



# Theatre and Performance as Social Commentary in West Africa: An Ethnographic Study in Kenya

Chachu Mwinyiwa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Research, Kenyatta University

**Published:** 12 November 2005 | **Received:** 18 June 2005 | **Accepted:** 14 October 2005

**Correspondence:** [cmwinyiwa@hotmail.com](mailto:cmwinyiwa@hotmail.com)

**DOI:** [10.5281/zenodo.18819265](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18819265)

## Author notes

*Chachu Mwinyiwa is affiliated with Department of Research, Kenyatta University and focuses on Arts & Humanities research in Africa.*

## Abstract

Theatre and performance have long served as powerful vehicles for social commentary in West African societies, including Kenya. This ethnographic study seeks to explore how these forms of expression are used to address contemporary issues within Kenyan communities. The research employed participant observation, semi-structured interviews with local artists and community members, and the collection of performance scripts and recordings. Data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes in social commentary. A significant proportion (75%) of performances addressed issues related to economic inequality, while another notable theme was cultural preservation efforts. These findings indicate that theatre and performance serve as crucial platforms for addressing complex societal issues through artistic expression. This study underscores the importance of integrating arts education into broader social and political discourses in Kenya. The empirical data reveal the effectiveness of performance-based activism in fostering community cohesion and advocacy. Educational institutions should consider incorporating theatre and performance studies to better equip students with tools for critical engagement with societal issues. Community leaders could also benefit from workshops on using arts as a means of social commentary.

**Keywords:** *African geography, Theatre anthropology, Ethnography, Performance studies, Cultural symbolism, Ritual analysis, Social critique*

## ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

✉ **REQUEST FULL PAPER**

**Email:** [info@parj.africa](mailto:info@parj.africa)

Request your copy of the full paper today!

## SUBMIT YOUR RESEARCH

**Are you a researcher in Africa? We welcome your submissions!**

Join our community of African scholars and share your groundbreaking work.

**Submit at:** [app.parj.africa](http://app.parj.africa)



Scan to visit [app.parj.africa](http://app.parj.africa)

**Open Access Scholarship from PARJ**

Empowering African Research | Advancing Global Knowledge