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Editor's introduction

The election of an American president so ignorant of the peoples of the South and yet so contemptuous of them cannot bode well for the nations of Africa, though such a mercantilist no doubt will learn to value African natural resources quickly enough. His understanding of the global facts of climate change and pandemics that intertwine people everywhere will likely take longer. The course of American decline could then bring fundamental reforms to the nations of the North. In the meantime, the processes of appraisal and resistance remain prominent in Africa.

This issue continues the ARAS mission of giving voice to critical analyses of the African situation from differing disciplinary perspectives. Common themes emerge across a geographical diversity.

The opening paper offers ethnographic insight into the continuing tragedy of slavery in Mauritania but also maps a path that can take its oppressed people to freedom. The two papers following deal with issues in Zimbabwe affecting young people: one with the access of adolescents to sexual and reproductive health services, and the other with parental involvement in the education of children who have special needs; each points to radical changes needed in the public policies of that nation.

The following two papers deal with formally different subjects - one with the reliance of Nigeria on imported oil supplies, arguably because of its failure to develop artisanal capacity, and the other with the limited influence of foreign direct investment on political stability in East African nations. Though distinct in methodology and implicit values, both suggest similar changes to political structures and processes in the nations studied.

An examination of two imaginative documentaries dealing with the history of South Africa since 1994 then mounts a severe critique of the failures of supposed "democratisation" in that nation. Next, a study of the social responsibility of universities to the communities of which they are a part, drawn from a continental survey, points to widespread deficiencies that can however be remedied in ways the authors suggest. The final research paper offers, as so often with this journal, an account of diasporan activity, in this case the application of the Ubuntu philosophy to a sports program developing future leaders in Melbourne, Australia. Finally, a research note on African male suicide points to poignant issues that need further elucidation, as suggested in the paper.

This edition of ARAS brings the journal to a point of transition for the editorial team. A new editor-in-chief, Rugare Mugumbate of the University of Wollongong, succeeds Geoffrey Hawker, who moves to a position on the revised advisory structure of the journal. The new structure includes an editorial board and a number of section editors with oversight of specific areas of focus for ARAS, including health, social and community work; law and human rights; education and pedagogy; business and economics; agriculture and development; politics, decolonisation and international relations; society, philosophy, culture and crime; migration, diaspora and gender; and STEM.

Details of the new structure will appear in the June 2025 edition. The outgoing team expresses its sincere thanks to the members of the editorial board and the international advisory board for their support over the last several years.

Primary contact with the journal remains via email: editor@afsaap.org.au.

ARAS renews its invitation to established and emerging scholars to submit manuscripts of their research-based work, and especially welcomes contributions from postgraduate researchers. Papers suitable for publication are referred to peer review. The editors aim to return such reviews to authors within three months of a submission being accepted for review.

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Mauritania's Abolition Movement

Anthony C. Andrist
Independent Researcher, Sydney

Abstract

The Haratine identity movement in Mauritania emerged during the 1970s and has challenged the social acceptance of subordination and subjugation to the ruling class. This paper examines the persistent struggles of the Haratine community against systemic slavery, racial marginalisation, and political exclusion in an ethnographic study. Despite legal abolition, slavery persists via entrenched social hierarchies and religious misinterpretations that justify oppression. The Mauritanian government's denial of slavery, along with the silence of Islamic scholars, perpetuates an environment of injustice. Local abolitionist groups, such as SOS Esclaves and the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA), have emerged as central forces in challenging the deeply ingrained structures that maintain the Haratine's oppression. These movements seek not only to dismantle the institution of slavery but also to redefine the social and political landscape of Mauritania by advocating for equality, dignity and human rights. True abolition in Mauritania requires a fundamental shift in societal attitudes, legal enforcement and political representation. Without full recognition of the issue at all levels, the structures of racial and economic exploitation will persist.

Introduction

This article is based on my field research in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania during the winter of 2015-2016. It provides an ethnographic account of the abolition movement and the Haratine community's determination to achieve justice and upward mobility. Despite growing resistance, the fight has not ended. The government's continued denial and minimisation of slavery's existence continue to hinder progress, reinforcing structural barriers that keep the Haratine marginalised.

Global awareness through the internet and social media coupled with NGO collaboration and increased international scrutiny has created a more visible movement,[i] positioning their struggle within a larger, transnational fight for human rights and self-determination. The push for abolition continues to this day.

This paper argues that the battle for abolition is not only a struggle against Mauritania's entrenched hierarchies but also against the imperial and economic forces that sustain them. Recognition of equal opportunity for the Haratine identity demands more than just legal recognition, it requires the dismantling of the power systems that continue to dictate who is seen, heard and valued (McDougall 2016).

Early Politics

The independence of Mauritania from the French in 1960 was well received by many of the elite Beidan (tribes of Arab-Berber origin). This was their return to power under the new banner of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. The nation began its statehood under the French-appointed authority of Mukhtar Ould Daddah, a Beidan law graduate from the University of Nouakchott. During their colonial period the French[ii] prolonged the internal dispute between the clerical class (Zawaya) and the Arab (warrior class) by favouring Zawaya with government positions, such as head of state, over the dominant Arabs (Pettigrew 2007, p.66). What was left out of the equation of independence was the place of the Afro-Mauritanians and the Haratine[iii] in society. These marginalised groups represented a greater number of the population than the Beidan, and both of them predated the Beidan in the area. What was significant is that neither of these majority groups were given political representation by the colonial power. Independence irresponsibly left a continuum of the previous one thousand years of Arab-Berber stronghold and domination in the region.[iv]

Nouakchott

Like many cities in West Africa, Nouakchott is a cross section of the region's cultural diversity cramped within a bustling niche of activity. The middle of the day in the Capital Market can be a penetrating bombardment of noise. People shouting for customers to fill crowded cars departing for the city's periphery. Music shops blasting sermons of local imams and competing with advertisement recordings (in a disturbingly endless loop) yelling for phone cards and money exchange. Somewhere off in the distance, a donkey's bray calls out, a familiar cry away from asphalt and traffic jams. Close to a million people are juxtaposed between the encroaching sand dunes of the Sahara Desert and the Atlantic Ocean. What was once a small cluster of tents at the edge of the desert is now the commercial and political hub of a nation (Chenal and Kaufmann 2008, p.166).

The spectacle of daily life easily distracts from the idea that slavery is taking place within a country described as one of the highest rates of slavery per capita in the world (Global Slavery Index 2023, p.78; See also

Guth, Anderson, Kinnard and Tran 2014).[v] In reality, slavery in Mauritania is complicated, caught up in a traditional social hierarchy of privilege and the vastness of the Sahara. The practice of slavery that exists today remains mostly unchecked, or even ignored, by authorities. Another issue is that the practice of slavery is taking place within a relatively small minority[vi] and in some of the most remote regions. The marginal aspect of the practice enables it to be widely dismissed in the country as non-existent. Although legally abolished a fourth time in 1981 (Fleischman 1994, p.84), the persistence of slavery has ignited the country's activists to fight against the enslavement of forgotten victims, and people's passive acceptance. Government attitudes of denying the existence of slavery fuel public opposition and undermine the significant impact of slavery and its eradication. Since French colonial rule, slavery has widely been overlooked and oversimplified by outsiders.[vii] A conspiracy of silence has discouraged people in the country to discuss or accept that racial tension exists. The urban population boom of the 1970s and 80s invariably gathered together a spectrum of people and attitudes. Nouakchott, as a result, is a meeting place for a myriad of political voices and the birthplace of Mauritania's abolition movement.

Abolition Begins: EL HOR

Identity Crisis

During two severe drought periods between 1968 and the early 1980s a large loss of viable agriculture and pasturage influenced the urban migration of Haratine and others from rural areas (Chanel and Kaufmann 2008, p.166). Many within these newly established communities formed political groups and organised themselves against the slavery taking place in villages. The city gave political activists greater mobility than the village, blending in among large populations of Afro-Mauritanians and other Haratine. The slave master's authority was no longer unchallenged as in the restrictive isolation of the village. A new social dynamic emerged from amongst urban flight. The small town of less than two thousand inhabitants in 1955 (Chanel and Kaufmann 2008, p.164-166), became the political catalyst of Haratine autonomy.

I sat with Boubacar Messaoud, a political activist since the 1970s and one of the founders of Mauritania's abolition movement. EL HOR (lit. The Free) was formed in 1978 by Haratine activists as the nation's first underground abolition group. Boubacar explained to me the beginning of the group EL HOR, and how it initiated the use of the title Haratine. "One proof that it started at that time is that the organisation, the name, EL HOR is the organisation of the liberation of Haratine. So they use [*sic*] the term

[Haratine] at that time to qualify themselves". EL HOR was not only working for the liberation of slavery, but also the emancipation of the Haratine from the Beidan system and their own mentality of enslavement. The term itself is an acronym – E, L, H, OR. It stands for Emancipation, Liberation, Haratine, and Organisation. It also translates directly in Arabic as "the free," giving it a double meaning. The recognition of Haratine autonomy emerged as an identity that was neither from the Beidan (their former masters) nor from the Afro-Mauritanians. Haratine are Arab speaking, with ancestry in Mauritania, and are not Beidan.[viii] The first step after recognising their autonomy was to create, *en masse*, an identity that defined them, and this was the beginning of the term "Haratine".

They first needed to accept an independent identity and then adopt being Haratine. Many of them initially resisted using the term, he explains, "At that time, it was seen as a bad word, a pejorative word. If you said to a Haratine: 'You are Haratine,' you would have a fight". The term is literally "newly freed" and is now openly used in the country among former slaves and slave owners alike. It is now a common term for those who were "slaves" of the past. He described the ideas behind the formation of the group:

> *When they started this idea of liberating themselves they [named it] EL HOR, the organisation of the liberation of Haratine… they framed it in that way because they first wanted to liberate slaves and then to emancipate them from the white domination — from the Beidane. That's why they had liberation and emancipation. Liberation from slavery and emancipation from the domination of the masters. We are Haratine and we are proud of it. That was a huge change.*

The tension between Boubacar and the accepted Beidan way of life came through in our interview. His demeanour is visibly nervous, tense, quickly jumping to conclusions, and easily excitable, prompting a sense of distrust of outsiders. Boubacar's personality emerged through the course of the second interview as a determined activist committed to the recognition of rights for the Haratine and for claiming their rights. We discussed the existence of slavery in the country, the denial of the government and larger society, inculcation of the slaves at a young age, and how the slave owners manage their position of authority. Boubacar's seeking of autonomy for the Haratine is openly criticised in the country for dividing national unity. Many people I spoke to were negative and unrelenting in their opinions, convinced that this approach of raising awareness emphasises difference and will lead to more problems of division. Division through racial identity is actually more along the lines of what the government is trying to do as they draw lines

between Arab and non-Arabs (Kohn 2011). The purpose of the abolition movement was not to deal with the problems of slavery in a way that was politically correct or socially sensitive, but to effectively confront racial discrimination and eliminate physical and psychological oppression.

The beginning of EL HOR and the adaptation of a single autonomous identity strengthened the political and psychological force of the Haratine.[ix] The political balance between Beidan and Afro-Mauritanians tipped as a result of the Haratine removing themselves from the political shadow of the dominant group. The historical tension between these three has been at ends for generations and came to a head during the Mauritania-Senegal War of 1989 **(**Fleischman 1994, p.13**)**. As a result, the government has succeeded in exaggerating the rift of identity between the Haratine and the Afro-Mauritanians. Boubacar is directly involved with international organisations and easily facilitates discourse in French. Language is a clear distinction from the country's Arabic identity and the Beidan who are in power.

Boubacar explained the political dilemma that the Haratine are facing regarding their own political autonomy: "The issue is that they are separated between two communities. Right? You have the community of Beidan here. You have the community of Afro-Mauritanians here. And you have Haratine here". Demarcation of cultural and political lines reflects the country's environmental gradient between the vast desert of the North and the lush sub-Saharan tropics of the South. Mauritania is along a fault line of ecology and historic tribal division. Traditionally, the Arab and Berber tribes dominated the North while the African, non-Arab tribes of the Haalpulaar, Wolof, and Soninke lived beyond the harshness of the Sahara. The Northern tribes migrated south and eventually imposed control over the entire region (Handloff 1990, pp.7-9). The overlap of the geographical and the political within Mauritania has created a unique and dynamic environment. Boubacar expanded on the political realities, "Now, the Beidan want to have all the Haratine amongst them. Because they speak Hasaniyya [the local shared dialect]". The linguistic diversity in the country is often used against the Afro-Mauritanians regarding citizenship (Salem 2021). The government ostracises the ethnic minority and in some cases refuses them identification (Fleischman 1994, p.34). Here again, the tension between the groups plays out through politics, "The majority[x] the Black [Afro-Mauritanians] want all Haratine because they have the same colour of skin, right? So two people pull them, want to include them". He emphasised the tension inherent in the region[xi] and the drive for autonomy "We don't want to be neither Afro-Mauritanians, neither Beidan, because Beidan means, *abeyad* — means white". There was a rising tone in his voice, "We are not white. We're black.

The only relation between Beidan and Haratine is slavery. They're not part of them. They are their slaves. We are Haratine and we are proud of it". For me this was the summary of what it meant for Boubacar to be Haratine. It was not just the affirmation of his own racial heritage but more so the distinction of whom the Haratine are not, that they are their own independent group from among a history of tribalism. They wanted to be Haratine and recognised as unique, not the slaves or even ex-slaves of the Beidan, and not Afro-Mauritanian.

When I asked him what tribe he was from, he stated, "I have yet to find my tribe". He stands clearly in opposition to the social norm of association — that Haratine identity comes from the Beidan tribes, as former slaves. This stern opposition emphasised the importance of ingraining an independent autonomy from the slave owners and from the Afro-Mauritanians. The Haratine must accept their independent political agency and recognise that they are cut off from their own ancestry in a similar way Africans were during the Atlantic Slave Trade, ending up in the Americas and parts of Europe with no connection to their past, other than as African. The Beidan tribes were the owners of slaves. These tribes took slaves as captives and integrated them into the Arab/Berber tribal identity (Fleischman 1994, p.93). The social and political domination of the Beidan remains as an accepted dynamic for many (McDougall 2016).

A major challenge to Mauritanian abolition is the complicated racial and tribal identities that are enmeshed within mental acceptance of hierarchy (Fleischman 1994, p.89).[xii] Traditional social ranks are widely accepted in Arab and African culture (Handloff 1990, p.21), based primarily on lineage, and inevitably race. This traditional thinking can lead to the idea of social norms being fixed within a framework of inequality, built on racial difference (see also Salem, 2009; Fanon). The slave owners are Beidan, which are a mix of Arab and Berber background and fair-skinned. The Beidan are distinguished from the Haratine, who trace their roots to settlements along the Senegal River and other parts of the South (Fleischman 1994, p.81). The problems that Boubacar faces are not just Haratine associating with Beidan tribes. But the greater challenge is to find how Haratine will hold an equal place in the society. This is a challenge both internally and externally. Boubacar and others recognise that the Haratine are in need of structural change within their political and legal surroundings as well as a psychological change of accepting the system as it is (Jenkins 1992, p.76). Abolition is a movement of empowerment for the Haratine to realise their potential within an abolition-driven reformation of Mauritanian society. The vision of unity is to see a nation that stands together for an eradication of

slavery and recognition of Haratine, Afro-Mauritanians, and Beidan as equals.

We discussed the necessity of a unified stance for abolition and its challenges. “If it’s only Haratine, who will do the work, then it will lead to separation — which [the Haratine] don’t want”. He advocates for justice and wants to see the nation work together to eradicate the social and psychological problems promoted by slavery. Unfortunately, a large number of the Beidan I spoke with were unable to agree with his approach. They are convinced raising awareness of identity is disruptive, emphasising more difference, and counter-productive to the social harmony that exists in much of the country. One Beidan stated openly that the abolitionists are corrupt and devour the money they collect from outside. The abolitionists are blamed for seeking European and American sympathies in order to gain more wealth and political strength in the country. This is seen as threatening by many practicing Muslims, both Beidan and Haratine, because it indirectly promotes secularity, or a way of life devoid of the country’s religious Orthodox identity.

Structures of Persistence

> *Consequently, de facto slavery in Mauritania continues to be a slow, invisible process which results in the “social death” of many thousands of women and men.*
>
> Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery (Gulnara Shahinian, 24 August 2010)
>
> *Considering the long history of slavery, however, progress in Mauritania towards eradicating slavery over the past decade represents the first steps on a long road ahead. It is crucial that the country’s robust legislation to combat slavery be fully and effectively implemented, with real consequences for perpetrators and tangible reparations to victims of slavery.*
>
> Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery (Tomoya Obokata 21 July 2023)

The enabling of the elite is to believe that they deserve to be in power, the acceptance of subjugation and inferiority (Fanon 1994, p.10-11). The way that the Beidan maintain their subjugation of the Haratine is through inculcation of the slave in religious meaning and the support of corrupt

judges and legal practitioners who encourage the slave master and ultimately the Beidan elite. Boubacar expressed his frustration with the avoidance of responsibility, "They deny this… the prime minister said, I think, 'Those are cases, those are people that you brought from Mali. Those are not Mauritanians'. You know? So, how can you end this?" The negotiation of justice is used in order to maintain a racial hierarchy. The cases of slavery are still cases of abuse and violations. The denial of fundamental rights to dignity for the Haratine illustrate the detrimental attitude of entitlement and privileged authority.

Recognition

From the onset of abolition in Mauritania there has been an underlying disdain, and perhaps resistance, to accepting the idea that the Haratine have a right to be free and equal in the society. It is this perceived social hierarchy that many of the elite and the government utilise for keeping themselves in powerful positions. Local abolition groups are directed at fighting first for the end of abuse in the name of slavery, and for the government to accept that slavery actually exists. Following this it is then necessary to look at larger social and psychological problems affecting the community of Haratine. These collective problems ultimately affect the entire society, but how can they be addressed if only a portion (who are mostly the victims) of society recognises them? The government claims that what exists is actually "vestiges" of slavery, and that slavery no longer exists (Shahinian 2010a, p.6). Boubacar makes the point, "Why would they need to make new laws [to combat slavery] if it doesn't exist?" Most of the Islamic scholars in the country are also able to divert the subject, claiming that what is taking place has no basis in the religion (Thurston 2012b, p.66). I spoke with a Mauritanian who described how the Islamic conquest stopped in Tunis, and the social construction of slavery in Mauritanian was actually based in tribal raids.[xiii] And herein lies the crux of the problem: between the denial of existence and the denial of responsibility, a particular group of people are facing continual abuse and loss of rights, based on their identity. Generations of racial exploitation under the guise of religion have occurred, since the Arab-Berber slavery began — violating the rights, and innocence of a people.

Religion of Inculcation

What many prominent Islamic scholars from the country are saying is there is no slavery, meaning *slavery* defined through a religious lens. What is taking place is not sanctioned in Islam. At the same time, there are no scholars, that I know of, who are standing up to the government and saying that the violations taking place are wrong. So, discrimination and marginalisation continues unchecked. Out of the eight prominent Mauritanian scholars that I personally spoke with, none of them accepted the existence of slavery. There were some who refused to speak about it entirely, saying they had no details of what was happening in the country and could not make a judgement. One particular imam in Nouadhibou told me, "Slavery [in Islam] is not, these [historical meanings]. Slavery is service".[xiv]

The government then follows along with its rhetoric, claiming there are no cases of slavery or discrimination in Mauritania, and also claims the cases being brought are people from other nationalities. So there is recognition that a crime is taking place but instead of speaking against the crime, they deny justice for the victims.[xv] Along with this, many of the slave owners claim that they have a right to own the Haratine, abuse, rape, and deny them dignity. So how can this abuse end if there is no clear wrong being addressed? The work of SOS Esclaves and others is bringing cases to the government to recognise the reality of what is happening in the country. But the mentality of the Beidan elite is road blocking the recognition of Haratine rights, specifically. Boubacar explained the steps needed to move forward, "It is possible, that the Haratine and the Beidan be equal, but [the] Beidan have to change their mentality. They have to admit that there is slavery first, and we should work together to end it". He continued saying this admission is not a reality. Most of the Beidan they do not want to accept what is happening. Along with collective denial, they are claiming to combat slavery by establishing tribunals in regions across the country (Marlin & Mathewson 2015, p.6; see also Platforms, 2014). He continued, expressing his disappointment with the country's leaders, "This is not what is happening now, they deny it. The president denies it; the prime minister denies it. So, if you deny it, how can you work on it?[xvi] It is not a matter of creating courts, because they created courts". The legal system has in itself fallen under international criticism due to the lack of enforcement and buffering of slave owners with more lenient sentences.[xvii] The United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery visited Mauritania in 2009 commending the 2007 law criminalising slavery. The follow up visit in 2014 saw progress through implementing a 2012 constitutional reform and a roadmap to combat the vestiges of slavery in 2014, that fell again under

critique of not doing enough.[xviii] Later visits included 2016 (Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights), and also 2022. Both highlighted important steps that have been taken to ratify legislation and move in the right direction to eradicate poverty as well as slavery. The remaining challenges are still racial inequality, political exclusion and the existence of slavery and their dependency on the ruling class.

Attitude towards entitlement is the underlying interpretation of the laws, legal meanings, authority, and judgment. *Who is right and who is wrong?* is without an objective response. The people who are dominating the political and social sphere are the minority ethnic group. If the attitudes within political structures reflect power, then the environment of change and revolution of the ways of inequality will always find resistance. The onus of justice is on those in authority. Again, there must be a new way of seeing the structure. There must be a reformation or revolution of vision and of attitude. The system must change. The Afro-Mauritanians and the Haratine want to be heard and to discuss new ways to interpret the system, new ways to define the system. The fundamentals of the system must be revolutionised in new ways. In this sense, abolition is challenging the system to be restructured and redefined today.

Against the Grain

The Imam

It was a mild winter's day in the capital city. Kids were playing outside as we drove between the buildings on what wasn't really dirt, more a soft grey sand — the colour and smell of used motor oil, infused with the tar. We were far enough from the main road no longer to be afflicted with the endless noise of congested traffic and large trucks. It was a couple of hours before midday — most of the local congregation was still at work — and the hustle before the Friday prayer service had not yet begun. We stopped and got out in front of a one-story building and Mohamed Mahmoud abruptly came out to meet us - a tall thin man, at ease with small curly tufts of short grey hair on his dark brown skin. He came to this area in 1990 and was a former slave, owned by a Beidane family just north of Nouakchott. He was the *imam* (or spiritual leader) of the local mosque. *The Mosque of Commanding the Right and Forbidding the Wrong* was visible from his front door, about two hundred meters away.

Riyadh is a small neighbourhood on the south side of Nouakchott, adjacent to the capital's largest and renowned district, Arafat. Inside the dark grey cement house, the plain walls stood with a cold depth as a single lightbulb swung from the ceiling and the small windows let in a faint idea of

daylight. He spoke with a matter-of-fact tone, slow and measured. I felt that for him, the ubiquitous nature of hardship, as with most people in poverty, is accepted as part of life. We sat on thin foam mats and listen to his childhood, how he was separated from his mother at a young age. He was about eight or nine years old located just north of Nouakchott when his former master passed away. After the funeral he was sent to work for one of the sons who was in a small town, about six hundred kilometres east. He lived with his new owner doing agricultural work and other physical labour. He mentioned the place of the slave in society "The slaves here — are a vehicle [lit. a thing that gives]. Do you know a vehicle? So you can ride him to get your destination. *Bismillah*. A slave is a vehicle. We arrive at the destination, upon him". This type of nonchalant resignation to slavery is common. The people who work as slaves or domestic labour are familiar with exploitation and racial stigma. Between poverty and the political domination of the Beidan*,* many are left with little to no options.

I, AM HERE

Distinctions of social class are an integral part of traditional Mauritanian society. The institution of slavery is expressed as racially structured and oppressive in nature (Fleischman 1994, p.79), emphasising difference. For many, there is a justified exploitation of race through misinterpretation of religion (Brhane 1997). Mohamed understood the nuances of his situation, and distinguished carefully, between the religious tenets and the cultural practice of slavery. "The tradition in Mauritania", he said, "is that the slave, the blacksmith, and the pastoralist — they're nothing at all, nothing, nothing at all". This distinction is reinforced in a religious space. He went on to explain, for most Haratine, seeking knowledge and joining the congregation in the mosque was not valued. Some Haratine in the rural areas find the company of Beidan discouraging, especially in the mosque. He elaborated on the marginalised experience and indifference within the Haratine community before their awareness began. "People who are called Haratine, or slaves, at that time [didn't have] anyone to ask. They didn't see [education] as important. For them, [seeking knowledge] didn't occur to them". There was a collective distraction that would be the advantage of the slave owner. Ignorance was keeping the slaves occupied in their work and indirectly preventing them from critically questioning their place in society. He expressed the disinterest among the Haratine community, "They didn't ask, it didn't matter to them. [The Haratine] would become accustomed to this — [it was] not important for [them]. The prayer in the mosque — they wouldn't even go at all". Their reluctance to be in the mosque

was not uncommon. I have spoken with several Haratine directly from the small village where I lived; they felt discouraged and many times worked during the time of congregational prayers. It was usually the older Haratine that could be seen in the mosque; perhaps their retirement from the heavy physical work gave them enough reason to join the others in the village. Again, if they felt stigmatised, they would pray elsewhere.

Social privilege was visible in religious propaganda such as "the Paradise[xix] of the slave" (see Esseissah 2015, p.). Although this and other ideologies are bereft of any religious foundation, those who did not know better, accepted it. Mohamed explained how this type of information, although falsely attributed as Islamic law, is passed on with perceived religious authority. He mentioned a popular saying from the Beidan, confirming this idea propagated to the slaves, "By God, [the masters] would say this for sure. 'The paradise of the slave is under the feet of his master'.[xx] This with [the Beidan] — it is like as if it was [sacred] text and ruling, as if it was revealed".[xxi] He continued to explain other precepts and the underlying inability of the Beidan authority to be challenged by the uneducated. "One of them says:' If he kills [his slave] nothing would reach him [of repercussions]'. This is a belief, but not from the *Sharia* (Islamic law)". It was clear he had researched the details of these and other precepts. It could have been through his study that he saw the religion being clearly misinterpreted. He came to terms with it by drawing the distinction between learning and ignorance. He explained how the ignorant enable their own demise:

> *Look… the ignorant person, is nothing. Because if they are told to go this way, they go this way. If you say to him to go over here, they go over here. If they are told they don't have any problems, they wouldn't have any problems. Someone who doesn't know, doesn't know. He doesn't have anything he dreads... people rely on this. By God, by God, we were learning, and there was no arriving at a place [of realisation] — no life — except with learning. [It was] not possible… because awakening, can't happen while a person doesn't know anything.*

Through the lack of education and without the freedom to challenge authority there remains a people unable to leave what they see as paradise in the next world. The belief and desire for salvation is there, but how can the slave owner be challenged as to how this is achieved, if no one questions his authority or has the resources to understand different meanings. The perpetual cycle of ignorance and acceptance of slave owner propaganda

remained largely unchallenged in Mauritania. The extent of its reality came through as he went on:

> *Even now, NOW, there are slaves who are told that: "You are free". They say: "No, no, no. I don't need that. I need the paradise, with you, that is under your feet", like this — they would prefer being a slave to free… our freedom, for us, isn't anything.*

Mohamed's ability to critically analyse the social norm — especially authority — is what enabled him to seek answers. When he described his unrest and unsettled feelings with his life, he began to study Islamic knowledge and came to a point where he could distinguish between scholarship and what people were saying.

> *What I'm telling you is - I thought and I felt — a displeasure of this life… for example, my awareness, for life and what is concerning it. And every time in my understanding, I would think that this would disappear... I began in myself, something loathed in myself, I couldn't bear this, and I wondered how could my condition pass.*

The critical self-analysis of his own condition may not have been the direct impetus for change. What was facing him initially was an agitation of who he was, his identity. His calling came in the form of seeking knowledge and he became a leader for the local community, perhaps among those facing the same internal struggles. He talked about the realities of being a visible authority in the community, how not everyone was able to accept it. "Yes, some of them would come, have a look, and they would see the imam and leave. (Laughing) For us, our belief is in God. And we don't look at any of these things. By looking, you are a slave. But it could be you are not a slave. But visibly, you are a slave". He did not seem to have any issues whether the Beidan accepted him or not. He arrived at a place in his own realisation and self-confidence that accepted who and where he was. What is interesting in his approach was that he actually was looking for resolution through the tradition and beliefs of the slave owners themselves. He did not reject the entire religion and its principles but studied and was able to distinguish between what the religion said and what was claimed by people who had not studied. His resolve and resignation in his own self-identity had a visible impact beyond just him as an individual. It came through when he was explaining a term to us: "*fard ra'si*" (lit: a single head). He explained it as "that happening by itself". He was using the example of him being present in his current position, "You don't need that I am here, and I, AM. You don't

need this to happen, but I, AM— PRESENT". He raised his voice and his conviction shook in my ears. I tried to swallow and my eyes swelled with tears as I took it all in. He continued to speak. "Disliked by you or liked – I, AM. This is it — [it] happens by itself". He embodied his realisation. He reached a point that was unwavering and he simply stated it.

The Making of a President: IRA

> *We are actors for change — gradual change certainly, but also a radical, definitive break from all forms of coercion, from moral corruption and from the practice of using religion to legitimise unacceptable crimes. We will no longer accept this archaic practice of violent repression* (Biram Dar Abeid 2016).

Opposition to slavery within Mauritania took a new turn in 2008 when Biram Dah Abeid, a former slave, founded the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA-Mauritania). This was an illegal organisation, unlike the more diplomatic SOS Esclaves of which Biram had earlier been a member. The threat of arrest at any point distinguishes the IRA from other abolitionist groups; its members explained to me that their work was not an administration-centred activism like SOS, as they were "constantly in the field", engaging and seeking the freedom of slaves across the country. As the name implies, IRA is also focused on a revival, or *resurgence,* particularly through religion. This adopts and challenges the inseparable element of religion in the country that the Beidan elite has been able to use to maintain the institution of slavery largely unchallenged by dissenting voices.

The potential of the IRA erupted in protests in April 2012, when members of the group, led by Biram, burned Islamic jurisprudence books in southern Nouakchott, drawing the attention of millions. Thousands gathered the next day in front of the Presidential Palace demanding Biram's execution (IRA-USA 2015). He was arrested after the protest with other members of the group and wrote a letter from prison formally apologising for actions.[xxii] Although detrimental to a unified platform between Beidan and Haratine the incineration had served its purpose well — to grab the attention of the nation and the world about the religious justification of slavery in the country.

The IRA's emergence has shown a mixed trajectory of popularity and resistance. The incineration of Islamic texts shocked the country and thrust IRA into the international stage. Biram now travels internationally promoting the IRA's fight against racial slavery and is not shy of his actions.

He declares that the books he burned legalise slavery and that he burned them, to "draw attention on the prohibition, to refer to them and to use them as justification of the maintenance of slavery practices" (Platforms 2012). No doubt abolition has been the principle generator of discussions about the larger pathways of political representation and human dignity that can bring both slaves and slave owners to a collective understanding of Mauritanian society. He is a rising star in the eyes of many marginalised Mauritanians, beyond those enslaved, and a relief to their long awaited representation. This feeling of marginalisation pervades not only the Haratine community, after all, but also the AfroMauritanians. The population of Mauritania has long awaited for justice to be served and equality, mentioned in the constitution, to be practiced.

The abolition movement is thus concerned with political autonomy and the independence of Haratine as a group from the slave owners, but it is about more than bringing the institution of slavery in Mauritania to an end. The abolition movement is largely about fighting the belief that people are enslaved by "the will of God" (Conway-Smith 2015; McDougall 2018a) and not given an option to this Divine Ordinance. The larger idea behind abolition is the questioning and deconstruction of the belief that religious principles justify texts that codify slavery. This final approach of deconstruction challenges not only the books that traditional scholars adhere to in Mauritania and across North Africa, but also the assumption that challenging the application of the texts is an attack on Islam in Mauritania and specifically the Beidan elite identity. This conflict has begun to untangle rights to applications of the law and how the principles of Islam need to be practiced. The religion has underlying principles that fundamentally do not contradict any of the principles that the IRA subscribes to, including human rights, equality, and dignity (Platforms 2012).

Conclusion

Ultimately, the divide between the enslaved and the former slave owners has grown, making political representation an urgent necessity for the Haratine. From the onset of the abolition movement, they have led the charge, but what has emerged extends beyond their cause alone. The struggle has evolved into a broader fight against racial marginalisation, and what McDougall (2018b) calls "Mauritania's history of genocide and contemporary practices of discrimination". This movement directly challenges the entrenched power of the elite Beidan and the structures of inequality that sustain it. While previous criticism was directed at Abdul Aziz (Lamlili 2016), today Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, although sitting his second term, is again the target of disapproval.[xxiii]

The meanings of marginalisation extend beyond politics, pervading cultural definitions of Blackness and Whiteness (Fanon 1994, p.84). The IRA has demonstrated that the fight is not only against political and religious ideologies but also against the very foundation on which they are built. As SOS Esclaves applies international pressure for policy reform and Mohamed Mahmoud reclaims his voice through traditional teachings, the IRA is reshaping the concept of nationhood and dismantling the positions of traditional scholars that religious justification is built on and manipulated to uphold racial hierarchies. This new vision of Mauritania is one of tolerance, equality, and dignity for all people that my research has sought to explore.

Beyond abolition, the movement is reclaiming the religious principles of equality and justice,[xxiv] challenging cultural distortions that have exacerbated the divide between former masters and slaves. This collective awakening has given rise to new political possibilities, positioning the IRA and its leader, Biram Dah Abeid, as formidable challengers to the ruling establishment including the presidency itself.

Endnotes

[i] The emergence of the internet and social media platforms and apps has not been always positive. See: Obokata 2023; Kah 2021; Lewin 2019.

ii Mauritania was officially included in the AOF with the six other French West African territories—Senegal, the French Sudan, Guinea, Ivory Coast (present-day Cote d'lvoire), Dahomey (present-day Benin), and Niger. (Handloff 1990, p.17).

[iii] The Haratine held a distinctly different position to the Afro-Mauritanians. See: Denna 2018.

[iv]Originally Mauritania had been a part of the French Occidental (OAF), headed from Dakar. It was after the French appointed a Beidan government that Mauritania began to gradually withdrawal interest from Black African nations and align more with an Arab identity of North Africa and the Middle East. The Arabisation of Mauritania began in 1966 (Fleischman 1994, p.93) through compulsory Arabic language in public schools and government communication. Within two decades of independence the monopoly held by the Beidan began to unravel. It was through multiple factors, such as the racial violence against Afro-Mauritanians and the Haratine developing political autonomy (separating themselves from the traditional Beidan identity), that Beidan political control was challenged.

[v] Created in 2013, the Global Slavery Index offers comprehensive discussions about the state of many of the world's countries, though there

have been some criticisms regarding methodology (see Gallagher 2014, 2016).

[vi] Although the Haratine are approximately 35-45% of the country's population (Fois and Pes 2012, p.153), the estimates of slavery by foreign NGOs can fluctuate from 1.058 to over 20%. According to MRG the Sub-Saharan population is near 25% and the Haratine at 45%. See: *Mauritania* 2019.

[vii] See First-World sensationalised reporting Bales 2012; Brown 2015; Okeowo 2014; and Finnegan 2000.

[viii] His concept of a socially distinct racial identity parallels the Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s United States. (See also: Muñoz 2007)

[ix] Durkheim (1975, p.160, 161) discusses a similar idea of the dualism between our sensations and our morality, the individual and the collective; in a way these beginnings of EL HOR demonstrated a reality that existed within the individuals' ideals that was greater than the individuals.

[x] Although listed as minorities (see Minority Rights Group International 2013a, 2013b), the Haratine are a larger population size than the Beidan. Although contested, the CIA World Factbook (1994) delineates the three ethnic groups as 40% Haratine (Black Moors), 30% Beidane (White Moors of Arab-Amazigh descent) and 30% Afro-Mauritanian (Sub-Saharan Mauritanians from the Senegal River Valley). What is notable here is that both the Haratine and Afro-Mauritanians are politically marginalised and lack representational power in a country of 4.7 million (2022 estimate).

[xi] When we think of the interface between two mediums, such as the edge of a coral reef or the edge of a forest, there is a variation in the ecology, such that the productivity increases numbers and types of species. Similarly, when there is the cultural 'edge effect '(Mollison 1991, p.26), such as between the intersection of the Arab desert and the African tropics, there is an embodied tension, or energy, that manifests. This energy is particularly beginning to manifest from the rise of Haratine as independent political players.

[xii] Similar to the rise of the Algerians against French domination and the "liquidation of all untruths," (Fanon 1963, p.250), for the Haratine there is a collective need to coexist and triumph through Haratine liberation.

[xiii] Village raids between tribes was common in Bedouin society (Handloff 1990, p.8. 9). In terms of the legitimacy of slavery, Islam accepts combat sanctioned by the state (Hanson 2007, p.89-92) as the only means to enslave another person.

[xiv] The way he explained it was that slavery is similar to a type of obligation or restriction that is placed on those captured in battle, sparing their lives. This description gives the idea of slavery as something that is not the

historical slavery, the exploitation and abuse, of dominant civilisations, something that is somehow more humanitarian (see McDougall 2005, p.958).

[xv] Similar principle to victims of sexual assault. See: Whitson 2023.

[xvi] The Haratine are not like one community who thinks together. There are many who are still related to their masters who say:“ It doesn’t exist.” But there are others, like Biram, who say:“ No. It exists and we got to fight it.” Or “every day on the street, to fight it”. To answer your question precisely, “If the Beidan as the President and the Prime Minister of the country, etc., will continue to deny that slavery exists, so there is no way to work on it, and the other Haratine who think that it exists, they will continue fighting for it. Maybe they will take weapons to continue this fight and there will never be national unity,” There will be “separation.” Boubacar Messoud (personal communication).

[xvii] This can be seen in cases such as the right of inheritance where legal cases are reclassified for more lenient sentences (See: Garciandia, Ryan and Webb 2020, p.10).

[xviii] The saga of enacting practical and positive change has been an ongoing frustration, as policy incrementally gets better for the disempowered. See: Marlin & Mathewson 2015, p.9; Human Rights Council 2016; Platforms 2015.

[xix] This is the eternal bliss of the next life anticipated by those who are believers and commit to right action: “But those who believe and do good works are the company of paradise, wherein they will abide” - The Quran (2:82).

[xx] This is akin to the familiar prophetic saying, paradise is beneath the feet of your mother (An-Nasâ’i 2007).

[xxi] Islamic law is derived from revelation, prophetic action, and the consensus of religious scholars. The explanatory texts then, are renditions of these three combined. The weight or validity of revelation supersedes the scholarly explanation, because it is a direct source. The point is that without education, there is no critical understanding when information such as “the paradise of the slave,” can be passed as scholarly or even revealed text, for the ignorant.

[xxii] See also Platforms 2012. This was not the end of his encounters with authority. Dah Abeid was jailed in 2014 and 2018, neither event discouraging his persistence nor deterring his momentum. He was runner up in every election in which he participated over the last 11 years. See: electionguide.org 2022.

[xxiii] Quashing dissent is a typical authoritarian characteristic, see: *The Authoritarian Playbook* 2022, p.13; see also: *Public criticism faced by arbitrary arrests in Mauritania* 2020; BTI 2022 , n.d.; Mohamed 2024.

[xxiv] These principles are universal. Justice and equality, ironically are spoken of highly in Western circles but play out very differently in the Global South.

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Perceptions of Parents and Guardians Regarding Adolescents' Access to Contraceptives and Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in Zimbabwe

Elias Maronganye*
Tinos Mabeza*
Isheanesu Leanard Makwambeni**
*Department of Social Sciences, Women's University in Africa, Zimbabwe
**Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, United Bulawayo Hospitals, Zimbabwe

Abstract

We explore parents' and guardians' perceptions of the access of adolescents to contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) in Zimbabwe. Cowdray Park was purposively selected, convenience and purposive samplings were used to recruit participants, and focus group discussions were used to collect data. Most parents and guardians believe that adolescent access to contraceptives and SRHS will lead to cultural erosion and encourage promiscuity. They consider adolescent sexual activities to be taboo due to religion, cultural practices and policies. Parents' and guardians' perceptions have a significant impact on adolescents' access to contraceptives and SRHS in Zimbabwe.

***Keywords*:** perceptions, parents, guardians, adolescents, contraceptives, SRH, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Adolescent access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services (SRHS) and contraception is often overlooked in underdeveloped countries despite 12 million births and 21 million pregnancies occurring each year among girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (Ahinkorah, Kang, Perry, Brooks & Hayen, 2021; Sully et al., 2020). Most teenage pregnancies occur in adolescents from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Bhatt et al., 2021). Zimbabwe has a population of 15.2 million of which 1.8 million are adolescents aged 10 to 19 (UNICEF, 2023a). The country has high rates of teenage pregnancies, with 127,561 girls married before the age of 18 and 7,002 married before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2023a). Adolescent pregnancies have serious risk factors such as low birth weights, premature

births, infant respiratory complications, and high infant mortality rates (Azevedo, Diniz, Fonseca, Azevedo & Evangelista, 2015). The responsibilities of parenthood can have a significant impact on the educational attainment, mental health, and lifelong financial prospects of young women who become mothers in adolescence (Ehiaghe & Barrow, 2022; Kabir, Ghosh & Shawly, 2019; Murewanhema, Moyo & Dzinamarira, 2024). In Zimbabwe, teenage mothers often end up engaging in informal occupations like cross-border businesses, vending, and commercial sex work, which increase their risk of contracting sexually transmitted illnesses like HIV (Murewanhema et al., 2024). Although Zimbabwe's policies aim to reintegrate pregnant women into school, prevailing conservative societal norms result in condemnation and marginalisation and create significant barriers. The paper explored the perceptions of parents and guardians regarding adolescents' access to contraceptive and reproductive health services in Zimbabwe.

Literature review

Drivers of adolescent pregnancy

Murewanhema et al. (2024) suggest that adolescent pregnancy is driven by socioeconomic, religious, and cultural factors, along with internet and social media exposure. Adolescents from economically disadvantaged homes face an increased risk of unintended pregnancies because they struggle to meet their basic needs, including obtaining contraceptives (Yakubu & Salisu, 2018). Zimbabwe's high rate of adolescent pregnancy is primarily attributed to its persistent economic issues, with many families struggling to meet basic needs (Nunu, Makhado, Mabunda & Lebese, 2020). The National Assessment on Adolescents Pregnancies in Zimbabwe Report 2023 states that the economic decline has led to widespread poverty, rising unemployment rates, and declining agricultural commodity value (UNICEF, 2023b). Poverty has caused parents to migrate to neighbouring countries and abroad for better opportunities. In some cases, children are left alone without adult supervision, and adolescents are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour and even become targets of sexual abuse (UNICEF, 2023b). Parental migration can benefit children through remittances but is harmful to the children who are left behind. The increased exposure to the internet and social media has heightened the vulnerability of young children, leading to early sexual activity indulgence (Nunu et al., 2020). In rural areas, girls continue to face significant discrimination, often dropping out of school to work and being married off to older men in polygamous relationships for bride price (Yah et al., 2020). Adolescent pregnancy is also primarily attributed to school bans on physical punishment, inadequate parental SRHS

communication, limited recreational facilities, prevailing social norms, and limited access to contraceptives (Yakubu & Salisu, 2018).

Benefits of contraceptive use to adolescents

Contraception is crucial in averting teenage pregnancy. Contraceptive methods aim to improve the quality of life of women and young girls by reducing the incidence of unwanted pregnancies and the need for subsequent abortions. Ignoring the family planning needs of adolescents leads to unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions, which can have serious health and social impacts and often play a significant role in maternal and child mortality in low-income countries (Nsubuga, Sekandi, Sempeera & Makumbi, 2015). Research shows that women who have access to contraception have better educational outcomes, higher economic status, and greater influence over their lives, all of which lead to better health outcomes and an overall higher quality of life. (Bhatt et al., 2021; Uprety, Ghimire, Poudel, Bhattrai, & Baral,2016). The United Nations Population Fund (2024) states that having safe and voluntary family planning is a fundamental human right as it plays a crucial role in fostering gender equality, empowering women, and alleviating poverty. Providing sexually active teenagers with access to contraceptives and other SRHS can help prevent unwanted pregnancies and is a successful strategy for reducing unsafe pregnancies and abortions. (Cavallaro, Benova, Owolabi & Ali, 2020; Darroch, Singh & Weissman, 2016).

Adolescents, sexual and reproductive health

In adolescence, a person transitions from childhood to adulthood and undergoes puberty-related changes marked by observable physical, biochemical, and emotional changes (Styne, 1994). The adolescent years are a period of potential, susceptibility, and danger, especially in terms of one's physical well-being and willingness to engage in risky sexual behaviour, leading to unwanted pregnancy (Ojeda & Terasawa, 2002). SRH remains a global public health concern (Ngum Chi Watts, Liamputtong, & McMichael, 2015). SRH refers to a comprehensive state of physical, mental, and social wellness in all issues about the reproductive system (WHO, 2017). The significant challenges impacting adolescents in the domain of SRHS include gender-based violence, limited sexual education, restricted access to contraception, unsafe abortions, and unwanted pregnancies (Krugu & Van der Kwaak, 2019). Though a large part of the population, teenagers are more prone to reproductive diseases and mortality like STIs, early pregnancies, abortions, and HIV and AIDS. A mix of physiological and behavioural variables contributes to adolescents' susceptibility.

In developing countries, approximately 11% of girls and 6% of boys aged 15 to 19 had their first sexual experience before turning 15 (Ram, Andajani & Mohammadnezhad, 2020). Studies document the importance of comprehensive sex education in assisting young people to become safe, successful adults (Castillo, Derluyn, Jerves & Valcke, 2020; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). Adolescents who have SRH education along with parental consent are less prone to teenage pregnancy, engaging in unprotected sex, having many partners, and are more likely to use condoms or delay sexual activity (Francis & DePalma, 2014; UNESCO, 2015). Studies in the West have shown that parents generally support comprehensive sex education, including in different US states, the Netherlands, and Canada (Barr, Moore, Johnson, Forrest, & Jordan, 2014). Parents in Canada support age-appropriate school sex education, emphasising abstinence-only or abstinence-plus based on adolescent mental maturity (Ram et al., 2020).

Adolescents are more prone to engaging in early unprotected sex, increasing the risk of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Studies indicate that sex education can postpone the initiation of sexual activity, reduce the likelihood of teenage pregnancy, and promote safer sexual practices (Ramírez-Villalobos et al., 2021; Stanovic & Lalic, 2010). Adolescents must have early access to high-quality and pertinent SRH services and information to be healthy and safe. Despite the numerous benefits of comprehensive sex education for teenagers in the West, it has faced resistance in other parts of the world. Parents in Fiji expressed hesitation and reluctance to break perceived taboos surrounding adolescent sexuality and to address teenage pregnancies honestly and openly; the subject of adolescent reproductive health is persistently touchy and divisive (Ram et al., 2020). In South Africa, teachers who were asked about their opinions on condom distribution in schools echoed the belief that condom availability would increase early sexual engagement and promiscuity among students (Hlalele, 2011). In Namibia, condom distribution in schools was heavily criticised as inappropriate and equivalent to encouraging evil (Shipanga, 2012). However, research has shown that youth who get HIV and sex education are more inclined to practice safer sexual behaviour and less likely to engage in sexual activity (Stanovic & Lalic, 2010).

Barriers faced by young people towards SRH

In Zimbabwe, young people face significant barriers when seeking SRH services, with policy and legal frameworks, religion, and cultural practices being significant deterrents.

Policy and legal frameworks

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) states that health program managers, legislators and health professionals need to learn more about and advocate for the positive role that sexuality and sexual health play in people's lives. They also must enhance health care services to support healthy sexual communities. According to Chinyoka and Mugweni (2020), Zimbabwe's health systems and policies inadequately promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH). Legislation and policies that deal with women's sexuality, sexual health, or concerns connected to them are challenging to put into practice due to many overlapping social and cultural oppositions that encompass the legal system. Zimbabwe has been refractory in changing the situation on the ground by effecting laws and policies that support adolescents' access to contraceptives. Regarding SRHS for young adults specifically, there is a deafening silence in Zimbabwe despite international pressure. The many intersecting factors of socioeconomic, religious, political, and cultural influences shape how these issues are dealt with in society.

Dr. Dokora, former Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, strongly opposed the distribution of condoms in schools, describing it as a threat to national dignity. The Vice President and former Health Minister Constantino Chiwenga stated that women under 16 cannot receive contraception because they are legally unable to consent to sexual activity (Chinyoka & Mugweni, 2020). Zimbabwe's Public Health Act of 2018 further supports this position by prohibiting children under 16 years of age from accessing SHRS, like contraceptives and emergency family planning pills, as they do not have legal consent to have sex. However, these restrictions do not guarantee that young people will continue to abstain from sex. Although Zimbabwe raised the minimum age for marriage to 18 in 2021, early marriages are still common in certain parts of the country despite these restrictions. Society and the government oppose adolescents accessing contraceptives due to concerns that this may promote teenage sex. However, the evidence from reported teenage pregnancies consistently shows that teenagers are engaging in sexual activity at younger ages without protection from pregnancy and disease (Chinyoka & Mugweni, 2020). Given the staggering number of school dropouts brought on by teenage pregnancy, this paper promotes candid dialogue and acknowledgement of access to contraception for sexually active adolescents. The authors propose that instead of dismissing the issue, we should focus on finding suitable solutions, such as determining the appropriate methods, timing, and channels for providing contraceptives to adolescents. This approach can help reduce adolescent pregnancies and promote educational and personal development among young people (Chinyoka & Mugweni, 2020).

Religion and cultural practices

Cultural norms and religious principles significantly shape SRH outcomes, often perpetuating harmful practices and behaviours, such as stigma, discrimination, and denial of essential services, which can have detrimental consequences for adolescents and communities. For decades, sex education has been considered taboo in African communities due to restrictive and conservative cultural and regional practices (Tuyisenge, Hategeka & Aguilera, 2018). Alomair, Alageel, Davies & Bailey (2020) argue that Islam significantly influences Arab women's views on bodies, sexuality, and SRH, with both Christians and Muslims in the Middle East embracing customs and beliefs that allow for the promotion and perpetuation of abuse and violence against women. The state and family determine access to SRH knowledge and services, making it challenging to advance women's rights and combat gender based violence in Arab culture.

In South Africa, according to traditional customs among tribes such as Zulu, Xhosa, Vha-Venda, Shangaan, and Pedi, sexual intercourse was supposedly delayed until after marriage (Afolayan, 2004). These ethnic groups observed the mandated puberty rites during initiation ceremonies to mark the achievement of maturity. Children today grow physically and sexually faster than in previous societies. Sexual maturity occurring at a younger age would appear to be a result of sociocultural changes in lifestyle, sexual views, and behaviours. Teenagers today live in sociocultural contexts that are very different from those of previous generations. Teenagers learn about the world via their classmates, the media (television, radio, and periodicals), and popular culture. According to South Africa's 2022 census population results, the population may rise to 100 million by 2050 (South African Goverment, 2025), with far-reaching adverse effects on the environment, unless teenagers get appropriate sex education and are allowed to access contraceptives in schools. Silberschmidt and Rasch (2001) reported that the median age at which the first pregnancy occurred was 12 years in Dar es Salaam. This suggests that conventional social institutions in general and traditional family arrangements in particular have undergone alterations. It appears that attitudes and responses towards sexual permissiveness are not rigorous enough to prevent teenage females from getting pregnant.

Zimbabwe is a predominantly religious country and most of the population attaches great importance to religion in their everyday life. To combat teenage pregnancy, some are advocating for easier access to contraceptives. However, conservative groups and churches strongly oppose this, believing it would undermine cultural values. This contrast represents an obstacle to solving the problem and highlights the tension between religious beliefs and reproductive health needs. The conflict hampers efforts

to provide comprehensive health care to adolescents and leaves them vulnerable to unplanned pregnancies and related challenges.

Intersectionality of SRH and health outcomes

The study used intersectionality theory, first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the context of black feminism, to examine how individuals and groups experience multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage (Crenshaw, 2013). This framework moves beyond a simplistic binary approach to gender differences and instead considers how different identities and circumstances intersect to produce nuanced experiences of inequality. Intersectionality recognises that inequalities are interconnected and reinforce each other, resulting in complex and contradictory social patterns (Anthias, 2005; Hankivsky, 2012). By examining these intersections, researchers can better understand how systems of domination and subordination shape individual and group experiences, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of social injustices and their impacts.

Intersectionality in SRHS studies focuses on how interdependent systems of prejudice affect adolescents, including women's bodies and oppression. Mann (2013) highlights how patriarchal and state power suppress discussions about SRH, restricting women's access to services and safe dialogue. This study used intersectionality theory to examine how patriarchy and state power intersect with gender, class, sexuality, power dynamics, oppression, shame, ignorance, and silence to objectify women's bodies in a variety of social contexts. Analysis shows how these merging discourses maintain systemic inequality and shape women's experiences. The paper suggests that culture, religion, community associations, and the social-political context influence the perceptions of parents and guardians about the access of adolescents to SRHS and contraceptives. Sociocultural influences significantly affect sexual health outcomes as a result of the exploitative patriarchal framework in society, and it is people from marginalised populations who are more likely to have negative health consequences (Collins, von Unger & Armbrister, 2008; Crenshaw, 2013).

Methodological issues

A qualitative cross-sectional investigation was conducted among parents and guardians of adolescent girls aged 10–17 years from Cowdray Park in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. Cowdray Park is the second-most populous ward in Zimbabwe and is home to a diverse population from different socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds. It was purposefully selected as the study site due to its more comprehensive and diverse population composition, which can better provide valuable baseline information for this study. Research assistants recruited participants in the study area through

community WhatsApp groups and public leaflet distribution, following permission from local authorities and ethical approval from the Women's University in Africa ethics committee. Participants who met the criteria were recruited through purposive sampling and scheduled for Focus Group Discussions (FGD) (with open-ended questions) at the participants' convenience. Research assistants also encouraged early participants to share study information on social networks. To be eligible, participants met the following criteria: being a parent or guardian of a girl child between the ages of 10 and 17, living in the study area, and being over 18 years old (the legal age of adulthood in Zimbabwe) at the time of data collection. The sample consisted of 42 parents and guardians of adolescent girls aged 10–17 years living in the study community and spanning a wide range of ages, education levels, genders, marital status, employment status, and religion. Female participants dominated this study, with 28 females and 14 males. The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 50 years old. Participants spoke various English, including Ndebele and Shona. To allow participants to express themselves, the researchers allowed them to choose their preferred language for the interviews, which were then transcribed verbatim in the original language and translated into English for analysis. Each FGD had 7–12 participants. All four research assistants had a Bachelor of Science in Social Work and expertise in FGD. The focus groups were organised by age and gender. The most insightful FGD transcripts were selected for in-depth analysis, yielding key themes.

Findings

Knowledge of contraception, SRHS and family planning

The study participants showed knowledge regarding contraception, recognised its significance in reducing unintended pregnancies, and were aware of available contraceptive methods. Most participants, however, did not know what SRH meant. The researchers had to explain the meaning of SRH, and then some participants agreed that they were aware of some SRHS, such as prenatal care and HIV and AIDS testing during pregnancy. The researchers observed that some of the participants associated contraception, SRH, and family planning with child spacing, which was only meant for adults who are married or cohabiting together. Some participants said:

> Yes, I know contraception and its importance. I am also aware of family planning, but I am not sure what SRH stands for. I first met the term in this discussion. (Participant 3)

> I know family planning, contraception, the pill, and the injection called Depo Provera. SRH is something new and I am hearing these words in this group. (Participant 2)

The researchers also noted that the majority of the male participants were not well-informed about contraception. For instance, in one of the groups, a participant said

> The problem is that nurses at public clinics do not explain much. I remember the last pregnancy with my wife; we went for HIV testing, that's all. Nothing was explained to me. We were not even given counselling. (Participant11)

Parent and guardians' discussions with adolescents on sexual issues

The study's findings indicate that most participants found it awkward to discuss SRH concerns with their children, who are adolescents. They reported that it was difficult, even though they viewed themselves as a significant and reliable source of SRH knowledge for their children. Some responses from participants were as follows:

> It is somehow a complex subject to talk to a 14-year-old child; I feel as if I am encouraging her... Most conversations concern reprimanding her to avoid boyfriends, men, and dating. (Participant 23)

> I cannot speak to my child about SRH; I do not feel comfortable at all when it comes to talking about sex issues, though they learn from TV and at school. (Participant 32)

> What SRH discussion can I have with someone who is 15 years old? To me, she is still a child and should stay away from bedroom issues. (Participant 15)

Talking about sex seems to be impeded by age because parents are often uncomfortable discussing sex with teenage girls, whether or not they are already involved in it. Other participants stated that it is the responsibility of aunts and educators to teach about SRH issues. Adolescent access may be difficult due to the limited sexuality options, especially if they must seek

SRHS with their mothers. On the other hand, it seems that some parents are open to discussing sexual issues with their daughters, while others are not.

Some parents believe that unmarried adolescent females should not be in relationships with the opposite sex or engage in sexual behaviour. One participant said

> I will not allow her to indulge in sexual activities or to have a boyfriend at 15 years old. If she is not at school, I expect her to be helping with household duties. (Participant 9)

Such views highlight how strictly regulated and controlled female sexuality is. Additionally, it suggests that girls were less likely to seek out SRH information or services and frequently spent more time on household chores than teenage boys. This demonstrates the intersection of gender, cultural expectations of female sexuality, and access to SRH knowledge. Some of the participants disputed the value of SRH for teenagers.

SRHS needs of adolescents

Participants were somewhat divided when it came to discussing the SRHS needs of adolescents. Some participants were referring to SRHS as contraceptives, and vice versa. The researcher, however, had to keep on explaining through the FGD. The participants said:

> We should respect our children's rights. Everyone is entitled to health care and health education. We are robbing them of their rights by refusing to provide SRH services. (Participant 6)

> Young people should be educated and have access to contraceptives because education and training guarantee safe usage. (Participant 18)

> The age of consent should remain at 18, but we should abolish laws that prevent young people from accessing SRH services. As for contraceptives, I am undecided, although it's a challenge considering many young girls drop out of school because of unplanned pregnancies. (Participant 29)

> I have a 17-year-old daughter who is pregnant. The boyfriend is also 17; contraceptives can ensure safe sex. When children are allowed to get emergency pills, they avoid pregnancies since some girls end up dying from illegal abortions. (Participant 20)

Other participants were, however, against the idea of allowing adolescents below the age of 16 to have access to contraceptives and even SRH information. The opposing participants said:

> I do not think unmarried adolescents have any need for SRHS information. It is like you are saying, go and do it; make sure you do not fall pregnant. Bedroom activities are supposed to be left to adults who are married. I propose that we emphasise abstinence and say no to sex before marriage. (Participant 1)

> I also agree that SRHS is for adults and the bedroom and is supposed to be limited to adults only. Kids should focus on learning and working hard. (Participant 25)

Despite the erosion of traditional norms, parents continue to have significant influence on their children's SRH. Various factors shape adolescents' sexual behaviour, including social status, place of residence, religion, family structure, parental wishes and life experiences. In particular, parents are often reluctant to discuss sexual topics with their children because they fear it might encourage sexual exploration. This reluctance can result in a lack of guidance and support, highlighting the need for parents to effectively navigate these conversations and provide accurate information to help their children make informed decisions about their SRH.

Parents and guardians on adolescent's access to contraceptives

Regarding the appropriateness of providing contraception to teenage girls, researchers received a variety of responses. Some parents believed that there was nothing morally wrong with allowing unmarried teenage girls access to contraceptives and SRHS. However, other participants believed it was morally wrong to allow unmarried adolescent girls access to contraceptives and SRHS. Participants argued that it was like saying you could go and do it. When the researcher presented them with cases of teenage

pregnancy and the possibility of a 16-year-old boy impregnating another 16-year-old girl, the debate took a different form. Participants said:

> The issue must be honestly addressed, and any measures should focus on securing our children's future rather than leaning on morality. Contraceptives guard against unplanned pregnancies and early marriages, not encourage sexual activity. (Participant 6)

> We need to stop living in denial and accept the fact that our kids are having sex; wait until you start seeing your 16-year-old girl gaining weight and having morning sickness. I am also of the view that even schools should implement a required sex education curriculum. (Participant 11)

> I am against the idea of allowing unmarried youth access to contraceptives and SRHS because they are children and should not engage in sexual activity. Only married adults should have access to SRHS, but not contraceptives. God never created contraceptives but white people brought them to reduce the African population. (Participant 30)

Policy and legislation barriers

Participants said that the state must play an important role in ensuring that women's health and rights are realised. They recommended that the government create laws, policies and programs on women's health, with a focus on SRH services and information on young women. Adolescents in Zimbabwe do not adequately use contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Contraception is underutilised by adolescents in Zimbabwe to prevent unplanned pregnancies. In Zimbabwe, adolescents under the age of 18 have limited access to contraception. The policies are Zimbabwe's most significant obstacle. Laws that forbid or restrict young or unmarried females from acquiring contraceptives and requirements that contraception be administered with the approval of parents or husbands are some of the hurdles to accessing contraceptives. However, some participants agree with the current legislation and policies that prohibit the access of contraceptives and SRH information to children under the age of 18. Parents also understand the implications this has for the girl child. They also understand how many girls dropped out of school when they fell

pregnant during the lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. Some of the participants said:

> The government's decision to reject contraception use by children below the age of 18 was poorly thought out. This is not an action that should be taken. Even if it means compromising our morality and cultural norms, we cannot deny the necessity of addressing the new pandemic of adolescent pregnancies. (Participant 9)

> I think the provisions in the Public Health Act that prevent minors under the age of 16 from accessing SRH should be reviewed. For how long do we want to keep fighting with reality? (Participant 6)

> The Public Health Act is okay like that; they should not be given access; otherwise, we will be another Sodom and Gomorrah. Children should remain children. (Participant 13)

Discussion

The parents and guardians linked contraception, SRHS, and family planning with the practice of spacing children among adults who are either married or cohabiting. Sexual activities are considered appropriate only for adults. Therefore, adolescents should not know of or engage in such behaviours despite the significant occurrence of unwanted pregnancy and abortion among teenagers. In Zimbabwe, the birth rate for people between the ages of 15 and 19 is 121 per 1000, and this is due to a lack of access to contraception (UNPFA, 2023). The level of communication between parents and their adolescents was found to be limited, a phenomenon that can be attributed to the conventional Zimbabwean culture. Most parents and guardians felt uncomfortable discussing SRH topics with their adolescent children despite admitting that they are an invaluable and dependable source of knowledge for their children. Discussions frequently revolved around warnings, particularly to girls, to stay away from boys to avoid teenage pregnancy, and this aligns with a study conducted by Mbachu et al. (2020), which reported that parental interactions with adolescents are characterised by a cautious and authoritative approach, primarily focusing on the dangers of engaging in heterosexual relationships at an early age.

Sexuality appears taboo in many Zimbabwean societies (Bhatasara, Chevo & Changadeya, 2013). Certain cultures virtually never discuss sexuality at home because they view it as culturally improper for parents to

discuss sexual concerns with their children. People view sexuality as a domain exclusively for adults, with specific requirements for their physical and social growth. Consequently, people often perceive ideas about child sexuality as forbidden, opposed, unimportant, or even harmful, leading to moral panic. The literature on youth sexuality is rich with notions of "high-risk adolescents" and "unknowledgeable or ill-informed adolescents" (Ignaciuk & Kelly, 2020). Adult sexual cultures, along with religious and moral discourses, stigmatise adolescent sexuality. Despite legislative attempts to remedy this, mixing sexuality and children is nonetheless tricky and ethically repugnant to many (Ignaciuk & Kelly, 2020). The myth that an asexual child requires protection from harmful sexual information stems from the underlying ideologies that associate adolescents with sexual innocence. This regulatory mechanism shapes how we view morality, sexuality, and young people. Long-standing sexual innocence stereotypes present the child as an issue that stifles sexual enchantment (Bhana, 2013). Despite such limited conceptions of childhood, several studies show that teenagers are sexually active beings.

This paper notes that despite the eroding of traditional norms and values, parents still exert enormous influence on their children when it comes to sexual and reproductive health matters. Many factors, such as social position, location of residence, religion, family structure, parents' educational goals, and life experience, have an impact on adolescent sexual behaviour. Parents' reluctance stems from fear that broaching sexual topics with their children might arouse their curiosity and concern about the reaction of the broader community. Most cultures in Africa stigmatise sexual activity outside of marriage (Iyer & Aggleton, 2014). Despite the recommendation to delay sexual activity until marriage, many adolescents are sexually active and need comprehensive sexual health education and access to contraceptives to make informed decisions and protect their health. Denying teenagers access to SRH information and services will not stop them from engaging in sexual activity, but it will leave them vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS, and other harmful consequences The need for comprehensive information and support is thus underlined (Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Policies have been created and put into practice in Nigeria and South Africa to guarantee that teenagers have access to contraception and other reproductive health care treatments. In Nigeria, for example, government-run clinics cater to adolescents (Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Youth-friendly facilities are offered by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019). Providing SRH information and family planning can assist Zimbabwe in curbing the scourge of unwanted teenage pregnancies and abortions (Swanepoel & Beyers, 2019).

Although there was no complete agreement on whether adolescents should have access to contraceptives and SRHS, the majority of participants were in favour, particularly female participants. Those in total agreement argued that whether they agreed or not, it was useless since these children were doing sexually active. They also argued that parents should be able to move with time; times have changed, and therefore, they cannot use the standards of their days for today's children. Further, the participants reported that TV and media are also teaching them; as such, they should not wait. Opposing parents argue that allowing them to have access to contraceptives is like allowing them to indulge in bedroom activities, and so much focus should be aimed at educating them on the benefits of abstinence and waiting for the right time. We found that the majority of those who spoke against access to contraceptives and SRHS were men, and those who cited religion, particularly Christianity. Zimbabwe is a religious nation, and when asked about religion, a large proportion of the public profess belief in God and affirm that religion is at least "most important" in their everyday lives. It is essential to note the stance of particular churches concerning contraceptives. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church views contraception as "intrinsically wicked"; as a result, Catholics are only permitted to use natural birth control methods, regardless of the repercussions (Ignaciuk & Kelly, 2020).

Despite the high rate of contraceptive use in Zimbabwe, adolescents who are sexually active face social, legal, and financial obstacles that make it difficult for them to obtain contraception, making them more susceptible to STDs and unwanted pregnancies (UNFPA, 2023). Children under the age of 16 are prohibited from getting SRH services like contraceptives and emergency family planning pills under Zimbabwe's present legal framework, specifically the Public Health Act [Chapters 15–17] of 2018. This is because they lack the legal capacity to consent to sex. Laws governing the age of consent are a tool for controlling the sexual behaviour and activity of children and adolescents. However, restrictions do not ensure that young people will abstain from sex. According to a report released in 2021 by the Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council (ZNFPC), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Ministry of Health and Child Care, approximately 48% of teenagers have confirmed unintended pregnancies. Hence, even though the legal consent age in Zimbabwe is 18, young girls and boys under the age of 18 nonetheless engage in sexual activities.

The paper used intersectionality theory as its conceptual framework to examine the various factors that influence parents' and guardians' perspectives on adolescents' access to contraception in SRHS in Zimbabwe. Intersectionality theory emphasises how interactions within different social contexts influence individuals. The theory was utilised to analyse the several

elements, including gender, patriarchy, economic difficulties, and other discriminatory systems, that hinder young women's access to SRH information and services. We observed that concomitant factors such as religion, class and culture work with legislation in interconnected and complex ways to influence parents' and guardians' decisions about ASRHS. Examining current contraception and SRHS disparities among teenagers in Zimbabwe using an intersectional perspective reveals how the historical exclusion of certain groups of individuals along various forms of discrimination contribute to these inequities. An intersectionality approach to ASRH is beneficial because it allows for the simultaneous assessment of all the factors and creates an analytical space for them. No one major factor is given more weight than the others. The intersectionality theory was applied to understand the power dynamics, power hierarchies, and obstacles young women in Zimbabwe encounter regarding contraception and SRHS. Zimbabwean young women face challenges in contraception and SRHS due to power dynamics, age, class, socioeconomic factors, cultural norms, religious misconceptions, patriarchy, religion, and state control, which give men even more incredible privileges to control and monitor the reproduction systems of women.

Conclusion

The study emphasises how difficult it is for adults to recognise the sexual agency of teenagers, especially girls since it is frequently thought of as something that should be restrained and controlled. Teenagers are viewed as weak and in need of adult supervision. The idea that children and adolescents are developing sexual and reproductive capacities has not found resonance with the public or policymakers despite support for ending child marriages in Zimbabwe. This kind of thinking makes it more difficult to provide comprehensive services for sexual health and education, which puts young people at risk for risks related to their sexual and reproductive health.

The paper also claims that Zimbabwe lacks the political will to enforce laws and public policies prioritising gender equality, health equity, and women's health. Policies are rarely followed, even when they are present, as evidenced by the number of child marriages. Zimbabwean society is implicitly committed to upholding patriarchal beliefs, customs, cultural norms, gender roles, patriarchal legislation, and religious misconceptions. In this paper, intersectionality is a practical theory for understanding the intersections of cultural, religious, socioeconomic, educational, age, class, identity, and gender that lead to disparities in women's SRH results. It offers a perspective through which to examine the many different types of oppression that women encounter.

Recommendations

For adolescents to make informed decisions, it is essential to ensure that they have adequate information on SRHS and contraception. The researchers suggest that the government and the parents rethink their position. Until this is addressed, sexually active teenagers will continue to suffer the consequences. To protect the future of female children who bear the brunt, it is imperative that social and political perspectives regarding adolescent contraceptive use change. Studies that concern adolescents' welfare should also include their voices. Future research should focus on how adolescents in Zimbabwe view contraception and SRHS.

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Parental Involvement in the Education of Children with Special Needs in Kwekwe, Zimbabwe

Faith Kurete*
Psychology, Women's University in Africa
Mathew Svodziwa
Development Studies, University of South Africa
Angela Maposa
Regional Director – Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe Open University
* Corresponding Author - fkurete@gmail.com

Abstract

The education of children with special needs poses unique challenges and requires a collaborative effort between educators and parents. Parental involvement is widely recognized as a crucial component in fostering academic success and the social-emotional development of children with special needs. This study explores parental involvement in the educational outcomes of such children through a qualitative study using a social ecological theoretical framework. We interviewed teachers who specialise in inclusive education and parents who have children with special needs and found important problems based on language and culture, poor communications between parents and school staff, parental mis-perceptions of the disability and the restricted availability of resources to nurture children with disabilities. Findings confirm that parental involvement is key to improved educational outcomes, social skills, and the emotional well-being; the most positive types of involvement included participating in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, assisting with homework, and maintaining regular communication with teachers. Barriers to parental involvement include lack of time, insufficient knowledge about special education processes, and limited school resources. Schools and educators should adopt a more inclusive and supportive approach to engage parents, recognizing the diverse needs and backgrounds of families. Policy implications include advocacy for more comprehensive support systems to facilitate parental involvement. We recommend the development of workshops and training programs for parents to better understand special

education processes and how they can support their children, and flexible communication channels between parents and schools to accommodate parents' schedules and preferences.

Keywords: parental involvement, education, children, special needs

Introduction

Parental involvement is a critical factor in the educational success of children, particularly for those with special needs (Epstein, 2001; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The unique challenges faced by children with special needs require a concerted effort from both educators and parents to ensure these children receive the tailored support they need (Turnbull et al., 2007). This study seeks to explore the multifaceted role of parental involvement in the education of children with special needs, examining how different types and levels of involvement impact educational outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2001). The increasing recognition of the importance of parental involvement has prompted extensive research into its benefits, yet there remains a gap in understanding the specific needs and experiences of parents of children with special needs (Lemmer, 2007). This study aims to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of the barriers and facilitators to parental involvement, as well as the impact of such involvement on the academic and social-emotional development of children with special needs. By understanding the dynamics of parental engagement, this research aims to promote effective strategies that can foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for these children (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Background

Parenting is a unique role that sets it apart from all other roles that people do in maturity, and parental engagement is essential. Its distinctive intense interpersonal relationships, commitment, responsibility, and practical and emotional nurture are some of its salient characteristics (Holte, 2014). Consequently, parents cannot abandon or postpone this task due to the significance of this function and the social expectations associated with it. When children are involved, especially those who are outstanding and have an intellectual disability, this becomes even more important (Ruskus & Gerulaitis, 2010). Many analysts have shown that parents' attempts to participate successfully in their children's education are hampered by a lack of information or expertise (Ruskus & Gerulaitis, 2010; Blacher & Hatton, 2007; Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014), In turn, this ignorance about the nature and prognosis of a child's condition of disability prevents parents

from putting professional and educational advice into practice at home, which has an adverse effect on the children's overall development and academic results.

In an ideal world, parents would play a crucial role in ensuring that the academic, social, and adaptive skills that children with intellectual disabilities learn in school are continued and practiced at home. It is therefore essential that they participate in the schooling of their children who are living with a disability. Studies by Chevalier et al. (2013) and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2007) suggest, however, that a parent's educational background may limit their ability to comprehend their child's disability in depth and prevent them from being able to support the child at home. More specifically, parents' involvement in their children's education may be hampered by poor parental education levels and parents with higher education levels tend to be more interested in their children's education than parents with lower education levels (Feliciano, 2006; Englund et al., 2004; Anderson & Minke, 2007). Compared with middle-class educated parents, parents with lesser educational attainment face greater obstacles when it comes to the education of their children. It seems that parents with higher levels of education are better able to care for and assist their disabled child at home than parents with less education. This notion is applicable to parents with a higher education and living above the poverty datum line. In order to provide a fair and just education for everyone, as envisioned by Freire (1971), it is necessary to inform, educate, and support parents who find it difficult to cater for the needs of their children living with a disability.

Research from Chevalier et al. (2013) suggests that parental involvement in their children's education positively correlates with their income and educational attainment; parents with lower levels of education are less equipped to raise children and are more likely to work in low-paying occupations that require longer hours. As a result, these parents also frequently have a large family, which calls for greater dedication. Due to their increased need for parental support and care compared to typically developing children, students with disabilities are particularly badly impacted by this condition, as are those with intellectual disabilities. Policy interventions are suggested, including high-level parental training, low-income subsidy, and low-education tuition fees.

The present study shows also that barrier to complete parental involvement in education are formed by teacher related variables including lack of funding, unresolved emotional feelings, conflicts between school directors or board of management members, negative attitudes toward

parents (e.g., viewing parents as a threat or challenge rather than as valuable resources), dismissing parental observations as biased or insignificant, and a lack of teacher training on working with parents (Ruskus & Gerulaitis, 2010, Feliciano, 2006). Furthermore, school professionals enforce a strict, limited curriculum that isn't able to accommodate parents' requirements, which raises the risk of low parental engagement and participation. Because of this, parents frequently express emotions of helplessness, annoyance, and exclusion from educators and the educational process (Moore & Lasky, 1999).

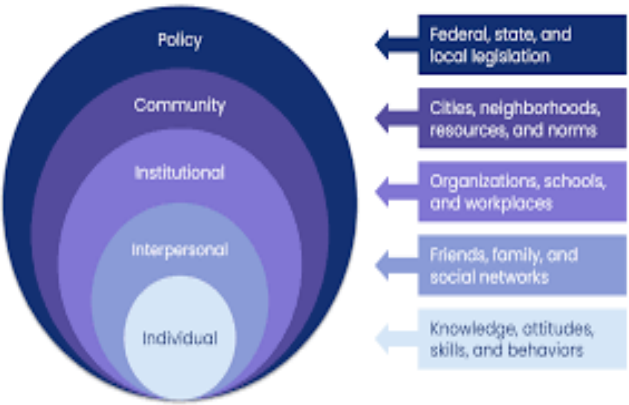
Perceptual, cultural, contextual, and structural impediments prevent parents from consistently participating in their children's education, according to McKay et al. (2004). The severity of a child's disability, parental stress or sadness, lack of support, lack of knowledge and skills, lack of confidence, and financial limitations are some of the categories used to categorise the hurdles. For the benefit of their children, parents' opinions of the instructors and other school personnel, as well as misplaced expectations, all have a role in determining whether or not they continue to seek assistance and collaborate with the school (McKay et al., 2004; Feliciano, 2006, Englund et al., 2004). As a result, time constraints, insurance, transportation issues, restricted services, and childcare become dismal impediments to parental involvement in school. According to Sandall et al. (2005), parents of students with disabilities hold a low and unfavourable position in the educational system, despite the fact that educationists present parents and teachers as equal partners, and their low position serves as a barrier to their involvement in their children's education. Some parents consequently abdicate all responsibility for their children to teachers, viewing them as authority figures with the necessary training to handle any school-related issue. No doubt there are times when teachers behave accordingly, giving parents directions rather than encouraging cooperation and teamwork.

However, research also shows that the majority of parents of disabled children, including those with intellectual disabilities, are extremely poor and unable to provide for their children's educational needs, potentially leading to a lack of care on the part of the parents for their children's education. Because of this, very few disabled children in underdeveloped nations benefit from a suitable education (Pang & Richey, 2005). This is a result of low-income nations' generally poor health, nutrition, and standard of living (Chevalier et al., 2013). The degree to which parents participate in their children's schooling depends on their socioeconomic class (SES), with lower-income households often having less parental involvement. Because

of their lack of parental participation, children who grow up in poverty are therefore more likely to suffer negative effects such as poorer levels of academic success and socio-emotional well-being (Oranga & Chege Kabutha, 2013). This study thus aimed to identify, in one specific locale, how parental participation affects the academic performance and general well-being of children with exceptional needs; to determine what encourages and inhibits parental involvement in their child's special education; and to establish the various parental involvement activities and how they affect the performance of the students.

Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 – Social Ecology Theory



Social ecology theory offered a robust framework for exploring the diverse factors influencing parental involvement in the education of children with special needs in Kwekwe, Zimbabwe. This theory, articulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner, emphasizes the complex interactions between individuals and their various environmental systems. By utilizing this theory, we can comprehensively understand how different contextual factors in Kwekwe shape parental engagement in their children's education (Oranga, 2020). At the center of the social ecology model is the microsystem, which included the immediate environments where the child directly interacts, such as the home and school; the microsystem highlights the vital role of family and educators in the educational journey of children with special needs. Parental

involvement at this level includes daily activities such as assisting with homework, attending Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, and maintaining direct communication with teachers. Given the unique socio-economic context of Kwekwe, where resources were limited, the quality and consistency of these interactions are crucial for the child's educational outcomes (Moroni, 2015). This study examines how parents in Kwekwe engage with their children's education within the microsystem and identifies ways to enhance these interactions despite resource constraints.

The mesosystem comprises the interactions between different microsystems, such as the relationships between parents and teachers (Roberts, 2020). In Kwekwe, fostering strong collaboration between home and school is essential for the success of children with special needs. Effective communication and coordination between parents and educators can help ensure consistent support and reinforcement of educational goals (Holte, 2014). This study investigated how these mesosystem interactions can be strengthened in Kwekwe through, for example, community meetings, parent-teacher workshops, and the development of collaborative educational strategies. Understanding and improving these mesosystem connections are vital for creating a cohesive support network around the child.

The ecosystem involves broader social settings that indirectly influence the child, such as parental workplace policies, community resources, and extended family networks. In Kwekwe, factors like economic stability, the availability of community support services, and the presence of extended family can significantly impact a parent's ability to engage with their child's education (Homby, 2011). This study explores how these ecosystem factors either facilitate or hinder parental involvement. For instance, the economic activities in Kwekwe, primarily mining and agriculture, might affect parental availability and engagement. By identifying supportive workplace policies and community resources, the study aims to propose measures that can help parents in Kwekwe better support their children's educational needs.

The macrosystem encompasses cultural values, societal norms, and public policies that form the overarching context for parental involvement (Winslow, 2013). In Kwekwe, attitudes towards disability, cultural beliefs about education, and national policies like the Zimbabwean Education Act shape the environment in which parental engagement occurs. This study considers how these macrosystem factors influence parents' attitudes and behaviors toward their children's education. It advocates for culturally sensitive policies and practices that promote greater parental involvement,

recognizing the diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of families in Kwekwe.

The chronosystem addresses the dimension of time, acknowledging that changes over time can influence development. This includes life transitions for the child, such as moving from early intervention programs to school-age services, as well as broader societal changes like evolving educational policies and technological advancements (Oranga, 2020). In Kwekwe, the study investigates how these temporal factors impact parental involvement, providing insights into how support strategies can be adapted to meet the changing needs of children and their families over time. For example, changes in national policies or economic conditions can significantly affect parental engagement (Moroni, 2015). By applying social ecology theory, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the various environmental systems and their impact on parental involvement in the education of children with special needs in Kwekwe. This theoretical framework allows for a holistic understanding of the multiple levels of influence, identifying key areas for intervention to enhance parental engagement and improve educational outcomes for these children.

Methodology

This study employed a case study research design to explore the nature, extent, and impact of parental involvement in the education of children with special needs in Kwekwe, Zimbabwe. Utilizing a phenomenological approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of parents, educators, and children within this specific socio-cultural context. This approach was well-suited to capture the rich, detailed perspectives of participants and to understand the complex factors influencing their engagement in educational activities (Holte, 2014). The research was conducted in Kwekwe, a city in central Zimbabwe known for its diverse socio-economic conditions. The study setting included various educational institutions such as public and private schools, special education centers, and community organisations that support children with special needs. This diverse setting provided a comprehensive view of the different environments in which parental involvement occurs and the various challenges and facilitators that exist (Nyarko, 2011).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse sample of those involved in the education of children with special needs. The sample included twenty parents, ensuring a range of socio-economic statuses, educational backgrounds, and types of disabilities among

their children. Additionally, ten educators, including special education teachers and school administrators, and five representatives from community organisations supporting children with special needs were included. This diverse sample helped to provide a holistic view of the factors influencing parental involvement. Multiple qualitative data collection methods were used to gather comprehensive and nuanced information. In-depth, semi-structured interviews are conducted with parents, educators, and community representatives to delve into their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to parental involvement (Winslow, 2013). Focus group discussions were held separately with parents and educators to facilitate the exchange of ideas and collective reflections on the issues at hand. Participant observations were conducted in various educational settings to capture the dynamics of parental involvement and the interactions between parents, children, and educators. Additionally, document analysis of relevant school policies, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and community support program records were undertaken to understand the institutional context and support mechanisms available (Oranga, 2020).

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data. The process begun with the transcription of all interviews and focus group discussions. Initial coding was performed to identify repeated patterns and significant statements in the data. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that capture the essence of participants' experiences and perspectives (Roberts, 2020). The themes are analysed in relation to the research questions and the social ecology theory framework, highlighting the interplay between different environmental systems and their impact on parental involvement.

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study. All participants were provided with detailed information about the study and gave their written consent to participate. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising data and protecting participants' identities. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Special care was taken to handle sensitive information, particularly when discussing challenges and barriers faced by parents and children (Roberts, 2020).

The study involved a diverse group of participants, categorised into parents, educators, and NGO representatives as presented in the table 1 below. This diverse demographic composition provided a comprehensive

perspective on parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities.

Findings

The findings illuminate the multifaceted nature of parental involvement, shaped by socio-economic constraints, cultural attitudes, and institutional support mechanisms. The analysis highlights both the opportunities for enhancing parental participation and the systemic barriers that need to be addressed to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Participants

Category	Sub-category	N participants	Education Level	Employment Status
Parents	Mothers	12	5 Secondary School, 7 College/University	3 Employed, 7 Self-employed, 2 Unemployed,
	Fathers	8	3 Secondary School, 5 College/University	2 Employed, 6 Self-employed,
Educators	Heads of Schools	3	3 University Degree	Full-time Employment
	Special Education Teachers	5	2 University Degree, 3 Diploma	Full-time Employment
	School Administrators	2	2 Diploma	Full-time Employment
NGO Reps.	Advocacy & Support Specialists	2	2 University Degree	Full-time Employment
	Program Managers	2	2 University Degree	Full-time Employment
	Community Outreach Coordinators	1	University Degree	Full-time Employment

Poor Communication Between Parents and School Staff

Lack of communication between parents and school staff is a typical barrier to parental involvement in the education of children with special

needs. Both parties' hectic schedules, misunderstandings or miscommunications, different expectations or priorities, and a lack of efficient communication channels are some prevalent causes. A communication breakdown can result in miscommunication, missed opportunities for cooperation, and eventually have an adverse effect on the education and general wellbeing of the child. To guarantee the best assistance for the child, it is critical that parents and school personnel place a high priority on open and transparent communication. One participant noted that

> *There is little support in schools to help parents especially in Zimbabwe. There are a lot of challenges to that. Some schools do not involve parents at all. The only time they call parents to school is when they need information about child and normally at the beginning of year. The other time is when the child is hurt or is sick. In most cases there is no communication. Some schools may want to involve parents but face the challenge of parents not cooperating. Some parents may not have time to go to school frequently due to work commitments and hustling especially in this economic situation we are in. Some schools are trying their best to help parents via WhatsApp and other platforms. (T2)*

Restricted Resources and Assistance

A major obstacle to parental involvement can be limited access to resources and support. Parents may feel overburdened and uncertain about how to effectively assist their child's education when they lack access to essential resources, such as details about their child's unique requirements, programs that are offered, or support networks. It may also be challenging for parents to effectively advocate for their child within the educational system as a result of this lack of assistance. Parents' participation in school events and meetings may also be further restricted by budgetary limitations or a lack of mobility. In order to guarantee that parents of children with special needs have access to the tools and support they require, it is critical that communities and schools collaborate. A key informant noted that

> *Some children are properly cared for and some are neglected due to various reasons. Some parents are not financially stable such that they fail to provide for the child's basic needs like food, medication, proper shelter, school fees, transport to school, assistive devices etc.*

Some parents may be financially stable but still neglect the child due to denial, lack of knowledge. (T1)

Belief that the Special Education System is Intimidating/ Overwhelming

One of the biggest obstacles to parental involvement in the education of children with special needs is feeling overburdened or scared by the special education system. For parents who have never navigated that before, it can be intimidating due to its intricate structure, which includes confusing terminology, rules, and procedures. Parents may become reluctant to actively interact with school personnel or take part in decision-making processes pertaining to their child's education as a result of feeling confused, frustrated, and powerless. Parents who experience feelings of overwhelm or intimidation may find it more difficult to participate in meetings, raise concerns, or successfully advocate for their child's needs. This may lead to a lack of parent-teacher cooperation possibilities, which may eventually affect the calibre of instruction and assistance offered. A participant noted that;

I have headache helping his siblings with homework and by the time am done with them l am already tired. I do not neglect him but his needs are just too much for me to cope with. (P1)

It's critical that schools provide a warm, inclusive climate that promotes family involvement, give parents clear and accessible information, and assist them in navigating the special education system. By removing these obstacles, parents will have greater confidence to support their child's needs and take an active role in their education.

Barriers Based on Language or Culture

Language or cultural barriers present significant challenges to parental involvement in the education of children with special needs. When parents do not speak the primary language used in the school or community, they may struggle to communicate effectively with teachers, administrators, or other parents. This leads to misunderstandings, miscommunication, and feelings of isolation or exclusion. Additionally, cultural differences in beliefs, values, and educational practices can impact how parents perceive and engage with the special education system. Parents from different cultural backgrounds have varying expectations of their role in their child's education, as well as different attitudes towards disability and special needs. These

differences create barriers to collaboration, trust, and understanding between parents and school staff, hindering effective communication and partnership in supporting the child's educational needs. It's important for schools to recognize and address language and cultural barriers by providing interpretation services, offering culturally responsive communication and support, and fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment that respects and values the diversity of families. By bridging these barriers, schools better engage parents in the education of children with special needs and make it more likely that families will feel empowered to advocate for their child's success.

Parental Perception

It's important for parents to advocate for their child's needs and work closely with educators to ensure the best possible outcomes for their child. Parents are their child's strongest advocates and know their child best, including their strengths, challenges, and unique needs. By actively participating in their child's education and working closely with educators, parents can help ensure that their child receives the support, resources, and accommodations necessary to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. If parents feel lack hope in a brighter future of the child with disabilities, they will likely fail to engage themselves in the education of their children. Parents with a child with extreme disability may see sending a child to school as a waste of resources. Some parents with children with disabilities view the school as place where the child goes to so as to lessen their burden of caring for the child for the whole day. One participant noted that;

> *I don't go to the school of my disabled child because it's a waste a time, as the school will be caring for him , l will also be having time to myself or do something productive for the family.*

When parents advocate for their child, they can help ensure that their child's individualised needs are met, whether it be through specialised instruction, assistive technology, or additional support services. By communicating openly and effectively with educators, parents can provide valuable insights into their child's learning style, preferences, and progress, and help to tailor educational plans and interventions to meet their child's specific needs. Another participant noted that;

> *"I am a concerned parent and l believe my child can succeed academically, hence I do communicate with the teachers of my child*

to find out on his progress and he if shows behaviour change in the unacceptable way. I would want to find out the cause of the maladaptive behaviour. Though at times my visits are not welcomed by teachers and school authority". P3

Collaboration between parents and educators fosters a team approach to supporting the child's development and success. By working together, parents and educators can share information, set goals, monitor progress, and make informed decisions that benefit the child's overall well-being and academic achievement. This partnership also helps build trust, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the child's growth and development. Ultimately, when parents advocate for their child's needs and actively engage with educators, they play a vital role in shaping their child's educational experience and ensuring that their child receives the best possible support and opportunities for success. A key informant noted that;

The parents in some cases are not given the same educational rights because some children with disabilities may be denied enrolment at nearest schools due to severity of the disability. If parent is not well up the child may stay at home and not go to school. T2

I had to send my child to school that is far from where l stay. The authorities of a nearby school asked to take my child elsewhere after he had attended 3days at the school. They said that they cannot cope with my child who has autism. P3

Discussion

The present study of parental involvement in the education of children with special needs in Kwekwe reveals both unique challenges and commonalities with other African countries. By comparing these findings with similar studies conducted across the continent, we can gain a deeper understanding of the regional trends and specific contextual factors influencing parental engagement in special education (Holte, 2014). In Kwekwe, as in many other African settings, socio-economic barriers significantly impact parental involvement. Economic constraints, limited access to resources, and inadequate support services are recurring themes. Studies of rural areas of South Africa, for example, have highlighted that poverty and limited access to specialised educational resources hinder parents' ability to support their children effectively (Oranga, 2020).

Similarly, in Kwekwe, the economic activities predominantly revolve around mining and agriculture, which demand significant time and energy from parents, leaving less time for active involvement in their children's education. Cultural attitudes towards disability also play a crucial role in shaping parental involvement. In many African countries, including Zimbabwe, societal stigma and traditional beliefs about disability can deter parents from seeking support or engaging openly with educators (Winslow, 2013). For example, research in Nigeria and Kenya has shown that cultural stigmatization leads to isolation of families with children with special needs, reducing their access to educational and community resources. In Kwekwe, these cultural barriers similarly impact the willingness and ability of parents to participate in their children's education (Munia, 2014).

Communication between parents and educators is another critical factor influencing parental involvement. In urban centers of countries like Ghana and Tanzania, studies have found that effective communication strategies, such as regular parent-teacher meetings and the use of mobile technology, can enhance parental engagement (Nyarko, 2011). In Kwekwe, the establishment of flexible communication channels is identified as a key area for improvement. By adopting similar strategies, such as using SMS or community radio for updates and information dissemination, Kwekwe schools can potentially increase parental involvement despite the technological and infrastructural limitations. Community support and collaboration are also vital (Roberts, 2020). In Uganda, for example, community-based rehabilitation programs have been successful in mobilizing local resources and fostering a supportive network for families of children with special needs. These programs emphasize the importance of community involvement in educational initiatives. In Kwekwe, strengthening partnerships between schools and local community organizations can similarly enhance support services and create a more inclusive environment for these children.

Policy frameworks and government support vary significantly across African countries and directly affect parental involvement. In Botswana and Namibia, progressive policies and substantial government investment in special education have led to better support systems and higher levels of parental engagement (Holte, 2014). Zimbabwe, including Kwekwe, can benefit from advocating for stronger policy support and increased funding for special education. This would address some of the systemic challenges faced by parents and educators in providing adequate

support for children with special needs. Training and capacity building for both parents and educators are critical. In Ethiopia and Zambia, initiatives to train parents on special education needs and effective parenting strategies have shown positive outcomes in enhancing parental involvement (Moroni, 2015). In Kwekwe, similar training programs can empower parents with the knowledge and skills needed to support their children's education more effectively.

Conclusion

This study shows that many factors prevent parents from being involved in their children's education when they have an intellectual disability. These factors include low parental education levels, teachers' disapproval of parents' involvement in their children's education, parental economic constraints, societal perceptions and stigmatization of intellectual disabilities, ignorance of the prognosis of intellectual disabilities, parental stress and depression, a lack of support, parental perceptions of teachers and school staff, a lack of clear channels of communication between the home and school, the number of siblings in the family, the severity of the child's disability, discrepancies in the language used by staff members and parents, and the absence of policy guidelines or frameworks. Parental involvement in the education of students with intellectual disabilities has also been hampered by the lack of intentional initiatives to promote inclusion and by the complete absence of planned in-service seminars for teachers working with students living with disabilities. As the interviews made clear, parents would become more engaged in their children's education if they felt competent and capable and if teachers encouraged them to do so. For this reason, it is important to empower parents as recommended. Unfortunately, lack of parental enlightenment and emancipation and other reasons as discussed above have served as formidable barriers to the full participation of parents of learners with disabilities in schools worldwide but most especially in developing countries. This calls for urgent redress measures for the benefit of all learners, and even more so, those living with disabilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance parental involvement in the education of children with special needs in Kwekwe, Zimbabwe. These recommendations address the identified barriers and leverage existing strengths within the community to improve educational outcomes for these children.

Schools should establish clear, consistent, and flexible communication strategies to facilitate better engagement between parents and school staff: regular meetings, using platforms such as WhatsApp or SMS for updates, and ensuring that there are accessible communication channels for parents who may not be able to attend in person are needed.

Schools, communities, and government agencies should collaborate to provide better resources and support services for parents. This includes offering information about special education programs, available assistance, and connecting parents with support networks.

Implement training programs for parents to help them understand the special education system, their rights, and effective ways to support their children's learning and development.

Schools should create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere that encourages parents to participate, ensuring that all parents feel respected and valued, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Schools should provide interpretation services, culturally responsive communication, and educational support that takes into account the diversity of the families they serve.

Schools should encourage and support parents to be active advocates for their children by providing guidance on how to engage with the educational system, express concerns, and ensure that their children's needs are met.

Community-based programs should be developed to mobilise resources, create support networks, and facilitate collaboration between local organizations, schools, and families.

Advocacy for stronger policy frameworks and increased government funding for special education should be a priority. This includes improving accessibility to schools, addressing stigma, and providing more specialized services.

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Artisanal Crude Oil Refining: Interrogating its non-Formalisation vis-à-vis Nigeria's Dependence on Petroleum Products Importation

Kenneth N. Dim[1, 2]
Franscica N. Onah [2, 3]
Paulinus E. Ezeme[1, 2]
Elias C. Ngwu[1, 2]
Osinachi P. Uba-Uzoagwa[1, 2]*

[1]Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria
[2] Social Sciences Unit, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria
[3]Department of Public Administration & Local Government, University of Nigeria
*Corresponding author: osinachi.uzoagwa@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

The downstream sector of the oil industry is critical in the Nigerian economy. It consists of four refineries with a total daily refining capacity of 445,000 barrels. At about sixty percent production, the refineries once met most of the country's petroleum product needs. Lack of maintenance and cumulative neglect however led to their collapse and Nigeria's near total dependence on the import of petroleum products for domestic consumption. This gave rise, among other ills, to the proliferation of unlicensed artisanal refineries in the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta, with associated environmental hazards and the perpetuation of an obnoxious subsidy regime by agents of the Nigerian state and their collaborators. Though the state has continued to clamp down on the artisanal refineries, the fuel subsidy regime which has cost the country billions of dollars in revenue still persists. Opinions are sharply divided in the extant literature on the activities of these artisanal refineries and the government's responses to them. This paper argues for the formalisation of the activities of the artisanal refineries within the context of fundamental reforms in Nigeria's downstream sector.

Keywords: informal oil refining, fuel subsidy, oil bunkering, fuel import dependence, foreign refineries

Introduction

The discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State in 1956, and in Umuechem in 1958, has proved to be a major source of revenue and the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Nigeria is sub-Saharan Africa's largest producer of crude oil, a member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and a leading exporter of crude oil (Salau, 2011). Since the discovery of oil in the country, multinational oil corporations (MNCs) have held sway in the upstream sector of the industry while the downstream has been the exclusive domain of Nigeria's national oil company, the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Aside from occasional security challenges which have disrupted crude oil production from time to time, the upstream sector has operated maximally but the downstream sector, which involves the refining crude oil into several products for local consumption, has fared poorly.

The Federal government through the NNPC had established and operated four refineries: Port-Harcourt Refinery; Eleme Petro-chemical refinery; Warri refinery, and the Kaduna refinery located thousands of kilometres away in Nigeria's North West. These refineries, constructed between 1965 and 1989, have a combined daily refining capacity of 445,000 barrels when fully operational (Ogele & Egobueze, 2020). At their peak, the four refineries produced between 57 percent and 89 percent of total domestic consumption of petroleum products within the country. During the early 1990's, Nigeria refineries produced enough refined petroleum products to satisfy consumer demand (FGN, 2013).

However, as a result of cumulative neglect and lack of maintenance, these refineries performed sub-optimally for a number of years before eventually breaking down altogether. As a result, the NNPC has resorted to the importation of all the country's refined petroleum needs, uniquely among OPEC members and even non-OPEC petroleum exporting countries. Perhaps nothing better illustrates the country's weak economic position than this paradox of being both a crude oil exporter and an importer of refined products. The process of importation has itself been riddled with extreme corruption. Nigeria's Minister of State for Petroleum from 2019 to 2023, Timipre Sylva, described it as "a criminal enterprise" (Olawoyin, 2022). In addition, many of the importers, in connivance with unscrupulous government officials or their cronies, have behaved in the manner of cartels with vested interest in ensuring that the refineries do not function (Ovaga, 2010; Chikwem, 2014). These cartels sabotage every attempt to fix the existing refineries (Enang, 2022).

Another major consequence of the non-functionality of Nigeria's refineries is the proliferation of artisanal petroleum refineries in the creeks in oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta region. Lack of engagement, poverty, and many years of government neglect of the region, with worsening unemployment in the midst of obvious affluence from oil exploitation, have intersected with the failure of the state-owned refineries and given rise to the flurry of artisanal refining operations in the region and the risks associated with them. The artisanal refining is generally sub-standard and below internationally acceptable standards for environmental protection and sustainability. This has led to clamp down against their operations by government regulatory and security agencies and the criminalisation of their activities by the Nigerian state through legislation.

Opinion is however divided on the operations of these artisanal refineries and the government's responses to them. Arguing from environmental protection perspective, some commentators have commended the government's clamp down, insisting that the activities of these illegal refiners should be completely abolished because of their despoliation of the environment. Onuh et al. (2021), for instance, argue that the proliferation of artisanal refineries in the region has brought negative effects on the environment with attendant long-term impacts on the atmosphere. Obenade and Amangabara (2014, p. 27) further argue that "the process of artisanal refining incurs reckless wastage of oil, such that two drums of crude oil can translate to only one drum of refined products, with the rest as waste". The waste oils are then dumped haphazardly on land, rivers and streams, causing severe damage to the environment and public health. Accidents, fires and explosions occur as a result of illicit distillery processes involving open fires fed by crude oil tipped into pits in the ground. Emissions from artisanal oil exploration activities (drilling, bunkering, pipeline vandalism, gas flaring) perpetrated in the mangroves have costly environmental implications for a region that hosts one of the most bio-diverse ecosystems in the world (Onyena and Sam, 2020). Additionally, significant quantities of oil are spilt on land and creeks from broken pipes used by numerous makeshift refineries in the region (Obenade and Amangabara, 2014). The operations of the artisanal refineries are also said to be in contravention of the Petroleum Refining Regulation Act of 1974 (S. 7), which states that "no refinery shall be operated or constructed in Nigeria without a license granted by the minister" (Ogele & Egobueze, 2020).

Despite these negatives, there are those who argue instead for the legalisation of artisanal oil refining rather than its abolition or even the

ongoing clampdown. Such scholars blame the situation on oil cabals comprising major players in the oil industry as well as government officials who have colluded to hijack the industry. The scholars argue that because of their easy access to government subsidy on imported refined products, members of the cabal profit more from importation of refined products than they would from local refining of products by the government-owned refineries. As a result, they have continued to undermine the functionality of the government-owned refineries (Ugwueze et al., 2024). These scholars thus canvas the legalisation of the operations of artisanal refineries so as to engage the army of unemployed youths in the Niger Delta and also to reduce the waste associated with petroleum subsidy (Enang, 2022). They further argue that the pollution arising from the activities of the artisanal refiners is minute when compared to that from the multinational oil corporations whose operations often result in oil spill and environmental degradation without corresponding compensation or attempts at remediation (Obenade and Amangabara, 2012; Ugwueze et al., 2024).

This paper mediates this raging debate. It argues for a legitimisation of the activities of the artisanal refineries by mainstreaming them into a modular refinery scheme within the larger context of a general reform of Nigeria's downstream oil industry. This will help reduce Nigeria's dependence of importation of petroleum products and also arrest the current state of mindless looting of the nation's treasury through a highly dubious fuel subsidy regime. This study relied on secondary data sources, such as books, journal articles, periodicals and other relevant materials that dwell on artisanal oil refineries, crude oil theft and environmental degradation. Content analysis was applied to analyse the generated data. The rest of the paper is presented under the following headings: conceptualizing informal refineries; the reasons for non-formalization of the informal refineries; theoretical framework; the imperatives of formalization of informal oil refineries; reducing fuel import dependency; and conclusions.

Conceptualizing the informal refinery

Informal **(**artisanal) refining also referred to as 'bush burning, cooking or *Kpofire* by the locals is a small-scale or subsistent distillation of crude petroleum over a specific range of boiling points, to produce useable products such as Kerosene, fuel, and diesel' (John & Nnadozie, p. 117). These miniature petroleum manufacturing enterprises are often beyond the reach of the state (Kyari, 2022). Refineries can be classified as informal or artisanal when the sources of raw material (crude oil) are derived through

illegal means or modes of operations that are sub-standard (Mamudu et al, 2020). Such refineries acquire crude oil through bunkering and theft, for example by installing taps on the government pipeline for the unauthorised extraction of oil. The siphoned crude oil is transferred into large rubber cans and conveyed to the refining camp where it is poured into metal tanks and cooked with fire, with the vapour from the boiling oil channelled out by pipes connected to a condenser. A pipe with bigger diameter then carries the refined products to receiver points for distribution and sales (SDN, 2013). There are problems associated with informal refineries, including air, land and water pollution, explosion, and loss of revenue and damage to governmental infrastructure as well as the poor quality of the products from such refineries which may damage car engines and other machineries in which they are used.

However, with government commitment and operational adjustment, a positive outcome can be achieved. We argue that even if government did not license the artisanal refineries in their current state, it can tap into the expertise of the operators to establish modular refineries, which will in turn provide lucrative jobs for the large army of unemployed youths in the Nige Delta that readily supply the owners of illegal refineries owners with the manpower they need to perpetuate their illicit activities.

Reasons for non-formalisation of the informal refineries

Nigerian policy makers and some environmental rights activists have, apparently persuasively, attributed the non-formalization of the informal or artisanal refineries to the crude nature of their operations and the environmental hazards they pose. They also point to the illegal means through which the operators obtain the crude oil they refine, mainly through illegal bunkering or tapping into government or oil company pipelines. These reasons appear germane, but a probing of the issues reveals that the non-formalization of informal crude oil refineries is actually predicated on the nature and character of Nigerian State and the rent seeking high profile government officials and their social networks that benefit from current policies around oil.

Over the past three decades, the Nigerian state has progressively been unable to operate its four oil refineries but has instead relied almost entirely on importation to meet its domestic petroleum products consumption needs. Table 1 indicates the volume of Nigeria's petrol imports from various foreign refineries over the past three decades while Table 2 highlights the level of Nigeria's on fuel imports from both oil producing and non-oil producing countries.

Table 1: Petroleum Volumes Imported from Foreign Refineries by NNPC/Independent Marketers

S/No	Country of Origin	PMS (Ltrs)
1	NNPC/PPMC (sources not available)	679,805,778.31
2	Belgium	50,462,441.49
3	Estonia	36,138,728.35
4	France	107,960,853.40
5	Israel	28,769,641.01
6	Latvia	25,445,458.91
7	Lithuania	10,694,842.43
8	Netherlands	188,604,619.40
9	United Kingdom	40,752,476.40
	Total	**1,168,634,839.69**

Source: Adapted from PPRA Monthly Review of Operation activities, 2018

Table 2: Nigeria's Dependence on Foreign Countries for Fuel Importation

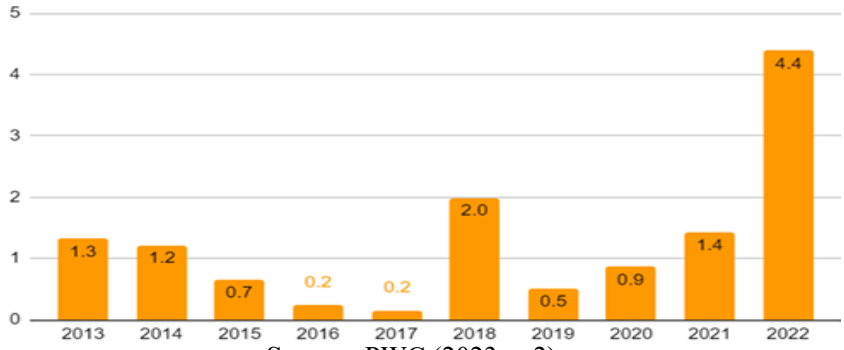
S/No	Imports from oil producing countries	Imports from non-oil producing countries
1	United States of America	Niger Republic
2	United Kingdom	Cote d'Ivoire
3	Venezuela	Belgium
4	Canada	India
5	Brazil	Korea
6	Netherlands	Finland
7	Persian Gulf Countries	Singapore
8		France
9		Israel
10		Portugal
11		Italy
12		Sweden
13		Tunisia and many more

Source: Researchers' compilation from various sources

The above tables show Nigeria's heavy reliance on foreign countries and refineries for her domestic petrol consumption. The sad commentary is that Nigeria buys petrol from non-crude oil producing countries that have functional refineries. In 2020, the Ministry of Petroleum Resources recently represented Nigerian Government in the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the government of Niger Republic for the purpose of importation of petroleum products. The Soraz refinery located in Zinder, Niger Republic has installed daily refining capacity of 20,000 barrels. The domestic requirement/consumption is 5,000 barrels per day, and this leaves a surplus of 15,000 barrels per day, which will be exported to Nigeria (Awojulugbe, 2020). The outsourcing of importation of petroleum products truncates the development of indigenous skill and technology in the downstream sector of oil industry in addition to exporting jobs to other countries.

And due to the vagaries of international petroleum products transactions, including exchange rate instabilities, the cost of importation of refined petroleum products has continued to soar. In response the government has introduced a regime of subsidies to cushion the effect on the consumers. Fuel subsidies became institutionalized in 1977, following the promulgation of the Price Control Act, which made it illegal for some products including petrol to be sold above the regulated price. The law was introduced by the military regime of Olusegun Obasanjo to cushion the effects of the global "Great Inflation" era of the 1970s, caused by a worldwide increase in energy prices (PWC, 2023). The subsidy has however been subjected to the worst forms of abuses running into billions of dollars over the past decades. Between 2006 and 2018, Nigeria spent about N10 trillion (US$24.5 billion) on petroleum subsidies. In 2019 and 2020 about N3 trillion ($7 billion) was spent on subsidies. Cumulatively, "the Nigerian government has spent over USD 30 billion on fuel subsidies over the past 18 years", and "this has had a significant impact on funds available for critical infrastructure and other essential sectors such as education, health, and defence" (PWC, 2023, p.2). Figure 1 highlights Nigeria's spending on fuel subsidy in trillions of naira for a ten-year period, from 2013 to 2022.

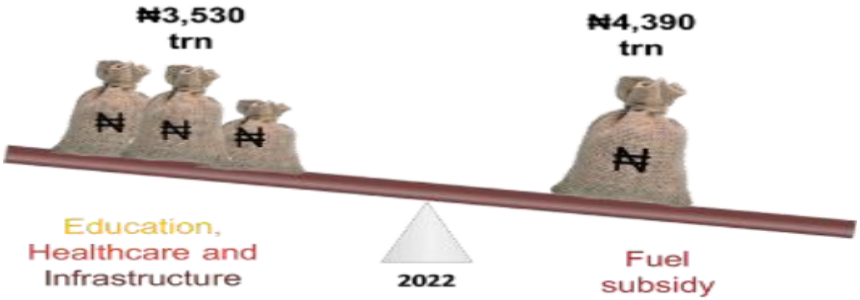
Fig. 1: Nigeria's fuel subsidy payment (N'trillion), 2013-2022



Source: PWC (2023, p.2)

Significantly, figure 2 underscores the real cost of subsidy payments on the critical infrastructure in the country. It shows that whereas subsidy payment gulped the sum of N4,390trillion in 2022, government's total spending in the same year on the three critical sectors: education; healthcare; and infrastructure amounted to only N3,530trillion.

Fig.2: Total fuel subsidy vs government allocation to critical sectors 2022



Source: PWC (2023, p.2)

Meanwhile, a few politically connected people benefit from subsidies by inflating figures for oil imports and over-invoicing the government for the

cost of import. And such players have used their political connections and influence to scuttle attempts to remove the subsidies. This has led to strident calls that the subsidy should be removed so that the country could make progress (Ekpenyong, 2022).

This call for subsidy removal has however been opposed by the same forces that oppose the formalization of the informal or artisanal refineries. To appreciate the power and influence wielded by this network it will be argued here that the Nigerian state which emerged at independence has since been hijacked by hegemonic local bourgeoisie class and their cronies, who directly or indirectly control the country's economic and political system (Hertz, 2001). With the incorporation of Nigeria into the global capitalist order, which was enabled by colonialism, the state was not constructed for the benefit of the people (Onimode, 1983). At the negotiated independence, power was handed to the conservative oligarchs who would be loyal, foster patrons-clients relationship and maintain economic interests especially in the petroleum industry. The Nigerian State which emerged at independence has since continued to play an overarching role in the management and distribution of national resources: it has continued to distribute these resources as prebends to private domestic and international interests to whom it is irrevocably beholden (Joseph, 1991; Azom & Udeoji, 2022).

Petroleum resources have heightened the centrality of the state as the locus of the struggle for resources for personal advancement, social networks and group security, and this explicates the ubiquity of the State in the regulation of the oil industry and the allocation of licenses. As the hegemonic class is in control of the State, and the state is relatively autonomous from the social classes, it is at the same time immersed in struggle and competition (Ekekwe, 1986). With the dominant class in firm control of the state apparatuses including the legislative organ of the government, the National Assembly, it becomes a herculean task to amend or repeal the Petroleum Refining Regulation Act of 1974.

The conservative oligarchs and their cronies who have appropriated the oil industry through the importation of petroleum products under an obnoxious subsidy regime will not compromise their business interests. They resist the repeal of the existing Act and empowering the informal crude oil refiners through legislation. Illuminating the opposition to formalization of the informal crude oil refineries, a representative of the conservative oligarchs, and the Managing Director of Nigerian National Petroleum Company, Mele Kyari, said that "artisanal refineries are mere cooking pots and cannot be licensed and legalized" (*Vanguard*, August 24th, 2022).

Though derogatorily tagged “cooking pots”, the reality is that the products from the informal refineries augment the deficit of the refined products imports by government. These “cooking pots” are happening because the authorities, saddled with the duty to monitor and protect the oil pipelines, have been compromised by the oil theft cartel and owners of the informal refineries. In other words, there is collaboration and connivance between the security forces who often are cronies of the conservative oligarchs (cabal) in the oil industry. As has rightly been argued:

> a sophisticated mafia of powerful Nigerians and foreigners, including top military personnel, government officials, highly placed and retired oil industry personnel, politicians and business persons are the big-time oil thieves and financiers of oil bunkering syndicates, which over the years have sucked out the country’s economy (Amaize, 2022, para.1).

These bunkering cartels working with oil workers steal crude oil directly from major crude oil pipelines while officials pump crude to the different government oil terminals. They are then provided with security on the instruction of top officers to escort their vessels laden with stolen crude till the vessel sail safely out of the country’s territorial waters (Amaize, 2022). On 3 August 2023, for instance, a private security outfit – Tantita Security Services Limited – contracted in 2022 by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation to support the fight against crude oil theft, intercepted an MT PRAISEL vessel carrying 8100 barrels of illegal crude oil, which was being escorted by a Nigerian naval boat led by a senior naval commander (Addeh, 2023). Not even the spirited denial of its involvement in the deal could exonerate the Nigerian Navy from complicity in such acts (Ugwueze et al., 2024). Such large-scale oil theft has led to the loss of billions of dollars in oil revenue by the Nigerian government.

Theoretical framework

To further probe the failure of the Nigerian state to act in the public interest in the face of continued importation of refined petroleum products for domestic consumption, the obvious abuses associated with the fuel subsidy regime, as well as the state’s continued refusal to formalize the informal refineries even in the face of non-functionality of government-owned refineries, this paper anchors analysis on the basic propositions of the

theory of regulatory capture which emphasises the role of interest groups in the formulation of public policy.

Early versions of capture theory were advanced in the 1950s and 60s by political scientists, whose studies of the lifecycle of regulatory agencies disputed the classic "public interest" theory of regulation and challenged its assumption of a benevolent regulator (Etzioni, 2009). These scholars observed a pattern that played out in regulatory agencies as they aged after an initial period of "youth" in which the regulations issued or promoted by a given agency work towards their public interest objectives, the agency enters into a phase of "maturity" marked both by increasing bureaucratization and growing distance from the group(s) initially responsible for setting the regulatory objectives. In this maturing phase, regulatory agencies were found to be drawn ever closer to the industry they were supposed to regulate and away from serving the public interest (Etzioni, 2009). Notable early proponents of the theory included Bernstein (1955), Black (1948), Buchanan and Tullock (1962); Laffont & Tirole (1991), and Levine & Forrence (1990).

The theory emphasises the role of interest groups in the formulation of public policy. One major way regulation is captured is when lobbyists representing industries or other special interests play a key role in drafting the legislation or the rules that implement it. In other words, regulatory capture occurs when a state regulatory agency created to act in the public interest instead advances the commercial or special interests that dominate the industry or sector it is charged with regulating. The basic assumption of this theory is that decisions do not just emerge; that in every decision, certain vested interests must be protected. Stigler (1971) considerably extended the explanatory capacity of the theory by arguing that the regulatory process can be captured by small business industries as well and not just by big businesses as had been previously presumed. Etzioni (2009, p.320) further expounded that "in many instances, capture occurs later, after the rule has already been authored…" and that "regulatory capture often takes place without altering the regulations on the books but by weakening their enforcement".

The theory enables explication of the subtle and subterranean decision making of self –interested individuals in government using agencies to achieve their objectives. It elucidates the framing and enforcement of government policies to benefit certain self-interested public policy makers, who make decisions as government officials or elected representatives. Our choice of this theory is premised on its capacity for broadening our understanding of the power of vested interests (cabals) in government and the informal social networks that influence government decisions with regard

to non-formalisation of informal (artisanal) refineries in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The vested interests in the oil industry oppose oil reform in the form of formalisation of the artisanal refineries and revitalisation of the existing four government-owned refineries, so that their interest in the importation of petroleum products from foreign refineries under opaque subsidy regimes will not be tampered with.

In line with the position of Etzioni (2009), even though the Nigerian government has enacted some laudable legislations like the Local Content Act (2010) and the Petroleum Industry Act (2021) respectively aimed at domesticating the upstream and downstream operations of the oil industry, the implementation of such legislations is often diluted by the capture effect such that the will of the special interests continue to prevail. Part of the manifestations of this capture effect is the continued proliferation of informal artisanal refineries in the face of government's refusal to formalise the practice even while continuing to depend on importation of refined products to meet domestic needs. Ngwu and Nwokedi (2016) had cogently argued that the capture effect is responsible for the marketing of Nigeria's crude on Freight on Board (FOB) basis and the consequent relegation of the more profitable Cost, Freight and Insurance (CFI) mode of crude oil marketing used by most other oil exporting countries. In the next section, we elucidate the complex web of interests that undergird crude oil theft and informal artisanal refining in Nigeria's Niger Delta and then we make a case for the formalisation of the refineries.

Discussion

The imperatives of formalisation of informal oil refineries

The sophisticated nature of oil bunkering operation is a threat to investments, the health of the industry, the environment and the wealth of the nation. Nigeria battles oil theft and artisanal oil refinery operation and loses about 400,000 barrels of crude oil per day, thereby not meeting the OPEC allocated quota of 1.830 million barrels a day (Vanguard, August 24, 2022). The artisanal oil refineries are adjudged unprofessional, operating below international standards and threatening to secure livelihoods and to the environment. But good government initiatives, matched with commitment and operational adjustment, can promote a positive outcome if the refineries now illegal are formalized, licensed and monitored by government institutions (Mamudu et al, 2020). Ignoring the neglect, deprivation, and denial of benefits of oil production to the host communities is a root cause of oil bunkering and artisanal refineries and treating them dismissively by

addressing them in derogatory words like “cooking pots” will lead to metastasis of disproportionate environmental deterioration and economic haemorrhage.

The irony of non-formalisation of informal oil refineries is that as government spends energy and resources to halt their operations, the more they spread and multiply. As using kinetic approach did not stop militancy in Niger Delta, its application will not stop their operations. Moreover, the use of force is in sharp contrast to non-kinetic approach adopted in artisanal gold mining in Zamfara and Kebbi States in Northwest Nigeria under Presidential Gold Mining Development Initiative (PAGMI), whereby the operations of the artisanal gold miners were formalized by the federal government. The PAGMI created an opportunity for formalization and mainstreaming of artisanal gold miners in synergy with Solid Minerals Development Fund, which amounts to double standard. This raises the question of the moral justification of providing the necessary support for the artisanal gold miners to deliver tremendous fiscal, economic benefits to the nation, giving them the economic opportunity to live, while attempting to deny similar reforms to the artisanal oil refiners.

The crude-for-fuel contracts are often not transparent and have been at the centre of corruption allegations, loss of revenue and under-development of human resources in the downstream sector of the oil industry. Nigeria has failed to benefit from high global oil prices largely as a result of the non-formalization of artisanal refineries, non-functional conventional refineries and opaque subsidy regime. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) reported that in 2023 being the last year of the Buhari administration, the government proposed to spend N3.36 trillion on fuel subsidy from January to June 2023 when the subsidy regime was expected to be terminated. Meanwhile, the total expected revenue from crude oil for the entire years was a mere N2.23 trillion (NESG, 2024). In 2024, the projected expenditure on petrol subsidy was 5.4 trillion naira (Geiger, 2024) irrespective of the claim by the Bola Tinubu administration that fuel subsidy had been scrapped. To address the budgetary deficits arising from dwindling oil revenue and the continued subsidization of imported petroleum products, the Tinubu administration planned to borrow an extra 6.6 trillion naira in the 2024 budget cycle (Geiger, 2024).

The above indicates that while crude oil revenue is in arithmetic progression, the subsidy spending is in geometric progression, with financial and budgetary deficit to the economy. Meanwhile the Bretton Woods institutions, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, had

admonished the Federal Government to retrace steps on subsidizing petrol arguing that subsidy policy is not targeted at those in need but the rich.

Subsidy notwithstanding, in refining the crude in foreign refineries, the government pays both export and import duties, in contrast to engaging the artisans, requiring no port charges. The cost of hiring vessels will sometimes be more than the cost of the product on the vessel, and whether the crude oil is sold or not, the days the vessels are hired will bring costs (*Vanguard*, March 22, 2022). Engaging Nigerians in the field as artisanal refiners will promote the earning of honest livings. Informal refineries represent an opportunity that could be harnessed by government to generate jobs and social opportunities in an environment of high unemployment and poverty.

Making a case for the informal oil refineries, the former Senior Special Adviser to President Buhari on Niger Delta Affairs, Senator Ita Enang, argued that some of the artisanal refiners should produce chains of petroleum products and supply them for consumption in the country. Formalizing and licensing the artisanal refiners, he said, would save foreign exchange, boost revenue, reduce the nation's reliance on imported products, make redundant the oil subsidy, prevent the vandalizing of pipelines, and encourage private investors since the start-up capital is low compared to conventional refineries (Enang 2022). He further suggested that informal refineries in clusters could be profitable if sited close to a crude oil production facility from which they would buy and receive their feedstock. They would concentrate on a particular product, with an off taker lifting the product from the site. The relatively small investment cost would make it easier for private investors to form co-operatives, access funds and enter the refining business compared to the full-scale refineries. The legalized and licensed informal refineries would assist the government by generating employment for the unemployed youths, and the nation generally by reducing the high incidence of environmental pollution and degradation.

Similarly, the former Group Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Maikanti Baru, during his tenure in 2017 indicated that government planned to set up modular refineries in the Niger Delta region, which would incorporate militant youths and the operators of illegal refineries into the formal economy. Baru explained that the government planned to organise the youths into consortia, each consortium refining 1000 barrels of crude daily. Such an arrangement, he argued, would not only provide employment but would, more strategically, lead to a reduction in crime including rampant crude oil theft, and also reduce

environmental and ecological damage and degradation caused by the activities of oil thieves (BusinessDay, 2017). Baru however cautioned that formalising the informal refineries would be a delicate process which must be carefully planned and meticulously executed in order for it to achieve the intended goals.

A 2017 BusinessDay editorial similarly advocated for the formalisation of artisanal refining, arguing that the projected growth in Nigeria's petroleum product consumption cannot be met even if all the four state-owned refineries with their combined 445,000 bbl/day refining capacity were to go into full operation. The paper also projected that not even the completion and activation of the 650,000 bbl/day capacity Dangote refinery, which was then under construction, would meet domestic product needs. The paper, therefore, made a cogent case for bridging the gap by formalizing artisanal refiners, especially in the creeks and remote locations in the Niger Delta, where difficult terrain and poor infrastructure make it nearly impossible to run the normal petroleum product supply chain (BusinessDay, 2017).

The Nigerian government has however been most reluctant to heed this call due to the intricate web of interests between the ruling elite and the special interests that have continued to hold the oil industry captive. Table 3 highlights the patronage network between the oil importers and Nigeria's ruling elite.

Table 3: Oil importers & patronage linkages with the Nigerian ruling class

S/No	Fuel Company Importers	Patronage Connections to the Ruling Class
1	Forte Oil Plc.	Forte Oil is owned by Olufemi Otedola, the scion of former Lagos State governor, Chief Michael Otedola. Chairman of Geregu Power plant, a major financier of People's Democratic Party and a close ally of former Presidents Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan.
2	Consolidated Oil (Conoil)	Mike Adenuga owns Consolidated Oil, but he is widely believed to be a front for General

		Babangida. Conoil's Headquarters is in Minna but head office is in Lagos.
3	Oando Oil Plc.	Oando Oil is owned by Adewale Tinubu, a nephew and relation of Sen. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, former Governor of Lagos State, and the Presidential candidate of All Progressive Congress.
4	Prudent Energy & Services Limited.	Alhaji Abdul Wasiu is the Chairman of Prudent Energy Ltd, one of the leading downstream oil and gas companies in Nigeria. He is a silent financier of All Progressive Congress. NNPC granted his company Prudent Energy license to lift 950,000 barrels of crude oil daily, in a two-year contract between 2018 and 2020. He is a major beneficiary of fuel for crude contract.
5	Cavendish Petroleum	Cavendish petroleum is owned by Alhaji Mai Daribe, the Borno Patriarch.
6	MRS Oil Plc	MRS Oil Plc, formerly Texaco is a fully integrated oil marketer. A leading downstream player with various positions in Nigeria oil industry. The Group Chief Operating Officer is Ms Amina Maina who is widely believed to be connected to the Presidency.
7	South Atlantic Petroleum Limited (SAPETRO)	SAPETRO was created in 1995 by General T. Y. Danjuma. T. Y. Danjuma is also the Chairman of ENI Nigeria Limited.
8	International Petroleum Development Company (AMNI)	Alhaji (Colonel) Sani Bello, a Fulani from Kontagora, Niger State, is the Chairman of AMNI. Alhaji Bello's son – Abu is marred to General Abdusalami Abubakar's eldest daughter.
9	Obat Oil and Gas Limited	Oba Obateru Akinrutan established Obat Oil Limited in 1981. A first-class influential traditional ruler of Ugbo Kingdom in Ondo State. Obat Oil is a major oil marketing

		company, with a tank farm that holds about 65million litres of petrol.
10	Rain Oil and Gas Limited	Rain Oil and Gas Limited is an integrated company established in 1997 by Chief Gabriel Ogbechie A prominent player in Nigerian downstream sector of oil and gas, and majority stakeholder in Eterna Oil. Its tank farm holds 50million litres of petrol.
11	Focus Energy	Focus Energy is a partnership with BG Group, a British Oil concern. Sen. Andy Uba, who was a former Special Assistant to President Obasanjo has major stakes in Focus Energy.
12	Cleanwater Consortium	Cleanwater Consortium, consisting Cleanwater Refinery and RivGas Petroleum and Gas Company, is believed to be owned by Peter Odili. Odili's brother in law. Okey Ezenwa, is the Vice Chairman of Cleanwater Consortium.
13	Starcrest Energy Nigeria Limited	Starcrest Energy Nigeria Limited is owned by Sir Emeka Offor, a very close political ally of Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan.
14	Capital Oil and Gas Limited	Capital Oil and Gas Limited was founded in 2001 by Senator Ifeanyi Ubah. Ubah is an entrepreneur, a businessman and the Chief Executive Officer of Capital Oil. The tank farm facility holds about 20% of NNPC fuel importation.

Source: Researchers' compilation from various sources.

The above table clearly illustrates the unwholesome connections between petroleum product importers and Nigeria's ruling elite whose responsibility it is to regulate the operations of Nigeria's oil industry, including ensuring the functionality of the four state-owned refineries. We thus argue that the elite have been unable to discharge their regulatory responsibilities due in large part to this capture effect. We further contend that the capture effect has also carried over into the quest for the formalisation of informal refineries in the Nigeria Delta which the ruling elite have continued to resist even while

admitting that doing so would benefit the Nigerian economy in no small measure. A clear case of such admission by the ruling elite was the earlier cited position of Maikanti Baru, then GMD of NNPC, that by formalising their operations through the establishment of modular refineries in the Niger Delta, the government will not only be alleviating rampant unemployment in the region but will also, in a more strategic sense, curb crude oil theft and other forms of crime, and by extension boost the economy. Of course, that plan did not materialize due to the interplay of forces already described and so the government has continued to prioritise largely ineffectual kinetic measures to combat informal oil refining. This clearly underscores the capture effect in Nigeria's downstream oil industry. Nor is it limited to the downstream sector as the submission by Ngwu and Nwokedi (2016) above has shown.

Conclusion

We examined the bewildering contradiction between the refusal of successive Nigerian governments to formalise and legalise artisanal oil refining in the Niger Delta and the perennial dependence of the country on imports of petroleum products to meet domestic demand resulting from the persistent non-functionality of the four state-owned refineries. We contrasted these with the government's repeated refusal to promote local content in the nation's oil industry, and concluded that the refusal of the government to formalise the operations of the artisanal refineries inundating the creeks of the Niger Delta and the non-functionality of the state-owned refineries are both the cumulative effects of the capture of Nigeria's oil industry by special interests who have effectively undermined the regulation and operations of the industry. Such interests consist of a complex web of actors that includes, but is not limited to, high-profile public functionaries in league with powerful businesses and transnational entities with holdings in offshore oil refining operations.

We argue for the formalisation of the activities of the artisanal refineries within the context of fundamental reforms in Nigeria's downstream sector. But since we are under no illusion that such reforms will come easily because of the coincidence of interest between the agents of the state and special interests engaged in the illegal oil bunkering that supplies the artisanal refineries with their stocks, we believe that the solution to the problem of informal oil refining and associated oil-related crimes in Nigeria is to be sought in a radical transformation in the character of the Nigerian state. It has become mindlessly predatory and has abdicated its primary

responsibility of ensuring the welfare of its citizens. We add that such transformation can only be contemplated through the agency of the country's intellectuals working as catalysts for societal awakening.

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Determinants of Foreign Direct Investment Inflows in the East African Community States: the Roles of Political Stability, Economic Growth and Trade Openness

Osman Sayid Hasan Musse
SIMAD University, Somalia
osmansayid@gmail.com

Abdelghani Echchabi
International Agriculture University, Uzbekistan
abdelghani.mo@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the effect of political stability on foreign direct investment inflows in the East African Community (EAC), alongside other key macroeconomic factors (GDP, trade openness, exchange rate, and inflation). Using panel data models, we analyse annual data from seven EAC states over a 10-year period (2013–2022). Findings reveal that while political stability is positively correlated with FDI inflows, it lacks statistical significance. Economic growth, on the other hand, emerges as a key significant driver of FDI, confirming that a strong economy boosts investor confidence. Trade openness is also significantly and positively associated with FDI inflows, underscoring its role in attracting capital, facilitating technology transfer, and enhancing knowledge flows into the region. Exchange rates show a positive and insignificant association with FDI inflows, while inflation similarly exhibits a positive but insignificant correlation, suggesting that moderate inflation can attract investment, but prolonged high inflation may deter foreign investors. This study is unique in its focus on political stability as a determinant of FDI inflows within a region that includes Somalia, Congo and South Sudan, three of the thirteen most violence-affected countries globally. The study recommends ways that the EAC should address the root causes of political instability, including policies aimed at reducing poverty, combating corruption, and expanding opportunities for youth and marginalized communities. Member states should also advocate policies that facilitate movement of goods, services, and assets to enhance regional trade integration and attract foreign investments.

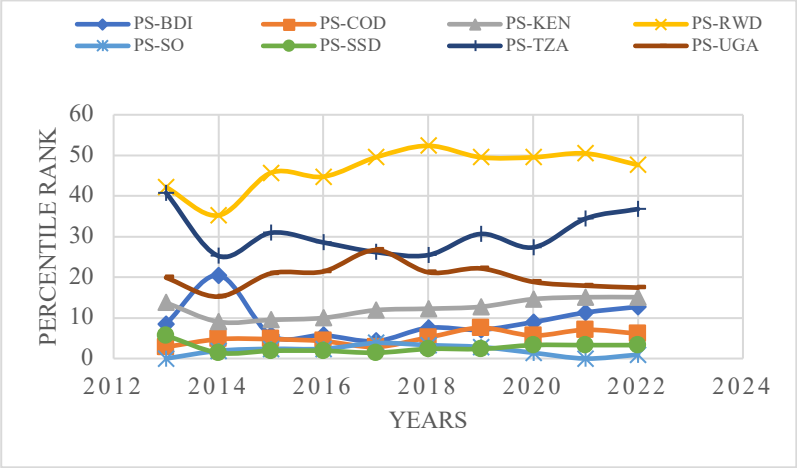
***Keywords*: p**olitical stability, foreign direct investment, East African Community, economic growth, Somalia, panel analysis

Introduction

Attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) is a crucial objective for countries seeking to enhance their economic development and global competitiveness (Bertrand et al., 2024). Several key factors influence a nation's capacity to attract FDI, with political stability and the absence of violence (PS), trade openness (TO), gross domestic product (GDP), inflation rate (Inf) and exchange rate (ER), standing out as the most impactful. Political stability and the absence of violence or terrorism are particularly important for attracting FDI (Ozbozkurt & Satrovic, 2019). They evaluated the risk of PS, all of which pose significant risks to potential investors. Instability often arises from factors such as failed transitions of power, armed conflicts, violent demonstrations, social unrest, and international tensions (Kaufmann et al., 2010). Additionally, internal conflicts, ethnic tensions, terrorism, and civil wars further contribute to political instability (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2023). As a result, states with stable political environments will attract FDI, offering investors greater security and promoting stronger economic growth and infrastructure development. This interplay between political and economic factors not only influences a country's ability to attract FDI but also shapes its overall economic landscape and long-term prospects for growth (Bertrand et al., 2024).

Globally, the rise of violent extremism has led to widespread loss of life across nations, faiths, and ethnic groups. Various countries have experienced over 500 deaths due to violence, with the number of affected countries rising from 5 in 2013 to 11 in 2014, representing a 120% rise compared to the previous year. Newly affected states included Somalia, Ukraine, Yemen, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Cameroon (UNDP, 2016). Among these, Somalia and South Sudan are members of the EAC region, underscoring the need to examine how PS impacts FDI inflows in the region. Moreover, political stability is essential for fostering business confidence, promoting social cohesion, and ensuring sustainable economic progress, especially in fragile or conflict-affected areas. Within the EAC region, countries such as Somalia, South Sudan, and Congo consistently rank among the lowest according to the PS metric data.

Figure 1 Historical data on political stability across the EAC

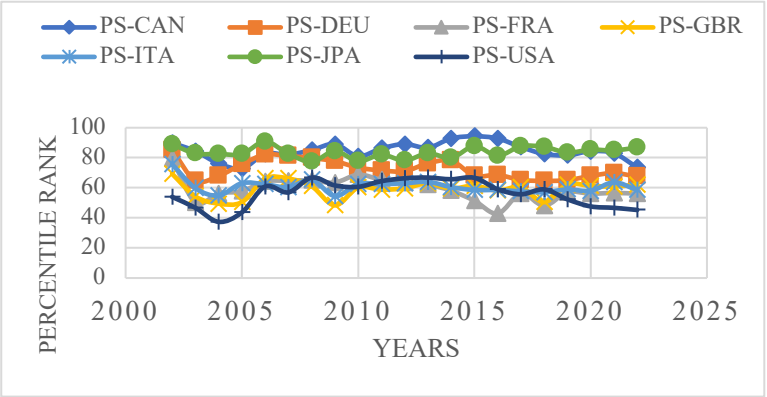


Source: World bank database: World Development Indicators

As Figure 1 shows, Rwanda has outperformed the other EAC members, maintaining an average percentile rank of 46 and surpassing the 50th percentile between 2021 and 2022. Tanzania follows with an average of 30, reaching its highest rank of 37 in 2022. Uganda comes in third, with an average percentile rank of 17, though it has shown a decline over the past four years. Somalia holds the lowest position within the EAC, with a percentile rank of 1.9 out of 100, showing a steady decline from 2020 to 2022. This is attributed to the persistence of terrorism and frequent terrorist attacks. South Sudan follows closely, averaging a 2.12 percentile rank, largely due to its ongoing civil war, although it has shown slight improvement between 2020 and 2022. The Congo holds a 4.8 percentile rank due to similar factors of internal conflict and political instability. Burundi, with a 9 percentile rank, has seen improvements over the past three years, while Kenya ranks fourth in the region with 12 percent, showing gradual progress and reaching its highest rank of 15 percent in the past three years. The data suggest that the EAC will continue to face challenges in attracting FDI, a critical driver of economic growth and infrastructure development. To provide a broader perspective on political stability in the EAC, it is useful to compare its Political Stability (PS) metric with that of the G7 nations—

Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. While the two regions differ significantly in various economic, social, and political aspects, this comparison serves to contextualize the EAC's stability within a global framework. Figure 2 shows the percentile rankings for political stability in the G7 over a 21-year period (2002–2022).

Figure 2 Historical data on political stability for the G7 nations



Source: World bank database: World Development Indicators

In the G7, Canada and Japan maintain the highest rankings, averaging over 80 percent in PS metric, based on a percentile scale out of 100. Germany follows with an average of 72 percent. The USA ranks lowest among the G7, with an average of 56 percent, due to factors such as the September 11 attacks, protests following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, and political violence after the 2020 presidential election. France and the United Kingdom hold similar rankings, both averaging around 60 percent, influenced by events such as the terrorist attacks in 2015–2016 in France and the London and Manchester bombings in the UK. Italy ranks slightly higher, averaging 61 percent on the 100-percentile scale for PS. Overall, G7 countries maintain PS levels significantly above 50 percent, demonstrating a stark contrast to the EAC region. Therefore, examining the impact of PS on FDI inflows, alongside other key macroeconomic variables, is essential, especially given that the region includes countries like Somalia, South Sudan, and Congo, which rank among the lowest globally in terms of

political stability and are significantly affected by political instability and terrorism. Furthermore, the study highlights a scarcity of research directly linking political stability to FDI inflows—a crucial resource for economic development. Thus, this study aims to examine the influence of PS on FDI inflows in the EAC, while also considering other key economic indicators i.e., economic growth, trade openness, exchange rates, and inflation. The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review. Section 3 outlines the methodology. Section 4 analyses the findings and the final section concludes the paper.

Literature review

Political Stability and FDI

Political stability and the absence of violence (PS) are critical factors in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows and promoting economic development (Okara, 2023; Weerachai, 2024). Numerous studies suggest that nations with high ratios of PS tend to attract more FDI, and it has been revived as a key driver of economic development, while those with significant political risk may experience reduced FDI inflows (Weerachai, 2024). Political instability creates an environment of uncertainty, deterring investors who fear for the safety of their investments and the potential return on investment (Saurav & Kuo, 2020).

Korsah et al. (2022), in their study of FDI drivers in West Africa from 1989 to 2018, used fixed- and random-effects econometric regression models but found that PS was not a significant determinant of FDI inflows in that region. In contrast, Chandra and Handoyo (2020) examined the determinants of FDI inflows in 31 Asian countries between 2002 and 2017, considering factors like political stability, inflation rate, trade openness, exchange rate, market size, and interest rate. Using the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM), they suggested that PS has a positive effect on FDI inflows. Brada et al. (2003) studied the impacts of political instability and economic transition on FDI in Central Europe and the Balkans. Their research revealed that both political instability and economic transition negatively impacted FDI inflows. They concluded that the restoration of peace and the reduction of tensions in these regions would likely result in increased FDI inflows, highlighting the importance of PS in attracting investment. Supporting Chandra and Handoyo's (2020) findings, Meressa (2022) analysed FDI inflows to 17 COMESA member countries from 2002

to 2016, using panel data estimators, and found that political stability had a positive and significant impact on FDI inflows.

Conversely, Le et al. (2023) examined the relationship between PS and FDI inflows in 25 Asia-Pacific countries the period from 1990 to 2020 and using dynamic system GMM, and found a negative impact of PS on FDI inflows in this region. Similarly, Maulidiyah and Fuddin (2024) investigated the role of political stability and macroeconomic factors in attracting FDI inflows to five ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) over a 20-year period using panel data regression. Their findings revealed that PS is positively and significantly correlated with FDI inflows in these nations. Drawing from these varied results, the following hypothesis was developed: Political stability is positively correlated with foreign direct investment inflows in the EAC.

Economic Growth and FDI

Economic growth, typically measured by gross domestic product (GDP), is a key driver of foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, as it presents location advantages and builds investor confidence. Strong economic performance signals to foreign investors that a country has a stable and expanding market, which enhances the potential for profitable investments. Ghazalian (2023) examined the short-run and long-run effects of economic growth on FDI inflows using the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM) system estimator for dynamic panel models. His study revealed that economic growth is positively and significantly affected FDI inflows. He emphasized the importance of growth-enhancing policies that align with the economic and geo-economic contexts of host nations to encourage increased FDI inflows, aligning with Othman's (2022) findings on the positive relationship between GDP growth and FDI inflows in the Arab region. Supporting this view, Chandra and Handoyo (2020) also found a positive relationship between economic growth and FDI inflows in their study of 31 Asian countries from 2002 to 2017. Using the GMM method for dynamic panels, they concluded that economic growth is crucial factor in attracting FDI. Similarly, Demirhan and Masca (2008) investigated the drivers of FDI inflows in 38 developing countries between 2000 and 2004. Their results suggested that economic growth is positively and significantly correlated with FDI inflows. Meressa (2022) reached the same conclusion in a study of 17 COMESA member countries from 2002 to 2016, suggesting that higher economic growth leads to increased FDI inflows.

In the context of Central Asia, Ashurov et al. (2020) studied FDI determinants in Central Asia Countries, covering the period from 2000 to 2017, also using the GMM system. They found that economic growth positively and significantly correlated with FDI inflows in these nations, further supporting the notion that strong economic performance attracts foreign investment. Given the consistent evidence from these studies, this hypothesis is formulated: Economic growth is positively correlated with foreign direct investment inflows in the EAC.

Trade Openness and FDI

Trade openness, measured by the total value of a country's exports and imports as a percentage of its GDP, is a critical factor influencing the economic dynamics of modern nations (BIS, 2015; Musse et al., 2024). The relationship between trade openness and FDI inflows is particularly crucial, with studies suggesting that trade openness tends to benefit countries with higher initial income per capita, higher levels of FDI, and greater gross fixed capital formation (Wiredu et al., 2020).

Chandra and Handoyo (2020) examined the determinants of FDI inflows in 31 Asian countries from 2002 to 2017, considering factors such as political stability, inflation, trade openness, exchange rates, market size, and interest rates. They discovered a positive association is recorded between trade openness and FDI inflows. Supporting this conclusion, Demirhan and Masca (2008) investigated FDI drivers in 38 developing countries from 2000 to 2004, finding that trade openness is positively and significantly correlated with FDI inflows. Similarly, Meressa (2022) studied the factors influencing FDI variability in 17 COMESA member countries from 2002 to 2016. The results aligned with previous studies, indicating that trade openness is positively and significantly correlated with FDI inflows.

In the context of Central Asia, Ashurov et al. (2020) investigated the determinants of FDI in Central Asia Countries from 2000 to 2017, using the GMM system. Their findings confirmed that trade openness has a positive and significant effect on FDI inflows. Further support for this positive correlation was found by Le et al. (2023), who examined the effects of political stability and FDI inflows in 25 Asia-Pacific countries from 1990 to 2020, using a dynamic GMM system. They concluded that trade openness positively influences FDI inflows in the Asia-Pacific region. Additionally, Asbullah et al. (2022), in their study of FDI determinants from previous literature, reached a similar conclusion, affirming that trade openness significantly boosts FDI inflows.

However, in contrast to above findings, Mudiyanselage (2021) explored the relationship between trade openness and FDI in Romania over the period from 1997 to 2019. The results showed that trade openness had a negative and significant relationship with FDI inflows in both the short and long term, contradicting the conclusions of earlier studies. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Musse et al. (2024) on the East African Community (EAC), although their results were not statistically significant. In light with the majority of evidence from selected studies, the following hypothesis is formulated: Trade openness is positively correlated with foreign direct investment inflows in the EAC.

Exchange Rate and FDI

Exchange rate fluctuations significantly influence FDI inflows (Tan et al., 2021). A depreciation of the domestic currency can make local assets cheaper for foreign investors, thereby encouraging FDI inflows by lowering the cost of investment (Bayoumi, 1996). This suggests that exchange rate volatility will have a positive impact on FDI inflows. Asiamah et al. (2018) studied the factors determining FDI inflows in Ghana from 1990 to 2015, using Johansen's cointegration approach within a vector autoregressive framework. Their findings reveal that exchange rate fluctuations have a statistically significant negative effect on FDI inflows in both the short and long term, consistent with results observed in East African countries (Tegegne, 2024). They suggest that the government should employ pragmatic measures i.e., exchange rate targeting strategies, to stabilize the exchange rate and enhance FDI attraction.

Conversely, Korsah et al. (2022) explored the drivers of FDI inflows in West African regions from 1989 to 2018, using fixed and random effects econometric models. Their research found that exchange rate volatility is positively and significantly correlated with FDI inflows, implying that exchange rate depreciation could stimulate an increase in FDI inflows. They recommend adopting a stable exchange rate regime to attract FDI. Therefore, this hypothesis is formulated: Exchange rate is positively correlated with foreign direct investment inflows in the EAC.

Inflation Rate and FDI

The inflation rate is a critical macroeconomic variable that can significantly impact foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows (Islam and Beloucif, 2023). It reflects the general rise in prices of goods and services over time, which can affect a country's economic stability and attractiveness

to foreign investors (Oner, 2024). High inflation often signals instability, reducing investor confidence and deterring FDI.

In theory, high inflation can discourage foreign investment, as it often leads to local currency depreciation, reducing the value of assets tied to the local currency compared to foreign currencies (Takefman, 2022). Asiamah et al. (2018) examined the factors influencing FDI inflows in Ghana from 1990 to 2015 using Johansen's cointegration approach within a vector autoregressive framework. Their findings indicate that inflation has a negative and significant impact on FDI inflows in Ghana.

Similarly, Chandra and Handoyo (2020) studied FDI determinants in 31 Asian countries from 2002 to 2017 using the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM) and found that inflation negatively affects FDI inflows, deterring foreign investors. Demirhan and Masca (2008) also supported these findings in their analysis of 38 developing countries from 2000 to 2004, concluding that higher inflation rates are negatively correlated with FDI inflows. Further supporting this view, Asbullah et al. (2022) reviewed literature on FDI determinants, emphasizing that high inflation erodes returns on investments, leading to reduced FDI inflows.

However, Maulidiyah and Fuddin (2024) presented a contrasting view in their study of five ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) over 20 years, finding that inflation positively affected FDI inflows in these countries. This divergence suggests that the effect of inflation on FDI may differ based on regional and economic contexts. Given the majority of findings, this study proposes the following hypothesis: Inflation rate is negatively associated with foreign direct investment inflows in the EAC.

Research methodology

This section outlines the data collection process, target population, and sample selection procedure.

Data and study period

This study utilizes yearly base data sourced from the World Bank's database, focusing on six key variables: Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, political stability and absence of violence (PS), economic growth (GDP), trade openness (TO), exchange rate (ER), and inflation rate (Inf). FDI and GDP data are kept in absolute numerical values without scaling, while TO, ER, and Inf are expressed as percentages or ratios. The analysis spans

from 2013 to 2022, chosen based on data availability. The data can be freely downloaded in Excel format from the World Bank's website.

Sample size

The population for this study includes all eight member countries of the EAC region. However, South Sudan is dropped from the sample due to limited data availability on adopted economic indicators i.e., GDP, inflation rate, and trade openness. Consequently, the final sample comprises seven countries—Congo, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda, and Tanzania—representing 87% of the target population (Musse et al., 2024).

Methodology

The study employs a balanced panel data, a cross-sectional time-series dataset. It also known as longitudinal data (Musse et al., 2024). This approach is advantageous as it increases the sample size and enhances the ability to analyse changes over time with the purpose of identifying the factors affecting foreign direct investment inflows, specifically examining the impact of political stability, economic growth, trade openness, exchange rate, and inflation rate on FDI inflows of the EAC. The study utilizes pooled ordinary least squares (OLS), random and fixed effects models. Diagnostic tests are performed to determine the most suitable model. The Breusch-Pagan Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test is used to choose between the random effects model and pooled OLS, while the Hausman test assists in selecting between fixed and random effects models (Gujarati, 2009). Based on these diagnostics, three models are formulated for analysis.

Model 1: Pooled OLS

$$FDI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{PS}_{i1} + \beta_2 \mathrm{GDP}_{i2} + \beta_3 \mathrm{TO}_{i3} + \beta_4 \mathrm{ER}_{i4} + \beta_4 \mathrm{Inf}_{i4} + \varepsilon_i$$

Model 2: Random Effects Model

$$FDI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{PS}_{i1} + \beta_2 \mathrm{GDP}_{i2} + \beta_3 \mathrm{TO}_{i3} + \beta_4 \mathrm{ER}_{i4} + \beta_4 \mathrm{Inf}_{i4} + \mu_{it} + \varepsilon_i$$

Model 3: Fixed Effects Model

$$FDI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{PS}_{i1} + \beta_2 \mathrm{GDP}_{i2} + \beta_3 \mathrm{TO}_{i3} + \beta_4 \mathrm{ER}_{i4} + \beta_4 \mathrm{Inf}_{i4} + \mu_{it} + \varepsilon_i$$

Where $\mu_{it} + \varepsilon_i = \omega_{it}$. ω_{it} is the error component which consists of cross-section error component and time series error component (Gujarati, 2009).

Table 1 summarizes the variable names, symbols, and their corresponding measurements

Variable Names	Symbols	Measurements
Foreign direct investment inflows	FDI	It is referred to direct equity investment flows in the economy.
Political stability and the absence of violence	PS	It assesses the likelihood of PS. The percentile rank represents the country's standing relative to all other countries, with 0 indicating the lowest rank and 100 representing the highest.
Gross domestic product	GPD	It is calculated by dividing the gross domestic product by the midyear population.
Trade openness	TO	It is the total of exports and imports as a percentage of GDP.
Exchange rate	ER	It is the exchange rate that is set by national authorities, calculated as an annual average derived from monthly averages.
Inflation rate	Inf	It is the annual growth rate of the GDP implicit deflator, reflects the overall rate of price change within the economy.

Source: World bank database: World Development Indicators

Results

Descriptive statistics

This section presents the descriptive statistics, covering the explanatory and response variables across the EAC. The variables analysed include FDI inflows, PS, GDP, TO, ER, and Inf. Table 2 displays the number of observations, means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum values for each variable, based on a dataset comprising 70 observations per variable (Nigussie, 2016).

Table 2 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
FDI	70	715,000,000	534,000,000	55420.36	2,090,000,000
PS	70	18.02403	15.25695	0	52.35849
GDP	70	814.625	467.2208	216.8274	2099.302
TO	70	48.34875	18.84684	22.24029	95.83957
ER	70	4726.872	7810.882	86.12288	26009
Inf	70	6.635204	7.001374	-2.850859	43.06866

Source (s): Authors' calculation

FDI inflows within the region exhibit an average of 715 million USD, with a significant standard deviation of 534 million. The FDI values range from a minimum of 55.42 million USD to a maximum of 2.09 trillion USD, indicating considerable volatility and variation in FDI levels across member states. This disparity can be attributed to a combination of political, economic, and social factors. Political stability and the absence of violence (PS) are measured by percentile rank, where 0 represents the lowest level of stability and 100 the highest. The region's average PS is 18.02, with a standard deviation of 15.26, reflecting notable disparities in political stability across member countries. Somalia ranks the lowest, with an average PS of 1.89, attributed to internal conflicts, terrorism attacks, and tensions between the central and state governments. The Congo follows closely, with an average PS of 4.83, due to ongoing internal civil and political instability. Rwanda, in contrast, exhibits the highest average PS at 46.69, surpassing 50 percent in 2018 and 2021, demonstrating strong political stability and serving as a model for the region. Tanzania ranks second, with a PS average of 30.64, reflecting relatively stable governance. The average GDP per capita for the EAC is 814.63 USD, with a standard deviation of 467.22. GDP values range from 216.83 USD to 2,099.30 USD, illustrating significant disparities in economic growth across the region.

Trade openness (TO) averages 48.35 percent of GDP, with a standard deviation of 18.85 percent. The minimum TO is 22.24 percent, while the maximum is 95.84 percent, indicating substantial differences in trade openness levels across the region. Exchange rates show significant variation, with an average of 4,726.87 per USD and a high standard deviation of 7,810.88. Exchange rates range from 86.12 per USD to 26,009 per USD, highlighting the differences in currency strength and valuation across the member states. Inflation rates within the region average 6.64 percent, with a standard deviation of 7.00 percent. The inflation rates range from -2.85 percent to 43.07 percent, pointing to considerable inflationary volatility in the region. This analysis highlights the significant diversity in economic performance, political stability, and macroeconomic conditions across the EAC members, reflecting both opportunities and challenges for the region.

Correlation Matrix and Multicollinearity Analysis

The correlation coefficient varies from -1 to +1, with -1 indicating a perfect negative correlation, +1 representing a perfect positive correlation, and 0 signifying no correlation (Team, 2024). The table also includes the findings of the multicollinearity test, which employs the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to identify any multicollinearity among the explanatory variables. (Oliveira et al., 2022). Multicollinearity arises when explanatory variables are highly correlated, potentially skewing the accuracy of regression estimates. The VIF measures the extent to which the variance of a regression coefficient is inflated due to this multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2018).

In the test results, the exchange rate (ER) has the highest VIF at 1.64, indicating a relatively low level of multicollinearity compared to typical thresholds. Inflation (Inf) shows the lowest VIF at 1.06. The average VIF for the variables is 1.45, indicating that overall, the multicollinearity among the independent variables is modest. This level of correlation does not require any corrective action, as it is within acceptable limits for regression analysis. Overall, the correlation matrix and VIF analysis confirm that while some relationships exist between the variables, multicollinearity is not significant enough to impact the reliability of the regression model.

Table 3 Correlation matrix & multicollinearity analysis

Variables	ln_FDI	ln_PSP	ln_GDP	ln_TO	ln_ER	ln_Inf	VIF
ln_FDI	1						
ln_PS	0.1037	1					1.53
ln_GDP	0.6269	0.3978	1				1.53
ln_TO	0.4159	-0.469	-0.1132	1			1.46
ln_ER	-0.0325	-0.3886	-0.504	0.3808	1		1.64
ln_Inf	-0.0355	-0.1067	-0.0861	0.1167	-0.0803	1	1.06
Mean VIF							1.45

Source (s): Authors' calculation

Regression analysis

This section presents the regression analysis conducted to assess the determinants of FDI in EAC. To achieve this objective, the study utilizes panel methods, including pooled OLS, fixed effects, and random effects. The focus is particularly on examining the impact of PS on FDI inflows, alongside other key variables i.e., GDP, TO, ER, and inf, covering the period from 2013 to 2022. Table 4 presents the regression results for the various models. The pooled OLS model shows an R-squared value of 0.6652 and an adjusted R-squared of 0.6368, indicating a strong fit to the data. This suggests that 66.52% of the variation in FDI inflows can be attributed to the independent variables. In contrast, the random effects model has an overall R-squared value of 0.6302, while the fixed effects model yields an R-squared value of 0.2558. These findings indicate that 63.02% and 25.58% of the changes in FDI inflows can be explained by the explanatory variables in the random and fixed effects models, respectively (Musse et al., 2024). The Breusch-Pagan Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test indicates that the random effects model is more suitable than the pooled OLS, with a p-value of 0.0000, well below the 0.05 significance level. Additionally, the Hausman test yields a p-value of 0.3191, suggesting that the random effects model is preferable

over the fixed effects model. Therefore, the random effects model is chosen as the most appropriate method for analysing the impact of political stability and other economic factors on FDI inflows in the EAC region (Musse et al., 2024).

Table 4 Regression results

Models	Pooled OLS	Random effects Model	Fixed effects Model
Variables	FDI	FDI	FDI
C	-8.14212(-2.93) ***	-4.86765(0.91)	1.314532(0.17)
ln_PS	0.2170574(1.19)	0.4252577(1.39)	0.7098206(1.75) *
ln_GDP	2.423643(7.91) ***	1.836803(2.90) ***	2.099665(1.70) *
ln_TO	2.498292(5.21) ***	3.036188(4.99) ***	2.805573(4.01) ***
ln_ER	0.2595861(2.1) ***	0.011515(0.04)	-1.051927(1.28)
ln_Inf	0.002021(0.01)	-0.1130841(0.83)	-0.0612319(0.42)
R-squared	0.6652	0.6302	0.2558
Dj R-squared	0.6368		
Prob > F	0.0000	0.0000	0.0008
Mean VIF	1.45		
B-P-ML Test: Random Vs. Pooled	Prob > chibar2=0.0000		
Sigma_u		1.0203101	2.4065924
Sigma_e		0.83233066	0.83233066
Rho		0.60043171	0.89316393
F-Test			
Hausman-Test FE vs. RE		Prob>chi2 =0.3191	
Chosen Model		Random Effects Model	

Source (s): Authors' calculation

The random effects model reveals a positive but statistically insignificant correlation between political stability (PS) and foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows in the EAC. This outcome can be attributed to the region's diverse political landscape. While countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Uganda enjoy relatively stable political environments, the EAC also includes fragile states like Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi, which face political instability, ongoing civil conflicts, and violence and terrorism. This disparity in political stability across member states may explain the statistically insignificant effect, despite the overall positive trend.

While the findings suggest that the region can still attract FDI, they also underscore the vulnerability of economic development to various forms of political violence and instability (Okara, 2023). This result aligns with previous studies by Chandra and Handoyo (2020), Meressa (2022), and Maulidiyah and Fuddin (2024), all of which found a positive and significant relationship between PS and FDI inflows. However, it contradicts Le et al. (2023), who identified a negative and significant relationship between the two variables. Overall, the result supports the hypothesis that political stability is positively related with FDI flows in the EAC. Economic growth often serves as indicators of political stability, which is a crucial factor in attracting FDI. Investors seek environments where their capital is secure, regulatory frameworks are predictable, and the risk of policy reversals, conflicts, or expropriation is minimal. Therefore, foreign investors are generally hesitant to invest in politically unstable countries due to the associated risks (Takefman, 2022).

The results also indicate that GDP is positively and significantly correlated with FDI inflows in the EAC region under the random effect model. This indicates that economic growth is primary driver of FDI inflows, as robust economic performance instils confidence in foreign investors about market stability and profitability. This finding aligns with the conclusions of studies by Demirhan and Masca (2008), Ashurov et al. (2020), and Ghazalian (2023), all of which observed a similar positive and significant relationship between economic growth and FDI inflows, supporting the hypothesis that economic growth positively influences FDI inflows in the EAC.

In terms of trade openness, the random effect findings show a positive and significant correlation with FDI inflows among EAC member states. Trade openness enhances the transfer of technology, knowledge, and capital, contributing to economic growth by leveraging comparative advantages through exposure to international competition (Nketiah et al.,

2020). This result is consistent with the findings of Demirhan and Masca (2008) and Le et al. (2023), who also reported a positive and significant impact of trade openness on FDI inflows. However, it contradicts Mudiyanselage (2021), who found a negative and significant relationship between the two variables. Nonetheless, the current study supports the hypothesis that trade openness is positively associated with FDI inflows in the EAC.

Regarding the exchange rate, the random effect findings reveal a positive, insignificant relationship with FDI inflows in the EAC. Exchange rate fluctuations can encourage foreign investment by making domestic assets more affordable (Sadewa, 2000). This finding echoes Korsah et al. (2022), who found a positive and significant relationship between exchange rates and FDI inflows in West African regions, but it contrasts with Asiamah et al. (2018), who reported a negative relationship. The result supports the hypothesis that exchange rate movements are positively associated with FDI inflows in the EAC.

Finally, the inflation rate shows a positive but insignificant relationship with FDI inflows in the EAC, suggesting that moderate inflation can be attractive to investors, while only prolonged high inflation levels pose a risk to FDI inflows (Takefman, 2022). This finding is consistent with Maulidiyah and Fuddin (2024), who found that moderate inflation had a positive and significant effect on FDI inflows in five ASEAN countries. However, it contradicts Asiamah et al. (2018), who concluded that inflation negatively and significantly affects FDI inflows in Ghana. Finally, the findings offer insights into the complex relationships between FDI inflows and political stability, economic growth, trade openness, exchange rates, and inflation in determining FDI inflows to the EAC region.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study utilized panel data techniques to assess the effect of political stability and other macroeconomic variables on FDI inflows in the EAC between 2013 and 2022. The findings reveal that although political stability is positively correlated with FDI inflows, the relationship lacks a significance. This suggests that while political stability contributes to attracting investment, the region remains vulnerable to internal conflicts, war, terrorist attacks, and challenges in the orderly transfer of power. These persistent issues hinder the EAC's full potential to attract foreign investment. Economic growth, as measured by GDP, emerged as a significant driver of FDI, confirming that a robust economy fosters investor confidence. Trade

openness is significantly and positively linked to FDI inflows, highlighting its importance in facilitating technology transfer, capital, and knowledge into the region, thus driving economic development. Exchange rates show a positive but insignificant relationship with FDI inflows, indicating that currency fluctuations may encourage investment but are not a decisive factor in the EAC. Similarly, inflation displays a positive but insignificant correlation with FDI inflows, suggesting that while moderate inflation can attract investment, sustained high inflation could deter foreign investors.

The study recommends that the EAC should address the underlying causes of low political stability by promoting good governance, collaborating with faith-based organizations and religious leaders, and fostering conflict resolution and internal peace (UNDP, 2016). Prioritizing efforts to alleviate poverty, combat corruption, and provide equal opportunities for youth and marginalized communities is essential for creating a stable and inclusive environment, which is crucial for attracting FDI. Additionally, EAC member states should adopt policies that enhance trade openness and facilitate the movement of goods, services, and assets. In order to boost investor confidence and reduce uncertainties, member states should focus on maintaining stable exchange rates and controlling inflation within manageable levels. This will help mitigate the risks related with currency volatility and high inflation, making the region more attractive for foreign direct investment. The study also recommends that future research expand the sample size by including other Sub-Saharan African countries and consider additional factors, such as lending rates, that may influence FDI inflows. Comparative studies analysing stable countries separately from highly unstable ones could provide valuable insights. The future studies also should conduct comparative studies, analysing more stable countries as a category, while comparing the results of highly instability countries. The study emphasizes the future studies should include interviews as part of the research methodology can also provide deeper insights into the root causes of political instability, violence, and terrorism in EAC.

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Expository Documentaries as Representation of Democratic South African Socio-Economic and Political Challenges

Carol Lesame
North West University, South Africa
carol.lesame@nwu.ac.za

Tshegofatso Thipa
University of Limpopo, South Africa
tshegofatso.thipa@ul.ac.za

Abstract

This article chronicles research findings of a study on the representation of democratic socio-economic and political challenges in two South African social issue expository documentaries, *Miners Shot Down* and *Dear Mandela*. Media represent real events to influence audiences to make sense of the social, economic, and political world around them. Media represent societal events using framing and reconstruction, which calls on media audiences and scholars to examine the cinematic expression in documentaries to interrogate how reality is represented. These documentaries address unemployment, poverty, lack of housing, poor health care services, and human rights abuses by employers that are not addressed by government. Interpretivism philosophy, ideological film criticism and framing theoretically grounded the study. The methodology combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies, executing embedded and convergent parallel research designs. Content analysis was the research method. The documentary analysis focused on language, context, setting and subject themes. Conclusions include that the stories in these documentaries were represented through storytelling, voice overs, interviews, montage, sound, music, camera shots, visual effects, and scriptwriting. Expository documentaries remain important in democratic South Africa to advance cinema *en vérité* and represent experiences of citizens in the absence of effective legislative and judicial provisions.

Keywords: media representation, corporate social responsibility, expository documentary, human rights, South Africa, *Dear Mandela*, *Miners Shot Down*

Introduction

Essentially, media representations are media constructions of society, influences and persuasions that are reported or portrayed in various forms of media such as print media, television show debates, and different film genres (Nkomo, 2016). Through these constructions, the media can expose maladministration and multiple forms of corruption in governance to increase economic efficiency and stability for citizens to prosper (Wasserman, 2013). Film features as a representation system that mirrors socio-economic and political challenges in different societies. The realist genre (including documentary film) has become an effective tool for advocacy and lobbying in many contexts. For example, filmmakers use it to frame social problems, to broaden awareness and to prompt corrective action from inactive government. This is evident in some international documentary films such as *Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004)* and *An Inconvenient Truth (2006)*. To highlight social issues in documentary films, filmmakers exploit different features that consider film holistic products such as cinematography, sound, aesthetic elements, narratives, and impact factors (Diesner & Rezapour, 2016). It is important to examine the relevance of the documentary as a medium that reflects socio-economic and political challenges affecting communities in South Africa.

Reflective documentary case studies

This study analysed the representation of democratic socio-economic and political challenges in two documentaries, namely *Miners Shot Down (2014)* and *Dear Mandela (2011)*, to highlight that a documentary can mirror socio-economic and political challenges that affect democracies with dysfunctional governments. A reflective practitioner case study values the embodied knowledge and experience of the practitioner and their reflection on and call for action, alongside the collection of integral materials related to the case study context – in this case, the analysis of the content of documentary with reference to language, context, setting and subject themes.

The documentary educates and explains, consequently facilitating a shift of perspective by challenging the status quo and creating a definitive alteration in perception when circumstances and information prove the former viewpoint or worldview is no longer valid. Documentaries that show underlying causes can be part of this process, as cause-related documentaries hold the potential to provoke action and evoke an emotional response (Faulcon, 2012). Documentary filmmakers usually have no direct personal interest in resolving a particular problem but may be sympathetic supporters

acting as second-order advocates (Hackley, 2012; Cheng 2016). They may become involved because of a range of other concerns, including their artistic satisfaction, their wish to entertain, instruct, enlighten or mobilise groups, their capacity to advocate and influence government leaders, and the advancement of their professional reputation and the winning of awards.

Expository documentaries

Expository documentary film refers to the basic information that underpins every documentary story: who are the characters, what is the conflict, when is it taking place, why is it worth telling this story, and why are these events happening (Salazar, 2008). Expository documentaries are mostly produced for television and are organised to follow the classic narrative techniques of the exposition. The expository documentary film has a narrator who addresses the viewers in a very direct way, quite often in the form of an authoritative commentary, employing voice-over narration (Cheng, 2016). The mode of practice in expository documentaries is mostly to persuade the audience about an opinion or argument and to promote the filmmaker's point of view. Expository documentaries have, as a genre, maintained a high degree of prominence, and have become a major form that every filmmaker dreams of producing (Salazar, 2008). They consistently provoke controversy and widespread public debate about the meaning of human existence, about the limits of dramatic interpretation, and about the power of film to influence popular understanding and to promote national traditions.

Expository documentaries are composed of dramatic feature elements in which the primary plot is based on actual events, or in which an imagined plot unfolds in such a way that the event is central and intrinsic to the story. However, there are still large variations in the types of films that can be considered expository documentary films. Because the genre overlaps with other well-established genres, it is useful to consider the expository documentary film in terms of several subtypes. These include the epic, the biographical film, and the period or topical film that presents conflicting viewpoints to illustrate the complexity of the ongoing challenges citizens face (Corrigan & Corrigan, 2014).

Socio-economic and political challenges

In South Africa, the strife over scarce resources has contributed to increases in youth unemployment levels, service delivery protests and xenophobic attacks which are considered governmental failure to oversee

important issues faced by South Africans (Choane, Shulika & Mthombeni, 2011). Other societal challenges include poverty and poor living conditions. These problems remain unaddressed and some South Africans pin hopes on the Government of National Unity (GNU) created after the 2024 national elections to address these challenges speedily.

Philosophical Perspective and Theoretical Grounding

Theories in film communicate the value of cinema and provide the conceptual framework to understand the relationship between film, reality, and audiences. We applied theories of ideological film criticism and framing based on their conceptual assumptions which are useful to film criticism, particularly in South Africa (Fourie, 2007; Devereux, 2014). Interpretivism grounded the study as a philosophical perspective and epistemological orientation. Interpretivism focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals within their social context (Carter & Fuller, 2015; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2019; Pillay, 2019; Rogers, 2020; Nickerson, 2024). It includes contentions that the social world cannot be understood fully from the standpoint of an individual; that realities are multiple and socially constructed; and that there is inevitable interaction between the researcher and their research participants.

Elaborations of these points by writers like Liddicoat (2020), Drew (2023) and Nickerson (2024), include:

(a) understanding the beliefs, motivations, and reasoning of individuals in a social setting is essential to decoding the meaning of the data that can be collected around a phenomenon.
(b) interpretivism in Media Studies has relied mainly on hermeneutics, phenomenology and ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism.
(c) Theorists that adopt an interpretivism approach to the study and analysis of Media Studies include Goffman, Bulmer, Weber, Garfinkle, Mead and Husser (Jansen, 2023).

Interpretivists use both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies but believe that there is no one perfect way of gaining knowledge, thus rejecting the idea that there is one methodology that will get to the absolute "truth of a situation" (Pillay, 2019; Rogers, 2020; Nickerson, 2024). Interpretivist approaches to research differ from positivist ones mainly in their emphasis on qualitative data and focus on explaining the context of the situation.

Theories that support the present researchers' interpretivism, philosophical orientation, ideological criticism and framing are discussed next, to assist in analysing how democratic challenges are represented or portrayed in the documentary films.

Ideological film criticism

While the study of ideology assists in protecting certain individuals, majority goals and sections of society, especially the elite, such study is essential in understanding the role of class dynamics. Dominant ideology protects certain individuals and ruling ideas in any society, and it is therefore important to study conflicting ideologies, including participatory communication, transformational leadership theory (Khan et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2023) and decoloniality theory. Participatory communication promotes two-way communication between corporate leaders and workers within a corporation, and other development communication stakeholders, and discourages top-down communication from corporate leaders to the workers without negotiating issues with the workers (Servaes, 1996, 2009; Dikeocha, 2024). Transformational leadership means "an approach in which a leader transforms his followers, inspires them, builds trust, encourages them, admires their innovative ideas, and develops them" (Khan et al., 2020). Decoloniality promotes African values in business, corporations and institutions; it is "a political and epistemological movement aimed at the liberation of (ex-) colonized peoples from global coloniality but also a way of thinking, knowing and doing" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Decoloniality speaks to the deepening and widening of decolonization movements in those spaces that experienced the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, apartheid, and underdevelopment (ibid.). Therefore, dominant ideology depicted in the two films could be replaced by a construction of films, for African audiences, from these ideologies such as decoloniality.

In Media Studies, this makes every film a political expression since it incorporates the ideology of those that produced it. Filmmakers control film production, which means that they may control the beliefs and mindsets of film audiences. Devereux (2014) thus argues that film can be viewed as an ideological construction, as it is informed by film text that invites the audience to experience a specific reaction. In the context of South Africa, ideology is also characterised by the engagement in government of active citizens, the practice of majority rule (which existed when the two documentaries were produced), and media freedom which is legislated by the

Constitution of 1996. Lemon (1991) contends that films are created based on the background, experiences and knowledge of both the creators and the subjects within such an ideological context.

One common critique of film theory is its bias and subjectivity. To analyse ideology, films critics should understand what ideology means. Generally, an ideology is a collection of beliefs that express the aspirations and objectives of a person, a group, a class, or a culture (Lemon, 1991). Ideology is commonly linked to political parties and their platforms, but it can also refer to a certain set of values that permeate all human endeavours, including the creation of films (Hefner, 2012). This study aims to show how ideas are connected to material conditions by concealing or distorting them, shifting them into terms falsely resolving conflicts and contradictions and presenting these situations as natural and unchangeable.

Framing theory

Framing refers to the process of selecting and highlighting elements of reality to define a problem, diagnose its causes, suggest judgments and propose suitable solutions and actions (Entman, 2017). It describes the influence the media have on public opinion when media practitioners report on issues focusing on the interpretive, ideological and contextualisation of news reports and visual productions (Khan, 2017). Filmmakers can thus frame social problems in a particular way to advance preferred solutions, and Fourie (2007) notes that there have been many complaints by people that media reports have framed them negatively. Still, scholars have shown that media framing can indeed have an effect in the way audiences interpret an issue or events (McQuail, 2010).

M**ethodology, research design and method**

Our study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodology and a descriptive interpretive design (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). The approach assisted the principal researcher in providing a description and interpretation of the visual and audio-text of the selected documentary films. The descriptive interpretive design was selected based on its appropriateness in the study of documentary films, which consist of images, conversations, speeches, audio and music. Each documentary film was divided into scenes that composed a table of scenes which facilitated thorough analyses of filmic features, visuals and narratives. The data were collected through content analysis which has quantitative and qualitative aspects. Qualitative aspects in the documentaries were found in words

expressed in each film and quantitative aspects involved the length of the documentary.

Findings and Discussion

This section discusses the filmic elements used in the documentaries to depict South African socio-economic and political challenges. These includes film construction and techniques, camera shots and angles, colour, visual effects, visual scripting, and voice-over narration as part of the composition of the films.

Film techniques and articulation of meaning

This study found that both *Miners Shot Down* and *Dear Mandela* have the technical qualities that confirm that film as an artefact is a marriage between technique and meaning. This is evident when producers of both films use aesthetics such as sound, colour, and camera work to represent the socio-economic challenges faced by the South African populace post-apartheid. We acknowledge that not all meanings in a film are deliberate because some of these meanings come from the background or culture of filmmakers themselves who unconsciously infuse their views into the production. This is important in film production because audiences live in a culture that shapes how they think and what they believe in as the contextual setting that ultimately informs their behaviour. Both documentaries are influenced by the apartheid historical contestations that are laced with racial prejudice, which determine the choice of technical aspects used in the production. Thus, the meanings of both *Miners Shot Dead* and *Dear Mandela* films are shaped by thematic or aesthetic necessity including visuals, shots, sound, and audio elements which seem to be neither entirely unconscious nor entirely deliberate.

Voice-over narration

Both films adopted voice-over narration as an active agent that helped to represent the democracy anti-thesis through corroborative themes in a way that an actor's performance or scenery would not be able to do. The films appropriately used a voice-over to provide the viewers with audio-visual information through the film's soundtrack, which is paired with important visual aids such as the colour of the sky and dried or green grass to enhance the viewers' mood. Thus, in both documentaries, the voice-over is used as a technical imperative to assume the role of uncovering or solving the (democratic) mystery; meanwhile, the images are either rolling or revealing accompanying footage. In this case, both films relied on voice-over

narration, audio-visuals and camera works to tell the story of abuse of authority, human rights violations, and unfair labour practices in the new South Africa.

This technique provided filmmakers with a range of abilities in storytelling that they otherwise would not have been able to deliver in its absence. In both films, the application of the voice-over indicates that the power of a voice-over is its ability to communicate directly with the audience. Hence, the films relied on the voice of an actor (narrator) who played the invisible controlling role of storyteller without participating in it directly. In so doing, the voiceover in *Miners Shot Down* had the role of uncovering the mystery that characterised the protracted strike whose demands were met with lethal state power. Furthermore, we found that the voice-over could not be restricted to one form but may include actors' roles to corroborate the perspective of the protagonists and so strengthen the cause of the narrative. This technique is used in *Miners Shot Down* to retrospectively reflect on the proactive actions that could have been taken to avoid the Marikana tragedy.

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Camera shots and angles

In *Miners Shot Down,* several close-up shots are used to represent emotional frustrations when the Lonmin management failed to respond to the grievances of the miners and when striking miners wielded traditional weapons of war including knobkerries, spears, and shields while registering their grievances. *Dear Mandela* also exploits numerous forms of camera shots such as medium and long shots to provide the viewer with both medium to long focus as well as wide shots to capture the background of the events as they unfolded.

Colour

The films serve as clear examples of how colour is used to provide more revealing scenes and details of the emotional state of the police who claim that they were provoked by the miners. This confirms that to date the use of colour in cinematography remains a vital part of creating films owing to the aesthetic and complementary features it brings to the film composition process. The findings revealed that the producers of both documentaries astutely used colour to depict numerous aspects of the transformation discourse in South Africa, especially in terms of the whiteness or blackness of actors to portray racial prejudice, inequality, and poverty in the mining environment and informal settlements. In both documentaries, black workers

are the only group shown as suffering injustice and low pay at work; these economic ills result in the life of chronic poverty and social ills that these workers find themselves in. In both cases, evidence shows that the use of colour involved a combination of artefacts with respect to space, time and locations as attractions that serve as explanations of events and associations that augment existing frames at different levels. The use of the physical aspects in both films involved the way specific aspects, issues and colours such as the informal settlement, poverty and racial prejudice are employed to affect the viewer and one's ability to interpret the films with a pleasant impression.

Visual effects

Both films made use of visual effects which were added to live-action, captured through techniques such as interactive video compositing, rear- and front-screen projection and practical effects. *Miners Shot Down* used live-action: interactive video compositing, rear- and front-screen projection and practical effects in conjunction with computer graphic objects, characterisation, and environments, as well as the compositing of images recorded in several ways. *Dear Mandela* exploited some of these technical aspects, particularly interactive video compositing and practical effects, to reconcile the past events which occurred during the apartheid era and contemporary transformation challenges in South Africa. Despite the negative encounter with law enforcement, the Marikana ordeal continues to serve as a cumulative cultural heritage over the apartheid legacy, as it carries the unintended purpose of (re) opening wounds which had otherwise virtually been closed after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of 1996. Ideologically, we frame both films as objective renditions of worker realities in terms of their aptitude to serve as sources and documentation of transformation challenges in South Africa.

Visual scripting

In both films, the producers adopted scripting features engendered in the context of popular protest deliberately designed to highlight the socio-economic and political grievances among disgruntled citizens. The scripts are designed and executed in a manner that is aligned explicitly to the reality genre with the intention to represent real issues affecting the welfare of contemporary South African society. For example, the socio-economic difficulties of the workers are clear in *Dear Mandela* when the writer uses the narrative style of adaptive scripting to highlight how the democratisation

process fostered great hope for the people that never materialised, an injustice to the workers when thirty years of democracy have not changed their disadvantaged lives and government offers them empty promises. This is juxtaposed with the legendary President Mandela who championed the freedom project in South Africa and inspired hope in the citizens for a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, and just society. Furthermore, it is against this background that the production and scripting of these films aimed at challenging the colonial and discriminatory tendencies of the past, which the writers use to motivate the poor and marginalised groups of society to confront the current and chronic injustices.

Furthermore, the films have exploited specific verbal and non-verbal scripting features including choice of language, tone, drama, music, conflict, vulnerability and resistance antics to confront undemocratic practices. *Dear Mandela* does this using music and dance (sloganeering), verbal articulation and commentary where actors denounce how the local leadership of the ANC has reneged on its promises of basic providing social amenities such as housing, water, and toilets to the citizens. In both documentaries, visual or screenplay scripting has succinctly presented a compilation of the social and economic realities. This further helped to expose the malpractices of the democratic government, which has abandoned the socialist approach to national development. The style allows the present researchers to emphasise the concentration of power on individuals (i.e., politicians in government) in South Africa who happen to focus on creating personal wealth at the expense of the citizens. Moreover, both films thrive on the use of protagonists (such as Mgcineni "Mambush" Noki in *Miners Shot Down* and S'bu Zikode in *Dear Mandela*) who rose to be community heroes by challenging the symbols of monopoly capital and dominant class ideology over the pressing circumstances affecting the working class and marginalised communities. For these reasons, both films can be viewed as ideological constructions informed by film text, which invite the audience to be influenced in specific ways, including social mobilisation and political activism.

Governmentalism: Poor Governance in Democratic South Africa

The films reflect contemporary socio-economic and intricate political processes that preoccupy the progressive space, a tendency that often negatively affects the delivery of the National Development Programme (NDP, 2009) in South African communities. The NDP was the government's plan to transform South Africa by improving poor communities and reducing poverty through job creation, starting in 2019 with

goals to be achieved by 2024 (the period of South Africa's "sixth administration" since 1994). However, in 2025, most NDP goals have not been achieved. Unemployment levels are increasing, for example, leading to the mobilisation of some sections of civil society, particularly poor homeless and other marginalised people, who seek alternative means of voicing their frustrations. The leadership deficit that exists between the citizens and the government prompts apolitical individuals mong the grassroots to help organise and direct the protesting communities to register citizen grievances.

Similarly, the Marikana miners were subjected to inhumane living conditions including lack of decent housing, health care and access to education for their children, which have been unresolved for many years. The rhetoric in political statements by those in authority shows that mining operators operate in solidarity with other formations (e.g., business and labour unions supporting the government) to exploit the workers. Political commentators and civic organisations in the documentaries expressed their displeasure over the increasing gap between policy and practical material conditions of citizens. Human living conditions have come under great scrutiny for over three decades (1994 – 2024) in South Africa. The films reflect the national service delivery outlook where the relations between elected leadership and residents are characterised by mistrust arising from the failure to fulfil social transformation promises such as access to housing, schools, healthcare, and clean water for the formerly marginalised communities. Hence, the ideological stance of staging collective protests was to mount pressure on the elected government led by the African National Congress (ANC) political party to be responsive to the demands of citizens.

Maladministration in government and poor service delivery

The two documentaries show citizens as witnesses of weak socio-economic systems, largely blamed (by workers speaking in both films) on maladministration, government corruption and the failure to implement of development policies. Both films make a convincing case that the democratic era has largely failed to meet the transformation expectations of the working class and people in the margins of society, and to ensure effective checks and balances where those in authority are made to account for the needs of the citizens. This is the backdrop to popular claims that there is said to be rule of law in the country, but still lack of accountability and violation of human rights have been on the rise, particularly in informal communities. This has compelled citizens to adopt alternative means of communication outside of

the electoral process, including as violent protest and vigilantism, to register their grievances. The films show that the authorities have reneged on their promises of establishing a developmental state framework with which to redress colonial injustices and move towards a new democratic social order.

Violence and Insecurity

The analysis of both films indicates that whereas South Africa has a long and gruesome history of different forms of violence pre-1994, the democratic dispensation came with the hope and expectations violence would be minimised after the country attained freedom in 1994. However, because government has failed to satisfy the socio-economic needs of its citizens, the citizens often take it upon themselves to engage in violent protests accompanied by multi-faceted anti-social behaviour in a bid to attract the attention of other stakeholders including the media. Both documentaries present a negative picture of the socioeconomic and political environment that characterises South Africa as an unstable nation largely due to class conflicts and inequality. Both scripts reflect characteristics of black-on-black violence, where law enforcement agents deal with violent protests with lethal force as a form of 'general standard' in the country. As a result, service delivery protests and labour disputes in both films display various forms of violence often compounded by acts of intimidation, vandalism, and murder. In both *Dear Mandela* and *Miners Shot Down*, viewers are presented with the narrative that the government has failed its people. Both documentaries depict violence laced with social unrest mixed with agitated trade unionism, particularly in the Marikana massacre (2012), whose outcomes tarnished the integrity of the South African democratic government.

Inequality, high unemployment and poor working conditions

The findings of the study show that the underlying elements of the producers' intentions in both documentaries were not to depict race relations in South Africa because there is limited conflict based on colour. However, race dynamics are clandestinely implied, particularly at the Lonmin setting where miners were shot dead. The films suggest that race and class continue to be used to justify the exclusion of some sections of the South African population, specifically most deprived people. Both documentaries reveal that inequality in South Africa is like that existing in pre-democratic times. This inequality denied most black people access to viable economic activity including access to land and labour inequality and entrenched white privilege

in the country. The producers of the documentary *Miners Shot Down* highlight the socio-economic milieu of the democratic era through giving workers a voice with which to object to prejudice against them.

Both documentary scripts highlight how South Africa faces the challenge of providing access to quality education for most of its poor population that live in townships and informal settlements such as those in the outskirts of Durban. The study notes that most of these challenges have been caused by a lack of sustained investment to transform institutions of the state, which continue to reflect apartheid trends that were based on prejudice. This is compounded by the challenge of unfair labour practices in the form of poor wages, poor living conditions and economic exploitation of mine workers by employers. Both film scripts clearly illustrate the protesters' overall dissatisfaction with the socio-economic circumstances reflective of inept governance practices in democratic South Africa.

Recommendations

The authors recommend that directors of related films, in future, could invest in extensive academic research to delve deeper into understanding how the documentary genre is influenced by multiple disciplinary contestations across many disciplines. These multiple contestations and critical reflections in documentaries could include an analysis of contemporary apartheid (because apartheid is not totally over and manifests itself in various work environments) and neo-colonial tendencies within the current government and corporate sector(s), since these ideological tendencies would benefit from the infusion of some practical transformational leadership and democratic values incorporated in corporate governance. The study findings reveal the producers' ability to communicate multi-faceted meanings on the socio-economic and political challenges in South Africa based on the dissimilar but contextualised scripts of both films. The study suggests the following as recommendations that could improve scripting techniques:

(a) To uncover or resolve the mystery that characterised the long Marikana strike and the demands of urban shack dwellers such as *Abahlali Basemjongolo* (i.e., shack dwellers) (*Abahlali* is a Zulu language word for Residents, *Basemjondolo* is a Zulu language word for Shacks), who live outside the city of Durban in the KwaZulu Natal Province and whose story of homelessness is told in the documentary *Dear Mandela*, the producers needed to invest into

extensive academic (in this case sociological, historical or political) research to delve deeper into understanding how the documentary genre is influenced by multiple-disciplinary contestations often premised on racial prejudice, abuse of authority, human rights violation or labour practice to tell the story of the democratic South Africa. For example, in *Dear Mandela*, *Abahlali Basemjondolo* experience violation of their human rights and are not assisted either by government or business (some their employers) to build homes; and so they remain homeless, staying in poorly and quickly constructed houses made of galvanized zinc, plastic and other unsafe and unsustainable materials. These structures affect their safety and health during periods of natural disasters and other environmental challenges. The focus of the documentaries is on the protests rather than on the real lives of the protesters which influence them to do protest actions.

(b) The researchers recommend the application of reconstructed or blended scripting formats, which would help to effectively achieve the composition and *cinema verité* that the producers intended through collective dissent and popular protest.

(c) Both political and socio-economic contestations in the South African political landscape pre-occupy the narratives in the two documentaries located in a democratic constitutional order. A critical reflection of contemporary neo-colonial and apartheid tendencies within the current government and corporate sector(s) would benefit from the infusion of some theoretical underpinnings in worldviews, namely post-colonial theory, feminism, critical theory, and so on, to inform a holistic scripting process that addresses abject poverty, violation of human rights, inequality and social injustice in South Africa, which are underrepresented in both films.

Conclusion

The films use symbolism and juxtaposition that highlight former President Nelson Mandela as a true revolutionary symbol of sacrifice, nation building and selfless leadership, qualities lacking in today's political leaders. Ideologically, the films demonstrate a shift of power relations, framed in both films as popular humanistic demands placed on authorities to become responsive to the will of the citizens, particularly the working class and homeless people. The films show that political and socio-economic contestations in the South African political landscape

have led to untenable confrontations among key role players such as mining corporations and labour unions, to the detriment of the aspirations of the democratic constitutional order. The documentaries are a critical contribution to society's understanding of the unjust practices by corporate companies which lack corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies and government authorities which fail to serve public interest though they are expected to work towards uplifting the lives of citizens nationally.

Both documentary scripts succeed in presenting a critical contemporary reflection of the perpetuation of colonial and apartheid tendencies against human rights, economic equality and social justice in democratic South Africa. This is achieved through scripting formats that lay bare the extractive corporate practices, especially in mining, that fail to curtail the influence of narrow political interests that negate social justice, equality, and human rights in labour environments. Failure to honour constitutional obligations by the elected government and corporate companies can yield anti-social mobilisation against the elected government with potential threats to national stability as evidenced at the Marikana massacre. The film producers critique South African contemporary governance practices and leadership shortcomings to dissuade authorities from pursuing narrow interests at the expense of collective national goals to benefit all citizens. Both documentaries should be acknowledged for illustrating deep societal dissatisfaction with the socio-economic situation caused by inept governance in democratic South Africa.

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University Social Responsibility: Exploring Policies and Practices in Flagship Universities in Africa

Amanuel Gebru Woldearegay
Samson Mekonnen
Yohanes Shiferaw
Elias Worku
School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University

Abstract

University Social Responsibility (USR) is a philosophy guiding the activity of universities that is designed to support the socio-economic development of communities. The social responsibility role is variously referred to as community engagement, civic engagement, or third mission and similar terms. This study explores the degree to which the universities studied embrace social responsibility in their mission or vision statements. The sample includes purposively selected universities from East, West, South and North Africa. Data were obtained from a content analysis of the universities' websites pertaining to university social responsibility discourse. Results indicate that most of the universities studied have references to USR but few clearly indicate their mission and have a full-fledged policy, even though many have administrative units to run USR. More research is required that examines how African universities are classifying, documenting and reporting their societal commitment as an important element of their institutional strategy.

Keywords: social responsibility, university, Africa, higher education

Introduction

Universities are no longer enclaves or elitist spaces detached from the social fabric in which they operate. They are under pressure to make themselves an integral part of their communities not just as pedagogical or scientific environments but as multipurpose institutions that serve society. A supposedly narrow focus on research and teaching has given way to a more ambitious agenda of serving societies diversely, variously called "community engagement", "community service", "civic engagement" or more descriptively "university social responsibility" (USR) (Stanton, 2012).

University Social Responsibility has assumed a multiplicity of meanings across university systems with the focus of operation and intervention differing significantly. A key definitional element has been the commitment to of universities to communities through a broad variety of forms of intervention such as service learning, outreach, socioeconomic development projects, social services, environmental commitment and knowledge production (Kouatli, 2019). In addition to sustainable development goals, USR seeks also to foster civic citizenship and an awareness of and respect for human rights and the rule of law as pillars of the extended functions of a socially responsible university. There is a further link to the idea of 'engaged scholarship' which has been defined as a type of engagement of university faculty in which linkage is created between the knowledge and ideas of a university as a knowledge producing organization and the use of the knowledge outputs to address the diverse development needs and aspirations of a community (Holland, 2005).

While knowledge about community engagement and university social responsibility has accumulated elsewhere, there is limited research and understanding about university social responsibility in African higher education contexts (Baptiste, Cai, Islam, & Wenceslas, (2022). In the context of developing countries in general and African nations in particular, the idea of community engagement has resonance for valid reasons, however. African communities need scientific direction and mass education to raise the level of peoples' control over their lives. Thus, the role of students, faculty and researchers in making contributions to meet the felt needs of local communities is significant (Preece, 2013; Preece, et al 2012; Lazarus, 2008). Such a civic mission, though very relevant in the context of Africa's socioeconomic and political gaps, has nonetheless been inadequately investigated.

Since the countries and regions of Africa have different political and economic as well as historical contexts it is important to understand how these contexts impact the operation of the third mission. For instance, the history of South Africa means that its universities can resemble those of northern Europe in terms of standards - which may include standards of community engagement (Cloete & Maassen 2015). North Africa, with some of the oldest universities on the continent, can be different in many ways from sub-Saharan Africa, both historically and socio-economically, which may again explain university social responsibility policies and practices. (Buckner, 2018). Many countries in west Africa have much in common and their higher education tradition can be different from those of east Africa

(Nwauwa, 2020). Country-level differences may also have implications. In Ethiopia, for instance, the system of higher education was guided by Marxist–Leninist philosophy and the ideology was reflected in all university missions and associated activities (Gemechu, 2024).

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

A review of the global literature shows that the broad area of corporate social responsibility has pertinently been conceptualized as the engagement of higher education in community development (Bernardo, Butcher, & Howard, 2012). A key element has been the idea of engagement as related to the context and aspiration of universities (Miahkykh, 2023). It has been argued that engagement is a symbiotic link between a university and its stakeholders. On the one hand, the university utilizes its knowledge and resources to advance science and technology and so raise the life standards of communities (Ramachandra et al 2014). On the other, the university may enrich its own research and scholarship levels and quality when it produces skilled and competent citizens that can address community aspirations for better lives and freedoms (Bloomfield, 2005). Engagement comes in many modes. According to Amorim et al (2017), universities may autonomously decide on the type and level of their engagement and involvement in USR in pursuit of their own aspirations and philosophies. Benefits to the university may include reputational gains, perceived impacts on the alleviation of societal problems, a widened societal understanding of the value of university research, an increased desire of community organizations to cooperate with the university, and generally a demonstration of the value of universities to society. Reiser (2008) argues that USR is a venture by a university to make its presence felt as an institution with an ethical mission to produce a positive effect on society through the varied contributions of its scientists and students beyond their more regular routines of research and teaching. Esfijani et al (2013) further extend the ideas of social responsibility as an outcome of an integrated strategic management of all core operations including outreach, which makes the university socially more relevant. The publics that universities address include internal and external stakeholders - businesses, NGOs, high schools, other universities, local communities, community leaders, advocacy groups, and alumni (Dima et al 2013).

Although considered the “third” mission, University Social Responsibility is believed to be no less important than the missions of teaching and research. However, despite the lofty ideals of the third mission, the conceptualization, operationalization and accomplishment of the

community engagement function is the least well-defined across university systems in Africa (Ogunode and Omenuko 2021; Walters and Openjuru, 2014). The strategic management of USR is also a subject of criticism, as many universities that have embraced the function and institutionalized it have not treated the subject as strategically important but as a reactive or ad hoc set of activities for "impression management". Evidence of the marginalization of community engagement shows that it is often confined to service learning which universities find easier to implement and monitor (Mudau, 2023). The allocation of insufficient resources may also be taken as evidence of the lack of full commitment to the third mission. The lack of consensus on what constitutes community engagement has resulted in definitional problems and targeted interventions as community engagement is many things to many universities depending on contextual factors including leadership philosophy.

The idea of community engagement itself is contested as is the idea of the university itself both enabling and constraining any third mission (Green 2011). From the dismissive idea that community engagement is irrelevant to calls for "true" community service, the literature on the third mission, irrespective of its rhetorical force, has been characterized by anarchy (Bidandi, et al). The contestations in the engagement discourse have implications for third mission activities which can be both altruistic and self-serving. Incommensurate perspectives lead to disparate activities that include business outreach and income generation as opposed to public health promotion projects that lead to "thriving communities". (Aguilar-Gaxiola, et al 2022)

As a result in part of the diversity of conceptions about community engagement, practices of measuring performance and more importantly impact have been few and far between and often illusory, unlike the measurement of teaching and research which is easier to do. Many companies have developed benchmarks for social responsibility delivery and outcomes yet many universities have lagged behind their corporate siblings (Patterson & Loomis, 2007). Notable exceptions include the University of Cape Town and Makerere University that have established not only clear strategic objectives but also yardsticks of performance (UC 2022; Makerere University 2022). In most other universities in Africa, except perhaps in South African higher education (Thomson, 2011), University Social Responsibility/community engagement is poorly defined and rarely measured.

Although there are perceptions of engagement being "unnecessary, unwanted and unproductive**" (**Pini & Mckenzie, 2006), the evidence seems to show that responsible universities have many positive impacts on society through their broad development aspirations and several studies have explored the positive outcomes of community engagement (Wigmore-Álvarez, & Ruiz-Lozano, 2012) (World Health Organization, 2017; O'Mara-Eves, et al 2015; Milton et al 2012; Attree,2011). Studies have also examined the drivers and challenges of community engagement. Austerity measures leading to financial constraints in public universities may constrain the operationalization of community engagement by African universities such as the Pan-African University that has reported financial challenges having an impact on its mission (University World News, 2023). While a few African economies may be in good shape for third mission programs (Oketch, 2016), in many other African countries existing national economic challenges (Johnson, 2020) coupled with lack of political will (Poncian, 2019) or institutional commitment (Mugabi, 2015), may hamper community engagement programs (World Bank, 2010). The effect on the number of beneficiaries and quality of community engagement interventions may further be impacted by combined fiscal constraints and reduced donor commitments.

Elements of university social responsibility policy

A model of University Social Responsibility could be the community engagement policy of Wits University in South Africa from which other African universities may learn. The policy includes important details starting with a general introduction to the policy and its aims, a definition of community engagement, key concepts relating to community engagement, justification for a community engagement policy, a policy framework that includes international frameworks, and details on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. This is in addition to regional frameworks (centered on the Banjul Charter, and the African Charter on Popular Participation in Development and Transformation), and South Africa's National frameworks including the South African Constitution and the country's National Development Plan.

The policy document is clear in stating what the university as a service provider cares about in regard to various stakeholders and acknowledges the value of the stakeholders to the university as partners, emphasizing reciprocity and synergy. The policy also states that the

university advances the interests of the community as a collectivity while cherishing individual voices as being important to university. The policy further recognizes the possibility of informational shortfalls among its stakeholders and aspires that the university will address any informational asymmetry between the university and its partners.

Vision and mission statements

The formulation of a university's vision and mission statements has strategic goals as it can be used as a test of performance. Whereas a vision statement is aspirational in nature stating what the university hopes to be or accomplish in the future, a mission statement is more realistic providing a succinct description of the core functions of a university. An important feature of mission statements is that they express their relevance and commitment to their base of diverse stakeholders (Kosmützky and Krücken 2015). In the majority of cases, the mission statement reflects commitment to community engagement and in a few cases the community engagement division has its own vision and mission statements as illustrated by Fairfield University (Connecticut, USA). It says:

> *Our engagement with local and global partners is grounded in the Ignatian commitment to a faith that does justice for the betterment of communities and the creation of a more just and equitable world. We work in solidarity with institutions and organizations across the globe in the pursuit of equity and social and economic justice.*

Websites and Community engagement

This study used university websites which are the principal channels which to project identity, mission, vision and publicize other institutional activities (Carnevale, 2005). The communication of mission, in particular, has significant relevance with regard to the university's third mission of community engagement (Arrazattee et al., 2013). Universities can be considered anchor institutions, well placed to articulate their commitment to community engagement as sources of scientific research, knowledge production, and institutions such as hospitals and other health research establishments that they can use to bring change to stakeholder communities. However, this need to use websites to articulate and demonstrate commitment to community engagement is not always clear (LePeau et al., 2018b), relevant institutional information may be inadequate or obsolete (LePeau et al., 2018a) and there is no way of knowing inputs and outcomes.

Theoretical framework

University Social responsibility has rich theoretical foundations in diverse domains as expounded in the broader conceptual literature on its business antecedent, Corporate Social Responsibility. Prime theoretical exposition comes from legitimacy theory which maintains that organizational survival requires responsiveness to a broad range of socioeconomic and political pressures. The response should come in the form of doing good to the community which provides the foundations for the organization's existence and sustainability. In practical terms, this requires responding to the myriad needs of surrounding communities and contributing to their betterment through a variety of mechanisms and interventions including literacy development in areas such as public health. Universities obtain legitimacy when they are community-oriented and add value to social justice enhancement and community improvement or demonstrate transformative impact (Bowen et al 2010). This role is particularly important in African contexts where communities are in dire need of assistance for life improvement.

The other theoretical framework for University Social Responsibility is open systems theory which postulates that entities need to enter in to and obtain the support of the immediate environment as a source of leverage (Kantabutra, 2022). The management of community engagement decides the extent and sustainability of a university's sustainability and outcomes on community engagement.

Research questions

1. Do the vision and mission statements of the selected universities have references to community engagement?
2. If so, how is community engagement presented in relation to teaching and research?
3. Is Social Responsibility institutionalized in the selected universities?
4. Do the study universities have full-fledged community engagement or University Social Responsibility policies? If so, how are the policies presented?

Methodology

Sampling was based on the exploratory goal of the study and the need to obtain insights into university social responsibility across the regions of Africa. A list of Africa's best universities would provide the sampling

frame, but such a list would be dominated by South African Universities, excluding many universities in other regions of Africa. Thus, based on Times Higher Education reputational rankings in reference to Southern and Western African universities (Stellenbosch University, University of Cape Town, University of Ibadan and University of Cape Coast) that were ranked among the top ten universities in Africa, universities with high reputational standing and attendant social responsibility objectives in Eastern Africa (Addis Ababa University from Ethiopia and Makerere University from Uganda) and North Africa (Alexandria University and American University of Cairo) were selected to have an Africa-wide sample.

The study focused on finding out whether the universities had clear references to community engagement or its equivalents in their vision and mission statements. It also explored whether any clear policies existed that advocated community engagement as well as strategies to be used to implement the policies. The study further investigated whether any mechanisms were used to measure community engagement either qualitatively, quantitatively or both. Once the universities were selected, text analysis applications were utilized to determine word count separately for Vision and Mission Statements as well as the total count. Applications were further used to identify references to community service, community engagement, civic service, service learning and other constructs that indicate the presence of the third mission presence.

Results

The primary question was whether the universities had mentions of University Social Responsibility or its conceptual equivalents. The websites showed that there is no reference to social responsibility or its variants (community engagement, outreach, community engagement and outreach, community service, civic engagement, citizen engagement, and so on) in the vision/mission statements of the universities studied with the exception of Addis Ababa University where there is a reference to a variant of the above called “community service”. Most universities seem to focus on either teaching or research or both as their primary mission and fail to mention the issue of university social responsibility. However, there are indirect indications of commitment to university social responsibility. Thus, there are implicit discourses of a mission of providing “services responsive to dynamic national and global needs” (Makerere University), enriching and transforming “local, continental and global communities” (Stellenbosch University), grappling with the “key issues of our natural and social worlds”

(University of Cape Town), contributing to the "the transformation of society through creativity and innovation"(University of Ibadan), "the building of a modern human being and cultural rehabilitation "of the society and be able to assume leadership positions in all sectors" (Alexandria University), The vision statements are more sweeping and variously make reference to university social responsibility but are not emphatic about community engagement or its equivalent. The vision of the University of Ibadan includes being "a world-class institution for academic excellence geared towards "meeting societal needs". Makerere university has the vision of being "a thought leader of knowledge generation for societal transformation and development). Stellenbosch University in South Africa advocates a vision to "advance knowledge in service of society".

Table 1. Mission, vision statements reference to USR

No	University	Vision	Mission
1	Addis Ababa University	Addis Ababa University aspires to be ranked among the top ten pre-eminent African graduate and research universities in 2023	The Mission of Addis Ababa University is to produce competent graduates, provide need based **community service** and produce problem-solving research outputs through innovative and creative education, research and consultancy service to foster social and economic development of the country.
2	Makerere University	Makerere University is a thought leader of knowledge generation for societal transformation and development	Makerere University is committed to providing transformative and innovative teaching, learning, research and services responsive to dynamic national and global needs.
3	Stellenbosch University	Stellenbosch University will be Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognized as excellent, inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge in service of society	Stellenbosch University is a research-intensive university, where we attract outstanding students, employ talented staff and provide a world-class environment; a place connected to the world, while enriching and transforming local, continental and global communities.
4	University of Cape Town	Vision 2030 is the result of inclusive and transformative leadership at the University of Cape Town (UCT). It was developed to give expression to UCT's massive transformative purpose- "Unleash human potential to create a fair and just society"- in the core academic functions, the cross-cutting responsibilities of transformation and	UCT aspires to become a premier academic meeting point between South Africa, the rest of Africa and the world. Taking advantage of expanding global networks and our distinct vantage point in Africa, we are committed through innovative research and scholarship, to grapple with the key issues of our natural and

		social responsiveness, and the systems that support and sustain UCT's work.	social worlds. We aim to produce graduates whose qualifications are internationally recognised and locally applicable, underpinned by values of engaged citizenship and social justice.
5	University of Ibadan	To be a world-class institution for academic excellence geared towards meeting societal needs.	To expand the frontiers of knowledge through provision of excellent conditions for learning and research. To produce graduates who are worthy in character and sound judgement. To contribute to the transformation of society through creativity and innovation. To serve as a dynamic custodian of society's salutary values and thus sustain its integrity
6	University of Cape Coast	To be a University with worldwide acclaim that is strongly positioned for innovative teaching, research, outreach and professional development.	The University of Cape Coast is an equal opportunity University uniquely placed to provide quality education through the provision of comprehensive, liberal and professional programmers that challenge learners to be creative, innovative and responsible citizens.
7	Alexandria University	Alexandria University aspires to restore the historic status of Alexandria University and to achieve a comprehensive qualitative leap in various fields of knowledge within a framework of noble human values, enabling to take a leading position in its national Arab, African, Mediterranean and global environments.	The University of Alexandria is a national, educational, research, and development institution integrated into the production and dissemination of knowledge. The university also emphasizes the building of a modern human being and cultural rehabilitation of the society and the ability to assume leadership positions in all sectors.
8	American University of Cairo	SMIE will be recognized throughout the University community as well as in Egypt, the region and internationally for its leadership and innovation in planning, assessment, research and for the quality of its work.	Strategy Management and Institutional Effectiveness (SMIE) advances the mission and values of the American University in Cairo, by facilitating evidence-based decisions and a culture of assessment and integrated planning. SMIE is the University's official source of information about itself, its peers and its educational environment

While there is a direct or indirect reference to their mission being societally-oriented through their third mission of university social responsibility, as Table 2 seems to show, there is a policy vacuum in the sample of universities. That is, there is an absence of a full-fledged university policy on university

social responsibility while there are mentions of isolated tools of community engagement. On the other hand, Stellenbosch University, University of Cape Coast, Addis Ababa University, Cairo University, and American University of Cairo have established separate administrative structures to run community engagement.

Table 2: Typology of community engagement across universities

University	Engagement Term	Presence of coherent policy		Presence of strategy		Presence of administrative unit for function	
		present	absent	present	absent	present	absent
Univ. of Cape Town	Community engagement		√		√		√
Stellenbosch University	Community engagement		√		√	√	
Lagos University	Community engagement		√		√		√
Univ. of Cape Coast	Community engagement		√		√	Industry and Innovation Unit	
Makerere university	Community engagement		√		√	√	
Addis Ababa University	Community Services		√	# but in need of modification		Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer	
Alexandria University	Community Service and Environmental Development		√		√	# led by president	
American Univ. of Cairo	Academic Community engagement		√		√	# led by director	

Discussion

Unlike many corporate entities with detailed corporate communication strategies, the studied universities do not seem to have strategies that broadly define their vision, mission, philosophy, values and their more specific relationships with their stakeholders and means of reaching them. Whilst there are statements of vision and mission, they are generic and do not give operational details of how these values are communicated (Steyn, 2000). However, communication should be at the center of strategy in university outreach or community service programs. It is important that universities clarify their relevant positions, articulate their mission for community engagement and draw interest to their engagement to mobilize broader community support (Arrazattee et al., 2013). The communication of community engagement does not appear adequately emphasized. The studied universities present a sharp contrast to other universities where the emphasis on community engagement g has its own more focused vision and mission, and websites present news of community engagement activities. An example would be Brock University (Brock University 2022) which articulates its vision, mission and goals for community engagement as follows:

> Community Engagement Vision, Mission and Goals
> Brock is firmly committed to being an important part of its community and encourages community engagement across all aspects of its operation. We see Community Engagement as the collaboration between institutions of higher education and broader communities for the mutual exchange of knowledge and resources. These efforts are carried out in a spirit of partnership, inclusiveness and reciprocity, with the objective of contributing to the community's sustainable economic, social, environmental and cultural prosperity.

Another good practice example comes from the University of California at Riverside, which ambitiously clarifies its relevance not only nationally but even globally (RCEC 2020).

> Vision of Community Engagement for the University of California (Riverside)
> Riverside aspires to be an institution that has a solid partnership with its communities by engaging them – regionally, statewide, nationally and internationally – utilizing the knowledge, creativity and

commitment of its students, faculty, staff and alumni to support a better quality of life.

Such messaging also includes an attendant strategic plan for community engagement; puts universities in the spotlight and adds to their credibility and raises their profile as community-oriented universities (Hollander et al., 2002). If universities take university social responsibility, then they have to articulate their commitment in their vision and mission statements including their operations and programs. In this study, the only prominently shared feature among the universities is a lack of emphasis on community engagement or its alternative functions. Despite the greater relevance of university social responsibility to developing countries as in Africa where poverty reduction should be an important third mission function, many Northern Universities seem to have communicated their social responsibility mission with greater articulation in places, even aiming at global agendas of poverty elimination beyond their immediate communities as the Declaration on University Global Engagement would show (APLU, 2024).

This study points to the need to close the policy gap in respect of USR in Africa through enhanced effort to devise policies or, where they exist, to publicize them, and to ensure they are accompanied by strategic, regulatory, programmatic and evaluative details (Pellegrini, & Vivanet, 2021). As the community engagement policy literature shows, a few African universities such as the University of Pretoria may be cited as examples with community engagement policies (University of Pretoria, 2022). More generally, South African universities have a distinctive focus on community engagement as a national higher education mission linked to the country's White Paper on the role of higher education in national transformation (South Africa. Department of Education (1997).

The policy gap noted in the present study regarding university social responsibility is a contrast to the relevant policies of corporate social responsibility formulated by corporate actors which so many universities have taken as models. The awareness of need for policy communication seems a further issue that needs to be tackled. In other words, universities need to communicate their social responsibility policies clearly and fully so that a public audit of their policy commitments is possible and stakeholders can transparently weigh the promises and the actual implementation of these promises.

Like South African Universities that have articulated the need for fostering partnerships with government, civil society actors, and corporate entities, other African universities need to develop proactive USR policies through the selection of desired objectives, the mechanisms to realize the objectives, the formulation of specific USR programs, and audits of performance in USR. These policies need to consider a variety of important factors including national and international contexts, donor environment, and political factors including international treaties and declarations to which the country is a signatory (Ball, 1993). This study finds that the integration of USR into university strategies and practices into management, teaching, research, services, and public activities is limited.

There is a need for an institutionalization of community engagement as some of the studied universities lack a separate division dedicated to the operation and management of community service. While department or faculty level structures may be difficult to set up, universities need to have an institution dedicated to community engagement with allocated budgets and human resources to successfully carry out the important mission of serving communities at the university level, and with a capacity to counter any charges of managerialism (Klikauer, 2023). The need for a specific organizational unit to handle community engagement is justified by the multiplicity and diversity of tasks that require particular focus and efficient handling (Kiplimo, 2023; Isomura, & Isomura, 2021) The status of a university (national, local) as well as the size of its network of collaborations (local, regional/provincial, and national, international) may dictate the need for a specialized body that organizes, manages, controls and supervises the myriad of activities under community engagement.

Conclusion

Whilst Southern Africa universities seem to be the closest to embracing the idea of community engagement, and although they take it as an important function, the present study shows that they differ in their level of adoption, assignment of importance as a function, and the formulation of clear community engagement policies and strategies. Universities naturally differ in perspective (Benneworth, & Humphrey, 2012). The two universities of South Africa included in this study do not have fully fledged policies of community engagement while other South African universities such as the University of Pretoria do. When USR is seen as an extension of the teaching and research and not as a core function, it must be concluded that USR is in its infancy across the majority of Africa universities. Efforts seem to be

driven by social desirability and publicity concerns as the USR contribution continues to much lag behind the traditional functions of teaching and research (Bender, 2008) and as such continues to be considered the "stepchild" of higher education (Johnson, 2020). The present study confirms the observation that whatever USR programs are present appear to be reactive acts, obscure, and limited in terms of impact (Hall, 2010).

The rhetoric of community engagement in African higher education seems to be at odds with the call for increased relevance and authentic engagement of universities as partners in the resolution of 'our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems' (Boyer, 1996b, 32). The community engagement responsibility of Africa universities should be larger considering the continent's level of development and the key role that these scientific institutions are assigned as partners in the socioeconomic transformation of Africa.

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African Community Understandings of Ubuntu and its Application to Design of a Junior Basketball Program to Support Health and Wellbeing in Melbourne, Australia

Ahmed Bawa Kuyini*
Abraham Kuol**
Rachel Goff***
Ronnie Egan***
Patrick O'Keeffe***
Robb Cunningham***
Robyn Martin***
Sarah Williams***

* RMIT University
& The British University in Dubai
Corresponding Author: ahmed.abubakar@buid.ac.ae
** Afri-AusCare Melbourne
*** RMIT University

Abstract

Sports-based youth-development programs are found to increase community connection, health and wellbeing within migrant communities, yet there is a little attention paid to integrating Indigenous viewpoints, cultural norms and practices in the early conceptualisation, design and development of such programs. We analyse African-Australian community members' views and practices of Ubuntu to inform the co-design of an existing sports-based youth development program, the Black Rhinos Basketball Program, for a younger age-group. Drawing upon data from a larger study exploring community members' views about Ubuntu, community, health and wellbeing, this study employed individual interviews and focus groups with 22 community members to explore participants' personal understandings of Ubuntu and how they could be employed in the co-design of the expanded program for children, young people and their families. Thematic analysis of the data highlights an integrated understanding of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing, which includes recognition, respect, sense

of family and belonging and reciprocity. These conceptualisations of Ubuntu were then applied to the design of the basketball program, with an emphasis on sport as an opportunity to practice role modelling and leadership. This study suggests that integrating indigenous philosophy and worldview into health interventions may cultivate and enhance values and skills that strengthen a young person's cultural identity.

***Keywords**:* Ubuntu, community, health and wellbeing, co-design, sport

In 2022, Afri-Aus Care ("AAC") in partnership with RMIT University Social Work secured funding from the Victorian Health Promotion Fund (VicHealth) to expand the existing Black Rhinos Basketball Program to support mental health and wellbeing among young people in South-Eastern Melbourne, Victoria. The aim of the project was to explore how a sport-based program could support young people (aged 5-14) and their families to connect with culturally responsive services that support physical and mental health and wellbeing. The proposed expansion incorporated a primary prevention focus, working with primary school aged children and their families to integrate leadership development, youth mentoring relationships, education tutoring and after school and holiday programs with the involvement of parents and family members in the program. Given the paucity of African worldview and values in existing sports-based programs (Onsando et al, 2021), a key aspect of the proposed project was to understand how African community members understand, experience and practice Ubuntu, and how that knowledge could be used as a framework of support for African Australian youth (5-14 years old) in an expanded Black Rhinos Primary Prevention Program.

Background to Afri-Aus Care Inc.

Afri-Aus Care (AAC) is an African-led not-for-profit community organisation that provides support services to African and other culturally and linguistically diverse community members in South-Eastern Melbourne, Australia. AAC has been working with RMIT University since 2019. AAC works to empower community members through culturally responsive service provision and operates as a drop-in community centre where service users can access employment support, job readiness training, culturally responsive counselling, community garden initiatives, sports programs, drug, alcohol and mental health information sessions, disability support and advocacy, and mental health assessments and referrals (AAC, 2023). Many

service users are immigrants from forced pathways who experience low-income and high rates of unemployment and represent disproportionately impacted communities who experience health disparities due to resettlement challenges, and inadequate and culturally unresponsive support services.

AAC partnered with the University of Melbourne and the Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity ("AAFRO") to deliver the *Empowering African Mothers: Ubuntu in Practice* program funded by the Department of Justice and Community Safety over a three year period (2020-23). This partnership resulted in the development of a set of Ubuntu guidelines, a toolkit, and practice principles that outline how to support African Australians and work in an "UBUNTU Way". The new partnership between Afri-Aus Care and RMIT (from 2019) expands on the existing body of research and knowledge, including existing understandings of Ubuntu from administrators and staff, and aims to develop an understanding of Ubuntu from community members and service users connected to the Black Rhinos program.

AAC have managed the Black Rhinos Basketball Program, a grassroots crime prevention sports program for African youth (aged 18-30) since 2017 in Melbourne (Onsando et. al, 2021). The Black Rhinos began as a community-led initiative to prevent crime and build the resilience of at-risk youth (Onsando et. al, 2021). The program uses sport as a vehicle to connect at-risk youth and their families to culturally appropriate services at AAC, provide young people with opportunities to connect with other community members and develop positive social skills, and support their effective reintegration into the community (Onsando et. al, 2020; Young & Block, 2023). The Ubuntu philosophy was chosen as an underpinning framework to guide the culture within the existing Black Rhino's program for youth 18+ years old and was considered appropriate for co-designing a new integrated and inclusive basketball program for children 5-14 years old.

Using the philosophy of Ubuntu and community-based co-design methodology (Till et al. 2022) to create a new program, the project sought to generate new evidence, opportunities, and possibilities to expand the existing program for a younger age group and define Ubuntu program delivery through the lens of the community. This paper therefore draws on data from the first stage of the program's co-design, which incorporated the views of African community members about Ubuntu, community, and health and wellbeing. We sought to answer the following questions: 'What is the meaning of Ubuntu for African community members connected to Afri-Aus

Care?' and 'How could Ubuntu be applied to the design of the new Black Rhinos Basketball program to support health and wellbeing?'.

Sports-based programs for youth development

Sports-based programs have been used to promote health and wellbeing among minority and marginalised populations in Australia (Cunningham et al, 2020). In general, such programs have been promoted on the premise of reducing marginalisation or enhancing physical and mental wellbeing, using frameworks such as ecological systems theory, supporting relationships**,** social capital, inclusion, sense of belonging, resilience, and navigating the social environment and social determinants of health (Frounfelker et al., 2020; Cunningham et al, 2020). While sports programs underpinned by such frameworks have been found to support integration and positive resettlement outcomes, many have been criticised as not being culturally sensitive and, being top-down and inadequately fostering stakeholder collaboration, unable to comprehensively serve community needs through holistic inclusion (Ahmad, et al 2020; Block and Gibbs, 2017; Spaaij et al., 2019).

A small number of studies emphasise indigenous viewpoints in sports-program design or delivery (Block & Gibbs, 2017; Brink, et al. 2020; Chigangaidze, 2021a). Block and Gibbs (2017) stress that anchoring program design, participation strategies and activities in community practices, norms and values, especially for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, may enhance connectedness both inside and external to the community. While these studies provide context for the role of culturally diverse communities in established sports-based programs, the literature shows little evidence of the framing and the deployment of Indigenous knowledge-based frameworks to conceptualise such programs in Australia and elsewhere, even though the concept of health and wellbeing differs between western and Indigenous cultures (Shakespeare et al. 2021). To ensure that the expanded Black Rhinos Basketball Program would effectively support young people and the health and wellbeing of their families in an 'Ubuntu way', incorporating the community's views and practice of Ubuntu into the conceptualisation of the program was critical. We thus report on African-Australian community members' views about the African philosophy of Ubuntu and its application in the co-design of a basketball program to support health and wellbeing among young people and their families.

Literature Review

Ubuntu, which is expressed in the maxim "I am because you are" or "I am because we are" is an Indigenous African philosophy (Ntibagirirwa, 2018). Broodryk (2008) defines it as an "African worldview based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative community life in the spirit of family" (p. 17). Ubuntu has at its core the recognition, valuing and respecting of personhood (Kuyini, 2013). The broad essence of Ubuntu is the strong relationship between the worth of the individual and those around them, and the value of service, participation and inclusion for collective wellbeing. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2000) states,

> The person who has the quality of Ubuntu is one who is open and available to others, affirming of others, …knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole….Ubuntu allows a person to say with confidence that "I am a human because I belong. I participate. I share….I am because you are" (p. 31).

Values and principles gleaned from the Ubuntu philosophy in the literature include notions of Ubuntu as community, recognition, respect for individual humanity, inclusion, participation, relationships, belonging, and collective wellbeing. Highlighting these values, Letseka (2000) asserts that "Ubuntu has normative implications in that it encapsulates moral norms and values such as altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy and respect and concern for others" (p. 180).

As a philosophy of life, the array of principles deriving from Ubuntu elucidate the role of values in societal conceptualisation, evolution and regulation of mores and behaviours. As Johnson and Cleveland (1999) observed, values are essential and pragmatic principles for accomplishment, learned and transmitted to successive generations as a psychological foundation for its further advancement. Values often dictate ways of thinking and perceiving the world (ontology) that lead to types of actions or behaviours expected of all members of a social group. Similarly, the values of Ubuntu generate ways of thinking and doing which are likely to be transformative for individuals and communities. In this regard the notion of "I am because we are" alludes to an integrative sense of what individuals and communities should think and do. From a social psychological standpoint,

Ubuntu values generate specific attitudes and behaviours among community members that are promoted and regulated by subjective norms (expectations of significant others) (Ajzen, 1991). The attitudes and expectations support the realisation of the goal of "I am because you are", by requiring all members of society to strive through their thinking and behaviour.

Contributing to the transformative potential of Ubuntu in respect of behaviour, Chigangaidze (2021b) states that "Ubuntu…promotes the behaviours that make life worthwhile, promote health and reduce human suffering" (p. 2). Koenane (2018) emphasised that Ubuntu rejects violence, xenophobia and promotes *philoxenia* or love for a stranger, which supports values of helping and sharing. Thus "internalising the Ubuntu values means that individuals and their communities are encouraged to perform good actions" (Koenane, 2018, p.5).

Another transformation perspective that flows from the notion that "I am because we are" is the recognition of personhood and the importance of relationships. In Ubuntu, the priority of individual first before community is reversed, because the starting point is a pre-existing society in which individuality and personhood are nurtured through social connectedness (Tutu, 2011). Thus, "you are, only because the other is". This is foundational to respect for persons (individual) and other principles and actions that are indispensable to realising the pragmatic ideal that "you can only continue to be if the other is". In short, one cannot continue "to be" unless one ensures that others "are". This essentialises the need to recognise and respect others as human beings, who are automatically included in family and community, with equal status and responsibility, and leads to participation, a sense of belonging and collective wellbeing (Kuyini, In Press). Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999, 2011, p.31) captures this transformative potential by stating that Ubuntu allows the individual to affirm their being (or humanity) because they belong, participate and share with others, which enables "the other to be." The individual is nothing without the community, the community is nothing without the individual (Bidima, 2002).

Other writers have explored the role of Ubuntu in creating a sense of belonging and sense of community through relationships and interconnectedness (Eze, 2008; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020), and responsibility and reciprocity which ensures collective wellbeing (Kuyini, 2013; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020; Tutu, 2011). Regarding responsibility, Ubuntu requires collective responsibility, which derives from interconnectedness (Nussbaum, 2003). Endorsing this line of thinking, Tutu (2011) suggested that because interdependency is the root of our being, the

individual has irreducible obligations to others, necessitating striving to live in ways that support the needs and interests of everyone, resulting in mutual flourishing (Tutu, 2000, 2011) or collective wellbeing (Kuyini, 2013; Rankopo & Draditsile, 2020).

Ubuntu embodying health and wellbeing

Researchers such as Chigangaidze, (2021a) emphasise the value of Ubuntu in conceptualising health and wellbeing and employed it to study mental health support and the multimodal approach to service delivery. The concept of health and wellbeing is understood differently in cultures around the world. It springs from the idea of being and thriving, and cultures have different ideas of what health and wellbeing entail. Under the philosophy of Ubuntu, community or context foregrounds the space where health and wellbeing are generated and maintained. In this regard, theories pertaining to well-being must be sensitive to the cultural context of the group for which it is applied (Adams & Salter, 2007). Related to this, Ubuntu endorses the idea that community embodies the space within which body, mind, and spirit (the three domains of health and wellbeing) thrive. Against this background, Chigangaidze, et al., (2021a) citing the work of Kasenene (1994) assert that an Ubuntu based health promotion approach focuses on "personal integration, environmental equilibrium, social harmony, including harmony between the individual, the environment and community" (p.322). Ubuntu principles such as inclusivity, belonging and striving for social harmony foster health and wellbeing (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Chigangaidze, et al., 2021b).

Methodology

This paper is contextualised within a larger study that sought to co-design an expanded version of the Black Rhinos Basketball Program for 5-14 year olds, with the Afri-Aus Care community in Melbourne, Australia. The co-design study employed community-based co-design (Till et al., 2022) to incorporate African-Australian community values and practices into the design of the expanded program (Goff et al., 2024). Culturally relevant frameworks such as Ubuntu and community-based co-design are useful approaches to conceptualise and operationalise preventive health and wellbeing programs (Brink, et al. 2020; Chigangaidzi, 2021a; IDEO, 2015), to support collaboration and achieve wellbeing outcomes beyond mere participation in sports (Cunningham, 2021). The research team, consisting of

six university social work researchers and the Afri-Aus Care project manager, practised cultural humility by emphasising collaboration, curiosity, respect, reciprocity, partnership and power-sharing to position the participants as co-researchers and contributors to the development of the new program, centralising the community's cultural expertise as central to the program development (Goff et al., 2024).

Project participants

A total of 22 community members took part in the co-design process, all of which were purposively selected by the Project Manager to ensure a diversity of perspectives and roles. The participants were selected based on their involvement with Afri-Aus Care services, their leadership role or cultural authority within the African-Australian community or their participation in the existing Black Rhinos Basketball Program. The existing relationships between the project manager and the participants was a crucial factor in the researchers establishing trust and partnership with the participants (Goff et al., 2024). All participants lived in Melbourne, Australia and comprised of female and male adults and young people, ranging in age from 18 – 60+ years. Ethics approval was granted from the 'Withheld' University Human Research Ethics Committee (no. 25696), and all participants provided their verbal and written consent.

Data collection and analysis

This paper reports on the analysis of data collected from a broader data set related to the participants views and experiences of Ubuntu, and its potential application to the proposed junior Black Rhinos Basketball Program. The questions informing this analysis were

- What does Ubuntu mean to you?
- How can Ubuntu be integrated into the Black Rhinos program?

Because a principle of co-design is to draw upon the diverse views and experiences of key stakeholder groups to develop a desired outcome (Sanders & Stappers, 2012), the first research question allowed the participants the opportunity to reflect on their own understandings, views and practices of Ubuntu. The second question explored how these views might be operationalised to meet the diverse needs of the community as program

beneficiaries. Responses to these questions were sought across multiple stages of the co-design process to allow for iteration and development of ideas (IDEO, 2015).

All 22 participants were involved at various stages of the program co-design (Goff et al., 2024). Stage one was a focus group, which aimed to establish relationships between the participants and researchers and co-develop creative tools for use in semi-structured interviews; stage two involved semi-structured qualitative interviews, which explored participants views and experiences of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing and community in greater depth; and a final workshop incorporating a charette protocol (Howard & Somerville, 2014) to generate insights into the operationalisation of participants' views of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing and community into the new program. The focus group and workshop were conducted face-to-face onsite at Afri-Aus Care, and interviews were a combination of face-to-face at a location chosen by the participant, or by telephone. The focus group and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and the workshop produced artefacts that represented participants' ideas and insights.

The audio recordings from the focus group and interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis method. The participants were given the option to review the transcripts of their individual interview. Each transcript was then double coded by two different members of the research team according to sensitising concepts most relevant to the project outcomes (Ubuntu, health and wellbeing, community, and program priorities). After initial analysis, the researchers met several times to discuss the categorisation of key phrases, terms and ideas, to allow for the identification of additional themes and to develop a shared understanding. The results reported on in this paper are specific to participants' views and experiences of Ubuntu, as well as their ideas for how Ubuntu should be operationalised within the new program.

Results

Emphasising the participants' views and experiences of Ubuntu, and how the philosophy should be integrated into the new basketball program, we present our findings within four key themes. Across generations, we identified participant definitions of Ubuntu, the interrelated nature of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing, specific dimensions pertaining to the practice of Ubuntu, and an envisaging of an Ubuntu-informed basketball program.

Participant definitions of Ubuntu

Participants reported Ubuntu as a multifaceted worldview, knowledge system and reality through which they filtered their consciousness, culture, and identity, all of which guide their interactions and experiences. Most participants commonly characterised Ubuntu as embodied and internalised, with these ontological characteristics contributing to their interactions and relations with others. One participant said, "I don't know how to define it, but it's in your heart and how you define it is very challenging what Ubuntu means. It means everyone... we have a background and history."

A sense of community and collective values was much discussed among participants. Many participants, despite their age or role within the community, described how Ubuntu was a thread that connected them to each other, for the greater good. For example, a participant reported that "Getting to understand Ubuntu and its principles and how that works, will help us as communities to live, to work together for the common good of the community." Another reported that "Ubuntu means that we want to be together." Most participants characterised Ubuntu in relation to positive actions or attributes, such as solidarity and co-responsibility, which would enhance a community's overall wellbeing. Their narratives illustrate interactions between the ontological nature of Ubuntu and its embodied relational expressions, such as through showing "a love and unity", and "Togetherness, expectancy, core responsibility (or co-responsibility), fairness – everybody being treated the same. Because everyone comes maybe from an unfortunate background, and we want people to feel accepted and feel important."

Together, the community members who participated in the research understood Ubuntu by its embodied and integrated interconnectedness to culture, history, identity, community and mutual wellbeing, all of which are promoted through a sense of collective responsibility.

Relationship between Ubuntu and Health & Wellbeing

Some participants demonstrated an integrated understanding of Ubuntu and the concept of health and wellbeing, which includes mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. Participants highlighted that their practice of Ubuntu informs and mediates health and wellbeing. Other responses capture this integrated understanding: "When I have family, I have everything (inclusive of health and wellbeing)", and "You can't have

wellbeing without health", and "Wellbeing is linked to happiness and satisfaction with life", which Ubuntu offers.

For several participants, Ubuntu supports community harmony, which facilitates health and wellbeing. One participant noted that Ubuntu "helps us as communities to live, to work together for the common good of the community", and that this harmony builds the social and psychological conditions for sustained wellbeing. Another participant suggested that Ubuntu principles and values were integral to maintain peaceful coexistence with others:

> I see Ubuntu as the pinpoint to a happy life. Ubuntu is kindness, the values behind it is instilled in our culture, it's instilled in all our religions. It is instilled in what our parents tell us every day... It's instilled in human rights. It's instilled in ethical values. So, I think anyone with a moral compass will agree with the Ubuntu principles and the message behind Ubuntu. And if you don't, you are not one for peace and community.

For another community leader, such integration "starts with community teaching … if there's none of that teaching it would be difficult for us to grow as a community." Thus, teaching is necessary and is facilitated by a sense of family and belonging which supports the development of self-concept, self-worth and wellbeing through a sense of belonging, social connection, family, and community. As social constructs, self-concept, self-worth and wellbeing are the result of social experiences and relationships with others in context (Crocker & Brummelman, 2018). In this regard, one participant said: "If you don't belong you are lost."

Dimensions of Ubuntu

Within the participants' overarching definitions of Ubuntu and its relationship to health and wellbeing, specific dimensions of Ubuntu were identified. These were respect, responsibility and recognition, belonging and sense of family, and equality, sharing and reciprocity. They are presented as sub-themes below.

Respect, responsibility and recognition

The responses of participants showed that respect for others and responsibility were expected within the African Australian community. Participants articulated their understanding of Ubuntu as involving respect

for other people, acknowledging their being, which is about recognition. One of the participants explained:

> We teach our kids about respect. You have to respect Uncle, you have to respect Aunty, you have to respect someone when they tell you something. Don't just throw the word [around]. You have to respect the other people when you are young. So, when there is respect in the community, there is love. When there is no respect, there is no love."

This response highlights the benefits of respect and responsibility, and failure to take responsibility can have negative effects. In explaining the implications of failure to take collective responsibility in relation to a past incident, one participant said, "I am because we are." In this regard, responsibility offers a connection to a sense of community.

Similarly, co-responsibility implies equality in showing reciprocity, sharing of burdens, duties, joy, problems, and making mistakes. Younger study participants who were active members of the existing Basketball program discussed their sense of responsibility to their team and each player's role within it. One said, "We all had responsibility as to why he [a team-mate] left. We had responsibility as individuals involved on the court at training" (to ensure he remained in the group). Another then responded, "Accepting responsibility in where we may have made an error." Acting on one's responsibilities to others was therefore considered by participants as a reciprocal process of 'being ok.' In their words, Ubuntu "makes sure someone is ok, someone also makes sure I am ok... we can all be ok."

Belonging and sense of family

To many participants, Ubuntu is a sense of belonging and family, which flows from recognition and respect for the individual. The benefits of belonging and the potential for distress associated with not having a sense of belonging are well documented (Allen et al., 2021; Cacioppo et al., 2015; Hari, 2019) and the participants' responses reflected both. Alluding to sense of belonging and family, participants stated that Ubuntu means togetherness and family: "It's like coming together, randoms I didn't even know would call me 'Oh Brother'. Family-hood. Bringing together, togetherness... so, for example, me helping people." Another participant reported that "Ubuntu is like family, first is like family and coming together. It's a reunion. To come together and help each other, with respect, with equality, and just 'we care

too'. And that's everyday life." To these participants, belonging and family, like respect, recognition and responsibility, means acting in ways that create a better community.

Equality, sharing, reciprocity

The majority of respondents talked about the links between previously reported dimensions of Ubuntu in relation to equality, sharing and reciprocity, which necessitates responsibility to self, others and shared or co-responsibility. Showing reciprocity was by acting towards each other, doing for self and others. Of reciprocity, participants said the following:

- It's kind of like I saved a life. And then that person could then go on and help someone else. So, it's a circle going around.
- So that's a concept of Ubuntu, because we are all helping each other. Tomorrow, they could be helping me.
- Giving back to community, reciprocity, bounded solidarity, giving more than you receive, giving first, making sure others have their needs met first.

Sharing non-material resources with others was highlighted by one participant as an enactment of reciprocity, which also illustrated its relational ontology. They said:

> Everyday Ubuntu has shown me to be kind, generous and give without expecting. I think Ubuntu is 'I am because we all are equal', it taps on so many different values... And without equality, there's no equity. Without equality there is no humility, or togetherness.

Such solidarity and reciprocity also extended to sharing other resources, such as information or time. One participant reported that they 'protected' their community health and wellbeing, which included political, social and financial domains, by providing guidance or information. They reported that "I will share with my community because if all communities are well, we are all well and the wider community is well." Thus, participants felt that Ubuntu was directly related to collective responsibility to both the functioning and wellbeing of their community through reciprocal actions.

Ubuntu informing the design of the Program

The findings so far highlight the participants' views and experiences of Ubuntu, which illustrates a set of principles, worldview and actions that are embodied by individuals for the collective good. Because the purpose of the research was to co-design a basketball program grounded in Ubuntu philosophy, the participants were asked about how Ubuntu could inform the new program, including being informed by how Ubuntu already operated within the existing, senior team. As one participant said:

> Ubuntu is sort of reflected in the basketball. Because, like, in order for me to be equal, we have to go together. And it's like in order for one person to be successful in the team, the whole team has to contribute together for that person's goal to be achieved. Basketball then pushes everyone to look beyond the differences that's in the community. To look beyond the colour differences, the racial, social, and just all the differences that we have. Put them aside for the moment, and just focus on building the relationships now, on just one focus. On one mission of basketball, or one mission of the local drug action team, or one mission of…whatever programs that we are doing. And it's like, that's why I am here. That's why I love the Black Rhinos.

For the new basketball program, participants believe that Ubuntu principles such as community, family, respect, responsibility, sharing and reciprocity were important to the design. In this regard participants said:

> If you understand that there is a lack of trust, towards people of any other colour, that aren't of African background, you can understand that 'OK, if this is what they need, then let's cater to that'. And build them to a point where they are confident to attend any other basketball program.

> I think that Ubuntu would really engage people. Not only engage them, will break down those barriers and break down those perceptions amongst the CALD

> communities…It will bring a sense of community and it will bring kids together.

The importance of role models and leadership

Within their imagining of the future Ubuntu basketball program, community members suggested the need for role models, leaders, and mentoring opportunities for youth within and beyond sport.

Presently, role models include parents, significant others, coaches and mentors in the Black Rhinos Basketball program, who play this role through informal and formal interactions. The interview participants emphasised the importance of communication and the active engagement of mentors (as role models) in sports and other activities within an expanded basketball program. One participant said, "Communication between the mentor and the parents too will be very important."

Participants maintained that success of role models will depend on engaging "People who know how to work with young people. People who can identify with the young people." Another said:

> When I think of that [engaging with young people], I think of how impressionable young kids are, and how important representation is. So, I think in terms of what the program would look like, obviously the mentors that are being a part of that being relatable, being people that kids can have a connection with.

Participants also reported that it was important to engage people who were currently or previously involved with the Black Rhinos program, to create the conditions for deep and enduring mentoring relationships, both inside the program as well as outside in the community.

According to the participants, Ubuntu is perceived as having the potential to enable a new form of leadership that enhances the prospects of young people. Speaking about older community leaders' approach, a young person said:

> One thing that I've noticed is that in the smaller groups of the communities, the leadership has always been an issue and leaders have always been I guess stuck in the old ways and not wanting to

> move forward... I think we have a lot of young leaders out there that I guess haven't had that opportunity because of that. They become reluctant to actually step forward and say, 'Hey I'm here, I want to be a leader and I want to be involved and more'."

Many African community leaders emerge organically within groups based on individual ability to take initiative or exhibit different forms of power. The failings of such leaders can be attributed to many factors including, limited understanding of how leaders ought to lead in the new Australian context and not holding an Ubuntu-mindset. Alluding to the latter, one of the young people said "I feel like if we all had the Ubuntu mindset we would have future leaders. More people contributing to the society and an overall better economy. I genuinely believe that."

For the young focus group participants, the current "tough times" experienced by African communities is ideal for developing leadership skills among the prospective new basketball team members, because

> At ages 5-12, I believe that is the perfect time to develop great leaders. There's a quote that says, 'Tough times create great leaders. Great leaders create good times, good times create weak leaders, weak leaders create tough times. And it's an ongoing cycle. In order for us to break that cycle, we've got to find ways to create strong leaders. But not like – I guess, give them tasks that are not easy, but not overly difficult.

These words from a participant highlight how they viewed the new program as an opportunity to develop future leaders, who would embody Ubuntu values in support of community wellbeing.

Discussion

Understandings of Ubuntu

The results of this study confirm diverse understandings of Ubuntu in the extant literature but uncover other understandings unique to the study population, which will constitute supportive ways for conceptualising and implementing a new Black Rhinos Basketball Program for children 5-14 years old.

Respect and recognition as primary elements of the Ubuntu concept involve respect for other people, acknowledging their being, which support the sense of belonging. To our study participants, recognition and respect for the individuals constituted the bedrock for belonging, sense of family, and community. The relationships created by a sense of community were linked to equality with others, responsibility towards others, sharing, reciprocity and acting for a better community. Responsibility along with sharing and reciprocity were noted as occurring in relation to sharing food, parenting, including transporting children to school or sports activities and other social good with the aim of creating better community. Overall, these findings reflect the work of authors such as Bidima (2002), Eze (2008), Letseka (2000), and also Tutu (2011) who maintains that Ubuntu is embedded in community and it is in the community context that the individual learns to be, to share, and reciprocate for collective gain (Rankopo & Dradistsile, 2020). Thus, shared responsibility and reciprocity are behaviours that aim for collective good and the promotion of wellbeing.

Older community members suggested that in a foreign context like Australia, Ubuntu enables them to have a sense of belonging, safety, connection and support. In many African traditions and cultures, family and community connectedness are core elements of the social structure. When people from forced migration pathways settle in Australia, these elements are not present, and with the resettlement process comes challenges such as loss of culture, social capital, community, and language as well as the need to adapt to a new and foreign environment (Kuyini & Kivunja, 2018) . By practicing co-responsibility and reciprocity, these aspects of Ubuntu enabled those participants who had migrated to Australia to feel connected to each other and their collective and individual histories as they resettled in a new place with cultural practices that may diverge from their own (Abur & Rugare-Muganbati, 2022).

Challenges associated with resettlement lead to newly arrived forced migrants feeling alienated, lonely, experiencing disadvantage, and ultimately social isolation (Cunningham et al., 2020). The re-introduction of Ubuntu into the lives of African diaspora in Australia can lead to positive social outcomes, support in rebuilding a sense of community, provide opportunities for social connections, and address some of the underlying barriers to participation in the wider society (Mayaka & Truell, 2021). In African cultures the Ubuntu worldview empowers the individual, families, and the community as a whole and embeds values such as respect, reciprocity,

togetherness, safety, belonging, and connectedness within the culture, culminating in better wellbeing.

How can Ubuntu be applied to the Black Rhinos Program?

Participants said that the existing Black Rhinos Program created a place where these different experiences of health and wellbeing could be realised. While the participants' understandings of Ubuntu provide several ideas for co-designing the new Black Rhinos Basketball Program, the notion of community is pivotal. Therefore, the co-design of the program for a younger age group could start from the premise of the child as belonging to community. By creating a community akin to the traditional African concept of community, a mix of the divine, sacred and the mundane (Mbiti, 1978; Bidima, 2002), young people should be able to cultivate specific attitudes and behaviours within a context where community others' expectations (subjective norms) generate enabling mental states to work towards collective wellbeing. As noted earlier, under Ubuntu, context or community foregrounds the space where health and wellbeing are generated and maintained. Community embodies the space within which body, mind, and spirit (the three domains of health and wellbeing) thrive. And social spaces such as sports programs, if guided by Ubuntu, will create contexts for body, mind and spirit to thrive. Additionally, the inclusion of the Ubuntu framework in the design of the expanded Black Rhinos Basketball Program will ensure that players, coaches, parents, and any other stakeholders involved have access to support, a community, and opportunities for empowerment. An Ubuntu-inspired community results in strong community bonds, and a collectivist attitude, it forges strong community relationships, and acts as a support structure for vulnerable individuals and families within the community.

Another important understanding that emerged from the participants is the integration of Ubuntu with health and wellbeing. In this sense, promoting health and wellbeing comes with practising Ubuntu. The two are not separate entities; the realisation of one leads naturally to the realisation of the other, whereby "Sport can be a bridge that leads to increased health and mental wellbeing ..allows young people to increase their sense of personal empowerment, … ability to cope and helps with social recognition and boosts self-esteem" (Pittaway & Dandas, 2021, p.3). An Ubuntu community would strengthen this reciprocal effect of sports and wellbeing. In this study, participants believed that Ubuntu principles can be applied to

the new Black Rhinos program through an inclusive environment that allows participation in sport. Such participation will enable relationship building opportunities with peers, between parents and children, and provide support outside of sport for community members.

Sport can be used as a tool to engage young people and provide them with learning opportunities and necessary supports such as mental health education, alcohol and drug education, job readiness training, employment support, opportunities to make social connections to reduce the likelihood of social isolation and address loneliness. In this study, community members stressed the importance of education in areas such as mental health, alcohol and other drugs ("AOD"), and leadership as part of the new program. Poor mental health, and AOD abuse contribute to many social, emotional, and behavioural problems among African youth (Mwanri & Mude 2021) and education is a key ameliorative pathway. However, such an education requires culturally responsive approaches like Ubuntu. Incorporation of Ubuntu in the delivery of AOD, mental health education would create a safe, judgement-free education environment, where community members feel respected, valued, and supported. The expanded Black Rhinos will offer such a space for mental health and wellbeing education or engagement that will support health development in children.

Another finding highlighted by community participants is the importance of role models, leaders to guide personal development, and mentoring opportunities for youth within and beyond sport. Role models support children and young people's development through social learning (Bandura, 1977). In community sport this is embodied by coaches, captains, and leaders within the team (Van Der Veken et al. 2020), who create an environment where participants have a sense of belonging, safety, and promotes values such as respect, teamwork, connectedness, and collaboration. Role models and parents play a key role in developing a child's skill through participation in sport, therefore role models need to have a clear understanding of the Ubuntu framework to support African youth in culturally responsive ways. The Ubuntu framework will equip Black Rhinos coaches, mentors, team captains, and parents with Ubuntu values embedded into the culture of the organisation and will help the team to operate in a similar manner to the Afri-Aus Care community or an African Ubuntu community

Conclusion

Using data from a broader study, this paper highlights the diverse understandings of Ubuntu among African-Australian community members. The findings indicate an integrated understanding of Ubuntu, health and wellbeing, which includes recognition, respect, sense of family and belonging and reciprocity. The individual is grounded in community as context for developing connections, sense of family, and belonging which enhance health and wellbeing through sharing and reciprocal support. Without a context to ground the self, self-worth is not easily internalised. Therefore utilising Ubuntu as a framework supports the formation and consolidation of positive self-concept, cultural identity and perceived self-worth, which are internalised, enabling healthy developmental trajectories of children and young people. The findings also suggest that the use of an Indigenous philosophy such as Ubuntu to frame sports-based programs has both a practical advantage and, potentially, a culturally-strengthened identity and wellbeing outcome. Applying the Ubuntu principles in a sports-based program such as the expanded Black Rhinos Basketball Program will enable children and young people, through interactions with peers, mentors and community members, to cultivate values, principles and leadership skills that could contribute to health and wellbeing.

The implications of the findings for practice include fine-tuning the governing principles of Afri-AusCare; fashioning the expanded Black Rhinos program philosophy from the emergent Ubuntu principles for young people and mentors; and using the health promotion and healing principles of Ubuntu to ingrain recognition, sharing, belonging, social harmony in the community, and create bridging social capital with the broader Melbourne community. Future research could focus on how these findings can be translated into practice and their role in improving wellbeing outcomes for children and young people. Overall, the study findings add to practice ideas, informed by strengths-based and decolonising approaches, and co-design as examples of creating community-based assets and resources for improving health and wellbeing of children and young people within African communities.

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RESEARCH NOTE

Some Reflections on African Male Suicide

Oluwole Sanni
Faculty of Applied Linguistics
University of Warsaw, Poland
o.sanni@uw.edu.pl

Abstract

Suicide notes not only reveal overt mental states but can also be regarded as data that can be analysed to reveal deeper meanings through approaches such as forensic linguistics. This note examines three suicide notes written by three African males to investigate the overt and covert meanings in these texts. Reflections from this analysis introduce a few ways in which males portray the masculine/male face in their suicide texts. The study argues that suicide completers use deliberate semantic and pragmatic resources to negotiate different masculine representations in their suicide texts. The present reflection concludes that suicide notes are instances of language use with multiple layers of meanings.

Introduction

Suicide notes are forensic texts with sociological and psychological implications and thus worthy of (forensic) linguistic explorations to uncover inherent linguistic and extra-linguistic meanings. Suicide is not just a bane in developed countries but also a crisis in developing countries as evident in some African countries.

The 'tabooing' of suicide in Africa (Eshun, 2003; Lester & Akande, 1994) explains why many religious practices and systems condemn the act. It also might explain the 'cleansing rituals' performed in some African homes whenever suicide occurs (Knizek, Akotia & Hjelmeland, 2010). Not only is suicide viewed as a cowardly act in many African communities, but the belief that 'precipitated murder is considered more acceptable than suicide' (Gibbs, 1988) has relatively wider acceptance in the African society. These reasons and more might explain why Africa in addition to countries in the Middle East, Central, and South America conceal suicidal acts and fail to report (or present accurate reports) to authorities such as the World Health Organisation

(Lester, 2013). Sometimes, suicide in Africa is described as 'death by natural causes' (BBC, 2019). However, Kootbodien, Naicker, Wilson, Ramesar, & London (2020) note that southern sub-Saharan Africa had the 'third-highest suicide mortality rate' in the globe in 2016. Recently, social media has become one of the recent platforms (African) suicide completers and attempters use to express their suicidal thoughts and ideations (Schoene & Dethlef 2016; Sanni 2021; Sanni 2022).

The present study considers the use of antonyms, how victimhood is constructed in suicide texts, and how local context influences the construction of meaning in suicide studies. Hence, the present study leans towards the semantic relations and pragmatic nuances in suicide notes specifically as it relates to the portrayer of self and others in this specific discourse type-suicide text.

Data

The present reflection is from three suicide notes derived online primarily from virtual African newspapers. The suicide notes were selected based on the reputation of the newspapers that reported it. Furthermore, there were many of cross-references of these reported suicide notes across different newspapers to see what was included and excluded in the suicide notes. The reported suicide notes are the exact words of the deceased, though some newspapers might decide to shorten some suicide notes (as that was the case of text C, with the full suicide note reported in another newspaper). The suicide notes are recent suicides, from 2018 and 2019, and thus show current masculine portrayers and representations in suicide discourse. The suicide notes were written by two Nigerians and one Kenyan suicide completer, all male. The choice of male suicide completers is to examine the phenomenon of male suicide particularly in Africa. This is hinged on the perception that there are more male completers and more female attempters when it comes to suicide. For instance, one Center for Disease Control and Prevention study notes (CDCP 2024) that the ratio between male to female suicide is 4:1, which explains the shocking statistic of suicide being the seventh leading cause of death in man and sixteenth leading cause of death in women.

Each of the suicide notes (that is, their short extracts/excerpts) are shown below and labelled text A, B and C. Text A revolves around the theme of fatherhood; text B about plagiarism with suicide the aftermath; text C about the betrayal of trust with regards to faithfulness and loyalty. What is similar in the three texts is the notion of the 'male face' which each strives to preserve despite being smeared either by self or by others. It foregrounds how

these three males convey the protection, compensation, and redemption of their masculine dignity and identity which seems not to align with mainstream conception of masculinity (as it is sometimes hinged on masculine achievement metrics like macho and traditional masculinity). Texts B and C echo the pragmatic construction of victimhood, as there are conspicuous instances of self-loathing due to perceived social isolation. Text A depicts the right portrayer of others within the confines of positive masculinity and societal approved masculinity.

The current analysis is inductive, qualitative, and exploratory. It is inductive as the data guides the analysis's direction without any premeditated bias from the researcher. It is qualitative because it represents a non-numeric analysis aimed at exploring the implied and explicit meanings in the suicide texts. It is exploratory because it examines issues and themes beyond the sentence level.

Text A

> "The best, that's what I used to call you. Finally, this is the end of my journey here on earth.
>
> The evil I have been battling with has succeeded in quenching the flame. **You married a wrong man. You're a good woman and you deserve the best.** You need to be happy. You need to soar. "Please take care of our princess, XXX. Tell her that I love her so much. Be peaceable with everyone though not gonna be easy. Tell my family not to harbour any resentment against you. .
>
> You're a blessing to us. That's the wish of a dying man. Don't cry for me but pray for me. I love you and XXX so much. Good Bye My beloved."

Text B

> "… same research work. He said I did copy and paste. Ever since den, things changed from bad to worst. Am in a deep mess at @ the moment. My life don tire me. I feel like dying. I wish I can sleep and wake not wake up again".

Text C

> "Nostalgia kills me when I remember all the good times we spent together. The sacrifices I made just to see you smile. We played together like little kids and I still remember your lack of talent for little games. I loved you for it. … Now that I cannot live without you. Now that you judged and gave me a command. Now that you shouted at me from inside your room with your "boyfriend" that I should "go kill yourself" and even asked for my suicide note, well here it is my love".

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis investigates antonyms, local context, and pragmatic meanings in these three suicide notes written by three African males. One salient issue with self and other portrayers is the concept of 'face' which is a pragmatic term that denotes how someone/others want to be perceived. Hence, the concept of private and private faces (real vs constructed/aligning identities) seems relevant in suicide discourse being the last acts of communication by an individual. Thus, it is important to see how these 'faces' are constructed, reconstructed, and negotiated through certain semantic and pragmatic features.

Antonymic construction

According to Lyons (1968) antonyms are used to 'polarise experience and judgment'. This is evident in suicide notes as suicide completers use evaluative constructions to achieve contrast between self and others. Usually, the antonyms used are unmarked/conventional as they rehash opposite relations between self and others. They also express some affective stances (which can be positive or negative) about self- and other portrayers in suicide notes.

In some suicide notes, the suicide completer uses antonymic construction to position a contrast of the self and the other. The use of this construction of contrast (in some suicide notes) is to highlight the positive qualities of the suicide completer/partner. This perhaps is done to project a favourable perception of their significant other (which might be tainted due to reasons like negligence among others). It can be interpreted as a redemptive strategy to absolve the other from suicide blame. This is because in some African settings suicide might be interpreted as negligence and insensitivity on the part of the deceased partner(s). An example of antonymic construction with other redemptive connotation/sub-text is:

You married a wrong man. You're a good woman and you deserve the best.

In this suicide note, the suicide completer is keen to protect the 'face' of his partner; he seeks to discredit himself and applaud his partner. This can be interpreted as a self-absorbing strategy of claiming full ownership for his suicidal decisions and the circumstances resulting in his suicide. This contrasting self-cum-other-positioning is needed as a redemptive strategy to protect his partner who might be liable to blame for his suicidal act. A full absorption from suicidal blame is evident in the next construction which indirectly suggest that the existence of the suicidal completer might have created hurdles in the realization of happiness and soaring heights for the partner (You need to be happy. You need to soar.). `

There is use of comparative and superlative construction (good and best) in the text. This describes the partner, to show the progression of positive qualities. It is also used to earn the partner's total acquittal from suicide blame in the court of public and community opinion.

Local Context

The textual significance of suicide notes might be vague to people outside of the discourse community of suicide completers. References and textual nuances in suicide texts might exclude those without shared linguistic repertoire, as the suicide completer might use linguistic constructions that have conventional usage in the community of use. Thus, situational and cultural contexts are vital in understanding some suicide texts (Olsson, 2004).

A particular suicide note (text B) reflects the sociolinguistic landscape of Nigeria as these expressions are inclusive of meaning to people of Nigerian nationality or those familiar with that linguistic construction - Pidgin English. The complex nominal phrasal construction 'copy and paste' means plagiarism, 'same research work' means current research work. 'I don tire' means I am fed up. 'Deep mess' means an unsanitary situation. Thus, the suicide completer appeals only to his Nigerian audience due to the use of constructions with meaning inclusivity only to Nigerians. These constructions represent an in-group affiliation or membership as it represents the use of Pidgin English/creoles which is also a means of communication of wider coverage. This type of 'lingua franca' is used by Nigerian youths for easy communication and accessibility. Hence, this might suggest that the suicide completer writes with the Nigerian youths in mind to elicit their sympathy and support.

Another type of context that seems relevant to suicide texts is the cognitive context. This is hinged on the mental state of the text writer. This is because certain assumptions are shared in their texts. These assumptions, presuppositions, and implications are best understood by the discourse community the text is meant for. In this text (Text B), cognitive context is displayed through the linguistic choice (Pidgin English) of the suicide completer. This depicts the use of shared meanings to facilitate mutual comprehension.

Constructions of victimhood

There is a loose assumption that suicide texts revolve around two identities: agency and/or victimhood (Roubidoux, 2011; Sanni, 2021). Usually, victimhood identity seems common when suicide is viewed as a form of escape from psychological or physical pain inflicted on self or by others. Hence, the suicide completer might portray the self as a victim based on the actions of others and the societal norms they are forced to live by (especially in cases of socially approved forms of masculinity), as being a victim of ill-health, unemployment, poverty, and other identities he/she inadvertently incurs due to membership of a particular society.

Victim-hood construction is an example of pragmatic meaning as pragmatics loosely deals with the 'what and how of communication'. While some suicide texts express this meaning explicitly, in some suicide texts it is presupposed or implied based on socio-cultural settings and the conventional social norms the suicide completer is expected to live by. Usually, suicide completers tend to emphasize their victim status in their suicide texts to rationalize how others' action have significant effect on their suicidal decisions.

It is important to note that passive constructions might be deployed by suicide completers to (re)position themselves as victims, a contrast to the demonstration of agency with the first person pronominal 'I' (Roubidoux, 2011). Examples of these passive-cum-victim-constructions are explicitly shown in a particular suicide text (text C) in which the suicide completer accused the partner of unfaithfulness which is the main trigger for his suicidal decision:

"Now that I cannot live without you
The sacrifices I made just to see you smile
Now that you judged and gave me a command

Now that you shouted at me from inside your room with your "boyfriend" that I should "go kill yourself" and even asked for my suicide note well here it is my love,"

reads the suicide note.

These are constructions of victimhood because the suicide completer, rather than rationalizing that his suicidal decision is because of wilful intention, bases his suicidal act on how he was treated by his partner. In this suicide text, the suicide completer resorts to suicide only because of the betrayal of trust and confidence which emasculates and dehumanizes his manliness.

Conclusion

Suicide notes, besides being forensic text, are instances of language use deployed by suicide completers as a vehicle of communication to disseminate specific information. The pieces of information conveyed in suicide texts are important as they represent the 'last words' of a person that invariably means what they want to be remembered for. Similarly, the linguistic constructions used to convey these messages are equally important as they connote deeper meanings that aid a holistic understanding of suicidal intentions and the suicidal phenomenon. Hence, suicide texts should not necessarily be perceived with negative connotations but should be seen as social texts that encode social practices and systems. These practices are usually expressed linguistically which foregrounds such intra-personal, inter-personal, and extra-personal crises as a suicide completer might have experienced. This further underscores the importance of forensic (text/discourse) linguistics to mental health.

From this reflection, it can be deduced that while antonyms might be used for to make explicit positive and/or negative (inscribed) portrayals of the self and others, pragmatic meanings are usually subtle and inferred (invoked) positive and/or negative portrayals of the self and others, usually hinged on local context interpretations. The study supports the general assumption that men (African men) are usually reluctant to seek help during their suicidal ideation stage compared to their female counterparts.

The present reflection concludes that the analysis of African suicide notes requires a more community-based interpretation. Thus, audience design, social context, and discourse pragmatics are important in understanding suicide texts. This will aid in rediscovering layers of meanings like the notions of public and private faces, roles and identities, and other

aspects of metalinguistics in suicide studies. Furthermore, while the present study represents preliminary findings based on the small sample size, a fuller analysis will explore the linguistic resources used by male suicide completers for self-portrayal, and the different narrative mechanisms and identity (re)constructions deployed by male African suicide completers as they relate to the construction of agency and victimhood. Also, a comparative analysis of African male and female suicide completers (the traditional genders) should be undertaken to foreground similar and different features. These fuller analyses will be explored in the ongoing doctoral research of the author.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ingrid Piller, Donna Butorac, Emily Farrell, Loy Lising, Shiva Motaghi Tabari, & Vera Williams Tetteh. *Life in a New Language*. Oxford University Press, 2024, 216 pp. ISBN 9780190084288 Hardback.

Life in a New Language serves not only as a book but also as a resource for sociolinguistics, migration studies, and teaching generally, as a source of real-life data for academics and non-academics and as a marker of quality collaboration. The authors, all female, hail from Germany, Ghana, Iran, Ireland, the Philippines, and Yugoslavia. They formed a rich team of authors for a work of nuanced context, and their diversity is relevant to its import.

Through ethnographic research and the re-use of six distinct sets of research data covering a period of twenty years, the authors systematically present and discuss the lived experiences of some 130 individuals. The generic theme of language and migration links the perspectives on their life situations, including using the Australian English language in a social context, settling in a new country (Australia) and into new work environments, overcoming linguistic challenges, dealing with family matters and issues of discrimination. The reader will find insights into these themes. Some I now summarise.

The authors consider the English language through multiple lenses, including English as a migrant language, as a legal instrument of migration management, and as a method of controlling human capital. They give an in-depth historical account of the ways in which the language has been used from such perspectives. Their systematic analysis of English as a legal instrument of migration management, for example, enables them to reflect on policies since colonisation in 1788 and to show that "migration policy has served to engineer English as a dominant language" (p. 7). The English language is well linked to the migration policies and requirements, and it is thus logical that in the economic world it serves as an "economic asset" for prospective migrants: a newly arrived migrant may be more or less advantaged proportionate to their depth of knowledge of English. As if it were merely the depth of knowledge of the English language! The lived experiences presented in the book unearth the cultural shock and impact of the different "Englishes".

Those shocks in coping with the different Englishes indicate the severity of the impact on their lives. Having to write a required English test such as IELTS is usually done several times, as in the case of "Amin" (p. 22) and other participants, and can hinder severely job and academic opportunities. The levels of English literacy of people who have settled in Australia from many countries varies greatly; but the confidence of some participants in their knowledge of what they know to be called the English language was crushed by the sudden incapacitating situation of unintelligible and indiscernible "Australian English" caused by accent and speedy local speech. The deteriorating aspect for the individual migrant is when they feel judged and are perceived as "dumb", "stupid", "an idiot", or "tedious" (p. 16). Such experiences must impact the academic, social and family life of many migrants as represented by the participants reported in the volume.

Indeed, family life, often stressful in the migrant situation for many reasons, may be further affected adversely when members adjust differently to the demands of a new language. Some adapt, but "some family relationships may fade away" (p. 68). Participants reported tensions as they tried to decide whether and how they could maintain languages other than English.

The authors provide suggestions on how to use the book in teaching, a testimony to the richness of the linguistic and pedagogical expertise they bring to bear on the book. They also provide suggestions for an informed understanding of possible solutions to the disparities sadly inherent in Australia's projection of multiculturalism and the actual lived experiences of exclusion and marginalisation. It would be prudent for the government to consider such a rich and timely resource to strengthen multiculturalism in Australia. This volume captures remarkable in-depth and nuanced data and is an important source of information for potential and new migrants. Few books leave a lasting impact, but Life in a New Language will leave a significant one long after you engage with it.

Davida Aba Mensima Asante-Nimako
Curtin University
Edith Cowan University
d.asante-nimako@curtin.edu.au

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Ephraim-Stephen Essien and Frank Aragbonfoh Abumere. ***African Political and Economic Philosophy with Africapitalism Concepts for African Leadership.*** African Philosophy: Critical Perspectives and Global Dialogue series, Lanham-Boulder-New York-London, Lexington Books, 2024. ISBN 978-1-66693-110-5 Hardback. 978-1-66693-111-2 eBook.

African Political and Economic Philosophy with Africapitalism is a compelling collection of essays that navigates the interrelations of African leadership, political philosophy, and economic thought, particularly through the lens of Africapitalism. It is part of a series that aims to highlight discussions of indigenous philosophies and address the urgent issues encountered by the African continent today. The editors set a solid foundation for understanding the significance of Africapitalism, explaining it as a paradigm that articulates the ability of Africa's private sector to drive economic transformation and social prosperity (pp. 1-3).

The distinguished thinkers of the volume engage with historical contexts, indigenous philosophies, and contemporary challenges beleaguering the African socio-political landscape. Abayomi Sharomi, Nana Kwasi Amoateng, and Thaddeus Metz and others offer pertinent insights into the underpinnings of Africapitalism, its moral implications, and how it connects to concepts of self-reliance and sustainable development. A significant strength of this volume is its capacity to merge theoretical analysis with actionable implications. Essays challenge the notion that African development is solely a matter of Western economic models, instead showing Africapitalism as a robust alternative. Essien, for example, contends that Africapitalism goes beyond a simple adaptation of Western capitalism to include an indigenous framework that promotes local values and social wealth creation, stressing successful practices such as the Igbo apprenticeship system (pp. 11-17). The integration of indigenous philosophies and the emphasis on cultural context allows authors to suggest a form of capitalism that aligns with African communal values rather than imposing foreign ideologies.

The multifaceted critique of past development theories, including African socialism, adds considerable ground to the narrative. The contributors engage with the historical failures of socialist policies in Africa and present Africapitalism as a needed evolution in economic thought—a means of escaping the pitfalls of its predecessors (Abumere, pp. 61-81).

Authors are also consistent in articulating the moral dimensions of Africapitalism throughout. Many authors call for a moral grounding in economic practices, underscoring the necessity for responsible leadership that favours social wellbeing alongside profit (e.g. Sharomi, pp. 17-29). This creates a compelling argument that aligns economic prosperity with ethical responsibility, proposing that the two are not mutually exclusive and making a strong case for a morally conscientious approach to governance and economic engagement in Africa. Authors also contribute meaningfully to current dialogue about leadership in Africa. They provide a framework for comprehending how concepts like Ubuntu and Africapitalism can be linked to contemporary leadership models to enhance accountability, cooperation, and sustainability (Adahada, pp. 159-181). By positioning traditional African values within the realm of political philosophy, the authors adequately elucidate a path toward a more just and equitable society.

This volume presents commendable insights, then, but some shortcomings call for attention. One is the potential overemphasis on Africapitalism as a panacea for the different barriers facing African states. The research posits that economic transformation can be determined by the private sector, but that risks underplaying the systemic issues linked to governance, corruption, and inequality that continue to plague many African nations (Etuk, pp. 89-102). Such obstacles are deeply grounded, suggesting that undue focus on Africapitalism may minimize the complexities of African development.

And while the authors engage extensively with moral philosophy, some are more nuanced than others in explaining how there can be a systematic implementation of these moral imperatives across different sectors and contexts. Although there is an emphasis on the need for moral capitalism, the actionable steps to enact these principles within entrenched bureaucratic and political systems remain abstract. Abumere's chapter on the resource curse in Nigeria, for example, presents the stark reality of corruption and moral failure, yet does not adequately explore how Africapitalism can change these profoundly ingrained practices in a genuine way (Abumere, pp. 61-81).

Some readers may also find that the breadth of the anthology leads to an unbalanced depth with particular topics. Chapters that focus on the philosophical underpinnings of Africapitalism versus its application, might leave readers desiring a more substantial evaluation of real-world implications and case studies with concrete examples.

However, the volume makes an important contribution to discussions about the role of philosophy in addressing developmental challenges in

Africa. It positions Africapitalism within the wider context of indigenous philosophical traditions, pushing back against the monolithic narratives that usually characterize African economic discourse. By advocating for the inclusion of local values and practices into economic frameworks, the authors enlighten the transformative potential of Africapitalism, offering it as a model for sustainable development that favours community and social well-being (Essien & Abumere, pp. 3-5).

The rich tapestry of perspectives on leadership, also, should galvanize critical reflections on what makes efficient governance in the continent today. The emphasis on moral imperatives within economic practices confronts dominant norms that usually identify the maximization of profit as the basic goal of business (Adahada, pp. 159-181). In this sense, the anthology revitalizes African political thought, encouraging new generations of thinkers and leaders to rethink the ethical implications of their actions and decisions in a fast transforming global context.

Future editions of this volume could benefit from deeper case studies that demonstrate successful applications of Africapitalism in specific contexts. The integration of more empirical data and examples would ground the theoretical discussions and also provide practical insights for practitioners and policymakers. The book could also broaden its scope to examine collaborations between Africapitalism and other rising economic ideas within Africa, such as social entrepreneurship or cooperatives, which may offer additional avenues for community development but still keep to capitalist principles (Isanbor & Ukagba, Chapter 9, pp. 121-135).

Overall, this book is an insightful and thought-provoking anthology that advances critical discussions around leadership, philosophy, and economic practices in Africa. Ably edited by Essien and Abumere, the volume is a rich ground for exploring Africapitalism as a viable answer to Africa's socio-economic challenges, while simultaneously advocating for a renewed commitment to indigenous values and moral responsibility within the framework of African leadership. Even though there are shortcomings, the book serves as a significant contribution to African philosophical discourse and will resonate with scholars, policymakers, and leaders engaged in the complex dynamics of political and economic ideologies in the region.

Martial Fanga Agbor
University of Religions and Denominations, Qom, Iran
Danat Al Emarat Hospital, Abu Dhabi, UAE
martialfangaagbor@gmail.com.