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## The Moral and Affective Function of Artivism in the XYZ Show

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### **Abstract:**

*Studies on popular art indicate that it has affective power, which gives it power for political mobilization. While previous scholars agree that The XYZ Show is a popular art form that satirically exposes controversies that surround contemporary political leaders in Kenya, the function of the artivism embedded in the show has not been exhaustively studied. In this paper, I focus on the moral, pedagogical, sensitization and catalytic function of artivism in The XYZ Show with a view to determining how the show uses humour to confront issues ailing the leadership in Kenya. Underpinned in Grace Musila's models of Bodies/ Affects and pedagogies, this scholar reads The XYZ Show as a popular art production that utilizes artistic strategies to bring to public light and confront socio-political vices such as corruption and misuse of power, lack of integrity displayed by government officials; negative ethnicity and electoral malpractices propagated by the same leaders. Primary data for this study was obtained from purposively sampled disparate episodes of The XYZ Show. The data was analyzed using qualitative textual analysis and organized using thematic content analysis. The findings of this paper add to the knowledge of puppet art and artivism and will form a basis for future studies on the political function of artivism in Kenya.*

**Keywords:** *Affective, artivism, catalytic, function, mobilization, moral, pedagogical, popular art, sensitization*

### **1. Introduction**

Artivism, as discussed by various scholars, is a fusion of art and political activism in which various artistic strategies are utilized for political motives. (Hachimi 1) posits that artivism is an alternative to direct activism, while (Bouhmala 61-62) adds that artists use artivism to expose flaws in their leaders and that animated characters mirror the animated rhetoric of the political class and their performances. *The XYZ Show*, which premiered on Citizen TV on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2009 after two years of struggle to be accepted by TV stations that dismissed it as too political and controversial, was influenced by the French satirical puppet broadcast – *Les Guignols de l'info*. It is Africa's first-ever animated puppet political satire that uses latex puppets that are caricatures of prominent political leaders in Kenya. The use of latex, which is skin imitating, gives the puppets realistic facial features and bodily shape. This, coupled with the realistic voice and mannerisms of the characters, makes these puppet characters easily identifiable by the Kenyan audience. For example, it is easy to identify the former presidents, Mwai Kibaki and Uhuru Kenyatta; Former deputy president William Ruto; former prime minister and leader of opposition Raila Odinga; and other prominent politicians like Musalia Mudavadi, Kalonzo Musyoka and Moses Wetangula all who are major characters in the show. This presents these leaders as subjects for ridicule and gives the Kenyan audience the privilege to laugh at them. This discussion agrees with (Kebaya 1) that representations in art constitute not only a central part of the contemporary creative production processes but also the representation, reconfiguration, reactivation, circulation and exhibition of various political imaginaries in Kenyan society today.

The reading of *The XYZ Show* in this paper was guided by Grace Musila's model of reading African popular culture: Bodies/Affect. Musila argues that many genres in African Popular imaginaries are defined by their capacity to generate affects, and, in fact, affects have material effects. Musila demonstrates that performance genres and audio-visual forms are examples of nodes that rely on affects. (Musila 3) Further, despite scepticism about their reach in addressing systemic challenges, affects hold significant potential for subversion (4). Based on this argument by Musila, I sought to demonstrate the affective function of artivism in *The XYZ Show*.

In discussing the political dimension and significance of puppets, Dariusz Kosinski argues that through puppetry, an image is transformed and used in such a way that it exposes and makes manifest precisely that which the satirist believes the public figure is trying to hide from public view. This leads us to the functionality of puppets since by being reduced to puppets; the criticized person is stripped of power, degraded and belittled (Kosinski 61,64)

Additionally, Joanna Kordjak points out that puppet theatre was considered to be a potentially perfect and relatively safe medium of socio-political critique due to its wit, irony and mockery and that, similar to a children's game,

puppet theatre provided a convenient space for rejecting certain social tenets, order and established norms of behaviour (Kordjak 8,11).

*The XYZ Show*, the focus of this study, not only exemplifies wit, irony and mockery but also allows socio-political critique as its writers confront the state and leadership through humour. As mentioned earlier, the show features prominent political leaders whose misdemeanors are exposed by the puppets. Based on this, this paper aims to determine how *The XYZ Show* has been used to lower our leaders from their pedestal and reduce them to public ridicule.

## 2. Confronting the State and Leadership through Humour

Remmy Barasa notes that humour and popular culture often function as a mirror through which the world and its political landscape become envisaged and that satire in political discourse is used to deconstruct the political class together with its policies, institutions and authority, as it makes a statement about society and its debilitating power structure (Barasa, 19). Mwampemba in *The XYZ Show* employs humour to expose society's inequities committed by senior political leaders, thus turning these leaders into recipients of legitimate criticism. Thus, the show relies heavily on humour not only to castigate the political class but also to incite the citizenry to raise questions about its leaders.

*The XYZ Show*, to a great extent, showcases episodes that point to the lack of integrity of a number of senior government officials. These episodes display leaders who are egoistic, intolerant, unaccountable and dishonest in the execution of their duties. Episode 7 of Season 3, produced and aired between September 2010 and April 2011 in a segment titled '*Bunge High*' features puppets of the then president Mwai Kibaki, prime minister Raila Odinga, deputy president Kalonzo Musyoka, deputy prime minister Uhuru Kenyatta and other leaders William Ruto and Martha Karua as student 3, 2, 5,4, and 1, respectively. The setting of this episode is a school, and the leaders mentioned are characterized as students in a social ethics class. Their teacher, a puppet of Kofi Annan, administers a test in which the classmates compete to outdo each other in scoring the 50% mark that will make up their final grade.

It is worth noting at this point that the leaders in this episode were part of the coalition government formed after the contested 2007 general elections in Kenya that degenerated into post-election violence. This coalition government was thereafter formed under the mediation of the UN peace ambassador Kofi Annan. The students' response to Annan's first question introduces the antagonism amongst these leaders who represent the two main political factions in the country-PNU and CORD. The CORD leader, Raila, differs from Ruto, who feels that if his brother stole his cake, he would fight him using all means possible. As for Raila, he would get back his cake using due democratic process. In this episode, the producers suggest that Raila Odinga explored available democratic avenues when his win in the 2007 elections was stolen. However, Ruto, who was Raila's chief campaigner, agitated for war. However, as for Mwai Kibaki, who is condemned as the incumbent who rigged himself to power, he readily accepts to share power. In this case, the producers of the show demonstrate layers of ethical problems in the country. To steal a cake and share it with the owner is not just comical but also a moral dilemma. Similarly, exploring democratic avenues where such systems are dysfunctional is impractical. The pragmatic solution would be war, yet it spirals to endless atrocities. Therefore, the episode highlights Kenya's moral dilemma at the time when the country almost degenerated into a civil war.

Further, the class is taken through an integrity test when the teacher asks them how they would react if they witnessed one of them cheating in an examination. Only two out of the five leaders pass the integrity test, proving their impunity. The three who failed declared that they would force him to share the leakage. The female student differs from them, and for that, she is heckled. Male student 2 contests the results while student 4 thinks of re-sitting the exam and paying other students or even the Ministry of Education to do the exam for him. In this episode, the producers are revisiting Kenya's entanglement in electoral malpractices.

The episode shows that as long as top political leaders stand to benefit, they will ratify electoral rigging. Student 4 is ready to bribe the core of the education system so that he can pass the test. This shows the absurd levels of corruption in the electoral system, which requires overhauling in total. The fact that only the female student stands up against electoral malpractices highlights aspects of gender in the country's governance. Even though the producers have Martha Karua in mind, she does represent Kenyan women's wish for free, fair and verifiable elections. As a person, Martha has been referred to in Kenyan politics as the Iron Lady. Her firmness is what disrupts the comfort of the group of male politicians. Furthermore, the producers foreground and ridicule the habit of contesting electoral results even when they appear to be fair. The fact that the student Raila is the one who contests his failure of the test causes laughter since, in the Kenyan political landscape, he is known for perennially contesting election results.

In any democratic society, elections need to be free and fair, but this is not the case in the country as determined in the above scenario and in *The XYZ Show* episode 8 of season 7 and episode 11 of season 1, also discussed in this paper. According to the National Crime Research Centre, electoral crimes and offences have remained a serious challenge in Kenya's electoral history and process. Bribery of voters, threats, intimidation, use of fraudulent devices, coercion of election officials, use of undue influence and tampering with the nomination and ballot papers are cited as forms of electorate crimes and offences. (Centre 1) These malpractices have had far-reaching negative effects that have disrupted the peace of the country. Episode 8 of season 7, in a segment titled '*XYZ Project Fame*' and episode 11 of season 1, titled '*Bloody Bahasha*,' humorously expose electoral offences spearheaded by our political leaders. Episode 8 of season 7, produced in 2013, five years after the hotly disputed 2007 elections and a few months before the 2013 general elections in Kenya, depicts the use of undue influence on the electorate and vote rigging. The episode serves not only to highlight election malpractices but also to condemn political leaders who perpetrated them. The segment features the three key presidential candidates in the 2007 elections who later formed the coalition government. They are comically presented as music artists performing at the "XYZ Project fame show." The first performer is MC Agwash, a name derived from Raila

Odinga's popular political nickname, Agwambo. In his song, he exposes his discontentment with the coalition government that was formed to quell conflict after the disputed 2007 elections when he says: "*Ukiniona na Kibaki, usidhani ni mabeshte. Najua plan yangu ni kutafuta salary...*" (When you see me with Kibaki, don't think we are friends. My plan is to get a salary). Here, Raila's deep-seated antagonism with Kibaki, whom he accused of rigging him out of the presidency, is evident.

The next performer, Kalonzo Musyoka's puppet, referred to as Man Stevo, exposes the political propaganda fueled by politicians during the election period to discredit each other. Further, he hints in his song about the antagonism between himself and Raila on the one hand and himself and Ruto on the other hand. He complains that the two politicians have branded him a traitor and his wiper party a donkey's party. He also exposes electoral malpractice when he suggests the presence of rigging in the previous elections when he sings: "*Hakuna kuiba kura this time. Tunataka watu waingie state house kwa njia inayostahili.*" (This time, there will be no rigging. We want people to get to the state house legitimately.)

The final performer in this segment is the puppet of the then-President Mwai Kibaki. He is wearing sports attire and has a golf stick in hand. He sings a popular genge tune with the refrain "*mi ni mjanja.*" In the song, Kibaki boasts of his cunningness that saw him clinch the presidency in 2007 and how he used undue manipulation to influence the election outcome that saw him sworn unceremoniously at night. Kibaki's gleeful admission of having rigged the elections is a portrayal of egoistic intent to commit electoral malpractice despite the volatile political climate at the time. In this episode, the creators perform what (Kebaya 6) refers to as symbolic degradation in which the elevated is brought back to earth. This is evident when, in this episode, the president, the prime minister and the deputy president are reduced to singers performing corrupted versions of well-known music. The extent to which these leaders' lyrics demean them can also not be overemphasized.

In another segment titled '*Bloody Bahasha*' featured in episode 11 of season 1, the dilemma of whether the perpetrators of the 2007/2008 post-election violence should be tried at the local tribunal or the Hague is the point of focus. The puppet of Kalonzo Musyoka is the main character. When the scene opens, he is making a call to one Mr. Mutula, whom he thanks for pushing Aanan and Ocampo to ensure the culprits of the post-election violence are prosecuted at the Hague. His selfish motive for coercing Mutula is exposed when he says: "*Endelea kusukuma Annan na Ocampo ili wapeleke hawa watu Hague. Nitapita katikati yao ningie statehouse by Disemba.*" (Continue pushing Annan and Ocampo to take these people to the Hague. I will go between them to get into the state house by December.) This exposed the politician's opportunism when Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto were prosecuted at the Hague. The segment further shows that most politicians' interest in the case was not for the purpose of seeking justice but for political gain, as the conviction of the accused persons would have reduced political competition. Additionally, Kalonzo's intention to coerce the army to offer security and safeguard his interests points to not only electoral malpractice but also potential corruption and abuse of power. He says: "*Mambo ya handing over haina shida. Mtu wetu wa jeshi atatusaidia na hiyo maneno.*" (The handing over is not a problem. Our person in the army will help us with that.) This utterance also points to ethnicity, as the Kalonzo character sees no problem with invoking ethnicity to clinch political power, which is unfairly acquired.

The illustrations above clearly show that political leaders are at the core of electoral malpractices in Kenya. This is seen in Mwai Kibaki's puppet's gleeful disclosure of having rigged the elections and Kalonzo's puppet's display of egoistic intent to commit electoral malpractices despite the volatile political climate at the time. This clearly shows that political leaders are a major hindrance to electoral reforms in Kenya. These leaders, as Myint (53) posits, always try to make the best out of a bad situation.

Further, the worrying extent of corruption in the country is also portrayed in *The XYZ Show*, episode 1 of season 5, in a segment titled '*Up Close and Personal*.' In the segment, *The XYZ* presenter Keff Joinange is joined by former Director of Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) Professor PLO Lumumba, who discloses his distaste for the corrupt government. The besieged professor alleges that corrupt government officials engineered his dismissal from the commission because of his incorruptibility. Notably, Keff Joinange is a corrupted version of Jeff Koinange, a famous news anchor who hosts important personalities on his *Jeff Koinange Show*. Jeff is known for his impeccable English; thus, the corruption of his name is a source of humour. Further, the deliberate mix-up of his name suggests to viewers that they are dealing with a corrupted world, a world that is upside down. Further, the EACC director disclosed to Keff that his efforts to ensure the integrity of the people in government and bring to book those implicated in corruption were thwarted by powerful people in government. On this, he says: "Let me tell you, Keff; I have seen some genetically modified squirrels that crisscross the ecologons of power with the intention to entice and trap the pursuers of the antelope... But mine has been the realm where the elephant blocks the entrance, and your chase of the antelope becomes useless!" (Episode 1, Season 5, *The XYZ Show*, 2012)

In this segment, the producers of the show highlight two Kenyan personalities known for their pomposity in the English language. Their vain pride in the language alone is laughable, yet here they are caricatured. PLO's woes epitomize Kenya's moral dilemma. This is because even the watchdog organization set up to combat corruption is besieged by the corrupt.

Similarly, in episode 10 of season 4, the puppet of PLO Lumumba opens his doors to *The XYZ Show* presenter in a segment titled '*Lumumba Cribs*.' In one of the scenes, PLO is dressed in a Karate uniform, and he engages in combatant moves, after which he exclaims that sometimes one has to fight his battles with his fists. Earlier in this segment, he pointed out that in his push to fight corruption, he needed words to fight the complaints. These two scenarios suggest the challenges he has to contend with as the Anti-corruption boss. He has to be prepared both mentally and physically to counter the grave corruption cases in the country. Shortly after the martial arts scene, PLO moves us to a room with four portraits on a wall he refers to as the wall of shame. On the wall are portraits of four prominent leaders whom he refers to as corruptible imbeciles wanted for various corruption offences.

The first is the portrait of the then Deputy President William Ruto, who is wanted for 'HAGUE LOITERING'; the second is the portrait of the then president Uhuru Kenyatta, wanted for budget errors and post-election violence; the third is the portrait of Kalonzo Musyoka, wanted for shuttle diplomacy; and the last is the portrait of Mike Sonko who is wanted for public madness. PLO refers to Sonko as a blabbering ignoramus who is embarrassed to even disgrace the wall of shame. This wall of shame illuminates top state leaders and exposes them to public shaming. PLO wittingly jokes about their failures and sins of omission and commission and, by doing so, incites the audience to scorn them. It is worth noting that the wall of shame is juxtaposed with our general knowledge of the hall of fame, where personalities are recognized for their varied outstanding performance and contributions to society. Therefore, the portrayal of these leaders in the wall of shame underscores their gross misconduct as persons expected to represent political uprightness. Such satirical portrayals enable the audience to "receive the indirect messages and construct their own interpretation." (Haugerud 1-2) As the audience makes fun of these leaders, the leaders, on their part, are forced to see their misdemeanors and challenged to change.

The Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission identify bribery and abuse of office as crimes considered corruption in nature. (E. a.-C. Commission 1) Some episodes interrogated in this study point to bribery and abuse of office by government agents. In episode 9 of season 10 of *The XYZ Show*, in a segment titled '*Kenyan Corruption*,' corrupt police officers are highlighted and satirized. In introducing the show, presenter Keff Joinange points out that corruption in Kenya, though more dangerous than Ebola and more sinister than cancer, has become a way of life in Kenya. The scene opens on a road where a driver is stopped by a police officer who not only accuses him of overspeeding at a section where the speed limit is 50KPH but also uses condescending language to intimidate him. The officer uses the diminutive in "*katoyota*" to look down on the man's car. This alone is laughable since the size of a motorist's car should be of the least importance to a traffic officer. The motorist apologizes but the police officer goes ahead to joke about the motorist's American accent. The officer demands the man's license, and when it is handed to him, he exclaims, "*Na hii license yako haina uzito*" (Your license is not heavy), suggesting that he expected the man to put some money in the license.

In response, the motorist says he does not subscribe to bribes upon which he is threatened with being arrested and taken to court, where he will be fined twenty thousand shillings for overspeeding. Instead of focusing on the maintenance of traffic rules, the officer focuses on intimidating the motorist. Further, the corrupt police officer directly solicits a bribe to allow the driver to evade arrest for a traffic offence. This is an example of what (Noor, 20) terms entrenched institutional corruption. According to Article 46 of the Anti-Corruption and Economics Act, 2011, this is an abuse of power, and the officer is culpable of an offence.

Noting that the police are part of the government in the sense that they enforce the government's laws and agenda, this segment satirizes the regime in power for its failure to enable a just and fair society. Earlier on, we noted that top government officials had besieged the anti-corruption watchdog (EACC) by striking at the head of that organization. By showing us the rampant corruption on our roads, the producers of *The XYZ Show* demonstrate that corruption affects almost every aspect of Kenyan society. In fact, the segment discussed here shows that the person who refuses to bribe is made to look ridiculous and out of place.

Besides bribery, police brutality and lack of professionalism and accountability in the police department are satirized. This is evident in *The XYZ Show* episode 12 of season 1 in a segment titled 'Returning Fire.' When the scene opens, the then police spokesperson Erick Kiraithe is being interviewed by the show presenter, Jonah. He is asked to respond on the pertinent issues of extrajudicial killings. Blatant police bribery and police reforms, and his responses are not only perturbing but disturbing. Despite the fact that police brutality against each other and cases of police killing each other at the slightest provocation were on the rise, the spokesperson claims there was no cause for alarm. In fact, he trivializes the matter when he asks: "Where is the problem when brothers fight and kill each other?" This not only contradicts professionalism in the police service because, as law enforcers, they should ensure law and order and safeguard human life, but also displays his lack of emotional and social intelligence.

Further on, he displays his intellectual, social and emotional ineptitude when responding to questions raised about police training and whether the shoot-to-kill order applied to civilians. On the question of training, he responds that there was no police officer who did not know how to shoot and adds that they shoot without missing. This response is not just laughable but also points to poor training of the police. On the question of the shoot-to-kill order, he responds that: "criminals are civilians and civilians are criminals." He gives the example of a boy shot at Kayole. He comically describes the incident, saying that the police saw a suspicious character, opened fire and the boy followed the route of the bullet and coincidentally he and the bullet met at the center and collided. From the police spokesperson's laborious explanation of how the young boy met his death, it is clear that the police will go to lengths to exonerate themselves from blame whenever they shoot at innocent civilians.

The police may have had a reason to shoot at the Mungiki because they could be armed and out to cause harm, but shooting at an innocent boy is inexcusable. Kiraithe goes further to trivialize the issue of accountability during police recruitment. To him, accountability is the same as counting and reporting on the number of bullets used. He says: "Every time we shoot thugs, the public gets to know. We've been counting bullets since time immemorial... how can you say we are not accountable?" This is not just for humour's sake but a way of satirizing not only the spokesperson but also the appointing authority and, by extension, the entire police force.

On the issue of corruption during recruitment, the spokesperson is unable to deny that recruitment is marred by corruption. He resorts to self-deprecation to justify the lack of transparency and integrity during recruitment. What he is indirectly communicating is that recruiting officers have no choice but to accept bribes to determine the right candidates from the large number of applicants. In short, he normalizes corruption, and this puts him up as an object of ridicule. In

this segment, the creators employ buffoonery to expose and question moral vices in the police service. They question the nature of training Kenyan police officers undergo and raise questions on whether the police are aware of their responsibility to safeguard human life and uphold justice. Further, they raise issues about the normalization of police brutality and corruption in the police service. As an audience, therefore, we have to struggle not to laugh and hate at the same time, such as open admission of moral corruption.

In episode 18 of season 11, titled '*Ruto's Wish List*,' the show portrays politician's potential for blatant abuse of power. When the scene opens, the presenter introduces the uncertainty that the then-deputy president, William Ruto, was facing as some Jubilee MPs raised doubts about him getting the support of the Central region in the 2022 general elections. In the second scene, Ruto visits a man in robes, probably a diviner who identifies himself as the wish doctor. Ruto's purpose is to make his wish to become president in 2022. Ruto makes his first wish, which is granted. His image transforms, and he is dressed in a captain's shirt; he has beads on his head and holds a golden staff- all symbols of power and authority. His first act, once in power, reveals his potential to abuse his position as he tries to avenge himself against political leaders who plotted against his presidential bid. He says: "Now, his majesty King William the first orders that his loyal subjects, such as Kabogo, or is it Kafogo and Jirongo, be brought before his presence so that they may atone for their sins."

For this, the wish doctor withdraws Ruto's wish. Ruto loses his authority, which is signified by the transformation of his dress. He begs for a second chance, which is granted, but once again, Ruto wishes to have absolute power and control over the citizens. He says: "I wish to be listened to by my people. *Nikikohoa, watu wanatetemeka.* (When I cough, people tremble.)"

In the above scenario, Ruto manifests not only greed for power but also his intention to be an autocratic leader who will stifle democracy. The withdrawal of Ruto's wishes is a clear indication of the producer's moral perspective. In this segment, satire has been used to speak out against greed and abuse of power.

*The XYZ Show* further explores the negative ethnicity that characterizes Kenyan politics. According to the Kenya Commission on Human Rights, ethnic identity is arguably the most important variable in the Kenyan political arena, with the proliferation of ethnic parties, ethnic mobilization during campaigns, ethnic voting and ethnic violence being key manifestations of ethnic politics. (K. H. Commission 8,26) In '*Mr. Rift Valley*,' a segment aired in episode 9 of season 11, produced in 2016 just before the 2017 general elections in Kenya, the competition among the Rift Valley political elite is highlighted. The scene opens with an auditorium set for a performance. Two judges are seated, and behind them is a wall hanging with the inscription "Mr. Rift Valley 2017." Four contestants present themselves for the contest: Gideon Moi (aka Man Giddy), Isaac Ruto (Isaac), William Ruto (Willy), and Joshua Arap Sang. While introducing the show, the judges point out that the contest will help put to rest the ongoing political feuds among the different candidates desperate to become kingpins in the Rift Valley. This scenario clearly points to the fact that the four are perceived as the possible political heads of their community from whom the community members should pick a kingpin. The first three contestants demonstrate the politicization of ethnic identity as their main campaign strategy. This is packaged in their claims of protecting the interests of "their people." For instance, the first contestant – Man Giddy – when asked what he will do for the people of Rift Valley, responds: "*Mimi kama Man Giddy wa Baringo ya kati, ningependa kusema, sisi watu ya Rift Valley hatupendi kutishwa tishwa. Ya muhimu ni kuheshimiwa. To respect the general good record yetu.*" (I, as Man Giddy from Baringo Central, would like to say that we people from Rift Valley don't like to be teased...)

The contestant fronts his belonging to Baringo Central as a strategy to convince the electorate that he is a Rift Valley native. He also appeals to the stereotype that his ethnic group is a tribe of fearless warriors, which is supposed to make the electorate believe that he is a fearless warrior who will fight for their interests.

The second contestant, a puppet referred to as Isaac, represents Isaac Ruto and the first question to him is how his election will benefit the people of Rift Valley. In his first utterance, instead of saying "kazi," he says "*kasi*," a deliberate corruption to depict an accent associated with the Kalenjin speakers. He responds:

*'Ah Mimi nimefanya kasi na CORD, na Jubilee... (Ah, I have worked with CORD and Jubilee)*

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

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

*Mimi nitainua maisha ya watu wa Rift Valley.' (I will uplift the lives of Rift Valley people.)*

It is worth noting that at the time of production of this episode, Isaac Ruto had formed his own party – Chama cha Mashinani (CCM). This was supposed to make him look like he would prioritize the needs of the people living in the rural areas. In this episode, he is portrayed as the proverbial hyena who wants to walk two paths at the same time since he has his own party but still claims affiliation with CORD, Jubilee and KANU. Isaac seems to lack a firm stand when it comes to party affiliations.

The third contestant, referred to as Willy, is introduced as a prayerful man who just won a case at the ICC. When asked what he will do for the people of Rift Valley, he says that being the Deputy President, he is about to take over the presidency. He adds that it would be a grave mistake for the people of Rift Valley not to elect him because he has set aside money for development projects in the Rift Valley. Here, Ruto is seen as anticipating becoming the next president, and he promises to reward his ethnic block once elected president. Like the other two contestants, he coerces the region to vote as a block. The three political figures ultimately propagate ethnic politics. The problem with such politics is that it polarizes the nation, thus thwarting any efforts towards national unity and cohesion.

Similarly, in Episode 2 of Season 10, in a segment titled '*Pesa Mashinani*,' the idea of ethnic mobilization of the electorate is also displayed. The scene opens with the presenter's introduction of the main character – Isaac Ruto, the

then-chairperson of the governor's council. The puppet of Isaac goes door to door campaigning for signatures in support of his '*Pesa Mashinani*' Initiative. Of great importance is the second person he meets- a man who refers to himself as 'ndugu,' which means brother. The man quickly picks up the form and appends his signature, claiming he has to support his brother's project. As they part, they talk in vernacular. In this case, the voting for *Pesa Mashinani* Initiative is based neither on value nor issue but on ethnicity. The same is displayed by the third person Isaac meets- a Luo woman, deduced from the language she speaks. Her first question when presented with the form is whether the document is aligned with ODM party led by a Luo politician. This suggests nepotism and political balkanization, all of which are contributors to bad politics in the country. When Isaac explains that the initiative he is pushing for is meant to devolve funds from the national government to the counties, the woman refuses to append her signature and dismisses Isaac, saying:

"*Aaah wacha kunisumbua, wacha mimi ningoje ya watu wa Raila*" (Aaah stop bothering me, let me wait for Raila's people)

"*Si ya baba ni okoa Kenya, nangoja hiyo.*" (Baba's is okoa Kenya, I will wait for that one)

In this scenario, baba and Raila refer to the same person – the ODM leader, who is a Luo. The female character displays loyalty to her ethnic leader because political parties are often overshadowed by their founding leaders, who double up as perceived political heads of their ethnic communities. Therefore, it can be deduced that in the above scenario, the woman's readiness to support Raila/ ODMs *Okoa Kenya* initiative is not issue-based but obviously ethnic-centered. This and the previous scenes in Mr. Rift Valley clearly exhibit ethnic "division" and "negotiations" that have featured both in local and national politics. These episodes discussed in this paper, therefore, expose to the public the failures of not just the leaders and government organs but also the citizens who allow themselves to be manipulated by these leaders.

### 3. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how *The XYZ Show* confronts the moral issues ailing state leadership in Kenya through humour. It has been established that moral vices such as lack of integrity of political leaders, corruption, ethnicity in the political arena and electoral malpractices propagated by political leaders are castigated. The episodes studied here revisit these moral problems as they condemn the normalization and celebration of these vices. To a great extent, the episodes display leaders who are egoistic, intolerant, unaccountable, and dishonest in the execution of their duties. As a result, it can be said that this puppet show serves a moral function as it exposes the moral dilemmas, shortcomings and other malpractices of the country's political elite. For example, in episodes 9 of season 10 and 12 of season 1 of *The XYZ Show*, titled '*Kenyan Corruption*' and '*Returning Fire*,' corrupt police officers are not spared as they are satirized for abuse of power and corruption. In introducing the first episode, presenter Keff Joinange points out that corruption in Kenya, though more dangerous than Ebola and sinister than cancer, has become the way of life in Kenya. Even the watchdog organization set up to combat corruption is besieged by the corrupt, and this is the reason PLO Lumumba is ousted from EACC, as evident in episode 1 of season 5.

Further, ethnicity and ethnicization of politics are satirized as they are seen to polarize the nation, thus thwarting any efforts towards national unity and cohesion. Political leaders are further castigated for electoral malpractices like vote rigging and manipulation of election officials and results. These are seen to disrupt the peace of the nation, as witnessed in the 2007-2008 post-election violence alluded to in episode 11 of season 1. Through *The XYZ Show*, therefore, satire has been used to expose the moral corruption of top leaders with a view to instigating critique of their suitability for those positions. The police department and key political leaders have been confronted, and their misdemeanors exposed for ridicule. By extension, the audience is also incited to demand radical cleaning of the corridors of power.

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