

**THE USE OF HUMOUR IN SOCIO-POLITICAL COMMENTARY IN MWALIMU  
ANDREW'S *STAFFROOM DIARY***

**RACHAEL KHALAYI**

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**DECLARATION**

This project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in another university

**Candidate:**

.....

.....

**Rachael Khalayi**

**Date**

**C50/60634/2013 (Candidate)**

This project has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors:

.....

.....

**Mr. Osaaji Mumia**

**Date**

**1<sup>st</sup> Supervisor**

.....

.....

**Dr. Godwin Siundu**

**Date**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Supervisor**

## **DEDICATION**

To mum, I don't know how much to thank you. You have been my pillar, my inspiration, my strength and my source of hope during this time. The daily calls you made to inquire about my progress, I cannot thank you enough, the joys of motherhood are when their daughter is at peace no matter what. Thank you for the support you have given me financially, spiritually and emotionally. May the good Lord shower you with abundant blessings. I love you mum.

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## ABSTRACT

This research project interrogates the use of humour in Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* as a style of commentary on the socio-political concerns in Kenya. The project further interrogates the use of character and characterization in the *Staffroom Diary* to assess in the development of plot in the column. The project uses Michael Warner's publics and counter publics, as well as literary stylistics of Michael Halliday as grounding theoretical framework. The research entails a close textual analysis of sixteen articles from the *Staffroom Diary* that focus on the pre and post 2013 General Elections, showing the convergence of national and institutional politics, collective and individual interests. Interviews with the *Sunday Nation* newspaper editors, teachers of the Loreto Msongari Convent and Mwalimu Andrew himself were also part of the methodology the study engaged itself into. The interviews conducted were also of great importance to the study since they added to the establishment of knowledge on the idea of the *Staffroom Diary* being popular. This research realizes that Mwalimu Andrew's language is important because it is the language that establishes humour in his columns and that the different strategies that he employs, are a deliberate choice that has essentially allowed him to foreground the socio-political concerns. The research also identifies contexts of both the rural and urban settings as effective in addressing the socio-political concerns intended.



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The *Staffroom Diary* is a column in the *Sunday Nation* that addresses the social, political and cultural concerns. It is written by Frankline Okata Muyonga, who uses the pseudonym Mwalimu Andrew. However, the writer strictly advised me not to mention his name, but because I owe the scholarly community a name, I indicate it but will not use it in our analysis since he does not use it in his articles. Mwalimu Andrew is a weekly columnist with the *Sunday Nation* where he publishes articles that situate the challenges, hope, aspirations and contradictions of Kenya, and the country's leadership-particularly in their often half-hearted attempts to make a difference in the lives of their people. Mwalimu Andrew began writing the *Staffroom Diary* in 2009 and at the time of writing this project, he has 263 articles to his name. This chapter introduces the study by defining terms that will be of great use in the chapters, the chapter also states the objectives of this study and gives a brief justification to this study. The chapter further gives some literature review concerning the key areas of the study, the theories that help in understanding the study, the methodology and the scope of this study before offering the conclusion to this study.

Mwalimu Andrew is one of the contemporary writers in Kenya who bring to light the socio-political issues affecting the country in their articles. But there have been existing columnists before him like the late Wahome Mutahi who ran a successful column called *Whispers* from the 1990s till his death in 2003.

## 1.2 Definition of Terms and Concepts

Humour from Raj Kishor Singh (2012) is the quality of being funny. It refers to an ability to perceive and express a sense of the clever or amusing thing. From *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (2003), humour is also defined as a variety of things from disposition or mood to peculiarity or affectation, particularly in Elizabethan times. It further states that, many works of literature even relied on humour for characterization and to provide convincing motivation for the characters actions. I would therefore come to a conclusion that humour is more about the telling of jokes that illustrate a political predicament which creates a humorous misidentification on behalf of the reader with his or her circumstances. There are different categories of humour including; parody, satire, situational comedy, slapstick, scatological, sexual, verbal and bathos humour. Out of these eight types of humour, the *Staffroom Diary* falls under satirical humour which is defined as humour used to provide a social or a political message. Humour and satire occupy a prominent position within the aesthetic conditions of contemporary culture, both in terms of literary art and popular media. This brings us to the definition of satire; also from *The Bedford Glossary of Critical Terms* (2003) defines it as, a literary genre that uses irony, wit and sometimes sarcasm to expose humanity's vices and foibles, giving impetus to change or reform through ridicule. It further states that, satire may generate laughter but essentially has a moral purpose. I would therefore conclude that, satire may rely more on understanding the target of the humour and thus tends to appeal to a more mature audience. In this case therefore, the *Staffroom Diary* becomes a clear platform for exhibiting the instances of humour that illustrate how satirical Mwalimu Andrew represents the socio-political issues in his column.

Literary journalism is the other term that will be common in this study hence the need for its definition. The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (2008) defines literary journalism as, journalism that uses literature; the active presence of the author's voice in the narrative and the use of tools long associated only with fiction, such as, elaborate structures, characterization, and even symbolism but with corded requirement of accuracy. This literary journalistic essay as it applies to writing about popular culture, involves writing true stories about people, places, events, films, and books. The *Staffroom Diary* therefore becomes a more relevant example of a popular culture piece of art written by the creative figure of Mwalimu Andrew. The purpose of the literary journalistic essay and review of popular culture are always to inform, educate and entertain readers.

There are many definitions on the term popular culture; Gramsci (1987) views it, as the contested terrain which various social groups attempt to impose their values on the organisation of popular consciousness. This can be seen as the contemporary popular culture of a particular society such as the western popular culture which deals with contemporary aspects of film, photography, art, poetry, music, influential people like political leaders, sports, heroes and so on. These institutions create brands that people can embrace and relate to.

It is with the above definitions on humour, satire, popular culture and literary journalism that we are basing the focus of our arguments in analyzing the *Staffroom Diary* by Mwalimu Andrew.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The generation of popular cultural writings and the expansion of the media space have correspondingly created new opportunities of creating and reading literatures. Some of these appear as regular columns that all the same comment on issues while borrowing literary devices.

In this regard, this study has explored how Mwalimu Andrew's weekly column, *Staffroom Diary*, uses humour to comment on the pre- and post- 2013 General Elections and on socio-political issues in the country. The exploration of this question and formulation of possible conclusions will enable us to appreciate the usefulness of humour in the discussion and understanding of the socio-political environment in the country, and the intrigues that come with such debates. This might be useful in the field of literary studies in as far as it locates the place of humour in understanding our day- to-day lives, within the space of popular culture.

### **1.4 Objectives**

This study sought to achieve the following two objectives:

- a) To examine how Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* exploits humour as a tool for socio-political commentary.
- b) To assess the effectiveness of character and characterization in Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary*.

## **1.5 Hypotheses**

This study has been guided by the following premises:

- a) Mwalimu Andrew uses humour in the *Staffroom Diary* to comment on the socio-political situation in Kenya.
- b) Mwalimu Andrew uses characters to explore certain characterizations that facilitate humour in the *Staffroom Diary*.

## **1.6 Justification of the Study**

Newspapers are an important part of a society's socio-cultural fabric insofar as they function to carry and convey news items, feature stories, analysis, and opinions that reflect and shape the society's way of life. The significance of a newspaper column cannot be gainsaid, for in some instances readers tend to buy an issue of a newspaper chiefly to read their favourite columnist. It is therefore worthwhile to interrogate the manner in which such columns and opinion pieces dissect the social and political issues of the day in the country. It is in this light that this study examines how *Staffroom Diary*, a weekly humour column in the *Sunday Nation*, re-presents the socio-political commentaries in Kenya. It is noteworthy that most of the opinion articles and columns in Kenyan newspapers are heavily political in their subject, tone, and analysis without employing many literary techniques. The *Staffroom Diary*, on the other hand, employs the techniques of humour and storytelling in its rendition and critiquing of the day-to-day social and political discourse in the country. This uniqueness in style and approach deserves a critical analysis in order to appreciate how different it is to encounter the daily issues being discussed through a different perspective.

The *Staffroom Diary* is unique in its use of narratives to re-present the same socio-political issues and commentaries, especially on matters that can be considered as the back-bone of a country—elections, since Mwalimu Andrew uses a style that does not involve an open and direct criticism.

These socio-political debates that are more often than not the subject of the *Staffroom Diary* are an integral part in the evaluation of the politics in the Kenyan society. I consider this a fertile field in which some literary analysis and documentation will go a long way in exposing, yet not necessarily elevating, the socio-cultural ethos of the Kenyan society.

Satire and humour may be termed as yet-to- be exploited fields in terms of critical literary analysis in Kenya. Even though much creative work in the sub-genre of humour exists in this country, little appears to have been done in newspapers, apart from few individuals like George Ogolla (2009) who appreciate such works and has researched on it. It is in light of this realization that this study sought to interrogate Mwalimu Andrew's column in the *Sunday Nation* as a case study of how effective it can be to employ humour in the discussion and the evaluation of day-to-day social occurrences.

### **1.7 Literature Review**

The purpose of this literature review is to highlight research work which has some bearing on my project. In specific terms, I review the existing critical works on satire and humour in various works from prose to poems and stories and newspaper articles in order

to establish the building blocks upon which this study is pegged. Finally, I provide examples in which key scholars have examined on works on satire and humour in their bringing to light the socio-political concerns. This section will be organized into three parts; satire, humour, literary journalism and popular culture and socio-political debates.

### **1.7.1 Review on Satire and Humour**

Satire as defined from the introductory part of this study relies more on understanding the target of the humour that tends to appeal to a more mature audience. As we look at satire, we realize that, needs one to look deeper into what something is said in order to get the exact meaning of what the intended message is. I wish to review literature on satire humour and creative imagination and link it to the study of Mwalimu Andrew's works.

In examining the relationship of humour quality in his satire and its application to political, religion and theology, Rowlland Herbert's study (2009), explores the different satires of Matthias Claudius, a German poet, who argues that, satire is an important means to negotiate identity and belonging and is more often used to attract a huge audience both in democratic and authoritarian societies. Hence, Mwalimu Andrew attracts a huge audience with his use of language that allows him to satirize the socio-political concerns of the country. From an interview with the editor of the *Sunday Nation*-Martin Mwangi, he ranked the *Staffroom Diary* as the second most read column on Sundays.

In his M.A thesis titled “The Uses of Satire in Fiction: An Analysis of Wahome Mutahi’s *Three Days on the Cross* and *Jailbug*, Chris Wasike’s principle objective in the study is to investigate the use of satire in Wahome Mutahi’s novels, and particularly to evaluate the satirical techniques used in Mutahi’s two texts and how this relates to the themes, characters, and style of narration. Wasike appreciates Mutahi’s use of humour as one of the devices that helps in achieving satire in these texts. In the current study, we acknowledge, therefore, that satire is indeed an authentic style of creative works that could pass across certain thematic concerns, and so, Mwalimu Andrew could be seen a creative literary writer who manages to infuse satire and humour to interrogate the socio-political concerns in Kenya. His usage of character sketches to address these concerns is what brings about the humour in his narratives.

Grace Musila (2000) addresses the use of cartoons in Kenyan newspapers and how they deploy humour. She discusses how these cartoons carry specific messages and comments in relation to humour in the society. “The cartoon is by definition, a genre that adopts a comic view in its intervention in socio-political issues”(89).

From Musila’s discussion, we are able to identify the reason as to why Mwalimu Andrew uses accompanying cartoons in his commentaries because, they are able to create imaginations of the situation being addressed. This level of creative imagination draws attention of the reader to the materiality of the body that causes the arousal of the reader’s interest since they create humour.



Hence with these in mind, we are able to analyze Mwalimu Andrew's column in his usage of humour to highlight the various issues that transpired during the pre and post 2013 election period and were raised by the media and other social sites.

### **1.7.2 Popular Culture and Social Political Debates**

In this section, we are going to examine a number of literatures that target popular culture as a forum for relaying different socio-political issues in the commentaries by Mwalimu Andrew in his *Staffroom Diary*. This is because, under popular culture, is popular literatures such as Mwalimu Andrew's writings that we are analyzing in this study.

As Mukerji and Schudson (1986) state:

..Popular culture includes both "folk" or "popular" beliefs, practices and objects, rooted in local traditions as well as "mass" beliefs, practices and objects generated from political and commercial centers. Objects taken to be part of popular culture are readable objects, written or visual materials for which are available traditions of interpretation and criticism. (49-50).

Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* can therefore be taken to be part of the readable objects which are written from socio-political standpoints hence making the column an example of a work of popular culture.

In her essay, 'Virtual Expressions: Alternative Online Spaces and the Staging of Kenyan Popular Cultures', Dina Ligaga (2004) argue that:

...by locating the Internet as an alternative site of production for popular culture, it becomes possible to begin to explore the myriad

meanings of online activities that reference the social and political lives of their users. It is in such a venture that one can begin to explore the impact and significance of the Internet in transforming how we read popular culture in Africa. (95)

She further argues that the Internet provides alternative routes of expression of popular culture, bringing to the front aspects of social and political ideas that would otherwise have remained hidden from public space. With this in mind, we get to note that Ligaga's research is similar to ours in the sense that it dwells on how different avenues like the internet space, creative newspaper space and films have been established to create awareness and various concerns affecting either individuals or masses. It is also similar to our study in that, the internet is one of the ways the *Staffroom Diary* is packaged which gives access to the public. The only difference, however, between Ligaga's research and the present study is that, my main focus is on Mwalimu Andrew's column, *Staffroom Diary*, and not on Internet blogging. And I will interrogate how he uses humour to analyze the socio-political issues.

Consistently, several scholars have shown that popular culture in Kenya has grown not just in opposition to power, but as a record of the everyday that shows how people managed to live in spaces and conditions that were not always conducive to their lives. This demonstrates how Kenyans found agency in avenues that were oppressive. Thus, Tom Odhiambo's study of "The romantic detective in Kenyan popular fiction" (2004), highlights accounts of ordinary men and women who "strive to exist in the bleak city

space” (194), of post-independence Kenya. He shows the meanings and processes of reception of everyday forms such as soap operas and magazines in the working-class spaces in Nairobi slums. This study highlights how Kenyans have innovatively found alternative avenues such as the newspaper space, to express themselves and engage with their realities in spite of the contexts of their existence. Indeed, it is such emphasis that allows for studies of how popular cultures intersect with power. Hence the more reason why I study Mwalimu Andrew’s column and get to see how far he gets in engaging with and representing reality that regards the country’s general elections as he expresses himself in the *Staffroom Diary*.

In his essay on “popular culture in Africa,” Johannes Fabian (1978) points out the notion of the archive, for instance, might help to find an alternative to an oversimplified concept of culture as the depository of beliefs and values. The next argument he raises is based on the assumption that cultural expressions are always more than mere reflexes of social, economic or political conditions.

...Culture does not simply mirror it; it symbolizes and thus always has a function (it is ‘semiotic’). More than that, any living culture must be viewed as a communicative process in which a society not only expresses but also generates and forms its world view. (318-319)

This is clearly evident in the Kenyan newspapers whereby it has been a platform for people to air out their individual or shared grievances time and again, hence the growth of

the *Staffroom Diary*, with his major reason for writing being, to raise the socio-political and econo-cultural issues.

Preben Kaarsholm and Deborah James (2000) talk of the notion of democracy becoming a central battlefield of meaning and new movements for democratic reforms emerging in the global south.

...This was not least the case in Africa where the performance of a number of states based on one-party system and ‘authenticist’ ideologies could be presented as degenerating into seeking corruption, cronyism, political oppression and negative growth and the new forces of opposition reintroduced tenets of liberal understandings of democracy such as pluralism, protection of human rights of expression and organization, and protection of electoral procedures. Culture in more aesthetic terms could be referred to as a distinct set of artistic genres and institutions.(204)

Kenya being a country in the global south, a lot of issues emerge on the notion of democracy and need for protection of human rights especially, the freedom of expression, and it is in light of this that, Mwalimu Andrew’s column becomes our central subject in interrogating how successful it has been in pointing out the major socio-political concerns and debates in the country especially at a time of the general election period.

Hence, from the above literatures, we can note that popular culture and popular literature is seen as what is socially acceptable among the masses. It revolves from films to the internet to books and to the creative newspaper spaces. This gives us an avenue to discuss the works of Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* and interrogate how he uses humour to comment on the socio-political concerns of Kenya, using the creative newspaper space as a form of popular culture. We shall now move to literary journalism and establish the link between literary journalism with the *Staffroom Diary*.

### **1.7.3 Literary Journalism**

Literary journalism from the initial definition refers to the journalism that uses literature – the presence of the author's voice in the narrative and the uses of tools long associated with fiction, such as elaborate structures, characterization and even symbolism but with added requirement of accuracy.

John Hartsock (2000) puts the emphasis on the noun; literary journalism as;

Journalism that uses the techniques of fiction; the life stories that read like a novel or a short story. (19)

Harstock further puts emphasis on the fact that literary journalists put themselves in the story. This is clearly evident in the works of Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* where he includes himself in the narratives as one of the major characters, since he always appears on each narrative he creates. This idea makes it relevant for us to categorize the *Staffroom Diary* not only as a work of popular culture but also as a work of literary journalism.

Simms (1995) argues that, literary journalism is journalism that uses literature, which means that, it should have the active presence of the author's voice in the narrative and it uses the tools that are long associated only with fiction, such as, elaborate structures, characterization, and even symbolism, but with added requirement of accuracy. Mwalimu Andrew can be categorized as a writer that incorporates all these in his works hence the *Staffroom Diary* can be studied as a work of literary journalism.

The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS) (2008) has defined Literary Journalism as “journalism as literature rather than journalism about literature” (15). They further say that, literary journalism often deals with ordinary people rather than celebrities or politicians. Mwalimu Andrew's use of the newspaper space to comment on the socio-political happenings in the country allows him to be a literary journalist since he uses the tenets of literature in his narratives. Mwalimu Andrew also uses ordinary folks/characters in writing his narratives. From the above discussions on literary journalism, we can therefore categorize the *Staffroom Diary* as a work of literary journalism that can also be studied also as a work of popular culture.

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

This section discusses the major theoretical underpinnings that inform and guide my research endeavor. I present the main arguments as canvassed in the theoretical framework, the proponents of those positions, and how those positions can be tailored to offer guidelines as to how the present inquiry might be projected and conducted. Brizee Allen and J. K Tompkins (2012) define theory as “ideas that act as different lenses critics

use to view and talk about art, literature and even culture” (n.p). My study is guided by and premised on the postulations advanced in two literary theoretical tools: Publics and Counter Publics and Stylistics theories. To begin with, I discuss the major tenets of the theories before I delve into how those principles or strands thereof apply in my analysis of humour in Mwalimu Andrew’s *Staffroom Diary*.

In answering the question to what extent would we categorize the *Staffroom Diary* as an overly read column, we have to look at the theory of publics and counter publics which revolve around the question, what is public? Ken Plummer (2003), in reviewing Michael Warner’s book, *Publics and Counter Publics* states that “a public is self-organized, brings together relations between strangers, can be both personal and impersonal, and can be constituted through mere attention” (12).

For Plummer, a public is the social space created by the automatic circulation of discourse. From this point of view, we can see that the creative newspaper space can be categorized as a public space where strangers interact through reading of the narratives that relate to them and connect them as a people of a nation. This alludes to the fact that the *Staffroom Diary* is not a conventional literary text like a novel and therefore, imagines its own public.

Jessica Blaustein (2004), writes that,

Publics are imagined entities with very real consequences; they are profoundly multiple in practice, and they are always products of social struggle. While a public’s meanings are by definition conditional and

contextual, much of the modern public comes from its intelligibility across cultural, political and economic landscapes of everyday living.(56)

From Blaustein's notion of publics, we can come up with a conclusion that, Mwalimu Andrew's use of the newspaper as a space for airing his views on the socio-political concerns can be considered public since, it keeps an account of the everyday living in the country. Hence the *Staffroom Diary* can be considered a public diary. It is also preoccupied with the social struggles mentioned by Blaustein above.

The theory of Publics and Counter Publics is a literary journalism theory by Michael Warner. In his book, *Publics and Counter Publics*, Warner defines public as the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation. He defines it as "a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself. It exists only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, web sites posted, speeches delivered and opinions produced. This means that it exists by virtue of being addressed."

The public is a kind of social totality. Its most common sense is that of the people in general, it might be the people organised as the nation, the common wealth, the city, the state, or some other community. But in each case, the public, as a people, it is a thought to include everyone within the field in question. This sense of totality is brought out in speaking of the public even though to speak of a national public implies that others exist; there must be as many publics as polite. (18)



Warner further emphasizes that a public organizes itself independently of state institutional laws, formal frameworks of citizenship or pre-existing institutions such as the church. So the modern sense of the public as the social totality, in fact derives much of its character from the way we understand the partial publics of discourse, like the public of Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary*. Mwalimu Andrew, in the *Staffroom Diary* constructs an audience out of the larger public that reads *The Sunday Nation*. One such segment of the audience constitutes teachers who provide the character sketches and surface subject of discussion. On the other hand, counter publics, constitute a near-subversive strand that resists official discourse. This means that, in the context of the study, Mwalimu Andrew in the *Staffroom Diary*, provides a subversive spin to dominant political issues, quite often taking an oppositional stand vis a vis the government line.

Secondly, I have used the stylistics theory to elaborate my use of humour in critiquing Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary*. Stylistics, according to Widdowson (1975), is "the study of texts and their interpretation with regards to their linguistics and tonal style as a discipline." It links literary criticism to linguistic sources of study in stylistics and may range from canonical works of writing to popular texts and from advertising copy to news, non-fiction, and popular culture as well as to political and religious discourse.

Common features of style include the use of dialogue, including regional accents and individual dialects (or idiolects) the use of grammar, such as the observation of active voice or passive voice, the distribution of sentence lengths, and the use of particular language registers and so on.

I have focused on Michael Halliday's (1985) strand of stylistics. One of Halliday's contributions has been the use of the term register to dialect. Dialect refers to the habitual language of a particular user in specific geographical or social variables: field (what the participants are actually engaged in doing) tenor, (who is taking part in the exchange) and mode (the use to which the language is being put). Halliday's third category, mode, is what he refers to as the symbolic organisation of the situation and describes the genre as pre-coded language – language that has not simply been used before, but that predetermines the selection of textual meanings. Hence, humour in the *Staffroom Diary* is determined by the language that Mwalimu Andrew uses to point out the socio-political issues that he addresses during the 2013 pre and post-election period. This stylistics theory has helped us in discerning what is humorous from what is not. It also helps in the interpretation of Mwalimu's commentaries by discerning irony, sarcasm and use of idiomatic expressions.

These two theories did ease our understanding of the idea that the *Staffroom Diary* is a widely read column with a variety of audiences with no age limit and that the style used for writing is efficient in the portrayal of the message intended.

## **1.9 Methodology**

I have done a close textual reading of the selected articles that focus on socio-political issues from the year 2009 when Mwalimu Andrew started writing up to date, though I have narrowed down my analysis to the election period—that is a few months to the elections and a few months after the 2013 elections. I also examined the different critical

works that have given their scholarly response to the effects of works on satire and humour. This has included a keen study of satirical humour to add value to this discourse—to note up to what extent satire deduces humour and if there is any point that humour erodes satire. I achieved all this by visiting the library and also through close consultations with my supervisors.

My methodology has also included going to the library, and having an overview of literary critical essays concerning socio-political concerns in other countries and also secondary texts especially the critical works dealing with satire, humour, popular culture and literary journalism. I have also conducted interviews with the editors of the *Sunday Nation*, teachers of Loreto Msongari Convent and Mwalimu Andrew himself.

### **1.10 Scope and Limitation**

This study has restricted itself to sixteen selected articles that focus on the 2013 pre and post-election period by Mwalimu Andrew published in the *Sunday Nation*—eight on the social commentaries and the other eight on the political commentaries. The analyses of these articles are within the boundaries of their relevance to socio-political concerns in Kenya during this election period and in terms of how satire is used to assess those concerns. The selected dates of the articles are those that have great socio-political overtones of that period.

Out of the eight social commentaries that I have analysed, four of them cover the pre-election period while the other four fall within the post-election period. This logic also

applies to the analysis of political commentaries. The criteria for choosing these sixteen articles was to take a sample on the humorous representation of the political and social issues which are the bedrock of Mwalimu Andrew's *StaffroomDiary* in the period immediately before and shortly after the hotly contested general elections.

## **1.11 Chapters Outline**

The following outline represents how I have organised my research project. It provides the concerns and issues discussed under each chapter.

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter has provided a guideline in terms of how I carried out my research. In this chapter, I have presented the background to my study, the statement of the problem, and the justification for this research project. I have also reviewed some relevant literature on my topic besides laying out the theoretical underpinnings upon which my study is based. Finally, I have discussed the methodology I have used during my study, and provide what I consider to be my scope and limitation in the present inquiry.

### **Chapter Two: Humour and Social Commentary in Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary***

My second chapter has identified the incidences of humour in the columns and interrogated their effect on social commentaries on the 2013 pre and post election period in the *Staffroom Diary* as a technique of creative imagination in Mwalimu's work. This chapter has also examined the relevance of these incidences in exhibiting the social concerns in Mwalimu's *Staffroom Diary*.

### **Chapter Three: Humour and Political Commentary in Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary***

In this chapter, I have examined Mwalimu Andrew's articles that re-present various political debates that occurred in the Kenyan society during the 2013 pre and post-election period. This chapter has also analysed the various effects of humour on the

socio-political debates that occurred during the 2013 pre and post-election period that Mwalimu Andrew addresses in his weekly column.

#### **Chapter Four: Character and Characterization in the *Staffroom Diary***

This chapter explores how Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* uses different types of characters to pass across different messages. This is achieved by evaluating how the characters bring to surface the effect of humour through characterization as a literary style in Mwalimu Andrew's delivery of messages in his commentaries. This chapter is richly fed by the discussions that will flow from the second and third chapters. It will be an evaluating chapter that will interrogate the extent to which *Staffroom Diary* might be read as a literary text and not a journalistic study that exhibits humour of the socio-political issues affecting Kenya.

#### **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

This is the last chapter of my research project. It is a reflective chapter in which I wrap up the observations and discussions that I have examined in my chapters one to four. I have also attempted an assessment of the research project in terms of meeting the set out objectives. I have also given my position in as far as the *Staffroom Diary* may be considered and consumed as a useful component in understanding and appreciating the socio-political culture of the Kenyan society.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HUMOUR AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN THE *STAFFROOM DIARY*

#### 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the focus of this study and the objectives aimed at. This chapter identifies incidences of humour in a number of articles in Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* and how this humour contributes to the representation of social issues. The chapter limits itself to the commentaries published prior to and after the 2013 elections in Kenya. The chapter focuses on this period because of how Mwalimu Andrew twists all these events to demonstrate how elections can be a time for people to get jobs and how Mwalimu Andrew gets to interact with people during this period. The chapter examines how humour is realized in the selected articles and discusses its contribution to social representation before and after the 2013 elections. The chapter is organized into two major sub-sections; literature on creative newspaper, the idea of space and spaces in Mwalimu Andrew's commentaries, and finally identify the instances of humour in the social commentaries in the *Staffroom Diary*.

#### 2.2 Creative Newspaper and the Idea of Space and Spaces in Mwalimu

##### Andrew's Commentaries

Mwalimu Andrew places his creativity along the cultural space of the home, the social space of the bar and the academic space of the school. These different settings allow for different power relations to be interrogated; the home is used as a space to interrogate the patriarchal relations, the school is used as a model for addressing bureaucratic or institutional relations while the Hitler's Bar is used to examine the social relations in the

*Staffroom Diary*. Michel Foucault (1980) states in his theorization of power relations, “the privileged place to observe power in action is the relations between the individual and the society especially its institutions” (97). The newspaper is an ideological manifestation of the material, social, political, and historical reality of a people’s level of development at every stage of their history. The fact that Mwalimu Andrew uses the newspaper space to address his concerns in his diary of the staffroom makes the newspaper a good platform for his creativeness. To paraphrase what most of the teachers from Loreto Msongari Convent said, that the *Staffroom Diary* identifies with them in so many ways including the idea of the staffroom reality whereby they normally discuss the socio-political events. Mwalimu’s idea of using his typical characters to represent the topical issues excites them since; they can also put into picture some of such characters among them within the staffroom.

Mwalimu Andrew uses the newspaper space to address the issues of Kenya from a rural setting which however reflects issues faced also in urban settings. Roger Kurtz (2000) talks of how Kenyan writers are focusing on the city because it is there that the social issues that most concern them are most obviously in evidence. He further argues that in contemporary African society the city is the venue for fundamental conflicts and contradictions on all levels of the social formation: economic, political, legal, religious and cultural. This is reflected in the works of Kenyan non-fictional creative writers who contribute to creative newspaper columns that tackle the same thematic concerns being raised and addressed by the fictional writers among them; the late Wahome Mutahi,



Benson Riunge who wrote for the *Daily Nation* before Mwalimu Andrew, among others in this discipline.

Mwalimu Andrew's choice of the rural setting to address the fundamentals of the country is an idea we should inquire and address and get to see the difference between the rural and urban space. Space and spaces are created under specific social conditions and they in turn have some sort of influence on the same social conditions. Writers employ their power of human creativity to use the spaces in a manner not originally intended. That is why in as much as *Mwisho Wa Lami* is seen as a village, the thematic concerns raised are those that happen in the urban environment or space. The use of the school setting to represent the capital of the state, the center of action in the village, is symbolic of urban Nairobi. In addition, the use of members of the school community – the Headmaster, the Deputy Headmaster, the Teachers, the Pupils, and the Parents – is instructive in as far as they may be understood to represent the structure of a state which has a President, Deputy President, Ministers, members of Parliament, and the Citizenry. Ordinarily, the seat of power of a government is located in an urban setting; hence the school symbolizes, in this case, Nairobi as the theatre of most of government action. Still as we learn from Kurtz research in *Post-Marked Nairobi: Writing the City in Contemporary Kenya*, urban space is, like narrative, a socially constructed act that sometimes conceals the more fundamental contradictions of a society. This in a way is like saying; the urban space is mostly created by citizens of a country.

Hence we can say that in as much as Mwalimu Andrew uses the rural space to represent his issues, his major focus is on the urban space. This becomes more evident when he

uses the idea of Hitler's Bar as a social place for recreational purposes – where the teachers go to meet and discuss the day's subjects. This could be compared to the urban life in which people gather in groups within the city or town to appraise themselves on the occurrences of the day or sometimes just to relax.

The *Staffroom Diary* works by acknowledging the limits of its genre, enlisting parody, satire and humour as its forms of expression. As Mwalimu states, in an interview I held with him; “He needs to give his audience a light reading.” This is because, he wants to deviate from the normal that other writers write about – the same cases but without using humour and satire. It is through these forms that the column examines the hidden struggles arising from the social and political changes in the country. This chapter is interested in how humour helps the writer navigate through the “limits” of the genre of creative newspaper columns as well as the conditions of its production.

The familiarity that the column creates within its readership is established within an institution which is arguably basic to every Kenyan – education and the family – just like George Ogolla (2004) discusses how Wahome Mutahi's ‘Whispers’ related with the people in the same way. Within the Primary School staffroom are employed a number of governors from which scripts that narrate the national are examined. Mwalimu Andrew uses this educational institution as a metaphor for the nation state. Hence we read the school as both an allegory and as a metaphorical microcosm of the country.

Mwalimu Andrew is the main character in the column. He is a teacher at Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School and is married to a woman named Fiolina who he keeps on referring to as “the laugh of my life.” At the time of writing this chapter, there is a new headmistress in Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School referred to as ‘ Bensouda’ though her real name is Skastina. We notice that Bensouda is a name that is used symbolically following the Kenyan ICC case at The Hague on the 2007 Post Election Violence. Therefore; Bensouda is a very significant statement in the Kenyan history. Though this chapter is on social commentary, we acknowledge that Bensouda refers to major political issues that have attracted intense media interest to date. We shall now examine the social commentaries that we are going to analyse in this chapter and the various instances of humour portrayed.

### **2.3 Social Commentaries in Mwalimu Andrew’s *Staffroom Diary***

This section is divided into subheadings that capture the social issues that Mwalimu Andrew pin-points. They include; patriarchy, Mwalimu Andrew’s fraternal relationships, family, Mwalimu Andrew and his social aspirations and finally, Mwalimu Andrew’s Status. This gives Mwalimu Andrew a platform to continue addressing the socio-political issues that have been raised from before. In most incidences, we notice that the school governing system changes on their representational roles basing on the serious social issues taking place in the country. These examples show how Mwalimu Andrew represents the thematic concerns to which we now turn to.

### **2.3.1 Mwalimu Andrew's Portrayal of Marriage and Patriarchal Relationships**

Under this section, we discuss the relationship between Mwalimu Andrew and his father. We are grounded by Allan Johnson's (2005) definition of patriarchy, where he argues that, patriarchy is organized around relationships and shared understandings. From this, we can gather that, Mwalimu Andrew has several relationships including; him and the father, the wife and the siblings. In our society, fathers and sons are expected to have a certain relationship whereby, they confide in each other since a boy is taught how to be a man by mostly spending time with the father. We are able to relate with how Mwalimu is being treated by his father whereby, the father thinks he is entitled to his son's achievement – when he insists on Mwalimu giving him money monthly and buying him drinks because Andrew is his son. The fact that Mwalimu Andrew is a teacher makes the situation worse because he has a regular income.

To cite an example of this, Mwalimu tells us of how he feels his wife wants to 'sit on him' and he will ensure that, that does not happen. In his **March 3, 2013** episode, he writes "Ominous Signs Fiolina Plans to Sit on Me"

... A few days later, Senje came and asked me to help her pay school fees for Theophillas her son. This was around the time we had just received a salary increase. I planned to give Senje 3500, until I told my first lady. " tangu lini ukakuwa Red Cross?" [since when did you become Red Cross] she asked me. "mimi sina lesa na viatu; nywele yangu ni mbaya [I don't have a wrapper and shoes, my hair is bad] and you are freely distributing money. Are you campaigning to be an MP?" Once she

was denied the money, Senje went around telling everyone that Fiolina had sat on me. As you know, ever since Hon. Mutula Kilonzo banned weekend tuition, we have been having idle Saturdays, as I walked out of the house, I found Fiolina at the door. She blocked me. “Where are you going?” She asked me. “Is it your business where am going?” I asked her. “Yes it is, I must know where you are going,” she answered. “What do you mean?” I asked her, pinched her nose and pushed her away. I walked to Hitler’s where I joined other teachers who had missed out on the IEBC jobs to drown their frustrations. It was about 8PM when I returned only to find the door to my house locked even though Fiolina and her retinue of relatives were all inside.

The excerpt reveals instances that suggest a sense of anxiety within maledom. Fiolina, the female character – Andrew’s wife is still inscribed with masculinity efforts to regain control over what it seems as a threat to her position in the society. This excerpt is intended to make the readers rethink their views on the institution of marriage and in particular the place of a woman in the society. Hence when Fiolina locks the house for Mwalimu and refuses to open until her niece decides to open the door, this seems to represent the social concerns of people in marriages. Mwalimu further uses his skill of humour when he says “once she was denied the money, senje went around telling people that Fiolina had “sat on me”(to mean that Mwalimu was being controlled by Fiolina). It is humorous that one’s relative would start spreading such rumours just because he/she has been denied money.

Fiolina further slaps her niece when she opens the door for her husband. This obviously does not sound right and the fact that Fiolina is supported by her parents-in-law when they are told of the incident without listening to their son's side of the story, makes it even more unfair. This is one of the instances that brings forth their father and son anxiety because, it is in such cases that fathers are supposed to listen to their sons and even side with them even though they still give advice to their daughters-in-law pertaining such matters. Later after this incident, we find Mwalimu's father trying to ask him for drinks and some money and we are left to wonder what kind of relationship that is, that after the father does not support Andrew, he still goes ahead to ask for drinks from him. This looks like a wake up call to Andrew who eventually realizes that his aunt Senje and his sisters are right when they tell him that clearly Fiolina has intentions of "sitting on him." This is because, not only does Fiolina want to be the one who controls her money but she also wants to be the one to make decisions for him and influence Andrew's parents on those harsh opinions that she wants for him to follow. This makes Andrew curse and even utter words that he really cannot take back:

....but Fiolina and my parents should know that I am not about to give up my constitutional rights and freedom of movement, assembly and association. Even if it means ending this marriage, I am ready for this.

Mwalimu humourously talks of how his rights are being ripped off from him and he will not entertain that in the above example. As we keenly look into this excerpt, we notice that during the election period, women wanted to be in control of their marriages because

the men always wanted to hang out in bars with their fellow men to discuss the ongoing politics in the country. This made the men arrive late in their homes making the women angry since they had also spend a lot of money buying alcohol. But as readers, we can make our own conclusions from the above excerpt and see if Mwalimu Andrew could be over reacting and could be making irrational decisions concerning his marriage.

The above was an example of how Mwalimu relates with the father and the wife, and it gives us a good insight of how fathers' always treat their sons no matter how old they are, they still seem like children to their fathers.

Though he does not have children, Mwalimu Andrew's life is full of petty drama which is brought mostly from the women of the home. However, when we look at how he keenly looks at the idea of the family, we note that, Mwalimu Andrew has a well formed idea about his role as a husband and he clearly outlines his thoughts on what Fiolina should do as his wife, as we saw in the article on "Fiolina plans to Sit on Me."

With the idea of coalition formation in the politics world during this election period, Mwalimu Andrew could not be left aside in the formation of coalitions in his home. With his sisters around, his mother and wife, there were a lot of intrigues because of the many women in his life and he is not sure who to side with when disputes arise among them. In the **December 9<sup>th</sup>2012** issue, Mwalimu's " I'm caught in the crossfire between the coalitions at home" had this issue to address.

...Caro played a major role in convincing me to marry Fiolina. The only person who had opposed my marriage to Fiolina was Yunia, the big sister but for different reasons. Luckily for me, Yunia returned to her husband soon after my first lady arrived. But she arrived back last week, two days after Caro. And the failure by my brother Ford, to send bus fare to his wife Rumona to travel to Shimo la Tewa has kept her around. Living with these women in the same compound even for two days is not a task for the faint-hearted. Although they had been friends for long, it became clear to me that Fiolina and Caro were no longer friends. It all had to do with shoes, rubber shoes. “I gave Caro my *ngoma* shoes and now she has made them hers,” Fiolina fumed. That night as we were taking supper, Caro came to our house she was breathing fire. “*mlamwa tutaheshimiana.*” [in-law, let us respect each other] she told Fiolina. “*We sio wa kwanza kununuliwa viatu nabwanako!*” [you are not the first one to be bought shoes by your husband] “*najua*” (I know) answered Fiolina. “*Na si uko na bwana, si umwambie akununulie pia wewe?*” (but you also have a husband, why can't you tell him to also buy you shoes) but if Fiolina was having problems with Caro, she was getting close to Yunia. They spent evenings together plaiting hair. ...Mother did not like this, come Wednesday, she stormed out of her house. She asked Yunia where her children were. Yunia said that Caro was taking care of her daughter. “when did Caro become your maid?” “let her also do some work.” Yunia told mother. “*mnapenda kubembeleza Caro sana.*” [you like being soft to Caro so much]



“chungu hiyo mdomo yako Yunia,”[watch what you say Yunia] mother warned. “ *naona kwanini huezi kuishi na bwana.*[I can see why you cannot stay with your husband] Umefunza dadako hizi tabia mbaya mpaka pia yeye amekosana na bwana wake.”[you have influenced your sister negatively that is why she cannot stay with her husband] mother said. It was only then that I realized that both Yunia and Caro had differed with their husbands, meaning they would stay for long. For some reason mother had started getting closer to Rumona, and has been visiting her house every evening, even eating supper there. I had not really noticed that there were three separate camps in our home, until last Thursday. Rumona usually sells scones and paraffin outside her house. So Bedford – Yunia’s son and Fiolina’s niece Frida have been minding her “shop” but, that evening, Frida was eating mandazi. When confronted, she said that Bedford had given her. I had spent most of the day at Hitler’s and arrived home to find fireworks. It was not clear what was happening but there were three camps. I tried to arbitrate but it was very difficult. I was vilified by all the three camps for taking middle ground. That is when I decided that I would no longer sit on the fence. I had to join one of the camps. But I am not giving support free of charge. Scratch my back I scratch yours. Which coalition should I join?

The above excerpt is rather longer than the previous ones because it elaborates how the women are related to Mwalimu Andrew and how the conflicts build on so that the reader

does not get confused as the conflict does not really end with any problem being solved. We could compare Mwalimu Andrew's mix-up with the confusion that was there before the elections. Coalitions proved to be the way forward for any candidate who aspired to win the elections. And as we know coalitions are formed by different groups with different ideologies coming together to agree on certain terms and conditions in order to back up each other. From the above excerpt, we see that Mwalimu Andrew uses the domestic spaces and squabbles to satirise the shaky national coalitions that characterized Kenya during 2013 election period. So, just as he uses the staffroom space, Mwalimu Andrew uses the family/domestic space as an allegory for national politics.

Mwalimu satirizes humourously the number of women in their home, explaining how difficult it can be staying with two of your sisters, a sister in law, a wife and a mother in the same compound, especially if the sisters have left their husbands homes. Mwalimu goes further to elaborate the issue that led to the formation of coalition. As we have read above, it all started with the issue of Fiolina lending Caro her rubber shoes which not only does she not return them on time, but she sends her child to bring them back to Fiolina and they are dirty. This makes the two disagree and Fiolina decides to be close to Yunia – Mwalimu Andrew's other sister. This annoys Mwalimu's mum who eventually engages in a war of words with Yunia, her daughter. Mwalimu's mother then forms a close bond with Rumona her daughter-in-law, until the day Rumona loses her money and it causes disagreement among the women because it was Fiolina's niece Frida and Yunia's son Bedford who used to help her with selling in her shop. And as we had earlier

explained, Mwalimu knows his role as a husband, but when it comes to him finding the role for coalition formation, he does not know how he will go about it.

It is after the time table galore – after Mwalimu allocated the lessons maliciously that the teachers strike happened and lasted for over a month. This was an unbearable month to all the teachers in the country and the government was even threatening to fire them and not pay them for absconding duty – as we read earlier how mwalimu was not going to be paid his July salary. It is through this that Mwalimu Andrew’s “laugh of my life” – Fiolina came up with ideas of how they could try out some businesses instead of just idling around waiting for the government to pay them. On the **6th of July 2013**, “The State Can go Ahead and Fire Me, I’m Married to a Wise Woman” Mwalimu comments on why a wise woman is better than a beautiful one.

...every afternoon once I ensured that Fiolina was at home safe and sound, I would leave for Hitler’s. from there I would stagger home to take a sumptuous dinner prepared by the laugh of my life... after long consultations, extensive research and thorough analysis of the opportunities available, the risks, capital available, we settled on two business ventures: selling of kerosene and mandazi. Fiolina would make mandazis every morning while I would sell them around the village, using my bicycle.

Mwalimu Andrew feels that he is lucky to have a brilliant wife and he is trying to tell the Kenyan citizens that they could always have the alternative of doing their own small

businesses and stop depending on the government funds or the white collar jobs. In return, Mwalimu Andrew tells us of how profitable the business was and he is lucky to be listening and doing business with his wife, unlike the way he was being advised initially that business is good only if one does not involve their wife. As he illustrates below;

...it was a lot of money, and if we could maintain such on a daily basis, “we could be able to make more money than my salary daily,” I told Fiolina. Then the government can go ahead and sack me. I am now a business man.

We now move to the sub-section on Mwalimu Andrew’s relationships.

### **2.3.2 Mwalimu’s Portrayal of Fraternal Relationships**

These are the relationships that Mwalimu Andrew has with his friends and colleagues.

Maxwell G. Mensinger (2012) defines fraternity as;

“a relationship that straddles the defined boundaries between friendship and family, affection and obligation, desire and necessity, floating elusively within the human psyche as an indefatigable bond between individuals.”

From his columns, we notice that Mwalimu Andrew has two places where he socializes when he is at Mwisho Wa Lami —the school and Hitler’s bar. While away from home, Mwalimu Andrew also has friends in Kenyatta University (KU). Within these places, Mwalimu has got friends who he mingles with and works with some of them in Mwisho Wa Lami Primary. Among his friends, we have Nyayo, Sapphire, Kwame, Rasto and Rashid. These are even the constant characters that he uses in his presentation of the

various concerns he raises. They seem to typically blend in the topical commentaries Mwalimu Andrew wants to address. We realize that in as much as Mwalimu has these friends who are good for the consumption of leisure, they can sometimes land him into trouble. A case in point is when Nyayo decides to be stealing things from people's houses in pretense that he had gone to Mwalimu Andrew's house to watch football matches and presidential debates around the 2013 election time. Mwalimu Andrew had decided to take advantage of the situation by charging some of the viewers because he was the only one at the moment who had a television in Mwisho Wa Lami village, hence a lot of people gathered in his house.

Mwalimu realizes how a means of getting money would land him into problems and in fact, make him use the money saved to bail himself out. In his **February 24<sup>th</sup>2013** issue, "How Thieving Nyayo got me in Trouble with the Law Enforcers," this is what he says;

....As one of the only two or three people with a working TV in Mwisho Wa Lami and its environs, last week was very lucrative for me. I must admit that I made some good money. The problem is that this money put me into problems and I had to use it to get out of the problems. But last Saturday, Kanungo's TV burned and as a result, the only people in Mwisho wa Lami who watched the semi-finals did it from my house. My wife Fiolina had cooked supper but on seeing that there were so many people, she secretly called me to the bedroom from where we quietly ate. Nyayo left a few minutes before half time. He returned as the game was almost ending. By then, Rasto and Alfayo were dozing. Nyayo told me

that he wanted to see me. He then showed me a small but powerful lamp that I could use in the house. We agreed on Sh.500 and I gave him Sh. 250 as deposit.

It is humorous how Mwalimu becomes so excited that he will charge people during the period when people would be watching the match in his house since his neighbour's TV set got spoilt. He does this for two days in a row since after the football finals there was the presidential debate being aired and people wanted to watch it so he provided this service for his friends and neighbours. However, there was an unexpected turn of events when his friend Nyayo decided to be selfish.

... The debate soon began although it was difficult to follow since Sapphire and Anthony had to translate what was being said. At around 10PM, we heard distress calls from one of our neighbours. "Mwizi! Mwizi!" [thief!thief!] She was shouting. "Nyayo uko wapi?" [Nyayo, where are you?] shouted Sapphire. But Nyayo was not around. Dre, this is my lamp that was stolen yesterday." Rashid said. He then showed me where he had written his initials R.A for Rashid Abdallah. " Nyayo aliniuzia jana usiku"[ Nyayo sold it to me yesterday at night] I said. "kumbe ni Nyayo mwizi?"[so Nyayo is a thief] said Rashid. Twende?" [Let us go] asked Rasto. We went to Nyayo's house where we only found his wife. "Na hii radio inakaaje kama ile yangu ilipotea jana?"[why does this radio look like mine that got lost yesterday] asked Rasto. Anindo – Nyayo's wife, said that her husband had bought it from the previous night. Early next

morning, Rasto arrived at my home accompanied by two policemen. “ni huyu,” Rasto said, pointing at me. Luckily, I had with me the money that I had collected the previous evening. I gave this money to the police and was released. Rashid was quite unhappy to see me free but the police told him to report when Nyayo appears. Nyayo has not been seen ever since.

Politics has always had a great influence on people’s social life and it always affects the domestic issues in the home or a society – especially poverty and corruption. As Ngugi Wa Thiong’o states in, *Writers in Politics*, a writer is always engaged in politics; hence Mwalimu Andrew describes how politics relate with various individuals. The above excerpt is a good example of this aspect, since we are able to see the relationship between the two issues pertaining to a social standing in a rural setting – Nyayo is forced to steal because of the poverty and he sells the stolen goods at a very low price. It is humorous to note that someone would lie to their wife that they were going to a friend to watch football or presidential debates, only for them to be going to steal from people’s houses – taking advantage of the fact that not so many people in the area have a television hence when they gather at one’s house, this is the opportunity they take to steal. This is the case for Nyayo – Mwalimu Andrew’s friend and a teacher at Mwisho Wa Lami Primary.

Nyayo is so courageous that he even sells the stolen items to Mwalimu and the neighbours from where he has stolen, not thinking that he might be caught because the stolen goods could be identified by the owners. In the event of watching the debate and a neighbour screams, it becomes bizarre that Nyayo is not found at Mwalimu’s house

where he had also been a part of the group that had come to watch the debate. Nyayo is also not at his place where they also find Rasto's stolen radio and the wife claims that Nyayo had bought it the previous day.

However, we can not dispute the fact that this is what happens not only in rural areas but also in towns, whereby people would gather in one's house or a bar to watch a game or news because they want to socialize, only to go back to their houses to find them looted. And since Mwalimu Andrew is the one who ended up paying for Nyayo's crimes, it does not sound like a just solution to hold captive the owner of the house or the bar. This also alludes to the fact that friends are supposed to be there to help one another—Nyayo puts Mwalimu in an awkward position and this was meant to be an opportunity for Mwalimu Andrew to mint some money since he had the platform to show that he was more powerful because now the whole village looked up to him for having a television. Unfortunately, his dreams do not really come to pass since he is forced to bribe the police because of his friend's selfish behaviour.

With his supposedly major achievements, obviously there have to be one or two people among his friends and colleagues that do not really feel good about it. And that is what Mwalimu is trying to bring to our attention following his article on him missing his July salary.

In his article on the **4th of August 2013**, "Missing My July Salary is Beyond all Imaginations," Mwalimu Andrew is trying to plead to the government to look into his



case before passing across a judgment on whether he should be paid or not. This is because the HM had accused him of absconding duty during the strike period and yet he was the only one who used to go to school. According to Mwalimu Andrew, this is because before the strike he had written a timetable and had allocated the HM's wife and the Deputy H/M classes during hours that they found were not convenient to them since they had to attend to other duties. Initially, when this complaint was raised by other teachers, the HM told them that they needed to organize among themselves to swop the lessons and not disturb Mwalimu Andrew, but when the HM realized that it also affected his wife and the deputy, he appointed someone else to prepare a new timetable so that he could show Mwalimu that he had the power to mess him up if he ever tries to be mischievous, and that is when he decided to mark him absent so that he could not be paid his July salary.

... "Juma has marked all the other teachers to have been in school during the strike except you," Sapphire told me. That is when I came to know that TSC had asked all the HM's to submit returns showing the teachers who had reported to school during the strike. How can it be that, I who had regularly come to school during the strike would be marked absent while the rest who never stepped in school had been marked present? Later that day, my sources at the D.E.O's office confirmed that I was the only teacher who had been reported to have been on strike in our school and I would not be paid for 16days. I am taking this up with KNUT but my prayer to Kaimenyi is that with the financial problems haunting me, I can't

imagine life without my pay. Please sir, discipline me, warn me, anything  
but let me get my full pay.

It is humorous when Mwalimu Andrew is planning to file a complaint with KNUT but is still asking for some form of punishment from the HM. This obviously says something about him being guilty of what he did – punishing the HM using his wife and also the Deputy H/M during the allocation of the lessons, hence the reason he is asking the HM to either discipline or warn him but not to make him miss his July salary. However, we note that deep down, he wants to pass across the message of malice from the side of his boss hence the idea of him reporting him to the KNUT offices. Since he is sure he never absconded duty, he is expected to stand by his word or admit that he missed duties and accept the consequences. We can, however, relate Mwalimu Andrew's situation to what some people go through in their job institutions. One can be humiliated to an extent of not being paid because of malicious reasons. This is seen by the people in power and authority whereby they are able to pull the strings by virtue of them having the final say in the employees under them. And Mwalimu is saying that in such situations, one should report the cases to the necessary authorities – like higher organizations which will listen to both sides of the story and pass a correct verdict. With the high economic standards, it is hard for an individual to survive with no pay especially, if one is subjected to such a situation and yet they work so hard to better themselves. This leads us to the next area of discussion which is on Mwalimu Andrew and his social goals or ambitions.

### 2.3.3 Social Aspirations in the *Staffroom Diary*

Dickens' (2012) explores the different notions of gentility in the 19<sup>th</sup>C and the implications of upward mobility on the lower class arguing that, social aspirations are a sign of people's search for identity. Everybody is allowed to have their social aspirations and Mwalimu Andrew in the *Staffroom Diary* is not an exception. He has been climbing ladders of success and has gotten to greater heights because of his determination. Mwalimu Andrew has been pursuing his Bachelors, degree at Kenyatta University and is almost through with his course, which will give him better opportunities in the job market. His social aspirations come with him having to put up appearances from how he dresses to what he eats. We can conclude that he marks his growth materially in the sense that, if his wife Fiolina has to bring him food to the staffroom, it has to be something like meat, 'omena' or 'matumbo' and not the vegetables that he considers are meant for the other teachers who are not of his social standing. He keeps on changing the colour of his clothes which are Kaunda suits that he considers expensive since the other teachers do not have. As the election period approached and him being supposedly the most literate in Mwisho Wa Lami village, Mwalimu Andrew was sure that he would get the best post in the IEBC, probably as a Presiding Officer because of his qualifications.

In his **February 10<sup>th</sup> 2013** article, Mwalimu Andrew uses his humourous ways to explain to us how he thinks he will be the boss of his boss during elections as he hopes to get the post of a Presiding Officer. "I might be the HM'S boss on March."

...when I declared that I was the most, if not the only, digital person in Mwisho Wa Lami and its environs, some enemies of development

dismissed me and accused me of chest-thumping. Little did we know that my analogue colleagues would soon need digital tips from me? “ This year I must be a Presiding Officer,” Juma declared. “ I was a Deputy P.O in the last elections.” “Who helped you get that job?” Lutta asked. “I gave up on election jobs after trying many years unsuccessfully.” “The jobs seem to belong to some families,” said Sapphire. “This is nonsense.” The H/M said, “It looks like IEBC doesn’t want some of us to be involved in the elections.” He then tabled a newspaper advert for the IEBC jobs. To be a Presiding Officer, or Deputy Presiding Officer, one needed to have a degree or diploma. Other than me who is pursuing a degree, the rest of the Mwisho wa Lami staff are certificate holders. As if that was not enough, computer literacy was mandatory for presiding officers and their deputies. There wasn’t much preparation until the HM arrived in the staffroom in a panic. “Dre, did you come with your computer? ” he asked. I asked why. “ ni kubaya! [it is critical] I have a friend who attended the interviews today and they had computer practicals.” he announced. I went home to bring my laptop so that I could take them through a crash computer usage. “I have booked to sit with you during the practical.” The HM sent me an sms that evening.

Mwalimu Andrew satirizes the idea that he is the only “digital” – one who is computer literate, in his village and that is why, when the IEBC demands that computer knowledge should be a requirement for all the applicants, Mwalimu gets a clear picture of how he

will be the HM's boss because, just like the other teachers in the staffroom, the HM is also computer illiterate. When they go for the IEBC interviews, Mwalimu is encouraged even more that his HM was planning to attend the clerks interview the following day, meaning that he did not think he would qualify in that category.

... " You wait," the HM said after the interview. "Me I will come tomorrow for the clerk interviews which I also applied for." "That's fine bwana HM," Lutta said encouragingly. "Even in the elections there are those who wanted to be governors but settled for other seats because of the degree thing." I proceeded for the oral interviews where I performed exemplary. I pray that I get the position and the HM also gets appointed clerk and assigned to my station to work under me. That will be a perfect opportunity for me to revenge.

In this excerpt, Mwalimu Andrew is pointing out that during the election of the people who would work for the IEBC in ensuring that the elections run smoothly, the idea of being digital in elections was meant to cut out the computer illiterate persons. Mwalimu Andrew obviously has a platform to show off his scholarship and make the rest of his colleagues feel his importance. That is why the whole staff of Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School was panicking when the HM arrived in school with a newspaper with the requirements for the various positions. Mwalimu Andrew had to take them through a computer crash lesson and still people like the HM still wanted to sit with him during the practical. And after the practicals and the oral interviews, the HM and some other teachers like Lutta who doubted themselves had to come the next day for the clerk

interviews. Mwalimu Andrew can be seen as someone who wants to be recognized because of his social aspirations and achievements.

In his **June 22nd 2013** article, “Changes Galore to the School Timetable” Mwalimu does not fail to brag about how he is normally allocated duties because of his qualifications. Mwalimu writes on how he was made in charge of allocating lessons since he was the one responsible for preparing the timetable because he was the only one in the staffroom with a laptop and digitalised and he had installed the software that ensures that he does not mix up lessons. With this responsibility, Mwalimu Andrew gets the platform to revenge against colleagues who have always, in one way or the other, not appreciated his efforts and those who also thought that he is ‘stupid’ and does not know what they do when they go to the nursery section – where his wife is teaching. This clearly reflects on the capitalist ideology of inequality— whereby, those in power use it to their advantage. And now that he is in power, Mwalimu gets the opportunity to frustrate those that are below him. He writes;

...in the last few weeks, I had noticed that Tito tended to go to the nursery section of the school and spend long hours with Fiolina. I had to change this so that by the time he is free in the afternoon, Fiolina has already left...Rumona: although she is my sister-in-law, she has this habit of carrying fitina[gossip] from school to home. And to ensure that she does not arrive late to school, I also assigned her morning classes and the last two classes. Meaning that she would spend the entire day just sitting in the staffroom.

We can see that Mwalimu Andrew is really exploiting his power for his own personal reasons. For instance, it is very humorous that he is allocating morning lessons to Tito because he feels that Tito is eyeing his wife Fiolina. It is funny how Mwalimu Andrew is always noticing Tito doing this and he has not asked him why, neither has he asked Fiolina. He continues;

...Kwame the Deputy: my revenge was very cold –literally, I assigned him late afternoon classes so that the rains would always start when he is still around and early morning classes so that he would arrive at school while it was still muddy. The HM, like all headmasters, has the habit of lumping all his classes on one or two days so that on the other three days he could make endless trips to the DEO's office. I put this to an end by assigning him daily lessons at odd hours when it was clearly not possible to leave the school.

Mwalimu's revenge towards his bosses is humorous in a way but disheartening since people tend to respect their bosses and do not want to take revenge against them. It does not cross his mind that this could boomerang and in turn make his life miserable. And the fact that he does this to most of the male teachers with the thought that all of them like wasting time going to talk to his wife in the nursery school section is even more humorous.

However, Mwalimu Andrew is just trying to show us what happens in our society. Be it in a school institution or any other institution, there are such malicious people who

struggle to get promotions in order to make their workmates lives unbearable. Mwalimu Andrew was also trying to rub into his colleagues the fact that he had more power over them to subject them into punishment regarding their lesson allocation if they crossed his path, which is a bad punishment as a teacher because it can complicate one's schedule.

From this section, we note that Mwalimu Andrew's social aspirations have made him a proud man and is always underestimating the other teachers because he feels that he is not on the same level with them. However, some of the teachers like the HM, are jealous of Mwalimu Andrew's achievement hence the mistreatment at times and yet they don't seem to aspire to do anything.

We are delving further into the issue of social aspirations by looking at how Mwalimu Andrew maintains his status in Mwisho Wa Lami as a soon to be Kenyatta University graduate from his vilslage and the only person who has been to Nairobi. As a marker of status, this lifestyle goes a long way from the beer he drinks at Hitlers, to the foods he wants to eat in public and the clothes he wears. He uses this as a weapon of sorts to portray his public image and maintaining it. It is in respect to this that we focus in the excerpt below, on what Mwalimu Andrew's neighbours think of him.

On **2nd November 2013**, "Nyumba Kumi makes me an Adulterer," Mwalimu Andrew is trying to expose why some people were excited with the idea of the nyumba kumi initiative – an initiative started by the government to enable each individual to know ten of their neighbours from what job they do, to who they really are away from work, for security reasons in the country. People had various reasons for doing this, some always



waited when the neighbours had cooked, then they could go and eat pretending to be on a nyumba kumi visit while others used this opportunity to go and flirt with other people's wives or girlfriends, as put by Mwalimu Andrew in the *Staffroom Diary*. In Mwalimu's case, he liked the initiative because of both reasons and the fact that he was thought of as an elite, he thought he could do this and set the pace for those looking up to him.

...I knocked only to find that it belonged to Kim, the owner of Mwisho Wa Lami hardware. There wasn't much I was to speak with a man and so I left immediately after. The next house belonged to Lucy, a teacher on teaching practice at Mwisho Wa Lami Secondary... I had gotten used to her, and so I removed my shoes and lay on the sofa as I sipped down the juice. I was still lying when someone knocked at the door. Lucy opened and in came Johnny, a high school teacher in a neighbouring school. The man went to the bedroom and as I got up to wear my shoes, he emerged carrying a nyahunyo.[a whip] "wewe ndio unanyemelea mabibi za wengine?"[You are the one who goes after other people's wives?] he asked as he moved to beat me. It was painful and as he moved for a second one, I jumped out of the house with only one shoe on. With that, I stopped any more nyumba kumi campaigns.

It is humorous how Mwalimu Andrew used to go to these ladies houses and they all used to love and entertain him showering him with praises about how he was one of the few smartly dressed men in Mwisho Wa Lami village with his favourite green Kaunda suit. The sarcasm comes in when Mwalimu Andrew, despite knowing that these women

had boyfriends and some were married, still used to go visiting them late in the night. Considering that he was even being told that by the secondary school female teachers, he saw this as a great achievement. But Mwalimu Andrew keeps on forgetting the boundaries of this initiative considering that these women were either married or with boyfriends, he was expected to behave appropriately since he used to visit them at night. For instance, in the above excerpt, we see how comfortable he gets to the extent that he raises his legs while awaiting for supper to be cooked and brought to him as he watched the news. The fact that Mwalimu Andrew also used to choose where to visit was also funny because he always ended up in a girl's or a woman's house. Once he went to a house belonging to a businessman, Mwalimu did not even spend five minutes with him—which shows that his intentions were not so genuine. These, however, are unfortunately some of the behaviours happening in our neighbourhoods in the name of nyumba kumi initiative. We are then left to ask ourselves, what are the boundaries of one getting to know their neighbours?

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter we have analyzed the social commentaries in the works of Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* that occurred slightly before and after the 2013 election period. The chapter has given as an insight to the social occurrences that happened during that time, like people stealing from others in pretense of going to watch the political debates and even the formation of coalitions in homes emulating the political coalitions and so forth. Mwalimu Andrew can be seen as an eye opener to the social occurrences experienced in our country during the pre and post-election period since he has a platform

that he can use to raise his pressing issues that overwhelm most citizens who have nowhere to speak them. As a literary writer, he uses the newspaper as a medium to explore his creative works with literary styles like satire and humour. Mwalimu Andrew is always smart enough to address the socio-political views from a neutral stand-point that make him admirable by the readers and also giving him a wider readership. The overview of the relationship between the newspaper creative writers and the socio-political themes in Kenya through the past years reveal that these writers have indeed functioned as a primary site of the opposition. In reaction to state oppression, and overt propaganda, these writers like Mwalimu Andrew have over and over again played a privileged role in offering alternative narratives because of the access to a platform. Hence Mwalimu Andrew exploits this genre to suit his literary needs and addresses the imagined social needs of a society at the same time. In the next chapter, we will at the political commentaries in the *Staffroom Diary* which will take a different angle from what we have been looking at in this chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### HUMOUR AND POLITICAL COMMENTARY IN THE *STAFFROOM DIARY*

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the political commentaries during the pre and post 2013-election period. We look at the articles written during this period to establish that Mwalimu's idea of politics is based on other perspectives such as the jobs that he will apply for during such times and the promotions he might get after the elections depending on who is elected. In an interview with him, Mwalimu tells us that one of his reasons as to why he moves away from the politics in most of his commentaries, is to avoid being at loggerheads with his readers who normally read his works for entertainment and they do not like him being so political, and also the fact that some people would over analyze his works and insist that he is biased. This makes it even more interesting to evaluate his works because we would love to see how he weaves the narratives to seem less political. We notice that during such times, not many people think as Mwalimu Andrew, instead, they think in terms of the propaganda and the political attitudes on the ground. We will divide the chapter into three subsections: the literature review on the idea of time and space in the *Staffroom Diary*, the national politics and the institutional politics. This will help us demarcate Mwalimu Andrew's political views and his understanding of politics.

#### 3.2 Literature on Time and Space in the *Staffroom Diary*

In the previous chapter, we touched a little bit on the idea of time and spaces in Mwalimu Andrew's commentaries according to how Rodger Kurtz views it. In this chapter, we will expound this idea with Bakhtin's idea on how he defines this issue of time and spaces and

we shall link it to the political commentaries that Mwalimu addresses on the pre and post-2013 election period. Bakhtin (1992), gives the term ‘Chronotope’ to mean the idea of time and space. Hence whatever counts is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time for literary criticism. And Mwalimu is a good example of Bakhtin’s definition of a literary writer who creatively marries the idea of time and space in his commentaries to make them easy for people to relate with and this also enables his works to have a sense of continuity making them more literary.

Through this analysis we are able to further our knowledge of how Mwalimu Andrew merges his ideas to harmonize his movements of time and relates them to the history that he wants to comment on – since time and space co-exist, and knowing very well that Mwalimu Andrew addresses weekly current affairs, this goes well with the staffroom setting that he has created.

As we discuss Mwalimu Andrew’s style of writing, we consider Peter Verdonks thought of stylistics, who, just like Michael Halliday, looks at stylistics as the analysis of distinctive expression of language and the description of its purpose and effect. And in looking at Mwalimu’s style of writing, we notice that he uses certain typical characters to create a very specific style that is, putting the main point of the news story he relates to and at the same time, captures the reader’s attention. For example, when he talks of a headline like “Nyumba Kumi makes me an Adulterer,” apart from this title being pleasing to the ears and the sense of rhythm it has, such a title adds to the attention drawing aspect and memorability of the headline by the reader. Through this we could

say that, it captures the essence of “Publics and Counter Publics” theory that we are using by Michael Warner who argues that, such a headline becomes very captivating to an audience in that in as much as one may not even read the story, but the fact that they read the title and found it catchy gives a lee way for discussion by the readers.

With Halliday’s idea of stylistics, we see how Mwalimu Andrew brings to life other people’s experiences and as Martin Mwangi – his editor would concur, he writes in the lay man’s language to be able to attract all kinds of audiences even though majority of his readers are teachers who can identify with better language. We therefore want to investigate how Mwalimu invents his language to explore certain concepts as he represents these socio- political commentaries. We now move to identify how he addresses the institutional politics.

### **3.3 Humour and Commentary on Institutional Politics**

Institutional politics are the political happenings within the rural environment of Mwalimu Andrew, which is Mwisho Wa Lami village and its environs including Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School.

Concern for political morality is constantly linked with economic morality. Acquisition of political power is often a means to exercise control over economic policy and advance social status. And as Emmanuel Obiechina puts it in his essay on *Politics in the Early Novel*, “the growth of literacy and spread of the mass media have encouraged the dissemination of ideas and information about political events everywhere in the continent

and in the world at large (21).” This is where Mwalimu Andrew comes in as a creative fictional writer reflecting on the pre and post 2013-election political issues of Kenya through the media space.

As stated from our sub-title, on the institutional politics, therefore, we look into how Mwalimu Andrew portrays the change in the Kenyan political structure right before and after the 2013 elections.

In his article on the **20<sup>th</sup> of October, 2012**, “Why Some Nominees for Head boy and Head girl Must ‘Lose’,” Mwalimu Andrew writes about the issues pertaining to the school elections. His main concern is not about the politics itself but the jobs that he is given during this period. This time, Mwalimu has been given the responsibility of printing the ballot papers.

.... “A suspension can not disqualify anyone from contesting,” said Sapphire. “If the Ocampo two are running for president, how can we prevent Kaunda or Alex from contesting? Sapphire was the the last councillor’s chief campaigner in the last elections and is a regular at Hitler’s. “ Since we can’t stop their names from appearing on the ballot, we must ensure that they do not win the elections,” the HM said. He wanted Malachi, his brother’s son to be head boy. I agreed to help out on condition that Sandra, Prudentia and Bedford also get elected as prefects. “Dre, we need you to ensure that some people do not head this school,” the HM said. “I am ready to have anyone as head boy but not Kaunda,”

added the Deputy. “We must do everything to stop him. And since you are the one who will print the ballot papers, we shall need your help, Dre.”

In the above excerpt Mwalimu Andrew’s satiric streak strikes in the way he draws parallels between the national politics and the politics of the school. He reminds us of the Uhuru and Ruto duo who contested the presidency even though they were facing charges on crimes against humanity at The Hague regarding the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya.

Our attention is held as we read this and we laugh at our own human frailty in drawing from the public space that which may be wrong but which support our own cause as in the case for Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School, however degenerating it may be. Sapphire points to our own parody of integrity rules as he fights the case of Kaunda and Alex by comparing the two student candidates to the presidential candidates, Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto.

The lesson that Mwalimu is teaching us is that the political scene is corrupt and this corruption runs deep and affects the little politics that happen in the lower echelons of engagements like the school.

Mwalimu Andrew brings the national leaders to the same levels of commoners like Kaunda and Alex. Such cannibalization enables the political society at all levels to look at itself in totality in such a way that the lower social strata does not become quick to



point a finger at the rot in the national politics since they too are just as deeply steeped in the rot of corrupt morals. This can be seen when H/M and Mwalimu Andrew are conspiring to select a candidate for the position of head boy by using the same crooked means that is typical of the political elite. And though Mwalimu's role is just to print the ballot papers, he manages to pin-point the plot on the rigging of elections in the school.

In the **27th October, 2012** issue, Mwalimu Andrew writes an article on the reasons why the Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School elections had to be pushed forward. "Why We Postponed Elections for the Head Boy." This is just a continuation of the previous thought about the school elections and the head teacher and his deputy being nervous of the other party winning. Though Mwalimu Andrew is not playing a political role, he is the brain behind the postponement of the elections:

... "The laptop is ready for the elections but there are other materials that I have ordered in Nairobi that may delay us," I said. "What materials?" Juma asked. "We need to finish this thing fast so that people don't ask too many questions." I told him we needed to have some special printing paper for the ballot paper and a projector. "What is a projector for?" He asked. "We need to project the results on the staffroom school board as they come in," I told him. "Once we do that, no one can complain of any rigging, I assure you." "What if you put everything there in the open and Kaunda wins?" he asked. "I will take care of that." I told him. Kaunda had representatives in almost every class campaigning for him while Malachi had posters all over. Based on my own scientific intelligence, Kaunda, the councillor's son was head to head with Alex. Malachi was a strong third

for head boy. Since both Kaunda and Alex came from Mwisho wa Lami village, they would split their vote and help Malachi win. This is what we planned to manipulate.

In this excerpt Mwalimu Andrew is painting the picture of the election board of the Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School where management of elections is full of wheeling and dealing that compromise the electioneering process and which do have an impact on the final outcome.

Here we find Mwalimu Andrew trying to delay the election of the school head boy because he is trying to help his boss's preferred candidate to win and delaying will give him room to maneuver the results in his favour. This can be related to the national elections delay where the country's elections were postponed by the IEBC from the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2012 to March 4<sup>th</sup> 2013. This was due to the delay of BVR kits which attracted different interpretations across the country.

It is humorous how Mwalimu Andrew and Mr. Juma think that a projector beaming results on the staffroom board will not cause alarm over any accusations of rigging. We laugh at how he is trying to play with the psyche of the electorate by showing the fairness of his unfair schemes, as he tries to wash off the charge of rigging through the projector.

That evening at Hitler's Bar, is when the arrangements were made between the parents of Alex and Kaunda and the following morning, Alex—Hitler's son, had stepped down for Kaunda. This disorganized Mwalimu's initial thoughts on how easy they were splitting

their votes and so the only way this could be solved was through the postponement of elections.

... “Karibu sana , Mheshimiwa,” [welcome, honourable] Nyayo said as he welcomed him (Kaunda’s father).“ wewe sasa umetosha kuwa Senator ama Governor,”[you are fit to be a senator or governor] Rasto told him. He paid for the drinks then called Hitler aside. They talked for a long time. Later, Alex, Hitler’s son, joined them. I did not need a BVR kit to know what they were talking about... Alex had stepped down for Kaunda; Alex was now asking his supporters to vote for Kaunda... “So what do we do?” the H/M asked me. I suggested that the elections be postponed until such a time that Malachi would be able to win. “And what would be the reason for postponing them? Mr. Juma asked. “ Simple,” I told him. You can say that all the election materials have not arrived and that elections would be done as soon as all the printed ballot papers are ready. The next morning he travelled to Nairobi and has not been picking anyone’s calls.

In this excerpt Mwalimu humourously tells us that he did not need a BVR kit to know that they were negotiating on making Hitler’s son, Alex, to step down for Kaunda and support him with all of Alex’s supporters. It is humourous when he talks of the BVR kit since it does not serve a purpose of making people laugh in real life. This was going to be a blow to the Head teacher since they thought that Kaunda and Alex were going to split their votes – since they were from the same region, and this would create space for Malachi to win. The HM, his Deputy and Mwalimu’s nemesis is on course of winning the

elections and so they had to do something fast. And that is when they decide to postpone the elections until such a time that their preferred choice, Malachi, would win.

This reminds us of the national politics where elections are a do or die situation where losing is akin to 'death'. So while Mwalimu Andrew seems to be unhappy with the deals being cut between Alex and Kaunda in their bid to have 'one of their own' for the position of the school head boy, we see that Mwalimu Andrew and the school administrators – the HM and his Deputy, are just as desperate to have one of their own – Malachi, win that seat.

On **the 18th of May 2013** issue, Mwalimu Andrew writes on “Why We Vetted ‘Half-baked’ Prefects.” In this article, Mwalimu Andrew uses his skills to explain to the country the reasons the president and his deputy did not select the best and digital ministers as had been expected by the public. He addresses this issue using the school space which is his usual setting. However, this was the period when the Kenyans were anxiously awaiting for the President and his Deputy to provide the list of their nominees for the cabinet secretaries after they had been sworn in and had to identify the ministers that they would be working with in their government. After waiting for close to two weeks, that is when the two leaders came up with a list that a majority of citizens together with the members of the county assembly had concerns with since, it was a list that contained some names that had been in previous governments and had not made any changes on their dockets.

It is in light of this that Mwalimu Andrew uses the school chronotope to represent these concerns in a lighter and clearer way. He writes:

... We suggested that we carry out interviews for this exercise but the HM and the Deputy were reluctant and resolved that they would make the appointments after which the entire staffroom would consider the list for approval. For two days, the HM and his Deputy sat in the HM's office for long hours drafting a list of appointees. With the exercise taking so long, we expected a list of credible names to approve. While the list had one or two surprises, the majority of the nominees were the usual suspects.

It is very humorous when Mwalimu uses the term 'the usual suspects' and as we laugh at it, we cannot help but compare these 'usual' prefect suspects to the usual names that were being listed by the President and his Deputy. Keeping in mind that the teachers were hoping that after the many hours they spent selecting, everyone was hoping for a certain change or a bit of credibility.

The teachers get to complain and the HM together with his Deputy agree that all the candidates go through an interview session so that the best candidate may win fairly. But this does not go as planned as we read from the excerpt.

...Lutta who had been quiet all along rose to speak. "Mr. Headmaster and Deputy, I agree with you that you were looking for the best candidates regardless of where they come from. Is it a coincidence that most of the nominees come from your villages?" About seven of the names come from Kwame's village while another

nine are the HM's neighbours." Most of the teachers supported the interview proposal but the HM and his Deputy rejected the idea.... It was only later that evening at Hitler's that I came to know what had actually happened. "Why did you give the HM the questions before hand? They spend the entire evening and this morning coaching the nominees on how to answer the questions," said Sapphire. "So that is the reason all the candidates answered the questions!" I exclaimed. Outraged, I struck a deal with Sapphire to do everything possible to reverse the appointments.

We can clearly relate to our government's situation at that time – after the general elections. The only difference, however, is Mwalimu's conclusion that he and Sapphire will try to do everything possible to reverse the appointments. Obviously when we relate it to the national situation, we find that there is nothing anyone could do since the appointments had already been done.

The institutional politics range from elections to promotions in Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School. Gloria was the initial nursery teacher at Mwisho Wa Lami before Fiolina took over from her after Gloria decided to resign, even after being lucky to fall in the category of people who were the first lot on the bamba five initiative (five years added for them before retirement). On the **20<sup>th</sup> January 2013**, Mwalimu uses Fiolina to express how a few people get direct nominations in the elections. In his article, "How Fiolina got a Direct Nomination," he writes this;

...Gloria should have retired a few years ago but when the government introduced the bamba tano plan[an additional five years for teachers before retirement] for teachers who were approaching 55 years of age, she took advantage and postponed her retirement by 5years. This did not go well with many people for there were so many women around who had been waiting to take over her post – one of the most lucrative in our larger area. There was Rasto's daughter, who even had started assisting Gloria free of charge in the hope that she would be left in charge. She got married when Gloria's bamba five plan was approved. There was also Rashid's son's wife as well as Lutta's second wife, and Prisca, apostle Elkana's oldest daughter, but when I made Fiolina my first lady, I got interested in finding out. She was the ideal candidate to succeed Gloria, since Gloria was employed by the county council. I went to see the councilor who promised to do everything to ensure that Fiolina gets the job. In return I decided to be one of his campaigners in Mwisho wa Lami. I also used my laptop to print his posters free of charge. I was in Juma's office the next day when Juma told me that Gloria had fallen ill and had decided to retire earlier than planned. That evening I met Nyayo, the school's P.T.A [Parents, Teachers Association] Chairman, and Rashid, the treasurer, at Hitler's after buying them several pick-ups, I told them of the impending appointment of the nursery teacher and why we need to give Fiolina the job. ...We dismissed all the handwritten applications only three remained. Although Prisca had attached her certificates, she did not have a C.V she

failed at this stage. “We can’t allow people from other villages to dominate us” said Nyayo, regarding Lutta’s wife. He was supported by Rashid and although the H/M differed with them, he was overruled and only one candidate remained: Fiolina. Rashid and Nyayo did not think an interview was necessary. “Just appoint her directly,” Nyayo said. “I know her, she is a good lady,” Rashid said, just nominate her.

In this excerpt we see Mwalimu satirizing the way our politics are full of underhand negotiations where positions are never given based on merit but on dubious grounds of knowing the right people in the right places. And in this case, he takes advantage of the situation to help his wife get a job.

Mwalimu Andrew fights for his wife to get the position of the nursery school teacher. Mwalimu Andrew shows the levels of desperation which man can sink into when looking for a source of livelihood. The panel for employing the new teacher easily dismisses the other candidates on flimsy grounds of coming from the wrong village just so that they can sieve right up to their preferred candidate. Though it is humourous how Mwalimu could stoop to the level of agreeing to campaign for the councilor and even print his ballot papers for free – in hope that the councilor would help Fiolina get employed in Mwisho Wa Lami Primary, only to realize later that all this was in vain since the councilor had no hand in the appointments of the nursery school teachers.



### **3.4 The National Politics in the *Staffroom Diary***

As we look into the national politics commentaries, we want to identify whether Mwalimu has the same idea concerning the politics outside the school setting and how he manages to link the national politics to the school space.

On the **24th February of 2013**, Mwalimu Andrew raises an alarm on his suspicions that people are planning to rig the polls in his village. He says; “There’s a plot to rig polls in Mwisho”

...Unless the IEBC chairman, the Police Commissioner and the Minister for Education intervenes, the General Elections in Mwisho Wa Lami polling station will be a great sham. This is because enemies of development have conspired to lock me out of presiding the elections so as to impose unpopular leaders against the wishes of the majority in Mwisho Wa Lami and its environs. As you know, besides our H/M and Deputy, our Area Education Officer (AEO) also attended the interviews. Ever since I sacked the assistant chief’s son as a prefect, we don’t see eye to eye. That night, I am reliably informed, our Assistant Chief, the H/M and the AEO met the Returning Officer, at Cosmos Bar where they sought to convince him not to hire me. The Returning Officer told them off and ruled that I had no police case and that even if I had; no one had proven that I had stolen. He appointed me as the P.O. [presiding officer], the AEO was appointed as my deputy while the H/M was appointed a polling clerk

along with the Deputy, Madam Ruth and Anita. Having failed to stop me, enemies of my development resorted to using state machinery to stop me.

It is humourous that Mwalimu is crying foul that he is about to be unseated from the position of presiding officer on corrupt and unprocedural ways yet he does not consider following the right avenues that could help him solve this problem. The case on Mwalimu Andrew taking Nyayo – his friend’s place, as the thief, was not a genuine reason for locking Mwalimu Andrew out as a Presiding Officer. As we analysed in the previous chapter, how Nyayo did the stealing in pretense that He was at Mwalimu’s place watching the Presidential debate and this is what put Mwalimu Andrew in trouble. That is why; the AEO and the HM resorted to using other means of locking Mwalimu out as we see as we progress with our analysis.

Mwalimu Andrew draws our attention to show us how human frailty plays upon our desires – the (AEO and the HM) people in authority could subject one to misery simply because they have the powers to do so. Power corrupts the mind and this is not only reflected in the rural areas like Mwisho Wa Lami, but also in our supreme areas in the country.

...last evening the H/M sent me a text telling me that I would be on duty during the last week. I reminded him that it was Mrs. Atika’s turn followed by Lutta. “I no but Mrs. Atika is seek while Tito will not be in because he will be out,” he texted me back.... We can’t have all the teachers going for IEBC training, especially teachers on duty!” the H/M

said. “But you have allowed Ruth, Anita, Kwame and yourself already, why not me?” “I gave permission on first come first serve,” he said. “TSC regulations do not allow me to have 60% of teachers away.” He suggested that I talk to the AEO for assistance. “If he agrees then I will allow you.” I called the Returning Officer that evening but he said that he had already replaced me. It was clear from his voice that he was under immense pressure from state officials to drop me. Reluctantly I went to school on Wednesday. Later on, Sapphire informed me that in my absence, the AEO had replaced me as the P.O while Mr. Juma would be his deputy. I immediately wrote a protest email to IEBC and TSC.

In this excerpt Mwalimu laments the manner in which the head teacher in collaboration with the AEO managed to sack him as a Presiding Officer. As the readers, we sympathise with Mwalimu Andrew when we see that he has been given the responsibility of being on the teacher duty so that he could miss the IEBC training, and therefore be replaced by somebody else who turned out to be the AEO while the HM ended up being the AEO’s Deputy Presiding Officer. Though the text that the HM sends him is humourous since it is full of grammar mistakes and we are left to wonder how such a person who cannot even spell correctly can handle such a big and demanding position. In a way, we would say that Mwalimu Andrew is criticizing teachers of how poor their grammar could be and yet they are empowered to pass such knowledge and language to students. Indeed, we cannot help laughing at him when he says that he immediately wrote a protest letter to IEBC and TSC.

On the **17<sup>th</sup> of March 2013**, Mwalimu Andrew had this to write regarding his new line of work – “My new Digital Career.”

.... “Since Dida did not win, do you see the teachers’ increments being implemented?” Lutta asked. Interestingly every teacher around claimed to have voted for Dida, although results from Mwisho Wa Lami polling station show that Dida got only two votes.

This is a discussion held in Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School where Mwalimu Andrew is a teacher, and it is very humorous the way all the teachers want to try to sympathize with the fallen candidate Dida who lost the presidential elections. “And going by the votes, we are told that Dida only managed two votes.” Mwalimu says. Mwalimu Andrew is trying to satirize the idea that in as much as there could be very many teachers in the country, the number of votes Dida garnered was not a good reflection considering that these teachers could have even helped in the campaigns for Dida, who, as their fellow teacher, would presumably understand their various needs, and would have helped solve them were he elected as the President.

And later when Andrew goes to hang out with his male peers at Hitler’s bar, that is when they have their discussion about the new president and the digital era.

.... Uhuru’s house is in state house. This is the samba [house] that he built when he was a teenager. By that time his father was still the president. “So will he continue staying in his simba or he will move to the main house?”

asked Kwame. “That will be very tricky,” Rashid said. “Can you sleep with your wife in the same bed that your parents or her parents slept in?”

The point that Mwalimu is making from this discussion at Hitler’s Bar is that, Uhuru the president grew up in State House and is now the President of Kenya. Hence the whole humorous questions on whether he would be sleeping in the same bed that his father and mother slept in. This is because, the African culture does not allow for sons to sleep on the same bed as their parents and they therefore are supposed to make their own simba’s. The conversation shifts to the idea of the promise of laptops that all of the men in the bar are optimistic that Mwalimu Andrew will get the honour of being in-charge of them since he is the most computer literate in his school and village.

.... “But Dre, don’t forget me,” said Sapphire and then ordered a drink for me for the first time in over a year. “What do you mean I should not forget you?” I asked him. I am quite sure you will play a big role when the laptops arrive. In fact, as for you the minimum position you will be given is the District Laptop Officersr.” He said. “Are you sure?” I asked. “I am sure if the laptops come, they will need people who are already laptop literate,” he said.

This commentary basically ridicules the idea that the introduction of the laptops to primary school is going to be a very challenging programme for the government considering the fact that not many Primary School teachers are computer literate. It is very humorous when Sapphire is already foreseeing Mwalimu’s future career as a District

Laptop Officer, a post that is quite humorous to the reader since it does not exist, and it becomes part of the fictional freedom that Mwalimu uses to create humour to his readers. With this news on the new digital post, Mwalimu decides to go home earlier than usual to tell the wife, only to get home and find that his wife had had a fight with the sister-in-law, Rumona, over a basin of water. This annoys Mwalimu and the wife and they decide to go and start looking for another house next to the county headquarters so that by the time the laptops arrive, they are already at the headquarters and they will hence avoid the petty family wrangles.

....we will soon leave this home so Rumona won't be a problem. "Really? That's so good. Do you mean you have bought land somewhere where we will move to?" "No, we will soon be staying at the county headquarters," I said. "wah, kwani [are] you are now a D.E.O?" she asked me. "No, I will not be a D.E.O but only a CLO – county laptop officer," I said. We then agreed with her that next day, she would go to the county headquarters to look for a suitable two-bed roomed house for us. "By the time laptops come, we shall be ready for them at the headquarters," She said.

Mwalimu satirizes the idea that when digitalization came along, there were some people who had their hopes and dreams revived and even started making plans for the future. A case in point is the Mwisho Wa Lami fraternity, where people are making plans for the future – Mwalimu and his wife, planning on looking for better houses since Mwalimu will have a better job. This hope that Mwalimu creates in this commentary is a reflection of how some citizens of Kenya had after they heard about the laptop initiative, but since

the people of Mwisho Wa Lami are still waiting, it would be well if the rest of the citizens also waited.

In his other commentary on the political issues faced after the elections, Mwalimu Andrew recalls everything he did to make the Election Day a success. And as we can recall in the above analysis on the commentaries before the election, we discussed an article he had written on how the elections were being planned to be rigged in Mwisho Wa Lami and that is why the higher forces of power, in this case the HM and the AEO, ensured that he was not part of the Presiding Officers. And though they managed to eliminate him from the job, they still needed his skills on computer literacy to ensure that the event was successful. This inspired him to write an article that sends a message to the IEBC. On **the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2013**, Mwalimu Andrew writes an article reading, “The IEBC Owes Me.” This is what he comments:

... The AEO and the HM were quite relieved to see me together with the clerk, we called a senior IEBC official and with my guidance, he was able to successfully get into the system. The clerk had problems using the laptop and the AEO asked me to stick around just in case they needed my assistance. “Dre, our BVR laptops are about to go off as the battery is finished,” he said. Please bring yours so that we can use it. The clerk declared that it could not be used since it did not have the IEBC software.

It is humorous and sarcastic to the reader and also Mwalimu himself, how people can conspire to eliminate someone from their legitimate jobs and fix themselves, only to call

back on that same person to step in and help them in the same job. In as much as Mwalimu Andrew is making this whole scenario seem humorous and sarcastic, the point he puts across is the idea of people misusing their power and status to hire and fire the ones who are less powerful in the society. And the other fact that several competent persons lack jobs because of corruption is also a problem that needs to be addressed. In the previous chapter there was the discussion by the staff of Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School insinuating that the government jobs, especially the ones dealing with elections, are usually given to the “who is who” of a community. Hence Mwalimu uses the newspaper space and the satirical humorous literariness to raise these very pressing issues.

Later on that same day in the article, we see that as Mwalimu Andrew goes to the bar to rest, he is called by Bedford to go back to the polling station and help in counting the votes since it was manual and they were not even aware of how they would send the results to the IEBC Centre without using the laptops.

... I wasted no time going to the polling station. I found the HM and the AEO confused about how to proceed with vote counting. Quickly I helped them count and by 3A.M we were through and I left to sleep. “I hope that in the next elections, the IEBC will insist on hiring qualified people like Dre,” said Sapphire.

In conclusion, Mwalimu emphasizes the need for the government to ensure that jobs should be given on merit and not through other dubious means such as tribalism or



nepotism. As we can even see from the concern of Sapphire when he insists that qualified people should be hired for certain jobs in order to avoid embarrassing scenarios. This is because, if good results are expected, then clearly, efficient people must be put to do the task.

The final political commentary regarding the post-election period is when Mwalimu and his friends try to imagine what would happen if the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission visited Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School. After the unfair selection of the prefects, all Mwalimu and his friends could think of was justice. They needed someone to do something concerning the HM and his Deputy. That is why in his **25<sup>th</sup> May 2013** issue, he writes: “If TJRC Came to Our School.”

...a week after the appointment of new prefects, nothing much had changed in our school: pupils are still arriving late. Noise-making in class is still the order of the day and general school cleanliness is as it were in the old administration. “You see what this impunity of appointing relatives is causing the school?” said Sapphire.

Mwalimu Andrew and the other teachers are trying to analyze what the new prefects are doing and they notice that they are just doing what they previously used to. Mwalimu is trying to educate us by satirizing the issue of appointing relatives and friends. This is evident in our government when the cabinet secretaries were appointed – most of them served in the old government and therefore could not bring any change in the current

government. This heightens the anger in Mwalimu that he decides to dig some dirt on his seniors.

.... I have first hand information of the atrocities and human rights abuses that have occurred in this school. I will mention several. Let's start with the HM. The gate was constructed at the same time he was building a toilet at his home. Anytime he bought materials for the school, the lorry would drop off some at his home first. Secondly, he never attended class but would take all the tuition money and leave us to share the little that had remained. "What about Kwame, the Deputy? Is he clean?" Tito asked. Every year the 4K Club tills the school farm. Have you ever asked yourselves where the maize we harvest every year goes to? He takes it home. Listen to me Dre, said Tito. If a Truth Commission investigated human rights abuses in this school, the incident of you beating Sandra until she fainted would be among the top human rights violations committed in this school." In the end we all agreed that a truth commission would reveal quite a lot, but felt that the HM and Deputy needed to be investigated as a matter of urgency.

This excerpt tries to justify that man is prone to making mistakes consciously or unconsciously. It is humorous how Mwalimu is ready to point fingers at the HM and his Deputy and forgetting that even he and the rest of the teachers have also participated in these violations of human rights. Hence when Mwalimu tries to look for the mistakes that the HM and his Deputy have committed, he is made to realize and understand that all

the teachers in Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School have blemish. This article could be compared to our happenings of the state whereby the other members of the county assembly are always ready to accuse the President and his Deputy not keeping in mind that they have also taken part in corruption. The lesson Mwalimu is trying to pass across is that people should not subject others to judgement not knowing that they too can be judged based on their wrongs.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

We can see that Mwalimu Andrew has tried to move away from direct politics in his articles as he finds a way of playing with words to bring a different angle of the political commentaries. Mwalimu Andrew tries to capture the institutional politics in a way that amuses members of a staffroom, case in point, the Loreto Msongari Convent staffroom. Mwalimu Andrew allows the reader to see the real reason in his perception as a writer. This is because, his role in society, is to keep an alert and critical eye on societal values and to hold a mirror up to society to let it see when it is in danger of going wrong. We can conclude further that, the boundary between institutional and national level is blurred because in both, people are pre-occupied with persuing and exercising power, through corrupt ways. The next chapter will focus on the artistry of Mwalimu Andrew –how he uses his characters to represent the social and political issues that we have been discussing. The chapter will further analyse the efficiency of the style that Mwalimu employs in writing his articles.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**CHARACTER AND CHARACTERIZATION IN MWALIMU ANDREW'S**  
***STAFFROOM DIARY***

**4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, we discussed how Mwalimu Andrew uses humour to examine the political commentaries in his *Staffroom Diary*. This chapter attempts an examination of Character and Characterization in the selected articles of Mwalimu Andrew. The chapter opens up discussions that illustrate the literariness of the *Staffroom Diary* since it focuses on the use of characters and characterization in the works of Mwalimu Andrew. The chapter examines how Mwalimu Andrew adopts the traditional storytelling mode of infusing characters in order to make commentaries on both social and political debates in Kenya as they evolve at any particular time. The chapter is organized into this introductory part followed by some literature on the idea of character and characterization and any information related to that, then finally an identification of instances of how Mwalimu uses his creativity to mould different types of characters that represent the thematic concerns that Mwalimu addresses before I offer some conclusion.

**4.2 Literature on Character and Characterization in the *Staffroom Diary***

From the Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary terms (2003), Characters are the people in narratives and characterization is the author's presentation and development of characters. The idea of characterization moves the story along because, a compelling character in a difficult situation creates his or her own plot; and as we are aware, character and plot are inseparable in literature. Crewe Jonathan (1937), argues that, “

wholeness” of characters does not necessarily lie in the representation, but in the collaborating activity of readers and audiences. This is to mean that, a good use of characterization always leads the readers or audience to relate better to the events taking place in the story. Mwalimu Andrew has adopted a diary mode of narration, constructed around the school to critique and confront power and other forms of dominance in Kenya. Thus, it revolves around what one may call a typical Kenyan traditional school comprising of the headmaster of Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School; Mr. Juma, the Deputy Headmaster, Kwame and the teachers; Mwalimu Andrew, Lutta, Tito, Rasto, Nyayo, Rashid, Madam Anita and Rumona who is also Mwalimu’s sister-in-law. Other characters, though relatively transient include, Mwalimu Andrew’s family members; his parents, brother Ford and sisters—Yunia and Caro, his wife Fiolina and his sister-in-law Rumona who we have already mentioned above as a colleague of Mwalimu Andrew.

Stacy R.H(1997), addresses the idea of names being traditionally, a mark of individuality. This idea allows Mwalimu Andrew to give the characters in his column names, occupations, houses, sets of personal possessions to fully complement the characters individuality for the reader. This further allows the reader to associate with the characters in various angles from their profession to their belonging.

The fact that each of the stories has a limited number of characters and is based on “simple incident or a moment of sudden insight”—in other words, is based on an episode, seems to me more feasible in defining the genre as a diary which is of the Staffroom. We can therefore, discern the main qualities of the column such as brevity, compactness in

terms of time and setting, concentration upon one episode and one main character—who is Mwalimu Andrew, a carefully woven plot and the ability to turn one single episode into a vast and expressive socio-political commentary. He majorly captures some kind of social, political documentary, drawing an immense panorama of the contemporary Kenyan society, consisting of social reality highlighted in each of the commentaries. To achieve all these, his idea of stock characters to represent the issues Mwalimu Andrew addresses is what makes the column come to life. His moulding of these characters is what qualifies Mwalimu Andrew as a creative newspaper columnist.

The use of visuals/ cartoons as support captions in the stories by Mwalimu Andrew, have significant dynamics that prove the columns popular nature. As the editor of this column, Martin Mwangi said in an interview with him that, “Most of the stories are accompanied by artistic illustrations supporting the particular story’s focus. This section, though not part of what Mwalimu does, is very important since it attracts quite a large mass to the column.” It particularly puts the experiences of the excluded into the spotlight of the otherwise censored media and thus makes the readers as well as the cartoonists read and see the materials about themselves. I would now like to examine the different types of characters in the *staffroom Diary* with regard to their gender roles, their social standings and their fraternal relationships. However, in these categories, we also realize that characters fall under different types of characterization such as; flat, round, static, dynamic and main characters.

Ross Murfin and Supryia Ray (2003) define character as a figure in a literary work that need not to be human, although most characters are. They say that modern versions of the character are generally called character sketches. They further define characterization as the various means by which an author describes and develops the characters in a literary work. Mwalimu Andrew uses his sketches of characters throughout his commentaries only that he uses them interchangeably because of the economy of the characters he has. In discussing depth and complexity of characterization, E.M Forster (1962) makes distinction between flat and round characters that is still in use today. He argues that, flat characters are types of caricatures defined by a single idea or quality, whereas; round characters have the three-dimension complexity of real people. Characters may also be divided into static and dynamic characters. Static characters do not change significantly over the course of a work no matter what action takes place, whereas dynamic characters change whether for better or for worse in response to circumstance and experience. Mwalimu Andrew has divided his stock characters in various types depending on the commentaries that he addresses. However, the characters are not well developed because the narrator (Mwalimu Andrew) emphasizes on the issues/ message and not the messenger. Saphire, is a good example of a static character in the *Staffroom Diary*, he spends most of his time at Hitler's bar drinking as he listens to what is going round in Mwisho Wa Lami village. Mwalimu portrays him as an alcoholic and one who is informative but, would not give anyone information unless he is bought for alcohol. In his **March 17<sup>th</sup> 2013** issue on, "My new Digital Career", this is what Mwalimu portrays of Saphire.

“ you are more digital than those politicians claiming to be digital and that is why you will have my vote,” said Sapphire, who had been quiet until I bought him a drink.

This excerpt depicts Sapphire’s character as a person who loves alcohol and would do something or say something depending on whether he has been bought for alcohol or not. All along, Sapphire was aware of Mwalimu being the most learned and literate person in Mwisho Wa Lami, but had not glorified him because Mwalimu had not yet bought him alcohol.

#### **4.3 Gender Roles as a Form of Characterization**

When discussing gender roles, what comes to our minds is how women are portrayed by men. However, according to Jacquelynne S. Eccles (1987), “occupational sex segregation continues to exist and the occupational career paths of men and women continue to differ.” Eccles further reviews the economic and psychological costs often associated with the traditional female choices, and proposes interventions aimed at achieving a more gender-fair, social system that does not devalue traditionally female domains. From this analysis by Eccles, we can conclude that, Mwalimu Andrew still portrays women in the stereo-typical way in that, the women in the *Staffroom Diary* still get involved in petty squabbles that reduce their level of intellectualism. Mwalimu Andrew also portrays how women cannot get jobs unless, through the intervention of their men.

...had I not Sapphire at Hitler’s, I would have continued being conned by the councilor. “ County Councils stopped employing nursery school



teachers long ago.” Sapphire said after I bought him a drink. “ Nowadays, nursery school teachers are employed by the Headmaster.“ we can’t allow people from other villages to dominate us,” said Nyayo regarding Lutta’s wife. “ just appoint her directly.”

From the above excerpt, we can see that Mwalimu Andrew goes through all means to ensure that it is his wife Fiolina who should secure the nursery school teacher job. With help from his friends, he manages to get Fiolina a teaching job at Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School as his husband and also as the man of the house. From this excerpt also, we can see as the readers that, Sapphire was able to advise Mwalimu only on the basis of the alcohol he was bought for by Mwalimu Andrew. His love for alcohol is humorous because, the fact that he is able to identify a problem and does not tell Mwalimu unless he is bought for alcohol could even endanger someone’s life. However, we could say that Mwalimu had to create his character to show that he is static.

From the above quotation, Mwalimu Andrew also portrays to us how Nyayo helped Fiolina – Andrew’s wife, secure a job as the nursery teacher of Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School. As the PTA chairman, Mwalimu had gone to him to ask for help for his wife to become a nursery teacher and he helped her get the position. This shows Nyayo’s side of being influential, outspoken and kind as he kept his word to Mwalimu, to help his wife secure a job at the nursery section and also the fact that his decisions actually matter in the school administration. As a flat character besides Mwalimu Andrew, he is one who is always easily recognizable and easily remembered by the reader.

While looking at how Mwalimu Andrew portrays the gender roles, we can see that, he employs indirect characterization in his works. In his **December30<sup>th</sup>, 2012** article, “Fiolina’s day out in Nairobi”.

“ Sweethut, I mast go to Nairobi, I can’t remain hear,” she SMSed me while having supper. I did not reply, but this did not stop her from texting me again. “ You can lend the money from your friend.” “ know I now why you don’t want to go with me,” she SMSed.

The above excerpt shows how Mwalimu managed to capture the traditional female choice of a wife in Fiolina. Fiolina can be characterized as a semi-illiterate character from the above excerpt, who keeps on nagging her husband over the issue of going to the city – Nairobi, with her husband. It is however, satirical and also humourous when we know that she is a nursery school teacher and her English is bad. As the reader, the idea we get is that, though she is not good at English, she is still persistent to talking it. The fact that Mwalimu is literate and speaks very good English is also a factor to her struggle to speak the language. From this excerpt, we can also characterize Fiolina as a pushy person. She keeps on sending one message after the other when Mwalimu does not reply and she even asks Mwalimu to borrow money from his friends if he does not have the money to go with her to Nairobi. As Mwalimu is still not replying, Fiolina sends him another message that she is suspecting the reason as to why Mwalimu does not want to go with her to Nairobi. Besides all this however, Mwalimu Andrew achieves to show how indirect characterization is evident in his works.

Apart from basing his focus on gender roles, Mwalimu Andrew uses women in his *Staffroom Diary* to make their plots believable and cause readers to identify with (or oppose) the characters in their works, authors must describe their characters convincingly and provide compelling motivation for their actions and beliefs. In his article on the **December 9<sup>th</sup> 2012**, “I’m Caught in the Cross-fire between Coalitions at Home”, Mwalimu describes Caro – his sister’s character who involves herself in petty squabbles with Mwalimu Andrew’s wife Fiolina.

“ unafikiria bwana yangu ni mshamba wa kuninunulia Ngoma?” Caro asked Fiolina, spoiling for a fight. “ Dre, sikujua umekaliwa na bibi hivi.” She said as she left.

Caro can be characterized as a very rude and mouthy person from the above excerpt. From this commentary, we can also learn of how ungrateful she is since she had been given rubber shoes by her sister-in-law – Fiolina, and she delays in returning them, only to send Yunia’s son BedFord to take the rubber shoes to Fiolina in a dirty state. Her ungratefulness goes further when she decides to insult Fiolina after being asked why she brought the rubber shoes in a dirty state. Not only does she insult her sister-in-law, but she also wants to provoke his brother Andrew in order to engage in a war of words with him or even spoil for a fight with either Fiolina or Andrew. All in all, from this excerpt, Mwalimu tries to describe his characters convincingly in order for the readers to try and identify with them either one on one or through other people that they interact with that behave in the same way. From this therefore, we can see that the reason for the

underdevelopment of the women in the *Staffroom Diary* could be because of their involvement in petty quarrels.

#### **4.4 Social Standings as a Mode of Characterization**

As we discussed in chapter two, Dickens (2012) argues that, social aspirations are a sign of people's search for identity. From his analysis, we can observe that, Mwalimu Andrew is not an exception in classifying not only himself but also some of his characters through this avenue for social standings.

In his commentary on the **August 7<sup>th</sup> 2012**, "Colleagues will only Visit my Home Over My Dead Body", Mwalimu Andrew portrays the teachers of Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School as gossips and people who like judging each other depending on the material value one owns. This is what Mwalimu Andrew has to say about Kwame the Deputy.

“ningekuwa Anita ningewacha kuzaa.” Kwame said. Anazaa kila mwaka, kwani ni marathon?

This portraiture of Kwame from the above excerpt illustrates very different behaviour that Kwame possesses. As the Deputy, it is unethical for him to indulge in small talks with his members of staff about one of his members in this context, Madam Anita. Since the initiative was a school program started to support the teachers by visiting each other as they contribute some little money for motivating each other, it becomes wrong for Kwame to give such uncouth comments on one of his teacher's.

In another commentary still on how the author ( Mwalimu Andrew) tries to make his plot believable and cause readers to identify with (or oppose) his characters, Mwalimu further gives us a good example using his other colleagues pertaining to the same incident. However, from this example also, we are able to see how dialogues also play a very important role in developing a character because they give us an opportunity to examine the motivations and actions of the characters more deeply.

“ I didn’t believe that was Anita’s house.” Rumona said. “ everything in the house was either old or fake.

“ Did you see the sofa sets? Those things are so old, Said Madam Mary. “ How someone still has sofa sets bought in 1980 still surprises me.” “what surprised me Anita hana Tv,[does not have a Tv], Mary said

“ Yawa,” Ruth joined in, “Hata kama hakuna stima [even if there are is no electricity] si one can buy solar na battery.”

“ I was wondering how come the glasses looked like Mary’s,” said Madam Atika

“ ningekuwa Anita ningewacha kuzaa [if I were Anita I would have stopped giving birth], Kwame said.” Anazaa kila mwaka, kwani ni marathon? [she gives birth every year is it a marathon]

This conversation bothers Mwalimu to the extent that he says, “ if this is how my colleagues will talk after visiting me, they are not welcome except to my funeral.”

From the above excerpt, Mwalimu gives us a clear picture of how the staffroom is usually a place where teachers discuss each other when one of them is not around. These

characterizations of the teachers of Mwisho Wa Lami can be identified with teachers in most staffrooms as reported by the teachers interviewed in Loreto Msongari Convent. As quoted by Mr Clifford Ouma that, “There are teachers like Rumona who are always the first to start gossiping in the staffroom in order to make the other gossipers chip in.” A good case in point would be like Madam Mary and Atika contribute in the gossip. This does not cut out their male counterparts since we are able to see Kwame – the Deputy also contributing to the discussion and giving his views on Madam Anita.

We can however say that Mwalimu has shown us the role the dialogue has played in exploring the characters more deeply and enabling us the readers to identify with his characters. We are also able to notice his use of indirect characterization to introduce these characters to us the readers so that we deduce ourselves the characteristics of the characters by observing their thought process, behaviour, speech and their way of talking with other characters and also discerning the response of the other characters.

Since characterization is inextricably intertwined with plot, in order for a work to be believable, the reader must find the characters convincing; and in order to find the characters convincing, the reader must be able to visualize them. Mwalimu Andrew therefore makes his characters “come alive” by describing not only such things as physical attributes, actions, conversations and their effects on other characters, but also such things as thoughts and emotions.

#### **4.5 Fraternal Relationships as a Form of Characterization in the *Staffroom Diary***

This was also a sub-section in chapter two whereby, we were discussing Mwalimu Andrew's fraternal relationships which included; the relationship between him and the father and also his relationship with his friends. In this chapter however, we will look at how mwalimu characterizes the characters in his diary and their relations.

As he does this, Mwalimu Andrew employs both direct characterization, explicitly presenting or commenting on the characters and indirect characterization, setting forth characters through representations of their actions, statements, thoughts and feelings. A good example of direct characterization is how Mwalimu as the narrator, portrays himself. Through this, we can see how he relates with his senior. In the **February 10<sup>th</sup> 2013** issue, "I Might be the HM's Boss on March 4<sup>th</sup>." Mwalimu has this to say;

When I declared that that I was the most if not the only digital person in Mwisho Wa Lami and its environs, some enemies of development dismissed me and accused me of chest-thumping. Little did we know that my analogue colleagues would soon need digital tips from me.

From this excerpt, we can see how Mwalimu Andrew's thought of being the HM's boss is exciting him. This is because, the idea of Mwalimu being the most educated and yet is not the HeadMaster of Misho Wa Lami Primary School, serves as an under estimate for him. This excerpt is however a good example of how Mwalimu employs direct characterization, as the protagonist in the *Staffroom Diary*, his character varies depending on the message he intends to address but one thing for sure is that he never changes as he

characterizes himself, is, the idea of him being the most literate and the best dressed man in Mwisho Wa Lami village. He has created this identity since he is the only one in his village who has gone to the university and also the only one who dresses in his green Kaunda suits. As we can see from the above excerpt, it is humorous how Mwalimu accuses people of telling him that he is chest-thumping himself and yet as the readers, we are also seeing him chest-thumping himself. As the narrator and author however, we can say that he employs a creative skill of direct characterization where he tells the reader about the character Mwalimu Andrew.

Occupations have also been very tactfully in narratives to highlight characteristics of certain protagonists. A good case in point in the *Staffroom Diary* would be the HM to Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School, Mr. Juma. He is Mwalimu Andrew's boss and was always looking for ways to make sure that he puts Mwalimu Andrew 'in his place' because he used to feel that Mwalimu's literacy and his education made him get so many things including the IEBC jobs. Whenever Mr. Juma had the chance, he would make sure he seized any great opportunity from Mwalimu. As we saw earlier during the IEBC jobs, Mr. Juma together with the AEO took Mwalimu's post of a Presiding Officer through dubious means. There was also an excerpt where the HM marked Mwalimu absent and sent it to the DEO's office who had requested head teachers to mark the register for all the teachers who never reported to school during the strike period. That was so unfair, considering that Mwalimu had been the only teacher who frequently reported to the school.



In his commentary on the **24<sup>th</sup> February, 2013**, “There’s a Plot to rig Polls in Mwisho”, we are able to analyse the HM’s character as portrayed by the narrator.

... suspecting that the HM was “ searching me words,” I agreed as I knew I would only be on duty for two days, and then go for the election training that was scheduled to begin last Wednesday. By the time the staff meeting started, Juma and I were not on talking terms.

From the above excerpt, we can see the relationship that exists between Mwalimu Andrew and Mr. Juma. Mr. Juma is characterized as a malicious and Jealousy person who does not want his teachers to be more powerful than him. As a head master, he is supposed to be happy with the achievements and progress of his teachers, but as Mwalimu puts it “ He is an enemy of development” since his mind is filled with a lot of malice and corruption—and that is why he would go as far as going to blackmail Mwalimu to the returning officer, in order for him not to be given a job. This is an article that also addresses the issue of corruption—that is as a result of excess power and money hence it further characterizes the HM as corrupt. Being a government official in power, we could also say that the HM is exploiting his power to oppress the less powerful.

Mwalimu Andrew has used his minimal characters to portray a lot of different types of characterization in literature and this is what helps him achieve the literary aspect in his column that separates it from a journalistic column.

Mwalimu Andrew also employs the use of round characters in his commentaries. A good example would be Kwame who has a bit of a complex personality where he is always portrayed as a conflicted and contradictory person by the author. As the Deputy of Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School, Kwame is in-charge of the school discipline and ensuring that the school rules and regulations are followed to the latter. However, he is at times strict with the teachers and the pupils but he sometimes changes to also be among those who break the laws. In the **October 20<sup>th</sup>2012** article, “Why Some Nominees for Head boy and Head girl Must lose”, this is what Mwalimu had to say;

... The Deputy rejected the two nominees. “ we cannot let this school be led by well known crooks.” He said. “ what example shall we be showing out there if we approve these?” he added.

Kwame can be categorized as a morally upright Deputy who values the name of the School and what people think about Mwisho Wa Lami Primary School, and he cannot imagine how the school’s name will be tarnished depending on the kind of prefects that will be elected – if they are of good morals or not. As the Deputy of the school, we become proud of his sense of morality and his good attributes of a good leader. However, this is just one side of him and when compared to the other excerpt where he was gossiping with his teachers, we note the contradictory behavior and can therefore categorise him as a round character in the *Staffroom Diary*.

Mwalimu also uses flat characters in his commentaries. These were called humourous in the 17<sup>th</sup> C, according to E.M. Forster (1962), and are sometimes called types, and

sometimes called caricatures. These flat characters are constructed around a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round. In the excerpts that we have analysed from the beginning, we note that Mwalimu Andrew is one such a character as the central character of the *Staffroom Diary*. However, we could also categorize Nyayo as one the flat characters besides Mwalimu Andrew. In most cases, Nyayo is usually a minor character who is major in complementing the major character, Mwalimu, to help him move the plot forward. In these cases, Nyayo is seen to change roles severally to suit the commentary Mwalimu is addressing during different occasions. As we have been reading from the different excerpts in this project, Nyayo can sometimes be good or bad. For instance, we analysed his commentary on how he decided to be a thief during the election period and took the advantage that people did not have TV's in their homes, so, as they watched debates, he stole from their houses.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

As Mathew Arnold would put in his *popular writings in America*, the interaction of style and audience journalism, is literature in a hurry. Precisely, how these subjects will be rendered in prose most often depends on the vigorous interplay between an author's style and purpose and whatever specific compositional standards or general tone required. Mwalimu clearly surpasses all this requirements considering that his style of writing and his use of stock characters is what actually pulls masses to reading his articles according

to an interview conducted in Loreto Msongari High School staffroom. We conclude by saying that his use of stock characters helps him in expressing efficiently the pedagogies intended.

## CONCLUSION

This study had set out to identify incidences of humour in Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* and how humour as a style is used to represent the social and political issues happening in our country using the creative newspaper space. It had the following objectives; to examine how Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* exploits humour as a tool for socio-political commentary and, to analyse characters and characterization in the *Staffroom Diary*. The study had two hypotheses; firstly, Mwalimu Andrew uses humour in the *Staffroom Diary* to comment on the socio-political situation in Kenya and, Mwalimu Andrew employs the use of character and characterization to help in the development of plot in the *Staffroom Diary*.

The study was guided by two theoretical tools; the theory of "Publics and Counter Publics" by Michael Warner, which allowed for the study to carry out interviews and establish how popular the *Staffroom Diary* can be rated. The second theoretical tool we used was, the "Stylistics" theory whereby we focused on the strand by Michael Halliday, which allowed for the study to interrogate the language Mwalimu Andrew uses to arouse the readers' interest in the column.

As observed, the column was not restricted to political issues; in any case, it majorly focused on politics during the 2013 election period.

This study entailed a close textual analysis and also interviews with the *Sunday Nation* newspaper editors, teachers and Mwalimu Andrew himself. Throughout this research, we realized that Mwalimu Andrew uses conspicuous elements, like the economy of

characters – 15 in number, to address the forms of relationships and how they impact on dynamics at the institution and national levels. Mwalimu Andrew uses the *Staffroom Diary* to enable him hold a promise of stylistic relevance thereby arousing the readers' emotions and interests. The study noted that the readers could associate with different characters depending on their social orientation, therefore empathizing with some. The study also noted that, as some of the characters kept on changing in their behaviour, there were some who were constant in retaining certain values, a case in point would be Fiolina – Mwalimu Andrew's wife, who is an illiterate but confident character that strongly believes in herself no matter the situation on the ground. We are tempted to compare Fiolina's strong attributes to Lawino who is also illiterate and backward but is confident and defends her uncivilized ways.

We can conclude that Mwalimu Andrew uses the school as the model for social order; whereby, anything that threatens its existence is also seen to threaten society. However, Mwalimu Andrew does not draw clear demarcations between the national and the institutional politics, since they seem to converge and diverge in various levels. Although the column does not offer explicit solutions and remains what Johannes Fabian calls a site where "perceptions, experiences and problems are being worked out in an open never-ending process,"(1978, 317) it nonetheless offers alternatives by implication, foregrounding and intensifying the negative consequences of the issues addressed.

We can also conclude that Mwalimu Andrew's portrayal of gender roles shows his stereotypical imaginations in that, women cannot achieve anything unless through the

intervention of men. A good example is Fiolina – Mwalimu Andrew’s wife, when she was employed as a nursery school teacher, it was through the intervention of Mwalimu Andrew who had to ask for help from his friends. The women are also involved in petty squabbles which portray the typical stereotype of village women and the reasons for their underdevelopment. As we were able to see, a good example during the coalitions that were made between the four women in the home – Rumona, Caro, Yunia and Andrew’s mother who argued over little things from borrowing “ngoma” rubber shoes to the reason why some had been chased from their marital homes. Mwalimu Andrew’s address of fraternal relationships was also seen in the stereotypical sense that, fathers’ are entitled to their sons’ achievements. We see this when Mwalimu Andrew has problems with his wife and his father asks Mwalimu Andrew to buy him alcohol in order for the father to support him in his household matters.

From the analysis of his column, we realize that for Mwalimu Andrew, language is important because it is through language that he creates humour in his columns. So, the different literary strategies that Mwalimu has employed are a deliberate choice that has essentially allowed him to foreground socio-political issues. A notable trait in Mwalimu Andrew’s language is that, when he is referring to the negatives in the society or deliberate jokes, he uses Kiswahili language to enhance the humour. Since Kiswahili is both a national language and an official language, it contextualizes the socio-political issues that Mwalimu Andrew.

As already indicated, Mwalimu's narratives have a rural setting though it addresses issues pertaining to urban space. This is because, the rural space serves as an antithesis of the urban as it provides an objective distance to both the readers and the writer, since they are able to look at the socio-political issues critically from the outside. The rural setting is both an insight of the situation of a state and it also allows him to give a world view about the contemporary society. We can therefore conclude that the study identified contexts of both the rural and urban setting to effectively address the socio-political concerns intended.

We identified several instances of social and political conflict within the narratives such as, friends who turned foes like the instance when Nyayo put Mwalimu Andrew in problems after stealing from his neighbours and Mwalimu had to bribe the police otherwise Mwalimu would have been arrested. There was also the conflict of behaviour and mannerisms of the characters, and a good example that we addressed on this was when Mwalimu's sisters – Yunia and Caro were at home with their sister-in-law – Rumona and his mother. This is when Fiolina – Mwalimu's wife fell out with Caro because of rubber shoes and they insulted each other while the mother also spoke very insensitively to Yunia, reminding her why she had left her husband's home. There was also the conflict of competition for resources and under this we saw a good example of the HM – Mr. Juma always competing with Mwalimu Andrew over things like power and jobs.



We can conclude that these conflicts are constructed around situations in which characters are bound to meet and cannot therefore avoid each other. The combatants are friends, family members, colleagues or community members which ensures that there is no way a conflict can easily end by one actor simply opting out. In the same spirit, we can also conclude that, some conflict is further enhanced through characters whose desires, owing to their inherent behaviours, put them in constant conflict with other characters, and a good example that we analysed was Rumona – Mwalimu Andrew's sister-in-law who was a gossip both in school and at home and always paved way for people to argue and quarrel. Finally, we can say that the desire to make conflict credible and interesting demands that the forces in conflict are balanced, making the conflicts in the stories worth reading.

The field of literary journalism goes a long way to be interrogated and I hope that this work will help other literary scholars to explore other discoveries in the creative newspaper space.

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### **Interviews**

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- Mwangi Martin. Deputy Chief Sub-editor Nation Media Group. Interview held at Nation Centre on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2014.
- Teachers of Loreto Msongari Convent. Interview held at the Staffroom on 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2014.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I

#### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITH MWALIMU ANDREW

Introduction:

- My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a student pursuing a Master of Arts in Literature at the University of Nairobi. My topic is: Humour and Socio-Political Commentary in Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary*. As part of this research, I am required to conduct field interviews with you as my Key Informant.
- The purpose of this interview is to obtain information about your column *Staffroom Diary* which appears in the *Sunday Nation*.
- The interview is voluntary and the information that you give me will be confidential. The information will be used only for academic purposes at the University.
- Could you please spare some time (around 30 minutes) for the interview?
  1. For how long have you been writing this column?
  2. Were you writing such articles before signing up with the *Sunday Nation*?
  3. Where did you learn the skill of satirical humour? Which writer/columnist inspires you?
  4. Could you briefly describe how you twist a mundane issue into satirical humour?
  5. What do you think attracts readers to your column? How do you relate with your readers? Are there times when they feel you have underwhelmed them?
  6. Are there cases when you have editorial issues (approvals) with your editors?

7. Would you name some of the creative strategies you consciously apply in your column?
8. Many columnists write directly about issues in our society. Why have you decided to adopt an indirect, literary, creative approach?
9. Based on your selected articles, ask specific questions on the period before the 2013 elections and 3 months afterwards: Why did you portray XYZ the way you did in article x...? etc
10. Were you inspired by Wahome Mutahi's column, "Whispers"? What attracted you to this column?
11. Do you think your column can compare with Wahome Mutahi's column, "Whispers"?
12. How are you able to sustain the column every week, 12 months in a year?  
(Knowing that humour is not easy to sustain over a long period of time).

Thank you very much for your time and for the invaluable information you have shared with me.

## APPENDIX II

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITH THE (EDITOR(S))

#### INTEGRATED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction:

- My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a student pursuing a Master of Arts in Literature at the University of Nairobi. My topic is: Humour and Socio-Political Commentary in the *Staffroom Diary*. As part of this research, I am required to conduct field interviews with Key Informants such as you.
- The purpose of this interview is to obtain information about Mwalimu Andrew's column *Staffroom Diary* which appears in the *Sunday Nation*.
- You have been selected because of your unique contribution in publication of the column.
- The interview is voluntary and the information that you give me will be confidential. The information will be used only for academic purposes at the University.
- Could you please spare some time (around 30 minutes) for the interview?
  1. Could you briefly describe your role in the Media House/Nation Media Group?
  2. Which of the columns in the *Sunday Nation* provide the biggest attraction to your readers? Could you explain why?
  3. If you were to rank what attracts your readers, where would you slot Mwalimu Andrew's "Staffroom Diary"? Do you have any data/customer survey reports on this matter?
  4. What do you think attracts readers to Mwalimu Andrew's "Staffroom Diary"?



5. Did you have any editorial issues (approvals) with Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* 3 months before the 2013 elections and 3 months afterwards?
6. How humorous was his representation of the issues? Probe on the portrayal of key players, institutions, and situations.
7. What unique quality(s) make Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* stand out as a compelling column?
8. Do you think Mwalimu Andrew's "Staffroom Diary" can compare with Wahome Mutahi's column, "Whispers"? Probe on similarities and differences.
9. Are you finding it hard to find a sustainable humorous column to replace Wahome Mutahi's column, "Whispers"?

### APPENDIX III

#### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITH THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION : (FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, SCHOOL TEACHERS AND GENERAL PUBLIC<sup>1</sup>)

##### INTEGRATED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction:

- My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a student pursuing a Master of Arts in Literature at the University of Nairobi. My topic is: Humour and Socio-Political Commentary in the *Staffroom Diary*. As part of this research, I am required to conduct field interviews with readers such as you.
- The purpose of this interview is to obtain information about Mwalimu Andrew's column *Staffroom Diary* which appears in the *Sunday Nation*.
- You have been selected by chance from all readers of the *Sunday Nation*.
- The interview is voluntary and the information that you give me will be confidential. The information will be used only for academic purposes at the University. There will be no way to identify that you gave this information.
- Could you please spare some time (around 30 minutes) for the interview?
  1. Do you read *Sunday Nation*? How frequent? (every week or occasionally)
  2. Which items/pages do you read first when you get your *Sunday Nation*? Why?  
(take note of the numbers and % of the responses *vis a vis* the entire group, eg. 4 out of 9 participants gave priority to the *Staffroom Diary*, which represents 44.4% of the readership).
  3. Do you read Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary*?.

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<sup>1</sup> Focus Group Discussions require 8-12 participants. Make sure there is no gender bias in favour of either Men or Women in the groups. If possible, hold separate interviews for men and women.

4. What attracts you to Mwalimu Andrew's "Staffroom Diary"? (Look out for the literariness of the column: stock character construction, humourous presentation, novelty in his imagination, freshness of topic, unique or daring treatment of taboo subjects etc)
5. Did you read Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* 3 months before the 2013 elections and 3 months afterwards?
6. Can you recall what topics he covered around the election period?
7. How humourous was his representation of the issues? Probe on the portrayal of key players, institutions, and situations.
8. What unique quality(s) make Mwalimu Andrew's *Staffroom Diary* stand out as a compelling column?
9. Did you read Wahome Mutahi's column "Whispers"?
10. Do you think Mwalimu Andrew's "Staffroom Diary" can compare with Mutahi's column? Probe on similarities and differences.

## APPENDIX IV

### LIST OF THE INTERVIEWEES

1. Mwalimu Andrew .....key informant
2. Martin Mwangi.....Deputy Chief Sub-Editor,  
*Sunday Nation*
3. Clifford Ouma.....teacher Loreto Msongari  
Convent (Drama Patron)
4. Mark Ondiek.....teacher Loreto Msongari  
Convent
5. James Kiruthu.....teacher Loreto Msongari  
Convent(Geography department)
6. Mrs. Claire Odhiambo.....teacher Loreto Msongari  
Convent(Humanities Department)
7. Mrs. Calyne Wangala.....teacher Loreto Msongari  
Convent
8. Mr. Josphat Momanyi.....teacher Loreto Msongari  
Convent(Games Department)
9. **Sunday, January 20, 2013**

## APPENDIX V: PRIMARY TEXTS

### How Fiolina got a direct nomination

By MWALIMU ANDREW

Like everyone else in Mwisho wa Lami and its environs, I went through the hands of Madam Gloria at Mwisho wa Lami nursery a few decades ago. Gloria has been the nursery schoolteacher since it opened long before Mwisho wa Lami Primary School was started.

If you were not taught by Gloria, you are either too old or you never went to school at all. Gloria should have retired a few years ago but when the government introduced the Bamba Tano plan for teachers who were approaching 55, she took advantage and postponed her retirement by five years.

This did not go down well with many people, for there were so many women around who had been waiting to take over her post – one of the most lucrative in our larger area.

#### **Bamba Five plan**

There was Rasta's daughter, who even had started assisting Gloria free of charge in the hope that she would be left in charge. She got married when Gloria's Bamba Five plan was approved.

There was also Rashid's son's wife as well as Lutta's second wife, and Prisca, Apostle Elkana's oldest daughter.

The three had been waiting for Gloria's retirement so that one of them would take over. The problem was that no one knew exactly when Gloria would retire. But when I made Fiolina my First Lady, I got interested in finding out.

As you know, Fiolina is a respected ECD professional, having gone to an ECD college for six months immediately after high school, where she scored a strong D. She was the ideal candidate to succeed Gloria.

My First Lady has been teaching three villages away at a nursery school near her parents' home. But, last week, the parents protested and asked her to get a job where she is married. I had to find her a job.

Since Gloria was employed by the County Council, I went to see the councillor who promised to do everything to ensure he gave Fiolina the job. In return, I accepted to be one of his campaigners in Mwisho wa Lami. I also used my laptop to print his posters free of charge.

He however kept on promising that he would bring the letter to Fiolina but he never did. Had I not met Sapphire at Hitler's, I would have continued being conned by the councillor.

"County councils stopped employing nursery school teachers long ago," Sapphire said after I bought him a drink. "Nowadays nursery teachers are employed by the Headmaster.

"Talk to Juma nicely," he said. I paid for all his drinks that day.

I was in Juma's office the next day. I could not have asked at a better time, Juma told me. Gloria had fallen ill and had decided to retire earlier than planned.

"She will be around until the end of January when I expect to have hired her replacement.

"Who will be succeeding her?" I eagerly asked.

"I will be conducting interviews for those interested in the post next week," he said.

Here was my opportunity to fight for my First Lady.

“Have the people already applied?” I asked. The HM said he had not declared an advertisement and I asked if I could help.

“In KU we have learnt a lot of psychological philosophy which I’m sure would be helpful when hiring a nursery schoolteacher.”

The HM agreed but he didn’t seem like one whom I could rely on to hire Fiolina. That evening I met Nyayo, the school’s PTA chairman, and Rashid, the treasurer, at Hitler’s. After buying them several pickups, I told them of the impending appointment of the nursery teacher and why we needed to give Fiolina the job.

“We need to have a young teacher who lives near the school,” Nyayo said. Rasto’s son’s wife lives far away.

“And we want a teacher who is married,” added Rashid. Elkana’s daughter is not married.

“We cannot allow someone from another village to come teach our children,” added Rasto. Lutta comes from the neighbouring village.

That evening I typed an advertisement that I knew would help knock out Fiolina’s key competitors:

**VACANCY VACANCY!!!**

Mwisho wa Lami Nursery School is a faculty of Mwisho wa lami Primary School renowned for producing the young minds that later join the primary school. The nursery is searching for a young, dynamic, female teacher who has a strong work ethic, is results-oriented and is a team player.

Reporting to the Headmaster, the successful candidate will be responsible for planning, designing and executing the academic, curricular and co-curricular programmes for the knowledge-thirsty young minds of the nursery.

Applicants must possess a minimum KSCE certificate (with at least a strong D mean grade), have a certificate in ECD, and be able to speak and write fluent English and Swahili. They should be living in Mwisho wa lami. Being married to preferably a teacher will be an added advantage.

**Successful candidate**

Suitable qualified candidates should send their TYPED application letters, enclosing carbon copies of their academic testimonials and resumes to: The Headmaster, Mwisho wa Lami Pri. School. A rewarding and competitive remuneration package awaits the successful candidate.”

The next morning we met with the HM and he liked the advert. He wondered why I had insisted on a typed application letter.

“The kids of today are dot.com, how can we give them a teacher who cannot type,” I said.

I printed it and pinned it on the school noticeboard and gate. Applicants had only two days to send in their applications. I sat with Fiolina to make her a CV and application letter. It was not easy as she could not remember the years she sat her exams but I managed to craft a CV and application letter for her.

The other candidates also looked for me for help with typing their application letters and CVs but I told them my computer had run out of ink. The next day, Nyayo and Rashid came to the school to help the HM to shortlist. I joined them.

We dismissed all the handwritten applications. Only three remained and the Headmaster advised that we call them for interviews. We checked and noted that although Prisca had attached her certificates, she did not have a CV. She failed at this stage.

There only remained Lutta's wife and Fiolina.

"We can't allow people from other villages to dominate us," said Nyayo regarding Lutta's wife. He was supported by Rashid and, although the HM differed with them, he was overruled. Only one candidate remained: Fiolina. The HM wondered if it was necessary to call her for an interview since she was the only candidate.

Rashid and Nyayo did not think an interview was necessary.

"Just appoint her directly," Nyayo said.

"I know her, she is a good lady," Rashid said, "just nominate her." And with that, Fiolina got the job. She starts work tomorrow.

When she gets her salary, I hope she will remember the role I played in securing the job for her.

*Chase me on twitter @mwalimuandrew*

**Sunday, March 17, 2013**

**My new digital career**

By MWALIMU ANDREW

Although my preferred candidate did not win the presidency, his good showing at the polls got me thinking that should I bow to pressure and seek the presidency at the next elections. I would surely give other candidates a run for their money. Who knows, I may even win!

Indeed, when I went at Hitler's last weekend, the general consensus was that I should contest a seat.

"Dre if you contest, you will not need to campaign here in Mwisho wa Lami," said Hitler. "We assure you of all Mwisho wa Lami votes so that you can concentrate on getting from other areas."

"You are more digital than those politicians claiming to be digital and that is why you will have my vote," said Sapphire, who had been quiet — until I bought him a drink.

"All I am waiting for is the graduation," I said. "Once I get my degree, I will try out."

When we resumed school last Monday, like everywhere else in Kenya, most discussions centred on the elections.

"Since Dida did not win, do you see the teachers' increments being implemented?" Lutta asked.

"We are in trouble," said Kwame, the Deputy Headmaster. "Since a teacher lost, I am sure the government will never get to know teachers' problems."

Interestingly, every teacher around claimed to have voted for Dida, although results from Mwisho wa Lami Polling Station show that Dida got only two votes. The discussions then moved to assessment of an Uhuru presidency.

"Do you know that Uhuru already stays in State House?" asked Lutta.

"No, his house is just along State House road, next to State House," said Tito. "He does not stay in State House."

"You what do you know?" wondered Lutta. "Uhuru's house is in State House. This is the *simba* he built when he was a teenager. By that time his father was still the president and that is why his first house was built in State House."

"So will he continue staying in his *simba* or he will move to the main State House?" asked Kwame.

By this time, Rashid, the school's PTA chairman had visited us.

"That will be very tricky," Rashid said. "I don't think he will move to the main State House; it will be a great abomination,"

"Why do you say that?" asked Mrs Atika.

"You mean you do not know African customs?" wondered Rashid. "You, Mrs Atika, can you sleep with your husband in the same bed that your parents or his parents slept in?"

"No, that can't happen," said Mrs Atika. "But you can't say that State House is still using the same bed that Kenyatta used!"

"Furniture is never changed in State House," Rashid said. "Maybe the solution will be for Uhuru to use another bedroom but I read somewhere that this is not allowed."

"But do you think Uhuru will make a good president?" asked Juma, the HM.

"I do not know, but if he can fulfil all the promises that he made, then he will be very good," said Kwame.

"What did he promise?" asked Juma.



“He promised very many things but what I remember most is that all primary school pupils will be given a laptop.”

“You people got it wrong. He promised laptops for university students, not primary,” said Madam Anita.

“No, he promised them to primary school teachers. I don’t think that pupils can be given laptops when teachers do not know how to use laptops. Who will teach the students how to use them?” asked Juma.

“But not all teachers are laptop illiterate,” I said. “Some of us will teach the pupils and other teachers.”

“Yeah, kwanza you Dre. I’m sure you will get a good post since in the entire of this region, you will be the only teacher who can use and teach pupils on how to use a laptop,” said Sapphire.

I, however, did not believe this promise of laptops until that evening at Hitler’s when Sapphire came with a newspaper cutting showing that the Jubilee coalition promised to provide laptops for all primary school pupils.

“Is it really possible?” I asked Sapphire. “Does the government really have the money?”

“I am sure the government has the money. They can’t promise what they cannot achieve,”

“But there is no power in many schools; how will the laptops be used?” I asked Sapphire.

“Don’t worry, they will be distributing solar laptops,” he said.

I have never seen a solar laptop but I am sure I can operate one.

“But Dre don’t forget me,” said Sapphire, and then ordered a drink for me for the first time in over a year.

“What do you mean I should not forget you,” I asked him

“I am quite sure you will play a big role when the laptops arrive,” he said. “In fact, as for you, the minimum position you will be given is District Laptops Officer, but most likely you will be appointed the County Laptops Officer.”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“I am sure if the laptops come, they will need people who are already laptop literate,” he said. “I heard from a reliable source that teachers will be given first priority.”

This was definitely good news and I immediately ordered a drink. I was quite sure that once the laptops land, my lot would improve.

“Do you think as a laptops officer I will still eat chalk?” I asked.

“I don’t think so,” said Sapphire. “Once you are a laptops officer, I do not think that you will still be required to continue going to class.”

I was so happy that I would soon be leaving the classroom for something better. Sapphire even went as far as telling me that I would not be based here in Mwisho wa Lami. “You will be staying at the County Headquarters.”

I bought Sapphire another drink and left him. I had to get home early and share the good news with Fiolina.

It was the first time in a long time that I was arriving home early. But Fiolina was quite unhappy. It’s only after I inquired that I learnt that she had quarreled with Rumona, my sister-in-law over a basin of water.

“Don’t worry,” I told her. “We will soon leave this home so Rumona won’t be a problem.”

“Really? That’s so good!” she exclaimed. “Do you mean you bought land somewhere where we will move to?”

“No, we will soon be staying at the County Headquarters,” I said.

“Wah, *kwani* you are now a DEO?” she asked me. “I always knew you would not be a classroom teacher for long!”

“No, I will not be the DEO, but I will be the CLO — County Laptops Officer,” I said. “I will be in charge of all the laptops that the government will soon be distributing to primary school students.”

“Yes, only you can do such a digital job,” Fiolina said excitedly, her mood having suddenly changed from sad to happy. We then agreed with her that the next day, she would go to the County Headquarters to look for a suitable, two-bedroomed house for us.

“By the time the laptops come, we should be ready for them at the Headquarters,” she said.

We can’t wait for the laptops.

## **The State can go ahead and fire me; I'm married to a wise woman!**

By MWALIMU ANDREW

When I married Fiolina, the laugh of my life, it was not just her extreme beauty that attracted me to her. Unlike most – if not all – women, Fiolina is very wise.

Indeed I am now a better person than I was during the pre-Fiolina era.

Were it not for her, I would never have moved from our rural home to Mwisho wa Lami's leafy suburbs, nor would I have bought a new engine motorcycle that I use to go to school. Last week, she also pushed me to make a decision that I am sure is going to transform our life.

It all started with the teachers' strike. As you know, I have had to go to school every day for obvious reasons. Although I would laze and idle around the school nursery every morning, I did not really find this to be time-wasting since I would be sleeping anyway if I had remained at home.

Every afternoon, once I ensured that Fiolina was at home safe and sound, I would leave for Hitler's. From there I would stagger home to take a sumptuous dinner prepared by the laugh of my life.

"So this is how you will be spending your time during the strike?" she confronted me last Monday.

"What else do you want me to do?" I asked her.

"Dre, get involved in some business," she said. "What if you lose your job, will you be coming to the nursery daily?" That is when my eyes opened. That night we deliberated on various business ventures that could fetch us alternative income.

After long consultations, extensive research and thorough analysis of the opportunities available, the risks, and capital available, we settled on two business ventures: Selling of kerosene and mandazis.

"Mafuta haozi," Fiolina said, in defence of the kerosene business. As for mandazi and kaimati, we agreed that once we buy all the necessary ingredients, Fiolina would make the mandazi every morning while I would sell them around the village using my bicycle.

"The market for this is huge," she said. "Almost every home requires tea escort in the morning, especially now that children are at home over the strike," she told me.

That day, I travelled to our district headquarters to buy a gallon of paraffin at wholesale price and also raw materials for the mandazi venture. This included an empty crate, flour and cooking fat, among others.

Had it not been for Fiolina's wisdom, I would have used Msamaria Mwema. "We need to save everything possible so that we can maximise on profit," she said. "Please use the bicycle; town is not very far."

I obeyed and rode the bicycle. It was around 12.30pm when I finished shopping. There was no way I was going to ride back home on an empty stomach. I had to reward myself. I walked to Teachers Tavern, my favourite restaurant in town. I ordered half a chicken, chips and Stoney madiaba. There were other teachers around and as we ate, we discussed how we hoped the strike continued.

"This will help me manage my farm for a longer time," said one teacher. Every other teacher talked about the projects they were involved in. I was not to be left behind.

"I am also beginning two business ventures that will revolutionise Mwisho wa Lami and its environs." I explained to them my two business ventures. Since I had bought a bottle of Allsops for each, they all encouraged me to proceed.

“Even the owner of Msamaria Mwema began small like that,” Kizito advised me.

“But I have a small piece of advice,” said Samuel, Kizito’s colleague and one of the richest businessmen around since he owns the posho mill. “Do not involve your wife. Business and wives do not mix.”

Although I did not disagree with him, I was not going to follow his advice. To me, Fiolina was an integral part of my business and I would keep her involved in all aspects of my business. Before I left, I bought my wife a bottle of Limara spray and two black handkerchiefs.

In the evening, I got someone who constructed a kibanda outside our house from where we would be selling our stuff. That night, Fiolina kneaded the flour and let it sit overnight. That night we discussed the business in detail, and had big plans on how we would spend the proceeds.

### **She woke up early**

Unlike other lazy women out there, Fiolina woke up at 5am to make mandazi and kaimatis. I only helped her light the jiko then went back to sleep.

She arranged them in the empty crate I had bought and as she left for school, I put the crate on my bicycle and started pushing it around the village. I had bought a new bicycle bell, which I kept ringing to attract people’s attention.

With all the children and teachers at home, business was good. In our Milimani neighbourhood, I was able to sell about 5 mandazis per home. I then went to the village proper. Here I also sold a good number, although most was on credit. It is the only way to do business in Mwisho wa Lami.

I also used the opportunity to inform everyone that I was selling paraffin and I actually got a few orders. By around 10am, I had gone through the entire village and I was happy to note that I had only remained with three mandazis.

To reward the body that had toiled hard all morning, I passed by Hitler’s to get one for the path. Sapphire soon joined me and I gave him the three remaining mandazis for free. He was very happy. Clearly, he had not eaten anything that morning.

Fiolina was quite happy when she arrived in the afternoon and found that I had sold everything.

“Tomorrow you have to make more since people now know that I sell mandazi.” She kneaded more flour and woke up the next morning to make even more mandazis.

We left at the same time—she went to school while I went around Mwisho wa Lami on my bicycle, ringing the bell loudly, supplying to customers, receiving money, and getting rich. Most of the customers were my students, and I easily gave them on credit as I knew their parents whom I would seek payment from.

I had finished all my stock by 9.30am and I went back home, although I passed by Hitler’s briefly.

That evening I also got a few people who bought kerosene. Two of them took it on credit. That night we sat with Fiolina and went through the collections so far—including what was out on credit.

It was a lot of money, and if we could maintain such on a daily basis, we would be able to make more money than my salary.

“If I can make this daily,” I told Fiolina, “Then the government can go ahead and sack me. I am now a businessman!”

It’s good to marry a wise wife.

**Saturday, October 27, 2012**

**Why we postponed elections for head boy**

In recognition of my intellectual prowess and academic acumen, the Government of Kenya, through its appointed agents, once again, invited me to offer my professional services in invigilating the KCSE examinations that begin next week.

Unsurprisingly, some enemies of development have been saying that only lazy teachers are appointed to do this job. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Any observant academic will tell you that with recent technological changes, there is need for teachers with a proven track record in superlative performance and unquestionable integrity to help in such duties.

When he heard that I would be away from school for a few weeks, the HM, Mr Juma, called me to his office. "I hope we will be able to do the elections before you leave," he said.

"The laptop is ready for the elections but there are other materials that I have ordered in Nairobi that may delay us," I said.

I had consulted my brother Pius and he had advised me on what I would need so as to hold elections that everyone would agree were free and fair.

"What materials?" Juma asked. "We need to finish this thing first so that people don't ask many questions."

I told him we needed to have some special printing paper for printing the ballot papers and a projector.

"What is a projector for?" he asked.

"We need to project the results on the staffroom school board as they come in," I told him. "Once we do that, no one can complain of any rigging, I assure you."

"What if you put everything there in the open and Kaunda wins?" he asked.

"I will take care of that," I told him.

Meanwhile, campaigns were continuing in earnest at school. Kaunda, Alex and Malachi had taken the campaigns a notch higher.

Kaunda had representatives in almost every class campaigning for him while Malachi had posters all over. Based on my own scientific intelligence, Kaunda, the councillor's son, was head to head with Alex.

Malachi was a strong third for head boy. Since both Kaunda and Alex came from Mwisho wa Lami village, they would split the Mwisho wa Lami vote and help Malachi win. This is what we planned to manipulate.

In the race for head girl, it had been assumed that Packetia would win. But the entry of Sandra, Nyayo's daughter, had changed things. She seemed to enjoy the support of teachers and the children from Mwisho wa Lami village.

Not surprisingly, all the teachers took sides, with each supporting certain candidates and openly campaigning for them. This came out clearly last Monday during lunch time. Sapphire had turned his classes into campaigns for Kaunda and Sandra.

"I tell you if Kaunda is elected head boy, I will seek a transfer to another school," said Ruth, who had just reported from maternity leave last May.

"So who do you want to be elected head boy?" asked Sapphire.

"Malachi is the best candidate for head boy," said Ruth. Malachi is Ruth's brother-in-law's son.

"We knew you will support one of your own, when will you ever think nationalistically?"

“I have nothing against Kaunda or Alex,” said Ruth. “I just can’t trust them with this school.”

On Tuesday after school, I went for evening classes at Hitler’s. No, I was not going to teach or learn anything. Thanks to Sapphire, this is what we now call the evening session at Hitler’s.

There was heated debate at Hitler’s that evening. I had not thought that the prefects’ elections would be such an emotional issue.

“We cannot allow both the head boy and headmaster of our school to come from the same family,” said Rashid. “When he was appointed HM, Juma appointed his brother as head boy, now he wants to appoint his other brother’s son?”

“That will not happen here,” said Nyayo. “As a member of PTA, I will not accept both the head boy and HM to come from other villages; this is our school.”

“The head boy and the head girl must come from this village,” said Rasto, who has always opposed Juma since he comes from a different village.

Kizito, a teacher from another school, had joined us for the evening classes. “But if Juma’s son wins, we will be to blame,” he said.

“Why?”

“We have split our votes. Why do we have both Alex and Kaunda standing?” he asked.

“This will allow Malachi to win.”

“Yes,” said Mzee Alphayo. “We must talk to their parents so that one of them leaves it for the other.”

The councillor, as if he knew he was wanted at Hitler’s, also joined us for the evening classes at Hitler’s. It is not common for him to come to Hitler’s; the last time he was here was during the last elections. Everyone was happy to see him, as they knew they would have free drinks.

“*Karibu sana, mheshimiwa,*” Nyayo said, as he welcomed him.

“*Wewe sasa umetosha kuwa senator ama governor,*” Rasto told him. He paid for the drinks then called Hitler aside. They talked for a long time. Later, Alex, Hitler’s son, joined them. I did not need a BVR kit to know what they were talking about.

The following morning, Kaunda was with Alex as they moved from class to class. I followed them and just as I had suspected, Alex had stepped down for Kaunda. Alex was now asking his supporters to vote for Kaunda.

Being in Class Seven, Alex could not vie for the assistant head boy’s position so he had now decided to go for sanitary prefect’s seat, with Kaunda’s support. This was a lethal combination. Unless something dramatic happened, Kaunda would win the elections hands down.

I went to see the HM and told him as much. “What do you mean? We can have ballot papers marked for Malachi or force all the lower primary pupils to vote for Malachi,” he said.

“Even if we do that, Kaunda would still win the elections,” I said. “With his main challenger now supporting him, it will be impossible to beat him.”

“So what do we do?” he asked me. I suggested that the elections be postponed until such a time that Malachi would be able to win. “And what would be the reason for postponing them?” Mr Juma asked.

“Simple,” I told him, “you can say that all the election materials have not arrived and that elections would be done as soon as all the printed ballot papers are ready.”

Juma was very happy with this. That evening, just a day before the elections, he called for a special parade and announced that the elections had been postponed due to logistical challenges. He went further. He appointed Malachi and Sandra as the acting head boy and head girl respectively.

“They will temporarily hold the positions until when the elections are held.”

The following morning, he travelled to Nairobi and has not been picking anyone’s calls.

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Fiolina, my First Lady and Duchess of Mwisho wa Lami has not been well for the last two weeks.

Despite all the drugs I have bought her, she has continued to vomit every morning and doesn’t eat much.

I can’t wait for schools to close so that I take her to a specialist doctor in Nairobi.

**14/7/2012**

**Colleagues will only visit my home over my dead body**

I do not yet have any photocopies of myself, but when I start replicating, there is one thing I won't do: I will not let my colleagues visit the baby.

I do not yet have any photocopies of myself, but when I start replicating, there is one thing I won't do: I will not let my colleagues visit the baby.

In fact, going forward, I have banned my colleagues from visiting me at home. Not when they behave as they did last week after visiting Anita.

As you already know, Anita went on maternity leave in May, two days after Madam Mary returned from hers. And Ruth, Juma's wife, is very pregnant, and will start her maternity leave in September, as soon as Anita returns.

Last week, Ruth, who is Anita's best friend, delivered greetings from Anita. They had met at the market.

"But I was so ashamed to meet her," she added. Lutta wanted to know why Madam Ruth was ashamed to meet her best friend.

"Si we have not visited her," she said.

"Kwani you don't visit your friend?" asked Sapphire. "I visit her but we have not visited her as staff," Ruth said. She was talking about a tradition we have in our school of visiting teachers who get newborns or are bereaved.

Very inconsistent

It is a very inconsistent programme. We visited almost all the female teachers every time they had babies.

As for men, only Kwame was visited. Due to his differences with Madam Mary, the chairperson, Lutta has never been visited.

We also never visited Juma when he had a baby with his first wife. Ruth is the HM's second wife. "Guys, we need to visit Anita," Mary said.

Ruth suggested we all contribute Sh700 but it was shot down. "Ati 700?" wondered Madam Mary. "Kwani we're buying her land?"

Mary and Mrs Atika suggested Sh300 but Sapphire and Lutta insisted on Sh100. "Gosh! Sh100 is so kidogo," said Rumona. "We need to get her something she will always remember."

"I agree," said Ruth, "maybe Sh500." I thought she was insisting on this as she is pregnant and expects to receive a lot of money on her visit.

After long deliberations on this, we agreed on Sh300. Rumona and Ruth were tasked to collect the money, buy the gifts and organise the visit.

But you all know Mwisho wa Lami when it comes to contributions. Sapphire refused to contribute, saying that he did not see how he would ever benefit.

"Why should I give the money and I will never be visited?" he asked. Lutta only gave Sh100, but reminded all that he was never visited when he had a new baby.

"But you never told us," Madam Ruth argued. Lutta later told me that will never allow colleagues to visit him. "Sitaki kusemwa a whole week," he said.

The visit to Anita's home was set for last Saturday but, two days to the date, only Sh1,250 had been raised. "If you did not contribute, we shall revenge when your time comes," Ruth warned.



We agreed to meet at Anita home on Saturday afternoon. Rumona and Ruth went there early to help her cook. I arrived with Kwame around 2pm, just in time for lunch – ugali matumbo and sukuma.

There were also several jugs of juice and, since it was self-service, I drank almost a whole jug. The visit went on well but, come Monday, the stories we got at school were different.

It was during tea time last Monday. “Gosh, si kuna watu huringa hapa kwa staffroom ni kama wanatoka mbinguni,” said Rumona as she poured her first cup of tea. “Kumbe wanatoka kwa shida!”

“What is it, Rumona?” asked Lutta. “You didn’t come at Anita’s on Saturday?” Rumona asked. “Kwani kulikuwaje?” Tito asked.

“I didn’t believe that was Anita’s house,” she said. “Everything in the house was either old or fake. Did you see the sofa sets?”

“Those things are so old,” said Madam Mary. “How someone still has sofa sets bought in 1980 still surprises me.”

“She took them from her father’s house and they are so hard to sit on,” said Rumona.

“And the way she usually complains of how the chairs here are hard,” said Kwame.

“Halafu radio ni ya kitambo sana,” said Rumona. “It only ‘catches’ one station and if you just touch it it stops.”

“What surprised me Anita hana TV,” Mary said.

“Yawa,” Ruth joined in. “Hata kama hakuna stima si one can buy solar na battery.”

“Nyinyi mnasema tu TV,” added Rumona.

“The kitchen was worse. Anita has nothing, even the glasses and jugs were borrowed from Mary.”

“I was wondering how come the glasses looked like Mary’s,” said Mrs Atika. “You mean a whole teacher can’t afford glasses?”

“And the food and drinks?” wondered Mary.

“I didn’t like the juice and could not even finish one glass,” said Kwame. “The man who left after we arrived, was that her husband?” asked Mrs Atika.

“Yes, that is him; no one knows what he does in Nairobi although Anita claims he is an engineer.” “Engineer mgani amekonda hivyo?” wondered Kwame. “That guy got a D+ in KCPE?”

“Lakini mi nasikia huyo jamaa huchapa Anita kweli kweli,” said Mary. “The guy was healthy and fat some months ago,” said Mrs Atika. “I hear he is very sick, mtu hawezi konda hivyo in six months.”

“Huyo bwanake sioni akimaliza 2012!” said Mary. “Nani alirealize Anita hana choo kwake?” asked Rumona. “She uses her neighbour’s.”

“Eish! Na vile yeye hudharau pit latrine ya hapa?” Kwame said before the topic shifted to the baby. “Mimi sijazaa, lakini kweli mtoto wa miezi mbili hutoshana hivyo?” asked Ruth.

“I think the baby is underfed,” Madam Mary weighed in. “The husband has no money so they are relying on Anita’s money that is why the baby is so malnourished.”

“Ningekuwa Anita ningewacha kuzaa,” Kwame said. “Anazaa kila mwaka, kwani ni marathon?”

If this is how my colleagues will talk after visiting me, they are not welcome – except to my funeral!

**Sunday, February 17, 2013**

**How thieving Nyayo got me in trouble with law enforcers**

By MWALIMU ANDREW

As one of the only two or three people with a working TV in Mwisho wa Lami and its environs, last week was very lucrative for me. I must admit that I made some good money; although I could have made more had everyone paid. The problem is that this money put me into problems and I had to use it to get out of the problems.

It started on Sunday. For those of you who have just arrived from Mars, that was the day of the Africa Cup of Nations finals. Very few people in Mwisho wa Lami watch football matches, but whenever there is a big final, like the World Cup or African Cup finals, everyone becomes a football fan.

A few years ago, I would have started showing games at a fee when the tournament began, but with the owner of Kanungo, the newest club in Mwisho wa Lami also showing the matches, I decided that it was below my social standing to show such games. The other owner of a TV is Mr Lutta, my colleague at school. But you know his wife, she never allows anyone in their house just to watch TV.

But last Saturday, Kanungo's TV burned and as a result, the only people in Mwisho wa lami who watched the semi-final did it from my house. I did not need a calculator to know that come Sunday, all roads would lead to my house. I decided to make a killing by charging Sh10 per match.

With no one knowing for sure what time the game was going to play, they started arriving early. First to arrive were the old men, who had not even known that the tournament was ongoing. Rasto, Rashid, and Alfayo arrived in our home at about 4 p.m., and after talking to my father for about half an hour, they came to my house.

"*Mpira umeanza?*" asked Rasto as he sat down. I told him that it would begin later on, although I did not know what time the match would begin.

"*Final ni Cameroon na nani?*" asked Alfayo.

"It's Nigeria and Burkina Faso," I said.

"I have heard of Nigeria but this Burkina Safo, is it a new country?" asked Rasto

"*Nani alitoa Cameroon, Brazil?*" Alfayo asked. It was difficult explaining to both of them but I tried.

"*Kama hakuna Ghana na Brazil hapa basi hakuna mpira mnaona,*" added Alfayo.

It was around 6p.m. and Nyayo, Saphire, Kizito and some other young men had arrived. I charged everyone except my colleagues at school and the old men.

"*Burkina Faso watashinda hii kikombe,*" said Nyayo. Kizito and Antony agreed with him but the old men, led by Alphayo disputed that.

"*Mnaongea tu ama mnajua Nigeria?*" asked Rasto.

"*Are Okocha and Taribo West playing?*" asked Rashid. "If this two are playing then there is no team that can beat us."

He laughed out loud on hearing that these two were not playing. "*Nigeria kwisha kabisa!*"

He dismissed us when we told him that the two were too old and that Nigeria had a new young team. Everyone kept quiet when the 7 o'clock news started.

"*Hii debate ya kesho tunaweza onea hapa?*" asked Rashid on seeing an advert of the Presidential Debate. I accepted, although I did not tell him that I would charge. My wife

Fiolina had cooked supper but on seeing that there were so many people, she secretly called me to the bedroom from where we quietly ate.

Soon the game began. By this time, all chairs in my house were occupied and children seated on the floor.

*“Mbona hawa wachezaji wako na nywele kama ya wenda wa zimu?”* asked Alfayo, pointing at the players.

*“Hiyo ndio fashion,”* said Kizito.

Nyayo left just a few minutes before half time. He returned as the game was almost ending. By then, Rasto and Alfayo were dozing.

All the people disbursed after the match except for Nyayo, who told me that he wanted to see me.

*“Niko na kitu nataka ununue,”* he said. He then showed me a small but powerful solar lamp that I could use in the house. We agreed on Sh500 and I gave him Sh250 as deposit, with the remainder to be paid the next day after the debate.

I left school early that Monday, and walked home to prepare to listen to the presidential debate. People started streaming into my house soon. With many of them either friends or close relatives, it was difficult to force all to pay.

The debate soon began, although it was difficult to follow since Sapphire and Anthony had to translate what was being said.

At around 9.30 p.m., we heard distress calls from one of our neighbours. *“Mwizi, mwizi!* She was shouting.

*“Let’s go check!”* said Rashid. *“Yesterday after the football match I went back home to find that my house had been broken into and a few valuable items stolen.”*

*“Nyayo uko wapi twende?”* asked Rasto. It was then that we realised that Nyayo, who had been around when the debate began, was not around.

*“Mwizi, Mwizi!”* the shouting continued.

*“Dre uko na torch?”* asked Rasto. I took the solar lamp Nyayo had sold me and we left. We arrived at our neighbour’s who said that someone had tried to break into her house but the thief ran away when she had cried for help.

We assured her that all was well. As we left, everyone was impressed at how powerful the lamp was, although Rashid was more curious. *“Hii taa inafanana na ile yangu ambayo iliibiwa jana usiku,”* he said and asked me to let him see it.

*“Dre, this is my lamp that was stolen yesterday,”* Rashid said. He then showed me where he had written his initials R.A., standing for Rashid Abdalla.

*“Ulitoa wapi hii?”* Rasto asked me.

*“Nyayo aliniuzia jana usiku,”* I said.

*“Kumbe ni Nyayo mwizi?”* said Rashid. *“Twende kwake.”* We went to Nyayo’s home where we only found his wife.

*“Where is Nyayo?”* asked Rasto.

*“Ako kwa Dre anaona debate club ya campaign.”* We informed her that Nyayo had left my place earlier.

*“Naa hii radio inakaaje kama ile yangu ilipotea jana?”* asked Rasto, pointing at a radio that was on the table. Anindo however said that her husband had bought it from me the previous night.

*“I did not sell anything to Nyayo,”* I said. It was Rashid’s radio.

Early next morning, as I was preparing to go to school, Rasto arrived at my home accompanied by two policemen.

“*Ni huyu,*” Rasto told them, pointing at me.

“*Mwalimu mzuri kama wewe ndio unadanganya watu waone TV hapa kumbe umetuma Nyayo kuiba?*” he asked. “*Utakaa ndani mpaka ulete Nyayo.*”

I was handcuffed and we started walking to the police post at the Chief’s office.

Luckily I had with me the money that I had collected the previous evening. I gave this amount to the police and was released. Rashid was quite unhappy to see me free but the police told him to report when Nyayo appears. Nyayo has not been seen ever since

**If TJRC came to our school...By MWALIMU ANDREW  
mwaliuandrew@gmail.com**

A week after the appointment of new prefects, nothing much has changed in our school: pupils are still arriving late; noise-making in class is still the order of the day and general school cleanliness is as it were in the old administration.

This was our observation when we met with Sapphire and Tito last Wednesday evening after all other teachers had left.

“You see what this impunity of appointing relatives is causing the school?” said Sapphire. “The school is dirtier than it was last week.”

“I am not surprised that the new prefects have not been felt at all!” said Tito. “There will be no impact until they make drastic changes at the top of the school.”

“Let the HM and Deputy do whatever they want, but one day, all they are doing will be known to the public,” said Sapphire.

“I agree,” said Tito. “The people who did bad things in the 1960s and 1970s thought they would never be exposed; now we know everything.”

“How did you know?” I asked. Sapphire and Tito showed me the newspaper of the day, which had details of the TJRC report.

“You can see the people who stole land, killed and detained others, among many other human rights abuses,” said Tito.

I took some time to read through the several stories and was shocked to note that not less than 400 senior public figures had been mentioned in one case or other.

“Wah, this is just like MwishowaLami,” I said. Sapphire asked me what I meant. “If we were to investigate all the human right violations that have happened in this school, the list would be endless.”

“Dre, that is a serious allegation, do you have any evidence?” asked Tito.

Although all appears rosy at MwishowaLami Primary School, hidden from the public domain are major atrocities that need to be investigated. As an insider for almost 10 years – as a student, a by-stander and teacher – I have first-hand information of the atrocities and human rights abuses that have occurred in this school. “I will mention several.” I said.

“Go ahead,” said Tito.

“Let’s start with the HM,” I said. “Who remembers when the gate was being built?”

“I remember, but what has a gate got to do with human rights?” asked Tito.

“The gate was constructed at the same time the HM was building a toilet at his home. Any time he bought building materials for the school, the lorry first would drop off some at his home before bringing the rest to school,” I said.

“No wonder he finished constructing his toilet before the gate was completed!” Tito exclaimed.

“That is true,” I said. “I believe such deliberate diversion of school resources for personal gain is a human rights abuse that requires further investigations.”

“Now that you say so,” started Sapphire, I remember the many times he has squandered holiday tuition money collected from parents.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “He never attended class but he would take almost all the money and leave us share the little that remained.”

“That is a gross abuse,” Tito said. “What about Kwame, the deputy, is he clean?”

“Oh, that one has his share of violations,” I said. “Let’s start with the school farm. Every year the 4K Club tills the school land. Have you ever asked yourselves where the maize we harvest every year goes to?”

I did not wait for them to reply. “He takes it home,” I said. “And that is not all. Do you remember we used to have a lunch programme for classes seven and eight? Do you know why that plan collapsed?”

“Yes we had that a few years ago but I can’t remember why it collapsed,” said Tito.

“Kwame killed it,” said Sapphire, “He ate all the money and I’m sure that is also a human rights violation as it touches on matters of the stomach.”

“That also reminds me of Praxedes, our headgirl in 2011,” said Tito. “Who remembers how Kwame confused that girl until she failed KCPE?”

“Yes,” said Sapphire. “She was a good girl but Kwame totally confused her when she got to class seven and she never recovered. When she got 158 marks in KCPE, Kwame never wanted to associate himself with her.”

“I am sure all other teachers are clean,” said Tito.

“No,” said Sapphire, “Every teacher here has committed at least one atrocity or the other.”

“Even this Dre,” continued Sapphire.” Do you remember April 2010? You beat up Sandra, Nyayo’s daughter, until she fainted and had to be taken to hospital.”

“I remember,” I said, “but that girl is generally weak and it was a mild slap. Why didn’t other students faint?”

“Listen to me Dre,” said Tito, “If a truth commission investigated human rights abuses in this school, the incident of you beating Sandra until she fainted would be among the top human rights violations committed in this school.”

“That would not compare to the violations committed by other teachers, Sapphire included,” I said.

Sapphire then challenged me to reveal any violations he had committed.

“How many classes do you miss every term? How many times have you dropped students’ books or answer sheets on the road while drunk? You don’t think those are violations?”

“Dre, those are minor misnomers and they would not make it to the list. All a truth commission would do is to recommend my transfer. I haven’t done anything major to warrant any adverse mention in such a report.”

He went on: “In fact, it’s you Dre who will be mentioned for other things.”

“Like which one?”

“Do you remember what happened during Drama Festivals in 2009?” he asked

“What happened?”

“Dre I’m sure you do not want me to remind you what happened between you and Mary-Ann? That would not be missed in a truth report.”

“Sapphire I can assure you I am clean, quite unlike you. Do you remember inciting students to go on strike in 2010? You think that would be missed?”

Tito then asked us about other teachers in school. “Do you think Mrs Atika would survive such an investigation?”

“Mrs Atika would never survive such a report,” I said. “Not after she squandered the money for the teachers’ chama. Twice. She disappeared with our money in 2009 and again in 2011 after we revived the chama.”

“She will not be alone,” added Sapphire. “She did this with Lutta and Madam Mary. Mary also disappeared with the lunch club money last year. I am sure a truth commission would recommend further investigations be carried out against the three.

“It looks like I would be the only clean teacher if they were to investigate us,” bragged Tito.

“Don’t be so sure,” I reminded him. “You think we do not know how you got a job in this school?” Tito kept quiet.

In the end we all agreed that a truth commission would reveal quite a lot, but felt that the HM and Deputy needed to be investigated as a matter of urgency.



### **Why we vetted ‘half-baked’ prefects**

If you remember, starting last year, we started appointing prefects in second term. This followed recommendations by the HM. He noted that since we had many prefects in Class Eight, this made it difficult for them to manage the school as well as prepare for KCPE.

“This time round we have to break from the past,” said the HM in the first staff meeting last week. “We need to appoint honest boys and girls of high integrity and impeccable character; people who will move this school to the next level.”

We suggested that we carry out interviews for this exercise but the HM and Deputy were reluctant, and resolved that they would make the appointments after which the entire staffroom would consider the list for approval. For two days, the HM and Deputy sat in the HM’s office for long hours drafting a list of appointees.

They emerged last Wednesday and tabled their choices.

With the exercise having taken so long, we expected a list of credible names to approve.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have taken our time to get a strong team of boys and girls whom, I believe, this school has been missing for a long time,” the HM said as he read out nominees’ names.

While the list had one or two surprises, the majority of nominees were the usual suspects. Malachi, the HM’s nephew, had been appointed head boy while Sandra, Nyayo’s eldest daughter, had been picked to be the head girl.

“We plan to make this announcement during parade tomorrow, but before then, we would like to hear your views so that we can speak with one voice on this matter,” the HM said.

“Thank you Mr HM,” said Sapphire. “I am impressed with the quality of boys and girls you have appointed. However, of the 26 names, only two come from this village.”

“Sapphire, please note that we weren’t interested in which village someone comes from when drawing up our list,” said the HM. “All we cared was that the person could deliver.”

“That is understood, Mr HM, but you can’t tell us that your nephew Malachi was the best we can get. This boy came here last year after he had been expelled from his previous school.”

Special circumstances

“Sapphire, you have to consider the circumstances under which he was expelled.”

“I agree with Sapphire,” said Mrs Atika. “Malachi is not the best person to be the head boy.”

The discussion next moved to Sandra, the head girl.

“By appointing Nyayo’s daughter to be the head girl, what message are we sending to the students and parents of this school?” asked Mrs Atika. “Nyayo has always been a problem.”

“Madam Atika,” started Kwame the Deputy, “We did not appoint Nyayo; we appointed Sandra.”

“I know but I understand from Dre and Sapphire that whenever Nyayo brews busaa at his home, it’s Sandra who usually serves the customers and receives the money. Is that the best we could get for a head girl?”

“I don’t find anything wrong with that,” I said. “It shows a responsible girl ready to assist her parents to meet their needs.”

Tito weighed in with his contribution. “With all due respect Mr HM, I note that three of the County Rep’s children have been appointed prefects. How can one home produce three prefects when many others have not produced even one?”

“We were looking for quality,” Kwame said. “I was the chief campaigner for the County Rep and I can tell you that I know all his children well. I have no doubt they will deliver.”

Lutta, who had been quiet all along, rose to speak. “Mr Headmaster and Deputy, I agree with you that you were looking for the best candidates regardless of where they come from. Is it a coincidence that most of the nominees come from your villages?”

Everyone went quiet but Lutta went on. “About seven of the names come from Kwame’s village while another nine are the HM’s neighbours.”

Near their homes

Madam Ruth moved to defend the HM and Deputy. “Mr Lutta you need to appreciate that the HM and Deputy were looking for the best. It’s possible that students whom they know well enough are those from near their homes.”

Despite being booed she continued speaking. “How well could they have known the students who live far away? Let’s be reasonable guys!”

Madam Anita vehemently opposed Madam Ruth’s explanation, saying that since the school was in MwishowaLami village, it was only fair that a majority of the prefects come from the village.

“However, to confirm that there are students from other villages who are better than the local children, why don’t we interview all the nominees before we approve them?”

Most of the teachers supported the interview proposal but the HM and Deputy flatly rejected the idea.

“We cannot subject young children to interviews,” said Kwame. “Most of them will not understand what interviews are!”

“If they can’t understand what interviews are, how will they understand how to lead the school?” asked Madam Mary.

After long arguments, it was agreed that only the head girl, head boy and four senior prefects would be interviewed. The exercise was planned for the following morning and I was tasked with coming up with the questions.

Being children, I did not want to make the interview difficult and so, apart from a few leadership queries, I sprinkled in a few questions from science, maths and social studies. The HM also asked me for a copy of the questions, which I gave him.

We carried out the interviews on Thursday morning. Interestingly, even the candidates who lacked confidence answered the academic questions correctly.

After the interviews, the HM and Deputy were happy and kept praising the nominees. “One or two were not confident but this is something they can improve on.”

Approved the list

“I never doubted that we picked the right prefects,” said the Deputy.

When it was time to vote, all the teachers approved the list. Parade was immediately called and the HM and Deputy walked out together to make the announcement.

“This was the most competitive appointment we have ever done,” the HM said before calling out the names.

It was only later that evening at Hitler’s that I came to know what had actually happened.

“Why did you give the HM the questions beforehand?” Sapphire asked me.

“He is my boss, I could not have refused to share the questions,” I answered.

“Do you know what they did with the questions?” he asked. I said I did not know.

“They spent the entire evening and this morning coaching the nominees on how to answer the questions.”

“So that is the reason all the candidates answered the questions correctly!” I exclaimed.

“Yes, we were duped,” he said.

Outraged, I struck a deal with Sapphire to do everything possible to reverse the appointments.

### **Eastleigh will never see me again!**

Because of heavy expenditures to help keep my blissful marriage afloat, I did not have sufficient money to pay for fees and so did not make it for the April session at Kenyatta University. Had I gone, that would have been my third-last semester.

Nevertheless, I still found myself in Nairobi. It had all to do with missing marks. You see, Wesonga, upon reporting, informed that I had ‘fallen’ in one of the course units.

There is no way I could have failed that unit and upon checking, it was discovered that some CAT marks were missing. I clearly remember being the best in that CAT with 16 marks out of 30. Luckily, I had the marked CAT paper.

I had to travel to Nairobi to see the lecturer. I arrived in the city two weekends ago and went straight to KU. For two days I tried to get the lecturer but I failed. He was never in the office and the two times he picked my call, he said that he was far away from KU.

What this means is that I stayed in Wesonga’s room most of the time. I just hope that Wesonga does not notice that after taking a good number of glasses, I diluted the juice in his bottle with water.

Bored to the bone, on the third day I decided to go see Pius, my brother. Pius was happy to see me.

“Welcome Dre,” he said. “How did you know that I needed someone like you right now?”

“What is it?” I asked him.

“You know madam is in her third and final semester so I need to go shop for the baby,” he said. I did not understand what semesters had to do with babies but I agreed to accompany him for shopping.

Eastleigh-bound

“We are going to Eastleigh,” he added. This was that first time I would be going to Eastleigh after hearing about it for long. We left Pius’ car and used a matatu to go to town, from where we boarded an Eastleigh-bound matatu.

I was still enjoying the journey when we arrived in Eastleigh. I had never seen such busy streets. If I was left alone, I would never find my way around the place.

We went to several shops where Pius bought clothes for the expected baby. Out of curiosity, I also asked for the prices of a few items, particularly green Kaunda suits. Although they weren’t the right shade of green I was looking for, I was happy to note that the prices were affordable. The prices of other items, including shoes, jackets and handkerchiefs were also relatively cheap.

I bought Fiolina a pair of Umoja slippers for less than half of what they cost back home. I also bought her a dozen handkerchiefs. I bought a dozen pair of socks for myself, with half of them in red, my favourite colour.

Although I had not liked the suits I had seen, I decided to try on one, especially since Pius appeared willing to pay. We went to the first shop and as soon as my eyes pointed at the Kaunda suits, the shop owner quickly started making his sales pitch.

“Brathachukuahii suit smart kabisa, pure cotton, nitakutengenezeabei,” he said, pulling Pius and I into his shop. In his attempt to sell, the guy just lost me when he mentioned pure cotton. Those who know me will tell you that all my suits are polyester.

We went to the next shop and although they did not have polyester suits, I saw suits whose colour was close to what I was looking for.

“Sijuikamaitanitosheahii,” I said.

“Brathavaahii,” he said. He immediately pulled a curtain around to create a dressing area where I could try on the suit.

“Brathauko smart kabisa, hiiukivaautapata promotion kesho.” He then brought a mirror and I could see that the suit was rather tight on me. I wanted a suit that I could grow into.

“Nataka suit kubwa, mimisikuhizinanonasana,” I said.

“Inakaabibiyakoanapikiawewevizurisana!” he said laughingly. I did not know how he knew that my Fiolina was cooking for me well.

“Sawa brother, ngojahapadakikamojanikuletee size yako,” he said and disappeared even before we answered.

We remained in his stall with Pius. Pius used the opportunity to check out some of the shirts. He was interested in a shirt that had many pockets and was multi-coloured. I did not understand how anyone could like such a shirt.

Just then, there was a blackout. The shop was, all of a sudden very dark and we moved to the corridor to wait for the shop owner. Although the corridor was dark it could not be compared to the pitch blackness inside the shop.

The owner came back shortly afterwards. “Brathanimepatavitu smart sana. Hebujaribuhizi,” he said, and gave me two suits.

It was very dark inside the shop and he asked me to just change outside on the corridor as it was fairly dark, and there weren't many people moving around.

“Bratha, toanguohapa, hakunamtuataangaliawewenastimaatarudikesho.”

I took off my suit and tried on the first one. We walked to the neighbour's stall that had lights and used his mirror.

The suit was a little too big and so we went back to his stall to try out the other one.

Under the cover of darkness, I stood in the corridor outside the stall and took off my trousers and Kaunda coat. I then asked the shop owner to give me the suit I was to try on.

Torn underwear

As he was handing it over, the lights came back! There I was, standing in the corridor in my slightly torn underwear as traders and shoppers streamed out of adjacent stalls to continue with their business.

I stood still, not knowing what to do or where to go. There was laughter everywhere, especially from the many children that were with their parents for shopping. Pius quickly pulled me inside the shop as the shop owner wrapped sheets around me.

Although they both insisted that I try out the new suit, all I wanted was to be as far away from Eastleigh as possible.

How could I continue shopping in a place where everyone had seen me naked?

We left the shop and although Pius wanted us to check out other shops, I was keen to leave Eastleigh immediately. As we took a matatu back to town, Pius wondered why I was not wearing a vest.

“If you had a vest, people would not have laughed at you that much,” he said.

I was in no mood to answer him, as the image of me naked while everyone laughed would not leave my mind.

I could not tell him that my IEBC and Enumerator t-shirts were torn and I had not received replacements after I was kicked out from being a presiding officer in the last elections. In town, Pius bought me three vests.

But vests or no vests, Eastleigh will never see me again!

**Saturday, November 2, 2013**  
**Nyumba kumi makes me an adulterer**

When the government came up with the Nyumba Kumi initiative some time ago, they found an already converted person in me, meaning that the government may have problems implementing this directive in many places – but not in Mwisho wa Lami.  
ILLUSTRATION/JOHN NYAGA

In Summary

If I would be eating this full on my Nyumba Kumi sojourns, it was a good thing after all, and I would do the same the next day.

Lucy too was happy to see me, and she served me juice. I don't know who had whispered to her how I loved juice.

I jumped out of the house, with only one shoe on. I left the other one in Lucy's house.  
advertisement

By Mwalimu Andrew  
More by this Author

As a law abiding citizen and a distinguished resident of Mwisho wa Lami community, I have always taken it as my responsibility not only to propagate, but also to help in the implementation of good government initiatives.

Indeed, as one of the main advisers to the Chief and a key consultant of our Member of County Assembly, I have always been a crystal figure in shaping the destiny of Mwisho wa Lami.

So when the government came up with the Nyumba Kumi initiative some time ago, they found an already converted person in me, meaning that the government may have problems implementing this directive in many places – but not in Mwisho wa Lami.

But it would appear that there are some people around here who are not seeing the advantage of such an obviously beneficial directive.

They are the same people that always oppose anything from government, for the simple reason that it is from government.

I first met these enemies of development at Hitler's.

"Hii nyumba kumi lazima tuifuata," I said to the usual suspects that patronise Hitler's place. "We need to know all our neighbours."

"Hiyo ni mchezo," said Sapphire. "In Mwisho wa Lami, don't we know all of our neighbours?"

"That is right Sapphire," said Rasto. In fact some of us know all the people in this place.

"I agree you may know them but do you know what they do," I asked.

"How is it my business to know what my neighbours do?" wondered Rashid.

"If somebody comes to me at night ati Nyumba Kumi, nitamkatakata," said Nyayo.

There was a heated debate and I lost for the simple reason that I was outnumbered.

## LEAFY SUBURBS

The only thing that we agreed on was that it was only in Milimani, the leafy, modern, urban part of Mwisho wa Lami village where Nyumba Kumi was more needed.

“Huko ndio kuna shida,” said Rashid. “You people don’t know each other at all.”

“If you want to do Nyumba Kumi, do it in Milimani, don’t involve us,” said Lutta.

I raised the same thing the next day in the staffroom. I suggested that as teachers we need to form a club where we will be visiting each other more frequently.

“We need to know each other well and also know where everyone comes from,” I said.

“As long as hamukuji kwangu I am okay” said Mrs Atika.

“And who doesn’t know my home?” wondered Sapphire. “I don’t think it would be necessary to come to me.”

“Why don’t you want to be visited?” wondered Madam Mary, who always organises staff welfare activities.

“I don’t want fitina,” Mrs Atika said. “The last time teachers visited me they went on talking about my house - oh, how my sofa sets are old, oh my black and colour TV. I will never welcome colleagues to my house again.”

“I think we need to do this in the spirit of Nyumba Kumi,” said Juma. “We can’t start knowing other people when we don’t know our colleagues well.”

## CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

We then all agreed to start visiting each other but the problem came when we started looking for who to host the staff first.

Every teacher said they were either busy or unprepared.

This got worse when Madam Mary announced that we would have to contribute Sh450 monthly each to be given to the teacher we visit.

“Ai, kwani tunamfanyia harambee?” wondered Lutta, and immediately announced that he was pulling out of the arrangement.

Sapphire also announced that he would not join us.

I decided to take Nyumba Kumi to Milimani.

Although the estate is the home of the who is who in Mwisho wa Lami, I only knew my new neighbours, Mr Juma and Mr Mboya, a teacher of Mwisho wa Lami Secondary School. It was time to know the others.

First to visit was the nurse at Mwisho wa Lami dispensary, who stays in one of the houses.

I arrived at her place just after 7.00p.m. She welcomed me in. Although she did not know my name, she told me that she knew me because of my ever smart dressing.

Evaline – her name – told me all about her, while she prepared supper.

We ate and talked more that evening. It wasn’t until 9pm that I left her house, having known more about her.

If I would be eating this full on my Nyumba Kumi sojourns, it was a good thing after all, and I would do the same the next day.

The next day, I went to some house whose owner I did not know well.

## LOCKED DOORS

I knocked only to find it belonged to Kim, the owner of Mwisho wa Lami hardware.



There wasn't much I was to speak with a man and I left immediately after. I decided to take a stroll around Mwisho wa Lami as most doors were closed.

I returned at around 6p.m and decided to try one of the houses where the owner had returned.

The house belonged to Lucy, a teacher on teaching practice at Mwisho was Lami Secondary.

Lucy too was happy to see me, and she served me juice. I don't know who had whispered to her how I loved juice.

We talked as we took the juice. "Where do you buy your suits?" she asked me. I asked her why she was asking. "You are always very smart. All the teachers in our school know you and talk about you."

"I import them from Nairobi." I told her. I was by then on the third glass of juice. It was around 7.50p.m when Lucy served supper: ugali and omena.

After supper, I sat around, as I waited for more juice. Seeing it not being served, I gathered courage to ask for it.

Lucy brought me a glass of juice, which I started taking. I had gotten used to her, and soon, I removed my shoes and lay on the sofa as I sipped down the juice. It was around 9pm and Lucy switched on her TV for news.

I was still lying down when someone knocked at the door. Lucy opened and in came Johnny, whom I knew as a high school teacher in a neighbouring school.

"Who is this?" he asked.

"It's Dre," Lucy said, smiling.

PAINFUL LOSS

"And you are just smiling?" Johnny asked unamused. "So this is the man who has been confusing you."

"No, Dre is just visiting", Lucy said.

"I am not a fool, how can a first time visitor be lying on the sofa that I bought you."

The man went to the bedroom, and as I got up to wear my shoes, he emerged from the bedroom carrying a nyahunyo.

"Wewe ndio unayemelea mabibi za wenyewe," he asked as he moved to beat me. It was painful and as he moved for a second one, I jumped out of the house, with only one shoe on. I left the other one in Lucy's house.

I took off, with Johnny in hot pursuit, unable to wail as I did not want to raise any alarm.

My knowledge of Mwisho wa Lami served me well. He soon gave up on me. I then walked to my house, regretting that I had left one of my shoes in Lucy's house.

Although it was dark, word that I had been caught red-handed with Johnny's wife spread like bushfire.

This was the talk of the village for the next few days.

With that I stopped any more Nyumba Kumi campaigns.

But first, how do I get back my shoe from Lucy's house?

**Sunday, February 24, 2013**

**There's a plot to rig polls in Mwisho**

By MWALIMU ANDREW

Unless the IEBC chairman, the Police Commissioner, and the minister for Education intervene, the General Election in Mwisho wa Lami polling station will be a great sham.

This is because enemies of development have conspired to lock me out of presiding over the elections so as to impose unpopular leaders against the wishes of the majority in Mwisho wa Lami and its environs.

I know some people will dismiss this as a wild allegation, but I can assure you that the enemies of development involved are high-ranking government officials using State resources to completely lock me out of the elections.

It all began after the interviews for election officials in Mwisho wa Lami were held. As you know, I was the only candidate who was able to use a computer. Most analysts and observers were in agreement that unless something went wrong, I would be appointed the presiding officer.

**The interviews**

This did not go down well with many people. As you know, besides our HM and Deputy, our Area Education Officer (AEO) also attended the interviews.

A few days after the interviews, rumours spread that I had been appointed the presiding officer. The rumour was rife on the same day that I was arrested for a few hours on claims that I was in cahoots with Nyayo to steal.

That night, I am reliably informed, our Assistant Chief, the HM and AEO met the returning officer at Cosmos Bar where they sought to convince him not to hire me.

Ever since I sacked the assistant chief's son as a prefect, we don't see eye to eye.

"Dre has a theft case with the police," a government official reportedly told the returning officer. "How can you make him our presiding officer?"

"There was violence in the last elections because elections were rigged," the AEO is said to have added. "We therefore should not put the elections in the hands of people whose integrity is in question."

The returning officer, however, said he would appoint the best.

"We won't report to a thief as our presiding officer," the HM then said, according to sources close to the source.

The returning officer told them off, and ruled that I had no police case and that even if I had, no one had proven that I had stolen. He appointed me the presiding officer. The AEO was appointed as my deputy while the HM was appointed a polling clerk along with the Deputy, Madam Ruth and Anita.

Having failed to stop me, enemies of my development resorted to using State machinery to stop me from presiding over the elections. Last Sunday evening, the HM sent me an SMS telling me that I would be on duty last week. I reminded him that it was Mrs Atika's turn followed by Lutta.

"I no but Mrs Atika is seek while Tito will not be in because he will be out," he texted me back.

Suspecting that the HM was "searching me words", I agreed, as I knew I would only be on duty for two days, and then go for the elections training that was scheduled to begin last Wednesday.

I arrived in school early Monday morning and oversaw all the cleaning. But when the HM arrived, he reprimanded me for having not supervised the cleaning of his office. “My desk is too dusty,” he said.

By the time the staff meeting started, Juma and I were not on talking terms. When the HM called out for AOB, Ruth spoke.

“Mr HM, some of us will be away from Wednesday attending IEBC Elections training.”

“Who else is attending?” he asked.

“I will be attending and I have also received requests from Anita and Kwame,” Ruth responded.

“I am also attending,” I said. “Please have someone else be on duty from Wednesday.”

“We can’t have all the teachers going for IEBC training, especially teachers on duty!” the HM said. “Already four of us are away and it would be irresponsible of me to allow a fifth teacher to leave.” He then ended the meeting.

I sensed trouble and after the meeting, I called our returning officer and told him that I may be denied permission. “Are you able to assist?” I asked.

“No. It’s your responsibility to make it for training otherwise we will replace you,” he said.

“Please write me a letter saying that I have been appointed a PO to compel the HM to release me.”

The returning officer insisted he could not intervene. “It’s up to you to get permission from where you work.”

I saw the HM that afternoon. I told him that he needed to release me.

“I wish I could release you but I can’t,” he said. “First of all, you are on duty. And you know that Lutta and Mrs Atika are not around.”

“But you have allowed Ruth, Anita, Kwame and yourself already, why not me?”

“I gave permission on first come first serve,” he said. “TSC regulations do not allow me to have over 60 per cent of teachers away.”

He suggested that I talk to the AEO for assistance. “If the AEO agrees, then I will allow you.”

With little time to waste, I went to see the AEO that afternoon. He was not in his office when I arrived so I waited for him.

“I hope you have no school duties this afternoon,” he said as he welcomed me to his office.”

I explained to him my predicament.

“I have already warned Juma that he has already allowed too many teachers to be away,” he said. “He can’t allow another teacher out of school.”

“Bwana AEO, general elections are an important national duty ....”

“I know, but learning cannot stop just because of elections,” he said. “These elections have caused us enough interruptions already!”

It was clear I would not get any assistance from him, so I left. As I rode my bicycle home, I really contemplated ignoring them and going for training.

“Do not try that,” Sapphire said when we met at Hitler’s that evening. “The AEO and HM want you to do that so that they can fix you.”

That evening I received an SMS from the HM telling me that I would be in charge of school while he and Kwame were away.

Reluctantly, I went to school on Wednesday. Later on, Sapphire informed me that in my absence, the AEO had replaced me as the presiding officer while Mr Juma would be his deputy.

“I can’t believe I am missing out on Sh2,000 per day!” I said.

“You mean its 2k per day?” he asked. “You go for that thing and should the AEO or HM bring any problem, with some of that money we can talk to a KNUT official to defend you.”

I called the returning officer that evening but he said that he had already replaced me. It was clear from his voice that he was under immense pressure from State officials to drop me.

I immediately wrote a protest email to IEBC and TSC. But should they not intervene, I urge all right-thinking Kenyans to reject the election results that will be announced at Mwisho wa Lami polling station as senior officials have clearly compromised the process with a view to influencing the results!

**Sunday, December 30, 2012**

**Fiolina's day out in Nairobi**

By MWALIMU ANDREW

In the wake of the fire lit by Xtash and which I rushed home to extinguish, I planned to travel back immediately. Since I was broke, I wanted to travel back alone, but Fiolina, my Running Mate, insisted that I fulfil my promise of taking her to Nairobi.

"I have no money," I pleaded, "so you will be hungry in Nairobi."

"*Heri kukaa Nairobi njaa kuliko kukaa hapa kama nimeshiba,*" she said. "Only your father wants me here, the rest have defected to Xtash."

I told her that was a lie, and that my family would accept the woman I chose. "Right now that woman is you."

Whenever my First Lady is angry, she usually resorts to using SMS even when we are in the same room. "Sweethut I mast go to Nairobi, I can't remain hear," she SMSed me while having supper.

I did not reply, but this did not stop her from texting me again. "You can lend the money from your freind."

I still did not reply.

Those of you who have been to Mwisho wa Lami know that the people who board or alight from Msamaria Mwema are usually known. That is why news that Xtash had boarded a Nairobi-bound Msamaria Mwema spread in the village like bush fire.

"Are you the one the one who gave Xtash 'transport' to go to Nairobi so that you can meet there?" Fiolina asked me when the news reached her. I told her that I was not even aware that Xtash had gone to Nairobi.

"Know I now why you don't want to go with me," she SMSed me.

I borrowed some money from my mother – I never borrow from my father – and I travelled with Fiolina to Nairobi the next morning.

She asked me many questions on the way. I can't remember that number of times she asked "*Kwani hatufiki?*"

As soon as we reached Naivasha, she collected her bags in readiness to alight.

As soon as she saw the "Welcome to Nairobi" sign, she stood up and started walking towards the door, clutching her bag. After much cajoling, she agreed to sit near the door, but every time the bus stopped to drop off passengers, she would attempt to alight.

We finally alighted at around 4 pm and immediately boarded a KU-bound matatu. I was lucky she was tired, otherwise she would have asked many more questions. The walk from KU's gate to Nyayo hostels really excited her, and she could not believe that all the buildings and streets belonged to Kenyatta University.

But the most exciting was walking all the way to third floor, Nyayo 3. Fiolina had never been to a storey building.

In her bag, she had tea in a flask and boiled maize which she served us as soon as we got into the room. Wesonga drank the tea quite happily.

Fiolina then prepared supper – there was no going to KM if I could get fresh food cooked by my wife. We borrowed sufurias from our neighbours and Fiolina prepared ugali and omena, which she had carried from home.

Although Wesonga had not liked the idea of Fiolina's visit, he was quite happy to have supper without spending a cent. It was clear Fiolina was tired after supper and wanted to

sleep. I had to “exile” Wesonga. With a full stomach, he was only too happy to leave so he picked up his books and went to a friend’s room.

Fiolina insisted on sleeping on the first floor of the bed instead on ground floor.

“*Sijawahi lala kwa kitanda ya ghorofa!*” she said, climbing up to sleep. I took time to write the notes from the classes I had missed but soon started dozing off. I joined her in bed.

We woke up very late on Sunday morning and, after breakfast – strong tea and *kaa ngumu* – we left for town. It was Fiolina’s day out. First stop was KU’s flyover, from where we watched vehicles sped past.

Fiolina was so excited that we stayed there for long and had to cancel the Uhuru Park tour. From the flyover, we went to town. Since I do not know the town well, I only took her to KICC.

“*Watu hutembea mpaka huko juu?*” she asked, pointing at the topmost floors.

“They use lifts,” I replied.

“Can we go in? I have never climbed a lift,” she asked excitedly. I told her that we couldn’t go in at that time but I could look for another building in town where we could use a lift.

I thought of taking her to moving stairs at KU’s Ultra-Post-Modern Library but I remembered she wouldn’t be allowed in as she did not have a student ID. We then took photos while “touching” the peak of the skyscraper. Fiolina could not believe it when the photos were presented a few minutes later.

### **Quite happy**

“*Kwani negative zimeoshwa saa ngapi?*” she asked, quite happy. She then asked for several copies.

“*Wacha nionyeshe wale husema sijafika Nairobi,*” she told me.

I then took her to lunch. Fiolina had never eaten chips and was really eager to taste them. I walked her to a chips place near the KU stage. She enjoyed herself although she embarrassed me by pouring tomato sauce into a glass, thinking it was juice.

From there we went straight to KU where Fiolina, too tired, went straight to bed. Later that evening I took her to KM for supper. We went to bed early on the bed’s first floor.

Last Monday, I took her to KU’s fly-over where she spent the whole morning watching cars as I attend classes. We went to Ruiru town in the afternoon.

On Christmas day, we went to Uhuru Park, and then passed by KICC where we took more photos. From there I took her to Machakos Airport where she boarded Msamaria Mwema to Mwisho wa Lami.

I went back to KU, very broke and quite behind in class work. Unless I do something drastic, I may fail exams this session. But I don’t regret it as I made a lasting impression on Fiolina. I hope she will remember this for the rest of her life.

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To Nyayo, Sapphire, Rasto, Hitler, Packetia, Sanglinda, Fiolina, my father Caleb, Rashid, Rumona, my colleagues at Mwisho wa Lami Primary, and indeed all the good people of Mwisho wa Lami and its environs: Happy 2013!

**Sunday, February 10, 2013**

**I might be HM's boss on March 4**

By MWALIMU ANDREW

When I declared that I was the most – if not the only – digital person in Mwisho wa Lami and its environs, some enemies of development dismissed me and accused me of chest-thumping. Little did we know that my analogue colleagues would soon need digital tips from me.

As the nation knows, teachers have been waiting with bated breath for the General Election so that they can offer their professional expertise in ensuring that, come March 4, this country conducts free and fair elections. Our staffroom is no exception.

“This year I must be a presiding officer,” Juma declared. “I was a deputy PO in the last elections.”

“Who helped you get that job?” Lutta asked. “I gave up on election jobs after trying many years unsuccessfully.”

“You can never get those election jobs if you do not know someone,” said Sapphire. “The jobs seem to belong to some families.”

Juma and Kwame later bragged they were in contact with someone who would assist them to become presiding officer and deputy respectively. Soon, they started openly calling each other “Presiding Officer”.

### **Foul mood**

But, late last month, the HM arrived in school one early morning in a foul mood.

“This is nonsense,” he said, “it looks like IEBC doesn't want some of us to be involved in the elections.” He then tabled a newspaper advert for the IEBC jobs.

To be a presiding officer or deputy, one needed to have a degree or diploma. Other than me who is pursuing a degree, the rest of the Mwisho wa Lami staff are certificate holders. As if that was not enough, computer literacy was mandatory for presiding officers and their deputies.

“*Hii ni mchezo*,” said Lutta. “We have seen many elections and a computer has never been required in polling stations.”

“You are right,” the HM said, “unless there are plans to rig the elections, I do not see the need for a computer.”

“*Wacheni uoga*, hii ni vitisho baridi,” Kwame said. “They are just scaring us from applying. I am sure no computer questions will be asked.”

Lutta, Juma and Sapphire agreed with Kwame's position and they all apply. Tito, Rumona and Ruth applied to be polling clerks.

I was quite happy with the requirements as this meant I had little competition. That evening, I made a few changes to the letter I used to apply for a job in 2010 referendum.

Excerpts:

“*Sir,*

*In response to your advert, privileged to be in receipt of my eagerly-awaited application epistle for the salient role of Presiding Officer in the fast-approaching Elections. I am more than well-equipped for the role; based on my unrivalled demonstrable experience in electoral, referendal and censal matters.*

*Take cognisance of the fact that not only am I a teacher of no mean repute, I am also an eminent undergraduate scholar of the world-acclaimed Kenyatta University where I am in the final year of a Honours Degree in educations.*

*Proudly born and bred within this geographical locality, and having worked in this hallowed hamlet for eons, I am well versed with our territory's geomorphology, and demographic orientation.*

*Besides, I am the only professional who is not only computer-literate, I am also lap-top literate; since I am the owner of the only laptop in this region, a gadget I am ready to lend your esteemed commission during the elections.*

*My Folk Song and Set piece was the best in the Divisional Music Festivals, while last term, my volleyball team emerged the best during the Zonal Ball Games – a clear testimony to my abilities.*

*Affixed here-in is my résumé and carbon copies of not only my academic certificates, but also a dozen testimonials attesting my multiple achievements in the arena of Games, Drama, and Music Festivals. Thirstily awaiting for the interview.*

*Yours expectantly;*

*Mwalimu Andrew; GHC, CRE, Insha, Facebook.”*

I delivered the letter to the district officer. We were invited to come for the interview last Monday. There wasn't much preparation until Monday afternoon when the Headmaster arrived in the staffroom in a panic.

“Dre, did you come with your computer?” he asked. I asked why.

“*Ni kubaya!*” he announced. “I have a friend who attended the interviews today and they had computer practicals.”

“If they bring that we are doomed,” Kwame said.

I went home to bring the laptop so that I could take them through a crash course on computer usage. It was a difficult session as each teacher had their own idea of what they wanted to learn.

“Show me how to switch on and off,” said the Headmaster.

I took them through and each teacher practised how to switch on and off.

“I hope they will ask us how to switch off or on,” said Lutta. Next I taught them how to type.

Kwame could not find half of the letters that make up his name. We hadn't achieved much in three hours and each of them wanted me to let them go home with the laptop but luckily it did not have power.

“I have booked to sit with you during the practical,” the HM sent me an SMS that evening.

We all met at the DO's office for the interviews on Tuesday morning. Almost all the teachers were there and there was no space to park bicycles as all trees and walls had already been taken.

Soon the IEBC officials arrived and called us in the room in groups of five. There were five laptops and each of us was asked to perform a few operations including writing our names, saving documents, highlighting and bolding writings.

The HM sat next to me but did not do anything with the laptop. He kept looking at me but I could not assist him as the Returning Officer was standing next to us.

“Computer *yangu ilikuwa mbaya,*” he said as we left. I asked him what the problem was.

“It did not have the thing for moving the arrow; did you call it a rat?”

“You mean mouse?”

“Yes, it had no mouse.”



I told him that one could operate a laptop without a mouse but he complained that I hadn't taught him that the previous day.

"This is a ploy to fail me but I must get an elections job as I really need the money," he said.

I told him he would get more marks in the oral interview but he disputed that.

"I can't go for orals, *sitaki aibu ndogo ndogo.*"

By then Lutta had joined us and, although he had also not done anything with the computer, he was going for the orals.

"I must go tell then that this computer literacy requirement is useless."

"You wait," the HM said, "me, I will come tomorrow for the clerk interviews which I also applied for."

"That's fine, Bwana HM," Lutta said encouragingly. "Even in the elections there are those who wanted to be governors but settled for other seats because of the degree thing."

"*Simba akikosa nyama hula nyasi,*" the HM said, laughing.

I proceeded for the oral interviews where I performed exemplary. I pray that I get the position and the HM also gets appointed clerk and assigned to my station to work under me. That will be a perfect opportunity for me to avenge.

**Sunday, December 9, 2012**

**I'm caught in the crossfire between coalitions at home**

This has been one of the longest weeks. As you know, schools closed sometime ago and, since I was not invigilating KCPE, I was up and about Mwisho wa Lami waiting for Kenyatta University to open for the December session.

Then my sister Caro arrived. Caro played a major role in convincing me to marry Fiolina, as the two had met at the posho mill several times and knew each other for long.

The only person who had opposed my marriage to Fiolina was Yunia, the big sister, but for different reasons. You see, Yunia had been used to receiving handouts from me, and the arrival of Fiolina put this to an end. Luckily for me, Yunia returned to her husband soon after my First Lady arrived.

But she arrived back last week, two days after Caro. Yunia, as usual, brought her children "for the holidays" but, to date, Caro is yet to say what brought her home.

We had expected both to stay for a few days and go back to their husbands but, more than a week later, they are both still here.

And the failure by my brother, Ford, to send bus fare to his wife Rumona to travel to Shimo la Tewa has kept her around too.

Living with all these women in the same compound for even two days is not a task for the faint-hearted.

Although they had been friends for long, it became clear to me that Fiolina and Caro were no longer friends. It all had to do with shoes. Rubber shoes.

As everyone knows, last month, after we had earned our salary boon, I bought Fiolina two pairs of stylish Ngoma rubber shoes. Last weekend, Caro borrowed a pair to wear to the market. I did not even know this until last Monday when Fiolina complained to me about Caro.

"Tell that sister of yours to respect other people's property," Fiolina told me. I asked her to explain.

"I gave Caro my Ngoma shoes and now she has made them hers," Fiolina fumed. Since I had spent money on the shoes, I told Caro to return them immediately.

I was in the sitting room when Yunia's daughter brought the shoes.

"*Mwambie sikumpea zikiwa chafu?*" Fiolina shouted at girl. "*Arudishe vile zilikuawa!*"

**Breathing fire**

That evening, as we took supper, Caro came to our house. She was breathing fire.

"*Mulamwa, tutaheshimiana,*" she told Fiolina even before she sat down. "*We sio wa kwanza kununuliwa viatu na bwana wako!*"

"*Najua,*" answered Fiolina. "*na si uko na bwana, si umwambie akununuliwe pia wewe?*"

"*Unafikiria bwana wangu ni mshamba wa kuninnuulia Ngoma?*" Caro asked Fiolina, spoiling for a fight.

I had to defend Fiolina.

"Stop this nonsense Caro!" I told her, ordering her out of my house.

"*Dre, sikujua umekaliwa na bibi hivi,*" she said as she left. I did not answer her.

But if Fiolina had problems with Caro, she was getting closer to Yunia. They spent evenings together, plaiting their hair.

Mother did not like this and, come Wednesday, she stormed to our house.

"Yunia, is this how I brought you up?" she asked.

"*Mama, nini mbaya?*" Yunia asked.

Mother asked where her children were.

“Bedford is here and Leornida is in your kitchen,” Yunia answered.

“So who is taking care of Leornida? Has she eaten?”

Yunia said Caro was taking care of her daughter.

“When did Caro become your maid?”

“Let her also do some work,” Yunia told Mother. “*Mnapenda kubembeleza Caro sana.*”

“*Chunga hiyo mdomo yako, Yunia,*” Mother warned. “*Naona kwanini huwezi kuishi na bwana!*”

Yunia told Mother to keep her husband out of the discussion.

“*Umefunza dada yako hizi tabia mbaya mpaka pia yeye amekosana na bwana wake,*” Mother said.

It was only then that I learnt both Yunia and Caro had differed with their husbands, meaning they would stay for long.

For some reason, however, Mother has started getting closer to Rumona, and has been visiting her house every evening, even eating supper there. Yet, just a few weeks ago, the two were not seeing eye-to-eye.

Were it not for Caro, Father would be finding food home, as my mother has been eating in Rumona’s house. Caro and Father have always been close. The only time they differed was when Caro got married. But, as soon as she arrived home with a suit bought by her husband, they became friends again.

### **Three customers**

I had not really noticed that there were three separate camps in our home, until last Thursday. As you know, Rumona usually sells scones and paraffin outside her house. Since she gets about three customers a day, she rarely sits around her wares. So, Bedford, Yunia’s son, and Fiolina’s niece Frida have been minding her “shop”.

But last Thursday, Rumona claimed to have lost some money from her “shop”.

She came to our house complaining. We told her that we did not know who had stolen the money.

But, that evening, Frida was seen eating mandazis. When confronted, she claimed she had been given by Bedford, Yunia’s son.

I had spent most of the day at Hitler’s, and arrived home to find fireworks at home. It was not clear what was happening but there were three camps.

“You will return what your children stole from me,” Rumona told Fiolina and Yunia.

“We can no longer live with thieves here.”

Mother, her new ally, supported her.

“And you, Fiolina, these children must return to their homes. Andrea does not have the money to feed other people’s children!” she declared.

Caro and Father also took sides on the matter. They admonished Rumona.

“But when you leave money openly in a home with many thieves, what do you expect?” she asked.

Father added: “Rumona, I have always told you to keep the money you get from your business well.”

“But I must get my stolen money from the thieves’ parents,” Rumona said.

“Don’t call my son a thief!” Yunia said. “It was your mistake.”

I tried to arbitrate but it was very difficult. I was vilified by all the three camps for taking the middle ground. That is when I decided that I would no longer sit on the fence: I had to join one of the camps.

But I am not giving support free of charge. Scratch my back, I scratch yours. Which coalition should I join?

**Sunday, March 3, 2013**

**Ominous signs Fiolina plans to sit on me**

by MWALIMU ANDREW

When I did Fiolina the great favour of marrying her, one of the things I promised her was a wedding this April. But as this date approaches, it is increasingly looking like we are more likely to part ways than have a wedding.

It all started a few weeks after our highly publicised and respected marriage. As you know, Senje Albina, my aunt, is the one who introduced me to Fiolina. As the most advanced person in Mwisho wa Lami and its environs, it did not take me long to convince Fiolina I was the only candidate who was worth her vote. She voted for me.

In the earlier days, Senje Albina used to visit us quite frequently — but this came to a stop less than a month later. It was in mid-October when she visited us. I remember the day well because Fiolina had cooked chapatis. After the meal, Senje Albina called me aside.

“*Dre si kama unakula hivi utanona sasa,*” she joked. However, she warned me against eating chapatis. “*Usizoe chapati za Fiolina, maybe amekalia kabla akupe.*”

“Why would she sit on them?” I asked her, laughing.

“You don’t know?” she wondered. “*Si ndio akukalie kabisa!*” she said. I laughed at this, and assured her that Fiolina could not sit on me.

A few days later, Senje came and asked me to help her pay school fees for Theophilus her son. This was around the time when we had just received a salary increase. I planned to give Senje Sh3,500, until I told my First Lady.

**Denied money**

“*Tangu lini ukakuwa Red Cross?*” she asked me. “*Mimi sina lesa na viatu; nywele yangu ni mbaya* and you are here freely distributing money. Are you campaigning to be an MP?”

She clearly opposed my plan to give Senje the money. Once she was denied the money, Senje went around telling everyone that Fiolina had sat on me.

“*Chungeni kabla huyu Fiolina akalie Dre zaidi,*” she advised my parents. Once this information reached my sister Caro, it had as well reached Fiolina!

Needless to say, this caused a strain between Fiolina and Senje, a development that saw Senje’s visits stop. Fiolina would continue influencing most of my other decisions. For example, she stopped me from agreeing to allow my sister Yunia’s son move in with us yet she invited quite a good number of her relatives to stay with us.

Since I planned to be a model husband in the whole of Mwisho wa Lami and its environs, I totally acceded to many of her demands, since I never wanted a quarrel.

But some of the demands Fiolina has been making of late have made me to re-consider our relationship. It all started last Saturday morning. As you know, ever since Hon. Mutula Kilonzo banned weekend tuition, we have been having idle Saturdays.

As usual, I woke up late last Saturday and prepared to leave for Hitler’s. As I walked out of the house, I found Fiolina at the door. She blocked me.

“Where are you going?” she asked me.

“Is it your business where I am going?” I asked her.

“Yes it is, I must know where you are going,” she answered. “And if you are going at Hitler’s, I will not allow you to go.”

“What do you mean?” I asked her, pinched her nose and pushed her away. I walked to Hitler’s where I joined other teachers who had missed out on IEBC jobs to drown our frustrations.

It was about 8pm when I returned, only to find the door to my house locked, even though Fiolina and her retinue of relatives were all inside.

Clinton, her nephew, opened the door for me but as I entered, Fiolina slapped him.

“*Nani amekwambia ufungulie huyu mlevi mlango?*” she asked before slapping him again. Clinton started screaming and I immediately intervened.

“Why are you beating an innocent boy?” I asked her, clearly angry.

“*Kwani ni mtoto wako?*” she asked. “*Ngoja upate wako ndio upige kelele.*” This soon developed into a loud quarrel that attracted neighbours including my parents.

“What is happening here?” my father asked us as he approached my house.

“It is Fiolina who is beating up children,” I said but Fiolina told him that I was the one who had come back drunk and noisy.

### **Bought a drink**

My father ordered both of us to go to his house. Having not bought him a drink for a long time, I knew that I could not expect justice from him.

“Sit down both of you,” he said as soon as we got into his house. He called my mother to join us. After ordering her to switch off the radio, he started his lecture.

“Both of you are respected people here, why do you want to soil your names by quarrelling?”

“Me I did not quarrel,” said Fiolina. “It’s Dre who came back home drunk and noisy.”

“Stop lying, I was not noisy at all,” I answered. “It is you who refused to open the door for me.”

“My daughter, did you lock the door for Dre?” my mother asked.

“Yes I did and he knows the reason why?” Fiolina answered.

“I do not know why you locked the door to my own house.”

“Your son is very rude and we disagreed in the morning after he left without even telling me where he was going?”

“But I don’t have to tell you where I am going!” I loudly interjected.

“I am your wife and I must know where you are going,” she said. “What if something bad happened to you, where will we find you?”

“I can tell you where I am going sometimes, but I don’t need your permission to go anywhere,” I answered.

“I agree with my daughter,” said my father. “These election days are very dangerous and she must know where you are going.”

I was shocked to hear my father say that – a man who never informs my mother about any of his plans.

“Fine. I can inform her where I am going but I do not need her permission,” I said.

“Yes you do not need my permission but there are places where I will not allow you to go to,” she retorted.

I asked her which ones and she answered, “Hitler’s, at Sapphire’s and at Nyayo’s; you must stop going to those homes.”

“I agree with my daughter,” said my mother. “You should always inform her where you are going and you should also never go to the places she doesn’t want you to. I am sure she has good reasons why she doesn’t want you there.”

My father then ordered us back to our house. “As agreed, you will always notify my daughter before you go anywhere and ensure that she agrees with you,” he said. “I do not want to hear more quarrels from you two.”

We left his house. But Fiolina and my parents should know that I am not about to give up my constitutional rights and freedom of movement, assembly and association. Even if it means ending this marriage, I am ready for this. I just can’t be sat on.

**Saturday, October 20, 2012**

**Why some nominees for head boy and head girl must lose**

By MWALIMU ANDREW

Recently, our HM, Mr Juma, announced that school prefects would be appointed in the third term and not first term, as has always been the tradition.

“We want the Class Eight prefects to concentrate on revising for KCPE,” he explained at a staff meeting. He then directed the respective class teachers to present their nominees for the positions for consideration in the next meeting.

“Let’s pick pupils of high integrity, and who are also academically strong,” he added.

As a class teacher for Class Seven and the sanitation master, I short-listed Sandra, Nyayo’s eldest daughter; Prudentia, Fiolina’s distant cousin; and Bedford, Hitler’s youngest son.

Knowing that some enemies of development would accuse me of favouritism, I prepared a detailed brief on why I thought each was qualified. But this was not to be. After the HM introduced the agenda, Saphire interrupted him.

“Mr Headmaster, sir, why are we appointing prefects in contravention of the ministry’s directive?” he asked.

“Which directive are you talking about?” Juma asked.

“Read this,” Saphire said, passing around a newspaper cutting. ‘School prefects must be elected, orders Minister Kilonzo’ read the headline. In the article, the minister had outlawed appointment of prefects and directed all schools to practise guided democracy.

**Receive circular**

“That is just a newspaper report,” said the HM. “We cannot follow it until we receive a circular from the DEO.”

“Mr HM you want play with Mutula?” asked Tito. “Do you remember what he did to the Headmistress of the school whose dormitory burnt killing pupils?”

“But we cannot let these ignorant pupils elect their own prefects,” said Mrs Atika. “What if the elect crooks?”

“I agree with Mrs Atika,” said Kwame, the deputy. “They are too young to know what is good for them.”

After long deliberations, we agreed to let the pupils elect their prefects. But the HM had reservations.

“Is there a way we can ensure that our preferred pupils get elected?” he wondered. “That would make a mockery of democracy,” protested Saphire. He was supported by Tito who said: “Let the pupils decide!”

A vetting committee to clear the pupils to contest the elections was established. Saphire and I were members.

The headmaster announced at the morning parade the next day the good news and the pupils responded with jubilation.

“Those interested must apply through the Election committee after which there will be a one-week campaign period,” he said. The school went into a frenzy. After the parade, many Class Seven pupils were seen moving from one class to another seeking votes.

Two days later, the election committee met to vet the names. The most interesting were Kaunda, the councillor’s son and Alex, Hitler’s son. Alex is his father’s principal assistant in brewing and selling alcohol while Kaunda is a rude boy, whom we have suspended several times.



The deputy rejected these two nominees. "We cannot let this school be led by well-known crooks," he said.

"What example shall we be showing out there if we approve these?"

"A suspension cannot disqualify anyone from contesting," said Sapphire. "If the Ocampo Two are running for president, how can we prevent Kaunda or Alex from contesting?" Sapphire was the councillor's chief campaigner in the last elections and a regular at Hitler's.

As for the head girl, Tito presented a spirited campaign for Packetia, who is rumoured to be his girlfriend, but Mrs Atika opposed her nomination. We cleared all of them contest.

That evening, the HM called me to his office and I handed him the list of the candidates.

"This is a big joke," he said on seeing the nominees. "No councillor's son can head this school while I am headmaster here!

Juma never liked the councillor after he had opposed his appointment to head the school.

"Why don't we disqualify him?" he asked. I told him it was impossible.

"Since we can't stop their names from appearing on the ballot, we must ensure that they do not win the elections," the HM said. He wanted Malachi, his brother's son, to be head boy. I agreed to help out, on condition that Sandra, Prudentia and Bedford also get elected prefects.

A day after we cleared the candidates to contest the elections, the councillor visited the school.

"I am happy to hear that you want to elect Kaunda head boy," he said. No one answered.

He then went to the kiosk outside the school where he paid for mandazi for all the pupils.

Kaunda went from class to class announcing that there was free mandazi at the kiosk for his voters. Almost the entire school queued at the kiosk at lunch time, where he stood with a placard written: VORT FOR KAUNDA AS HERD BOY.

There were all manner of campaign graffiti everywhere: on walls, blackboards and toilets.

The headmaster gave me money to type posters for Malachi and my preferred candidates which I printed the next day.

He instructed the school watchman to paste them all over the school compound at night.

This caused uproar in the staffroom. Sapphire was incensed.

"It seems some candidates in this election are projects," he said at lunch time. "How can the other candidates compete when school resources are being used to support them?"

"Can you prove what you are saying?" said the Deputy.

"School money was used to pay Dre to print posters and the watchman was forced to distribute them. Using school resources for campaigns is unconstitutional," he said.

I defended myself saying that anyone who wanted my services could pay for them. With the election date fast approaching, I met the HM and Deputy to plot our next move.

"Dre, we need you to ensure that some people do not head this school," the HM said.

"I am ready to have anyone as head boy but not Kaunda," added the Deputy. "We must do everything to stop him. And since you are the one who will print the ballot papers, we shall need your help, Dre."

We discussed in detail how we shall stop Kaunda and Pocketia from becoming head boy and head girl respectively.

"There is nothing wrong with our actions," said the HM. "If you read clearly, the directive talks of guided democracy."

## **Changes galore to school timetable**

By MWALIMU ANDREW

Following the interdiction of Saphire, I was instructed to re-do the school timetable so that his classes would not go unattended.

On hearing this, teachers complained that no changes should be made as they were already overworked.

“Mr Headmaster, you knew very well our huge workload, so why did you interdict Saphire? Who did you expect to take over his classes?” asked Mrs Atika.

“Saphire was doing nothing anyway,” said Juma, the HM. “I have already requisitioned for an additional teacher.”

“Please get someone on PTA to take over Saphire’s classes,” said Ruth. “We are already overwhelmed.”

To stop any further discussion on the issue, the HM told me to make changes to the timetable. “I was not suggesting that changes be made to the timetable, I was ordering,” he said and closed the topic.

One of the advantages of being the only teacher with a laptop is that only I gets to be assigned some of the technical assignments like making the timetable.

You see, before anyone had a laptop, we used to have serious problems because when Kwame made one, lessons would clash as teachers were assigned to more than one class at the same time.

But with some soft hardware on my laptop, I was able to make timetables where lessons don’t clash. For me, this was the perfect opportunity to get back at some of my colleagues who, for one reason or another, had crossed my path.

That evening, I sat down to come up with a new timetable for the school.

Here are the details:

Tito: In the last few weeks, I had noticed that Tito tended to go to the nursery section of the school and spend long hours with Fiolina.

This was because most of his classes were in the afternoon, meaning he was idle in the morning. I had to change this. I gave him back to back classes in the mornings so that by the time he is free in the afternoon, Fiolina has already left.

Rumona: Although she is my sister-in-law, she has this habit of carrying fitina from school to home. This is because she had few classes in the afternoon and as a result she would leave school early to go gossip. But I had a solution. I gave her the last lessons almost daily, meaning that she could not leave school until late in the evening.

And to ensure that she does not arrive late to school, I also assigned her early morning classes. For three days every week, she had the first two classes and the last two classes, meaning that she would spend the entire day just sitting in the staffroom.

Lutta: You all know Luta. He goes to the farm before coming to school every day. I did not have a problem until he started looking at Fiolina suspiciously. There was no better way to get back at him than to scuttle his farming programme. I assigned him early morning classes so that he could not make it to the farm in the morning.

Kwame: Since his home is two villages away, Kwame cycles to school every day. Anyone who has cycled every day will tell you it's not an interesting experience in this weather where it rains every day from around 3 pm. To help him, I had, at the beginning of the term, not assigned Kwame late afternoon classes, so that he could leave school before it starts raining. But how did he repay me? By getting interested in Fiolina.

### Afternoon classes

My revenge was served cold — literally. I assigned him late afternoon classes so that the rains would always start when he is still around, and early morning classes so that he would arrive at school when it was still muddy.

Madam Ruth: As the HM's wife, she always uses Juma to get what she wants. Last time, Juma instructed me how he wanted her lessons arranged. It was only after I had finished the timetable that I realised she was always free at the same time as the HM and she would spend all her free time in his office.

However, this was an easy matter to deal with. I adjusted the timetable so that she was free when Juma had a class and vice-versa. This was to ensure they spend as little time together as possible. Our school is not a holiday camp.

The Headmaster: Like all HMs, Juma has this habit of lumping all his classes on one or two days so that on the other three days he could make endless trips to the DEO's office. I put this to an end by assigning him daily lessons at odd hours when it was clearly not possible to leave school.

Madam Anita: You will all remember how she made a lot of noise last year after she came from maternity leave. She actually came with a letter from the doctor instructing us to give her mid-morning classes. A year later, Anita was still coming to school at 10 am and leaving after lunch. I would not change her hours, but she has never been a supporter of my projects. Instead, she is always on Kwame's side so I scuttled her programme and gave her early morning classes.

Madam Mary: Madam Mary and I have come from far. Whenever I quarrel with Fiolina, I always visit her for support and we have become very tight as she always advises me on how to interpret Fiolina's moods. She also supports my suggestions during staffroom meetings.

### **Market day**

As a result of our friendship, I asked her to choose the times she wanted to be in class and ensured that we would both be free at the same time. I made sure that every Tuesday, our market day, both of us had no classes in the afternoon, so that we could take a stroll around the market. We also have no classes on Friday. For those who are about to start making nose, Madam Mary is not married.

Mrs Atika: Mrs Atika and I have always had a flat relationship. At times we are good friends but not always. But last month, she helped me big time. As you know, I had many expenses in the month of April and did not have enough money for rent at the beginning of last month. Mrs Atika loaned me the money which I am yet to pay back although she has been asking me about it.

To buy more time, I decided to assign her classes I knew she would love. Like Madam Mary, I gave her mid-morning lessons.

The timetable is ready and below it, I have included the following caveat: Lessons randomly assigned by computer soft hardware.

I will put it up in the staffroom today and it becomes effective from tomorrow. I know there will be resistance but, as the new government will attest, implementing change has never been easy!

[mwalimuandrew@gmail.com](mailto:mwalimuandrew@gmail.com) [www.facebook.com/mwishowalami](http://www.facebook.com/mwishowalami)

