



Political Repression in East African Drama: The Potency of Silent Protest in Ruganda's *Echoes of Silence*

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ABSTRACT:

The East African region has, since independence, been largely characterised by political intolerance. Dissenting political voices have, in past, been censored. This has negatively impacted on the people's faith, and participation, in political activities. Their political consciousness has been dwarfed, in a number of instances, culminating in apathy, inaction, silence and disillusionment. There are, however, notable attempts to reawaken political consciousness in the region. Literature has played a great role in this respect and it is within this framework that this research project seeks to explore the manufacturing of acts (verbal and nonverbal) of dissent in postcolonial Africa. Protest and resistance have been established as the new forms of power negotiation and the expression of popular emancipation in democratic societies. In fact, resistance to established oppressive orders and social injustice has always characterised the history of humanity, as the oppressed have never achieved freedom without protest, resistance and even bloody battles. This study seeks to appreciate the rise of political consciousness in East African drama. Of specific interest in this paper is the potency of silent protests. The objective of this study is to explore the representation of subtle protest in reawakening political consciousness in Ruganda's *Echoes of silence*. This study relies on the tenets, ideas and arguments of Marxist and postcolonial literary theorists – Eagleton (1976); Said (1978); Bhabha (1994) and Fanon (1967) - in the reading of the selected text. Principles, such as the construction of new occidental and oriental space, the language of those in power, and of subjects, the new third space, cultural hegemony and othering, false consciousness, class struggle, economic determinism and dialectical materialism guide this study. The study takes an analytic research design. Ruganda's *Echoes of silence* has been purposively sampled. Ruganda's *Echoes of Silence* has a particularly loud title and it is Ruganda's only text that appears to be largely set in Kenya making it relevant to our study. We have thematically and inferentially analysed and discussed data from this play. The study concludes that silence, like other subtle modes of political expressions represented in Ruganda's *Echoes of silence*, is a powerful form of political protest in contemporary East African societies. By deploying this strategy, Ruganda's succeeds in developing political consciousness and calling for political action. The paper is significant because it encourages and promotes further research on the power of drama (and literature in general) to cause social and political change.

(Key words: Silence, Other, activism, Orient, Occident, Dissenting, Wretchedness, Echoes, Protest)

1. Introduction

In a strongly worded statement titled 'Return of the Dark Days of Repression,' the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) (2023) condemned the recent events in the country that seem to take the nation back to an era of repression. The LSK was concerned that the police were using disproportionate force to quell protests, protesters were denied bail, and others were moved from one police station to another and denied legal representation among other infringements on the bill of rights. Besides, they were 'troubled by cases of people in civilian clothes, others posing as police officers, bearing arms and involved in policing protests as there [was] no way to ascertain whether those bearing arms [were] indeed police officers or armed militia. Such incidences place the country on a dangerous path that can only result in anarchy and disruption of the public order' (LSK, 2023) In the same period, several social media personalities opposed to the current regime were also arrested and charged with "False publication contrary to Section (22) (1) (b) (d) of The Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act No. 5 of 2018' (LSK, 2023).

The turbulent political conditions of a given period notwithstanding, writers are duty bound to check on the excesses of the ruling elite. They cannot abdicate their roles or be excused from it. Achebe (1965) points out that 'The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done.' Ngugi (1981) agrees with Achebe and further points out that the task of a writer is 'to persuade us, to make us view not only a certain kind of reality, but also from a certain angle of vision often, though perhaps unconsciously, on behalf of a certain class, race, or nation.' Over and above the task of checking the ruling elite, the writer also bears the burden of providing alternatives and helping their people chart a different path.

With their role so clearly cut out ahead of them, writers find themselves in a place where they must speak truth to power. The problem of speaking truth to power - as we learn from an oft-quoted saying attributed to George Orwell, 'In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act' - is that the consequences may be fatal. Telling the truth, or pointing out the shortcomings of a regime in East Africa is a dangerous adventure that is always

met with censorship. In Uganda for instance, Kabeba (1979, p. 19) notes that ‘censorship in Uganda started as early as 1964, two years after independence.’ During this period, the Uganda National Cultural Centre was a “ghost house” without any performances. Anyone who offended the Amin’s regime was either jailed, exiled or killed. He notes, for instance, that photographer Jimmy Parma disappeared without a trace, playwright Robert Serumaga went into exile, and Byron Kawadwa was killed. This clearly shows that those willing to speak truth to power, especially in an oppressive regime, must be prepared for the worst. The alternative, and this is what we explore in this paper, is that they must find other subtle ways of accomplishing their noble mission.

In 2018, Tanzania’s arts council, Baraza la Sanaa la Taifa (Basata) published sixty-four (64) regulations to be adhered to by creatives in the country. Komba (2019) observes that ‘Basata may ban any artwork within its mandate that it deems offensive, it thinks may cause public discord or it judges to be contrary to Tanzanian morals under the guise of formalising the arts industry, promoting authentic Tanzanian traditions and protecting peace.’ It is clear that the purpose of these regulations was to put a chokehold on dissenting voices. This was a clear and unequivocal signal from the government that they would not condone criticism and being called out. These regulations required artists to register with them and present their work for consideration before being published among other things. The intention of Basata, it seems, is to control the kind of messages and narratives that creatives in Tanzania publish. This, therefore, makes it difficult for artists to address any pressing issues of their time as they are under close scrutiny.

Kenya, which prides itself as the most liberal country in the region, still struggles with allowing her people the ‘right to offend.’ Rushdie’s (1988) question on freedom of expression succinctly captures the contemporary state of fledgling democracies like Kenya: ‘What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist’ (Rushdie, 1988). This aptly defines the irony embellished in pronouncements of freedom of expression in the region. It clearly shows that freedom of expression must go beyond saying what is popular and inoffensive to what is unpopular and offensive failure to which this freedom becomes absurd and meaningless. The recent arrests and intimidation of persons critical of the excesses of Kenya’s political regime under the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act of 2018 clearly show that publishing material that offends the sensibilities of those in power is still a big problem and one would be daring the state to do so.

While countries in the East African region boast of their new constitutional dispensation that guarantee her people the right to assembly, picket, freedom of speech among other such rights and freedoms, the people are truly not free. The lived reality of the people of the region is a far cry from what is envisioned in their new constitutional dispensations. Activists, journalists, writers, novelists, dramatists, poets, musicians, and all manner of creatives continue to operate under the watchful eye of the state. But this is not a new phenomenon. This study focusses on ways in which some of these creatives, and dramatists in particular, have managed to carry out their craft without reprisal. We are particularly interested in the potency of silence and its significance in East African drama. Our focus in this paper is on Uganda’s *Echoes of silence*.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study concerns itself with the development of political consciousness through East African drama. A number of factors – historical, political and cultural – play a critical role in determining the politics of a given people. This makes it a complex and multifaceted phenomenon and in order to understand the different ways in which East African drama has dealt with political issues, we rely on the ideas of Marxist and postcolonial theories of literature. The two theories are utilised complementarily to make for a rich and comprehensive study.

Marxism is a social, economic and political theory espoused by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-19th century. The theory seeks to understand how a capitalist society works; it critiques it, demonstrates how it can be overthrown and a classless society installed. Tyson (2006) contends that: ‘for Marxism, getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, the media, and so on. Thus, economics is the base on which the superstructure of social/ political/ ideological realities is built.’ Tyson further points out that having economic power also includes social and political power. Class struggle is an important underpinning of Marxism as it holds that the capitalist society exploits the working class (Eagleton, 1976). According to Barry (2002), ‘the aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange.’

The Marxist theory of literature goes beyond the classical view of literature as a mirror of the society. Marxists agree that literature reflects the social infrastructure but add that it also reflects the economic base of that society. Marxist literary theorists point out that literature is a product of the social and economic forces of the society. Further, that literature is loaded and cannot be assumed to be a neutral reflector of the society. Eagleton (1976) notes that Marxist criticism is not just interested in the origin of literature, how literary works are published and whether they mention the classes of the society, rather, it aims to ‘explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and, meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history.’ Literature, because it is ideologically loaded, can be used for revolutionary ends, cause change and give voice to the marginalised.

The Marxist theory of literature has been lauded for its keen interest in the social, economic and political context in which literature is produced. This focus is important for two reasons: one, it opens our eyes on how literature does not only reflect our values, norms, beliefs and customs among others, but it also shows how it may reinforce them. Second, the focus on the social, economic and political context that underpins the production of literature shows ways in which it may be used to cause change in the society by challenging dominant groups and ideology. Critics, however, have taken exception with the overt focus on the social, economic, and political context of the production of literature. They argue that literature, as an art, is aesthetically and emotionally loaded, and these two dimensions are ignored in the Marxist theory of literature. Critics also point out that the theory denies individuals agency in shaping literary texts thereby ignoring important aspects such as sexuality, race, and gender.

The postcolonial theory of literature, on the other hand, focuses on the ways in which colonialism and/or imperialism and its legacy have shaped the cultural and political landscape of formerly colonised peoples. As a critical approach that emerged in the mid-20th century, it assesses the impact of colonialism and imperialism on literature and society. It is a useful tool in analysing the connection between imperialism, power and representation in works of art. The theory looks at the production of literary works in colonised or former colonised regions. It provides a framework for analysing how such works are written, read and interpreted. The theory also helps us understand ways in which colonised peoples responded to oppression, marginalisation and silencing, either through resistance, and/ or through artistic expression. Of critical importance to the postcolonial theorist is how the question of culture, language and identity are represented in literary works.

One strength of the postcolonial theory of literature is that it provides a framework for understanding the production of literary works in colonised countries. In so doing, it calls our attention to voices of oppressed and marginalised groups and pushes us to critically look at the assumptions, misrepresentations and biases that may go unnoticed in literature. This theory, by looking at the historical and cultural contexts in which literature is produced, allows people from diverse backgrounds to appreciate literature. Critics of the postcolonial theory of literature find the singular focus on the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised to be problematic as it ignores other power dynamics within colonised regions. The theory has also been faulted for reinforcing stereotypes and cultural differences in colonised countries. Further, that the theory ignores the input of individuals and other details in works of art in its abstractedness.

Said (1978) looks at the representation of the East by Western scholars. He notes that this representation is biased and aimed at maintaining the control of the East by Western imperial powers. He faults Western scholarship for creating, sustaining and mainstreaming the binary between the West and the East which justified the control of the east. For Said, 'Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.' Fanon (1967), on the other hand, examines the effect of colonisation on both the coloniser and the colonised. He notes that colonisation was violent and inhuman and violence is necessary in attempts to dislodge it. Fanon argues for a national culture, literature and consciousness which are important to the decolonisation process. He is unequivocal in his assessment of colonialism noting that: 'Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.'

Bhabha (1994) narrows in on hybridity, in-betweenness, and the third space in his study on the postcolonial culture and identity. He contends that the interaction between the coloniser and the colonised produces a different culture. Thus, the identity of the 'Other' is not a simple mix of the coloniser's culture and that of the colonised but rather one that is neither the two, what he calls the 'third space,' in-betweenness, 'and 'cultural hybridity.' Bhabha wonders whether there is need to 'contest the grand narratives' that define the postcolonial subject and nation and wonders what alternative versions of narratives we may come up with: 'Do we need to rethink the terms in which we conceive of community, citizenship, nationality, and the ethics of social affiliation?' For the purposes of this, we focus on the concept of 'Other' as relates the interaction between the coloniser, in this case, the imperialist, and the colonised, who are, for the purpose of our study, the politically marginalised voices.

This study employs some of the ideas of key Marxist and postcolonial literary theorists canvassed above in the reading of Ruganda's *Echoes of silence*. This study, as indicated before, benefits from principles such as the new occidental and oriental space, the language of those in power, and of subjects, the new third space, cultural hegemony and othering, class struggle, economic determinism and dialectical materialism among others. The interest of the study is to interrogate and appreciate how these ideas have influenced the writing of the selected text and determine their applicability in the analysis of the text in question.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an analytical research design because it is qualitative in nature. We recognise that this study calls for a critical appreciation of a literary work to determine its correspondence to the potency of subtle protests in post-independence East African societies. We regard literature, particularly East African drama, and, more specifically Ruganda's *Echoes of silence*, as a fictional platform for representation of contemporary social realities. This text, which is drawn from the East African literary space, has been purposively sampled for this paper. We critically read this text and assigned codes to textual components that deemed relevant for interrogating the dramatist's representation of political repression and the potency of silent protests. Our critical analysis and discussions anchored on the two theories we have identified: Marxism and postcolonialism. To reinforce our arguments in this paper, we have also made references to similar studies that we found particularly intriguing.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Politics and literature enjoy a very close relationship; however, this relationship is not always rosy. Earliest attempts to restrict and censure writers can be found in *The Republic* by Plato. In his wisdom, Plato banishes the poets from his ideal republic on the charge of misinformation and corrupting the minds of the youth. He contends that 'all poetical imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, and that the knowledge of their true nature is the only antidote to them.' This charge, and its various mutations, informs the acrimonious relationship between literature and politics.

Hohendahl (2014), looks at what Satre calls 'engaged literature' being literature that 'seeks to influence political discourse.' He contends that politics and literature impact on each other but the impact of politics on literature is high during what he calls 'extreme' political conditions as opposed to conditions marked with stability. Hohendahl's observation is correct in the sense that periods characterised by high political tensions often witness a lot

of critical activities in an attempt to make sense of the conditions. This is because literature ‘can be used to report and comment on current affairs, for political pressure, for propaganda, and to reflect and shape public opinion’ (Finnegan, 2012).

In an environment as hostile as one discussed, dramatists and writers in general have to find other ways of putting their message across. Rich (1990) in ‘Cartographies of Silence’ contends that silence may be a strategy and should not be confused with lack of agency. The poem looks critically at the inequalities and silences prevalent in our society. It calls us to reflect on the ways in which minority voices are delegitimised and silenced. Rich correctly points out that silence is a voice, “it is a presence”, and we should listen to its message:

*Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed
the blueprint to a life
It is a presence
it has a history a form
Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence*

Scholars continue to look at the concept of silence and its significance in literature and other fields. Beville and Dybris (2012) note that, ‘as a concept silence is more than just the absence of speech and sound. It can relate a silence that is purposeful or one that is forced.’ Silence, for most people, means the absence of speech or sound. A proper and richer understanding of silence demands that one questions the origins of that silence. Is it coerced or willful? Such an understanding would then help us appreciate the import of a particular kind of silence. Li (2004) agrees, noting that ‘silence is a complex and complicated cultural phenomenon. While it is common to view silence as the opposite of speech, silence also compliments speech.’ For Li, it is also important to look at the cultural significance of silence as different communities have different views on silence.

Mazzei (2007), in her project of theorising on silence, ‘seeks to make present that voice which is absent.’ Her mission is ‘to attend to the words between words, or the language buried in language, is to conceive of the silences as intelligible elements of language.’ She ends with a particularly riveting question: ‘What if the unseen, the unheard, the not read is the essential gift or the ground of the seen, the heard, and the read?’ This question is important in the sense that it helps us appreciate the silences present in a text in a different light. It would be pointless to read a text and because of the general assumptions on silence miss out on the ‘essential gift’ which would have provided for a fuller understanding of the text.

Booth (2007) observes that ‘all silences are against some body and against something.’ Silence, regardless of its motivations, has a target. It is therefore a kind of action, a form of resistance. Booth further notes that, “the silent in world politics are not physically voiceless: they are politically silenced. The disenfranchised are not born without power: they are disempowered. There is no poverty gene to be discovered: people are made poor by political choices.” This points to the centrality of politics and the material conditions prevailing at a given time and how they shape the lived realities of a people. Marx and Engels (2010) put it better when they say: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”

In his study of Ngugi and Imbuga, and how each of these dramatists attracted different responses from the state, Outa (2001) contends that there has to be ‘constitutive elements in the ‘dramaturgy’; the aesthetic and conceptual choices employed by playwrights, that can more meaningfully-or additionally explain- the different responses.’ He concludes that Ngugi’s approach is confrontational while ‘Imbuga’s approach seems to be based on the higher aesthetic realm, that in fact, theatre is not just mirror like reality, but rather as is often said a ‘re-enactment’ or even an illusion of reality. With this in mind, a writer is then liberated from the artificial confines of politics while at the same time engaging that reality into criticism and scrutiny.’

More than ever before, protest and resistance have become recurrent (recursive) forms of democratic expression in Western democracies. The most recent and vivid example is the ‘Stop the steal protest’ of January 6th 2021 that led to the storming of the Capitol by pro-Trump militants during the certification of the results of elections in the USA. This last event comes after a series of protest that have marred American tranquillity. Protests are triggered by all sorts of events, all of them having enduring social injustice, socioeconomic precariousness, socio-political dissatisfaction, oppression and disillusion as the root cause. The recent enduring movements like that of the Gilets Jaunes in France, the George Floyd and ‘Black lives matter’ protests in the US, the street protest in Hong Kong, are not aberrations but rather a culmination of decades of struggle. Protests pave the way to a new phase in the fight for better leadership that would bring about more social justice, equality and better living conditions for the people.

Africa is becoming acquainted with the new waves of popular emancipatory expression of dissatisfaction, and it is worth apprehending the issue from the benchmark of postcolonialism (Said 1978). The history of Africa also provides accounts of dark periods during which Africans have been through bondage: from the slavery ordeal to the very recent colonial experience. In fact, the quest for independence by Africans met fierce and bloody resistance from the colonial powers who were not ready to let go the territories which they had long exploited.

In the aftermath of independence, the struggle changed its form, shape and target. In fact, the masses in the newly created political entities soon discovered that beyond the proclaimed independence, there was need for more freedom and democracy. As a result, their fight was redirected from colonial powers to new targets: neo-colonial entities that were established as the colonial masters passed on power to indigenous leadership and administration. New forms of democratic governance was introduced in Africa in the 1990s following the Eastern wind. There was great expectation that more public

participation to debate on public life would lead to regular power change, and indirectly to socioeconomic transformation that would foster the wellbeing of the population. More than thirty years later, the populations have been disillusioned as they come to realize that there has been political status quo despite of the parody of democracy.

In this postcolonial context (Said 1978), characterised by the emancipation of conscience, (empowerment of masses and civil society organizations), Africans seem to have reached another state of maturity as democracy has established multiparty system, human rights, and freedom of speech as core values. It is claimed that the governments are faced with a huge challenge that dictators did not experience: governing king-population. Populations in post-colonial Africa are getting more conscious of their rights and are no longer ready to tolerate poor governance. They seem to be inspired by trends in Western context.

Ruganda's *Echoes of silence* revolves around three characters, Wairi, NN and OO. This play is set in one of the suburbs in Nairobi – a green-gated compound in Buru Buru Phase Two (2014, p. 1) – Njoroge Njuguna's living room. Double O is here to see Double N; he has an appointment with Double N at six o'clock. As he waits for Double N, who fails to show up in long run; Double N and Wairu, Double N's wife engage in a desultory conversation that turns heated in a number of instances. Their conversations reveal a number of things about the Kenyan society. Ruganda uses this dramatic platform to address the challenges facing contemporary East African societies. Double N's and Double O's families are representative of different social classes within the post-independence Kenyan society. Kenya is, in this play, a microcosm of the wider East African society. As suggested in the title, Ruganda's drama focuses on powerful nature of 'silence' as a mode of protest. Silence, to this end, acquires a metaphorical significance in this play. What is said or subtly spoken of has the potential of reverberating. Ruganda appears to be suggesting that the Kenyan society, and, by extension, the East African society is reverberating with the silent sounds of heavy protests arising from her citizens.

What is particularly striking about Ruganda's dramatisation of resistance through protest in *Echoes of silence* is that while most political protests in Africa have seemingly followed a despairingly familiar script – people, unable to earn a proper living and yearning for political change as democratically elected leaders are not able to meet their needs, initiate a wave of protests that usually involves an angry mob rioting in the street; military exaction or excessive use of force leading to dead casualties; and people calling for decisive police accountability – Ruganda represents 'silence' as a powerful strategy in political resistance. Some of these mass protests and uprisings in the 'staple' script have, in the past, led to the arrest and, in some instances, murder of political dissenters in African countries. These 'staple' protests appear to have been very effective tools of political bargaining in Postcolonial Africa, but what Ruganda dramatises in *Echoes of silence* are subtle modes of political expression.

Pang (1996) observes that 'silence conveys a variety of messages. In mainstream society, when a person is silent she may be seen as weak, passive or voiceless.' Silence is clearly a form of speech and one would be foolhardy not to listen and instead make the general assumption that it implies weakness or a lack of agency. Perez (1984), in the same vein, points out that silence is not monolithic: 'there are silences which communicate, susceptible of interpretation approximately as exact as that of the written or spoken word, and other silences which mystify or confuse.' As such, how we treat one form of silence ought to be different from how we treat another. If all silences are treated the same, certain messages would be lost, glossed over or conflated with others.

In Ruganda's *Echoes of silence*, that which is not said becomes the most strategic form of protest. In what appears to be an adaptation of the absurdist theatre, Imbuga abandons conventional dramatic form to demonstrate the futility of dreams and aspirations in post-independence African nations. By adopting this strategy and appropriating it to suit the African context, Imbuga is suggesting to resist European literary traditions in favour of domesticated techniques. He is also calling for a paradigm shift in Africa's politics. It is important to note that the theatre of the absurd is a technique that subverted and indeed dismantled traditional theatrical forms that had dominated Europe for quite a long time. It began as a literary offshoot of the second World war. There is very limited dramatic action in *Echoes* as the two characters, Wairi and Double O converse repetitively around similar issues. Spivak (1988) reflects on the silencing of marginalised and oppressed groups through unfavorable power structures in the society. For Spivak, minorities, marginalised, and oppressed groups cannot speak due to the biased power structures. She observes thus: 'in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow' (Spivak, 1988).

The dramatist employs this strategy to demonstrate the vicious cycle of hopelessness that defines post-independence East African societies today. The long and unfruitful wait for Double N signifies the long wait for real socio-economic emancipation from colonial and now neocolonial bourgeoisies. This wait foregrounds the hopeless existence of the plebs in contemporary East African societies. Leaders make alluring and tempting promises – like Double N's 'Six o'clock. Sharp' (Ruganda, 2014, p. 2) – that are not honoured in the end. Wairu's 'hidden embarrassment' when she confirms that her husband will keep time suggests a lack of confidence that borders on insincerity. The dramatist uses Double N's absence to give prominence to insensitivity that characterises the capitalistic class in these societies. As long as they 'warm and cozy,' they 'can be merciless' to the likes of Okoth Okatch, who are drenched in cold (Ruganda, 2014, p. 2). When Double O speaks of his ilk, he withholds the identity that defines 'them,' perhaps afraid of the implications of such revelations. The dichotomy of 'us' verses 'them' is significant in illustrating the mistrust and suspicion occasioned by class differences in contemporary African communities. That Double O is allowed to sit 'anywhere except the master's (Double N's) throne,' – a comment that Double O repeats sarcastically – further exemplifies social stratification. Double O confesses this in self-pity when he says:

It's wet and cold almost everywhere, for the likes of us. But I had a swig or two, though downtown, to kill the cold and mingle with the crowd. Despicable little rats. No particular direction, no particular destination. Ranting away about soccer and unconjugal lusts. Always chasing dreams in endless little circles. (Ruganda, 2014, p. 5)

This seemingly irredeemable circle of cold, directionless life is sharply contrasted with Double N's lavish lifestyle: 'a very cozy atmosphere ... not a house of horrors,' 'posters of successful productions, portraits of glorious moments and upholsteries,' 'books defying cobwebs and cockroaches,'

'stainless steel and glass,' 'roses' and above all 'a smiling wife.' The gap between the rich and the poor is gaping. Those who enjoy such trappings of economic power are afraid of the discomfort that its absence is likely to create and 'only an idiot could shun a place like this one'; in fact, a 'look at the [dreadful] pigsties the desolate ones squat in' (Ruganda, 2014, p. 6) justify the need to shun them.

The elliptical colloquial exchanges between Wairimu and Okoth reify the power of the unsaid. The union of Wairimu and Njoroge largely represents unions, which are christened nations, or more accurately, countries, in post-independence African societies. They are borne out of convenience as parties to these unions do not seem committed to them. Ironically, they pretend to because they are afraid of confronting the proverbial elephant within these unions. A historical context to this conversation should be rewarding; the boundaries that define these countries were decided upon by the colonialists. These colonial delimitations served the interests of the coloniser and not the colonised. It is small wonder, therefore, that they took control of affairs in African states and 'othered' the ancestral owners of these lands. A sense of entitlement set in, relegating the colonised to the periphery. Wairi does not want to admit to being alone as the 'man with a mission' is bent 'on rocking the world to smithereens...' (2014, p. 3). She pretends she does not understand what Okoth's statement means. She seems uncertain about her status as Njoroge's 'one and only wife.' She says this with a lack of conviction, a vainness that casts doubt on her trust in Njoroge. Double O's relationship with Double N, it is evident, is also not devoid of hypocrisy. He claims that Double N is 'basically a good man' and he likes him for his 'soul bleeds with the masses.' Eagleton (1983), points out that, 'the work's insights, as with all writing, are deeply related with its blindness: what it does not say, and how it does not say it, may be as important as what it articulates; what seems absent, marginal or ambivalent about it may provide a central clue to its meanings.' In reading a text, most people would not dwell on the 'blindness,' 'subtexts,' and gaps present in the text as communicating the most important message or any message for that matter. As Eagleton correctly observes, the things mentioned in passing, intimated at, put in the periphery, and those which appear to be absent may very well be the message of the text.

The union of Wairi, like that of Double O and Muthoni, is a microcosm of the relationship between communities in Kenya. It would appear that by pitting Okoth Okatch against a Kikuyu wife, Double N and Wairu; Ruganda is trying to replay the political rivalry between Kenyatta and Oginga that was witnessed immediately after Kenya's self-determination: the entitlement of the Kikuyu-led political regime, on the one hand, and the dissenting camp of the Luo-led opposition. The mention of Maseno and the tribulations of OO mirror those of Oginga's family: 'When the missionaries at Maseno got to know my family history, they threw me out. Said I was a bad influence on the other boys.... So my dear lady, we may have not gone to the forest, but the truth is, we did fight... My progenitors are a breed of proven warriors' (2014, P. 13). The memory bells that the word 'wife' rings to Double O are 'pinpricks,' 'cold shivers,' 'slamming of doors and a tongue spewing out cascades of venom like a cobra' (2014, pp. 3-4). This is reminiscent of the bitter fallout between Kenyatta and Oginga. There is no love lost between Double O and his wife as he wishes her dead. That his wife's death might have been a better proposition suggests deep-seated hatred.

Double O's parody of his wife, Muthoni, in what is presented in a play within the major play, reveals a chaotic marriage, one in which the couple display irreconcilable differences. The dramatist's representation of the rivalry between ethnic communities in Kenya is not overt, yet silent protests acquire immense potency. Double O appreciates Wairi for tolerance as she remains polite and patient even when she is 'tired of [his] laments, but it is the comparison he draws that displays his disgust at political entitlement. Without explicitly mentioning his wife, Double O sarcastically says that 'some women [he knows] would have thrown him out at the slightest excuse' (Ruganda, 2014, p. 9). He introduces such cultural epithets that have been used to discredit the leadership potential of the Luo community in Kenya; they regarded as an 'uncircumcised' and cowardly lot. Though he does not quite verbalise the source of this stereotyping, the answer can be inferred from his sarcasm. '... you might be secretly wondering, this very moment: 'What was this man, this Double O or whatever his name is, what was he doing when, at sixteen, I smuggling food for our liberating in the forest, behind the backs of the whites and the callous homeguards?' (p. 9). Fanon (1967) posits:

But, standing face to face with his country at the present time, and observing dearly and objectively the events of today throughout the continent which he wants to make his own, the intellectual is terrified by the void, the degradation and the savagery he sees there. Now he feels that he must get away from white culture. He must seek his culture elsewhere, anywhere at all; and if he fails to find the substance of culture of the same grandeur and scope as displayed by the ruling power, the native intellectual will very often fall back upon emotional attitudes and will develop a psychology which is dominated by exceptional sensitivity and susceptibility. This withdrawal which is due in the first instance to a begging of the question in his internal behaviour mechanism and his own character brings out, above all, a reflex and contradiction which is muscular. (Fanon, 1967, p. 70)

Unable to hide his indignation, Double O declares that he, too, 'did fight for this goddam Uhuru of [theirs]' (Ruganda, 2014, p. 10). He also addresses the challenges that the orient, the 'Othered' or the wretched of the Earth, have faced in post-independence East African societies. The dramatist gives subtle indications that the society represented in this play transcends the Kenyan borders when OO talks of political assassination of the Anglican Bishop, Hannington, who was murdered in Busoga. Over the course of the play, discussions revolving around the cotemporary state of the present-day Kenya intensify. These national discussions are intertwined with family issues. It would appear that Ruganda is hesitant to take a gloves-off approach to political matters in East Africa. He uses the family set-up to allegorically represent national issues and, indeed, regional issues. Double O's sentiments of disaffection are subtle protests against entitled regimes in Kenya and East Africa. The 'forest' metaphor suits both Uganda and Kenya and the justifications that specific regimes in the two countries have given to defend their stranglehold on power: 'You didn't go to the forest, you are not entitled. You don't qualify. Others don't even go beyond one's name to come to their staple conclusions' (2014, p. 13). Some ethnic communities in these countries have been mobilised to resist 'Other' leaders on the basis of the dialectics of political entitlement.

Double O's declaration towards the end of this play demonstrates the potency of silent protest. It is an indictment on the future of post-independence East African nations and Africa as a continent: the existing marital institutions were forced upon African communities. To redeem the 'Othered' or the orient from the repressive tendencies of the dominant political classes that purport to serve the interests of the entitled communities, a political renegotiation has to be initiated: 'Talking of feathers,' OO says, 'I swear if she came back now from her flight, it would be a proper wedding' (2014, p. 109).

5. Conclusion

Resistance through protests also portrays vividly an aura of frustration and indignation to the system of governance which offers no hope for tens of thousands of people in the countries. An exasperation when one does not foresee any hope for any lasting change in one's condition if the system has not changed. A return to status quo appears to no longer be politically viable. Rather than going to the extreme situation by resorting to immolation, activists and engaged citizens use a variety of channels, signs and words to express their discontentment and inclination to dissent. East African dramatists have devised new forms of communication that also play an adjuvant role in this trend. New drama forms have fostered indirect mobilisation of the masses against totalitarian tendencies. Because traditional theatrical forms were censored by the governing powers, contemporary dramatists, like Ruganda, have adopted subtle ways of resistance and protest. Silent protest, as demonstrated in this paper, is instrumental in disseminating the images and messages of the protests aiming at the mass mobilisation. Ruganda's *Echoes of silence* is a typical example of such drama. The play presents some of the most telling episodes of the fact that the masses can decide their fate even without necessarily employing traditional and confrontational forms of protest. Ruganda's *Echoes of silence*, using the symbolism of echoes, testifies to the potency of silent protests as represented in East African drama.

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