister Raila Odinga; and other prominent leaders Moses Wetangula, Kalonzo Musyoka and Musalia Mudavadi. This caricaturing is therefore not only used for dramatic effect but also political motives since it exposes to the viewer, the shortcomings of these leaders thus making them accessible for criticism. The puppets reveal what the public personalities they represent would ordinarily conceal from public view.

Besides the use of caricature, the puppet characters engage in coordinated dialogue just like in drama and TV theatre. While reading the text, it was possible to follow through the dialogue and pick out the various themes raised. Several stylistic techniques are employed to expose these themes just as in traditional art forms like the narrative, drama and poetry. For example, in episode 10 of season 1 of *The XYZ Show*, in a segment titled '*Interview with Dr. Goldstein*', imagery has been extensively used. Just like traditional authors like Imbuga 'invent comic figures to speak truth laughingly,' (Ruganda 10), the producers of *The XYZ show* use the puppet of Dr. Goldstein as a comic figure that exposes the corruption and excesses of senior leaders in Kenya. Dr. Goldstein's reference to 'jiggers infesting the heads of politicians' is not only humorous but also contemptuous reference to the massive corruption of senior government leaders. In so doing the audience is provoked to abhor corruption.

Likewise, in Episode 1 of season 5 of *The XYZ Show*, the puppet of former KACC boss, is also used as a comic character to expose corruption and impunity of senior

government leaders. In an interview with *The XYZ Show* host- a puppet named Jonah, PLO uses extravagant words and metaphoric expressions purposefully to expose corruption of senior government leaders. He says: ‘The demise of the saints and crusaders of truth, at the hands of vicious gladiators to satisfy a corrupt leadership...’Vicious gladiators refers to highly corrupt and ruthless leaders who trample on and silence crusaders of truth like himself. This and many more such expressions in this scene inform the audience as well as amuse them thus offering momentary escape from the serious discussion on corruption. This segment like all other segments in the show is a satirical representation of political leaders with a view to provoking the audience to question the integrity of these leaders.

*The XYZ Show* therefore as discussed in this section exemplifies the political aesthetics of humour. Humour achieved through, caricaturing, allegory and the ironies and paradoxes presented is politically textured. According to (Holm 12) political aesthetics of humour refer to the idea that the aesthetic aspects (characteristics) of a text- its form and structure, style, and narrative can do political work. In the episodes discussed here caricatured characters are used to represent revered political leaders with a view to lowering them from their pedestals. Also, other comic figures who are not politicians are created to castigate their political leaders ‘laughingly’. From the conversations that ensue, there is humorous display of emotion, realistic and evocative depictions of real political issues that send strong messages about the misdeeds of senior government leaders.

### **2.2.1 Reading *The XYZ Show* as Popular Art**

This section determines the features of popular art evident in *The XYZ Show*. (Selvin 2) opine that popular art is produced for mass audience; therefore, it ought to be accessible

to its consumers - the masses. With this in mind, the distribution of *The XYZ Show* was well planned and executed to ensure that it reached its target consumers. Since its premiere fourteen years ago, different seasons of the show have been aired on local free to air TV stations -Citizen TV, NTV, KISS TV, and KTN. (Murunga 167) identify TV as having the largest audiences among other mass media due to its potential to attract audiences from different demographics; literate or illiterate. By being on TV therefore, the show was made accessible to large audiences.

Additionally, episodes of already aired content were posted on *The XYZ* official YouTube channel for viewing by the digital public. By doing so, the producers understood that due to digitization and growth of social media, audiences were shifting to digital platforms for information and entertainment. As (Murunga 164) opine, with digitization, audiences initially found in front of the TV set are now found in the virtual space creating a shift in the consumption space; therefore, the TV broadcast has had to repackage itself to follow the audiences there to remain relevant. By having the show on YouTube, the producers have ensured that the content is retained long after the initial broadcast and interested viewers can stream or download these episodes to watch them long after they were aired. Information gathered from *The XYZ* official YouTube channel confirms that: *'The show has gained popularity locally and has been accessed by over ten million people through television broadcasts on the web, on community radio stations, as caller ring back tones, and as part of related outreach programs.'*

During this study all the 30 sampled episodes were available on *The XYZ Show* YouTube channel. It was evident that these shows have attracted viewership as recorded on this site. This implies that the show is easily accessible to many viewers confirming

Mandal's argument that mass or popular art is designed for accessibility and easy access (Mandal 2).

In the reading of *The XYZ Show* as a popular art, its contextual aspects were interrogated. Since popular art is about the real world and addresses issues that are immediately contemporary (Selvin 2), the context of production of *The XYZ Show* was important in understanding and interpreting the show. It was determined that the show alluded to real events in the Kenyan political scene and the puppets presented these events/ scenarios intelligibly and in everyday terms.

For example, Season 3 of episode 12 produced in 2010, a year and four months after *The XYZ Show* premiered, has a segment titled "*Interview with Artur Margarian*" that highlights the controversy that surrounded the two Armenians at the time. This segment that takes the form of a studio interview is set in *The XYZ* studio and features puppets of Artur Margarian and Winnie who are referred to using their real names reminding us of the Artur brothers' controversial saga of 2006. While introducing the scene, Jonah, the puppet studio presenter alludes to the theatrics the Artur brothers displayed around the country as well as Artur and Winnie's romantic relationship that caused a stir in the country because Winnie was purported to be the then President's daughter.

Excerpt 1:

Presenter: Tonight, we have a very interesting guest in studio who has caused quite a stir in this country.

From gun trotting displays at the airport to flamboyant romance – much like in Spanish soap operas. Welcome Artur Margarian.

(Episode 12, season 3, *The XYZ Show*, 2010)

This episode also explores the political motivation behind the Artur brothers' presence in the country in 2006. In the show, Artur contradicts himself when he denies their being mercenaries claiming that they were investors but at the same time admitting that they were paid by government to carry out tasks that needed to be done without it (government) dirtying its hands. The latter bit of Artur's claim insinuates to their being government mercenaries hired to execute 'dirty' jobs.

According to a report on *Jicho Pevu* by KTN's investigative journalist and reporter Mohammed Ali and Dennis Onsarigo, the Artur brothers (Artur Margarian and Artur Sargarsian) were reported to be foreign mercenaries brought into the country by rogue government officials in response to the seizure of 1.1 metric tons of cocaine. Their activities in the country infuriated Kenyans in early 2006.

The two brothers were publicly exposed after their 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2006 raid on The Standard Group offices, a raid that the then security minister, John Michuki, termed as a government operation. The controversy around the Artur brothers prompted an investigation by a joint parliamentary team which named NARC activist Mary Wambui, former special advisor to the president Stanley Murage, and CID boss Joseph Kamau as key players in the Artur saga (Onsarigo). The conversation in excerpt 2 below explains the role the political context outlined above played in the production of this episode. In the excerpt Artur admits that he and his brother raided KTN and were handsomely rewarded.

Excerpt 2:

Presenter: Ah! Okay... Artur, you have been accused of various things

one of which is being a hired mercenary.

Tell us, who are you really? What are you?

Artur: Mmmh! These things are fake. They are false.

We are not mercenaries. We are investors Jonah

Presenter: Investors?

Artur: You see Jonah, when government needs eh...something done,

I mean... how do we say? (waves hand)

without getting its hands dirty, it invests with us.

We are the ones they call.

Presenter: Mmmh... so the government invested in you to raid KTN and The Standard?

Artur: (With a chuckle) And the government got good returns for its investment. We are professionals you know, (chuckles)

(Episode 12, Season 3, *The XYZ Show*, 2010)

Further, when reporting about the deportation of the Artur brothers, the parliamentary team reported that the then immigration minister Gideon Konchellah was involved in staging a fake deportation of Margarian, Sargarsian and two other foreigners that were part of the Artur team on orders from the then Minister for Security John Michuki (Onsarigo). Artur in the following excerpt confirms this when he declares that their deportation by the Kenyan Government was stage managed to dupe the public that had started raising concerns about them.

Excerpt 3:

Artur: (With a wave of hand) Eh... That's okay Jonah.

They didn't really kick us out, he!

You can't be kicked out and driven to the airport with a limo.

They needed to hoodwink you and Kenyans

to think that the government is working...

you know, doing something.

If they kicked us, why are we here today?

In fact, there is another operation in which we will be involved very soon.

Presenter: Oh interesting! (Chuckles)

Lady: (To Artur) Sweetie, you mean you're not telling him about our wedding.

Artur: Oh yes! I will marry my sweetheart Winnie very soon eh! If not this year, next year. If not next year, then the year after that one. And if not then, (he chuckles and Winnie chuckles too) Who knows, you know, these things you can't predict.

(Episode 12, Season 3 *The XYZ Show*, 2010)

In the above extract, Artur Margarian, who proclaims to be connected to the government seems non-committal about marrying Winnie, the then president's purported daughter. His humorous response in which he deliberately fails to mention a specific date of marriage leaves the audience questioning the seriousness of their purported relationship. Apparently, Artur is not as committed as Winnie wants him to appear, probably because it is all part of the cover up plan. In this show, the writers

humorously expose the government's involvement with the Armenian Mercenaries and, though their specific agenda is not disclosed, the ironies and contradictions point to a not so noble a motive. The contextual background of the episode was key in the interpretation of the political motive of this episode.

Another episode that exhibits the centrality of context in the production of *The XYZ Show* is episode 13 of season 10 set in 2014, a year after the 2013 general elections. In this episode, in a segment titled "*The Christmas Story*," the issues that were contemporary at the time of its production inform the production. As the scene opens, the puppet of former President Uhuru Kenyatta appears in an office. Prominently set on the wall is the government's court of arms that helps identify this as a state office. A puppet of the president is working on a laptop whose cover is decorated with the court of arms as well. Shortly after, the puppet of his then deputy William Ruto enters.

The political context informs several aspects of the above scene like characterization and costuming of the characters. Besides their recognizable facial design, the characters refer to each other using their real names and known nicknames. In the first excerpt for instance, the then deputy president casually refers to the then president as Uhunye, a corruption of his name Uhuru and one that was a popular street name. This corruption of the president's name by his deputy and his using it in an official set up is deliberate. These puppets are also dressed in the then president's and deputy president's characteristic similar black suits and red ties that they first appeared in during their inauguration speech in 2013 and continued to adorn during their joint public appearances as a show of their unity. The following excerpt illustrates this.



Excerpt 4:

Ruto: *Uhunye.*

Uhuru Kenyatta: *Hey, ni nini?* (Hey, what is it?)

Ruto: *Uhunye my friend, umesikia Yesu amezaliwa?*

(Uhunye my friend, have you heard that Jesus has been born?)

(Episode 13, Season 10 *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

In another scene of the same episode, the Coalition of Reforms and Democracy (CORD) leader is referred to as captain while the then Ford Kenya leader Moses Wetangula is referred to using his real name. The CORD principal Raila is in an orange shirt. In the political scene, orange was ODM's party colour and it was common among the party leaders and its followers to adorned it as a show of solidarity. When introducing themselves, the CORD leader tells their host: "We are the three corded men." These episodes make use of visual and auditory imagery drawn from the local political scene, thus making the show relatable to the Kenyan audience.

Additionally, in the same scene, both Kalonzo and Wetangula agree to let their leader Raila, whom they refer to as captain, to "knock" meaning they allow him take the lead. This alludes to their deliberate decision before the 2013 general elections, to support Raila as CORD's presidential torch bearer. It is documented that the two, together with Cyrus Jirongo and Sylvester Wakoli Bifwoli stepped down from their presidential bid in favour of Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka as his running mate. Thus, by referring to themselves as the three corded men, Raila is making reference to their political identity as CORD principals The following excerpt clearly show this.

Excerpt 5:

Voice 1 (Raila): Wetangula, wacha mi ndio nigonge. (Wetangula, allow me to knock)

Voice 3 (Kalonzo): (Excitedly) Ni hapa...ni hapa ... (It's here, it's here)

Voice 2 (Wetangula): Sawa sawa captain. (Okay Captain)

(Knocking continues)

Man 1 (Raila): Yes hi.

(Man in orange appears holding a shopping bag with the inscription 'Nyakumatt'. He is accompanied by two other men.)

We are the three CORDED men and we are here to see the little baby who has been born so that we can worship him.

(Episode 13, Season 10 *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

In the same episode aired in 2014, a year after the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013 general elections that saw the Jubilee coalition's presidential candidate Uhuru and his running mate Ruto defeat their rivals Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka of CORD coalition; the political rivalry that still continued between the Jubilee coalition and CORD is re-enacted. As captured in excerpt 2, the puppet of Ruto visits the president's office to discuss the birth of Jesus. In excerpt 3, the three CORD principals visit a new born whom they also refer to as Jesus. The juxtaposition of the two political camps (Jubilee and CORD) in this episode re-creates the political rivalry that existed at the time of production of this episode. The two political camps are competing to influence to their side 'the parents of Jesus.'

This rivalry is further heightened when later in the same episode, Uhuru and Ruto derogatively refer to the CORD leaders as “watu wa vitendawili” and “chama cha makelele”. Ruto is worried that the CORD coalition will also visit the new born and blames Itumbi for failing to stop them from going. ‘Itumbi’ refers to Dennis Itumbi, the then Director of Digital, New Media and Diaspora in The Executive Office of the President. The new born/ Jesus in this episode, refers to the politicians that the Jubilee government and CORD coalition are competing to win over to their side in order to have a tyranny of numbers. As evident in the following excerpt, Jubilee is ready to use government resources and agencies to win support. They suggest deploying KDF to guard the baby. This sends a message about these leaders’ intent to abuse their positions for selfish political gain.

Excerpt 6:

Ruto: *Itumbi hajaweka?* (Hasn’t Itumbi posted it?)

...

Ruto: My friend, hata watu wa vitendawili wataenda huko.

(My friend, even the men of riddles will go there.)

Uhuru Kenyatta : Haiyayaya, enyewe umesema. Tutatuma KDF huko mara moja. (you have said it. We will send KDF there at once.)

Ruto: Tutume kabisa. (We should)

Uhuru Kenyatta: Na halafu nikuulize, hao wazazi wa huyo Yesu, ukiona, ni watu wa Jubilee ama ni watu wa hiyo chama ingine ya ... ya ...

makelele hii ya ...men in black. (May I ask, by looking at Jesus' parents, are they supporters of Jubilee or do they support that other noisy party?)

(Episode 13, season 10, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

Though the writers of this show use a humorous approach, the narrative presented stands out as factual as opposed to being purely imaginative. As evident in the sampled episodes, *The XYZ Show* that is produced locally heavily relies on allusion as a literary device to make reference to Kenya's socio-political situation. Each episode alludes to easily identifiable moments in the Kenyan socio-political scene and have identifiable socio-political, historical, and geographical context/setting. Watching the episodes, it is clear to tell where and when the events in the story happened and why the story unfolds the way it does. This is made possible by the political and social allusions made, the physical and geographical representations as well as the imitated characterization.

The language used (a blend of english, kiswahili and sheng) also gives the show a Kenyan feel and makes it intelligible to a wide audience. A phrase like 'watu wa vitendawili', resonates with the Kenyan audience because the CORD leader was commonly known for his use of 'vitendawili' (riddles) during political rallies. In the same episode, Jose, child's father enters and is identified as the puppet of Mike Sonko the then Nairobi Senator. This puppet addresses Mary (Shebesh's puppet) and Kidero in sheng. He uses words such as msee(man), wasee (men), ishia (go away) and mtoi(baby). This choice of register helps in characterization of Jose representing Sonko who in reality is known for his pompous display of sheng. It also aided in contextualizing the episode.

It was therefore deduced that *The XYZ Show* is a popular art production that re-imagines the Kenyan political context by making allusion to identifiable socio-political situations. Again, the show uses a variety of language and register that resonates with Kenya's diverse audience. All these could be said to be intended to make the show relatable to the Kenyan audience as well as others interested in Kenyan politics. To make the show accessible, popular local TV stations have aired the show. Though the show is on break, all aired episodes are available online therefore still accessible for viewing.

### **2.2.2 Artivism Aesthetics of *The XYZ Show***

*The XYZ Show*, as discussed in section 2.2.1, has been identified as a popular art, a comedy show in which humour has been utilized to point out vices propagated by political leaders and, by extension, critique their misdemeanors. This section situates *The XYZ Show* as a work of art with multiple possible political trajectories. Indeed, artivism is characterized by its provocative nature and catalytic function by which it can spark discussion surrounding specific issues. (Holm 12).

Episode 10 of season 1 aired in 2009, in a segment titled, "*Interview with Dr. Goldstein*", the producers employ satire to highlight the vices displayed by the politicians in the grand coalition government and the urgent need to "treat" them. In the segment, the puppet of Dr. Goldstein is used as a jester who satirizes top government officials for their corruption. Dr. Goldstein refers to corruption metaphorically as "jiggers infesting the politicians" leading to a disease that he refers to as "Jigger Nasomiasis Corruptiophilia." He goes further to affirm that an anti-jigger campaign was ongoing to suggest that anti-corruption campaigns aimed at bringing to book culprits of corruption were ongoing. Jiggers, as we know them, affect the low-income

groups who live in unsanitary conditions. Thus, it is unexpected for them to infest top government officials and this incongruity is what offers the text comic quality. Though presented in the form of a jest, Dr. Goldstein's tone reveals corruption as a disease, a nagging problem that calls for action as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 7:

Presenter: Hello Doctor Doctor, tell us, what is this jigger campaign all about?

Doctor: That's a very good question Jonah.

Now the anti-jigger campaign is a non-profit campaign

that seeks to remove jiggers from the head of politicians.

Now, the jiggers infest their brains causing a disease known as

Jigger Nasomiasis Corruptiophilia, are you following?

Now as you can see, the disease is very fatal if left untreated.

(Episode 10 Season 1, The XYZ Show, 2009)

This excerpt displays activist ideals in that it raises awareness about as it condemns a social vice - corruption. As is the function of satire discussed in (Zakariae 61-65) this episode uses humour to expose the corruption (Nasomiasis Corruptiophilia) exhibited by the political leaders in the coalition government. It further raises awareness to the need for radical campaigns (anti-jigger campaigns) to eradicate corruption. The doctor discloses that non-profit making organizations were ready to support these campaigns to eradicate corruption. In the episode, Dr. Goldstein demonstrates the crude extraction of the jiggers by drilling the politician's head and this expresses the contempt with which corruption should be treated. The following excerpt captures this

Excerpt 8:

Presenter: Right Doctor, those were very disturbing symptoms. What kind of treatment do you recommend for these types of mental jiggers?

Doctor: Ah! I have devised a very simple way of eradicating those mental jiggers.

(He drills into the brain of the human head prop.) After you've made a deep hole, just use forceps to take out the jigger or jiggers in this case. You might be surprised how many you might dig out of this head. (He removes small black objects from the head using forceps.)

Presenter: Aah! That's quite drastic doctor.

Doctor: Oh! Not really.

Presenter: How long does it take for an MP to recover from this operation?

Doctor: Oh not long... Once the jiggers are out, the MP can function quite normally, almost immediately.

(Episode 10, Season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

(Holm 28) posits that humour functions as a form of dissent. Thus, by suggesting radical action against corrupt leaders, Dr. Goldstein in this episode is inciting dissent. As opposed to holding street protests, art is used to inform about the presence of corruption in high offices by using the metaphor of the jigger and point to the fact that corruption is a nagging issue in our society that requires radical action. The doctor declares: "... just use forceps to take out the jigger or jiggers in this case. You might be surprised how many you might dig out of this head." In this episode, the writers are able to

express their views about corruption and abuse of office thus achieve educational and social function of activism.

In the same episode, allegory has also been used as an artistic strategy to raise issue about the fact that most of the political leaders, even when found culpable, will never admit to their omissions or commissions. This is what Doctor Goldstein satirizes when he says that the first symptom of Nasomiasis Corruptiophobia is denial. In the episode, the puppet of Uhuru appears and talks hurriedly: “Eh! Typing errors? What typing errors? I don’t I know what you’re talking about. You people need to stop making up those things. They do not exist. Do I look like I make typing errors? Eeeh- look at these fingers. I can type. How much do you want me to pay you?” His last utterance here suggests corruption thus confirming Dr. Goldstein’s claim that top government officials engage in the vice.

In 2009, the year that the above episode was produced, Uhuru Kenyatta was the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance in the Grand Coalition Government. On 29<sup>th</sup> April 2009, Kenyatta faced a controversial scare after he presented a supplementary budget that was inadvertently approved in parliament. A discrepancy was raised by Gitobu Imanyara after its signing. Kenyatta defended the approval but later admitted that there were computer and typographical errors in the budget bill. The speaker had ordered the CID and a parliamentary committee to question him on the discrepancies but he was later cleared.

Having considered the contextual aspects of episode 10 season 1 of *The XYZ Show*, it was determined that the episode not only critiqued the Grand coalition government for abetting corruption and abuse of power, but also exposed it to the public for criticism. According to a report by Institute for Security Studies in 2008, the Grand Coalition



government was accused of Grand Corruption. This report pointed out how unscrupulous businessmen colluded with connected politicians to exploit the public (Muchai).

It was also determined that *The XYZ Show* is rich in satire that serves to expose to the show's audience the moral vices propagated by senior government officials. In so doing the show exposes to ridicule the structures of power in the country. This argument was grounded in Peterson Russel discussion in (Holm 45) that asserts that satire is a form of humour that uses "truth" to critique an idea, person, institution or structures of power.

Writing about puppet art, Kordjak asserts: "puppet art with its wit, irony and mockery is potentially perfect and relatively safe medium for socio-political critique" (Kordjak 8). Episode 13 season 10 of *The XYZ Show* produced in 2014, a year after the 2013 general elections in the country, exposes to the public the continued rivalry between the CORD coalition and Jubilee party long after the elections. This rivalry is seen to inhibit service delivery and derail progress.

In two separate scenes, the puppets of the Jubilee leaders (president Uhuru and his deputy William Ruto) are juxtaposed with those of the CORD principals Raila Odinga, Moses Wetangula and Kalonzo Musyoka. In the first scene, there is a newborn in the country in whom the two rival parties are interested. The jubilee leaders want to beat the CORD leaders by being the first to visit the new born referred to as Jesus with their main interest being to seek the political support of its parents. They are afraid that the CORD group (whom they refer to as "watu wa vitendawili" and "...hiyo chama ya makelele... ya men in black" will also visit the new born as seen in the extract below:

Excerpt 9:

Man 2 (Ruto): My friend, *hata watu wa vitendawili wataenda huko*. (My friend, even the men of riddles will go there.)

Man 1 (Uhuru): *Haiyayaya, enyewe umesema. Tutatuma KDF huko mara moja*. (you have said it. We will send KDF there at once.)

Man 2 (Ruto): *Tutume kabisa*. (We should)

Man 1 (Uhuru): *Na halafu nikuulize, hao wazazi wa huyo Yesu, ukiona, ni watu wa Jubilee ama ni watu wa hiyo chama ingine ya ... ya ... makelele hii ya ...men in black*. (May I ask, by looking at Jesus' parents, are they supporters of Jubilee or do they support that other noisy party?)

(Episode13, season10, The XYZ Show, 2014)

Later on in the episode, the CORD principals Raila, Kalonzo and Wetangula manage to visit the newborn and take gifts that they give to its mother — a puppet of the then Nairobi women representative Ms. Rachael Shebesh. As part of the gifts for the child is an “Okoa Kenya T-shirt” that the three agree it will fit the child perfectly. In their conversation with the Shebesh, it is clear that their agenda was to sell their political agenda and lure her and the ‘child’s’ father (Mike Sonko), the Nairobi senator at the time, into their political outfit.

Excerpt 10:

Man 3: *Ngoja kwanza, we Kalonzo, Kalonzo*. (Wait first. You, Kalonzo...)

Man 2: *Eeh...* (Yes)

(Baby whimpers)

Man 3: *Ile T-shirt ya Okoa Kenya imeenda?* (Where is that ‘Save Kenya’ Tshirt?)

Man 2: *Aaai*

Man 1: *Umeangalia hiyo?* (Have you checked that?)

Man 2: *Si ilikuwa tu hapa.* (checking inside his bag) (It was just in here)

Man 3: *Kanaweza ng’ara sana hapo ndani.* (The baby can look great in it)

(Season 10 Episode 13, The XYZ Show, 2014)

The allusion to “Okoa Kenya” in this scene takes us down memory lane to “The Okoa Kenya Bill” initiated by CORD which, according to Ken Opalo’s report, had the political intention of triggering a popular referendum to amend the 2010 Kenya Constitution. This came after their defeat by Jubilee Coalition in the March 2013 elections which they believed their presidential flagbearer Raila had been robbed of the presidency in favour of Uhuru. This bill targeted the IEBC with a view to improve the electoral management and adjudication process in Kenya. It further sought to grant the judiciary greater independence to boost its neutrality when adjudicating electoral disputes. What the bill sponsors needed then was to collect a million signatures as provided in article 257 of the constitution for the bill to be considered by each of the 47 county assemblies before being introduced in parliament. According to Opalo, if the opposition succeeded in its agenda and won a populist referendum ahead of the 2017 general elections, it would boost its chances of beating the incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta and the ruling Jubilee Government in the 2017 elections (Opalo).

It is apparent that *The XYZ Show*, Season 10 Episode 13, exposes political rivalry and propaganda that Kenyan leaders continue to engage in after elections instead of

focusing on delivering services to the nation. This provokes the Kenyan viewer to question the interests of their topmost leaders. It is said that politics is a game of numbers; this episode is a portrayal of the competition between the two political camps who are seeking numbers. They each struggle to convince Sonko and Shebesh to incorporate their party (child) to their coalitions. In the episode, the CORD principals are also marketing their political agenda with the intention of garnering support for their Okoa Kenya Bill. As mentioned earlier, their Jubilee rivals have also expressed interest in ‘buying’ the child’s parents to their camp.

CORD uses different strategies including propaganda and promising a better political position to the child’s father. The CORD leader, when speaking to the child’s mother, castigates the ruling Jubilee coalition for the high unemployment situation in the country and promises to offer the child’s father a position at the Orange Democratic Movement, a member party of CORD whose leader is Raila Odinga. This is captured in the following extract:

Excerpt 11:

Man 1:           And how will this baby survive?

*Naskia mzee hana kazi.* (I hear your husband is jobless)

Lady:           *Tunahustle tu! Jose ni hustler kabisa. Hakosangi kibarua hapa na pale.*

(We are hustling, Jose is a hard worker. He never lacks something to do)

Man 1:           Unemployment everywhere, Jubilee has failed us.

Man 2:           Captain, *tusaidie hii familia haki.* (Let us help this family)

Man 3:           *Yes yes, inafaa tuwasaidie* (We need to help them)

before Uhuru comes and adopts them.

*Mnajua alichukua Njaro Soldier, akachukua Otonglo.* (You know he adopted Njaro Soldier and Otonglo)

*Na hapa kunakaa kama Kibera.* (And this place looks like it is Kibera)

Man 1: Yes yes. Sasa mama,  
tell your husband to come and see me  
*akikuja.* (when he returns.)  
*Sawa sawa?* (Okay?)

Lady: *Sawa sawa.* (Okay)

Man 1: We can create a position for him at ODM.

Lady: Okay okay.

Man 1: *Kuna position mingi,* since *yuko* opposition we can consider that. (There are vacancies and since he is in opposition, we can consider that.)

(Season 10 Episode 13, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

After the departure of the CORD principals, the governor of Bethlehem, in the form of the puppet of the then Nairobi Governor Evans Kidero elected on an ODM ticket enters the woman's house. In her discussion with the governor, the woman complains about crime, bad roads and traffic congestion and poor sanitation: problems bedeviling the city. This exposes to criticism the city leadership that has failed to maintain basic infrastructure. The governor argues that he was working hard to better the situation but his efforts were not being appreciated. Excerpt 12 captures this.

Excerpt 12:

Man: *Aah pole sana. Nai ni kupoa sana. Hakuna stress.* (I'm so sorry, Nairobi is a good place, there is no stress here)

Lady: *Aaai*, but we were robbed the first nights here.

Governor: *Hiyo ni isolated incident tu.* (That's an isolated incident)

Lady: *Usiseme hivyo coz jana, maneighbour waliibiwa halafu ni kuchafu tu sana.* (Don't mention it, yesterday a neighbour was robbed and the place is so dirty)

*Na jam nayo ...yaani barabara ni mbaya pia.* (And the traffic, I mean...the roads are terrible) You cannot say that.

Governor: *Eei ni nini na macomplain;* (Why are you complaining?)

And the way I'm working very hard over here. It's not my fault that people don't see progress.

(Season 10 Episode 13, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

The fact that these omissions are pointed out by the woman representative suggests a disconnect amongst the leaders. This representation of conflict amongst county leaders is satirized in this episode as what was supposed to be collective responsibility now turns to personal blame game. Through this scene therefore the audience are made aware of the disconnect among leaders brought about by their different political affiliations. Governor Kidero had been elected on a CORD ticket whereas Shebesh was in Jubilee.

As the scene progresses, the woman's husband comes in. We recognize him as a puppet of Mike Sonko the then Nairobi senator. It is worth noting that in the context of the production of this episode, the Nairobi senator and the women representative had been elected on a Jubilee ticket in the March 4<sup>th</sup> 2013 elections while the governor had been elected on ODM ticket. Political rivalry between the two leaders is exhibited in the way the puppet of Sonko confronts the governor's puppet leading to a scuffle that ends with the forceful eviction of the governor from the house. The puppet of Sonko then confronts the puppet of Shebesh and even threatens to disown their child on claims that she was philandering with other men. The following excerpt shows this:

Excerpt 13:

(Enters 2<sup>nd</sup> man in a light grey coat, red cap and gold chains on his neck)

Man 2: Mary, *huyu ni nani?* (Mary, who is this?)

Man 1: I am the governor of Bethlehem.

Lady: *Ni msee wa census.* (He is census person)

Man 2: *Ati msee wa nini?* (a person of what?)

Lady: *Wa census.*

Man 2: *Si nilikuambia sitaki kukuona na wasee wengine hapa hivi.*

(Didn't I tell you I should never find you with another man?)

(Confronting man 1) *Wee unajua mimi ni nani?* (Do you know who I am?)

*Hebu toka kabla nikupatie mapleple...*

(Man 2 manhandles man 1 and forces him out.) (Leave before I rough you up)

Man 1: *Eeh* don't don't. I will send chariots to you.

Man 2: Governor *ishia*. (Leave)

Man 1: I am the governor doctor I ...

Man 2: *Kwani unajua kutibu ...* (do you know how to cure...)

Man 1: How uncouth!

Man 2: *Hebu ishia*. (Just leave) (bangs the door and turns to face the lady) Mary!

Lady: *Eeh*. (Yes)

Man 2: *Nilikushow usikuwe unaentertain wasee kwa nyumba yangu*. (I warned you not to entertain men in my house)

*Hata labda huyu mtoi ukona yeye si wangu* (Even maybe this is not my baby)

Lady: *Wewe!* (You!)

Man 2: By the way *nimeishia, huyu sio mtoi wangu*. (I am leaving, this is not my baby)

(Season 10 Episode 13, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

In this extract, there is allusion to the political as well as the love relationship of senator Sonko and the women representative Rachael Shebesh. The two teamed up in the March 2013 general election campaigns but would later fall out after the elections suggested in the episode when 'Jose' abandons 'Mary.' At the time of their fall out, there were claims that Sonko and Shebesh were involved in a sexual affair. The fall out between



Nairobi women's representative and Nairobi county senator, thus, is not only political but also personal. The excerpt further alludes to the rivalry between the two Nairobi legislators and the then governor Dr. Evans Kidero after the March 4<sup>th</sup> elections as reported in *The Standard*. (Reporter).

Instead of co-operating and discharging their duties professionally, these leaders engage in uncalled for political rivalry. The result is wastage of public resources and poor delivery of services that the puppet of Shebesh complains about in this episode. As discussed in this section, *The XYZ Show* uses puppets to present top government officials and institutions as satirical targets. The show therefore fuses artistic elements to navigate different political issues. The end result is that the audience, especially Kenyan, are allowed to see and possibly interrogate their leaders' misdemeanors. This is what (Latorre 6) explores in their argument that activist works exhibit politically provocative and activist sensibilities defined by the ability to merge political and aesthetic elements of satire.

Indeed, in puppet art, representations of public figures are not burned or pierced with swords but ridiculed (Kosinski, *The politicality of the Puppet* 60). In *The XYZ Show*, puppets of prominent leaders are displayed on national television, their dealings with each other are revealed as selfish and lacking integrity. They are therefore projected as objects of satire and ridicule and the audience is given a chance to laugh at their misdemeanors. Laughter, in this case, acts as a social corrective by whipping excessive aberrations back into line (Eagleton 35). It can, therefore, be concluded that behind *The XYZ Show*, just like is characteristic of satirical texts, "lurks an authorial figure who is making a point and overwhelmingly a point that is thought to unsettle or contest the social, cultural or political status quo" (Holm 44). As such we read *The XYZ Show*

content as revealing political dynamics at play in the country and, at the same time, serving the socio-political function of reawakening people to pay more attention to their leaders' acts and think about action without having to carry effigies and hold protests or demonstrate on the streets.

### **2.2.3 Ethos of Laughter in *The XYZ Show***

*The XYZ Show* is a puppet comedy as it employs humour as its main strategy of communicating its political messages. In the show, prominent leaders are exposed to public ridicule when their caricatured forms appear as puppets on national television and go through motions that mock their positions. This grants space for the ordinary citizens to laugh at their leaders. For laughter to happen, first, there must be a joke; and secondly, the laughter emanates from a ridiculing of the scruffiness of people who are in higher positions of power than the laughers (Emmerson 2087).

Episode 5 of *The XYZ Show* Season 10, produced in 2014, four years after the promulgation of Kenya's 2010 constitution that saw the inception of devolution in the country, has a segment titled "*Devolution Report*." The section takes the viewer through the journey of devolution in the country. Devolution is metaphorically referred to as a baby and, as *The XYZ* puppet reporter, who plays the role of jester in the entire segment, puts it: "A baby born after many years of waiting and trying... On this journey, we sweet-talked men." This can be viewed as jokes that are political statements. In the first scene, the joke continues when the puppet of the second president of Kenya Daniel Arap Moi, appears and is seated with a puppet of a woman who introduces herself as Kenya. The woman tries to seduce the president to impregnate her. Instead, the president casually tells the woman that she will be made pregnant and get a child whose

name will be devolution but does not point at who will “aid” the conception. This is clearly demonstrated in the following extract:

Excerpt 14

Man: *Ooh unataka mtoto?* (Oh, you want a baby?)

Woman: *Eeh* (Yes)

Man *Aah! Umekuja wakati mzuri* (You have come at the right time)

Woman: *Ukweli?* (Really?)

Man: *Wewe utapachikwa mimba. Na utazaa mwana na huyo mwana aitwa devolution.* (woman laughs) (You shall conceive and get a child, and that child’s name will be devolution)

Woman: Yes, yes devolution yes.

Man: You can take my words to the bank.

(Episode 5 season 10, *The XYZ Show* 2014)

(Sorensen 13) observes that humour can be expressed in a wide range of techniques including irony, exaggeration, parody and impersonation. In this scene, humour is expressed through, first, the impersonation of the then President Moi and presentation of Kenya as a woman seeking a child; and secondly, in the president’s ambiguous response “*Wewe utapachikwa mimba. Na utazaa mwana na huyo mwana aitwa devolution.*” This is what William Connolly terms as ironic self -distancing (Lombardini 206). The president disassociates himself from the responsibility of delivering the long-awaited constitution and devolution to the people and this is mocked by joking about his virility, a serious subject that ordinarily would elicit empathy as opposed to laughter.

However, it is worth pointing out that at this particular time, the then president had ruled for over twenty years and was in his old age, probably a reason the writers joke about his inability to sire a child. Aristotle in (Eagleton 55) points out that people are usually inspired to laugh at representations less than admirable subjects. Going by this, laughter in this segment will be a response to the writers' witty mockery of the president's inability to deliver a new constitution to his people as opposed to his actual failure to deliver a child. This joke about the president, therefore, allows us to momentarily bring him down from his pedestal and, as (Eagleton 55) asserts, if we rejoice in seeing the high brought low, a deflation that allows us to relax a certain psychological tension, it is partly because we can condescend to those whom we were previously intimidated. More laughter is elicited in the president's statement to the woman, "You can take my words to the bank." This is verbal irony because the situation alluded to in this excerpt calls for action as opposed to verbal assertions.

The country's desperation for devolution is further captured when the woman (Kenya) visits a traditional doctor in search of a baby. The joke is presented from the onset: the inscriptions on the sign board leading to the traditional doctor's hut are absurd and ridiculous. The sign board reads: "Hutibu: kuleta katiba, kutibu kanu, kuepuka ugali wa Moi, Jereha za sabasaba." The poster can be translated to: We treat: helping bring a new constitution, treat Kanu, escaping Moi's staple food, and the injuries of Sababa. These issues cannot be categorized as illnesses but demonstrates Kenya's desperation for a new constitution, to the point that the citizens would even have sought supernatural interventions. In a voice over, the puppet reporter offers a witty commentary on how difficult the journey in search of devolution had been and, in the commentary, uses comical word play. He reports "What would take many years of political agitation street

protests by men of cloth and men without clothes; men with stones against men with hearts of stone for this baby to be born...”

Inside the hut, the traditional doctor performs rituals and stunts in a bid to rid the woman — Kenya of her childlessness and all this is punctuated by cackles of laughter. It is paradoxical that the traditional doctor alludes to the bible when prophesying the woman’s conception. He borrows the angel’s proclamation to Mary in the bible, but as is the case in this excerpt, the child’s name is devolution, not Jesus. This allusion in the given context reinforces laughter as it is misplaced.

Excerpt 15:

W. Doctor: (laughs and chants amidst drum beats.)

*AbraKadabra!* (More laughter)

*We wewe nikuulize...* (Laughter) *uko na bwana wewe?* (May I ask you; do you have a husband?)

(Beats & laughter)

Woman: *Ndio, ndio niko na bwana mtumishi* (Yes shepherd, I have a husband)

W. Doctor: (Laughter & chants) *wacha nikwambie kitu kimoja*, (Let me tell one something.)

*Utapata mtoto wewe mmmh na utamwita* (shouts) Devolution. (You shall bear a child, and you will call him devolution)

Woman: (Softly) *Ndio ndio* (Yes, yes).

W. Doctor: (Laughs & chants as he performs his stunts. V. O resumes)

(Episode 5 season 10, The XYZ Show 2014)

In a different scene after devolution has been actualized, there is an outcry from county governors who complain that the fund allocation to the counties is insufficient to support their devolved functions. This is presented humourously as captured in the following extract:

Excerpt 16:

Man with a baby: *Hamuezi kutupatia mtoto na hata hamtumi maziwa ya yeye*

(You cannot give us a baby and yet you don't send it milk.)

Man 2, 3, 4: *Hamwezi* (You cannot)

Man with baby: *Kwani mnafikiria yeye atanyonya nini?* (What do you think he will suckle?)

Man 2: *eeeh*

Man with baby: *Ama atanyonya nani?* (Whom will he suckle?)

Man 2: *Nani, nani?* (Who, who?)

(Episode 5 season 10, The XYZ Show 2014)

The puppets in this scene are puppets of governors led by the then chair of governors Isaac Ruto who, just like the characters in the previous scenes, refer to devolution as a baby. At this point, however, the demands are different. The joke is around the fact that after Kenyans fought for devolution, its implementation would become a nightmare. The governors claim that the national government has become reluctant to fund

devolved functions. This can be read in the statement: “*Hamuezi kutupatia mtoto na hata hamtumi maziwa ya yeye* (You cannot give us a baby and yet you don’t send it milk.) However, wastage of funds in the counties can be noted through ridiculous demands for a baby in its initial stages of development, such as schooling and vacationing. These can be noted in excerpt 17 below:

Excerpt 17:

Man with baby: *Huyu mtoto anahitaji kwenda shule* next week. (This child needs to go to school next week.) Transport *hamjatuma*. (You have not sent transport)

Man 2: *Bado* (Not yet)

Man W.B: *Hata outing...Hata mtoto anasema anatakiwa kwenda outing* (Even going out... the baby says he should be going out)

(All men nod)

Man2: Yes.

Man w. B: *Akule vizuri, jioni achape glass moja kama watoto wengine* (He should eat well and, in the evening, take a glass like other children)

(Episode 5 season 10, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

Aristotle names wittiness as a virtue pertaining to laughter and joking and those who possess wittiness will joke and raise laughter in appropriate ways (Lombardini 208). Laughter, in this case, should seek to give pleasure to the individual of good judgement and not refrain from paining the one being mocked. This is evident in the above episode whereby the subject of childbearing has been cleverly navigated to present the situation

of devolution in the country and mock different leaders for their failure at different stages of the devolution process.

Episode 11 of season 1, unlike episode 5 of season 10, is a clear example of buffoonery. As Aristotle postulates, buffoons are excessive with respect to laughter and desirous of raising laughter on all occasions as they care more about laughter than saying something decent (Lombardini 208). In the episode, there's a segment titled "*XYZ Project Fame*" — an imitation of a popular TV show known as Tusker Project Fame which provided a platform for upcoming music artists from Kenya and neighbouring East African countries to compete in showcasing their artistic talents. The puppets of Raila Odinga, Kalonzo Musyoka and Mwai Kibaki are contestants. The episode was produced in 2009 at the time when the coalition government was birthed after the 2007/2008 post-election violence. In this grand coalition, Mwai Kibaki was president, Kalonzo Musyoka Deputy President and Raila Odinga the prime minister.

Each of the three contestants perform a different song expressing their prowess and interest in the presidency in 2012, but none says anything positive about themselves; instead, their utterances are ridiculous in an amusing way. The first contestant Raila who introduces himself as man Agwash discloses in a parody of popular song "Salary" by Kenyan artist Nameless, that he agreed to work with Kibaki not for anything but because of monetary benefits. Apparently, he is already strategizing on how to clinch the presidency in the 2012 elections while still in the coalition government.

Excerpt 18:

MC Agwash: (Singing) When you see me faint, I am struggling to find my way.



I hustle both day and night

So I can be present 2012

*Sikiza sawa* (Listen well)

*Ukiniona na Kibaki, usifikiri ni mabeshte.* (When you see me with  
Kibaki, don't think we're friends)

*Najua plan yangu ni kutafuta salarie eeh.* (I know my plan, I'm looking  
for salary)

(Episode 11 season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

Kalonzo Musyoka, on his part, sings a parody of Jemimah Thiong'o's gospel song "Akisema Atakubariki" but in it hits at Raila and Ruto whom he claims do not wish him well politically. He speaks against rigging at the previous elections something that the third contestant, Mwai Kibaki, confirms in his presentation. Mwai Kibaki engages in self-mockery when in his song he admits to being sly.

Excerpt 19:

Man 3: (chanting) *Ini ii niguu, ni mimi, hakuna mwingine* (Yes, it's true, it's not  
anyone else)

*Niko hapa hapa hakuna kwingine, pumbavu wewe* (I'm here and nowhere else,  
you fool)

*Mimi ni... mi ni* the head (I am ... I am the head)

Where is the microphone?

*Mi ni mjaja* (I am sly) (repeat three times)

*Ati rere. Ati dandia kama wewe* (Only jump in if you)

Chorus: *We ni mjanja* (you are sly)

(Episode 11 season 1, The XYZ Show, 2009)

He goes on to boast about his win at the disputed presidential elections and his infamous swearing in at night after the 2007 elections that sparked violence in the country leading to the death of 1200 people and displacement of over 30,000 people.

Excerpt 20:

Man 3: *Nairobi, poa, kumbuka KICC Usiku stima zikalosti.* (Nairobi, remember that blackout at KICC at night?)

*Halafu wakasema ati mimi mimi ni prezidi...* (Then they said I was president)

*Raira akasema amesanyiwa mavoti.* (Raila said his votes had been stolen)

*Niliweka masecurity hadi mawachi* (I beefed up security including watchmen)

*Nikafanya ODM wakae kama machizi mean.* (I made ODM look like crazy people)

What the heck!

*Hati ya kuwa Kibaki yeye* (That Kibaki himself)

Chorus: *We ni mjanja* (You are sly).

Man 3: *Kura na apishwa usiku* (I was sworn in at night).

Chorus: *We ni mjanja* (You are sly).

Man 3: *Na anapita haraka* (And he wins fast).

Chorus: *We ni mjanja* (You are sly).

Man 3: *We ni mubaya* (You are bad).

(Episode 11 season 1, The XYZ Show, 2009)

In this episode, unlike in episode 5 season 10, where the leaders engage in ironic self-distancing, here the leaders engage in self-mockery and self-deprecation, hence causing laughter at their character flaws. As Cicero in “The Orator” notes, we scoff at delusions, self-deceptions, inflated self-importance, undisguised lechery and voracious egoism (Eagleton 32). In this episode therefore the audience is allowed into the world of the leaders and made to witness vices like electoral malpractices these leaders engage in to secure a win. The fact that the puppet characters’ names and facial features are not disguised is intentional. The viewers easily identify these leaders and associate them with the mentioned political realities.

For example, as the puppet of Kibaki engages in pompous display of self-importance it exposes his involvement in vote rigging. Instead of defending his innocence in the accusation levelled against him after the 2007 elections, the puppet of Kibaki admits that he rigged the elections and beefed-up armed security to quell any revolution against his presidency. He actually seems proud of his late-night swearing-in. Raila, on his part, admits to staying in the grand coalition for material gain.

The style of presentation of this segment in which the three top leaders are reduced to music performers on stage is also a form of humour. The characters in this segment are jesters in their own right and this time they are made to joke about themselves. In this

segment, there is a deep tone of mockery and ironic mockery that invites viewers to laugh at these leaders.

Notably, laughter in this section can be interpreted in relation to Milan Kundera's idea about angelic and demonic views of human existence. While the angelic sees the world to be orderly with reality being drearily legible and intelligible, the demonic deflates the angelic, puncturing its pretentiousness (Eagleton 25). In both episode 5 season 10 and episode 11 season 1, senior government leaders are presented in incongruous situations and this situates them as objects for laughter. Humour of this kind, as Kundera points out, is the amusement that springs from things being out of order, estranged or defamiliarized and deprived for a moment of their allotted role in the overall scheme of things. And, as Hegel argues in "Philosophy of Fine Art," laughter springs from the self-satisfaction involved in observing human aberrations. ( 33).

### **2.3 Strategies of Telling Truth to Power**

In the introduction and previous segments of this chapter, *The XYZ Show* has been discussed as a satirical puppet comedy that draws its comic content from the country's socio-political context. (Leboeuf 5) identifies three features of satire namely: critique, irony and implicitness. Thus, satire is as any piece, literary, artistic, spoken or otherwise presented, that critiques human behaviour vice or folly with a view to persuading the audience to view it disdainfully. *The XYZ show* as discussed earlier exhibits critique and irony but is not totally implicit. This is because the writers have not used distancing in naming of characters and context. However, they still have managed to speak truth to power laughingly.

Unlike writers like Francis Imbuga who used distancing in their plays to evade censorship by the authorities (Ruganda 9), *The XYZ Show* writers seem to enjoy

freedom of expression thanks to the dispensation in 2010 Kenyan constitution. While Imbuga uses idiotic characters like Agege, Ababio and Mulili, to draw attention to the foibles of figures of authority in our society, *The XYZ Show* writers have created comical figures (caricatured puppets of known political leaders) and employed various other strategies of humour to articulate serious political concerns in our society.

In this section we discuss the nature of this ‘politicised’ humour in *The XYZ Show* with the focus being the strategies employed in the jokes expressed about politics and political leaders in the show. These will be discussed under the subsequent five sub-sections.

### **2.3.1 Stereotyping**

Stereotypes have been defined as widely held impressions about people or groups that we all share (Mindiola, Neiman and Rodriguez 36). According to Kinuu, stereotypes are useful for predicting and understanding the behaviour of a particular group but they can also lead to misunderstanding of groups and their characteristics (Kinuu 26). In episode 7 season 5 of *The XYZ Show*, stereotyping has been used to tell truth to and scoff at the government and security agencies for their blanket condemnation of people of Somali descent. This episode, produced in 2011, the year that Kenya deployed its troops to Somalia in the ‘Operation Linda Nchi’ in retaliation to the continued Al-Shabaab attacks in the country, employs stereotyping to address the Kenya government’s response to terrorism. The stereotyping is contained in the segment titled “*Al-Shabaab Profiling*.” These are the introductory words by *The XYZ* presenter at the start of the episode: “The Kenyan soldiers continue their assault on Somali and will do so until Kenyans feel safe.” He further indicates that the government has declared war against Somali. Unfortunately, the security agents do not target terrorists but deal

indiscriminately with people of Somali ethnicity, especially those living in Nairobi's Eastleigh area.

The show demonstrates attacks of Somali people through various scenes. For instance, there's interaction between two puppet characters Mwaniki, the owner of Mwaniki Jewelers and Cyber Café and Abdi, the puppet of a Somali customer. This is illustrated in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 21:

Customer: *Wallahi, I wish! Kusema kweli wacha mimi anauliza wewe*  
(Honestly, let me ask you)

Tangu ile Al-Shabaab *ilianza kurusha gurunedi hapa Nairobi* (Since the day Alshabaab bombed Nairobi,)

*Wallahi nyinyi watu yote naona kila Msomali ni gaidi kwani iko nini?*  
(Honestly, all of you consider every Somali a terrorist)

*Kwa nini mtu yangu?* (Why my friend?)

Boss: *Pole sana Abdi* (in a hushed voice) *lakini unajua, sasa Abdi* (Pole Abdi, but you know, Abdi,) (Raising voice) *Nyinyi ni kama Chinese. Nyinyi wote imefanana kama photocopy* (You people are like the Chinese, you all look alike like photocopies)

*Halafu majina pia haisaidii jameni* (Then your names don't help either). *Abdi...Abdairahim, Abdul, Abdula, Abdurahime jameni.*

Customer: (Exclaims) *Ngoja kidogo aai, bwana kwani majina ama sura ndio anafanya mtu inakuwa Alshabaab?* (How do names or looks make someone Alshabaab?)

*Yule Alshababaab ilishikwa hapa juzi hapa... hapa Kayole.. alikua ya Kisomali?* (Was the Alshabaab arrested in Kayole the other day of Somali origin?) *Wallahi alikuwa naitwa nani? Mmh Bwire.* (What was his name? Mmmh... Bwire)

*Alikua mluhya tu kama nyinyi* (He was Luhya like you people).  
*Somali kitu gani?* (Not Somali)

(Episode 7, season 5, *The XYZ Show*, 2011)

In the excerpt, Mwaniki points out in what comes off as another stereotype and joke, that all Somalis look alike and their names are indistinguishable. He claims that this makes it difficult to make out terrorists from a crowd of Somalis. Abdi reminds Mwaniki that even non-Somali's have been involved in terrorist attacks. He cites Bwire, a young man of Luhya origin arrested in Kayole estate in Nairobi. This sends a message to the audience to avoid ethnic profiling and blanket condemnation of the Somalis in Kenya.

In a discussion of Operation Usalama Watch set up by the Kenyan government in 2014 in response to the March 2014 Mombasa grenade attacks, Asamoah engages with injustices meted on Kenyan Somalis (Asamoah 5-6). At that time, the government deployed 6000 police in Nairobi's Eastleigh. The operation saw 3000 Somalis detained in the Kasarani Sports Stadium, most of whom were arbitrarily arrested on the basis of their facial appearance. According to Asamoah, even the Somalis who had requisite

documents were forced to flee to refugee camps. In the episode discussed above, therefore, Mwaniki jokingly responds to Abdi's complaint by reinforcing the ethnic and religious profiling of the Somali's. But Abdi voices serious dissent against such inhuman treatment of Somalis based on perceptions equating them all to terrorists. This is a message to not only the ordinary viewers but majorly targets the government.

In episode 6 season 1 of *The XYZ Show*, there's a segment titled "Turkana Oil" where stereotyping is deployed as a strategy of telling truth to power. The segment that is presented in the form of an advertisement reveals the opportunism of a local entrepreneur who takes advantage of the oil discovered in Turkana. The business owner, a puppet character of Mwaniki, dominates the scene as he takes viewers through the services and goods available in his business. This is the same character presented in episode 7 of season 5 discussed earlier in this section. Mwaniki is presented as a stereotype of a Kikuyu business man as depicted in his screen name and his use of Kikuyu accent.

When the scene opens, a tune in Kikuyu is playing. Mwaniki's enterprising and opportunistic nature is presented comically when he declares that his business Mwaniki and Sons General Shop has been appointed as the sole partners of Tullow Oil among other business ventures unrelated to the description of the nature of his business. His is meant to be a general shop, therefore his involvement in the oil business, property and later dating agency does not just cause amusement but points to a serious discrepancy. The incongruous juxtaposition in the last utterance in excerpt 22 below not only supports the stereotype about the enterprising nature of the Kikuyu but also reinforces laughter. To the Kenyan audience, it is not clear whether CD here refers to Compact Disk or condoms.



Excerpt 22:

Shop owner: (Animatedly)

*Eeh ni Mwaniki hapa! Yes vipi wakenya!* (Mwaniki here. Yes, Hello Kenyans)

*Nataka kuwajulisha expansion ya biashara yetu.* (I want to notify you of the expansion of our business)

*Ya mwaniki and Sons General shop and cybercafé* (Mwaniki and sons General shop and Cyber cafe)

TM (laughter)

We have been appointed as the sole partners of Turrow Oil, NBI branch now open. *Na kama unataka kuonja keki ya Turkana.* (If you want to taste the cake from Turkana,) This is the place to be, *dikwira tuko na ploti za 4\*10 huko Turkana na zinaeda kama nguo za mituba* (I tell you we have plots of 4 by 10 in Turkana, and they are selling like second hand clothes). Actually, *zimebaki kidogo sana* (Actually, there are very few remaining).

Man: *Kumi? Unaona! Nakwabia zinaeda kama hot cake* (chuckles) (Ten, see, I tell you they are selling like hot cake)

(On screen is a display of a title deed document with bold inscription (INSTANT))

Across it)

*Na hizi sio kama zile za Syokimau!* (And these ones are not like the ones in Syokimau).

*Juu ni* community land, title deed *inatoka hapo papo* instantly (Because this is community land, title deeds are processed instantly)

*Hakuna mambo ya kungoja. Hata hakuna haja ya kushida ukieda kufanya* search. (There are no delays and there is also no need of conducting a search)

*Na pia tuko na samaki kutoka L.Turkana na CD pia.* (We also have fish from Lake Turkana and CD).

(Episode 1 season 6, *The XYZ Show*)

Mwaniki is satirized as overly materialistic and opportunistic when he declares that he also runs a dating agency and advertises prospective spouses as he would other material stock in his shop. Though Mwaniki could be alluding to human trafficking, the language used elicits humour. He, for example, compares the rate at which the Turkana spouses are selling to the famous Safaricom IPO and asks those interested to buy one wife to get free oil. His idea of ‘trading’ in wives from Nyeri is not only funny but stereotypical as it borrows from the popular stereotype that women from Nyeri are overly aggressive and ferocious. The following excerpt captures all this:

Excerpt 23:

Man: *Haya Ngai Mwathani, woi nilikua nimesahau! Asante sana Mogaka, wewe ni rafiki yangu sana.* (Oh no! I had forgotten. Thank you Mogaka. You are my true friend)

*Na pia Tuko na Turrow Dating Agency ambayo ina deal exclusively na wachumba kutoka Turkana.* (We also have Turrow Dating Agency that deals in partners from Turkana).

Mwaniki General shop (on a screen a poster advert “Turrow Dating Agency” appears).

*Na kama unataka bibi au bwana mTurkana* Hurry, hurry hurry while the stock lasts. (If you want a wife or husband from Turkana, Hurry while stocks last)

*Wanaeda haraka kuliko IPO ya Safaricom.* (laughter) (They are selling faster than the Safaricom IPO)

Buy one wife, get oil for free!

(A poster with the above information appears on screen). Come one, come all

*Na pia kwa ndugu zetu kutoka Nyeri* (Also our brothers from Nyeri)

To trade in *unaeza leta bibi yako ufanye trade-in* (You can trade in your wife)

*Tu unaongeza tu kitu kidogo juu!* (laughter) (You will just top up a little amount). Mwaniki and Sons General shop and cybercafé! *Tunaagalia maslahi yetu... na yenu pia!* (laughter) (We look out for our gains and yours too)

(Episode 1 season 6, *The XYZ Show*)

This objectification of human beings for material gain is subject to scorn and mockery of Mwaniki’s sense of humanity. There is also mockery in the reference of the tiny plots thus a jest at the obsession with land. Mwaniki is therefore mocked for his extreme materialism thus through him capitalism is satirized.

Thus, in this episode, stereotyping has been used as a strategy to exaggerate negative attributes of Mwaniki and this parodies an age-old negative stereotype about the Kikuyu who are said to “have insatiable love for money and are obsessed about business and money deals” (Kinuu 37). The portrayed Mwaniki further showcases his and, by extension, his ethnic community’s obsession for grabbing land. Mwaniki is a symbol of opportunism, materialism and opportunism. Through him, a serious message is being sent to the government to be on the look-out for possible opportunistic maneuvers of local entrepreneurs who would want to benefit from the oil ventures in Turkana if left unchecked. Thus, the episode forewarns or warns the government to exercise control to check the exploitation of the local population by entrepreneurs.

In the two episodes discussed in this section, stereotypes are parodied, exaggerated and implicated in incongruous situations (Eagleton 82), and are used to tell truth to power. In the first one, the government agencies are coerced to avoid blanket condemnation of Somalis in their war against terrorism while in the second case the government is indirectly prepared to protect the interests of the locals in Turkana.

### **2.3.2 Derisions**

Derisions have been defined as contemptuous laughter meant to express ridicule and mockery. This section focused on the ridiculous portrayal of senior government officials that incites laughter about them thus reducing them to objects of public mockery. The XYZ Show Episode 9, season 8 and Episode 11, season 10 demonstrate how derision has been utilized as a strategy of telling truth to power. Both episodes produced in 2013 and 2014 respectively in segments titled “Security Concerns” and “Veterans’ Café” address the subject of insecurity in the country and mock the government’s failure to ensure safety of its people.

It is worth noting that these episodes were produced two and three years after Kenya deployed its troops to Somalia in October 2011. During Kenya's military operation in Somalia, Al-Shabaab established an active presence in the country and carried out numerous attacks in the country (Asamoah 1,6). By December 2014, the Alshabaab was directly blamed for about 211 incidents, 192 of which occurred after October 2011. These involved 609 deaths with 290 occurring in 2014 alone. This made insecurity an important factor in all considerations of the country's economic and political progress as well as diplomatic engagements (Asamoah 15).

Going by the above background information, we can relate with President Kenyatta's desperate and combative mood in episode 9 season 8 while dealing with the then Defence Cabinet Secretary Rachael Omamo, Minister Joseph Ole Lenku and the Director of National Security Intelligence Service Major General Michael Gichangi. In this episode, the puppet of President Uhuru Kenyatta is chairing a security meeting in which he reprimands the puppets of the three senior Security bosses (identifiable from their screen names) for their display of incompetence and inefficiency and threatens to sack them. While doing this, he is emotional and shouts at these leaders. Despite the formality of the context of this meeting, it is ironical that the president assumes an informal and condescending tone and uses Kikuyu language to address a formal security meeting.

Excerpt 24:

President: Now, I have gone through all these files and I don't seem to find any records

*Nikii kariki?* (what is the matter?)

You know it's the duty of the state to protect its citizens

*Kana ni atia?* (Isn't that so?)

(murmurs from the group)

Stop asking me questions, I want answers from you immediately!

Now I want each one of you to tell me one reason, just one good reason, why I should not fire you.

(More murmurs)

(Episode 9 season 8, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

The president's uncontrolled anger outburst is mocked as it inhibits communication and intimidates the three security officials. When Rachael Omamo fails to verbally respond to the president's questions she is crudely thrown out of the meeting. Before then, Gichangi makes fun of her by saying, "She said she has a body ache." This utterance by Gichangi propagates gender stereotypes of women that are meant to prove them weak thus unsuitable for certain positions. The producers are aware of how national security matters are considered masculinist, thus their demonstration of Omamo being thrown out of the security meeting. This agrees with Rashelle Peck's claim that masculinities feature in the political decisions of leaders and this affects the country (Peck 146).

Ole Lenku and Gichangi's responses to the president's questions on why they shouldn't be sacked are not only ridiculous but exposes their incompetence. Ole Lenku dismisses claims of his poor performance as rumours yet he cannot substantiate this. It is hilarious when he says that that was what was being said out there. Gichangi, on his part, asks the president to await forensic reports before sacking him and all this makes the

president more agitated. In this scene, the president humiliates the three officers by exposing their incompetence but at the same time he exposes his failure as the appointing authority. His question to Rachael Omamo at the end of excerpt 25 below is ironical because the question on competence needs to be asked before appointment to a position but not after one is assigned duties.

Excerpt 25:

President: Olelenku!

Lenku: Eh... eh... eh yes, your excellency. Er... if you will do that, you will have fired me purely on speculations and rumours.

President: Uh...rumours huh!

Lenku: And because...

President: (Interrupting him) Rumours huh...Are you listening to yourself? Are you?

Lenku: Ee...no! Eeh...it is also what I'm hearing out there.

President: (pointing at him) *Wewe unafanya mchezo sana wewe. Unafanya mchezo. Nunathaka na wira muno.* ( You are playing around... you are joking. You are playing with work.)

Gichangi give me one good reason.

Gichangi: (Paper in hand) Your excellency, I would recommend that you wait for forensic results about our performance. Then you can choose whether to fire us or not ...

President: (banging the table) Wait for what! *Niki?* (The group is taken aback)

I don't need forensic wha-whatever to come...to know that you have under-performed.

*Nyinyi leo mtaniona...nkt.* (Today all of you will see)

*Na wewe Omamo, wapi O...Omamo.* (And you Omamo, where is O...Omamo)

You are in charge of Defense! Do you know what Defense entails? Do you? (Omamo faces away, hand in mouth)

*Unajua?* (Do you know?) Do you?

Voice: *Si uongee wewe!* (You talk)

President: (Agitated, shouts) Rachael tell me one reason why I should rely on you...tell me, talk to me...

Gichangi: She said she has a body ache.

President: Gentlemen, is Rachael, okay? eh! (Shouting)

*Mwambie atoke hapo.* (Tell her to leave)

*Toka toka hapa toka nje.* (Leave! Get out of here! Go out)

*Mambo inaharibika na hata huwezi ongea.* (Things are getting out of hand and you can't talk!)

*Ananyamaza nyamaza, anajifanya bubu.* (She is playing dumb)

(Lenku persuades her to leave)

Lenku: Just go, just go. (She hesitates)



President: *Mmenipea stress mpaka nimesahau kumpigia Ruto.* (You've really stressed me, I even forgot to call Ruto)

(There's a scuffle as they try to get her to leave)

(Episode 9 season 8, The XYZ Show, 2013)

Likewise, in the '*Veterans Café*' a scene set in a café features puppets of former president Daniel Moi and Mwai Kibaki and the then president Uhuru Kenyatta in the company of Nigeria's president Jonathan Goodluck. In the set-up of the first joke, President Kenyatta and Jonathan Goodluck are seated at table in a café whereas the former president Kibaki and Moi are chef and waiter, respectively. The mere presentation of the two former presidents in that position is derisive as it intentionally belittles the two former presidents of the country and, at the same time, displays them as being at the mercy of the current president. The joke is developed further as president Uhuru and Jonathan express relief that the former's case at the Hague had been dropped and both agree that the presidential candidate at the time of the post-election violence that led to Uhuru's accusation at ICC should be arrested.

It is laughable that they say this within earshot of the former president Kibaki and this leads to the punchline of the joke when Kibaki reacts by dropping a glass that results in his scolding by former president Moi and this scenario generates more derision. This derision is enhanced by the exaggeration of Kibaki's clumsiness in excerpt 26 when Moi accuses Kibaki of "breaking everything" and that soon "he would break the whole hotel" yet he has just broken a glass. But it, as well, reveals Moi's high-handedness in the way he handles Kibaki's clumsiness.

Excerpt 26 and 27 below illustrate this

Excerpt 26:

Jonathan: Ehee, my broder, you know even I forgot to congratulate you on the dropping of that your case. (chuckles) It is a miracle ooh. (chuckles) You know that case actually gave us sleepless nights in the Hague. We thank God oh.

Uhuru: I know... I know... I'm lucky it's all over. But I still don't understand why me. I wasn't even a presidential candidate at that time.

(Episode 11 season 10, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

Excerpt 27:

Jonathan: But then those who were contesting were the ones who should be arrested now.

(Man in waiter's uniform is wiping plates next to the two men. He expresses shock. The chef in the kitchen drops a glass and the waiter turns towards the kitchen; stands at the window. The two men remain at their table and are in conversation.)

Moi: Kibaki *ni nini mbaya...mbona unavunja glasi, unavunja kila kitu.* (Kibaki what is wrong? Why did you break a glass? You're breaking everything.)

Kibaki: Aah ni accident. (It's an accident)

They do happen. Pole. (Sorry)

Moi: Accident *kitu gani?* (Accident?) *We una shida. Juzi umevunja, leo umevunja, utavunja mpaka hoteli.* (You have a problem. Yesterday you broke something, today you've done the same... you will break the entire hotel)

(Episode 11 season 10, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

Further on in the episode, president Uhuru and Jonathan discuss the issue of insecurity on the continent with close reference to Kenya and Nigeria. President Jonathan mentions that rebel groups have resorted to kidnapping young girls and it is amusing that the two former presidents eavesdrop on their customer's conversation and even non-verbally and verbally respond. Ironically, their responses in the entire conversation are ridiculous and laughable. Kibaki, for instance, responds to Jonathan's utterance with a totally ridiculous opinion that brings comic effect in the midst of a very grave subject when he suggests that the rebel group terrorizing citizens in Nigeria should kidnap Nyeri women. Besides the ludicrousness of this expression in this context, the use of ethnic stereotype (reference to Nyeri women) and sheng (*mambo biad*) provokes laughter in this episode.

This segment also reveals underlying gender stereotyping of Kikuyu women- especially those from Nyeri- who are generally considered to be independent and liberated from patriarchal societal principles. At the same time, this alludes to incidents where Kikuyu women in Nyeri have been reported to cut off genitals of their irresponsible husbands.

Excerpt 28:

Kibaki: (audibly) *Waambie wajaribu kukidnap wanawake wa Nyeri waone. Ooh hao ni mambo biad.* (Tell them to try kidnapping Nyeri women. Ooh those are dangerous)

(The waiter who has been writing on a pad exclaims)

*Mambo biad* I tell you. (Dangerous I tell you)

Waiter: (Putting the pad down) Let me tell you, Nyeri women, they are more than fire. *Moto ya kuotea mbali!* (They are dangerous fire)

(Episode 11 season 10, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

In this segment, Uhuru Kenyatta and Goodluck Jonathan's ineptitude is mocked when the two admit to relegating the security matters to the people which is a clear admission of their lack of control of security matters. It would appear that former presidents Moi and Kibaki also ridicule Kenyatta and Goodluck when, in their conversation, they claim that Ethiopia was dealing better with terrorism than Kenya. Ironically, all that president Kenyatta does is laugh out loud.

Excerpt 29 illustrates this:

Excerpt 29:

Jonathan: It's not really something I'm bothered about as much. I'm not really bothered because as I've always said, security starts with the people.

Uhuru: Yes, exactly! (excitedly) Thank you! Thank you very much for saying that! I even thought I was crazy for saying that myself. People saying ati ati Ethiopia is attacking Al-shabaab better than Kenya. Can you imagine?

Moi: (Interjecting from a distance) Yeah it is true...

*Na mimi hiyo najua Ethiopia hawawezi fanya mchezo na makaidi.* (I know that. Ethiopia cannot play with terrorists)

Kibaki: *Huko nasikia ukipatikana eti wewe ni gaidi, wewe ni shingo kukatwa mara moja, na unakufa, kama mbuzi.* ( I hear that there if you are found to be a terrorist , you are slaughtered like a goat, and you die.)

Uhuru: (laughs out loud.)

(Episode 11 season 10, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

As Eagleton posits, to be laughed at means having your case undercut rather than seriously contested, discounted rather than refuted and is thus a particular painful kind of humiliation (Eagleton 33). While in episode 8 season 9 the president of the time and the three security bosses are the butt of the joke, in episode 11 season 10, the two former presidents and the two seating presidents are the butt of the joke. In both episodes, the joke performer not only exposes the failure of the government officials represented but also ridicules them for their incompetence and inefficiency in handling security matters. Further, in episode 11 season 10, the retired heads of state are presented as shallow and their continued presence in the politics of the state is ridiculed. In the same episode, the seating presidents Kenyatta and Jonathan are ridiculed for their laissez-faire manner of handling the security matters of their country. From the two episodes, the audience is made to be privy to the going on in the senior most offices in the country. By getting to see the possible ludicrousness and carefree attitude of their leaders towards serious issues such as security, they are provoked to question not only their competence but also whether these leaders have best interests for the country.

### **2.3.3 Incongruences**

According to Simon Critchley, humour functions subversively by revealing the incongruities in everyday structures of power in order to render the familiar unfamiliar

and thereby produce opportunities for critique. Thus, humour is produced by the disjunction between the way things are and the way they are represented in the joke (Critchley 1). Such incongruous situations can be glimpsed in episode 10 season 1 of The XYZ show produced in 2009. The episode features the puppets of the then President Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga. When a segment titled “*What if?*” begins, the narrator introduces an incongruous situation in his rhetorical question below:

Excerpt 30:

Presenter: Kenyans are known to be an inquisitive bunch or so we think?  
One of the questions we’ve been asking ourselves lately is, What if?  
(The Inscriptions *KWEKWE SQUAD WORK FOR HAGUE, OCAMPO AND ANNAN NI CHAMA*, and *What if KENYA WAS PERFECT* appear on screen)

(Episode 10 season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

The wording of the statement: “what if *KWEKWE SQUAD WORK FOR HAGUE, OCAMPO AND ANNAN NI CHAMA, What if KENYA WAS PERFECT?*” are deliberate discrepancies. In this case, the subject hints at the ridiculous manner in which the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague was handling the Kenya case regarding the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence (PEV). Wring in *The Standard*, Hudson Gumbihi shows that the Kwekwe squad was an infamous police unit set up to exterminate Mungiki, a criminal sect, and was notorious with extrajudicial killings. The group saw the killing of a number of members of the Mungiki Sect.

Hence, suggesting that Kwekwe squad could work for The Hague, an institution meant to safeguard human rights and justice, is outrageous. Yet many aggrieved Kenyans hoped ICC to deal ruthlessly with the Ocampo six — the six Kenyan personalities indicted for committing crimes against humanity. There's also mockery of Kofi Annan's brokerage of peace during the PEV. By claiming that the then ICC prosecutor Ocampo and Annan could be "a Chama," *i.e.*, associates, the show suggests the international UN peace mediation and the international criminal justice were conspirators against Kenya. In this case, humour is produced by the disjunction between the expected functions of the ICC and the way it is represented in the joke as a chama.

Still in the same episode, the scene shifts to a cell where the puppet of former president Kibaki and prime minister Raila Odinga are locked in.

Excerpt 31:

*(Scene shifts to a dark cell. Images of two men in similar prison uniform appear. Music plays in the background)*

Man 1: *Wacha kucheza na hicho kijiti* (Stop playing with that stick)

You've been holding it for the last two weeks.

*Wachana nayo. Kuja tuendeleee na karata.* (Leave it, come we continue with our game of cards)

Man2: Sasa wewe Raira, mbona unapenda kunichokoza? (Raila, why do you like teasing me?)

Saa zile tulikuwa nje, ulinichokoza kila wakati (while we were outside, you teased me everytime.)

Sasa wachana na mimi mmmh.. (now leave me alone)

I want peace, I mean...

Man 1: Ngoja kidogo (Wait a minute)

You're the one who keeps frustrating me all the time.

Mimi nimejaribu kuita lawyer wangu. (I have tried calling my lawyer)

Najaribu kuappeal case hii yetu. (I have tried to appeal our case)

Lakini wewe kazi yako ni kukaa tu. (but all you do is sit)

Ati wewe ni president (that you are the president)

President kitu gani! (what is president!)

Man 2: Sasa unataka nifanye nini? (now what do you want me to do?)

Siwezi nikachange the past! (I can't change the past)

Mambo yalifanyika, na vile yalifanyika, (Things happened, and now  
that it mimi nitakaa hapa hapa, hapa sitoki. happened, I will stay here.  
I won't leave.

Man 1: No way! No way! Agwambo does not accept defeat. There must  
be something we can do!

(Episode 10 season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

The scene imagines the late former President Mwai Kibaki and former Prime Minister Raila Odinga as convicts at The Hague. This is incongruent to what actually happened as the two were not even mentioned in the ICC trial. In the imagined prison, Kibaki is



portrayed as resigned to his fate while Raila continues on with his revolutionary spirit. His claim that “Agwambo does not accept defeat!” is humorous as it alludes to his persistent refutation of election results. This scene if interpreted in connection with a previous episode ‘*XYZ Project Fame*’ in which the puppet of Kibaki performs a song admitting to have rigged the elections, then it could be argued that Kibaki caused the 2007/2008 post-election violence (PEV) in the country; thus, should have been charged at the Hague with the other political leaders. It was because of the PEV that Uhuru had been presented at The Hague as brought in episode 11 season 10 discussed earlier in this section. This scene therefore could spark debate about who the real culprits for The PEV were.

#### **2.3.4 Hyperboles**

According to classical rhetoric, hyperbole is “a figure or trope of bold exaggeration” (Norrick 1728). Hyperbole serves to emphasize a certain point and can also be used sarcastically for the sake of humour. Hyperbole as a strategy of humour has been used extensively in *The XYZ Show*.

In episode 10 season 1 in a segment titled “*Interview with Dr. Goldstein,*” prominent politicians Uhuru Kenyatta, Kalonzo Musyoka and Bifwoli Wakoli are given hyperbolic representation that is not only comical but points to their flaws. For instance, the puppet of Uhuru Kenyatta is exposed in the doctor’s demonstration of the first symptom of Nasomiasis Corruptiophilia-denial. Uhuru’s puppet vehemently denies ever making typing errors at any point and boasts of his excellent typing skills but ironically is ready to “clean his name” through bribery as evident in the following excerpt. This puppet’s nature of speech is uncontrolled and exaggerated with use of

gestures and body movement as it talks too fast. Besides that, its tone is desperate as he tries to deny accusations of corruption.

Excerpt 32:

Presenter: How can we identify the symptoms of Nasomiasis Corruptiophilia?

Doctor: Quite simple! The politician will first be in a state of denial.

(Scene shifts to an office, at the background is an executive office chair, desk and a cabinet. On the desk are money bags and a briefcase with the emblem of the court of arms. Man in black suit appears and talks fast. It is the caricature of Uhuru Kenyatta. A cigarette is on his ear.).

Uhuru: (Talking rapidly) Eh! Typing errors? What typing errors? I don't know what you are talking about. You people need to stop making up those things, they do not exist. Do I look like I make typing errors?

Eeeh... look at these fingers... I can type. How much do you want me to pay you?

(Episode 10 Season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

The scene shifts back to studio and, as Dr. Goldstein reveals, the second symptom of corruption, the puppet of the then deputy president and Wiper Party leader Kalonzo Musyoka appears and talks about his presidential aspirations in the 2012 general elections. The puppet talks very fast as if in a reverie. This combined with the exaggerated Kamba accent and body language contribute to the funniness of this scene.

Excerpt 33:

Doctor: The second symptom is quite appalling I tell you. It is *kupayukapayuka*.

You know, just talking aimlessly.

(Scene shifts to a scene set outside a big gate. A man in black suit stands talking.

There are microphones in front of him.)

Man 2: We are going to build a bus, a big bus, and then we, the winning team will enter the bus, then we are going to drive away in that bus. We might drive slow, we might drive fast, we might stop along the way to help our brothers from the other side. Anything can happen in that bus...

*wapi wiper?* (where is a wave?)

(Episode 10 Season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

The bus is used here as a symbol of the Kenyan state which is run at the whims of those who clinch power. But it also satirizes the childish ambitions of politicians such as Kalonzo who daydreams of doing whatever he would wish with political power. In the context of diagnosing corruption, the show demonstrates that such hallucinations of absolute power significantly contribute to entrenching a culture of corruption in Kenya.

Episode 11 season 8 of *The XYZ Show* produced in 2013 features the period after the launch of the Nyumba Kumi Initiative by the Kenyan President in a bid to enhance security in the country. This was a civilian vigilance initiative where any stranger in a neighbourhood would be scrutinized as well the activities of every neighbour monitored. While launching the Nyumba Kumi initiative in October 2013, the president had asserted: “Security is a shared mandate of all people living in Kenya. The first rule of security is vigilance... we must embrace Nyumba Kumi” (Reporter).

In a segment of the episode, titled “Nyumba kumi,” hyperbole has been used to expose the incompetence, inefficiency and excesses of legislators. In the segment, the puppet of an MP that takes the form of a pig is used to satirize the misdemeanors of the legislators. When the segment starts, the puppet of a resident is moving from door to door getting information about his neighbours in line with the Nyumba Kumi Initiative. After leaving the first house, this puppet knocks on door number 7 and the door opens to reveal the puppet of a character with a pig’s face, mouth and hooves reading a paper. This puppet talks like a human but keeps snorting like a pig giving it a comical representation. The image of a pig reminds us of the common reference to our MPs as Mpigs suggesting their greed for wealth. It also alludes to the Mpigs display of 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2014 outside parliament that sent a strong message against the MPs who were pushing for salary increment. The hyperbolic representation of the legislators in this episode therefore is not only for laughter’s sake but also exposes and mocks their excesses.

Excerpt 34:

Neighbour: Hodi, hodi hapa? (May I come in)

Mpig: Yeah. (Snorts.)

Neighbour: (chuckles) eh habari yako Jirani, pole kwa kukusumbua

(Hello neighbour, sorry for the bother)

Mpig: Mzuri. (fine)

Yeah yeah (snorts).

Neighbour: Lakini nilitaka kujua, wewe unafanyaga kazi wapi? (I wanted to know where you work)

Mpig: (laughter) Yeah unajua... (snorts) (Yeah, you know)

Neighbour: Mmmh...

Mpig: Ukiniuliza mambo ya kazi yangu, hiyo ni tricky eh...(snorts) yeah

(It's tricky to ask me about my job)

Neighbour: Kwa nini? (Why?)

Mpig: Wacha tuseme tu... (snorts) (Let's just say)

Mimi huenda huko nairobi kukaa kwa nyumba (snort)... ingine hapo inaitwa (snort) parliament...(laughter) (I go to sit in a house in Nairobi called parliament).

Neighbour: Kwani wewe ni idler huko? (Are you an idler there)

Mpig: (Amidst laughter) hapana! (snort...) (No!)

Neighbour: iini (yes...)

Mpig: Wakati mwingine tunaongea kitu (snort)... (Sometimes we say something)

Wakati mwingine (snort) tunalala... (other times we sleep)

Neighbour: eeh

Mpig: Lakini pesa nayo, (snort) inaingia tu! (But money keeps flowing)

Neighbour: Haiya! (Exclamation)

Mpig: Yeah (laughs hysterically)

Neighbour: Mnalipangwa tu kulala? (laughter) (Are you paid to sleep?)

Mpig: Ma allowances, (snort) eh! Yeah, CDF...

(Episode 11 Season 8, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

The puppet of the neighbour moving from door to door mimics the activities of community policing leaders. In the process of knowing his neighbours, the inefficiency and materialism of the legislators are exposed when the Mpig declares that they sleep in parliament but keep enjoying their salaries and allowances. Hyperbole has been used in this statement to emphasize the irony in that the legislators are paid for their inefficiency. Barasa concludes that humour offers an opportunity to reflect on important issues as it involves an interaction between the performer and the consumer; that use of latex characters in *The XYZ Show* is a humorous device that involves manipulation of language by a cast of extra-ordinary creations therefore the viewer is placed to accept amusement and enjoy it (Barasa 22). Thus, the use of animal symbolism, the pig in this case, causes amusement as well as exaggerates the greed and materialistic nature of these legislators with a view to exposing them to ridicule. The message that perhaps the public should re-think the kind of leaders they elect is raised laughingly.

### **2.3.5 Mimicries**

Linda Candita notes that mimicking can be used as a device to amuse and entertain and that in mimicking, speakers assume the characterization of another, copying both verbal and non- verbal expressions in order to produce humour (Candita 246). We note mimicry in episode 2 season 9 of *The XYZ Show* produced in 2014, a year after President Uhuru and his deputy backed the Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC) in

their bid to cut Kenya's vast public sector wage bill. Mimicry is deployed to condemn MPs' proposals for hefty salaries and allowances. In 2013, the SRC proposed pay cuts for all MPs which they rejected claiming they needed high wages in order to provide charitable support to their constituents. It was only after a number of demonstrations by the public and civil society groups outside parliament denouncing Mps as "Mpigs" that the Mps bowed to public pressure and accepted the proposed pay cuts. However, this turned out to be a ploy as the MPs demanded, in exchange for pay cuts, tax free car grants, pension and extra allowances (Macharia 2).

In the episode's segment titled "*Pay Cuts*," the Kenyan Member of Parliament represented by the puppet of a creature that is half human and half pig, are ridiculed through mimicry. The scene set in a hospital ward, features a puppet of a human doctor attending to his half human, half pig patient ailing as a result of "eating too much money" and the apprehension that gets him when news of a pay cut reaches him. The patient's screen appearance, character, mannerisms and even the name "MPig" all mimic the mannerisms and behaviour of a pig as we know it. For example, the Mpig snorts like a pig in between his speech, and boasts of over eating. The Mpig, in this scene is, therefore, a symbol of greed and materialism. Thus, mimicry has been used to expose the excesses the legislators indulge in after they take office. As the doctor puts it, his patient's brain and stomach were normal three years back. This is evident in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 35:

Doctor: Okay...look. This is your brain x-ray taken 3 years ago everything was normal.

Patient: *Eeh ndio hiyo* (oh it is the one).

Doctor: Everything was normal

Patient: *Naona, naona* (I see, I see).

Doctor: Yes and this (patient snorts).

Doctor: This was your stomach.

Patient: Ooh *hiyo ni tumbo?* (Oh, that is a stomach?)

Doctor: Also quite normal, nothing really strange about... quite normal. My friend I'm  
afraid there has been a rapid change in your body.

Patient: Mmmh.

Doctor: And it seems to be work-related.

Patient: Mmmh (snorts).

Doctor: Did you change jobs in the last three years?

Patient: *Makazi kazi nimefanya...* (I have done several jobs...)

Of course, *nilichanguliwa kama MPig* last year (snorts)... (Of course, I was  
elected as an Mpig last year...)

*Unaona ....yeah* (you see...)

Doctor: So, what does the job entail?

Patient: It simply involves ...

*Kazi yetu ni rahisi sana.* (Our job is so easy)

Taking money and making policies to take more money...

(Episode 2 season 9 *The XYZ Show*, 2014)



The doctor in this scene imitates an actual doctor and diagnoses his patient with a stomach tumor caused by “eating too much money” and comes up with a treatment plan that will require his patient to quit “eating public money.” Though he is warned that his condition could deteriorate if he doesn’t heed his doctor’s advice, the patient is adamant and suggests favourable measures like painkillers or piriton. The role-play in this scene therefore brings to the fore and ridicules the Mpigs greed and materialism. The following episode demonstrates this:

Excerpt 36:

Doctor: Let me show you something else. And your stomach is just...

(Displaying another x-ray)

Patient: (Exclaims)

Doctor: My goodness I have never seen such a thing *hii kitu* ....look at it.

Patient: *Ama ni vile nimekuwa nikikula pesa. Unajua hii kazi inafanya nikule pesa mingi sana.* (Or is it because I have been eating money, my job makes me consume a lot of money)

Doctor: *Ooh kumbe...* (oh really...?)

Didn’t know that

Patient: (laughs)

Doctor: *Sasa unajua pia side effects za kukula pesa nyingi.* (Now you know the side effects of consuming too much money)

You know. *Kwanza za uma, za uma my friend. Lazima upunguze...* (especially public funds, my friend you must cut down)

Patient: (Shouting in protest) *Ati nini nipunguze?* (I reduce?)

Doctor: Yes! Yes *bwana* MPIG. The X-ray shows you have an aggressive and contagious virulent and malignant greediotis. It's a tumor

*Na unafaa kureduce.* (You need to reduce)

Patient: No, no, no... *Daktari tafadhali, niandikie tu dawa nitameza.* (No!

Doctor, please prescribe for me drugs, I will take them)

*Lakini usiniambie ati nipunguze kukula pesa.* (But don't ask me to reduce my consumption of money)

(Episode2 season 9 *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

The episode above demonstrates that Kenyan politicians' commitment to corruption is incurable. Furthermore, corruption levels in the public sector are cancerous. Just like in the previous episode, this episode could spark conversation around the subject of accountability of public leaders.

Mimicry has also been used in episode 4, season 5 to ridicule politicians involved in political violence. The episode was produced in 2011, three years after the 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya. It features the then president Mwai Kibaki and the then deputy prime minister Uhuru Kenyatta and presidential aspirant for the 2012 presidential elections. Kenyatta was one of the six people accused of triggering the post-election violence. It further features the then Prime Minister Raila Odinga. The segment

is a parody of a popular hit song by Jamaican artist Shaggy — “It Wasn’t Me.” The song is performed by puppets of President Mwai Kibaki who appears as a bald, elderly man in a purple shirt and Uhuru Kenyatta who appears as a younger man in blue.

Just like in the original song in which Shaggy vehemently denies cheating on his girlfriend even when caught red-handed, in this parody, Kenyatta, though caught red-handed by Raila dealing with Mungiki and handing them weapons, is being advised by Kibaki to deny any association with the outlawed gang. This scene effectively employs mimicry of Shaggy’s song to narrate the puppet of Uhuru’s involvement with the terror gang, thus justifying his charges at the Hague. The following two excerpts demonstrate this:

Excerpt 37:

Man in Purple: *Aah..niki?* (Ah what is it?)

Man in blue: Open up *muthee*...

*fungua* (open)

Man in Purple: *Aah we kijana...* (Young man)

What do you want?

Man in blue: Raira just caught me...

Man in Purple: *Eti* you let him catch you?

Man in blue: I don’t know I let this happen.

Man in Purple: With who?

Man in blue: With the Mungiki boys next door you know...

(Scene shifts to a golf course. The man who was in the house is now outside holding a golf stick. Behind him is a magnificent house)

Man in Purple: Come on *wewe* (you ) just say it wasn't you.

Man in blue: I don't know to do.

Man in Purple : Say it wasn't you!

*Kwani iko nini?* (So, what's up?)

Man on screen: Al...right

Excerpt 38:

Man in Purple: *Akisema* night *na wewe unasema* day. (If he says night you say day)

And never admit to a word that he say.

*Akileta Ocampo unasema* no way. (If he brings Ocampo you say no way)

(Clips of man in blue in the company of hooded men welding machettes and money appear. There's person recording them)

Man in Purple: Yes...

Man in Blue: But he caught me with Mungiki...

Man in Purple: It wasn't me!

Man in Blue: Saw me with Maina Njenga!

Man in Purple: It wasn't me!

Man in Blue: *Alinipata kwa Kameje* (He found me at Kameje's)

Man in Purple: It wasn't me!

Man in Blue: Saw the guns in the office!

Man in Purple: It wasn't me!

Man in Blue: And the words that I told them!

Man in Purple: It wasn't me!

(Episode 4 season 5, *The XYZ Show* 2011)

This episode demonstrates the state's denialism of grave injustices. The producers of the show suggest that the state's denialism has become a song, a chorus. Furthermore, it shows that the state is the greatest obstacle to achievement of justice.

The two episodes discussed in this section clearly make use of mimicry as a strategy to mock or satirize top government officials. The audience is granted opportunity to laugh at the greed of the animated Mpig as well as at the desperation of Uhuru's puppet as he seeks a way to exonerate himself from the charges of instigating political violence. While at it, they may be provoked to think about change. Thus, as Zakariae observes, the animated characters mirror the animated rhetoric of the political class and the audience plays an active role in textual interpretation (61-62). The animated political speeches in the two episodes conceal corruption, violence and injustice.

## **2.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the nature of activism in *The XYZ Show*. From the interrogation of the show, it was determined that like all popular art productions, the show was produced for mass audience. The show was available to the local viewer as it was aired on local to air channels. Even long after the last season was aired, the show was still

accessible online for viewership. It was observed that the show avoided distancing dimension in the naming of characters and contexts alluded to. It drew its content, characters, images and language from the country's historical, political and social context. Though the work is a product of creativity, the puppets went ahead to represent events that were intelligible to the Kenyan audience and in every day terms and this makes the show stand out as more factual than fictional.

Further, the chapter engaged with how the show employed laughter to satirize government and senior government officials in Kenya. It analyzed how *The XYZ Show* deployed various strategies to laughingly tell truth to power. Various strategies like: stereotyping, derision, incongruencies, hyperbole, and mimicry were used to mock government officials and institutions. In all these strategies, a deep tone of mockery was used to engage with various political aspects like political scandals and ridiculous state decisions were engaged with. For instance, among the scandals that assailed the Mwai Kibaki regime is the Armenian mercenaries who were involved in attacks against some media houses that were featuring stories regarding the first family. Even Kenyan military's invasion of Somalia is portrayed as scandalous. This is because security apparatuses resorted to stereotyping and profiling ethnic Somalis instead of professionally dealing with the threat of terrorism. There's also political rivalry among various political factions. The rivalries eventually lead to atrocities.

In the show's portrayals, political and governance ineptitude is laughed at and condemned. The ironic mockery of masculinities in politics that influence political decisions were also espoused. This section therefore determines that *The XYZ Show* is a popular art form that is politically textured thus by nature activist.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MORAL FUNCTION OF ARTIVISM IN *THE XYZ SHOW*

#### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discusses how *The XYZ Show* utilizes several strategies to satirize government and government agencies. This chapter discusses the moral, economic, pedagogical and sensitization functions of activism in *The XYZ Show*. The chapter argues that apart from the show's catalytic function, it actually confronts various moral issues ailing the country. Indeed, humour has long been used to empower resistance and satire and cartoons convey a complex argument in popular and easily digestible way (Branagan 470).

#### 3.2 Confronting the State and Leadership through Humour

Studies on popular art reveal that it has affective power thereby making it an effective tool for political mobilization. Aju Basil James opines that humour "promotes a nuanced, historical understanding of political events of our time and can "open alternative spaces for political engagement and that the use of humour to talk about political issues is very effective in consolidating a political community and gives an entertaining voice to a discursive community" (Aju 29-37). *The XYZ Show*, as established in chapter two, is a satirical text that employs various ethos of laughter to critique government and those in power. This section, interrogates the political scenarios in *The XYZ Show* that pinpoint socio-political vices exhibited by political leaders in the country.

##### 3.2.1 Integrity of Political Leaders

According to Gatimu and Wagacha, there are five guiding principles of political leadership: selfless service based on public interest, honesty in execution of public

duties; accountability to the public for decisions and actions; discipline and commitment in service to the people (Gatimu and Wagacha). *The XYZ Show* showcases episodes that point to the lack of integrity of a number of Kenyan senior government officers. To a great extent, the episodes display leaders who are egoistic, intolerant, unaccountable, and dishonest in the execution of their duties. This is communicated comically as these leaders are caricatured and made to act foolishly.

*The XYZ Show* episode 7, season 3, has a segment titled “*Bunge High*.” The episode, produced between September 2010 and April 2011, features puppets of the then President Mwai Kibaki (male student 3), the then Prime Minister Raila Odinga (male student 2), the then Deputy President Kalonzo Musyoka (male student 5), the then Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta (male student 4), William Ruto (male student 1) and Martha Karua (female student) in a school setting. These puppet characters are classmates during a social ethics class. Their teacher, a puppet of Kofi Anan administers a test during the class.

The classmates compete to outdo each other in scoring the 50% mark that will make up their final grade. Their responses to the teacher’s first question introduces the antagonism amongst these leaders. This reflects the antagonism from the two major coalitions (PNU and CORD) in the country at that particular time. The two coalitions were the major political rivals for the presidency in the 2007 general elections. It was after this election that the grand coalition government was formed under the mediation of the UN peace ambassador Kofi Anan. From the students’ responses to Annan’s test, it is evident that even long after the formation of the coalition government, political rivalry still exists. The CORD leader differs with Ruto who feels that if a brother stole his cake, he would fight him using all means possible. As for Raila, he would get back



his stolen share using due democratic processes. This exchange portrays the opposition leader as having a higher moral standing than Ruto. Even with this, the show does not exonerate the opposition from criticism since at the time of the production of this episode, Ruto was Raila's ally in opposition.

Excerpt 39:

Teacher: Silence class. Ah good morning class?

ALL: Good morning teacher?

Teacher: Our social Ethics lesson has just begun and we are going to do an oral test today. This should make up 50% of your final grade.

(The students are now seated, behind them are wall charts)

Class: Mmh mmh!

Teacher: (Reading from a file) Now, question one: What is the moral thing to do when your brother steals your cake?

(Students raise their hands)

Male Student 2: Teacher! Teacher! Teacher!

Teacher: Yes Tinga.

Male Student 2: You see *Mwalimu*, this is where you employ what is known as a thorough democratic process. The same as the one president Roosevelt of America employed when his brother stole his Christmas shoes.

(Murmurs in class)

Male student 1: You fight them using any means necessary!

Male student 4: Oh no! Ask Jomo or your uncle for help.

Male Student 3: Oh yes, for as long as I have plenty of cakes, I don't give a damn if he eats half of it.

(Episode 7 Season 3, *The XYZ Show*, 2011)

In this excerpt, the producers suggest that Raila Odinga explored available democratic avenues when his electoral win was stolen. But William Ruto, who was Raila's chief campaigner, agitated for war. But as for Mwai Kibaki, who is condemned as the incumbent who rigged himself to power, he readily accepts to share power. In this case, the producers demonstrate layers of ethical problems in the country. To steal a cake and share it with the owner is not just comical but also a moral dilemma. Similarly, exploring democratic avenues to solve a political stalemate such as electoral rigging in a country where such systems are dysfunctional is impractical. The pragmatic solution to electoral rigging would be war, yet it spirals to endless atrocities. Therefore, the episode highlights Kenya's moral dilemma at the time when the country almost degenerated into a civil war.

Further, the class is taken through an integrity test when the teacher asks them how they would react in a situation when they witnessed one of their classmates cheating in an exam. Only two out of five leaders pass the integrity test proving the impunity of majority of the leaders. Student one, three and four declare that they will force him to share the leakage while student two feels that that will be a big mistake. Only the female student differs with the rest of the class and, for that, she is heckled by the rest. When the results come out, only the male student 3 and the female student have passed the exam. Male student 2 contests the results while male student 4 thinks of resitting the

exams and paying other students or even the ministry of education to do the exam for him. This lesson ends with the teacher pointing out that the results should serve as a lesson to the entire class.

In this case, the show producers are revisiting Kenya's entanglement in electoral malpractices. The episode shows that, as long as top political leaders in government stand to benefit, they would readily ratify electoral rigging. Student 4 is ready to bribe the core of the education system so that he can pass the test. This shows the absurd levels of corruption in the electoral system which require overhauling in total. The fact that the only female student stands up against electoral malpractices highlights aspects of gender in the country's governance. Even though the producers have Martha Karua in mind, she does represent Kenyan women's wish for free, fair and verifiable elections.

As a person, Karua has been referred to in Kenyan politics as the iron lady. Her firmness is what disrupts the comfort of the group of male politicians. Furthermore, the producers' foreground and ridicule the habit of contesting electoral results even when they appear to be fair. The fact that the student Raila is the one who contests his failure of the test causes laughter since, in the Kenyan political landscape, he has been perennially contesting election results. Juxtaposing the leaders in government and those in the opposition in this scene helps us see their shared greed for power.

In episode 1 season 5 of *The XYZ Show*, there is a segment titled: "*Up close and Personal.*" In the segment, *The XYZ* presenter Keff Joinange is joined by the former director of Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) Professor PLO Lumumba who discloses his distaste in corrupt government officials. The besieged professor alleges that corrupt government officials engineered his dismissal from the commission because of his incorruptibility. PLO says:

Excerpt 40:

PLO: The siege as witnessed against the anti-corruption Tsar and the office of the director of the Kenya Anti- corruption Commission...

Keff: Yes...

PLO: Was by no means against the incorruptible person of PLO Lumumba...

Keff: Oh yes...

(Episode 1, Season 5, *The XYZ Show* ,2012)

Notably, Keff Joinange is a corrupted version of Jeff Koinange, a famous news anchor who hosts important personalities on his famous Jeff Koinange Show. Jeff is known for his impeccable English thus the corruption of his name is a source of humour. Further, the deliberate mix-up in his name suggests that viewers should understand that they are dealing with a corrupted world, a world that is upside down.

Further on, the former EACC director discloses to Keff that his efforts to ensure integrity of people in government and bring to book those implicated for corruption was thwarted by powerful people in government. On this he says:

Excerpt 41:

Keff: Were you distracted from the pursuit of the antelope?

PLO: Let me tell you Keff, I have seen some genetically modified squirrels that criss-cross the echelons of power with the intention to entice and trap the pursuers of the antelope.

Keff: Oh yes...

PLO: But mine has been the realm where the elephant blocks the entrance and your chase of the antelope becomes useless!

(Episode 1 Season 5, *The XYZ Show*, 2012)

In the above two excerpts, the producers of the show highlight two Kenyan personalities who are known for their pomposity and pride in the English language. Their vain pride in the English language alone is laughable, yet here they are caricatured. PLO Lumumba decries his ouster from the Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission. His woes epitomise Kenya's moral dilemma. This is because, even the watch-dog organisation set up to combat corruption is besieged by the corrupt. These two episodes exhibit activist sensibilities as they shed light on the lack of integrity of government leaders.

### **3.2.2 Corruption and Abuse of Power**

Corruption is the abuse of public office and public resources for private gain. This results to the failure to enforce legislation and public policies. (Begovic 2) Further, Kenya's Anti-Corruption and Economics Crimes Act (ACECA), 2003 identify crimes considered corruption in nature, key among these are bribery and abuse of office. (E. a.-c. Commission 1)

In Episode 9 season 10 of *The XYZ Show* titled "*Kenyan Corruption*," corrupt police officers are highlighted and satirized. In introducing the show, the presenter Keff Joinange points out that corruption in Kenya, though more dangerous than Ebola, sinister than cancer, has become the way of life in Kenya. The scene opens to a road, a man is stopped by a police officer who not only accuses him of over-speeding at a

section where the speed limit is 50 KPH but also uses condescending language and tone to intimidate him. The use of the diminutive in ‘katoyota’ to look down on the man’s car is comical as the size of a person’s car should be of the least importance to a traffic police officer. Instead of focusing on the maintenance of traffic rules, the officer focuses on intimidating the motorist. This is illustrated in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 42:

Police officer: Aaah we nani? (Aaah who are you?)

Unafikiria unaenda wapi haraka hivyo? (Where do you think you are going in such a hurry?)

Eehh can you rewind and make a pull over? (Stop and pull over)

.....

Police officer: Haka Katoyota kako unafikiri ni ambulance? (Do you think your small Toyota is an ambulance?)

(Episode 9 of season 10, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

The driver apologises but the police officer goes ahead to joke about the driver’s American accent, something that comes off as self -deprecation. His condescending attitude that is also witnessed in the previous episode, is meant to intimidate the motorist. This harsh treatment of the motorist by the police officer re- imagines the harassment law enforcers put citizens through instead of living up to their motto ‘Utumishi kwa wote.’

Excerpt 43:

Police officer: Na hiyo kisungu yako ni mzuri sana bwana. (Your English is so good)

Police officer: Utafurahisha wenzako sana kwa cell ukirap kisungu kama hiyo. (You will excite your cell mates as you rap in such English)

(Episode 9 season 10, *The XYZ Show*, 2013 )

The officer demands for the driver's licence and when it's handed to him, he exclaims "Na hii licence yako haina uzito" (Your licence has no weight) suggesting that he expected the driver to put some money inside his licence before handing it to him. In response to this direct demand for a bribe, the driver says, "I'm sorry, hiyo kazi sifanyangi" (I'm sorry, I don't do that). The officer directly threatens to take the driver to the police station in which case he will be fined up to twenty thousand shillings cash for over-speeding. This is an example of entrenched institutional corruption (Noor 20). The corrupt police officer directly solicits for a bribe in order to allow the driver evade arrest for a traffic offence. This, according to article 46 of Anti-Corruption and Economics Act, 2011, is abuse of power and the police officer is culpable of an offence. Noting that the police are part of government in the sense that they enforce government's laws and agenda, the show satirises the regime in power for its failure to enable a just and fair society.

Earlier on, we noted that government individuals had besieged the anti-corruption watchdog EACC by striking at the head of that organisation. By showing us the rampant corruption on Kenyan roads, the producers demonstrate that corruption affects almost every aspect of the Kenyan society. In fact, the episode analysed here shows that the person who refuses to bribe is made to look absolutely ridiculous. Thus as (Myint 40) observe, indeed, greed and the need to remain in office is a motivating factor in cases of high-level corruption.

In *The XYZ Show* episode 18, season 11 titled "*Ruto's Wish List*," the show portrays politicians' potential for blatant abuse of power. When the scene opens, the presenter introduces the uncertainty the then Deputy President William Ruto was facing as some

Jubilee MPs raised doubts about him getting support of the Central region in the 2022 presidential race. In the second scene, the puppet of Ruto visits a man in robes, probably a diviner who identifies himself as the wish doctor. Ruto's purpose is to make his wish to become president in 2022.

Excerpt 43:

Man in suit: I hope umeskia kuwa watu wamenichorea. (I hope you have heard people are plotting against me)

Hii mambo ya 2022 bana... (This 2022 issue)

Hawataki Uhunye aniwachie hii kiti... (They don't want Uhunye to hand over this seat)

Man in Robe: Oh okay

(Episode 18 Season 11, *The XYZ Show*, 2017)

Ruto makes his first wish which is granted: His image transforms as a new scene is introduced. In this scene, Ruto is dressed in a red captain's shirt, he has beads on his head and holds a golden staff - the symbols of power and authority. His first act once in power, reveals his potential to abuse his position as he tries to avenge himself against political leaders who plotted against his presidential bid.

Excerpt 44:

Man in Red: (one arm raised) Now, his majesty King William the first orders that his loyal subjects such as Kabogo, or is it Kafogo and Jirongo be brought before his presence. That they may atone for (looking up and raising index finger) their sins. (He laughs arrogantly.)

Man in Robe: (laughs until he chokes)

Man in Red: (Shocked, arms outstretched) *Iko shida nani?* (Hey, is there a problem?)



*Nitumane dawa?* (Should I send for medicine?)

Man in Robe: (Amidst laughter) You just misused your powers. Wish withdrawn.

(*The XYZ Show* Episode 18, Season 11, 2017)

This scene ends with the man in red being transformed back to his first appearance. He pleads with Doctor Wish to grant him one last chance to make a wish. This chance is granted, but once again misused as the man in red wishes to have absolute power and control over the citizens. He says:

Excerpt 45:

Man in suit: ... I wish to be listened to ... by my people.

Nikikohoa, watu wanatetemeka. (Whenever I cough, people tremble.)

Nataka ikuwe ni vitendawili zangu ndio wanategua. (I want them to unravel only my riddles)

(Episode 18 Season 11, *The XYZ Show* 2017).

In the above scenario, Ruto's puppet manifests not only greed for power but also his intention to be an autocratic leader who will stifle democracy. The claim that when he coughs everyone should tremble betrays the potential for autocracy. Furthermore, sibling rivalry is evident when he demands that the citizens listen only to his riddles. This is in reference to Raila Odinga whose political rhetoric is spiced by riddles. This episode not only it comically exposes Ruto's greed, vengeful nature and intent to abuse power but also allows the audience to listen to and witness vice being challenged.

Angela Philips qtd. in (Musila 7) suggests that the porousness of advice genres makes them instrumental in challenging norms; because by listening to what has been 'unsayable' and producing these forbidden discourses bring the 'unsayable' to the realm

of ‘normal’ and ‘sayable.’ Thus, in the interpretation of the moral power of activism in this episode, it was determined that it challenges corruption and abuse of power. While doing so, both government and opposition are exposed as having potential to abuse power.

### **3.2.3 Ethnicity**

Ethnic identity is arguably the most important variable in the Kenyan political arena with proliferation of ethnic parties, ethnic mobilization during campaigns, ethnic voting and ethnic violence being key manifestations and implications of ethnic politics. This ethnic division and negotiations that have featured at national level play out to some degree in the counties (K. H. Commission 8, 26, 6).

“*Mr Rift Valley*,” a segment aired in episode 9 season 11 of *The XYZ Show*, produced in 2016 just before the 2017 General elections in the country, the competition amongst Rift Valley political elites is highlighted. The scene opens to an auditorium set for a performance. Two judges are seated and behind them is a wall hanging with the inscription “Mr. Rift Valley 2017.” Four contestants present themselves for the contest: Former President Moi’s son Gideon Moi referred to as Man Giddy; prominent politician and a former chair of governors, Isaac Ruto referred to as Isaac; Former Deputy president William Ruto referred to as Willy; and Joshua Arap Sang. While introducing the show, the male judge points out that the contest will help “put to rest the ongoing political feuds among the different candidates desperate to become Kingpins in the Rift Valley.” This scenario clearly points to the fact that the four are perceived as the possible political heads of their community from whom the members of this community should pick their kingpin.

The first three contestants demonstrate politicization of ethnic identity as their main campaign strategy. This is packaged in claims of protecting the interests of “their people.” For instance, the first contestant - Man Giddy - when asked what he will do for the people of Rift Valley, he responds:

“Mimi kama Man Giddy wa Baringo ya Kati ningependa kusema, sisi watu ya Rift Valley hatupendi kutishwa tishwa. Ya muhimu ni kuheshimiwa. To respect the general good record yetu, na maendeleo yetu hapa.”

(I as Man Giddy from Baringo Central would like to say, we people from Rift Valley don’t like to be teased. We demand respect, to respect our general good record and our development.)

(Episode 9 of season 11, *The XYZ Show* 2016)

This statement offers no tangible issues that he will address once elected but manifests ethnic politicization. The contestant fronts his belonging to Baringo Central as a strategy to make electorates believe he is a native of Rift Valley. Also, he appeals to the stereotype that his ethnic group is a tribe of fearless warriors. This is supposed to make the electorates believe he is a warrior who will fight for their interests.

The second contestant, a puppet referred to as “Isaac” represents Isaac Ruto, The Chama Cha Mashinani leader. Isaac’s puppet enters the stage and the judges ask him how his election will benefit the people of Rift Valley. In his first utterance instead of saying ‘kazi’ he says ‘kasi’, a deliberate corruption to depict an accent associated with the Kalenjin. The contestant responds:

Excerpt 46:

Ah mimi nimefanya kasi na CORD, Na Jubilee... (Ah! I've worked with CORD and Jubilee)

Na pia siko mbali sana na chama ya baba na mama... (And I'm not far from the parent party, read KANU)

Halafu msisahau naelewa shida za mashinani (Then don't forget I understand the problems at the grassroots)

Mimi nitainua maisha ya watu wa Rift Valley (I will upgrade the lives of the Rift Valley people)

(Episode 9 season 11, *The XYZ Show* 2016)

At the time, Isaac Ruto had formed his own party — Chama cha Mashinani (CCM). This was supposed to make him look like he would prioritise issues affecting people in the rural areas. In the episode, he is portrayed as someone without a firm stand when it comes to political party affiliations.

The third contestant whom the female judge refers to as Willy is a prayerful man who had recently won a case at the ICC takes the stage. In response to the judges' question on what he will do for the people of Rift Valley, he says:

Excerpt 47:

I am the assistant to the current Mr. Kenya.

Kwa hivyo nimefika karibu. (so I'm almost there)

Hata nimeshaingiza kichwa! (My head is already in)

Kwa hivyo watu wa Rift Valley kuniweka nje watakuwa wamefanya makosa sana! (If Rift Valley people leave me out, they will have made a big mistake)

Mr. Kenya akiretire pap! Mimi ndani! (When the current Mr. Kenya retires, I'll get in)

Na pia nimetengea watu wa Rift Valley pesa za miradi... (I have set aside money for development projects in Rift Valley)

(Episode 9 season 11, *The XYZ Show* 2016)

Here, Ruto is portrayed as anticipating to become the next president. He promises to develop his ethnic block once elected president. The three political figures featured in the above segment of *The XYZ Show* clearly propagate ethnic politics. All the contestants urge the Rift Valley region to vote as a block. The problem with such politics is that it polarizes the nation thus thwarting any efforts towards national unity and cohesion.

Episode 2 season 10 of *The XYZ Show*, in a segment titled "*Pesa Mashinani.*" similarly displays the idea of ethnic mobilization of the electorate. The scene opens with the presenter's introduction of the main character - Isaac Ruto, the then Governor's council chairperson. Isaac, a man in black coat goes door to door campaigning and seeking signatures in support of his "*Pesa Mashinani Initiative.*" Of great interest is the second person he meets — a man who quickly picks and signs the document Isaac is taking round and pledges his support.

He says:

Excerpt 48:

Hebu leta hii kitu yako, nimekungoja ufike kwa mlango yangu bwana.

Na unajua lazima ni support hii project ya ndugu yangu eeh!

Si unajua wewe ni wa kwetu?

(Bring this thing, I've been waiting for you to get to my door. You know I must support my brother's project. You know you are my kinsman)

(Episode 2 season10, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

As they part, they communicate in a vernacular language identified as Kalenjin. The voting for the Pesa Mashinani Initiative, in this case, is based neither on value nor issue but on ethnicity. The same is displayed by the third person Isaac approaches — a Luo woman, deduced from the language she uses (pesa marang'oo). The woman's first question when presented with the document is whether the document is aligned with the ODM party led by Raila- a Luo politician. This suggests nepotism and political balkanization all that are contributors to bad politics in the country.

Excerpt 49:

Hii ni ile ya ODM? (Is this an ODM's document?)

(Episode 2 season10, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

When Isaac explains that the initiative, he is pushing for is meant to devolve funds from the national government to the counties, the woman refuses to append her signature and dismisses Ruto saying:

Aaaah! Wacha kunisumbua, wacha mimi ningoje ya watu wa Raila.

(Stop bothering me, let me wait for Raila's people)

Si ya baba ni okoa Kenya, nangoja hiyo.

(Baba's is Okoa Kenya, I will wait for that one.)

(Episode 2 season10, *The XYZ Show*, 2014)

In this scenario, Baba and Raila refer to the same person - the ODM leader who is a Luo. The female character displays loyalty to her ethnic leader because political parties are often overshadowed by their founding leaders who double up as perceived political heads of their ethnic communities (E. a.-c. Commission). Therefore, it can be deduced that in the above scene, the woman's readiness to support Raila/ ODM's Okoa Kenya Initiative is not issue-based but obviously ethnic centered. This and the previous scenes in "Mr Rift Valley" clearly exhibit ethnic 'division' and 'negotiations' that have featured both in the local and National politics. Again, this vice is portrayed by both opposition and government sides. Ethnicity therefore is a vice that that the episodes highlight with a view to challenging them. The message from the episodes discussed herein is clear: ethnicization of politics derails good decision making. This is because, if citizens think along ethnic lines when voting, or making serious political decisions, they are likely to settle for poor leaders.

### **3.2.4 State and Political Propaganda**

According to Haifeng Huang, propaganda is the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people's thinking, emotions and behaviour and shaping the thinking of the masses. Historically, the media has been used to spread propaganda be it positive for common good or negative to attain selfish goals by individuals or government. (Huang 421-422: 458-459) *The XYZ Show's* episode11 season 7 and

episode 8 season 7 depict political propaganda with what (Fitzmaurice 64) calls “a hint of nostalgic humour”. In these episodes, senior politicians make propagandist utterances against their political rivals in a bid to malign them.

A close look at season 7 of episode 11 unearths propagandist messages propagated by the puppets of the then outgoing President Mwai Kibaki, the then incoming President Uhuru Kenyatta, his then deputy Ruto and the former Prime Minister Raila Odinga. This is particularly so in a segment titled “No Wasting Time” produced after the hotly contested elections of 2013 that saw the entry into office of President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto for their first term. When the show opens, the puppet of former President Mwai Kibaki is seen in the president’s office together with the puppet of the then president-elect Uhuru Kenyatta. Uhuru’s puppet criticizes Kibaki’s disorganization and the presence of too much paper on his desk and drawers. He says:

Excerpt 51:

Uhuru: Na utoe hizi karatasi mingi hapa. (Clear all these papers).

We need computers hapa, hii gava ni ya digital. (We need computers here, this is a digital government.)

(Episode 11 Season 7, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

Uhuru Kenyatta’s utterance matches the political climate after the 2013 general elections. The people in power had promised the country digital transformation. Apparently, Uhuru is subtly selling his political agenda that was captured in his Jubilee manifesto long after the elections.



We also read political propaganda when Kibaki tries to poison Uhuru against his deputy, Ruto, when he says:

Excerpt 52:

Kibaki: We sikiza basi, nimeona witness wa Ruto amelenga statement yake juzi.  
(Listen, I have seen that Ruto's witness withdrew his statement the other day.)

Uhuru: *Uriku?* (which one?)

Kibaki: Kwani anataka kukuwacha huko ICC peke yako? (Does he want to abandon you at ICC?)

Uhuru: Ah! Ruto hawezi fanya hivyo. (Ah! Ruto cannot do that.)

Kibaki: Hiyo kijana anakaa suspicious sana. (That young man looks very suspicious)

Uhuru: Oh no no no...

Kibaki: Oh yes...

Uhuru: No, we Kibaki *tiga, tiga!* (No Kibaki, stop it!)

(Episode 11 season 7, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

In the above excerpt, Kibaki's puppet uses divisive politics in an attempt to poison the president-elect against his deputy. The use of Gikuyu words like "uriku and tiga" are the writer's way of revealing the aspect of ethnicity among the ruling elite and this exposes the leaders to public ridicule. This excerpt therefore exhibits political propaganda. Yet, the suspicions and ethnic preservation strategies imagined in *The XYZ*

*Show* back in 2013 would turn out to be prophetic as Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto fell out before the 2022 presidential elections.

Later, in the same episode, the puppet of Uhuru and Ruto leave the office and head to the airport in order to take a flight to the coast with a view to address the drug menace. At the airport, they are confronted by the official opposition leader and former Prime Minister Raila Odinga. The two parties conflict on who should use the government jet, air force one, with Ruto asserting that they booked the plane earlier. The president-elect and his deputy claim that they are going to Mombasa on official business, a claim that Raila trivializes saying:

Excerpt 53:

“Biashara gani, hiyo tu ni kuzunguka zunguka mkitafuta kumbekumbe.”

(What business? You are just making rounds looking for termites.)

(Episode 11 Season 7, *The XYZ Show*, 2013).

In response, Uhuru asserts that his government was action oriented and had started executing its mandate immediately. He says:

Excerpt 54:

“Sisi jamaa sio wale wa kuzubaa, tumeanza kazi mapema!” (We are not the slow type. We have started working.)

(Episode 11 Season 7, *The XYZ Show* 2013)

Here, Raila highlights Uhuru and Ruto’s wastage of public resources through official government trips. In as much as the trips are purported to be for public good, they are unmasked as misuse of public resources. While at that, one may question why the

retired Prime Minister insists on using the government plane to travel yet he is not entitled. The scenario presented here sends negative criticism about the former prime minister and official opposition leader who seems not to have accepted the election results and court ruling. Further, the fact that leaders are still competing amongst themselves for supremacy and control at a time when they should be serving the public exposes them to public ridicule. The nature of propaganda used in these episodes perform what (Fitzmaurice 3) points out: advances political agenda which, in the long run, influence the masses. In the last episode discussed in this section, it is evident that both government and opposition leaders are found culpable of propaganda.

### **3.2.5 Electoral Malpractices**

In any democratic society, elections need to be free and fair, but this is not the case in the country as determined in the two episodes of *The XYZ Show* analysed in this section. According to The National Crime Research Centre, electoral crimes and offences have remained a serious challenge in Kenya's electoral history and process. Bribery of voters, threats, intimidation, use of fraudulent devices, coercion of election officials, use of undue influence and tampering with nomination and ballot papers are cited as forms of electoral crimes and offences. (Centre 1). These malpractices have had far reaching negative effects that have disrupted the peace of the nation.

Episode 8 season 7 titled "*XYZ Project Fame*" and episode 11 season 1 titled "*Bloody Bahasha*" humorously expose electoral offences that are spearheaded by our political leaders. Episode 8 season 7 produced in 2013, few months before the 2013 general elections depicts the use of undue influence on the electorate and vote rigging. The episode serves to not only highlight election malpractices but also to condemn political leaders who perpetrated them. This episode, produced five years after the hotly disputed

presidential elections of 2007 that culminated in the post-election violence of 2007-2008, features the three key presidential candidates in the 2007 elections who later form the coalition government. They are presented as music artists performing during *The XYZ “Project Fame” show*. The first performer is MC Agwash, a corruption of Raila Odinga’s popular political name Agwambo. Here, he exposes his discontentment in the coalition government that was formed to quell conflict after the disputed 2007 elections and his intention to vie in the next elections. He says:

Excerpt 55:

MC Agwash: When you see me faint, I am struggling to find my way.

I hustle both day and night, so I can be present in 2012

Sikiza sawa (listen keenly)

Ukiniona na Kibaki, usidhani ni mabeshte (When you see me with Kibaki, don’t think we are friends)

Najua plan yangu ni kutafuta salary oooh ( I know my plan I’m looking for a Salary oooh)

(Episode 8 of season 7, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

The next performer, Man Stevo, exposes the political propaganda fuelled by politicians during election period to discredit each other. He hints in his song the antagonism between himself and Raila on the one hand and himself and Ruto on the other hand. He complains that the two politicians have branded him traitor and his wiper party a donkey’s party.

Excerpt 56:

Man Stevo: Hata kama Raila na Ruto hawanitaki, 2012 ni guarantee nitaingia state house. (Even if they don't want me, it's a guarantee that I'll get to state house in 2012.)

(Episode 8 of season 7, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

He further exposes electoral malpractice when he suggests the presence of rigging in the previous elections when, in his song, he adds: "Hakuna kuimba kura this time" (This time there will be no election rigging.)

Excerpt 57:

"Tunataka watu waingie state house kwa njia inayostahili" (we want people to get to state house legitimately.)

(Episode 8 of season 7, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

The final performer in this episode is the puppet of the third president Mwai Kibaki who is dressed in a blue shirt, white T-shirt inside and a white cap. The puppet carries a golf stick and sings boasting of his cunningness and how he used underhand methods to clinch the presidency in 2007. His performance is hilarious as he keeps repeating the refrain "mi ni mjanja" (I am sly) and goes ahead to reveal how he used undue influence and manipulation to influence the election outcome in 2007 that saw him sworn in unceremoniously at night. Here Kibaki's puppet is a comical figure who is made to make a fool of himself by boasting about rigging the elections.

Excerpt 58:

Man in Blue: Nairobi poa, kumbuka KICC, usiku stima zikalosti. (Nairobi, remember black out at KICC at night?)

Halafu wakasema eti mimi ni prezi (then they said that I am President)

Raira akasema amesanyiwa mavoti. (Raira said his votes had been stolen)

Niliweka masecurity hadi mawachi (I beefed up security including watchmen)

Nikafanya ODM wakae machizi men (I made ODM look like crazy men)

.....

Man in Blue: Kura naapishwa usiku. (I was sworn in at night)

Chorus: We ni mjanja (you are sly).

(Episode 8 of season 7, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

In episode 11 season 1 segment titled “*Bloody Bahasha*”, the dilemma on whether the perpetrators of the 2007-2008 post-election violence should be tried in a local tribunal or at The Hague is the point of focus. The puppet of Kalonzo Musyoka is the main character. When the scene opens, he is making a call to one Mr. Mutula and thanks him for pushing Annan and Ocampo to ensure the culprits are prosecuted at The Hague. His selfish motive for coercing Mr. Mutula is clearly exposed when he says:

Excerpt 59:

“Endelea kusukuma Annan na Ocampo ili wapeleke hawa watu Hague. Nitapitia katikati yao niingie statehouse by Desemba.” (Continue pushing Annan and Ocampo to take these people to the Hague)

My swearing in speech is ready. And even Pauline and I have been practising for the New Year’s ball.

(Episode 11 Season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

This exposes politicians’ opportunism when Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto were prosecuted at The Hague. The episode further shows that most politicians’ interest in the case was not for the purpose of seeking justice but for political gain as conviction of the accused persons would have reduced political competition.

Additionally, Kalonzo’s intention to coerce the army to offer security and safeguard his interests points to not only electoral malpractice but also potential corruption and abuse of power. In this excerpt, the Kalonzo character sees no problem with invoking ethnicity to clinch political power which is unfairly acquired.

Excerpt 60:

Mambo ya handing over haina shida. (The handing over issue is not a problem)

Mtu wetu wa jeshi atatusaidia na hiyo maneno. (Our person in the army will help with that)

(Episode 11 Season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

The illustrations above clearly show that political leaders are at the core of electoral malpractices in Kenya. This is seen in Kibaki’s puppet’s gleeful disclosure of having

rigged the elections and Kalonzo's puppets display of egoistic intent to commit electoral malpractices despite the volatile political climate at the time. This clearly shows that political leaders are the major hindrance to electoral reforms in Kenya and as (Myint 53) points out, they always try to make the best out of a bad situation. By watching this episode, the audience is made privy to the possible electoral malpractices leaders engage in with a view to provoking debate around these malpractices.

### **3.3 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated how *The XYZ Show* confronts the moral issues ailing state leadership in Kenya through humour thus addressing the second objective of this study. It has been established that moral vices such as lack of integrity of political leaders; corruption and abuse of power; ethnicity in the political arena, state and political propaganda; and electoral malpractices are propagated by political leaders both in government and the opposition. The episodes studied here revisit the moral problems as they condemn normalisation and celebration of vices.

To a great extent, the episodes display leaders who are egoistic, intolerant, unaccountable, and dishonest in the execution of their duties. As a result, it can be said that this puppet show serves a moral function as it exposes the moral dilemmas, shortcomings and other malpractices of the country's political elite. For example, in episode 9 of season 10 of *The XYZ Show* titled "*Kenyan Corruption*," corrupt police officers are highlighted and satirized. In introducing the show, the presenter Keff Joinange points out that corruption in Kenya, though more dangerous than Ebola, sinister than cancer, has become the way of life in Kenya. even the watch-dog organisation set up to combat corruption is besieged by the corrupt and this the reason PLO Lumumba is ousted from EACC.



The police are not spared as they are satirized for abuse of power and corruption. Negative ethnicity and ethnic politics are satirized as they are seen to polarize the nation thus thwarting any efforts towards national unity and cohesion. Political leaders are further castigated for electoral malpractices like vote rigging and manipulation of election officials and results. These are seen to disrupt the peace of the nation. The show as discussed in this section does not subscribe to a particular brand of politics as it exposes the vices committed by leaders in government and the opposition and sometimes the ordinary citizens, who on grounds of ethnicity, allow these leaders to manipulate them. Through *The XYZ Show* therefore, satire has been used to expose the moral corruption of top leaders with a view to instigating critique on their suitability for those positions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SOCIO-POLITICAL WORLDVIEW OF ARTIVISM IN KENYA

#### 4.1 Introduction

World over, activism has sparked appreciation towards visual arts and social movements and it is causing such a stir that the academia, progressive politicians and citizens have now become avid consumers of art (Akinyi and Musalagani). To complement this, the rise of social media platforms such as Kenyans on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have given Kenyans avenues for political advocacy. As Motaraki opines, “placing campaigns online gives them higher visibility as opposed to traditional forms of protest” (Motaraki 64). Motaraki adds that though demonstrations and protests are leading forms of activism in Kenya, the probability of people taking part in them is not very high as there is no guarantee of personal security. As a result, activism is shifting more towards online platforms that allows the citizens to have political engagements without being physically present (21).

In a discussion on popular theatre, (Outa 18) points out that Africa has “dextrous and complex ways” in which there is co-existence between high literary theatre and the popular that weaves its way in all manner of places. According to Outa, marginalized popular theatre will, with time, give itself space in the more officious circles. As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, *The XYZ Show* is an established activist production whose creators utilise digital platforms to transmit political satire. Guided by the discussions by outa and Motaraki, this chapter analyses Kenya’s socio-political world-view of activism in Kenya as portrayed in *The XYZ Show*. The chapter is subdivided into sub-sections titled: Activism as Civil Resistance, The Paradox of Satirizing the Kenyan State, and The Liberative Power of Activism.

## 4.2 Artivism as Social Resistance

From the 1990s, Kenya became some kind of theatre for “staging politics” as indirect messages floated between orators and hearers and speakers manoeuvred within what is and what could not be publicly spoken, thus listeners constructed their own interpretation. It is during this time that Kenya witnessed the rise in forms of cultural expressions which entailed revival of popular theatre and music for purposes of enhancing political agitation. Wahome Mutahi joined in the rapidly emerging sector of political reformers that used theatre and other popular, cultural expressions to make their point (Outa 88).

Through *The XYZ Show*, Mwampemba joins this group of activists to first expose the vices of the ruling class and, secondly, indirectly affect the consumers of his content to resist such leadership. This section engages with episode 5 season 8, a segment titled “*Tax Troubles*” and episode 12 season 12, a segment titled “*Election Jitters*” to demonstrate how artivism can indeed be used for civil resistance.

Episode 5 season 8 addresses the tax measures put in place by the Jubilee government during its first term. It explores over-taxation and the glaring high cost of living that frustrates both the low-income and the middle level population at the time. The jubilee government had imposed VAT on maize flour — “unga” — a staple food for the low-income population. The unga is referred to by the then deputy president’s puppet in the scene as ‘low class’. This flour is restricted to the middle class who complain that this is unjustified as they are not to blame for the inflation facing the country.

When the scene opens, puppets of a man and a woman appear shopping in a supermarket. From their conversations, the two seem to belong to the middle-class. Even so, they too notice the high cost of living as food prices have drastically risen.

Their only consolation is that they can afford whatever they need. The following excerpt shows this:

Excerpt 61:

Lady: Aai. Aki baby si vitu zimepanda bei. (Oh baby, the prices of items have really gone up.)

Man: Eeeh naona. (Yes, I see)

Lady: Itabidi hao macuzo wamerudi ocha nakuambia. (I tell you; my cousins will have to go back to the village.)

Unaona vile maziwa imeshoot? (Just see how the price of milk has shot up)

Man: Eeeh, nacheki. Lakini wacha tu usijali. (I see, but don't worry)

Good thing we can afford it.

(Episode 5 of season 8, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

The irony is that the couple goes for subsidized “unga” meant for the poor. Furthermore, the couple also goes for duty-free car importation, thereby evading taxation through dubious deals. During his shopping, the man receives a call from a car dealer who has helped him buy a car worth three million for only one million shillings. From their discussion, it is clear that the buyer has got the car duty-free courtesy of the dealer. At the same time, the puppet of deputy president Ruto appears dressed in black suit and cap. He introduces himself to the male shopper as “Hustler.” It appears that Hustler is accompanied by the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) officials tracking those evading taxation by illegally importing items duty-free. The ‘Hustler’ insists that since the male shopper can afford a car worth a million, he should buy flour whose price is inclusive of VAT. Ironically, Ruto’s insistence tax-paying is founded mostly on his personal financial needs such as the fare to travel to Hague. This is evident in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 62:

*Magavana wanataka pesa ama waende referendum by the way.*

*(Governors want money or they will push for a referendum)*

*Inafaa mnisikilize na mnielewe. Thika Super Highway inafloodi, inabidi tuirekebishe. Bensouda anataka ni attend case in person. Sasa fare itatoka wapi jameni? Wacha niwaulize.” (You should listen to me and understand. Thika Super Highway is flooded, we need to reclaim it. Bensouda wants me to attend the case in person, let me ask you, where will the fare come from?)*

(Episode 5 season 8, *The XYZ Show* 2013)

The man and lady complain that they are not to blame for the tough economy thus should not be over-taxed. But Hustler retorts that they will tax them till their last day.

The following excerpt captures this:

Excerpt 63:

Hustler: “Usipolipa ushuru, utalindaje Uhuru na mimi?” (If you don’t pay tax, how will you safeguard Uhuru and me?)

Man: Sasa mimi nafaa kuwalinda kweli? (Now, should I protect you surely?)

Hustler: Lipa ushuru ulinde Uhuru wako. (Pay tax and protect your independence)

Man: No sweetie, twende (Let’s leave)

Hustler: Tuta watax mpaka siku ya mwisho... ama muende ocha (We shall tax you till the last day... or you go to the village.)

(Episode 5 of season 8, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

In this episode, the low income and middle level citizens bear the brunt of inflation. But the government is not only unsympathetic but also selfish. The use of the deputy

president's puppet in the scenes discussed above gives the citizenry, represented by the man and lady shopper, an opportunity to resist the government's move to over-tax them. Likewise, season 12 episode 12 of *The XYZ Show* portrays the manipulation Kenyans experience just before the general elections. Kenyans' ability to stand up to this manipulation sends a strong message on their political stand. From the puppet characters' dialogue, the elections referred to in this episode are the 8<sup>th</sup> August 2017 elections. The first scene opens to a lady seated on a bench in an open space. Around her are skyscrapers giving the aura of Nairobi city centre. A man approaches her, presents her flowers and proposes marriage; a proposal she turns down saying:

Excerpt 64:

Hujui elections ni next week? Wacha hiyo mambo iishe halafu tuongee Septemba. (Don't you know elections are next week? Let us finish with that and talk in September.)

(Episode 12 season 12, *The XYZ Show*, 2017)

In the subsequent scene, a young man approaches an older man whom he identifies as his landlord. The young man attempts to give the older man a bundle of notes that the older man rejects saying he will accept the money on 9<sup>th</sup> August, the morning after the elections, or better still on 10<sup>th</sup>.

Excerpt 64:

Landlord: Wacha mchezo kijana. Unanipatia pesa saa hii nifanye nini? Wewe enda.

Utaniletea pesa tarehe tisa. Eh! Asubuhi wakati tumeshamaliza kupiga kura.

Ama fanya hivi... fanya hivi, Kijana... Nilettee tarehe kumi.

(Stop joking young man, what do you want me to do with this money you're giving me now? Just go. Bring the money on the morning of ninth... after we are done voting... or do this... young man... bring the money on tenth.)

(Episode 12 season 12, *The XYZ Show*, 2017)

The artistic creators in the first scene of this episode symbolically use marriage to represent the leaders seeking elections and attempting to woo the electorate to support them. Similarly, scene two alludes to the relationship between landlord and tenant to represent the relationship between the leaders and the electorate. As is custom, in the two scenes, reference is made to the leaders' last-minute attempts to win the electorate even if it meant buying their support. Ironically, the electorate resist their manipulation and turn them away as they are aware that voter bribery is just but political manipulation that has nothing to do with the genuine "love" or concern the leaders profess.

Their ability to turn them away sends a strong message about the citizens' ability to resist manipulation and coercion by the political aspirants. This clearly shows that *The XYZ Show* as an artistic production seeks to transform Kenyan politics. It subtly reminds the electorate that they are the landlords of the country - Kenya and the elected leaders are mere tenants. The artist uses realistic analogy by referring to the rejection of a suitor by a lover he has courted over time; and a landlord who would ideally, gladly receive the rent due to him but he ironically rejects it. In these episodes therefore, art has been used to communicate the idea that ordinary citizens can and should resist manipulation by politicians.

#### **4.3 The Paradox of Satirizing the Kenyan State**

In Kenya, comedy shows such as *The Redykyulas Show* created at a time when the then president Moi's name could only be mentioned in hushed voices, might have made Kenyans laugh, but it also became a form of opposition when it took on the ruling elite using political satire and laughed at the 'big man' in open public spaces (Mukhongo 156, 165-166). Just like *The Redykyulas Show*, *The XYZ Show* satirizes Kenyan leaders

and government institutions. However, unlike the former whose characters were real and known actors, namely John Kiarie, Walter Mong'are and Tony Njuguna; *The XYZ Show* uses puppet characters that are given physical features that make them easily identifiable to the Kenyan audience. In Episode 12 season 1, in a segment titled “*Returning Fire*” and Episode 10 season 4 in a segment titled “*Lumumba Cribs*”, the creators take the stage to expose and ridicule a failed police department and key political and government leaders respectively.

In episode 12 season 1, the puppet of the then police spokesperson Erick Kiraithe is being interviewed by *The XYZ Show* puppet presenter Jonah. He is asked to respond on the pertinent issues of extrajudicial killings, blatant police bribery and police reforms. When asked why the police are hell-bent on killing each other, Kiraithe responds thus: Excerpt 65:

Where did you hear that? It is all propaganda and anyway if brothers fight and kill each other, shida iko wapi? (Where is the problem?)

Pilipili isiyokuwasha, unaikula ya nini? (Why should you eat pepper that doesn't irritate you?)

(Episode 12 season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

Despite the fact that police brutality against each other and cases of police killing fellow police at the slightest provocation were on the rise, the then police spokesperson claims there was no cause for alarm. In fact, he trivializes the matter when he asks: “where is the problem when brothers fight and kill each other?” This contradicts professionalism in the police service. The second response in Swahili, that is a distortion of a famous Swahili saying “pilipili usiyoila yaku washiani?” not only arouses laughter but also further exposes the police spokesperson's intellectual ineptitude to public scrutiny and



ridicule. Immediately after this, he speaks in a simplistic manner about accountability and police recruitment that are key pillars in the police reforms. According to him, accountability is the same as counting and reporting on the number of bullets used. This is not just for humour's sake but a way of satirizing not only the spokesperson but also his appointing authority and by extension the entire police force.

Excerpt 66:

Every time we shoot thugs, (he bends to pick something from under the table) the public gets to know. We've been counting bullets since time immemorial. (He straightens up and places cartridges on the table.) You see... (counting) one, two three, four, five... ziko hapa (here they are). How can you say we have not been accountable?

(Episode 12 season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

On the issue of corruption during recruitment, the spokesperson is unable to deny that recruitment is marred by corruption. He resorts to self-deprecation as he attempts to justify the lack of transparency and integrity during recruitment. What he is indirectly communicating is that the officers in charge of the recruitment have no choice but to accept bribery so as to determine the right candidates from the large number of applicants. In short, he normalises corruption and this puts him up as an object for ridicule. As an audience, we have to struggle not to laugh and hate at the same time such open admission of corruption.

He says:

Excerpt 67

Wacha nikwambie... (Let me tell you) Let me tell you my friend, he! There are 4000 slots and 60000 applicants. Mnataka tufanye nini? What do you want us to do?"

(Episode 12 of season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

Later in the interview, when questioned about the measures put in place to ensure police are well trained, he proves not only his intellectual ineptitude but also his lack of emotional and social intelligence. This is so especially at a time when many people had lost their kin to police shootings. The following excerpt shows this:

Excerpt 68:

Presenter: Speaking of injuries, what kind of measures will you put in place to ensure that the police are well trained?

Police Spokesperson: What do you mean? Is there a police who does not know how to shoot? The Mungiki shoot at us and we shoot at them. (voice hushed) And we don't miss.

Presenter: No, you do not. The shoot to kill order, does it also apply to civilians?

Police spokesperson: Let me tell you Jonah, criminals are civilians and civilians are criminals. Like there is that boy who was shot. The truth of the matter is that the boy was not shot. Our boys were on patrol. They saw a suspicious looking character. They opened fire, so the bullet was coming this way (gesturing) and the boy was coming this way. (gesturing) What happened is that the boy followed the route of the bullet. And, coincidentally they met at the centre. (clasps hands) What did you expect? They collided. So, he was not shot, they collided with the bullet.

(Episode 12 season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

The creators of this episode employ buffoonery to question the nature of training Kenyan police officers undergo. They, as well, raise questions on whether the police are aware of their responsibility to safeguard human life and uphold justice. From the spokesperson's laborious explanation on how the young boy meets his death, it is clear

the police will go to lengths to exonerate themselves from blame whenever they indiscriminately shoot at innocent citizens. They may have had a reason to shoot at Mungiki because these could be armed and out to cause harm, but shooting at an innocent boy is inexcusable. The spokesperson's choice of language to explain this killing evokes laughter. But at the same time provokes the audience to look down on and criticize the police institution.

In Episode 10 season 4, PLO Lumumba opens his doors to *The XYZ* presenter in the segment titled "*XYZ Cribs*." In one of the scenes, he is dressed in Karate uniform and he engages in combat moves imitating the martial artists on his television after which he exclaims that sometimes one has to fight his battles with his fist. Earlier, he had pointed out that in his push to fight corruption, he needed words to fight the complaints. These two scenarios suggest the challenges he has to contend with as the anti-corruption boss. He has to be prepared both mentally and physically to counter the grave corruption cases in the country.

Shortly after the martial arts scene, PLO moves us to a room with four portraits of prominent leaders whom he refers to as corruptible imbeciles and the wall he refers to as the wall of shame. The first is the portrait of William Ruto, the then deputy president under which are the inscriptions: "WANTED FOR HAGUE LOITERING, REWARD MANY BAGS OF MAIZE". The second is the portrait of Uhuru Kenyatta, the then president. Under the portrait are the inscriptions: "WANTED FOR BUDGET ERRORS AND PEV, REWARD 9.2 BILLION SHILLINGS." The third is the portrait of Kalonzo Musyoka, the Wiper Democratic Movement leader. Under his portrait are the inscriptions: "WANTED FOR SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY, REWARD 6 MILLION SHILLINGS". The last is the portrait of Mike Sonko who is wanted for public madness

and the reward is his parliament seat. PLO refers to Sonko condescendingly as a blabbering ignoramus who is an embarrassment to even disgrace the wall of shame.

This wall of shame illuminates top state leaders and exposes them to public shaming. PLO wittingly jokes about their failures, and sins of omission and commission and by doing so incites the audience to scorn them. It is worth noting that this wall of shame is juxtaposed to our general knowledge of hall of fame. This therefore underscores the politician's gross misconduct as persons expected to represent political uprightness. Such satirical portrayals enable the audience to "receive the indirect messages and construct their own interpretation" (Haugerud 1-2). As the audience make fun of these leaders, the leaders on their part are provoked to change.

In the above episodes the police department and key political leaders have been confronted through humour. Their moral corruption and other political misdemeanours are projected for ridicule. The audience is also incited to demand for radical cleaning of the corridors of power. The two episodes demonstrate Julie Webber *et al* position that political comedy has been established as dominant in popular culture not only as a means to inform and entertain audiences, but also confronting precarity, increasing police power and state abandonment but also it is the preferred genre: as the old saying goes, they laugh to keep from crying (Webber and Willet 3).

#### **4.4 Liberative Power of Artivism**

From chapter one of this thesis, artivism has been established as a new language for social change, and the current language of independence and freedom that makes use of creativity and artistic creation to arouse social engagement (Vico, Semora and Bailey 10,13). Indeed, art forms have historically accompanied movements for social change

and have been agents in the production, resistance, and re-existence of affectivities (Barsey 21).

Episode 1 season 10 and episode 5 season 7 of The XYZ Show, clearly demonstrate that activism has the potential for inciting social action. In episode 5 season 7, there's an interview segment titled "*Up Close and Personal*." Here, the puppet presenter Keff Joinange holds an interview with puppets of Nairobi County senatorial candidates: Mike Sonko and Margaret Wanjiru. The episode aired on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2013, a few months before the general elections, is rife with political overtones that water down the credibility of the two senatorial candidates. This works to inspire the public to re-think the contestants' eligibility for this position.

This episode brings the two leaders down from the pedestal and gives power to the viewer to criticize them. To begin with, Bishop Margaret cannot defend her degree. When asked what happened with her degree, she responds: "That's the devil's deception." It is apparent that Wanjiru lacked credible academic papers to qualify for the gubernatorial seat, but she goes ahead to blame the devil for it. She goes on to suggest that she had made her own plan to be governor but God wanted her to be senator and that she was anointed by the highest university which is God's university. Her ignorance is over-emphasized when she declares that she was pursuing an "advanced PhD in C.R.E on how to castrate the devil." Wanjiru's outright display of intellectual deficiency, coupled with lack of academic qualifications strip her of her credibility and suitability for the position she is vying for. As we laugh at Bishop Wanjiru, we also laugh at ourselves because we elect the very same leaders who lack intellectual capacity to lead the country.

This is further proven later in the interview when the two aspirants are asked to talk about their agenda for the city if elected. On the subject of Nairobi traffic jam, Margaret's response is not only hilarious but an outright display of ignorance and lack of political strategy. The deliberate slip of the tongue when she declares that the tax money will benefit JIAM- her church, foregrounds her selfish personal interests in pursuing the political seat. It is apparent that her religiosity is geared towards self-aggrandizement and not the glory of the Lord as purported. She says:

Excerpt 69:

Margaret: ... Keff, traffic jam will never end in Nairobi. However, what I propose is that we make use of the time that we are in the jam.

Keff: Ha!

Margaret: I will allow (gesturing with both hands) hawkers free access

Sonko: Ati mahawker? (Hawkers?)

Margaret: So instead of going out to buy in any supermarket, you can buy everything in the jam.

It will be like a drive in the market.

Keff: Oh my! Drive in!

Sonko: Unafikiria kila mtu anadrive? (You think everybody drives?)

Margaret: Drugs, veges, unga, CD and ... za music, name it... then we will tax the hawkers and make more money for JIAM. Sorry for the Kanjus. (Sorry, for the city council)

(Episode 5 season 7, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

In the same way, Sonko invites criticism on himself not just by his manifesto but also when he proves he cannot communicate in English. Throughout the interview, he uses “sheng”. Additionally, key on his manifesto is the empowerment of the youth, a brilliant thought. But when specifying how he will go about this he proves his ignorance on job creation when he proposes that all youth should join the police service. He says:

Excerpt 70:

Mimi napropose mayouth wote wajoin poli... wajoin police. (I propose all youth join Kenya police)

... Halafu hapo hivo kila mtu atakuwa na kazi. (Then just like that, everyone will have a job.)

(Episode 5 season 7, *The XYZ Show*, 2013)

In the same way, episode 10 season 1, in a segment titled “*What if?*” the puppets of former president Mwai Kibaki and official opposition leader Raila Odinga identified as man 2 and 1 respectively, are locked up in a cell. The picture of the two most powerful leaders in prison has been used to capture the idea about how Kenya would be like if it were perfect. Indeed, if Kenya were perfect, political leaders who perpetuated crimes against humanity, would be held culpable and brought to book. The following excerpt displays the helplessness the two senior most political leaders would be in if the law indiscriminately served its purpose.

Excerpt 71:

Man 2: Sasa wewe Raira, mbona unapenda kunichokoza chokoza kila wakati?

... (Raira, why are you always on my case?)

Man1: Ngoja kidogo (Wait a minute)

You're the one who keeps frustrating me all the time.

Mimi nimejaribu kuita lawyer wangu (I've tried to call my lawyer.)

Najaribu ku-appel case hii yetu, lakini wewe kazi yako ni kukaa tu. (I have tried to appeal our case but as for you, you just sit there.)

Ati wewe ni president, president kitu gani? (That you are the president, president my foot.)

Man 2: sasa unataka nifanye nini? Siwezi nikachange the past. (Now, what do you want me to do? I cannot change the past.)

Mambo yalifanyika, na vile yalifanyika, mimi nitakaa hapa hapa. Hapa sitoki. (now that things happened the way they did, I will stay here. I won't leave.)

(Episode10 season 1, *The XYZ Show*, 2009)

This scene highlights the helplessness and hopelessness of the president and official opposition leader as they are made to pay for Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election violence. Though, in reality, the two were not part of the Ocampo six that were indicted for the PEV, *The XYZ Show* re-creates the ideal situation and suggests that leaders, regardless of their political standing, should take responsibility for their actions.



Ideally, it was as a result of the opposition leader's discontentment with the election results and Mwai Kibaki's questionable ascendance to top election results that sparked the PEV. This episode, therefore, raises issues on who the real culprits are and suggests that if Kenya were perfect, then the real culprits would be brought to book. Through this, the episode strips the represented leaders of their supremacy and exposes them to social criticism. In a way, the scenario inadvertently invites us to look at our leaders as answerable to law and, by extension, allows us to question the justice system.

In the two episodes analysed in this section, art has been utilised to liberate the masses (audience) from the enslaving mentality that make them view political leaders with awe and reverence. Here, art restores the audience's power to challenge political leaders. The first episode is an artistic expression of protest against incompetent but power thirsty politicians who use political gimmicks and propaganda to win their way into elective positions. The second excerpt imagines the possibility of prosecuting powerful politicians when they commit injustices. Therefore, as Mesias writes, the outcome of this kind of activism is social sensitization against collectively shared problems and its artistic strategies influence politics (Mesias 20).

#### **4.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated that through *The XYZ Show*, Mwampemba joined the group of activists to first expose the vices of the ruling class and, secondly, indirectly affect the consumers of his content to resist such leadership. For example, episode 5 of season 8, the low income and middle level citizens who bear the brunt of inflation are given an opportunity to resist the government's move to over-tax them. Likewise, episode 12 of season 12, portrays the manipulation Kenyans experience just before the general elections and proves that they have the ability to resist this manipulation. This

sends a strong message on the people's ability to have a solid political stand. It subtly reminds the electorates that they are the landlords of the country Kenya and the elected leaders are mere tenants.

The artist uses realistic analogy to the rejection of a suitor by a woman and refusal of rent from a tenant to remind citizens that they have power over their leaders. Episode 10 of season 1 in the same way strips the represented leaders of their supremacy and exposes them to social criticism. This clearly shows that *The XYZ Show* as an artistic production seeks to transform Kenyan politics by satirizing poor state leadership and reminding the electorate that they can resist this. It can therefore be concluded that here, art restores the audience's power to challenge political leaders.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the work presented in this thesis. It summarises the findings, conclusions and recommendations for further studies on this topic. The study aimed at analysing art and politics in Kenya through the interrogation of the nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show*. The study was driven by the assumptions that, there is activism embedded in the political joke text of *The XYZ Show*; activism in *The XYZ Show* has political function; and that the nature and function of activism has a socio-political impact on the worldview of activism in Kenya. To interpret the data collected from the purposively sampled episodes of the show, Grace Musila's proposed model of reading African popular culture was used.

The study utilised the qualitative approach to interpret and explain the nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show*. The data, collected by viewing purposively sampled disparate episodes, was recorded in structured checklists and in-depth analysis of this data done through textual analysis. Thematic content analysis was used to organise the data into various thematic strands that would address the objectives of this study as summarised below.

#### 5.2 Summary of the Key Findings

##### 5.2.1 The Nature of Activism in *The XYZ Show*

To address the first research objective that sought to determine the nature of activism in *The XYZ Show*, Grace Musila's strand: Politics/ Power/ Agency guided in the contextualised reading and interpretation of the show. The Show was read as a popular

art to corroborate the artistic aesthetics that make it politically textured. From the findings, it has been established that *The XYZ Show* that premiered on Citizen TV on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2009, is a popular art produced locally and that which heavily relies on the Kenyan socio-political context for its characters and content. It is a parody through which the writers deliberately use animated latex puppets to tell a variety of stories. These stories are allusions to events that took place in the country at different moments; thus, the narrative presented appeals to audiences as if it were factual. For example, episodes studied made allusions to easily identifiable political situations like the marred 2007 general elections, the Grand coalition formed after these elections, the Artur brothers' saga, and the sacking of the Kenya Anti-corruption boss PLO Lumumba among others. To expose pertinent issues in the different scenes, the show draws upon devices that historically appear within cartooning such as caricature, parody, allegory and humour.

It has also been established that the show is a satire that tells truth to power laughingly as it heavily relies on humour to expose and challenge our leadership structures. As a satirical text the show is characterized by critique and irony, but it lacks implicitness as it does not observe distancing in naming of the characters and context. Seemingly, the writers named the puppets using common names like Uhuru/ Uhunye, Ruto/Willy/ Hustler, Raila/ Tinga/ Baba, MaDVD, Weta, Kalonzo, PLO etc. Therefore, with this kind of naming, prominent leaders are exposed to public ridicule when their caricatured forms appear as puppets on national television and go through motions that mock their positions. This grants space for the ordinary citizens to laugh at their leaders. In the attempt to tell truth to power, *The XYZ Show* laughs at the government and its leaders

using strategies such as stereotyping, derisions, incongruencies, hyperboles and mimicries.

### **5.2.2 Moral Function of Artivism in *The XYZ Show***

Guided by Musila's strands of Public Pedagogies/ Techniques of Self; and Bodies/ Affects the second research objective that sought to determine the function of artivism *The XYZ Show* was addressed. These guided in explaining how the show was used to challenge certain norms thus giving it moral power. It was established that the show confronts state leadership through humour and, by so doing, pinpoints vices exhibited by the leaders. From the episodes studied, it was noted that leaders represented therein were egoistic, intolerant, dishonest and unaccountable, thus proving their incompetence for the positions they held.

Additionally, corruption and abuse of power was identified as a pertinent issue bedeviling key government offices and officials. On this, it was ascertained that the traffic police sought bribes and interfered with the judicial processes. Senior political leaders likewise interfered with the fight against corruption by fighting and silencing those who championed this process as seen in the sacking of the anti-corruption boss. Furthermore, it was noted that the greed for power made key government officials stifle democratic space of the citizens.

Further, ethnicity was identified as a vice propagated and normalized by Kenyan politicians. By extension a group of citizens subscribe to ethnic politics as well. Key on this is ethnic mobilization of voters, ethnic voting and tribal politics that proved to be divisive and detrimental to the country's peace.

It has also been noted that state and political propaganda is propagated by political leaders in a bid to push their political agenda and win the sympathy and support of the electorate. Most often than not, this propaganda is divisive and misleading.

Finally, electoral malpractices were also brought to the fore in the episodes studied. The key issues that arise here are vote rigging, manipulation of the electoral body and incitement to violence. It was therefore determined that, *The XYZ Show*, uses humour to expose the weaknesses and vices of Kenyan political leaders and government institutions with a view to exposing them to public ridicule.

### **5.2.3 The Socio-political Worldview of Artivism in Kenya through *The XYZ Show***

To determine the socio-political world view of artivism in Kenya through *The XYZ Show*, Musila's strand: Public Pedagogies/ Techniques of Self was engaged with to explain how this popular art served as a tool for political mobilization. From the interrogation of sampled episodes, it was established that the show exhibited activist ideals thus, was a tool for civil resistance. For example, the rejection of a suitor by a woman and refusal of rent from a tenant serves to remind citizens that they have power over their leaders.

By doing so, the show strips the represented leaders of their supremacy and exposes them to social criticism. This clearly shows that *The XYZ Show* as an artistic production seeks to transform Kenyan politics by satirizing poor state leadership and reminding the electorate that they can resist this. It can therefore be concluded that here, art restores the audience's power to challenge political leaders.

Further, the show satirizes the Kenyan state as it uses humour to allow viewers laugh at the "big men" in the country, at their ignorance, incompetence, corruption and inadequacies. Through this, the leaders are brought down from their pedestal and

subjected to public shaming. Thus, it can be concluded that this kind of activism has liberative power.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study points out that *The XYZ Show* as the first political puppet show in Kenya, is a popular art production that blends art and activism thus the examination of this show as activist. In this comedy, various strategies of humour have been used to satirize government and tell truth to power. The show does not just give commentary on the misdeeds of top government officials but, most importantly, it allows the common person view and intrude into the world of these leaders and see their omissions and commissions. As a result, the common person is accorded power to laugh at and ridicule these very leaders. The study therefore adds to the body of works on popular art and politics.

### **5.4 Recommendations for Further Study**

This study limited itself to the nature and function of activism in *The XYZ Show*, a puppet comedy show. The study proposes that future studies be carried out on

- i. The effectiveness of these latex puppets in propagating activism in Kenya.
- ii. An ethnographic study on these puppets to establish degree of influence on the Kenyan on the Kenyan audience (viewers) is therefore recommended.
- iii. The effectiveness of music as a tool of protest in *The XYZ show*

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Nacosti Letter

  
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NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR  
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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**This is to Certify that Ms. GLADYS MBITHE JOHN of Machakos University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Machakos on the topic: ART AND POLITICS IN KENYA: INTERROGATING THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF ARTIVISM IN THE KENYAN SOCIETY THROUGH THE XYZ SHOW for the period ending : 28/January/2024.**

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10<sup>th</sup> January, 2023

The Director,  
National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation  
P.O Box 30623,  
**NAIROBI**

Dear Sir

**RE: GLADYS MBITHE JOHN (C50/12723/2017)**

The above named is a Masters student in the second year of study and has cleared course work. The University has cleared her to conduct a research entitled: **“Art and Politics in Kenya: Interrogating the Nature and Function of Artivism in the Kenyan Society Through the XYZ Show”**

Kindly assist her with a Research Permit in order to undertake the research.

Thank you.



**PROF. KIMITI RICHARD PETER, PhD**  
**DEAN GRADUATE SCHOOL**

KRP/em





## Appendix III: Plagiarism Report

INTERROGATING THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF ARTIVISM IN  
THE KENYAN SOCIETY THROUGH THE XYZ SHOW By Gladys  
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