

# **‘THIS PRODUCTION HAS BEEN CANCELLED’: THEORIES OF REPRESENTATION AND THE LIMITS OF EDUCATION PRACTICES IN KENYA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** This study aimed to investigate the complexities surrounding educational drama in Kenya, particularly examining the absence of a clear framework, the prevalence of cancel culture, and their implications on drama education practices.

**Statement of the Problem:** Educational drama in Kenya lacks a clearly defined framework, resulting in ambiguity regarding objectives, target audiences, thematic boundaries, and evaluation methods. Consequently, this has led to instances of censorship and cancel culture, affecting practitioners' ability to use drama effectively for education and social engagement.

**Methodology:** The research employed a qualitative approach, reviewing existing literature and case studies related to educational drama practices, theories of representation, and cancel culture within Kenya's educational settings. The analysis drew upon theoretical frameworks such as Social Representation Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Semiotics, Postcolonial theory, Feminist theory, and Plato's theory of Mimesis.

**Results:** The findings indicated that the absence of a robust pedagogical framework significantly contributes to the emergence of cancel culture in educational drama. Practitioners reported feeling restricted creatively due to fears of censorship, resulting in self-censorship and diluted educational content. Additionally, cancel culture has led to cancellations of school-based drama performances, negatively impacting educational outcomes and societal dialogues on sensitive issues.

**Conclusion:** Educational drama is crucial for fostering critical thinking, empathy, and cultural understanding in Kenyan education; however, its effectiveness is undermined by unclear frameworks and cancel culture. Addressing these issues is imperative for enhancing educational drama's potential and fostering inclusive, meaningful cultural exchanges in Kenyan schools.

**Recommendation:** The study recommends the establishment of a clear, comprehensive framework for educational drama that balances artistic freedom with cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Additionally, there should be proactive dialogue among stakeholders—educators, theatre practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders—to mitigate the impacts of cancel culture and promote a supportive environment for educational drama in Kenya.

**Keywords:** *Education drama, theories of representation, cancel culture*

## INTRODUCTION

In the realm of education, drama has long been recognized as a powerful tool for fostering creativity, critical thinking, and empathy among students. It has the unique capacity to engage learners on multiple levels, encouraging them to explore complex social issues, cultural diversity, and historical contexts. In Africa, where diverse cultures and traditions intersect, educational drama can play a significant role in fostering understanding and unity among students. However, the effectiveness of this tool is often hindered by challenges related to representation and the limits of educational drama practices.

This article delves into the complexities surrounding the use of drama as an educational tool in Kenya, focusing on the issues of representation and the boundaries that educators must navigate. By examining the theories of representation in educational drama, we can better understand the challenges faced and the opportunities presented in promoting holistic education in the Kenyan context.

In the academic milieu of Kenya, theatrical pedagogy, particularly in the domain of educational drama, functions as a pivotal agent in the facilitation of the learning paradigm, markedly enhancing the spectrum of students' imaginative capacities, critical analytical skills, and cultural consciousness. Nonetheless, this educational landscape is confronted with a prominent impediment: the absence of a rigorously delineated structural framework within this discipline. This lack of clarity has precipitated a phenomenon colloquially termed 'cancel culture', wherein pedagogical dramatic endeavors are prematurely ceased, thus thwarting their potential impact on the academic and cognitive development of students and audiences in aggregate. The primary objective of this research is to undertake a profound exploration into this intricate issue, endeavoring to elucidate its multifaceted dimensions. Specifically, the research aims to dissect the nuanced interplay between educational drama, representational theories, and the genesis of 'cancel culture' within the Kenyan educational ethos. This scholarly inquiry is committed to furnishing insights instrumental in the formulation of a robust, enduring framework for education-based theatre, thereby ensuring its continued pertinence and efficacy within the contemporary educational landscape of Kenya. Through this exploration, it is anticipated that the study will not only delineate the prevailing challenges but also proffer innovative resolutions, thereby substantially augmenting educational methodologies within Kenya and, consequentially, across the broader African spectrum.

## Background to the Study

A scholarly dissection of the evolutionary trajectory of educational drama within the Kenyan context reveals its deep-seated origins, entwined with the nation's rich tapestry of cultural diversity and pedagogical heritage. Historically, scholastic drama has emerged as an integral and dynamic element of Kenya's educational framework, providing an unparalleled avenue for learners to navigate complex ideations, exhibit creative prowess, and engage with societal paradigms. The genesis of school-based drama in Kenya can be traced to the ancestral customs of storytelling, rhythmic dance, and musicality inherent in indigenous cultures. These cultural expressions laid the groundwork for nascent iterations of educational theatre.

As educational systems in Kenya formalized, drama became integral to curricula, recognized for promoting cognitive growth and community engagement. Pachomius, Ndwiga, and Wachira (2021) examined how drama skills influence student behavior in Central Kenya's secondary schools, utilizing Canter's Assertive Model and mixed-method approaches. Their study found a significant correlation between drama activities and improved student discipline, highlighting drama's effectiveness as an alternative disciplinary method. These findings reinforce drama's vital role in shaping behavior within Kenya's educational landscape.

This antecedent research forms a critical backdrop to the present study, accentuating the tangible impact of dramatic engagements on student behaviour within the educational milieu. The current exploration, while building upon this foundational understanding, pivots to a more nuanced dimension: the challenges confronting practitioners of Kenyan school drama, particularly the absence of a structured framework and the emergence of a 'cancel culture'. Through addressing these issues, the present study aspires to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse initiated by Pachomius, Ndwiga, and Wachira, thereby enriching the comprehension of the multifaceted role of educational drama within Kenya's academic sphere.

Incorporating the findings of Pachomius, Ndwiga, and Wachira enhances the contextual depth of the current study, underscoring the utility of dramatic skills not merely in behavioral management but also in the transformation of the broader educational experience. The current research endeavors to dissect the intricate interplay of educational drama, representational theories, and the phenomena of cancel culture, building upon previous scholarly work to present a holistic view of the challenges and potentials within the domain of educational drama in Kenya.

During pivotal junctures in Kenya's historical narrative, such as the post-independence era and subsequent sociopolitical transitions, educational drama assumed a critical role in articulating the aspirations, challenges, and resilience of the Kenyan populace. It metamorphosed into a conduit for students and educators to dialogue on societal issues, champion change, and exalt their cultural legacy. The post-independence period witnessed an augmentation in the formal integration of drama programs within educational institutions, advocating for a comprehensive pedagogical approach that not only fosters academic prowess but also cultivates essential life competencies like communication, collaboration, and empathy.

Educational drama in Kenya faces challenges, mainly due to the lack of a clear operational framework, causing inconsistent implementation and evaluation. Donelan (2010) examines intercultural educational drama, specifically through "The Gods Project" in Melbourne, Australia, led by Kenyan artist Jean. This project involved diverse students performing *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Ola Rotimi's Yoruba adaptation of the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, enhancing cross-cultural communication and understanding.

Central to Donelan's research was the experiential narrative of intercultural interaction between the researcher and Jean, the pedagogic artist. This partnership was co-constructed through reflective dialogues and collaborative endeavors, emphasizing reciprocal respect for their diverse backgrounds and experiential narratives. The outcomes of this study align substantially with contemporary research trajectories. Both Donelan's work and the analogous studies interrogate the pedagogical potentials of theatre and drama within multicultural contexts. Donelan's findings provide unique insights into the facilitation of cross-cultural engagement through drama, a theme that resonates with the current study's emphasis on educational drama in the Kenyan milieu.

These studies collectively underscore the criticality of participatory and collaborative methodologies in intercultural educational frameworks. Donelan's collaborative synergy with Jean echoes the participative spirit of the current study, wherein the experiences and perspectives of educational drama practitioners are integral to the research narrative. Donelan's exploration sheds light on the intricate dynamics and challenges endemic to international educational initiatives, thus augmenting a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between diverse cultural factors and educational outcomes.

Donelan's insights enhance understanding of educational drama in Kenya by emphasizing the importance of intercultural dialogue within drama education. The absence of a clear framework

in educational drama allows 'cancel culture' to thrive, making subjective judgments on creative outputs common. This situation highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive framework to guide drama practitioners effectively and protect them from arbitrary decisions, ultimately fostering a more inclusive environment.

### **Recognition of Drama as a Learning Tool**

The recognition of drama as a potent pedagogical instrument has precipitated a paradigmatic shift in educational methodologies and instructional theory globally. Within the educational arena, drama is esteemed not solely as an art form but as a transformative medium that nurtures creativity, critical thinking, empathy, and effective communication competencies in students. The field of drama in education has undergone extensive scholarly investigation and has garnered endorsement from eminent academicians and educational institutions. Heathcote & Wagner's seminal work in 1976 posited that drama-based pedagogy enhances learners' cognitive faculties, facilitating the assimilation of intricate concepts through the enactment of characters and scenarios.

Poulter (1996) emphasized drama's transformative power in promoting societal change and empowering marginalized groups. Boal's concept of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" highlights theatre as a catalyst for social transformation and active critical engagement among learners. Kalidas (2014) explored drama's effectiveness as an alternative pedagogical approach in business education, improving language skills and business understanding through reflective writing and practical observations. This study showcased drama's superiority over traditional lecture methods.

Van de Water's (2021) essay delves into the application of drama and performance techniques in education and social work, framed within the theories of multiple intelligences, emotional intelligence, and brain-based learning. Drawing from contemporary neuroscientific research, Van de Water advocates for the inclusion of drama in alternative pedagogical models, emphasizing the interplay of cognitive and emotional processes in learning and the role of drama in creating life-like metaphors through these dimensions.

Khidirova's (2021) study addresses the implementation of drama techniques in teaching English as a foreign language, underscoring its efficacy not only in enhancing linguistic proficiency but also in contributing significantly to learners' social, emotional, and intellectual development. This research highlights how drama tactics can be tailored to individual student needs, promoting engagement and motivation in language learning.

In the field of early childhood education, Brown's (2017) study employs a qualitative research approach to assess the impact of creative drama on young learners' cognition and behaviour. The data vividly demonstrates the positive effects of creative drama, underscoring its vital role in enriching early educational experiences.

Lastly, Dawson and Lee's (2018) book "Drama-based Pedagogy: Activating Learning Across the Curriculum" explores the versatile and dynamic nature of drama-based teaching and its seamless integration into diverse educational settings. The book serves as a crucial resource for educators seeking to enrich their teaching repertoire and cultivate engaging learning experiences.

Collectively, these studies and theoretical frameworks assert drama's dynamic role as an educational tool, capable of transforming learning experiences by immersing students in the realm of theatre, thus enabling them to grapple with complex issues, develop empathy, and acquire vital life skills, aligning with the core tenets of contemporary education.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

In this segment, the research embarks on an in-depth exploration of the existing theories of representation at the confluence of education and drama. Representation in this context is multifaceted, encompassing the depiction and interpretation of ideas, cultures, and experiences. This inquiry probes into established theoretical frameworks, scrutinizing their influence on pedagogical strategies and dramatic expressions. The objective is to unearth the nuanced modalities through which representation is manifested within the realms of education and drama. This analytical dissection illuminates the ways in which these theories shape narratives, perceptions, and their transformative potential in both educational and dramatic spheres.

The issue of representation in the spheres of education and drama is intricate, embedded deeply within cultural, social, and historical contexts. Academics have delved into various theories of representation to comprehend how ideas, identities, and experiences are portrayed and interpreted in educational settings and theatrical enactments. This section critically examines substantial theoretical frameworks, offering insights into their impact on education and drama.

Moscovici's (1984) Social Representation Theory explores how communities collectively create shared meanings and interpretations, influencing educational practices and curricula. Lima and Campos (2015) integrate this theory with Bourdieu's sociological concept of "field," highlighting how symbolic aspects shape social realities within educational settings. Their comparison underscores similarities and differences—Bourdieu focuses on social behaviour,

while Moscovici emphasizes egalitarian group knowledge. This integration provides a deeper psychosocial understanding of educational dynamics, particularly in school contexts.

Moscovici's (2001) work underscores the foundational elements of Social Representation Theory in social psychology. He delves into its core, discussing themes like the genesis of social psychology and the role of representation in human cognition. Moscovici brings to light the transformational power of representation in both reflecting and actively shaping social reality.

Freire's (1970) *Critical Pedagogy* highlights the importance of challenging prevailing power structures and fostering critical thinking in learners. This approach calls for inclusive and transformative teaching methods that engage students actively with educational content. Giroux's (2020) critique of the commodification of education in neoliberal contexts underlines the critical pedagogy's role as both a theoretical and practical framework for re-envisioning education and politics. Giroux argues for education as a moral and political act, shaping agency and power within social relationships.

Sardabi, Biria, and Golestan (2018) assess the impact of a teacher education program informed by critical pedagogy on novice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' professional identity development. Their study reveals significant changes in instructors' professional identities, reflecting increased confidence and a shift towards a more humanistic, empathetic, and socially conscious approach to education.

Semiotics, as elucidated by Barthes (1977), explores signs and symbols in communication; in theatre, it delves into the symbolic meanings in performances. Danckwardt-Lillieström, Andrée, and Enghag (2018) investigate the utility of creative drama in chemistry education, particularly in aiding learners' understanding of complex chemical concepts. They combine sociocultural theory and multimodal social semiotic analysis to study how drama facilitates students' engagement with scientific ideas.

Xu and Tateo (2022) analyze Drama in Education from the viewpoint of cultural psychology of semiotic mediation. They explore DiE participants' experiences across every day, dramatic, and existential layers, each contributing to the creation of signs through various generalization processes. Their case study on "The Green Child" demonstrates the complexity of meaning-making in DiE.

Postcolonial theory, as articulated by Edward Said (1978) and contemporaries, probes into the intricate cultural and societal aftermaths engendered by colonialism. This inquiry is particularly

focused on how such aftermaths have permeated educational syllabi and the depiction of indigenous epistemologies. When applied within the realms of educational drama and the dynamics of cancel culture, this theoretical paradigm critically dissects and evaluates the narratives and perceptions that have been sculpted by colonial hegemonies and their capacity for transformation. Asante and Yaw (2021) apply the postcolonial theory to Yaw Asare's play "Ananse in the Land of Idiots," analyzing the post-colonial and post-Afrocentric elements within it. Epner (2017) applies postcolonial theory to Baltic drama, offering insights into the cultural and political intricacies of the Baltic states post-Soviet Union.

Within the educational drama sphere, postcolonial theory catalyzes a critical reevaluation of historical and cultural narratives. It impels both educators and students to scrutinize the origins and dominance of certain stories, probing into the marginalization or silencing of voices in conventional educational resources and dramatic compositions. This introspective process is pivotal in confronting and restructuring the prevailing narratives that are frequently rooted in a colonial framework. Within the educational drama sphere, postcolonial theory catalyzes a critical reevaluation of historical and cultural narratives. It impels both educators and students to scrutinize the origins and dominance of certain stories, probing into the marginalization or silencing of voices in conventional educational resources and dramatic compositions. This introspective process is pivotal in confronting and restructuring the prevailing narratives that are frequently rooted in a colonial framework.

Postcolonial theory serves as a guiding compass in educational settings, particularly in the use of drama as a medium for the exploration and comprehension of diverse cultural heritages and histories. It underscores the imperative to portray cultures with precision and sensitivity, steering clear of stereotypical or reductive representations that are residuals of colonial thought processes.

The integration of postcolonial viewpoints in educational drama affords educators the opportunity to establish a podium for the voices of indigenous and historically marginalized groups. This integration fosters a more inclusive and respectful curricular approach, acknowledging and valuing the plethora of experiences and historical narratives.

In understanding cancel culture, postcolonial theory provides a critical lens, framing it as a reactive measure against the persistent dominance of colonial narratives and perspectives. It offers a structural basis for critiquing artistic and literary works that continue to propagate colonial ideologies or misrepresentations of colonized peoples.

In the domain of drama and the arts, cancel culture emerges as a tool for public and community accountability, targeting content that is perceived to perpetuate colonial biases or stereotypes. Postcolonial theory enlightens these critiques, spotlighting the historical and cultural contexts underpinning such representations.

Postcolonial theory advocates for a narrative paradigm shift, championing stories that encapsulate the intricacies and subtleties of post-colonial societies. In educational drama, this shift can engender the creation of content that is more encompassing and reflective of a spectrum of experiences.

By adopting postcolonial perspectives, educators and artists are poised to cultivate critical analytical skills, urging learners and audiences to interrogate and challenge entrenched power structures and representations. This critical engagement is instrumental in fostering a profound comprehension of global histories and intercultural dynamics.

In both educational and theatrical contexts, postcolonial theory augments cultural empathy and insight. It champions the recognition and appreciation of diverse cultural histories and backgrounds, nurturing a worldview that is more empathetic and inclusive.

Feminist perspectives, as articulated by Hooks (1981) and Butler (1990), critically evaluate gender representation in education and drama. Palestini (2013) examines the intersection of feminist theory and educational leadership, while Coady (2017) explores feminism in early childhood education in Australia. Winston (2005) advocates for a moral education approach that integrates drama and narrative storytelling, focusing on children's moral development.

Feminist theoretical discourse, particularly exemplified by Laura Mulvey's seminal analysis of the male gaze, exerts a substantial influence on the pedagogical domain of drama and the phenomena of cancel culture. This theoretical orientation scrutinizes the construction of narratives and perceptions, with a specific focus on the delineation and interpretation of gender roles, exhibiting a significant capacity for transformation within both educational and dramaturgical spheres.

In the context of educational drama, feminist theory mandates a rigorous critique of the portrayal of female characters. It advocates for a paradigm shift beyond conventional, archetypal depictions where women are predominantly presented for the visual gratification of male characters and audience, a concept elucidated by Mulvey.

Within educational arenas, drama emerges as an efficacious conduit for the introduction and examination of intricate feminist themes. This medium facilitates the crafting of narratives in

which female characters transcend their traditional roles as mere objects of gaze, evolving into active, multifaceted entities endowed with agency.

The application of feminist principles to the realm of drama enables educators to forge more inclusive and heterogeneous representations of women, challenging and dismantling the entrenched notion of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. This approach fosters a more equitable portrayal of genders, recognizing women as subjects in their own right, rather than mere objects.

Feminist theory interprets cancel culture as a response to problematic gender portrayals in drama, prompting scrutiny of sexist stereotypes and the male gaze. It advocates transforming passive female portrayals into empowered, diverse representations, encouraging critical analysis among students and audiences. By promoting empathy and inclusivity, feminist theory reshapes perceptions of gender roles in educational and theatrical contexts.

### **Plato's Theory of Mimesis and its Connection to Cancel Culture**

Plato, the illustrious philosopher from the annals of ancient Greece, introduced the seminal concept of mimesis, a cornerstone in the disciplines of aesthetics and philosophy, with profound implications in the sphere of art representation. This concept, commonly interpreted as 'imitation' or 'representation,' occupies a central position in Platonic philosophy, notably in its application to current phenomena such as censorship and the emergent trend of cancel culture within the domain of drama.

In the Platonic paradigm, art inherently embodies a mimetic characteristic, essentially acting as a mirror to reality (Ferrari, 2003). His theoretical construct posits that the tangible world is merely an ephemeral shadow of a more profound and true reality, the realm of abstract ideas or forms. Consequently, art is perceived as a derivative, a secondary replication of reality, a notion extensively expounded in his seminal work, "The Republic," wherein he delves into the societal roles and intrinsic value of art. Specifically, within the dramaturgical context, Plato's theory suggests that stage productions are essentially recreations of human behaviour and experiences, representing not the actuality of the world but rather a distorted reflection of it, thus distancing further from truth or the ideal.

### **Platonic Critique of Art: Implications for Censorship**

Plato's stance on art, drama in particular, was one of skepticism, driven by the belief that art could potentially skew the perception of truth and negatively influence the audience. In *The Republic*, he posited that artists, being mere imitators, might lack genuine comprehension of the subjects they depict. This deficiency in understanding could potentially propagate

inaccuracies and moral degradation among the spectators. Such philosophical concerns reverberate in the modern discourse surrounding drama censorship and cancel culture. Plato's contention that art's deceptive representations could wield detrimental effects underpins the rationale for censoring or 'cancelling' certain dramatic works. Dramas perceived to misrepresent reality in a manner deemed morally or socially detrimental could invoke censorship, mirroring Plato's qualms regarding art's adverse societal impacts.

### **Cancel Culture Interpreted Through Platonic Mimesis**

The contemporary phenomenon of cancel culture, wherein individuals or works are socially expunged for alleged transgressions, resonates with Platonic mimetic theory. Just as Plato advocated for the restraint of art that distorts truth or ethical standards, cancel culture manifests as a societal tool to regulate dramatic portrayals considered noxious or objectionable. The act of cancelling a drama or playwright for content adjudged as ethically or socially inadmissible aligns with Plato's apprehension regarding the potential hazards of mimetic art. This act of cancellation functions as a modern form of societal moderation, aimed at diminishing the sway of what is perceived as harmful mimetic representations.

When applied to drama, Plato's mimetic theory offers a fundamental framework for dissecting the contemporary challenges of censorship and cancel culture. His perspective that art is a derivative form with the capacity to influence moral and social norms holds relevance in current debates concerning the role and impact of drama in society. Regardless of one's stance on Plato's stringent views on art, his philosophical insights provide a meaningful context for examining the dynamics of representation, truth, and the ethical dimensions of artistic expression in today's world.

### **Convergence of Ferdinand De Saussure's Semiotic Theory and Censorship/Cancel Culture Dynamics in the Arts**

In the intellectually stimulating domain of linguistic theory, Ferdinand De Saussure is recognized as a seminal figure, particularly noted for his pioneering contributions to the field of semiotics — the scientific study of signs and symbols as pivotal elements in communicative processes. De Saussure's theoretical constructs have not only revolutionized our comprehension of linguistic phenomena but also proffer profound insights into contemporary societal issues such as the censorship of artistic works and the phenomena of cancel culture.

Central to De Saussure's semiotic theory is the concept of the 'sign', which he articulates as an amalgamation of the 'signifier' (the physical form of a word or phrase) and the 'signified' (the

conceptual or associative meaning) (Eco, 1984). This linkage is characterized by its arbitrary nature, predicated on communal consensus, a cornerstone principle in semiotic analysis.

De Saussure accentuated that meanings are not intrinsically embedded in words but rather are constructed through relational differences and oppositions. For example, the semantic content of the term "tree" is derived from its distinction from related terms such as "bush" or "flower". This relational approach underscores the notion that language operates as a system of signs, functioning to articulate ideas.

Transitioning to the domain of art censorship and cancel culture, the applicability of De Saussure's semiotic principles becomes markedly evident. Art, akin to language, functions as a system comprised of signs and symbols, communicating ideas, emotions, and narratives through its distinct lexicon of imagery, auditory elements, and expressive modalities. The critical inquiry arises when certain 'signs' within the artistic milieu are subjected to contention (Elliot, 2010).

Mirroring the arbitrary connection between signifier and signified in linguistics, the interpretation of art exhibits similar subjectivity. What is perceived as expressive and meaningful by one demographic may be construed as offensive or detrimental by another, an aspect central to the discourse on art censorship and cancel culture.

De Saussure underscored the significance of contextual factors in determining the value of a sign. This viewpoint is essential in dissecting the reasons behind certain artistic works or expressions becoming targets of censorship or cancel culture. Cultural and historical contexts can significantly alter the interpretation and perceived propriety of an artwork.

The concept of opposition as a catalyst in meaning generation plays a pivotal role in censorship debates. The act of censoring an artwork or 'canceling' an individual frequently engenders a binary distinction, delineating what is deemed 'acceptable' from what is not. This binary mode of thought, paralleling the dualistic nature of linguistic signs, influences public discourse and cultural standards.

### **The Impact of Collective Consensus**

De Saussure's postulation (Eco, 1984) that the relationship between signifier and signified is contingent upon societal consensus is particularly germane. Instances of censorship and cancel culture often emerge from shifts in collective agreements regarding what is socially acceptable or objectionable. As societal mores evolve, so too do the interpretations and permissibility of varied artistic expressions.

Ferdinand De Saussure's semiotic theory provides a profound analytical framework through which the intricacies of art censorship and the dynamics of cancel culture can be comprehended. It highlights that meaning is not static but is continuously molded and remolded by cultural contexts and social interactions (Harris, 2019). In the dynamic discourse surrounding acceptable art and expression standards, De Saussure's theoretical insights offer valuable navigational aids through these complex and often contentious discussions

These diverse theoretical frameworks provide educators and theatrical practitioners with profound insights into the complex processes of representation, shaping pedagogical practices, dramatic productions, and audience interpretations. They contribute to a richer understanding of the intricacies inherent in education and drama, enhancing the educational landscape and enriching the cultural fabric of the art of drama in education.

### **EDUCATION DRAMA PRACTICES IN KENYA**

This section embarks on an explorative journey into the domain of Education Drama Practices in Kenya, scrutinizing the multifarious elements of this innovative pedagogical approach, encompassing dance, music, mime, and storytelling. The investigation dissects successful instances of education drama programs in Kenya, casting light on their impact on students and the broader community.

Odero's (2017) research in Kenya's Ugenya Sub-County probed various forms of education drama used in Early Childhood Development (ECD) educational facilities, emphasizing the community's indigenous theatre tradition. Influenced by postcolonial theory, the study critically evaluated these forms, challenging the predominance of Western models over local theatrical expressions. An ethnographic research design was utilized to capture the lived experiences of children and caregivers, encompassing 1,110 children and 78 caregivers. The findings underscored the vibrant diversity in dramatic genres' development and execution, spotlighting indigenous theatre's dynamic nature and potential, albeit hampered by poor policy implementation and dominance of Western narratives.

Imirongo's (2021) study investigated the role of oral songs, storytelling, and proverbs in Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP) among the Igembe people of Meru, Kenya, focusing on the didacticism of messages within oral genres. The study, guided by functionalist theory, examined various oral narratives and songs, revealing the Igembe people's continued use of traditional oral art forms in ARP rituals, thus maintaining their communication relevance.

Idogho's (2013) exploration delved into the ongoing confusion surrounding the concepts of drama and theatre in higher education. The study distinguished between drama as an educational tool and theatre as an academic discipline, emphasizing the importance of both in the development of young people's potential.

Komu's (2016) comprehensive study of Kenyan theatre delved into its evolution from colonial times, analyzing the socio-political forces impacting Kenyan theatre. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from theatre history, postcolonialism, and theatre for development, the study revealed political regimes and ideological influences' substantial impact on Kenyan theatre.

Kangogo's (2020) research on the Koito celebration among the Tugen people of Baringo, Kenya, refuted claims that African traditional celebrations lack dramatic organization. The study documented and analyzed the Koito festival using performance theory, confirming its indigenous roots and dramatic elements.

Mose, Moseti, and Kandagor (2021) explored the integration of African performance theatre and cultural history in Kiswahili plays through Greenblatt's New Historicism and Kristeva's Theory of Intertextuality, emphasizing playwrights' skillful referencing of African themes. Similarly, Namayi (2021) analyzed Kenyan drama using postcolonial and gender theories, examining the representation and ideological framing of women, and demonstrating drama's power to redefine female identities in contemporary Kenya. Together, these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the role and complexity of educational drama practices, highlighting their significant influence on educational experiences and cultural expression in Kenya.

### **Cancel Culture in Education Drama**

This segment delves into the intricate landscape of "Cancel Culture in Education Drama," a phenomenon increasingly manifesting in the sphere of education drama. The study examines the challenges and dilemmas faced by practitioners within this context. This examination probes into strategies and impediments inherent in imparting drama education in the milieu of contemporary culture, addressing issues ranging from navigating sensitive subjects to circumventing societal taboos. Through a synthesis of case studies and expert perspectives, this section elucidates the complex framework of cancel culture as it interweaves with the expressive, often contentious domain of instructional theatre.

Additionally, the section confronts challenges faced by practitioners in Kenya, notably the absence of a well-established framework and the emergence of a cancel culture. These

impediments bear significant implications for the adoption and evolution of education theatre in Kenya, necessitating a critical examination of their effects on both educators and learners.

‘Cancel culture’ in the context of educational drama refers to the phenomenon where certain theatrical works, performances, or individuals associated with educational theatre are subjected to public repudiation, condemnation, or ostracism due to perceived objectionable behaviour, viewpoints, or content. These controversies often center on themes, narratives, or portrayals deemed offensive, insensitive, or inappropriate within educational drama settings. Manifesting predominantly through public disapproval, often fueled by social media platforms, cancel culture can lead to the cessation of support, funding, or involvement in theatre productions or educational initiatives. This culture underscores the heightened scrutiny and accountability faced by the educational theatre in the digital era, where debates and controversies are magnified, shaping discourse on the boundaries of creativity, cultural sensitivity, and social responsibility within the educational theatre landscape.

Smith and Okuto's (2017) research navigates the challenges encountered by theatre practitioners in applied theatre in Kenya. The study reflects on their personal experiences and research to delineate the array of challenges in the broader political and governmental context of Kenya, and in the international development sector's engagement with applied theatre and Theatre for Development (TfD). Governmental interference in theatre activities poses a considerable hurdle. Additionally, the scarcity of governmental support for applied theatre or TfD projects highlights a dissonance between constitutional recognition of culture and policy implementation. The article illuminates the adversities confronted by Kenyan theatre practitioners regarding governmental legitimacy and financial sustenance, impeding the growth and sustainability of applied theatre.

Lenin Ogolla, a Kenyan TfD practitioner, criticizes the utilitarian approach of NGOs towards theatre, where it is employed as a transient tool and abandoned post-issue resolution. The reliance on development funding poses challenges, as some practitioners are perceived as opportunistic, engaging for monetary gain rather than commitment to the cause. Issues such as delayed grant disbursement further exacerbate these challenges, affecting staff remuneration and project progression, and necessitating practitioners to navigate funding uncertainties and external agendas for impactful community engagement.

Connelly (2010) investigates the Theatre for Development movement in post-election Kenya, where organizations faced unprecedented challenges due to political instability and violence.

Theatre for Development in Kenya, rooted in empowerment theories of Augusto Boal and Paolo Freire, differs from mainstream community theatre, focusing on addressing community issues and stimulating social and political change. These organizations had to negotiate social and political conflicts within communities, balancing the need for social commentary against the risks in a politically divided environment.

Geusens, Ouvrein, and Remen's (2023) research explores the emergence of cancel culture, particularly in the online YouTube beauty community. Initially aimed at educating about unacceptable remarks and behaviour, cancel culture has increasingly been criticized for its perceived extremism. The study analyzes the cancellation of high-profile beauty YouTubers, revealing underlying motivations beyond social justice, including jealousy, competing business interests, or personal vendettas.

Lewis and Christin (2022) study "cancel culture" in the context of online accountability on YouTube. Their research, employing cultural studies scholarship and qualitative methods, reveals that YouTube drama involves a complex interplay of cultural and moral contests within social media platforms. "Cancellation" is seen as a performative act involving public negotiation of structural conflicts, often blurring the lines between genuine accountability and performative acts within the dynamics of platform drama.

These studies collectively underscore the multifaceted and challenging environment in which practitioners of education drama operate, navigating complexities like cancel culture, societal expectations, and political and financial constraints. This intricate landscape necessitates a nuanced understanding of the delicate balance between creative expression, cultural sensitivity, and social responsibility in the educational theatre domain.

In 1990, thespians within a Kenyan theatrical collective envisioned a groundbreaking concept with their production titled "Shamba La Wanyama," a Swahili term translating to 'garden' or 'farm'. This production, a satirical allegory, delineated the tribulations endemic to life under a totalitarian regime, set against the backdrop of an African farm. The narrative was propelled by characters portrayed as various farm animals, notably a horse and a pig, leading the dramatis personae.

The ensemble anticipated widespread appeal across this predominantly agrarian nation, notwithstanding the play's derivation from "Animal Farm", an English literary work penned 46 years prior by London-based author George Orwell. However, an unexpected development arose when an unidentified entity within the Kenyan government's bureaucratic apparatus took

cognizance of the play and its scheduled performance in Nairobi's Kangemi slum. Deeming the content excessively provocative, the authorities abruptly rescinded the troupe's license to perform, effectively silencing the production.

This abrupt cancellation mirrored a preceding prohibition imposed on "Ngahika Ndenda", a play by Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, and further instances of governmental censorship ensued. In 1991, 'Poetry night', a monthly event at the University of Nairobi featuring dramatic renditions predominantly of poetry, plays, and skits, was banned. This action was rationalized on the grounds of the content purportedly casting the Moi administration in a derogatory light, thereby extinguishing a long-standing theatrical tradition for ostensibly self-serving motives.

A notable instance of such governmental intervention occurred in 2013 with the initial prohibition of "Shackles of Doom" under the pretext of national security, although this ban was subsequently lifted. These episodes typify the myriad challenges faced by theatrical practitioners within the ambit of government scrutiny.

In 2019, Bungoma and St Joseph's Kitale High Schools were excluded from the National Drama and Film Festival, reportedly due to disciplinary issues impacting some cast members. According to the Festival organizers, this exclusion was based on a policy that students with disciplinary records should not represent their schools at national events (Nation TV, April 2, 2019). This decision, while aligned with government policy, was perceived by the students as a response to their portrayal of sensitive political themes in their performances (ibid). Similarly, in 2015, Dagoretti High School faced a two-year ban from the festival for misconduct, despite their presentation of a culturally significant dance highlighting the consequences of stereotyping (Orido, 2015). In 2020, several schools in Nyanza Province were unable to participate in the drama festivals, attributed to the government's delay in disbursing educational funds (Daily Nation, July 3, 2020). These instances illustrate an ongoing pattern of educational drama cancellations due to various reasons, reflecting broader challenges within the educational and cultural spheres in Kenya.

In the broader context of censorship, these specific instances are as revelatory of the censoring authority and the societal milieu it governs as they are of the censored artistic works themselves. Concurrently, as Africa witnesses burgeoning movements advocating for democracy and greater political liberties after extended periods of authoritarian governance, Kenya's antiquated single-party state has paradoxically both invited and obstructed its citizenry's participation in this transformative wave.

The preclusion of dramatic productions in certain African nations prior to their staging can be attributed to a multitude of causative factors, predominantly situated within the sociopolitical and cultural milieu of these regions. These factors encompass:

- i. Governmental or Political Intervention - In regions where freedom of expression is circumscribed, state authorities may intercede to forestall the presentation of theatrical works perceived as politically provocative or critical of the governing regime. As mentioned earlier, a case in point is the 2013 prohibition of the high school play "Shackles of Doom" in Kenya. This play, addressing ethnic tensions and historical injustices, was initially banned citing national security concerns. However, this action was later reversed following public outcry and advocacy, reflecting the government's sensitivity to cultural and ethnic issues in a country with a history of ethnic conflicts.
- ii. Censorship Due to Cultural or Religious Sensitivities - Dramatic productions may be cancelled due to their content being potentially offensive to particular cultural or religious groups. In such instances, local or national authorities may intervene, either cancelling or demanding modifications to the production in order to uphold social harmony and adhere to cultural norms. For example, the play "The River Between" (2015), based on Kenya's Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel, was banned by Ugandan authorities. The novel's themes of colonialism, traditional circumcision, and Christianity were deemed too sensitive, particularly given the cultural context of Uganda. Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologue" was banned in Nigeria due to its explicit content and discussions of female sexuality and rights, which were considered taboo and offensive to the predominantly conservative and religious society. In Egypt, Tawfiq Al-Hakim's historic play faced opposition from religious authorities for its portrayal of the Caliph, a religious figure. It sparked debate about the representation of historical and religious figures in art. These examples indicate the complex relationship between art, cultural norms, and societal sensitivities in various African contexts. Dramas that delve into contentious or culturally sensitive topics often provoke robust reactions, reflecting the diverse social, religious, and cultural landscapes of the continent. The response to such dramas can vary significantly, not only from country to country but also within different communities in the same country, illustrating the diversity of opinions and attitudes across Africa.
- iii. Public Outcry or Social pressure - Occasionally, public backlash or social media campaigns against specific aspects of a production, particularly those perceived as

insensitive or controversial, can result in its cancellation. This phenomenon, often part of the broader "cancel culture," involves rapid mobilization of public opinion against a particular production.

- iv. Financial or Logistical Challenges - Productions in Africa, including Kenya, are often canceled due to limited financial support, logistical challenges, and underdeveloped theatre infrastructure. High production costs for sets, costumes, venues, and salaries exacerbate funding constraints, especially during economic downturns when government and private sponsorship diminish. Additionally, heavy reliance on inconsistent donor funding creates sudden financial shortfalls, further hindering theatrical productions. These financial and logistical barriers significantly affect the sustainability and regularity of drama activities.
- v. Security Concerns - In regions experiencing turmoil or conflict, dramatic productions may be halted over concerns for the safety of performers and audiences.

In the Kenyan context, 'The River and the Source,' a play adapted from a novel by Margaret Ogola is another example of a drama that was censored or cancelled due to cultural or religious sensitivities. This cancel culture is reflective of the intricate interplay between artistic expression and prevalent societal norms. "The River and the Source," faced challenges in parts of Kenya due to its exploration of cultural change, women's rights, and the clash between Christian values and traditional African beliefs, which was deemed controversial in certain conservative communities.

In Tanzania, the 2018 ban of Ebrahim Hussein's play "I Want to Fly" by the government, officially attributed to licensing issues, was widely believed to be due to the play's critique of government policies and its exploration of religious and cultural themes.

These instances underscore the complexities faced by playwrights and producers in navigating the diverse and sometimes conflicting cultural and religious sensitivities within African societies. The intersection of art, culture, and politics in these settings highlights the nuanced role of theatre as a medium for social commentary and the delicate balance artists must maintain when addressing sensitive subjects.

### **Consequential Dynamics of Cancel Culture Phenomenon**

In scientific parlance, the ramifications of cancel culture can be conceptualized as the systemic and multifarious consequences arising from this socio-cultural phenomenon. It encapsulates a spectrum of outcomes, both intended and unintended, that manifest across various societal, psychological, and communicative domains. This phenomenon prompts a reevaluation of

cultural norms, ethical paradigms, and dialogical processes within the public sphere, particularly in domains where public opinion exerts substantial influence

The corollaries of cancel culture on the creative methodologies employed by practitioners of educational drama present a complex and multifaceted issue. Cancel culture, characterized by public indignation and the exclusion of individuals or entities due to perceived objectionable conduct or commentary, exerts a profound influence on those engaged in the field of educational drama. This culture engenders an atmosphere of apprehension and self-restraint among drama educators and theatrical professionals. The apprehension of facing critique or being subjected to 'cancellation' might compel practitioners to eschew contentious themes, topics, or inventive decisions. Such self-imposed censorship constricts the scope of artistic expression and could potentially hinder the exploration of vital societal issues within educational realms.

Additionally, cancel culture significantly affects how educational drama performances are received. Practitioners dealing with provocative subjects or pushing the boundaries of their craft may encounter challenges. Reactions of disapproval or resistance from audiences, parents, or educational institutions may lead to the abrogation or alteration of planned performances. Censorship, whether self-imposed or externally mandated, can attenuate the intended impact and educational efficacy of theatrical endeavors.

Moreover, the influence of cancel culture extends to the dynamics between instructors and students within educational settings. Educators and facilitators might find themselves compelled to sidestep contentious dialogues or provocative pedagogical methods to circumvent potential conflicts. This avoidance can limit students' exposure to diverse perspectives and curtail their capacity for critical analysis and empathetic comprehension of complex subjects.

Cancel culture imposes constraints on the creative liberties of those involved in educational theatre, affecting the content, themes, and discourses in their work. It also impacts the reception of educational performances and stifles open discourse in educational environments, thus impeding the transformative potential of education dramas.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined how cancel culture impacts educational drama in Kenya, highlighting the need for a balanced framework promoting artistic freedom alongside cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Such a framework would foster open dialogue, critical analysis, and empathy, empowering educators and students to explore diverse narratives without fear of censorship.

Addressing financial, logistical, and security challenges through comprehensive strategies is equally crucial to support educational drama effectively. This approach can mitigate cancel culture's negative effects, fostering a dynamic, inclusive environment for cultural dialogue and learning.

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