Society on Trial in *Society in the Dock*

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Abstract

Prince Kagwema's (1984) novel *Society in the Dock* uses the subversive metaphor "society in the dock" and the rhetorical device "No Father No Society" to critique societal notions of responsibility and accountability. The "No Father No Society" slogan, in particular, sharply critiques societal prejudices against children born in ways society deems unacceptable. This article uses Charles Wright Mills' concept of the sociological imagination, along with the concept of literary imagination, to analyse the novel's depiction of the relationship between an individual and society. Although the metaphor "society in the dock" indicts society for an individual's antisocial behaviour, the analysis shows that both societal and individual factors shape social problems. The analysis further shows that, beyond the subversive and rhetorical significance of the "No Father No Society" campaign, the slogan fails to capture the intricacies of parenting by focusing solely on paternal absence. The argument is not about paternal presence; it is about being present and supportive.

Keywords:
Price Kagwema, *Society in the Dock*, sociological imagination, literary imagination, No Father No Society.

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1. Introduction: Literary and Sociological Imagination

In 1970, C.S. Lewis published a compilation of essays titled *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, wherein he criticises the human tendency to 'accuse' God and place him 'on trial' as if he were a wrongdoer: "For the modern man" Lewis writes, "the roles are reversed; he is the judge, God is in the dock" (p.268). This courtroom metaphor demonstrates a shift from holding individuals accountable to holding God

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responsible. Even if the trial concludes with "God's acquittal," the implication remains that "man is on the bench, and God is in the dock" (p.268). Similarly, Albert, a key character in Society in the Dock, a novel that uses a similar courtroom metaphor, ponders the reasons behind immoral behaviour and reflects on who instils "evil ideas inside a person's heart: the Devil or society" (p.3-4). In a parallel reflection, Sood, another character and a half-brother to Albert, ponders God's role in societal stigma about illegitimate children. Stigmatised by society due to his illegitimate birth, he asks: Why does God bless the sexual act between married people yet not ensure that each act results in pregnancy? Does this suggest that children are just good or bad accidents of lovemaking? If it is not a sin when a married couple makes love, which does not result in pregnancy, how can one who is not married sin by doing the same thing? And how can the mere act of marrying make it acceptable and good? These inquiries sustain Lewis's analogy of "God in the dock." Nonetheless, Sood and Albert swiftly 'acquit' God and place responsibility for social problems on society. They argue that "you and me—the society contributes an awful lot to crimes committed by people," suggesting that "societal circumstances" shape individuals into "what they are" (p. 145).

Sood and Albert are half-brothers born to Miriam and Ega. Employing a *Deus ex machina* technique, Sood and Albert meet at work and become friends before discovering they are half-brothers. Portrayed as fate bringing the main characters together, their discovery at the narrative's outset is a deliberate, convenient plot device for exploring the theme of illegitimacy. United by blood, Sood and Albert resolve that the man who fathered them, Jackson Bumereng, the managing director of Bumereng Impex Ltd, should publicly acknowledge them as his sons. To further this goal, they launch a campaign, "No Father No Society", under the acronym NOFANOSO, suggesting that society will fail if illegitimate children are not recognised by their fathers. The main question they ask in the "No Father No Society" campaign is "why should society accept the birth of only certain children?" (p. 37). Both the question and the "No Father No Society" slogan illuminate the novel's primary concern and Mills' theorisation of how personal troubles connect to societal dimensions.

Kagwema's creative output is impressive. Born Osijah Mwambungu and later known by his pen name Prince Kagwema, he remains relatively unknown as a writer, especially compared with other early Tanzanian English-language novelists such as Peter Palangyo, Gabriel Ruhumbika, and Ismael Mbise. His literary contributions include *Veneer of Love* (1975), *Married Love is a Plant* (1983), *Chausiku's Dozen* (1983), *Society in the Dock* (1984), *Storm in a Teacup* (1988), and *Fear of the Unknown: Vadis Tanzania*? (1985).

Set mainly in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, *Society in the Dock* tells the story of two young men, Sood and Albert, who are both born as illegitimate children and face challenges in gaining acceptance from their society, which is a "society built on the sewage of birth, racial or colour prejudice" (p.37). Viewing societal rejection as an injustice, they resort to violence and commit a series of horrific crimes under the "No Father No Society". In response to the NOFANOSO atrocities, Bumereng escapes to Mauritius, where he fakes his death, travels to London, and undergoes plastic surgery to alter his looks. Plastic surgery is a symbolic metamorphosis, where Bumereng is altering his external appearance for convenience, but deep inside, he is still the same putative father. This mismatch between external convenience and internal struggle is a hallmark of irony. Upon his return, he discovers that his wife, Maggie, has married Philip, the family doctor. He also learns from Maggie that he is not the biological father of their only daughter, Julie; her biological father is Philip, the man Maggie initially loved. Ultimately, Sood and Albert abandon their pursuit of Bumereng and settle into ordinary lives. The two young men are eventually arrested and charged with the crimes they committed under the "No Father No Society" campaign.

As Sood and Albert get ready for their court appearance, they ponder a pressing question: "So, what do we do to prove to the world that we weren't born criminals and that it was due to forces beyond our control that made us do the terrible things we are being accused of?" (p.140). At the core of this question is an implied argument that society should hold individuals accountable for antisocial behaviour. As noted earlier, the analysis shows that this view glosses over the intricacies of social problems.

2. Blending Sociological and Literary Imagination

The concept of sociological imagination, theorised by Mills in *The Sociological Imagination*, offers a way to see "the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities" (p. 15). This approach focuses on the interplay between personal experiences and historical contexts, the individual and the community, the private and the public, and the self and the world. Mills's theory emphasises the need to "grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world" (p. 4). Applied to the analysis of the novel *Society in the Dock,* this approach imagines a link between individual moral imperfections and larger social injustice. This imagination illustrates the connection between the characters' personal lives and broader societal influences. Mills' core idea of sociological imagination is that "neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both" (p.3). Mills suggests that, by employing sociological imagination, one can examine the link between personal difficulties and societal issues and distinguish between situations stemming from an individual's decisions and those arising from social forces beyond their control. My application of the sociological imagination to Society in the Dock follows Ashleigh Louise Watson's claim that "the novel operates as an effective form of public sociology," which is crucial for "communicating sociological ideas in an accessible way" (p. 6). This approach lets me analyse Society in the Dock as a novel infused with what Richard Hoggart describes as a "combination of sociological imagination and literary sensitivity" (p. 265). This analysis seeks to understand how social concerns intersect with literary features, enabling an exploration of societal problems.

Mills criticises our limited awareness of social dynamics, attributing it to being "bounded by the private orbits" and the "close-up scenes" of our lives (p.3). He argues that this confinement to the "private orbits" contributes to our inability to "cope with the larger worlds" (p.4-5). Given that the objective of sociological imagination is to "grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society," it positions society at the forefront and, in doing so, aids us in transcending the narrow views of

individualistic or private epistemologies, which Mills calls "limited orbits" (p.8). In their explanation of the sociological imagination, Sean Seeger and Daniel Davison-Vecchione emphasise its strength in enabling individuals to envision how historically conditioned social influences shape personal experiences and inner lives. I aim to use Society in the Dock as a critical tool to explain the society-individual relationship.

Richard Hoggart's reference to the combination of literary and sociological sensitivity" resonates with my decision to pair Mills's sociological imagination with literary imagination. Mills' sociological imagination acknowledges literature's ability to unveil "values" and "suitable ways of feeling and styles of emotion and vocabularies of motive" (p.17). Furthermore, it acknowledges literature's significance, observing that "critics and novelists, dramatists and poets have been the major, and often the only, formulators of private troubles and even public issues" (p.18). This theorisation suggests a blending of literary and sociological research, aligning with Richard Hoggart's assertion that the writer and the sociologist are so "close to each other" that the sociologist's "capacity to find hypotheses is decided by his imaginative power" (p.265). Elsewhere, Martha Nussbaum, in "The Literary Imagination in Public Life," examines literary imagination as a form of public imagination, noting how imagination aids judgment and personal consideration in assessing "the quality of life of people" (p. 879). These principles of literary imagination align with the central focus of sociological imagination: exploring individual-society relationships.

In this article, literary imagination is used to analyse the significance of the textual features in *Society in the Dock*. Elizabeth Camp, for example, argues that literary imagination is an "offline" simulation of actual beliefs through "representational" creativity (p. 107). Kagwema's attempt to simulate reality is confirmed in his preface to the novel, where he declares that *Society in the Dock* "reflects life" in which we "see beauty as well as ugliness" (p. iv). This link between imagination and novelistic realities makes sense only if we see literary imagination as Jean Bessiere has advised: "as the imagination of the commonplaces" (p. 37). Even where imagination is abused through "imaginary transgression", Bessiere argues, it is often in "constant

agreement upon the life forms that men share. (p. 37). Kagwema's preface is a deliberate paratextual element that serves his sociological imagination. Nowhere is this combination of literary and sociological elements more clearly encapsulated than on his dedication page. He specifically dedicates the novel to a girl whose boyfriend refuses to accept responsibility for her pregnancy. Presented as a poem, the dedication demonstrates the merger between literary and sociological imagination. As Pellatt argues, the dedication also shows how paratextual elements "surround and support the core text, like layers of packaging that initially protect and gradually reveal the essence of the packaged item" (2013, p. 1). I reproduce the poem here because it sums up the "No Father No Society" slogan:

> To a girl who has made a child
> With one who denied it in a rage
> On being told in words sweet and mild
> That the child was his very image
> Resulting from love passionately acted
> In private and not on a public stage
> This book is sympathetically dedicated. (p. i)

While Kagwema is sympathetic toward the young single mother in the poem, the boy —not society —is held accountable, an inconsistency in Kagwema's thesis that shifts from blaming society to blaming an individual. Introduced by Bakhtin, heteroglossia is especially valuable in examining the novel "as a diversity of social speeches (p. 262). Bakhtin further explains that heteroglossia helps to "express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (p. 324). The inconsistency in the dedication poem suggests a potential heteroglossic situation in the novel's main narrative.

Literary imagination is the ability to think in metaphors. This potential is visible in the novel's careful deployment of language devices. David J. Leigh highlights the importance of language devices in appreciating the text's literariness: "As symbolic, literature can embody human experiences which are impossible to convey in other types of language" (p. 223). Among other devices, Leigh mentions the role of style, figurative language, narrative shape, and symbolic events in deciphering a text's meaning.

The subversive metaphor "society in the dock" and the slogan "No Father No Society" suggest the subversive character of literary imagination. Martha Nussbaum argues that "literature, and the literary imagination, are subversive" (1998, p. 879). Literary imagination is subversive because it offers alternative ways to view, interpret, and narrate society. Nussbaum further argues that subversion in a literary text encompasses the characters' feelings, the way the story is told, the shape and texture of the sentences, and the pattern of the narrative. Subversion hinges on the possibility of alternative perspectives or voices in the novel. While the novel's main orientation is to demonstrate society's culpability, the analysis also examines other voices and counterpoints consistent with Mikhail Bakhtin's view of the novel as a diversity of voices.

3. *Society in the Dock* as a Social Critique

Mills argues that sociological imagination is an "attitude of mind" that involves concern about "the values that are threatened" in society (p.130). The "No Father No Society" campaign illustrates Sood and Albert's awareness of the imminent threat that society will fail if the problem of illegitimate children is not addressed. The "No Father No Society" campaign is therefore the boys' reaction to the societal and systemic factors. Kagwema's omniscient narrator claims that the problem lies with society rather than the individuals. The problem is society because it is "built on the sewage of birth, racial or colour prejudice" (p. 37). The "No Father No Society" campaign is retribution, which, as James Scott has argued, is characterised by "rage, insult, anger, and violence" (p. 37). The atrocities, anger, insults, and chaos that result from the campaign are the boys' response to the societal foundation that is defined by the metaphor of 'sewage'. By displaying overt rage against society, the "No Father No Society" resistance does not fit James Scott's notion of the "weapon of the weak" because it makes no effort to "clothe the practice of resistance" but instead openly declares the atrocities and owns them (Scot p. 283). In inscribing the NOFANOSO acronym on all the crime scenes, "burning down the godown of the Bumereng Impex Limited, murdering the couple related to their father, murdering their father's informer, bank robbery, among others) The boys own the atrocities and establish a connection between personal troubles and public issues. By leaving inscriptions at the

crime scenes, the boys convey the message that this is what happens when society or fathers abandon their children. In this way, the boys' creativity lies in devising the slogan that sums up their philosophy.

For example, the sewage metaphor depicts societal corruption. By arguing that the fictional society is built on sewage, the assumption is that its foundation is dirty and corrupt. In contrast, the sewage metaphor also suggests that the boys are like a sewage system, often separated from society's main activities. Like the sewage system, Sood and Albert are buried and separated from society. The sewage metaphor is therefore a stark rendition of the "society in the dock" metaphor, highlighting a society's role in discriminating against the boys. The irony, however, is that the boys are fighting for acceptance and recognition in a morally flawed society, as the sewage metaphor suggests. The question is: are they trying to secure validation from a society already corrupted? This becomes situational irony: they seek recognition from the system they deem filthy. By arguing that they hate this kind of society and "belong to it rather uncomfortably" (p.17), they show how they are stuck in a system they do not fully agree with, a mismatch between the society they were born in and the society they would like to be—this contrast between the real and the ideal fuels their "No Father, No Society" atrocities.

According to Mills, "man is a social and a historical actor who must be understood, if at all, in close and intricate interplay with social and historical structures" (p.158). Sood and Albert's miseries are not isolated from history. Their lives are a constant struggle against the dirty history of how they came into being and how that history translates into social otherisation. This way, the metaphor "Society in the Dock" becomes a device for interrogating societal norms of belonging and unbelonging. The "No Father No Society" campaign is therefore the boys' punitive approach to society for dehumanising them. The question is whether the violence and atrocities they orchestrate under the campaign help them bring justice. Apart from being a form of subversive speech, the violence and the crimes, as well as their targeting of the symbols of prejudice, do not help them solve the problem; in fact, more problems and injustices are created.

Mills argues that the sociological imagination highlights the role of "widely accepted moral symbols" in shaping societal meanings (p.36). These moral symbols are used to rationalise societal intrusion into individuals' lives, functioning as "symbols of justification" (p. 36). Although Albert's mother, Ega, is happily married to a church pastor, Reverend Tumbo, she cannot live with her son, Albert. As a pastor in a moralistic society, Reverend Tumbo must set a standard by not appearing to offer moral support to women like Ega, who, according to societal prescriptions, are social deviants. To him, adopting Albert would signify such support. Sending Albert to live with a poor aunt means the reverend distances himself from his stepson, a living exhibit of his wife's premarital carelessness. Reverend Tumbo avoids ascribed shame—shame that comes from being associated with someone with disreputable qualities. In this way, Albert becomes an object tossed here and there from an early age because society prioritises the technicalities of birth. Albert's stepfather is prioritising reputation over compassion. As a spiritual and moral leader (and a father figure), he fails to care for his stepson, revealing that society as a whole is devoid of love. As a man of God, he should have been proud to inherit someone else's responsibilities. In this way, he shows no compassion toward the stepson, the wife, or the putative father. As a stepfather, he is present but not supportive.

Mills argues that the sociological imagination involves grasping the "interplay of men and society" and examining what this interaction reveals about who people are (p. 5). This interplay is vital to understanding the "larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of various individuals" (p. 5). The society in *Society in the Dock* holds the boys and their mothers accountable—mothers for succumbing to the perils of urban existence and the boys for being born out of wedlock. This viewpoint overlooks systemic factors for prostitutes and young offenders; instead, it blames and punishes them by labelling them as social misfits.

The prevailing view is that the mothers' involvement in premarital prostitution emerges from their "lust and love for easy money" and their "happy-go-lucky life" approach to surviving in the city (p.5). The idiom "happy-go-lucky life" offers a shallow explanation for the carefree attitude

society misreads in women's lives. In a typical heteroglossic context, the narrator critiques this blindness by deploying a proverb in defence of the mothers: "A hungry stomach has no ears" (p. 40). This saying does not necessarily approve of the institution of prostitution; it is an appeal to critically consider the factors that force Miriam and Ega into prostitution. After all, as the narrator argues, "mtoto umleavyo ndivyo akuavyo"—a child grows up the way they were raised (p.141). The insinuation is that Miriam and Ega are victims of poor parenting. These proverbs only explain their involvement but do not necessarily excuse their wickedness. In other words, in deploying them, the narrator does not condone prostitution but seeks to explain the factors beyond the problem, as if to say the remedy to the problem lies not in castigating the mothers but in finding solutions to the systemic challenges.

Even then, the proverbs themselves show considerable heteroglossia. The proverb "A hungry stomach has no ears" reflects on how societal poverty affects young girls' lives. At the same time, Mzee Atuman's link of the mothers' premarital sex with the "happy-go-lucky life" attitude is another voice, a surface moral judgement of the women. These two voices and moral judgements create a layered dialogue, in which one indicts society while the other indicts the individual. The proverb also highlights the intersection of poverty, unacceptable livelihood strategies, and societal judgment. By bringing out this proverb, the narrator reveals the women's desperation, especially how abject family poverty closed off all the survival options for the mothers. Through this proverb, the narrator adopts a critical stance toward society's role in pushing women into stigmatised occupations. The mothers in this context are sacrificing their bodies and risking their future to cover up the inability of their families to take care of them. Their desperation therefore stems not from an inherent zeal to enjoy life, but from love for their families. Society's failure to acknowledge this as a sacrifice accounts for the novelistic empathy.

Contradiction is the hallmark of heteroglossia. By analysing this novel as a heteroglossic work, we can identify the various voices and characters who share responsibility for the hardships the mothers and boys face. After deep reflection, Mzee Mbegu, a former chauffeur for Bumereng, admits, "I must

have contributed to making Miriam a prostitute" (p.9). Pimps like Mzee Mbegu Athuman bear responsibility for transforming Miriam into a city prostitute. Understood in the context of the "No Father No Society" angle, the observation suggests that although Miriam had parents, pimps such as Mzee Athuman took advantage. Miriam's parents' failure lets us extend the "No Father No Society" philosophy to contexts where father figures exist in a child's life but are not sufficiently supportive.

It is challenging for Sood and Albert to navigate their lives without being psychologically distressed. When Sood finally has his first sexual experience with a girl, he thinks about how his birth resulted from his parents' casual sexual encounters: "So, this is how bastards are made", he wondered (p.75). Here, a scathing satire, specifically dark humour, is deployed to comment on the absurdity of society's harsh judgment on illegitimate children who are most of the time born as an accident. The satire seeks to deride Sood's society for the harsh treatment of illegitimate children, as if to suggest that the real 'bastards' are the adults who are reckless in their sexual adventures. Sood has just had a casual, almost accidental intimacy, and wonders if he could have created an illegitimate life. This realisation is so traumatising that he feels he is almost perpetuating that cycle of illegitimate children. He is struggling with his own illegitimacy, but the sexual encounter reminds him that he is also about to be another putative father like his own.

Living in a society that stigmatises illegitimate children produces automatic defensive reactions. These reactions can be verbal or physical. The stigma associated with bastardy makes Sood lose his first job after allegedly "flattening the nose of another worker who had called him an 'awkward bastard '" (p.9). In this context, the term 'bastard' serves as a derogatory reminder of sexual deviance and undesirability. The verbal abuse he suffers in this case says a lot about the person who perpetrates it. The fact that this kind of language and verbal abuse can find space at the workplace suggests a prevailing culture of contempt in society. This explains the double standard of the consequences: the verbal abuser is tolerated, while the physical abuse resulting from the verbal abuse is punished by summary dismissal. The employer addresses the symptoms of the problem, namely insults and physical abuse. Sood's decision to physically abuse the

coworker does not help. This explains the limitation of violence as a solution, just as it is the case with all the "NO Father No Society" crimes.

According to Mills, "troubles occur within the character of the individual and the range of his immediate relations with others," which means that the "resolution of troubles properly lies within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu" (8). Maggie and Phillips love each other, but differences in class and race keep them from marrying. This means that Maggie must choose someone else, even though she loves Phillips. Therefore, Maggie's marriage to Bumereng is primarily one of practicality—a " marriage of convenience rather than the one in which there was a union of hearts" (p.5). The marriage of convenience challenges the conventional perception of marriage, where love should be its foundation. Maggie's marriage to Bumereng is practical because both "came from distinguished, ancestral, and affluent families." Moreover, their parents "were recognised as pillars of the Christian church" within their community. Maggie and Bumereng may love each other, but not enough to marry each other out of genuine desire. In the circumstances, the parents are to blame for Maggie's marriage to someone she does not love.

In this fictional society, birth status suggests that some children are more socially acceptable than others. Sood and Albert face greater vulnerabilities than children born in socially and legally acceptable relationships. Because they are born bastards, Sood and Albert are called various names, the most demeaning being "scavengers" and "dirty fingers" (p.34). As scavengers, they are symbolically defined as opportunists trying to gain access to Bumereng's riches. As a metaphor, Sood and Albert use the "No Father No Society" campaign to exploit society. The metaphor of dirty fingers suggests that Sood and Albert are sneaky and dishonest. This suggests their campaign is also a shady game. These metaphors also relate to the geographic spaces they occupy. These spaces are where scavenging is a livelihood strategy, and filth is the norm. While their father resides in his affluent house in the Oysterbay suburb, Sood and Albert endure severe poverty in a "dusty room, infested by fleas and fat rats"—a dilapidated structure that "bathes in filth"—a slum for uneducated boys and girls who harbour criminals. In this way, society acts as a gatekeeper, keeping the

boys at a distance and preventing them from crossing the existing barriers. The reference to the slums and bathing in filth echoes the earlier sewage metaphor in the analysis. Symbolically, the boys' lives and their father's are worlds apart, and the geographical spaces they occupy underscore this disparity. The Oyesterbay residential area is defined by order, structure, and civility, while the Manzese slums, where the boys live, are a neighbourhood marked by raw, gritty survival mode. These spaces symbolically represent affluence and abject poverty, with social injustice at their core. The disparity between the two spaces illustrates that the boys' assumed biological proximity to wealth does not translate into quality of life.

To justify societal stigma, Sood and Albert look elsewhere for evidence. They express discontent that the Roman Catholic priests do not perform baptisms for children born out of wedlock. This condemnation stems from the church's moral opposition to the unacceptable sexual relations that produce such children, yet it does not sufficiently take into account the root causes of illegitimacy. By bringing up the issue of baptism, the boys wonder whether it is the church's suspicion of children born out of wedlock or the suspicion of the parents' commitment to raise the children as Catholics. What is clear is that the illegitimate children are punished for the sins of their parents. If we understand it as a theological and doctrinal issue, then the question becomes one of priority: people or doctrine? This is the dilemma that Sood and Albert want to expose regarding the church.

The courtroom metaphor of "society in the dock" challenges society's actions, or lack thereof, in shaping people into who they are. To make his point, the narrator draws on the biblical narrative of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In the story, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea, would have pardoned Jesus after whipping him for being a political troublemaker. Nonetheless, the crowd loudly insisted on his execution by crucifixion. The governor, unable to withstand the public pressure, acquiesced and had Jesus crucified to death on the cross. The narrator believes the mothers cannot be blamed for acquiescing to the man-eat-man city life. If yielding to societal influences is a sign of weakness, many notable and influential individuals in history, including Pilate, share that weakness. The claim that Pontius Pilate decided to have Jesus crucified as a result of the pressure

from the Jews crowd raises the question of free will. He could have decided otherwise because he held power in his own right. Kagwema's strategy is therefore not to compare the women's helplessness with Pilate's—for Pilate was powerful but chose not to act—but to show that societal pressure shapes how people behave. Here, allusion helps us understand the questions of societal complicity, guilt, and innocence, linking to the novel's title, Society in the *Dock*. Pontius Pilate's washing of hands symbolises societal complicity, as society failed to act in the women's case.

Internalised stigma keeps a problem a protected secret. The societal stigma has forced the mothers not to reveal to their sons the identities of their fathers. As a passive participant in this enduring discriminatory notion, Mariam, for instance, provided Sood with "as many versions of what happened to his father as there are days in a year" (p.2). Albert, for his part, had been warned against the dangers attendant on asking too many questions about his father's absence (p.2). Enduring this for many years is psychologically traumatising. And keeping the problem a secret creates more problems for the sons. In the novel, the mothers' lies contribute to the sons' incomplete social development. Only later in life do the young men discover the truth for themselves. For instance, following a brief sexual encounter with Hilda, Albert feels regret and comes to understand " how babies are made merely as a byproduct of casual pleasures" (p.70). He concludes that children are either a "good or bad accident" (p.70). When Sood has sexual relations with a girl, he experiences a mix of anxiety and relief as he "understood how bastards come to be" and "yet he could not distinguish between them (the bastards) and the children born of marriage." He believes that "all children are conceived in an accidental fit" stemming from their parents' irresistible sexual force, or libido (p.74). Regardless of whether libido is compelling, Sood's perspective, like his half-brother Albert's, is that blaming individuals for problems they did not directly create is unfair. These revelations suggest that societal morals have contributed to and perpetuated the boys' incomplete socialisation.

Sood and Albert's society suffers from what Bauman et al. have called the "double plague of ignorance and impotence" (p. 59). While societal ignorance entails failure to display "knowledge of their situations",

impotence refers to a limited "sphere of their freedom of choice" (p.59). Bauman et al. echo Mills' argument that "the job of the sociological imagination is to show how personal life and individual biography are intimately connected with historical events and structural processes' (p.3-4). Swaleh, the Chief Inspector of Police, illustrates this problem of ignorance. Consistent with Bauman's notion of societal ignorance, Swaleh is not motivated to investigate the social patterns and dynamics that lead to the boys' behaviour, let alone the significance of the NOFANOSO inscriptions. As a result, the Police Force focuses on identifying the culprits—the boys—aiming to imprison or even eliminate them. In essence, this represents a method of addressing a problem by targeting an individual. By targeting individuals rather than the system, the approach punishes some while leaving others unpunished. Swaleh himself is deeply disturbed by his own "contribution to the population of bastards" but remains unpunished as a high-ranking police officer (p. 128). The irony here is that he seeks to bring Sood and Albert to justice while fathering more 'Soods' and 'Alberts.'

In demonstrating further ignorance, Swaleh is remorseful about his contribution, but proceeds to criticise the girls for not using contraceptives, only to learn later that they do not know anything about contraceptives. This lack of sexual education is so severe that Anna, Bumereng's girlfriend, admits to having once disposed of "an illegitimate baby in the latrine as she had no idea how to abort" and that "nobody had told her about contraceptives" (p.137). In this context, the systemic issues, rather than the girls themselves, are to blame. These girls have never been taught about the risks associated with casual sexual encounters, unplanned pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases. Yet, when they become pregnant, they face criticism for not adhering to societal morals. These shortcomings lie within the system, not with the individuals.

According to Percy Kammerer's theory about the link between illegitimacy and crime, an illegitimate child is "more likely to become a criminal or a prostitute than is a child born within marriage." However, the likelihood is "not due to innate mental or physical weakness but to the treatment which the illegitimate child gets during the developmental period" (p.13). In their theory of social rejection, Nathan DeWall and Brad Bushman argue that

there is a strong link between social rejection and violence. They claim that social rejection "increases aggression" and "undermines self-regulation" (257). Consistent with Mills' theory of the sociological imagination, what begins as the boys' offences against Bumereng quickly escalates into crimes against society at large. With self-regulation undermined, Sood and Albert cannot clearly define their enemy, ultimately leading them to see society at large as the real enemy. This revenge illustrates Mills' claim that a private issue can swiftly transform into a public threat.

The narrator compares the boys' maltreatment to the way a greedy master treats his dog. The proverb says, "a dog starved at the master's gate predicts the ruin of the state" (p.25). Sood and Albert feel that, by discriminating against them, society, like the master's ill-treatment of the dog, is sowing the seeds of its own destruction. Metaphorically, Sood and Albert are dogs, and society and their father are the masters. This folk wisdom closely parallels the message in the NOFANOSO inscription: society will fail if it does not recognise illegitimate children. It is this reduction of the boys to the status of dogs that explains why they are not only "upset by the society's attitude to people born as they are" but are also convinced that Bumereng and the broader society have wronged them and should be "subject to their wrath and revenge " (p.140, 25).

The question is: what do Sood and Albert hope to achieve by taking revenge against the larger society? Are they hoping to stop the disrespect in some way? When Sood and Albert kill the Dewanis, because they are connected to their father, it represents a misdirected form of revenge, as a vicarious act of retribution against a larger society and not necessarily their putative father. In their theory of revenge, Arne Sjostrom and Mario Gollwitzer suggest that a key element of displaced retaliation is "entitativity"— "the extent to which an aggregate of individuals is perceived as a unified, coherent entity" (p.192). It is, therefore, accurate for the narrator to state that "for the first time in Dar es Salaam, and in his life, Bumereng attended a funeral" to grieve alongside the Dewanis relatives (p.30). While this constitutes displaced revenge, it serves to diminish Bumereng's confidence, as he is the sole individual aware of the connection between the NOFANOSO inscriptions found at the site of the brutal murder of the

Dewanis and the two half-brothers. The murder of the Dewanis and all the subsequent killings illustrate, as Mills theorised, how personal troubles can easily turn into public concerns. Indeed, as Sood confirms, this misplaced revenge is wrongly construed as part of their process of avenging themselves on society, which they think is giving them "a raw deal" (p. 77). Apparent in the use of the tagline "raw deal" is the emphasis on unfair treatment because of one's birth, a resonance of the earlier metaphor of society built on the sewage of birth prejudice. The atrocities are, therefore, seen as a reciprocal aggression, returning humiliation with humiliation against society.

Critical to Sood and Albert's quest for recognition is what the narrator calls their "indomitable will-power" and "stubbornness" to extract recognition from Bumereng and society in general, even if it means chasing this "to the end of the world" (80). By arguing that they can do anything to achieve their aim, they suggest that when retribution is the motive, it becomes an illusion one is forced to live with day by day, turning it into a form of bondage. Yet, in the process, their resolve is flawed, as they fail to define their enemy, ultimately victimising even the innocent. A saying applies: "Before you draw a bow, you must first see to it that your aim is on a straight path to hit the target" (p.80). Sood and Albert are prepared to kill even Bumereng's daughter, Julie, if need be. What they envision as a rampage on society quickly becomes a rampage on innocent individuals, some of whom are not directly related to the issue at hand. This approach leads them away from an effective solution. In the process, they not only become crooks but also grow more morally rotten inside. For instance, when he sleeps with Inspector Zawadi, the thought of being an illegitimate child fighting for social acceptance not only turns him to behave like a "licentious bull" during sex, he also finds self-assurance in that although he is a confirmed bastard, he can sleep with a "beautiful, soft, cute chick who was born properly" and is probably much more educated than he is (p.68). Sood and Albert are becoming a force to be reckoned with, to the extent that anyone who interacts with them fears for their life.

From Mills' perspective, sociological imagination enables a person to "understand his own experience and gauge his fate" and "to use the information and to develop a reason to achieve lucid summations of what

is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves" (p. 5). The boys' sexual experiences, primarily casual encounters with prostitutes, have offered them insights into what their mothers endured, leading them to suspect that Bumereng might not be their father. Sood reinforces this idea: "I think I now know what being born is all about, and I don't have to worry anymore about who's my father" (p.109). This epiphany is further deepened by the boys' thoughts on the deceptions they were subjected to regarding their fathers. For Sood, there's a lingering question: "Is it possible that she [his mother] was lying to him on her deathbed about Bumereng? For Albert, his mother was "always evasive" about revealing his father's whereabouts. Thus, it is fitting that the conclusion they come to together is that "Bumereng might not be our father" (p.109). This realisation is followed by their resolve to abandon their search for their father and recognise that "children do not belong to their fathers…they belong to life" (p.109). This understanding is best exemplified by well-known instances of "children whose parents –both mother and father—die on the same day they are born" (p.78).

This notion of fatherhood as a construct implies that, as an identity, fatherhood is a legal fiction—a claim accepted as accurate for legal reasons, even if it may not be. The boy's realisation that children belong to society, not to their fathers, counters their "No Father No Society" project, suggesting the campaign focuses more on blaming paternal absence than on addressing the problem's root causes. The message here is that children are shaped by community, not just biological ties. Sood and Albert are finally convinced that their father is mere 'fiction' and believe that even if they gain recognition, the paternal relationship will likely be just as artificial. What is apparent in all these realisations is what Mills calls the "transvaluation of values": the sociological imagination's ability, through "reflection and sensibility", to review taken-for-granted meanings and assumptions (p.8). As a form of review, transvaluation also involves self-reflection and, for the boys, a review of their efforts to gain societal recognition. Their giving up the chase for Bumereng and settling into ordinary jobs suggests that a good life does not come from constantly reliving painful past experiences. This sentiment is reflected in their resolve to give up their "wild goose chase" for Bumereng, which they agree is a

futile endeavour, which the narrator likens to "pushing a stone up a hill almost right at the top to see it roll down" (p.109). On one level, the saying criticises the approach the boys chose; on the other, it affirms an individual's failure against society.

According to Mills, "uneasiness and indifference" condition is the "signal feature of our period: the "uneasiness itself that is the trouble; …the indifference itself that is the issue" (p.12). The uneasiness and indifference that characterise the life, the "beat feeling that all is somehow not right", result from contemporary minds that "divorce the individual life from the larger institution within which that life is enacted" (p.12). By pimping for Miriam, Mzee Mbegu is not only indifferent but is also part of the problem, which is consistent with Mills' definition of indifference, which is "when people are neither aware of any cherished values nor experience any threat" (p.11). It is this indifference that makes Mzee Mbegu happily share his awareness of many others who could have been Sood's father, which serves to confirm Miriam's involvement in prostitution. Based on Mzee Mbegu's description, Sood's case falls into the hit-and-run illegitimacy category. Shorter defines this type of illegitimacy as involving "temporary liaisons where the partners articulate romantic sentiments and substantive ego awareness, and thereby are sexually expressive, yet are not inclined to remain together after conception has taken place, or are prohibited by the force of events from doing so" (p.243).

The indifference also applies to the police inspector, Swaleh. Swaleh, a police officer, owes his success to his collaboration with his wife, Inspector Zawadi, who works in the same police department. Inspector Zawadi has such deep affection for her husband and the police force that she engages intimately with criminals, giving her insights that help her husband solve cases. This portrayal is satirical, mocking Zawadi's incompetence as a police detective and ridiculing systemic weaknesses in the police force. Ironically, it suggests that success is not always what it appears to be. For many people, Zawadi is a hard-working, successful detective, but deep down, she knows she is a failure. However, when examined through the sociological imagination and system-blame approach, Zawadi can be absolved from such judgments. In an environment where the police force laments "ill-training" and struggles to differentiate "homicide from germicide" or

"murder from homicide," it is essential to scrutinise the effectiveness of their training. Secondly, given that the country is "too large for the size of the police force," along with "poor equipment" and "outdated signalling systems," one must question whether Zawadi should shoulder all the blame for her investigative methods. In other words, the government also bears responsibility for the police force's overall ineffectiveness. Only after the police force receives adequate training and resources, along with proper "education for crime prevention, detection, and investigation," can we rightfully criticise morally corrupt officers like Zawadi (p.42).

While the novel's resolution may not be persuasive, as Kagwema eliminates Sood, Albert, Bumereng, and Swaleh by orchestrating a car accident that kills them, it still supports his aim of holding society accountable. It is narrated that the driver of the petrol tanker involved in the accident with the police car was intoxicated. In this instance, Kagwema encourages us to recognise the impact of alcohol on the driver's impaired driving and to observe a clear connection between alcohol consumption and criminal behaviour. He wants us to understand that his reckless driving is directly related to alcohol use. In this light, the narrator prompts us to consider drunk driving as a societal issue rather than an individual one. Demonstrating the connections between personal and public spheres, a core concept of Mills' sociological imagination, the narrator illustrates that the driver's employer was aware of the driver's chronic alcoholism but failed to take any action. Therefore, when the accident occurs, society—including the employer, who remained silent about the driver's drinking problem—should be held accountable. In this way, they share the moral responsibility for the incident. By refraining from addressing the driver's alcohol issues and allowing him to continue in his role as a driver, the employer becomes morally implicated. This societal negligence is captured by the nature of the accident that kills Sood, Albert and the police constable:

> The van had overturned twice over a group of pedestrians after it had been hit by a petrol tanker. Albert, Sood and the police constable- to whose arm they had been handcuffed- were among those who died on the spot. It was established later, without room for doubt, that the driver of the petrol tanker was

> driving under the influence of alcohol and that his employers knew that he was an inveterate, habitual drunkard (p.147).

Here, the question is both the ultimate bind and the tragic irony. The police constable and the handcuffs symbolise the system's control over individuals and the chains that strangle them. The system's grip on individuals' lives is inescapable, even in death. In other words, even death does not break the chain. In this way, the problem Sood and Albert grapple with through the "No Father No Society" slogan creates a web that catches everyone, including the system itself, represented by the police constable. In a failed society like this, no one is safe. Discrimination is therefore detrimental for the victims, the perpetrators and the system as a whole.

As a symbol, the handcuffs represent a systemic entanglement of deviants and non-deviants, as if to suggest that, as human beings, we are all connected. The handcuffs suggest that what begins as Sood and Albert's problem rolls over and becomes a problem that catches everyone. Without offering its English equivalent, the narrator uses a metaphor for the insect called *ing'eng'esi* in the Nyakyusa language. However, the description shows that the insect is a dung beetle. The insect carries its load and problems by rolling it into a ball and pushing it backwards with its hind legs. When it encounters an impediment, it somersaults over it repeatedly in any direction to avoid the stumbling block. After avoiding it, it resumes its journey backwards again.

Kagwema's society behaves like an *ing'eng'esi*, neither interested in understanding the root causes of problems nor in contributing to them. By preferring a punitive approach to social deviants, society abdicates its responsibility and, like an ingénu, ensures a backwards rather than a forward movement. The *ing'eng'esi* metaphor has two sides that both support and challenge the novel's placement of society on the dock. The beetle's ability to carry a load heavier than its own weight suggests individual accountability. Just as the beetle rolls its ball, each person in society often carries their own load. They might be pushing it without always seeing the path ahead. The connection between the NOFANOSO slogan and the dung beetle metaphor is poignant. For these boys, the dung ball was an unexpected burden. The father's rejection is the moment that the ball is dropped, and suddenly, they are left to push it. They cannot see

the path ahead clearly because they focus on the immediate, immense task of surviving and caring for themselves, relying solely on their instincts, like the beetle.

Society in the Dock appears to suffer from what Robyn Warhol calls "narrative refusal," which points to flaws in a narrative caused by gaps. Some of these gaps are particularly noteworthy; H. Porter Abbott calls them "egregious gaps," suggesting that while they are "central to a narrative," they can be "beyond the reader's grasp" (p. 132). These gaps are so vital that they cannot be readily addressed. Because Society in the Dock focuses on the boys' endeavour to gain recognition from Bumereng, it is essential to discuss the unexplained physical resemblance between the boys and their alleged father. Although resemblance can be deceiving, we are informed that Sood is "a carbon copy of Albert", so much so that "even their shadows appeared to be identical" (p.16). As for their resemblance to Bumereng, they are so similar that their gesticulations confused Buemereng's secretary and allowed them into the office without prior appointment, thereby circumventing the usual protocols. Bumereng's secretary is deceived by their resemblance. She argues that the young men are perfect replicas of her employer: "the physical resemblance of the two young men to you, their gesticulations and voices, are almost as yours" and "I thought they might be related to you" (p.24). Here, exaggeration serves the narrator's aim of biologically linking the novel's main characters, namely Sood, Albert, and Bumereng.

When considered alongside Bumereng's acknowledgement of having "scored it" multiple times with Miriam and Ega, this resemblance is clear evidence of Bumereng's paternity. However, a significant gap remains: the novel's climax reveals that Bumereng is Azospermic and therefore incapable of fathering the boys. The discovery that Bumereng is Azoospermic is dramatic irony, as it contradicts biological facts and the boys' resemblance. This creates tension and changes the narrative's course. This revelation is corroborated by Maggie, his wife, who says she married Bumereng while already two months pregnant and that Julie is not his biological daughter, as she was with a family doctor. These are significant gaps. Should Bumereng hold himself responsible for not undergoing

another fertility test? Why would the doctor performing the test advise him against further fertility examinations? All these gaps point to societal discrepancies that the novel prompts the reader to consider when dealing with personal troubles.

4. Conclusion

Society in the Dock blends literary and sociological imagination. This blend allows analysis of individual characters' experiences and the broader social context in which they occur. First, by deploying the "No Father No Society" mantra as a literary strategy, the analysis of the novel's textual devices has uncovered layers of meaning in characters' motivations related to the themes of social acceptance, responsibility, and accountability. The novel's overarching tone presents the "No Father No Society" assumption from a conservative perspective: without father figures, society is doomed. The idea of heteroglossia, however, reveals a counterpoint to this: children belong to society and not to their fathers. This strand suggests that the execution of the "No Father No Society" slogan is situational irony. As an exaggeration, the boys ultimately realise that societies can exist without every individual having a father figure. In fact, they confirm this aspect as children raised by single mothers. Second, the use of frank language, where, for example, Sood and Albert are referred to as bastards, illegitimate children, accidents, scavengers, dirty fingers, dogs, among others, is a deliberate choice to expose harsh societal norms; to convey the magnitude of discrimination and stigma in society; to add to the novel's unforgiving realism where society is portrayed as sewage, a dung beetle, a bath of filth, among others; and to reveal the systemic origins of social injustice in the depicted society. These tags account for the boys' antisocial behaviour as revealed in their 'No Father No Society" crimes. Third, although the violence they commit through the "NO Father No Society" campaign functions as a form of speech, the strategy neither relieves them of pain nor changes society. The faults include assuming that the violence can solve their pain or bring justice, and in targeting the symbols of their discrimination, they create more problems than they solve. Therefore, the value of the "No Father No Society" rhetorical device lies in the awareness it raises and the societal fissures it exposes. Fourth, explained in relation to

the subversive metaphor of "society in the dock", Sood and Albert are reformists in their way, indicating that a balanced perspective is necessary when attributing blame to the individual. If Sood and Albert can commit all these crimes while knocking sense into society, then the main message of *Society in the Dock* is that the stigma and social injustices attached to illegitimacy are more of an obstacle than illegitimacy itself.

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