



Tusker Project Fame: Ethnic States, Popular Flows

Mbugua Wa-Mungai

To cite this article: Mbugua Wa-Mungai (2007) Tusker Project Fame: Ethnic States, Popular Flows, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 1:3, 338-358, DOI: [10.1080/17531050701625771](https://doi.org/10.1080/17531050701625771)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17531050701625771>



Published online: 10 Oct 2007.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 495



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

Tusker Project Fame: Ethnic States, Popular Flows

MBUGUA WA-MUNGAI

Kenyatta University, Nairobi

ABSTRACT *Ethnicity has come to be the dominant currency of Kenya's politics over recent years. This article explores the social meaning of ethnicity through an examination of ethnic stereotyping, as this is revealed in a variety of popular discourses. Stereotypes are forged and circulated within popular sites of cultural encounter, and they are one of the principal means through which the objectives of ethnic projects are executed. The predominance of stereotypes within everyday social discourse in Kenya makes ethnic 'othering' normative. The article interrogates the links between popular cultural flows that enable the formulation and dissemination of both ethnic-based and other stereotypes, for instance on masculinity. It is argued that a consideration of (en-)gendering, often entirely missing from discussions of stereotypes, enables a more nuanced reading of such practices. It is asserted that stereotypes have become a dominant mode of discoursing in Kenya today because they constitute a corpus of folklore, originated within 'in-groups' and deployed in various modes against 'out-groups'. In a society where folklore reaches deep into the past few people ever stop to question the validity of folkloric interpretations that are constantly at work in the present. These issues around stereotyping and ethnicity are examined through consideration of bar-room conversations, the lyrics of popular songs, text messaging, internet chat rooms, and newspaper cartoons*

Every society has its pet likes and hates; it is doubtful that any society would want to be seen as liking what it supposedly hates. This is a dilemma that one immediately faces in trying to interrogate the subject of ethnicity in Kenya. Both the ethic of ethnicity and a consciousness of the instrumentality of ethnic networks seem to have developed tenacious roots in the post-colonial period. Do Kenyans really dislike ethnicity – or the more recognizable 'tribalism' – beyond protestations to the contrary as might be read in popular daily newspapers, seen on TV opinion polls, and heard on radio call-in shows? Indeed, there must be a compelling reason for writer Evans Skuma to have hurriedly compiled and published in 2005 four booklets on Gikuyu, Kamba, Luo, and Luhya ethnic stereotypes. What, then, is the role of dominant stereotypes not only in the formulation and circulation of ethnicity and ethnic identities but also in the contestations that these invite? Ethnicity seems to spawn stereotypes that work by, as Bhabha has argued, aggregating and reducing complex entities into simplified and thus memorable formulae whose chief mode of 'affirmation' is their repeatability.¹

A discussion of popular ethnic stereotypes seems more relevant than ever as Kenyans move toward a general election slated for December 2007 against the background of the

Correspondence Address: Mbugua Wa-Mungai, Department of Literature, Kenyatta University, PO Box 43844, Nairobi, Kenya. E-mail: matatuman71@yahoo.com

fractious tensions put in place by and during the campaigns leading to the constitutional referendum of November 2005. For Kenyans, 'ethnic questions' now seem to dominate public discourse. This is demonstrated by a sample of articles appearing in the first three months of 2007 in Kenya's leading national newspaper, the *Daily Nation*: 'ODM [Orange Democratic Movement] should opt for candidate from a small ethnic community' (28 February, p.12); 'Ndung'u may be qualified, but regional balance was critical' (6 March, p.10); 'Wait and judge CBK boss Ndung'u by performance and not ethnicity' (8 March, p. 12); 'Ethnicity killing our democracy', 'Worrying trend in major public sector appointments' (14 March, p.11); 'It's time to free key offices from political patronage' (15 March, p.11); 'MPs anger over top public service jobs' (22 March, pp.1, 4) and 'Tribalism is the cancer eating into Kenya's political flesh' (31 March, p.12). This is not just an obsession of the *Daily Nation*, as other newspapers too carried the same stories reported in a similar way. In nearly all of these texts, the dominant sentiment, real or perceived, is that what began as a surreptitious trickle of ethnically biased appointments into top civil service jobs has become open, unapologetic favoritism of cabinet ministers' relatives, friends and tribesmen. We might well ask why this trend has not been so seriously questioned before, but the combination of the immense gains in freedom of speech since the fall of the Kenyan African National Union (KANU) from power in 2002 and the political fervour gathering as the current election campaign takes shape seems the most likely explanation. However, it is more important to ask how such discourse functions in the construction of Kenyans' identities about themselves as well as others.

As Mutonya has argued with regard to musical practices in Nairobi, 'ethnic feelings and biases [...] live on in the cultural repertoire of present-day Kenya and form part of the perspective through which Kenyans view contemporary events'.² Of these events, those that have a political nature seem to be more open to ethnically coded readings, especially given the tendency by politicians to seek narrow power bases in the tribe – which incidentally is deemed by many to be a more meaningful constituency – before they can stake claims to broader national leadership. Indeed, the speaker of the Kenyan national assembly, Francis Ole Kaparo, only recently condemned the country's political parties as ideologically rudderless tribal outfits.³ But beyond the vote-seeking, ethnicized rhetoric of politicians, what is even more engaging is the tendency amongst *wananchi* ('ordinary' Kenyans) to conscript narratives of ethnicity to the service of their individual and sometimes collective projects precisely because they recognize the futility and perhaps the attendant irony in the 'united Kenya' concept circulated by the political elite and therefore seek to subvert it. Ethnic stereotypes might in this sense be seen as counter-narratives of power. This paper seeks to demonstrate, first, that stereotypes – forged and circulated within popular sites of cultural encounter – are one of the principal means through which the objectives of ethnic projects are executed. Indeed, the predominance of these stereotypes within everyday social discourse seems to make ethnic othering normative. In this case, the objectives of both the narrow and the wider ethnic projects do not necessarily coincide but they certainly feed into one another. Second, I seek to interrogate the links between popular cultural flows that enable the formulation and dissemination of both ethnic-based and other stereotypes, for instance on masculinity. Third, I contend that a consideration of (en-)gendering – often entirely missing from discussions of stereotypes⁴ – might enable a more nuanced reading of such practices. Dundes' argument in regard to the uses of inverted projection in folklore will be relevant to this purpose.⁵ Finally, the paper asserts that stereotypes are such a dominant mode of discoursing in

Kenya today because they constitute a corpus of folklore, originated within ‘in-groups’ and deployed in various modes against ‘out-groups’. In a society where folklore reaches deep into the past, few people ever stop to question the validity of folkloric interpretations that are constantly at work in the present. The creators of such lore realize that by stereotyping they are involved in the construction of folkloric texts, but they will still disavow their role in the ethnicization of the broader Kenyan culture.

It has been argued that in Africa popular cultural production, and its subversive agenda, retains its peculiar potency because it exists outside the direct control of the state and industry.⁶ This paper contends that popular culture’s practices that creep furtively into the mainstream are even more puissant. Drawing upon diverse material ranging from bar-room talk, cartoons, ethnically conscious music, phone text-messages, web-based ‘discussions’ and FM radio, we will explore how Kenya’s stereotypes are created, when they are most intensely deployed, and what is achieved by their use. These emergent urban practices enable us to interrogate the processes by which ethnic identities are debated and constructed. The bar-room, in particular, is a popular social space for Kenyans, and its centrality has been firmly inscribed in the public imagination through popular writings such as Wahome Mutahi’s *Whispers*.⁷ At a more mundane level, it has been noted than an increasing number of people are spending too much time in bars.⁸ In these spaces, ‘matters of ethnic and national identity are negotiated and promoted’⁹ as patrons swig their booze to the beats of various types of music – traditional, western and local hip-hop as well as Christian. These discourses are neither homologous nor uncontested and it is precisely within the tensions generated in these spaces that one often encounters profoundly ambivalent attitudes about ethnicity. The above point might become apparent if we consider the popularity of football and the English Premier League in Nairobi. While some people can access the matches from their homes the preferred social space that generates the most palpable passion is the bar-room, where the viewing of key games draws viewers from across the breadth of Kenya’s social and cultural spectrums in a manner that indicates, however temporarily, solidarities beyond ethnicity.¹⁰ Games involving Arsenal or Manchester United pull in the largest crowds; ethnic affiliation and fan loyalties to local clubs like Gor Mahia or AFC Leopards are evidently supplanted by deep admiration of these English clubs. Thus, new points of tension can emerge as existing identities are (momentarily) supplanted by new ones. In 2006 the Kenyan press reported that a man was beaten and left for dead in Kisumu as he left a bar where he had been cheering for the ‘wrong’ English Premier League team; that both the victim and his assailants were all Luo indicates that shared ethnicity was not in this case a guarantee for survival.

At this point let us consider in greater detail other common topics – rumours, ‘expert analyses’ on diverse issues, scandals amongst others – that circulate in bars and which might enable an understanding of some of the popular ways in which ethnicity is continuously being constructed and contested.

Anecdote 1: Tusker Project Fame

Time: A hot afternoon in December 2006. Venue: a popular spot in Thika town, Kenya. At a corner table is a party of four; three 30-something-looking men in suits and a much younger-looking woman. The group, alternately swigging their Tusker beer and ploughing through a mound of roasted meat, is boisterous enough to eliminate the

necessity for eavesdropping. Their conversation is held in code-switching mode between Ekegusii, English, *Sheng*¹¹ and Kiswahili.

X1: *Maze uliona hiyo* Merc Valerie *aliwin kwa* Tusker Project Fame? *Ni noma!*

Y (the girl): *Wewe* Bosire, *ati* who were you supporting, Linda or Valerie?

Bosire: I didn't support either. In fact *yule* Valerie, she is too fake. *Yeye* she was just copying western mannerisms and styles. My man was Cedric because he merged well the traditional and the modern. Cedric *ndiye alikuwa* original!

X2: I feel Linda should have won over Valerie. But the reason Valerie won is that the majority of those who voted are the youth, and they like western things like fashion. Do you remember the way she used to dress?

X1: Don't forget that this whole thing was rigged. How come all the final four contestants were from Kenya, eh? . . .

Bosire: (Interjecting) You remember the way that judge, Ian, was so hard on the Ugandans until Gaetano, the MC, you remember the Ugandan guy from last year's Big Brother? He had to ask publicly what criteria the judges were using to kick people out of the Tusker Academy, and whether only Kenyans could sing.

Y: Imagine *ati* not even one of these fine Tanzanian musicians made it to the finals? *Kwani* in the whole of East Africa only Kenyans can sing well?

X2: Given that the teachers in Tusker Project Fame Academy were *Jang'os* what did you expect?!

From this conversation emerge a number of crucial aspects that might enable us to interrogate the workings of stereotyping. First, the people in question are urban youth—informed about both local and international events – and evince a cosmopolitanism about the world that enables them to make fairly objective comparisons about how it works. For instance, even if they are all Kenyan, they feel that contestants from Uganda and Tanzania were unfairly treated yet, at the same time, they ignore the contradiction in their insistence that the traditional (i.e. 'local') is preferable to the western and therefore the 'alien'. This conversation also instantiates the glossing and reductive processes at work in stereotyping. For example, the teachers at the music academy included at least one Kamba, Regina Re, but being all Abagusii the group here seems to have something against the Luo. However, this slip is quickly counteracted – consciously or otherwise – by citing the perceived bias on the part of Ian Mbugua, a Gikuyu, where the implicit assumption is that he played a role in ensuring that three of the four finalists (Valerie Kimani, Linda Muthama and Alvan Kariuki) were from *his* tribe. The fourth finalist, Cedric Dambala, a coastal Kenyan, does not seem to fit so easily into the predetermined moral economy that pits 'scheming' Luo against 'unprincipled' Gikuyu, and he is thus left out of the grid.

In this manner the stage is set for the moral censure of Valerie whose short dress is seen as indicative of her lack of proper (traditional African) values – to our group the west is synonymous with moral corruption. In turn, the broader youth category in East Africa that voted for her is being implicitly censured but the most biting criticism is levelled against the Luo judges; their 'collusion' throws away the whole project to an unworthy ('immoral') winner. This supposed Luo fetishization of western commodities is not incidental since it is a widely held perception that they are 'black Englishmen'; the term *Jang'os* is a contemptuous street reference to the Luo, often described in many contexts as

Jaluo Jinga Jeuri (foolish, arrogant Luo). In a recent instance, when opposition Luo politician Raila Odinga was captured on television arriving for the opening of the ninth parliament in a red Hummer on 20 March 2007, Luo conspicuous consumption (deemed to be another ethnic trademark) promptly became the subject of parody in Maina Kageni's show on Classic 105 FM Radio the following morning.¹² In like manner, it is crucial to note that the four bar-room patrons in the conversation cited above are evaluating the world through lenses forged at the intersection between popular media (reality TV) and popular spaces; the consumption of Tusker beer in Kenya is a social occasion in which 'wisdom' is uttered, disputed, accepted or simply ignored. Inadvertently, a glitzy marketing event that was supposed to showcase Kenya Breweries' commercial accomplishment ended up opening up a discourse on ethnicity. It did not help matters that the Kenya Breweries MD, Gerald Mahinda is a Gikuyu; one of my informants stated that right from the beginning it was clear that only a Gikuyu was going to win.

Ultimately, in bar-room talk and radio commentary the Luo are constructed as being both unreliable and sell-outs who are adept at cutting deals with the devil. This narrative is powerfully informed by the 1998 political deal that saw Raila's opposition party National Development Party (NDP) (and thus 'the Luo') join Daniel Moi's KANU government, notwithstanding the fact that Raila had been persistently jailed during Moi's reign. Again, the memorandum of understanding allegedly signed between Raila's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Mwai Kibaki's National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) in 2002 seemed to confirm in the public imagination the portrait of the Luo as self-centred, back-room schemers.

However, the Luo are not always seen as plotters, as our second anecdote shows. Rather, they are considered to be gullible and willing to be conscripted into conspiracies that often lead to their own peril. One way through which this can be achieved is by pandering to their ego, as the following episode aptly illustrates.

Anecdote 2 'You must (not) believe the Steadman polls!': Stereotypes as Political Discourse

It is a Saturday afternoon in March 2007. Four men, apparently in their forties, are huddled over a tiny bar-room table whose surface is covered by beer bottles. The loudest among the speakers is a Kamba man while the other three, rather quieter patrons are Luo:

Kamba man: You see, politics is all about numbers, and according to the Steadman polls Kalonzo has the votes to easily become the next president.

Luo man 1: But if we consider the strength of delegate votes, then it is Uhuru Kenyatta who will become ODM's flagbearer against Kibaki.

Kamba man: (Defensively) You see, I'm not supporting Kalonzo because he is Mkamba, but because that is where the evidence points to. At any rate, if Raila stands alone, people won't vote for him simply because he is a Luo. So why ruin the party for ODM [by not nominating Kalonzo]?

Luo man 2: But it would be disastrous, even with Uhuru [being] in ODM, for us to have another Kikuyu president!

Luo Man 3: I don't see us supporting a Kikuyu for president again!

Kamba man: (with a wave of the hand) Leave the Kikuyus alone! What do they know other than buying land and cultivating coffee? They don't even know Kiswahili but the Luo know English!

The Steadman polls have over time become a crucial barometer with which to gauge public opinion on a diverse range of issues in Kenya, but it is the Steadman findings on political matters that generally elicit the most anxious reactions. The above anecdote needs to be read against the historical animosity between the Luo and Gikuyu, dating back to Jomo Kenyatta's reign and especially the Kisumu killings during the opening of the New Nyanza General hospital in 1969, the subsequent placement of Jaramogi Oginga under house arrest and the banning of his opposition party KPU, and the assassination of Tom Mboya the same year. Even though popular Luo opinion did not place the blame on the Gikuyu for the 1990 murder of then Foreign Affairs minister Robert John Ouko, it emphasized the perception that they were a group under siege. Incidentally, popular Gikuyu opinion during Daniel arap Moi's reign (1978–2002) was keen to underline its victimization by the system – sentiments captured well by secular pop musicians such as Joseph Kamaru and, subsequently, John De Mathew. Thinking about the processes of the conscription of stereotypes into national political discourse thus necessitates a reference to predominating bi-polar mentalities of victim-hood (*'kunyanyaswa* (oppression)') and entitlement (*'tule sasa* (it is our turn to eat)'), since the discourse of exclusion and othering is based on either consideration.

In our anecdotal example, the Kamba speaker knows that he is outnumbered and so he seeks an 'objective' basis for disagreeing with his Luo friends whom he assumes, naturally, to be Raila supporters merely on account of their ethnicity. It is glibly assumed in popular ethnic stereotyping that a Luo cannot disagree with Raila and that a Kamba cannot be opposed to Kalonzo, or a Gikuyu to Kibaki for that matter. In this regard, when the spectre of another Gikuyu presidency is raised, the four speakers consciously decide to marshal their support for a common candidate; Raila should back Kalonzo who is seen as neutral in the historical Luo–Gikuyu antagonism, and he is therefore certainly 'better' than the Gikuyu Uhuru Kenyatta. Interestingly, the Kamba speaker gives great emphasis to perceived anti-Raila (and thus anti-Luo) sentiments ('if Raila stands alone nobody will vote for him simply because he is a Luo') as a rhetorical strategy to win over his Luo friends. In the same instance he is also alluding to a commonly expressed fear of the Luo; *'Mkichagua Jaluo* president *mtaona!* (If you elect a Luo for president you will have it rough).' As we shall see, the Luo are figured as 'monsters' and the ogres of much traditional Kenyan folklore, a phraseology that speaks to commonly expressed fears of 'the animals from the west'.

The clincher in the crystallization of the anti-Gikuyu alliance in this conversation comes when the Kamba man turns to Gikuyu stereotypes (avarice for large coffee farms and swathes of land). Whereas Kiambu and Nyeri districts in Kenya's Central Province are known for coffee farming, the real story that the stereotype refers to relates to 1970s *magendo* (smuggling) boom during which Gikuyu businessmen from Kiambu, allegedly with the connivance of highly placed bureaucrats in the Kenyatta regime, reputedly made huge fortunes selling cheaply obtained Ugandan coffee, then euphemistically called 'the black gold of Chepkube', on the Kenyan market. This episode in Kenyan history helped to give rise to the 'Kiambu Mafia' soubriquet to describe these wealthy, Kenyatta-connected businessmen, but on a broader scale the Gikuyu collectively came to be labelled as a

corrupt people. The supposed legendary Gikuyu voracity for land referred to above seems to have grown out of the fact that numerous Gikuyu-owned land buying companies came up in the 1970s and bought swathes of land in the Rift Valley. Again, Kiambu businessmen were perceived as the key architects of these enterprises and this is a critical point if we consider the role played by land ownership in shaping Kenya's political economy.¹³ Depicted as being backwardly rooted to the land and in other senses to be non-intellectual, it seems only 'natural' that our group should consider that the Gikuyu can only speak 'bad' Kiswahili. And even if they were to speak the language 'properly', it is still less prestigious than English, of which the Luo are supposedly 'masters'. This is a backhanded and ironic compliment that only 'confirms' the recurrent popular stereotype of the Luo as being slavishly enamoured of western lifestyles, especially English-sounding names and titles, suits, cars and lavish houses. That the Mkamba here successfully weaves in and out of ethnic labelling – in the process he insults his interlocutors in a veiled manner but still maintains points of collaboration – speaks to the rhetorical power of stereotypes as metaphorical devices.

Self-Portraits of the House of Mumbi: Stereotyping through Popular Music

If it is true to argue that the most dominant ethnic labels in Kenya appear to be organized around political themes, then it is also correct to contend that they are mainly told about the major ethnic groups, especially those that have already had a stab at power or, even more significantly, those who have been or 'should' be excluded from it. In this regard, the Gikuyu ('thieves'), Luo ('stone-throwers'), Luhya ('good watchmen'), Maasai ('backward'), Kamba ('super cooks and sex athletes') and the Kalenjin ('illiterate looters') tend to feature most frequently in stereotypes. However, the more enduring and deeply anxious of these labels seem to be woven around the Gikuyu and the Luo, perhaps on account of their predominance in Kenya's post-colonial political landscape. It is to these two ethnic stereotypes that this interrogation will now turn.

A popular way of figuring the otherness of the Luo amongst the Gikuyu is by recourse to Old Testament Jewish narratives. For instance, unhappy that his son was about to marry a Kisii girl, the father to one of my informants tried to dissuade against proceeding in that direction by means of the following interdiction: '*Niuui Ayahundi tutiguranaga na Akalidei?*' (Gikuyu: 'Do you know that we Jews do not intermarry with the Chaldeans?'). Overtones of ethnic 'superiority' come through in the old man's indignation even as he loses sight of the irony that in terms of race Jews and Gikuyu are different, just as the latter and the Abagusii in fact belong to the same race and both are Bantu speakers. However, the point of the father's analogy is clear if we consider his warning as an allusion to 'chosenness'; the House of Mumbi (matriarch of the Gikuyu tribe), as part of God's elect, needs to be kept free of miscegenation. At any rate, the father continued, the Abagusii are '*nduriri*' (Gikuyu: 'foreigners') who might, like the Biblical Delilah, sneak into the house, 'learn our people's ways and leak the secrets to the enemy'; matters are further complicated by the fact that geographically, the Abagusii are closer to the Luo and hence their being distrusted.

Stereotypes are particularly adept at glossing over contradictions, and a curious irony is evident in the fact that the Gikuyu seem to be afraid of far-off people while being more comfortable with their Maasai neighbours, with whom they have traditionally fought. This is clearly seen in the common saying '*Ciri ukabi itiriite*' (i.e. If our cattle are with the Maasai

they are in safe hands) in reference to traditional cross-border raids that almost always ended with the capture of women leading to inter-marriages between the two groups.

The theme of purity and contamination invoked by the Jews–Chaldeans metaphor has also been appropriated into political discourse. This was evident in March 2005, when a Gikuyu cabinet minister in Kibaki's government remarked that goats (in reference to Raila's LDP) have to be kept apart from the sheep (National Alliance of Kenya (NAK)), thus calling for the expulsion of Luo ministers from government. In Mwampembwa's acerbic cartoon,¹⁴ appearing in the *Daily Nation* on 1 April 2005, the NAK¹⁵ flock is depicted as having wolves, hyenas and pigs amongst its membership. Being 'Fools' Day', those in the seat of power at State House (the Gikuyu and their allies) are depicted as having been 'fooled' into admitting carnivores into the sanctuary of the House of Mumbi. In this manner, the cartoonist calls into question the erstwhile Gikuyu stereotype of the Luo as *the enemy*. Looking beneath the surface of Gikuyu self-portraits reveals fractures within their House. Indeed, Mwampembwa's cartoon enables us to see the dynamics of the historical rivalry between Kiambu and Nyeri leaders. Intra-ethnic stereotyping characterizes men from the latter district as indecisive and henpecked while those from Kiambu are depicted as cunning and irredeemably corrupt. Thus, post-2002 competition for power is seen as being between two Mafia clans – a newer one from Nyeri and the other, older one from Kiambu.¹⁶

These intra-ethnic spats do not last for long, however, as a voice soon emerges calling for unity against the wider threat 'out there'. The clannish enclaves of intra-ethnic squabbles are entreated to subsume their will and identity into a wider, more powerful ethnic project. Amongst the Gikuyu, the call for 'unity' is to be heard in the work of popular musicians. These have ranged from Joseph Kamaaru, whose earlier 1960s music sought to assert and celebrate the role that Mau Mau, as a nationalist project, played in Kenya's liberation struggle – as we see in his '*Nyimbo cia Mau Mau*' (Gikuyu: Mau Mau songs). Over time, Kamaaru's music later became decidedly anti-Moi,¹⁷ especially with the May 1990 Muoroto shanty demolitions in Nairobi that were perceived to be aimed at decapitating the Gikuyu-dominated *jua kali* (informal) enterprises.¹⁸ A less well-known performer, J. J. Muoni sang an anti-establishment song in 1990, '*Muoroto*', but the only Gikuyu musician after Kamaaru who has consistently taken upon himself the mantle of herald for the House of Mumbi is John De'Mathew (a stylized rendition of his Gikuyu name, Ndemethiu). In his thirties, this relatively young musician who describes himself as a seer (*murathi*), layers his music thickly with narratives of the anti-colonial struggle and metaphors of ethnic belonging. Most importantly, De'Mathew clearly points out who he thinks the 'real' enemy of the House of Mumbi is. It is necessary to examine in depth one of his recent (2006) musical video recordings, '*Thakame yaitirwo*' 'the blood that was spilt' in order to see how he constructs metaphors of self-figuration that at the same time other (and stereotype) the 'enemy'.

The lyrics of *Thakame yaitirwo* tell the Gikuyu nation that if they do not heed the warning of the song, then they will attract a curse. Singing against the backdrop of the anti-colonial struggle, and most specifically the Mau Mau phase, De'Mathew asserts that the Gikuyu are entitled – more than others – to the fruits of independence because of their immense suffering. But they must not flirt with 'idols' – and as the lyric makes this point, the video closes in on ODM leaders Raila, Kalonzo and Ruto in a throng of supporters. These leaders are cast in the metaphor of the hyena, a prominent dupe in Gikuyu folklore whose chief characteristics are profound stupidity and greed. While

invoking the 1992 land clashes in Molo, and the Enosupukia killings in 1991,¹⁹ De'Mathew is emphatic that both Daniel Arap Moi and William Ole Ntimama were part of a broad strategy of economically and politically disenfranchising the Gikuyu; how then can Ntimama, an ODM leader, even remotely be garlanded as a hero by some sections of the Gikuyu masses, he asks? In this regard, Uhuru Kenyatta, son of Kenya's first president who is seen as a prodigal son, is chided for pitching his lot with the ODM; 'during the season of hunger, he will be left out there and he will be devoured by the hyenas!' This is a varied recurrence of the monster image that is also frequently raised both in sms [text messaging] lore and in popular anti-Luo stereotypes amongst the Gikuyu.

In this song De'Mathew is also clear that the Gikuyu nation can never be annihilated; they survived the brunt of colonial rule, and then Moi's reign, and so will they survive any Luo threats. Their rejuvenation can be achieved by firmly placing 'our sons in strategic jobs in order to safeguard our wealth'. The Gikuyu must also revive their agricultural production – coffee, tea, dairy farming – that the Moi regime is deemed to have systematically run down as a strategy of weakening Gikuyu economic might. At any rate, De'Mathew sees some of the young rebellious Gikuyu men (here the video is focused upon Ndura Waruingi, former *Mungiki* leader and grandson of Mau Mau's General Waruingi) as an asset, an army that can be used to defend the Gikuyu nation. In this case, the singer conceives the struggle between the Gikuyu and others as one with genocidal intent whereby the state's legitimate instruments of force cannot be relied upon to protect the Agikuyu; after all, what use were they during the Molo and Enosupukia clashes? The Kenyan state is thus being rejected as it cannot, or will not safeguard Gikuyu ethnic interests, especially so when the interests of that state can be aligned with those of the Luo (and in this respect ODM is identified as a Luo block).

Thakame yaitirwo portrays the Gikuyu as a besieged people, both in recent and contemporary history. However, their troubles with other Kenyan groups are seen to be rooted in the competition for material resources. The sphinx image that constantly comes up in the video's montage speaks to the artist's imagination of the Gikuyu as a people who will always rise from the ashes to new prosperity. The notion of renewed prosperity is premised upon the emergence of a strong Gikuyu nation among an alliance of pan-ethnic unity with fellow 'marginalized', such as the Luhya and (ironically) the Kalenjin. Once this is achieved the House of Mumbi will then be said to have truly expanded. For De'Mathew the Gikuyu 'seer', the Kenyan nation cannot be envisioned without ascribing a central role to the Agikuyu.

The theme of fighting for freedom features prominently in De'Mathew's recent work and is also seen in his popular 2003 song '*Urathi wa Ma*', which was released soon after Kibaki took the presidency. In this song, just as in *Thakama yiatirwo*, the role of the Gikuyu in anti-colonial armed struggle is emphasised. In the lyric, De'Mathew is critical of those tribes

who were dead asleep as our blood was being spilt, as we were being detained you were resting at home, that is why you have been unable to tend the tree [...] if an animal has been wrestled to the ground it cannot escape the branding iron but I warned you that *uncircumcised boys* are never to be invited at the in-laws. (my emphasis)

The VCD version of *Urathi wa Ma* shows Raila as the boy who ought not to have been invited to the in-laws. In another song, *Ciunguyu iria nene* (big fish) (2003), De'Mathew

laments ‘that is why our troops are normally shaken by a *small boy* who is normally carrying but a stick’ (my emphasis).²⁰ The obvious anti-Luo stereotypes here are based on the fact that the Luo do not traditionally practice male circumcision. The ‘small boy’ is an epithet that is derogatively deployed to imply immaturity and irresponsibility. Set in a deeper historical perspective, the Luo role is seen as one of slavish acquiescence to domination. Thus, Luo identity is mapped alongside that of white colonial rulers and post-independence ‘enemies’ of the Gikuyu, such as Moi and William Ole Ntimama. Together, these are the ‘hyenas’ that seek to eat the shins of the Gikuyu. The hyena epithet, as we shall see later in the discussion of diasporic ethnicities, serves to remind the song’s Gikuyu audience of the ‘fact’ that people from western Kenya are ‘beasts’. In a further elaboration of this imagery, De’Mathew uses the hyena character in his song *Hiti iri Gicinga* (2004) to metaphorize the ravages of HIV/AIDS. The hyena image is bound up with the figurations of the Luo as vermin and monsters in cellphone metaphors also. In this powerful sense, the Luo are figured as not just being detrimental to Gikuyu interests but, like HIV, detrimental and dangerous to the entire Kenyan nation.

‘Off to Thailand with the whole lot of them’: Ethnic Stereotypes in Sms-lore

Kenyan’s lifestyles are rapidly changing as communication technology expands their horizons. This has become a critical site of popular culture, most notably in the fields of computer applications, the use of the internet, and cellphone usage. In the latter case, a little-remarked upon but quite critical aspect relates to how cellphones have changed the way people socialize, often in previously unforeseen ways from dating to trading and the organization of crime. The practice of text-messaging has rapidly emerged as a key dimension of this technology, especially among youthful urban dwellers. The appeal of this relatively new mode of communication commonly known as ‘texting’ lies in the perceived power and freedom that it confers upon participants; information can be passed back and forth right in the midst of ‘enemy’ territory. Thus, it becomes a frontier of communication that cannot be easily or immediately policed, and this makes texting fertile ground for the quick dispersal of stereotypes, especially during moments of national crisis. We will now examine three text messages that might demonstrate how this emergent media taps from, and feeds into popular labels.

The following text-messages were circulated in the run-up to the November 2006 constitutional referendum, ostensibly by those against the ODM/Raila group:

I (Pre-referendum, 2005)

<p><i>Nari korwo Kibaki arendia nyamu ici cia ruguru (meera) nakuu Thailand. Tutiguu tutari ona imwe. Kana tugicicheane ouguo tuhu? Ukuuga atia wee mundu wa Mumbi?</i></p>	<p>I wish Kibaki was selling these animals from the west (Luo) over to Thailand. We remain without even one. Or can we even give them away for free? What do you say son of Mumbi?²¹</p>
---	---

II

If you read the name ‘Raila’ back to front you get ‘a liar’.

III (Circulated on the night of 31 December 31 2006)

Ndakuhoera Ngai akwehererie tunyamu I pray to God to keep away vermin

*tungiguthumbura, ta tutambi,
tumbuki, tukurumi, tuthugumi, tucogothi,
tuhaiici na tuhambati.*

*Na agitire andu aku kuma mirimu,
indo ciaku kuma cianangi,
mahiu maku kuma nyamu njuru,
na bururi kuma ODM.*

*Urorathimirwo mwaka mweru
na magetha ugethe.*

that might bother you, like climbers,
those that fly, crawl, urinate, provoke,
mount and caress.

May he protect your people from illnesses,
your wealth from destroyers,
your cattle from beasts of prey,
and the country from ODM.

May you be blessed in the new year
and may you reap (richly).

The first text comments on an agreement between the governments of Kenya and Thailand, in which Kenya agreed to donate some 135 wild animals worth US\$ 300 million to Thailand for the Chian Mai Night Safari Park.²² However, as Appadurai (1986) has argued in relation to commodities,²³ all gifts have (social) meanings. In this case, the disparity between the official and unofficial meanings inscribed into the gifting process became immediately evident when a number of civil society groups went to court to challenge the legitimacy of giving away state resources in this manner. Thus, even though the animal donation was an unpopular act, it was turned around in popular discourse so that the animal imagery became a fitting reminder of the presence in the country of other 'beasts' who – according to the author of the text – might be worth more if exported either for sale or, preferably, free of charge. This speaks to the anxieties over the prospect of the ODM, seen as being a predominantly Raila/Luo party, winning the referendum against the government. That the Luo are considered to be the particular enemy of the government (and by extension the House of Mumbi) is seen in the fact that of all the ethnicities that might be referred to by the umbrella label 'animals from the west', only they have been named. This gives a 'real' face to the 'enemy'. Again, the reference to the House of Mumbi is intended to warn the recipients of the text message that the Luo threat is a collective one just as we have seen in John De'Mathew's heraldry.

As the second text illustrates, Luo leaders, not just Raila, are perceived as being liars. In the moral grid that the text message establishes, the Luo (represented by Raila) are depicted as having a debilitating effect on the Kenyan nation's moral fibre and hence the implicit wish that they be eliminated. This calls to mind the earlier wish that the Luo be given away or, as is implied in the third text message, that they be eliminated like vermin. It is safe to assume that among the Luo, too, anti-Gikuyu stereotypes of a similar kind are prevalent. For Kenyans, this reference to the extermination of an undesired social group is pointedly reminiscent of the Rwanda genocide in which the Tutsi were portrayed in Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) broadcasts as '*inyenzi*' (cockroaches):

The media told people to follow the direction of their local militia and local leadership. They told people to go after the enemy, 'the cockroaches'. Without this intense message the genocide would not have claimed anywhere near the numbers that it did.²⁴

Whether or not the Rwanda/Kenya correspondences can be read to mean that the fires of genocide might eventually ignite in Kenya is not the point; what must be noted is that the ingredients for ethnic cleansing exist very much in Kenya. The differences lie in the specific local dynamics, such as land, as we might see in the Mt Elgon clashes,²⁵ and organized violence when politicians hire unemployed youths from their ethnic

communities as private militia, or when young people organize themselves into armies such as Mungiki to foist themselves upon the polity and formidably challenge the police.²⁶ There are also in Kenya anxieties about vernacular FM radio stations that are sometimes perceived to be fuelling ethnic sentiments, as happened with KASS FM, broadcasting in Kalenjin, which was temporarily shut down by the Kenyan government in November 2005 during the run-up to that year's referendum.²⁷ Previously, president Moi had threatened to shut down the Gikuyu language Kameme FM over alleged RTLM-like activities.²⁸

The extensive reference to vermin in the 'New Year wishes' text is deceptively double-edged, for subsumed within it is a discourse on sexuality and, by extension, masculinity. The prayer begins with the rather harmless invocation to God that the recipient of the text, his family and property will be safe from vermin of all types. But there is a sexual contest embedded into this text that requires attention. *Gutamba* (to ride over), *kuhaica* (to mount and penetrate), and *kuhambata* (foreplay caressing) have sexual connotations since they are euphemisms for male sexual conquest of a woman. The referendum is thus cast as a sexual contest; 'why should the Luo/ODM conquer us?' If we link this up to the earlier metaphors of the Luo as Chaldeans and boys, then we can see that they are figured as unwelcome sexual partners; any union with them can only lead to the 'miscegenation' of the House of Mumbi. The significance of metaphors that are woven around practices of copulation are particularly potent in a political culture where political actors are figured in terms of 'father-mother' images.²⁹ Narratives of illegitimacy which abound in such a context supply ample grounds for the invention and signification of ethnic stereotypes. Thus, as perceived agents of miscegenation, as 'pests', we see an echo of the stereotype of the Luo as an inherently destructive people ('unable to tend the [*uhuru*, freedom] tree') that is raised in De'Mathew's song lyrics. This is a particularly pointed metaphor in 2007, an election year when the Luo ODM is seen as having the potential to literally ruin the party for the Gikuyu.

Diasporic Ethnicities: Mashada Forums.Com and the 'Kiambu Cowboys'

One often over-looked issue in discussions of stereotypes is the practice and expression of intra-ethnic labelling, an aspect of ethnicity with which people are obviously familiar given the widespread clan system in Kenya but which they choose to de-emphasize in order to marshal resources for the 'defence' of the wider ethnic group. At certain points of intra-community competition, these clan/or other internal differences come to the fore and bring out sharply fractures within groups that are otherwise thought to be solidly united. Intra-ethnic stereotypes enable self-criticism, an 'inward looking mimicry' as Nyairo and Ogude have called it in their critique of Nairobi City Ensemble's '*Otonglo Time*', in which the persona lampoons the perceived laziness, complacency and the irrational pursuit of the goods of conspicuous consumption amongst the Luo.³⁰ Such stereotypes enable a gaze into the mirror, and the resulting laughter becomes a cautionary moment.

If the Gikuyu have their in-house self-critical narratives, these tend to coalesce around a historical antagonism in which the Gikuyu of Kiambu are alleged to have vowed first, that power would never leave the House of Mumbi, and second, that even in the unlikely event that this happened, 'it'd never cross River Chania!'³¹ The Chania river, physically cutting between Murang'a and Kiambu districts, is sometimes substituted with Thagana

(Sagana river) – as we see in John De’Mathew’s popular 2006 track ‘*Uguo niguo kuri* (that is the way it is)’. Whichever the river, the meaning is the same: these rivers are more than geographical monuments, speaking to profound undercurrents of loss and humiliation on the one hand and brazen exclamations of masculine domination on the other. A little-known folkloric account of the origin of this Kiambu versus Murang’a/Nyeri hostility was recently related by an informant. It holds that once upon a time, the Murang’a and Nyeri Gikuyu invited their distant cousins from Kiambu to visit. As is customary, they were treated to a sumptuous feast that lasted for ‘many seasons’ and because the visitors from Kiambu could not be asked to work, they spent their time roaming the ridges and sleeping around with their hosts’ ‘women’. By the time the hosts realized what was happening, a majority of their women had become pregnant by the Kiambu men who then promptly fled back across the Chania river. ‘They were left to raise our babies! *Kai wi gugikoma na muka wa mundu hakiri mbaara ingi ugitigitie kumuhuura* (once you have slept with someone’s wife what other battle are you left to fight him)?’, my informant chuckled gleefully. Domination here is mapped in terms of phallic contests. Whether this is to be seen as myth-making, or simply as a refashioning of reality that seeks to explain a stereotype, the narrative brings to the fore a dominant belief among Kiambu men about their sense of super-masculinity as evinced by their ownership of vast swathes of fertile land planted with productive coffee trees and tea bushes. The Kiambu side of central province is deemed to be the Promised Land. By extension, on account of their control of these resources, Kiambu men feel that they can take better care of their women and hence their perceived preoccupation with ‘keeping women’ (i.e. concubines). Far from the practice being seen as a demonstration of moral turpitude, these men pride themselves in it as one of the many acts in the performance of their masculinity.

Differently put, Kiambu men’s self-concept fulfils the traditional Gikuyu definition of ‘a real man’, whereas men from Murang’a and Nyeri are seen as being unable to perform the least of a man’s duty (‘if they had [sexually] satisfied their women, they would not have fallen to us so easily!’), and are thus constructed as weaklings – ‘no better than their women’. A useful insight here might be gained from Dundes,³² who has argued that in contests human beings always find it necessary to portray their opponents as weaklings in terms of sexuality; the weaker an opponent, the more feminine they are deemed to have become thus making them easier to conquer or dominate. The emasculation of non-Kiambu Gikuyu men in this manner effectively prefigures their effeminization, giving rise to the widely held stereotype of Murang’a and Nyeri men as being severely cuckolded by their women. Besides, where Murang’a and Nyeri Gikuyu are seen as having inherited the land from their ancestors, Kiambu men regard themselves as self-made, having tamed the forest for productive cultivation and settlement while warding off the Maasai on one side and the colonial authorities on the other. This imagery naturally leads Kiambu men to wonder how political power can be handed to ‘people who have never achieved anything!’

This background sets the stage against which the various ethnic categories of diaspora Kenyans – a captive audience of topical local issues in the *Jamhuri* (republic) – debate ethnicity in times of extreme political crises. The following text is taken from a popular chat room, *mashada* forums (mashada.com/forums/index.php?a)³³ and it is set in the context of the rivalry between supporters of the former ruling party KANU and those of NARC, the party that formed the government after winning power in December 2002:

Topic ID 17359 Mashada forums

17373, Re: MTT and Waweru

Posted by Mark Twist Thuo, Thur Mar-06-03 01:59 Pm

Truly, truly no plain is safe from a hyena with a burning ember. This particular hyena wants to masquerade as a lion. *Ati njamba!* If you are a true *njamba* go confront Kanyingi himself and thump your chest *fuda wewe!* Just *fika* Kwa Mbira by Safari Bar and you'll find him there. *Lakini* when you see Kiambu men wearing Cowboys (*sic*) hats and boots its (*sic*) not for show. Those are made men. We *chapa nugas* like yourself *bila* notice and we order another round like nothing happened. You *fika* Kamirithu and repeat what you said if you are a man. *Na utige kwi yamba ta nugu ya njamba fuda ino.*

17382, RE: MTT and Waweru

Posted by Waweru 1, Thur Mar-06-03 03:00 Pm

Njamba,

You are just a pathetic loser. I am Kiambu *damu* and I am also Kanu *damu*. I don't depend on Narc like you. In Kiambu '*urutagwo mwiruti*'. So what if I support Kanyingi, Karume or Githunguri??? (*sic*: the three are KANU politicians). It is none of your business. I can support whoever I want to support. You can go and lick NARC'S assss (*sic*).

Even though it appears here that an argument is being woven for or against one party or the other, the critical point seems to be who between these two Gikuyu men is the 'better' and thus 'real' one regardless and in spite of their political affiliation. While a wide tradition of verbal jousts exists in Nairobi and other Kenyan urban centers styled as '*mchongoano*' or '*mutenguanō*',³⁴ the 'insults' traded here invoke ideas of masculinity and might be read more within the African American tradition of 'joning', or the 'dozens', in which an overtly sexist imagery forms the template for street corner discourses of masculinity.³⁵ This becomes clear if we consider that '*nugu ya njamba*' refers to the dominant male in a troop of monkeys; his sexual authority is not in doubt. While it is true that in the exchange between MTT and Waweru neither person's sexuality is an issue, it nevertheless matters that Waweru should lay no claims to being a superior man, a *njamba* (a title often used to refer to the heroism of independent Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta). The invocation of Kenyatta's heroism becomes necessary in order to remind Waweru (and the blog's readers) that not all Gikuyu can be legitimately included in the narrative of nationalism constructed around the independence struggle. Indeed, MTT's constant metaphors of '*hiti*' (hyena), '*nugu*' (monkey) and '*fuda*' (donkey; Limuru is notoriously populated with these animals) can be read in the manner suggested above since these animals offer uncomplimentary metaphors for greed, laziness and brainlessness. The invocation of the hyena and monkey in particular, both common characters in Gikuyu folklore, directly negates Waweru's claims to hard work.

Both Mark and Waweru apparently originate from Kiambu and live abroad, but the former seems to be more passionate about his connections – real or imagined – with the local Member of Parliament, Kuria Kanyingi. However, there are two curious ironies to Mark's case. First, his name closely resembles that of Mark Twist Kinyanjui, a Kenyan police informer who was implicated in the abduction and subsequent murder of J.M Kariuki in 1975.³⁶ It seems that Mark has deliberately distorted the common stereotype of

the Gikuyu as thieves in an impudent self-referential gesture that suggests pride in ‘hard work’, legitimate or otherwise. This ties up with the second irony; Mark’s hero, Kanyingi, is alleged to have irregularly acquired a portion of the land meant for a potato research institute at Tigoni, Limuru.³⁷ MTT sees nothing wrong with this; it simply proves that Kanyingi is a worthier politician than those Waweru supports. However, the most fascinating aspect of MTT’s understanding of manhood – and his own self-concept – lies in the harnessing of images from the American Wild West to define and metaphorize manhood. Real Kiambu men (‘those are made men’), like cowboys who live by the fruits of their sweat, subdue everything by sheer muscle; any contests are settled in the bar, an extremely masculine space where men who are considered to be weak financially and physically stand no chance. For MTT, it matters not that in Kiambu there are no vast grasslands upon which to rear cattle. Ironically, he seems not to realize that the cowboy macho ethic might be turned against him – in the connotation of brawn versus brain.

Cowboy culture, an extremely phallogocentric form of social organization, is a good metaphor with which to think about the performance of masculinity.³⁸ As Gilmore has demonstrated,³⁹ the bar-room has its own peculiar rules. Thus, it is not enough to fight at the slightest challenge for a real man to demonstrate his true worth; it is more essential that he can buy beer for his drinking peers after the fight. Nevertheless, Waweru apparently has the last laugh when he raises the possibility of MTT’s licking NARC’s ‘assss’ (arse) because the party is seen as a creature of the Mt. Kenya Mafia, comprised of ‘lesser men’, thereby undermining his tough cowboy claims. The success of mostly Nyeri men (NARC) over KANU (founded in Kiambu) in the elections of December 2002 might be taken to indicate that the cowboys have finally been repaid for their perceived libidinal transgressions alluded to in the folklore text cited earlier. That the clincher in the joust is made in terms of sexuality is not incidental; MTT is portrayed as playing an undesired role, one into which he is forced rather than one of his choosing.

At another level, the machismo invoked by the allusion to the image of a Kiambu Cowboy is underpinned by other male symbols of material success. A General’s walking stick, a leather jacket and a huge shiny ring often worn on the index finger were symbols identified with Jomo Kenyatta, and this might in part account for how these markers of ‘social arrival’ filtered into the common grammar of self-presentation amongst the Gikuyu political class. The ethos of the cowboys, with its distinctly masculine allusions, has shaped Kenya’s wider political culture. However, popular discourse is increasingly being formulated to contest these ideas of masculinity in Kenyan public life. Again, stereotypes are the currency of such contestation as we shall see in the final section.

‘Of Stools and “Husbands”’: Representations of Fe/male Power(lessness) in Editorial Cartoons

If it is true that popular Gikuyu stereotypes call to question Luo manhood by reference to circumcision, other groups also have their own methods of casting aspersions on Gikuyu masculinity. In order to see how this happens, I will first demonstrate how traditional Gikuyu construct their own ideas of manhood. When they seek to legitimize their (supposed) stranglehold on power, particularly over their women, Gikuyu men often resort to the (supposedly) traditional narrative of *Wangu wa Makeri*.⁴⁰

In this folktale women are depicted as tyrannical rulers, especially Wangu who is reputed to have literally sat on the backs of men while addressing official gatherings. However, through careful plotting, the men in Gikuyuland made all their wives simultaneously pregnant and only then were they able to overthrow them. According to this narrative, one of the first decrees issued by the new male rulers stated that henceforth men were going to arrogate to themselves the right, previously exercised by females, to have more than one spouse. They would also hold all rights to land. Whether this tale is a true reflection of a historical reality or, more likely, an embellished account given the overt bias inherent in its male authorship is not important; what is crucial is the fact that Gikuyu men find the subject of sexuality to be imperative enough to warrant the creation of a narrative that legitimizes their notions of masculinity.

A crucial offshoot of such a narrative is that there has emerged an equally, if not more, forceful counter-discourse which calls to question male claims to authority. In this counter-discourse Nyeri men are contemptuously referred to as 'sat-on-men', who are often subjected to physical violence. 'Marry a Nyeri woman at your own peril', young men from other parts of Kenya will be told: '*Acio marumagia arume ta ndarama* (Gikuyu: Those ones beat their men like drums)! Other stereotypes narrow down to Mathira women as a violent type. Equally, Gikuyu women from other parts of the country have their own 'faults' that form the basis of particular stereotypes. For instance Murang'a women are 'mean' and 'likely to bewitch', while women from Kabete (i.e. Kiambu) are 'too money-minded' and 'with their chocolate-flavoured tongues they make imbeciles of their men by feeding them on *chapati* (traditional Indian bread) that they have sat on' (i.e. a form of witchcraft that works like a love potion).⁴¹ However, my contention is that when the more general 'husband batterers' stereotype of Nyeri women is invoked, the point usually is to comment about their emasculated men.

Nowhere is this more evident in Kenyan popular culture than in cartoons. Academic attention to the cartoon genre of popular expression in Kenya has been scant, save for Mwaniki and Muhoro⁴² and Musila.⁴³ Gathara's *Drawing the Line*⁴⁴ also offers a useful historical overview of cartooning in Kenya. Here, we will examine a critique of manhood by Mwampembwa,⁴⁵ under the pen-name of Gado, whose editorial cartoons feature president Kibaki and his wife (both Gikuyu from Nyeri) and appear to be crystallizations of the kind of contestations on sexuality raised immediately above.

Of Mwampembwa's seven cartoons that form the basis of the argument here, six make an array of comments in relation to the president and his wife while one is on women as a social category. First, the president's wife is (mis)taken for the Commander-in-Chief, and in the immediately succeeding cartoon, former president Moi (whose wife Lena stayed away and in the shadows throughout his presidency) is depicted laughing at Kibaki for giving his wife too much freedom; Kibaki wears a look of total bewilderment on his face.⁴⁶ Next, there is a caricature in which a monstrously huge woman is depicted squishing a prostrated Kibaki; she is gleefully watching over her shoulder as the president, with helpless officials looking on, writes a 'statement'.⁴⁷ The cartoon of 25 August 2004 then depicts a wife who, having just beaten up her husband to a state of bloodied unconsciousness, is explaining to two policemen how she has turned round the traditional 'wisdom' that to express their affection loving husbands beat up their wives.⁴⁸ In another cartoon, president Kibaki is seen boasting to his cabinet ministers how he has accorded his wife a place of high honour by swapping his portrait with hers on an oversized Kenyan currency note.⁴⁹ Another cartoon depicts Mrs Kibaki as having taken the

reins of power as the *de facto* 'president', in order to deal with corruption, while in the background the *de jure* president snores snugly in bed.⁵⁰ This cartoon plays around the popular perception of Kibaki's leadership style as being 'laid back'. A subsequent cartoon depicts an imaginary Kenyan Oscar Awards presentation; the winners are rewarded for their notoriety in one field or another. While Kibaki's award is based on his 'sleeping' leadership style, his wife, Lucy, gains an award for her 'upright', 'hands-on-the-podium' combative approach to issues.⁵¹

In all of the Kibaki-Lucy cartoons, the image of the hen-pecked husband is the dominant theme. In the cartoon on domestic violence, the artist implies that there are many men who silently suffer the pain of a thrashing by their wives. Women-on-men violence has in recent times become a critical issue in Kenya, as men have begun to publicly admit to being battered by their spouses.⁵² The 'weak' men stereotype formulated on this basis represents the negation of some of the most profoundly meaningful traditional perceptions in which masculinity is grounded.

Gathaara has made the important observation that 'though the presidential caricature has since become commonplace in Kenyan cartoons, back then [late 1980s and early 1990s] it was revolutionary'.⁵³ This is a crucial point, because in Kenyan political culture the president is prefigured as '*the father of the nation*'.⁵⁴ The act of procreation that this metaphor raises is especially relevant here, and all the more so if the masculinity alluded to is presented in contested terms as being dysfunctional. It seems only natural that as caricatures, cartoons that allude to the occupant of that office – particularly in a manner that calls to question a leadership that is predicated on masculinity or lack of it in the domestic space – should attract heightened attention. As satire, editorial cartoons work within the parodic mode, their light humour emanating within a grotesque representation of individuals, one that simultaneously 'encode[s] some comment on the person's behavior or actions, which is based on a real occurrence (the truth)'.⁵⁵ Thus, the political cartoon centres on the contradiction between what is and what ought to be. If it is true that corporeal materiality is a site of anxious meanings, *pace* Bakhtin,⁵⁶ then it might be argued that these become even more profound when social roles based on sexuality constitute the 'truth' around which a political cartoon is drawn. The critique becomes even more pointed when we consider the perceived emasculation of the president against a traditional discourse that represents virility as the basis of masculinity and, thus, power. The broad implication then is that the problems ravaging Kenya might be directly traceable to the 'fact' that if Gikuyu men cannot exercise proper control of their women, no matter how wealthy they might be, then they cannot run the affairs of a state.

Conclusion: Between a Cobbler, a Televangelist and the Masculinity of Politics

This paper has given an account of the prevalence of ethnic stereotypes in a variety of Kenyan public discourses. These discourses thrive because they are embedded in broader cultural flows, and also because they enable a legitimization of self–other perceptions, especially when there are critical political considerations at stake. Ultimately, a full understanding of stereotypes necessitates a closer examination of ideas on gender – especially on the expression and contestation of masculinity – and how these are used to stake claims on power. There are numerous examples to be drawn upon from Kenyan public life that illustrate the kind of linkages that this paper has elaborated, for even fairly

mundane-if-absurd occurrences have considerable value in the social analysis of stereotyping.

A riveting domestic drama that illustrates this very aptly was recently played out in Kenyan media.⁵⁷ It pitted on one side televangelist 'Archbishop Dr' Margaret Wanjiru of *Jesus is Alive Ministries*, and on the other side a certain Mr Kamangu. When Wanjiru announced in January 2007 that she was going to be married on 14 February, Kamangu came forward to claim that he was the preacher's estranged husband. What is curious and worthy of attention here is not the understandably emotional reaction on the part of the preacher – for which she later apologized – but the terms in which she had at first denounced Kamangu, who had claimed to be the biological father of her two sons. Kamangu claimed to have paid Ksh.3000 bride price to Wanjiru's mother in 1978. Wanjiru countered this by stating that her mother could not have been so desperately poor as to accept such a low figure – this was said in front of the TV cameras – as, in any case, she was not a '3000 shillings woman!' Furthermore, she averred, she cannot have been married to 'that drunkard [Kamangu] whose fingers were jigger-infested'. Beyond the obvious entertainment value of these exchanges, as witnessed by the subsequent reactions to this story generated in Kenyan print and electronic media, and jokes circulated via text messaging as well as the internet, the Wanjiru/Kamangu incident exposes some latent but anxious social-economic and political questions that are formulated around issues of masculinity and that are often captured in stereotypes. The issue here is not whether Kamangu's claims can be proven; rather, it is the contest between poverty and wealth, and between masculinity and modern femininity. For instance, traditional practices such as the ability to pay bride price and thus validate one's 'manhood', are the objects of fun here.

In Kenya's contemporary culture, if claims to masculinity cannot be immediately backed by demonstrable riches and obvious power, being a poor or weak male invites ridicule. Jiggers, as vermin, invite associated ideas of dirt and poor personal hygiene; Kamangu here epitomizes the much derided pauper figure of Gikuyu folklore. Add to this the irresponsibility that comes with alleged drunkenness, and Kamangu is plummeted to the lowest point of the scale of manhood. This is a dramatic subversion of Gikuyu traditional hierarchies of power, especially where the antagonist is a well-to-do woman who is not confined to a kitchen but occupies a public space of significant visibility. Kamangu's description calls to mind the stereotype of weak central Kenya men of Murang'a and Nyeri. This is significant, given that at the height of the drama Wanjiru chose to join ODM rather than NARC Kenya. Being a Gikuyu, her ethnic loyalty would have been expected to lie with NARC and to closely associate with 'Mount Kenya' people. Instead, she repudiated the stereotype of the Luo as 'boys' by joining ODM and thus shunning the 'weak men' in NARC.

At another level, the gap between boys and men is increasingly becoming hazier as we see in the recent marriage between Raila's son and a Gikuyu woman. With 2007 being a general election year, it will be interesting to see how anti-Luo and anti-Gikuyu stereotypes from both the government and opposition sides are to be redeployed to speak to the new-found social and political collaborations between Kenya's elite in the political campaigning to come. One can expect to see the profound truth of one of my informant's statements, that 'ethnicity and its attendant stereotypes exist in the minds of the elite, as they stand to benefit greatly from it'.

Notes

- ¹ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*.
- ² Mutonya, 'Mugithi Performance', 57.
- ³ 'Kaparo Warns on Dangers of "Tribal Democracy"', *Daily Nation*, 14 March 2007.
- ⁴ See for instance Miller, *Theories of Africans*, 35; Mutonya, 'Mugithi Performance'.
- ⁵ Dundes, *From Game to War*.
- ⁶ Nyairo and Ogude, 'Specificities', 383.
- ⁷ Ogola, 'Christening Fiction'; Ogola, 'Wahome Mutahi'; Wa-Mungai, 'Big Man's Turn to Dance'.
- ⁸ See *Lifestyle, Sunday Nation*, 18 March 2007. Where the story 'In the grip of alcohol: social crisis as thousands go through life glass in hand' reports on the deleterious effects of alcohol abuse on at least 70 per cent of Kenyan families, here I am interested in social organizations, especially the folklore, that obtain from these moments of collective consumption.
- ⁹ Nyairo and Ogude, 'Specificities', 3.
- ¹⁰ The practice of showing these sports events in bar-rooms first began in up-market Nairobi establishments that could afford the high costs involved in the installation of satellite television, but it has subsequently spread to bars of all kinds and styles.
- ¹¹ Sheng is an increasingly popular Kenyan urban 'dialect' that works by fixing particles of words from other languages onto Kiswahili stems.
- ¹² For an analysis of the critique of this trait in the Luo music of Nairobi City Ensemble, see Nyairo and Ogude, 'Specificities', 389–393. In the radio show, the distinctly Luo-accented studio comedian informs Maina, a Gikuyu: 'Do you see how Agwambo [Raila's nickname] has become the first man in Kibera to buy a car that looks like a plane? Do you imagine what he will buy when he becomes president? And you tell me to leave Kibera? To go where?' The last question fragment indicates the widely held hope among the predominantly Luo slum population that a positive turn in Raila's fortune will automatically translate into their own prosperity. The broader struggle for political power is reduced to, and mapped within, status symbols.
- ¹³ See for instance Schatzberg, *Political Economy of Kenya*.
- ¹⁴ Mwampembwa, *The End of an Error*, 113.
- ¹⁵ The National Alliance of Kenya dislodged KANU from power in 2002 but soon after serious in-house fractures led to a faction of the politicians in NAK going off to form NARC-K.
- ¹⁶ Mutonya, 'Mugithi Performance', 59.
- ¹⁷ Haugerud, *Culture of Politics*, 30.
- ¹⁸ Kinuthia, 'Slum Clearance'.
- ¹⁹ Oucho, *Undercurrents*.
- ²⁰ De'Mathew sings this in the Gikuyu language: 'Ithui no ithui twari kuu-i mutitu ona thakame tugiitwo inyui mwari o-toro, ona ithamirio tugiitwarwo mwari o-mucii, nokio mwaremwo ni guthikirira muti [...]. Ikurundwo ma ndiregaga ruoro no ndamwirire ihii itiiitagwo uthoni.'
- ²¹ The same text can also be found at Africanbulletsandhoney blog but most informants indicated that they are only aware of the cellphone message.
- ²² Murimi, 'Game Export'.
- ²³ Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value'.
- ²⁴ Gruppen, 'Hate-Media Chiefs Found Guilty'. See also Forges, 'Call to Genocide'.
- ²⁵ See *Daily Nation*, 4 April 2007, pp.1, 4 and 5, 'Terror Zone'; and *Daily Nation*, 9 April 2007, pp.1–2, 'Deadly Militiamen: The Untold Story'. See also Oucho, *Undercurrents*.
- ²⁶ Mukinda, 'Policeman Shot Dead'.
- ²⁷ 'Radio Station Suspended Over Reported Incitement to Violence'. Available from <http://www.ifex.org/es/content/view/full/70535>.
- ²⁸ IFEX, 'Moi Threatens'.
- ²⁹ Haugerud, *Culture of Politics*.
- ³⁰ Nyairo and Ogude, 'Specificities', 382.
- ³¹ Mutonya, 'Mugithi Performance', 59.
- ³² Dundes, *From Game to War*.
- ³³ The tag 'tribalism' in Kenya is often a code for Gikuyu ethnicity. This is an anxious subject that often results in emotional cyber-debates, as can be seen in another blog, *Africanbulletsandhoney*, whose topic for 6 October 2006 was headlined 'The Gikuyu Debate Hots UP!'
- ³⁴ Nyairo, 'Modify' 145–147.

- ³⁵ Hannerz, *Soulside*.
- ³⁶ 'Inside Report: J.M. Murder', *Daily Nation*, 11 February 2002.
- ³⁷ 'Special Report; Fight for Land May End up in Court', *Daily Nation*, 10 March 2003.
- ³⁸ Thomas, 'Pick-up Trucks'.
- ³⁹ Gilmore, *Carnival and Culture*.
- ⁴⁰ The story of Wangu wa Makeri is often cited by Kenyan feminists who see her as a nineteenth-century heroine in the cause of women's rights. In doing so they ignore the fact that the narrative voice is clearly masculine, and that the core point of the tale is to disparage women's leadership, not to praise it. Besides, it should be instructive that outside Kenyatta's *My People of Kikuyu* (1942), no other account of this tale has been reported. There is accordingly good reason to be sceptical about this text's validity as social history.
- ⁴¹ Other Kenyan communities have their stereotypes about 'clans' whose women are 'unmarriageable'. For instance, amongst the AbaKuria, the women from Isebania, an urban centre along the Kisi-Sirare road, are said to 'be so hungry for sex even if you marry them, they will never stop looking for it' (Kesero Tunai, personal communication).
- ⁴² Mwaniki and Muhoro, 'Role of Editorial Cartoons'.
- ⁴³ Musila, *Democracy*
- ⁴⁴ Gathaara, *Drawing the Line*, 37, reports that he consulted Levi Obonyo who was then writing a doctoral dissertation on Kenyan cartoons at Temple University, but Obonyo's work has not yet been consulted at the time of completing this paper.
- ⁴⁵ Mwampembwa, *End of an Error*.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 46–47.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 104.
- ⁵² See Kamau, 'Why Do Men Suffer.'
- ⁵³ Gathaara, *Drawing the Line*, 25.
- ⁵⁴ Haugerud, *Culture of Politics*.
- ⁵⁵ Musila, *Democracy*, 99.
- ⁵⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.
- ⁵⁷ 'Jilted Ex-husband Speaks of his Deep Love for Bishop Wanjiru', *Sunday Nation*, 14 January 2007, 8–9; 'Bishop Tells off Man who Claims to be her Husband', *Daily Nation*, 15 January 2007, 5.

References

- Appadurai, A. Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value. In *The Social Life of Things*, edited by A. Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Bakhtin, M. *Rabelais and His World*, Trans. Helene Isawolsky. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984 (1st edn 1968).
- Bhabha, H. K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Dundes, A. *From Game to War*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997.
- Forges, Alison des. "Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda, 1994." In *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, edited by Allan Thompson. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2007.
- Gathaara, P. *Drawing the Line*. Nairobi: Frederich Ebert Stiftung and Katuni, 2004.
- Gilmore, David D. *Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol and Status in Spain*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Gruppen, P. "Hate-Media Chiefs Found Guilty." 4 December 2003. Available from <http://www.clandestine-radio.com/crw/news.php?id=206&stn=153&news=205>; INTERNET.
- Hannerz, Ulf. *Soulside*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.
- Haugerud, A. *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- IFEX. "Moi Threatens to Ban *Kameme*". Available from <http://www.ifex.org/es/content/view/full/11693>; INTERNET.
- Kamau, N. "Why Do Men Suffer in Silence?" *Daily Nation*, 7 May 2007, 11.
- Kenyatta, Jomo. *My People of Kikuyu*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1942 (reprinted 1966).

- Kinuthia, M. Slum Clearance and the Informal Economy. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (1992): 221–36.
- Miller, C. *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1990.
- Mukinda, F. “Policeman Shot Dead in Mungiki Violence.” *Daily Nation*, 25 April 2007, 1 & 4.
- Murimi, J. “Game Export: It is a National Shame, Declares Leakey.” *Daily Nation*, 10 November 2005.
- Musila, G. “Democracy: Laughter in Gado’s Editorial Cartoons (1992–1999)”. In *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths: Popular Culture and Literature in East Africa*, edited by James Ogude and Joyce Nyairo. Trenton, NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2007.
- Mutonya, M. “Mugithi Performance: Popular Music, Stereotypes and Ethnic Identity. *Africa Insight* 35, no. 2 (2005): 53–60.
- Mwampembwa, G. *The End of an Error and the Beginning of a New One!*. Nairobi: Sasa Sema Publications, 2005.
- Mwaniki, A. and Muhoro, N. “The Role of Editorial Cartoons in *The Standard*, *The Daily Nation* and *The Kenya Times*.” Unpublished paper, School of Journalism, University of Nairobi, 1990.
- Nyairo, J. “‘Modify’: *Jua Kali* as a Metaphor for Africa’s Urban Ethnicities and Cultures”. In *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths: Popular Culture and Literature in East Africa*, edited by James Ogude and Joyce Nyairo. Trenton, NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2007.
- Nyairo, J. and J. Ogude “Specificities. Popular Music and the Negotiation of Contemporary Kenyan Identity: the Example of Nairobi City Ensemble”. *Social Identities* 9, no. 3 (2003): 383–400.
- Ogola, G. “Christening Fiction: Sermonising the Popular in *Whispers*”. In *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths: Popular Culture and Literature in East Africa*, edited by James Ogude and Joyce Nyairo. Trenton, NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2007.
- . “Wahome Mutahi: (Hi)story and Popular Literature in Kenya”. In *Wahome Mutahi’s World*, edited by Hweru Maupeu and Patrick Mutahi. Nairobi: TransAfrica Press, 2005.
- Oucho, John. *Undercurrents of Ethnic Conflict in Kenya*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Schatzberg, M.G. ed. *The Political Economy of Kenya*, New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Thomas, Jennie B. “Pickup Trucks, Horses, Women and Foreplay: The Fluidity of Folklore.” *Western Folklore* 54 (July 1995): 213–28.
- Wa-Mungai, Mbugua. “The Big Man’s Turn to Dance in Kenyan Bar-rooms Wahome Mutahi’s Parody of Power”. *Leeds University Centre for African Studies Bulletin* 65 (2003): 37–48.

Music

- De’Mathew, J. *Ciunguyu iria Nene*. CD. Nairobi: Shoeward Ltd Music Division Production, 2003.
- . *Thakame Yaitirwo*. CD. Nairobi: Promise Music Store, 2006.
- . *Uguo Niguo Kuri*. CD. Nairobi: Promise Films, 2006.
- Kamaaru, J. *Nyimbo Cia Mau Mau*. Nairobi: City Sounds Productions, nd.
- Muoni, J.J. *Thina wa Muoroto*. Pirate tape, 1990.