

Original Paper

Young Adult Vulnerabilities in the Fiction of a Ugandan Woman Writer

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Abstract

Questions of identity, power, autonomy and vulnerability carry a particular weight in cultures that have emerged from colonialism. Although few writers of fiction focus on the conflicts between African and European characters, a focus on power and marginalisation remains. One category in which this focus may be plainly seen is writing for and about young people. The study's aim was to analyse young adult fiction written by a Ugandan female author, Barbara Kimenye to investigate this writing to find out how young adult vulnerability is depicted in literature. Although literature targeting young people in Uganda has flourished and though issues of limited representation have been scrutinised in literary studies, like gender discrimination, very limited attention has been accorded young adult representation in literature. This research analyses fiction written by a female author Barbara Kimenye to expand knowledge about the criticism of young adult representation in literature with particular focus on young adult vulnerability in an adult dominated world. The methodology was mainly qualitative research design, where a document analysis method was used to aid analysis and make critical appreciation of the fictional works. The study investigated the state of young adult characters in literature with special focus on their vulnerability.

Keywords

Vulnerability, disposability, linguistic vulnerability

1. Introduction

In this study, I examine how the young adult characters in two of Kimenye's novels for young adults (*Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy, Beware*) are depicted as being vulnerable to a host of ills, for instance exploitation, sexual abuse and substance abuse. I examine the different situations and contexts of vulnerability that the characters are imagined being in, the factors that fuel this vulnerability, the

lessons the fictional works teach us on vulnerability, and the key stylistic devices that Kimenye uses to depict vulnerability.

It is important to start by explaining the key term I have deployed in the study—vulnerability. Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds (2014) observe that the concept “vulnerability” derives from the Latin word *vulnus* (“wound”) and denotes “the capacity to suffer that is inherent in human embodiment”; so to be vulnerable is to “be fragile, to be susceptible to wounding and to suffering; this susceptibility is an ontological condition of our humanity” (p. 4). For these scholars,

Human life is conditioned by vulnerability. By virtue of our embodiment, human beings have bodily and material needs; are exposed to physical illness, injury, disability, and death; and depend on the care of others for extended periods during our lives. As social and affective beings we are emotionally and psychologically vulnerable to others in myriad ways: to loss and grief; to neglect, abuse, and lack of care; to rejection, ostracism, and humiliation. As socio-political beings, we are vulnerable to exploitation, manipulation, oppression, political violence, and rights abuses. And we are vulnerable to the natural environment and to the impact on the environment of our own, individual and collective, actions and technologies (p. 1).

We come into the world unknowing and dependent, and, to a certain degree, we remain that way. We can try, from the point of view of autonomy, to argue with this situation, but we are perhaps foolish, if not dangerous, when we do. Of course, we can say that for some this primary scene is extraordinary, loving, and receptive, a warm tissue of relations that support and nurture life in its infancy. For others, this is, however, a scene of abandonment or violence or starvation; they are bodies given over to nothing, or to brutality, or to no sustenance. No matter what the valence of this scene is, however, the fact remains that infancy constitutes a necessary dependency, one that we never fully leave behind ... there is no way to argue away this condition of a primary vulnerability, of being given over to the truth of the other, even if, or precisely when, there is no other there, and no support for our lives [...]

Paul Formosa in (Mackenzie et al., 2014, p. 89) makes a similar point when he observes that “[t]o be vulnerable is to be susceptible to harm, injury, failure, or misuse” and gives this example to make his point: “an individual person can be vulnerable to assault, a group of persons to genocide, a species to extinction, a delicate vase to breaking, an argument to being refuted, and an outdoor concert to being cancelled due to bad weather”.

The above quotations capture all key aspects of vulnerability that I identify in the texts under study: exploitation, emotional and sexual abuse, material and financial deprivation, physical injury, and violation of human rights, among others. I examine how Kimenye handles some of these issues in *Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy, Beware*.

2. Methodology

A synopsis of each of the fictional works is necessary in order to appreciate better the different aspects of vulnerability they highlight. After this a textual analysis of each of the fictional works is done.

2.1 Synopses of the Texts under Discussion

2.1.1 Beauty Queen

Beauty Queen tells the story of Adela who jokingly joins a beauty contest that is organized in her home town upon being requested by the pageant organizer, Yoweri Wamala. While she considers both participating in the contest and winning it as a joke, a cunning businessman called Joe Banda takes these two seriously, and decides to train her so that she competes in international pageants. She wins the very first international one she participates in named Pan Africa Beauty Contest and soon becomes a celebrity, but with this success comes tragedy: she contracts HIV when she sleeps with one of the judges—a film star she has always admired and who happens to be HIV positive—and soon dies of AIDS.

2.1.2 Prettyboy, Beware

In *Prettyboy, Beware* Joseph Wangala sends his youngest son, Matthew, to the coast, upon being evicted from a shanty town. His hope is that Matthew will continue with his education at the coast, since there are no good schools in the village where the family is to relocate. Matthew's new guardians, Jamani and Ezra, are killed in a fire that is started by a family whose daughter Jamani's sons attempted to rape, and Matthew—the only survivor of the fire—becomes not only homeless, but also penniless. A white tourist called Mark Baker, who happens to be a pederast, takes him in and introduces him to homosexuality. When Baker returns to Europe after a few days, he leaves Matthew with money to take him back to his family. Unfortunately, on the bus to the village, Matthew is robbed. A Good Samaritan helps him to return to the coast where he becomes a teenage prostitute as a way of surviving as he has no family to care for him. Like Adela, he too contracts HIV and dies of AIDS.

Suffice it to mention that the fictional works are conceived as didactic ones, for they are meant to communicate particular messages to the intended audience of young adult readers, who are likely to identify with Adela (who is sixteen years old) and Matthew (who is twelve years old).

3. Result

3.1 Physical, Emotional and Attempted Incestuous Abuse in Kimenye's *Beauty Queen*

Kimenye's *Beauty Queen* opens with its protagonist feeling vulnerable to an impending sickness:

When the organizer triumphantly waved card number 7 above his head, and Adela with shock realised that it was also the number she wore attached to a ribbon on her wrist, she felt vaguely sick and her body became hot all over (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 1).

The feeling of sickness is a result of the shock at learning that she has won the Miss Kabongo District beauty contest event that she had joined as a joke upon Yoweri Wamala, the organizer, pleading with her and her friend Ketu to join it as the only decent girls available, since it usually attracted “the local bar-girls and small-time prostitutes” (3). But the feeling of sickness is also symbolic, in many ways, of how Adela’s decision to join a beauty contest is going to bring her a host of problems. The immediate one is the reaction of the audience when she stands at the podium to receive the award:

[She] stood rooted to the spot, wishing the floor would open and swallow her up. She did not at all enjoy the wolf-whistles and crude personal remarks about her physical attractions that reached her from the mainly male audience. She wanted to run away and hide (Kimenye, 1997a, pp. 1-2).

It is significant that in the community hall where the contest has been held, there are Ministry of Health posters warning the population “against the deadly AIDS” (3)—an indication that there is an enemy prowling around that could pounce on anybody who is not careful enough to protect themselves from it. It is this invisible enemy in the midst of the population and the fact that the contest attracts bar-girls and prostitutes that makes Adela vulnerable to being misunderstood as a loose girl—by her parents, the headmistress of her school, and her village-mates. Her father declares her a “little slut” and a “whore”, and deals her “a series of punches until Adela collapsed sobbing across the threshold, then with a final kick he strode angrily into the house” (8), without even finding out the reasons she had in participating in the contest. Her mother, who is more understanding, asks her, “Whatever possessed you, child, to enter a beauty contest? Don’t you know that only the lowest type of girl goes in for that sort of thing [...] Girls whose vanity allows them to flaunt themselves in beauty contests are heading for disaster?” (9). The headmistress at Adela’s school, St Mary’s High School, Sr Felicia, holds a similar view. This is what she tells Adela without mincing her words:

Well, young woman, I hope you understand the damage you have inflicted on this highly respected school. Your vain and thoughtless action has made a mockery of everything that St. Mary’s has hitherto stood for—namely the virtues of modesty and self-respect. We who are privileged to serve here have always prided ourselves on producing women who are good conscientious workers in their chosen professions, women who will eventually become excellent wives and mothers. In other words, women who are a credit to their church, community and country (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 16).

With these words, she expels her from the school, for “[g]irls who believe that their physical attractions are more important than the purity of their souls can only be classed as vain and shallow—and there is no place for such girls in St. Mary’s High School” (17). Her attitude is similar to that of Adela’s mother, for she tells Adela: “It’s common knowledge that beauty contests attract a very inferior clique of girls” (19). Such girls, she says, cannot be allowed to continue studying at St. Mary’s High School. Later in

the novel, the view—that there is a link between beauty contests and sexual looseness—is made clear at the Pan Africa Oil pageant when Maxi, a character with immense experience in fashion business, informs Adela that “[t]he judges’ names are being kept secret so that none of the contestants or their hangers-on can get to them in the hope of doing a deal” for “[y]ou can bet your life that some of these girls are prepared to do anything—and I mean anything—to try influencing the judges in their favour!” (66).

Suffice it to note that this stance of Sr. Felicia’s—that her school aims at training women who will become excellent wives and mothers—is problematic in the sense that it reduces women to breeders for the nation, as well as the upholders of national virtue, owing to their perceived “femininity, purity, submissiveness, mothering, caretaking instincts, compassion, and morality” (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003, p. 208). This view is similar to Turshen (2000, p. 816) observation that “[c]oncepts of virtue and family honour objectify women, as does the need to protect a woman’s chastity or virginity for the reputation of her family in a community and for the successful arrangement of a girl’s marriage”.

Needless to mention, the expulsion of Adela from St Mary’s High School causes her emotional distress, for it marks her as a misfit at the school, and a kind of moral pariah among her schoolmates. Had her sister, Ujeni, not been supportive, the expulsion would have crashed her emotionally. Luckily, Ujeni corners Sr. Felicia into writing a fair testimonial on Adela that does not mention that she has been expelled from the school. This saves Adela the trouble of having her name dragged into the mud by the gutter press and her school-mates’ gossip chats.

It is significant to note that these three adults (Adela’s father and mother and Sr Felicia) act in such a way that denies Adela a voice; for them, it does not matter that she had a reason, even if a weak one, for participating in the contest. If it is true that young people “need a pedagogy steeped in respectful selfhood” as Henry A. Giroux (1996, p. 213) argues, it is clear that in the novel, the kind of pedagogy that the three adults push for is not one that allows for critical reflection so that Adela understands where she has gone wrong. Instead, they push for a pedagogy of violence—physical violence (the father who beats and punches her) and verbal and moral violence (the mother and Sr Felicia, who suggest that Adela has made herself morally cheap by participating in the beauty contest). Adela’s village-mates also respond to her and Ketu in a way that underlines how the beauty contest has made the two girls vulnerable to sexual innuendos:

[A]fter the contest, some of the boys who have known me and Ketu since we were small waited for us outside the community hall, but instead of teasing and tormenting us as they usually do, they were suddenly pretending to be friendly in the oddest way and it seemed that they couldn’t keep their hands off us. It made us feel dirty. We had to run to get away from them (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 13).

It is not only the boys in her village who misunderstand Adela and Ketu as being ready for sexual activities because they have had the courage to participate in a beauty contest where they have “flaunted” their bodies before men, to use her mother’s words; Adela’s father does the same thing, for it is not by coincidence—I suggest—that he attempts to rape her a few hours after she has won the beauty contest. The narrator relates this incident thus:

In spite of the aches and pains received at the hands and feet of her father, she was tired out by the evening’s excitement and quickly fell asleep. She was wandering in an unintelligible dream when a sweating, heavily-breathing body stole into her bed, and clumsy hands fumbled impatiently with the folds of the kanga in which Adela was wrapped. Only as she sensed a rough urgency in the handling did she become wide awake, and then, as the horror of the situation dawned upon her, she let out a terrified scream. Instantly, the big, clumsy body withdrew. Lights were switched on in other parts of the house, and then Adela’s mother and the maid Lucretia swiftly padded into her room, their faces reflecting a strangely furtive fear (Kimenye, 1997a, pp. 9-10).

In other words, Adela’s father subjects her to sexual abuse which, according to (Doak, 2007, p. 9) includes incest—a vice that (Brown & Alexander, 2020, p. 66) define as “sexual relations between a child and a family member within specific categories of kinship, such as parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles”. When Adela shares this experience of surviving being raped by her father with Ujeni, she is surprised to learn that her siblings were exposed to the same vulnerability when they were younger. Ujeni tells her:

You were too young to know what went on in that God-fearing family home of ours. Maria, Estella, Salomi and me—we all went through it until Jamesi [the first born coming before Ujeni] realised something was wrong. [He] threatened that dirty old man who happens to be our father with the clan elders and the police, so we were more or less safe while he was around. Now you know why we all rushed into marriage with whomsoever we wanted, without bothering to get father’s blessing or approval. With Jamesi threatening to report him for incest if he made any trouble, the old man was in no position to raise objections (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 11).

This revelation is of course shocking to Adela, particularly upon knowing that her mother and her sisters did not alert her about her father’s evil practice—a silence that made her vulnerable to being sexually abused. It is also evident in the above extract that Adela’s sisters married early as a way of escaping from their father, who—by practicing incest—had evacuated himself from the category of the human to that of a monster that needs to be fled. In other words, incest makes the home not only a den that reeks of danger, but also a dungeon where the young female adult is subjected, or susceptible to being subjected, to sexual abuse by a father who is expected to provide care and protection to her. No

wonder that he is more or less evacuated from the novel the moment Adela starts staying with Ujeni, which is a way of keeping her safe from his unnatural inclination.

Ujeni explains the silence: her mother is terrified of their father, so she is “too scared to speak about it”, while Ujeni and her siblings “kept quiet for mother’s sake, and that’s why we all visit her and father and behave as though everything is normal between us” (12). In other words, incest is “a hidden crime”, to use G. Flores-Ortiz’s phrase (1997, p. 50), which is why it is “often referred to as ‘the family secret’ since

Frequently, several non-participating family members are aware of sexual abuse but deny its existence to outsiders. Denial may reflect embarrassment or a feeling that ‘things like this should not be discussed outside the family’ (Clark, Clark, Adamec, & Gelles, 2001, p. 94).

The point to emphasize here is that this silence makes Adela vulnerable to being sexually abused, for had she known about her father’s incestuous inclinations, she would have been more careful in his presence. As Doak (2007, pp. 9-10) observes, child abuse is always kept a secret, which makes it a shadowy practice that is difficult to fight. Adela’s mother, who knows what is going on, covers up her husband’s evil behaviour by declaring that Adela has had a nightmare. When Adela insists that it was her father who was attempting to rape her, for she is sure she smelled his sweat, her mother admonishes her: “Hush, child. You were dreaming. Your father is a good man. He would never harm you”.

Suffice it to note that Ujeni makes a similar statement about Joe Banda: she declares him a good man (49) when Adela refuses to be trained for international beauty contests, like Miss World. Yet she does not know anything about him at the time she is making the declaration, except that he drives a gleaming limousine of a Mercedes Benz. Adela’s mother’s statement is therefore ironical, for what her husband attempted to do to Adela does not show him as a good man at all. No wonder Ujeni refers to him as an “old goat” (11), with the animal image being intended to show how unnatural and beastly he is, for it is among goats that there is sexual intercourse between fathers and daughters, since animals do not have a moral code.

Even when Adela insists that it was her father who tried to sleep with her, her mother counter-insists that she was having a bad dream, showing how vulnerability to sexual abuse in families is fuelled by people who are close to the victim: first, the father, the perpetrator, and the mother, whose interest is to protect her husband’s name and reputation, for lack of a better word. By narrating this incident in the novel, Kimenye aims to lift the secrecy surrounding incest by making it a topic that matters, a topic for public debate. This way, some girl or two, who have parents who are involved in this form of sexual abuse, could be helped or even saved, by realizing that their plight is known by somebody, the author at least, and that there is a way of going about it, the way Adela is able to fight and eventually escape her father’s attempted incestuous rape. By speaking with her “whole mouth”(Asaah, 2006, p. 499), that is to say openly, without using euphemisms to textualize this taboo, Kimenye also challenges whoever

knows about the evil practice to speak up, since she demonstrates that it persists through secrecy.

It is worth noting that although vulnerable to several dangers, Adela successfully fights off a few of them, for instance her village-mates' indecent touches and her father's attempted incestuous rape. But there are those she does not manage to fight off, for instance the beatings she suffers from her father and the expulsion from her dear school, which comes with her increasingly becoming distant from her friend, Ketu.

Perhaps the worst instance of vulnerability that the female young adults are exposed to in *Beauty Queen* is the belief by some old men that "they could escape the AIDS scourge if they confined themselves to virgins", even when it is likely that most of them might "already have been HIV positive before embarking on their deflowering routine" (12).

It is clear, from the above incidents in the novel, that it is not easy to be a female young adult in Kabongo District for the odds of making it to adulthood without being assaulted physically or sexually are so high that even one's father can rape her, with tacit knowledge of her mother, who has no power or agency to do anything to stop it. The fact that the girl child is exposed to sexual vulnerability from almost every front—the family space (through the incestuous father), the community hall (the wolfish whistles), the street (the indecent touches) and later in the novel the hotel room (Byron Warlock's deflowering of Adela, which I discuss in a moment) confirm Nancy Whittier's observation that "[t]he fact that sexual assault is more common against girls than against boys, and that male offenders are more common than female, indicates the importance of gendered power structures in shaping patterns" (Whittier, 2016, p. 96). This is why "[f]eminist scholars argue that the root of all violence against women is the patriarchal empowerment of men, the privatisation of family life, and the creation of systems and values rooted in patriarchy which objectify women and dehumanize men" (Flores-Ortiz, 1997, p. 54). It is little wonder then that in the novel, it is male characters—Jamesi, Adela's brother, and later Sam, Ujeni's husband—who can confront the old man over his incestuous relationships, not women (Ujeni, her sisters and her mother) as if to indicate that it is only the male folk who can tame the monster. This disempowers the women characters, some of whom—like Adela—are portrayed as being capable of defending themselves, the way she does when she successfully fights off being raped by her father. The point I am making is that by privileging the male characters as the only people who can tame the incestuous old man, the novel narratively confirms the identity of Adela as a survivor of attempted incest rather than the more empowering one of her as a strong young adult character who successfully resisted incest.

3.2 Economic and Sexual Exploitation of Young Adults in Kimenye's *Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy*, *Beware*

As already mentioned, young adult characters face vulnerability from different fronts. Apart from Adela's defencelessness at her own home and at school, she fulfils the proverbial notion of moving from "the frying pan into the fire" when she goes to live with her sister Ujeni. Her vulnerable status is

magnified although it is not obvious at the beginning. The same proverb applies to Mathew whose suffering gradually intensifies as he becomes distanced from his parents and guardians.

3.3 *Economic Exploitation in Beauty Queen*

Both novels (*Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy, Beware*) portray the protagonists as suffering exploitation in different forms: financial and emotional (for Adela), and financial, emotional and sexual (for Matthew). Financial exploitation comes in two forms: the characters are deprived of money that should come to them for the services provided by an adult character who helps himself or herself to it for doing much less work than the young adult character does. In *Beauty Queen*, Adela is exploited by Joe Banda, Ujeni and Maxi. Joe Banda sets up a company in which himself, Ujeni, Maxi and Adela are shareholders. The company does well as shown by the fact that Ujeni is able to buy her husband, Dr Sam, a Mercedes Benz, as well as refurbish his clinic, giving it a new look in the process, besides sponsoring his trip to London where Adela is to promote the marketing of “a new range of cosmetics and scent designed for the modern black woman” (*Beauty Queen* 109). Maxi makes it clear that Joe Banda, Ujeni and she have made a lot of money because of Adela:

I have known Joe for a very long time, and I know how he operates. I made it my business to ensure that I got my share of the pickings. After all, I made that girl. Without me, she would never have made it to the top. I earned every cent I got out of turning her into a beauty queen. As for your wife! You have only to look at your smart car and clinic to realise that she didn't lose anything on the deal. (*Beauty Queen* 139)

When Adela is diagnosed with HIV at a time when she starts manifesting the symptoms of AIDS, Sam is shocked to learn that despite being a co-owner of the company that Banda, Ujeni and Maxi run, his sister-in-law is actually penniless. The narrator explains how this state of affairs came about:

Maxi revealed how Joe Banda had craftily worked on the company's accounts to show a consistent loss, hiding the profits in a mass of fictitious expenses. “The expenses for practically everything Adela was involved in were fully paid for by sponsors”, she revealed. “And Joe made various investments with most of the money she earned to reap substantial profits [...] Adela and the company are one. On paper, the company is broke, so Adela is also broke. As for Joe's investments, he has covered his tracks with extreme care. It would take a miracle to trace them”. ((Kimenye, 1997a, p. 138)

Kimenye dramatically presents Adela as a victim of exploitation using the device of irony—the disjuncture between two realities, the apparent and the realistic. Adela, the beauty queen of international renown, is taken to a world-class HIV clinic in Arizona in the United States of America, led by world-class medical doctors and researchers, but when Banda stops paying the bills, she finds herself “a destitute patient”—she who six months ago “lived in the lap of luxury and had the world at

her feet” (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 144). There is nothing Sam can do, but to have her transferred to an under-facilitated, poorly equipped hospice run by Catholic nuns back in her country. The fact that Adela is not in position to do anything about her condition brings to mind Joel Anderson’s words, that “vulnerability can be simply awful for people and can erode their agency in subtle and profound ways” (2014, p. 151) since

A person is *vulnerable* to the extent to which she is not in a position to prevent occurrences that would undermine what she takes to be important to her. Vulnerability is thus a matter of effective control, understood as a function of the relative balance of power between the person in question and the forces that can influence her. Vulnerability can be increased by those forces becoming more powerful or the effects more probable but also by the person becoming less able to counter these forces and effects.” (Anderson, 2014, p. 135) (emphasis in the original)

The point I am highlighting is that Adela has no control over the forces influencing her, right from the moment she moves in with Ujeni and starts attending Maxi’s Charm School, to the moment she succumbs to HIV/AIDS. It is significant that it is because of this lack of control, exacerbated by the white pills that Maxi gives her and the alcohol that she takes at the party thrown in her honour, which exposes her to the HIV infection in the first place, for she prevails over Byron Warlock to sleep with her at a moment she is not in control of her senses, as I explain in a moment. Were she sober and not drugged, it is most likely that she would not have forced Warlock into having sex with her. In any case, there would probably have been no reason for Warlock to escort her to her room, which is what starts off the unfortunate and fatal sexual intercourse that the two have.

One of the lessons the reader gets from *Beauty Queen* is that dependence is dangerous since it robs the person of agency. Adela gets infected with HIV because for the first time, she finds herself without the people who are chaperoning her—Banda, Maxi, Ujeni, and to some extent Wamala, when they are barred from attending the dinner held in her honour when she wins the Miss Pan Africa Oil pageant. Drugged, drunk and without the people who have protected her from danger all along, she becomes vulnerable to disaster. This brings to mind Susan Dodds’ words that:

Dependence is one form of vulnerability. Dependence is vulnerability that requires the support of a specific person (or/people)—that is, care. To be dependent is to be in circumstances in which one must rely on the care of other individuals to access, provide or secure (one or more of) one’s needs, and promote and support the development of one’s autonomy or agency. (Anderson, 2014, p. 182)

Kimenye uses the device of juxtaposition to underline Adela’s misery at being exploited by Banda, Maxi and Ujeni. The reader is able to visualize the Adela who used to travel the world first-class or in private jets with the one who arrives back in her country “at the AIDS hospice on the back of a lorry carrying sacks of charcoal, and for which Sam had paid a ridiculously high bribe” (p. 151). This is

upon the ambulance that Sam hired to carry her to the hospice declining to do so when its driver and attendants aggressively state “their case for protecting themselves, their families, and future patients to be transported in their vehicle” out of a silly and ignorant belief that HIV is a highly infectious disease that could spread from one person to another through physical contact with a person carrying it (151). This juxtaposition is heartrending for the reader who will find it hard to stomach the extent to which Adela has been exploited to destitution and to death.

This destitution comes as a result of Banda, Maxi and Ujeni emptying Adela of her humanity, choosing instead to see her as a commodity, a thing. Banda calls her “my investment” (p. 61)—“a means for him to make large amounts of money” (p. 71). It is little wonder that she is treated as “a marketable commodity” (p. 48) and “private property” (p. 115), with clear allusions to the slave trade. Byron Warlock, one of the judges at the Miss Pan Africa Oil pageant that Adela wins, underlines this allusion when he refers to Banda, Ujeni and Maxi as

flesh merchants! That’s what we call them in the [United] States. They take a kid like you and turn her into a beautiful walking, talking, living doll. Then when they’ve made as much as they can out of her, and she’s past it, they throw her on the scrap-heap and she’s lucky if she doesn’t end up a junkie (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 90).

What Warlock is talking about is disposability. Because she has been emptied of her humanity, Adela is disposable like tissue. Indeed, sooner than later, Banda, Ujeni and Maxi abandon her when she is diagnosed with HIV and admitted in a clinic in Arizona. Banda stops paying her bills, while Maxi makes it clear that she has nothing to do with her welfare. As for Ujeni, the “twinge of guilt” she once experienced “at allowing the idea of pots of money to override the sisterly concern and protection that she was to be providing for Adela” (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 43) has long dissipated; what she cares about is the money rolling in from Adela’s “winnings in other international beauty contests, from advertising contracts, from special appearances at important charity functions, from guest appearances in films [and] from promotions” (Kimenye, 1997a, pp. 111-112), as well as “putting a great deal of energy into netting Joe Banda whom she had marked out as her next husband” (119). In other words, Ujeni, Banda and Maxi do not look at Adela’s young adulthood using the “language of responsibility and justice” but from the perspective of “the scandalous philosophy of money—that is, a logic in which everything, including the worth of young people, is measured through the potentially barbaric calculations of finance, exchange value, and profitability” (Giroux, 2009, p. 115). It is this philosophy that makes it easy for Banda and his protégés to come up with a false biography of Adela’s “which described her as the only daughter of a roving diplomat from a family with aristocratic connections, gave her age as 18, claimed fictional academic successes, and stated that she was a serious student whose sole ambition was to work for the society’s underprivileged” (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 88).

Suffice it to mention that Banda’s calling of Adela as his investment constitutes what Judith Butler calls “linguistic vulnerability”, one clear dimension of which

has to do with our exposure to name-calling and discursive categories in infancy and childhood—indeed, throughout the course of life. All of us are called names, and this kind of name-calling demonstrates an important dimension of the speech act. We do not only act through the speech act; speech acts also act on us. There is a distinct performative effect of having been named as this gender or another gender, as part of one nationality or a minority, or to find out that how you are regarded in any of these respects is summed up by a name that you yourself did not know and never chose (Butler, 2016, p. 16).

There is no doubt that indeed, the way Adela is treated is “summed up” by the name she has been given—investment—for she is perceived as a commodity with a market value, as I have explained above. If she had been given a different name that underlined her humanity, it is likely that she would not have ended the way she does. Indeed, when the “commodity” she is loses value and is hospitalized at a clinic in the US, Banda stops paying the medical bills altogether. The point we get from the novel is that the kind of name one is given matters; for this reason, we should beware what names we are given or we give other people (There is a saying in Runyankole (A language used in Western Uganda) that sums up this same “linguistic vulnerability” that “Eiziina ribi riroga nyinaryo” translated to mean that “A bad name bewitches the owner”. It connotes the vulnerability of the named, almost always a child, who has no say as to what their names are and what they connote. It is significant that it is Adela’s non-blood relations—Sam, her brother-in-law, and Ketu, her childhood friend—who care for her the moment she loses value as a commodity, that is, when she is diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Banda, Maxi and Ujeni, who only looked at her as a commodity and an investment are nowhere to help with caring for her in her hour of need. In fact, it is only Sam and Ketu who are present at the Catholic nun’s hospice when she dies, penniless, despite the so much money she had made in her short stint as a beauty queen.

In the novel, financial exploitation is symbolized by the gleaming limousine that Joe Banda drives. With the knowledge given to the reader that Banda is “a complete opportunist, and an exceptionally efficient one at that” (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 118), it is clear that the expensive, elite machine that he owns has not come from honest hard work, but sheer craftiness. To point to this fact, Kimenye makes the representative of the moral consciousness of her novel, Sam, sell off the Mercedes Benz that his wife, Ujeni, had given to him as a gift, and mortgage the clinic, that Ujeni had refurbished, because he is aware that the money that paid for the car and for the refurbishing of the clinic had come from Adela’s work and sweat.

Besides economic exploitation of Adela, there is also emotional exploitation which arises from the fact that Banda, Ujeni and Maxi hurt her feelings. At the Pan Africa Oil competition, Adela is horrified to learn that Banda and several other people are placing bets on her winning or not winning first place. This fact—that “to many people she was now in the same impersonal category as a horse race; that

their sole interest in her and the other contestants was their potential to win or lose bets” (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 68)—disturbs her, for she becomes aware that she has been reduced to a commodity. While the novel is quite silent on her reaction upon not seeing her sister Ujeni during her fatal illness, it is clear that this is yet another hurting moment for her, for it is people who are not her blood relations (Sam and Keti) who care for her and in whose caring and loving presence she dies.

3.4 Economic and Sexual Exploitation in Prettyboy, Beware

In *Prettyboy Beware* (Kimenye, 1997b), financial exploitation is clearly portrayed in the dealings of the European, Spencer, who runs a pimping business in form of weekly parties. The young boy, Daniel, tells Matthew that Spencer charges 40% of the young children’s earnings. But when Matthew gets his first customer, Olaf, at one of the said parties, Spencer pockets “more than half the money” (Kimenye, 1997b, p. 92). No wonder that on at least two occasions, he calls Matthew “a goldmine” (ibid, p. 66, p. 92) on account of him being “prettier than most girls” (p. 91), hence his nickname, Prettyboy, which gives the novel its title.

Yet it is Matthew, not Spencer, who suffers the consequences of the sexual encounter he has with the much, much older man, Olaf, who leaves him with “bruises on his arms and shoulders, and a sharp pain [which] made him explore the outer surface of his back passage” (Kimenye, 1997b, pp. 91-92). It is clear that these bruises, and the bleeding from the back passage, are not worth the paltry 50 US Dollars that Spencer leaves him, having taken 150 of the 200 USD as his introduction fee (p. 94). This is not to imply that there is an amount worth the suffering the young adults, Daniel and Matthew and the others they represent go through; the point I am making is that Spencer and his likes profit off these little ones, whom they have turned into sexual commodities. Through the device of characterisation, Kimenye makes it clear that Spencer is a monstrous, greedy man, who considers Matthew, Daniel and the other young adults he pimps for as mere commodities.

The European men who photograph Daniel and Matthew nude and in “posing obscenely together or with one or other of the men” upon paying them 150USD (99) are also exploiters, since they do not explain to the two boys how they will benefit from the photographs they are taking, implying that what they pay the two boys is much less than what they stand to get. Worse still, the two boys are certainly not the only ones who are photographed in nude and in obscene poses; the novel implies that there are bound to be several others whom the European tourists have met and photographed already, or those that they are bound to meet sooner or later.

This tourist business goes on with the tacit knowledge of the authorities who advertise the country’s coastal strip to foreign tourists “as a place of sun, sand and sex” meant to appeal “to those interested in youthful activities, particularly in connection with the very young!” (p.110). In other words, the very young members of the population are dangled to European tourists as commodities to use, and by implication to dispose of, thereby bringing to mind Fanon’s prescient words:

The national bourgeoisie organizes centres of rest and relaxation and pleasure resorts to meet the wishes of the Western bourgeoisie. Such activity is given the name of tourism, and for the occasion will be built up as a national industry. If proof is needed of the eventual transformation of certain elements of the ex-native bourgeoisie into the organizers of parties for their Western opposite numbers, it is worthwhile having a look at what has happened in Latin America. The casinos of Havana and of Mexico, the beaches of Rio, the little Brazilian and Mexican girls, the half-breed thirteen-year-olds, the ports of Acapulco and Copacabana—all these are the stigma of this depravation of the national middle class. Because it is bereft of ideas, because it lives to itself and cuts itself off from the people, undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of that nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe (Frantz, pp. 153-154).

Fanon is writing in 1963 (with the translation of his book into English coming out in 1968), but it is as if he has the East African coast, where *Prettyboy, Beware* is set, in his mind, for what the authorities have done, in the name of promoting tourism, is to make their country the brothel of Europe indeed, what with their availing of the very young children to tourists, for their (the tourists') use as they see fit. For the political leaders in the East African coastal country where the novel is set, [l]ong-term commitments along with values related to durability are now sacrificed to a mode of temporality in which quick turnovers and short attention spans become the measure of how our everyday lives are experienced and futures anticipated" as Zygmunt Bauman (cited in Giroux "Youth" 709) would put it, with an unfortunate development: "[a]s authority is colonised by the market, politics loses its moral force to the appeal and status of the latest trend" (ibid). Consequently, we live in a world where "children are no longer viewed as an important social investment or as a central marker for the moral life of the nation" but rather as commodities, thanks to a market-driven politics "in which young people are prepared for a life of objectification while simultaneously drained of any viable sense of moral and political agency" (Giroux, 2009, p. 715). This is a world where the independence of African nations has been compromised, for by turning the countries into the brothels of Europe, national dignity is eroded, yet sovereignty and dignity are exact equivalents since "a free people living in dignity is a sovereign people" (Fanon 198). If the government's mission is to give back "dignity to all citizens, fill their minds and feast their eyes with human things, and create a prospect that is human because conscious and sovereign men dwell therein" as Fanon (205) argues, then it is clear that the leaders in the coastal country where *Prettyboy, Beware* is set have failed the people who voted them into office.

In the novel, Kimenye presents a politician, Pila Shotto, who is critical of the practice of advertising the country's coastal strip as "as a place of sun, sand and sex" meant to appeal "to those interested in youthful activities, particularly in connection with the very young"—an advertisement that he uses to inflame the crowd that is against paedophilia and pederasty into ridding the town of these vices, so that the town may regain its lost glory and honour of being "the jewel of the coastal strip" (Kimenye, 1997b, p. 110). While there is no doubt that Mr Shotto is not genuine in his call; it is also clear that he uses the crowd that the Reverend Abel has organized to do his own politicking, without much commitment to actually mobilizing the community and his fellow leaders into solving the problem of child molestation that the novel names as child prostitution. In other words, he wants to win political capital out of the plight of child prostitutes like Matthew, without explaining how he hopes to address the major causes of child prostitution—poverty and the material impoverishment that results from it.

In the same vein, the Reverend Abel himself exploits Matthew's vulnerability upon being attacked by an anti-paedophilia mob to appeal "for funds to establish a street children's village to provide a stable home for the deprived young" (p. 111). Again, it is not that the Reverend Abel is not genuine in his mission of ridding the coastal town of the practice of child prostitution and paedophilia; the point to underline is that he uses Matthew, whom he has just saved from a menacing mob, to help him raise money for his church. He allows the boy to exaggerate the molestation he has suffered, for this increases the number of people coming to his church as shown by the fact that as Matthew's descriptions become "increasingly lurid" every time he is on the pulpit, "Sunday evenings soon saw folk fighting for seats in the corrugated chapel" (p. 109). In other words, the Reverend Abel prefers some untruths from Matthew in his church for the sole reason of attracting worshippers, who are likely to improve the collection at the offering and the tithe. Unfortunately, the sordidness of the story he tells at the Church gathering comes with a fatal consequence: when his mother, who has learnt about the arson that killed Matthew's guardian Jamani and has come to look for her son hears what he is telling the congregation, she commits suicide for she cannot stand to witness the extent to which her son has been abused and dehumanized.

The final aspect of exploitation I would like to identify in *Prettyboy, Beware* is the same I pointed out when discussing this theme in *Beauty Queen*: disposability. All the foreign tourists who use Matthew—Mark Baker, Jax and Olaf—dispose of him as soon as they have got the sexual gratification that they want from him. When Baker's holiday is over, he gives Matthew a brief farewell, which stuns the young man for he had expected something warmer, since Baker was "someone who had shown him strong affection and more", which is why "[u]p to the very last moment he had believed, or rather hoped that Mark would at least promise to keep in touch" (p. 80). This does not happen, leaving him bitter and regretful. Similarly, after Olaf has bruised Matthew, leaving him bleeding, he (Olaf) appears "to deliberately ignore him" (p. 91). The same thing happens when Jax uses him: immediately afterwards, he

excused himself, saying he had an appointment with a friend holidaying nearby. Matthew happily expected him to arrange another meeting, but Jax did nothing of the sort. He walked up a sand dune and disappeared in the direction of a cluster of cottages, whose roofs could be glimpsed beyond a line of trees, without so much as a backward glance.

Mathew's thoughts were troubled as he made his way alone back to the outdoor bar. Jax, after all that talk of friendship, had abandoned him as casually as had Mark. Matthew was rapidly learning that grown-ups, despite convincing expressions of sincere friendship, could not always be relied upon, once they had taken what they wanted from him. (Kimenye, 1997b) (98)

It is clear that the men who get involved with Matthew do not actually love him; they go to him because he is young, pretty and usable. The passage above shows that he is learning this fact the hard way. One would expect him to resolve to leave the terrible life he has got himself into on account of being homeless, but he does not, as he sets himself the goal of raising 1,000 USD from the men who use him, which he hopes to send to his parents. Unfortunately, his dream is not fulfilled, as he soon suffers a mental breakdown when his mother commits suicide. Shortly before he dies of AIDS, he tells his father who is attending to him in hospital: "Dad, stay with me. I want you and mother to have a thousand dollars!" (p. 120).

It is important to note that rather than see Matthew and other young adults like him, for instance, Daniel as being at risk of exploitation by European tourists, the local population instead sees them as the risk itself. This is evident when Matthew is attacked by teenage boys on his way from buying a bus ticket, in preparation for leaving the coast upon being advised by Jojo to quit prostitution:

"This is one of them!" He heard somebody shout. "Look at his fancy clothes and jewellery!"

The cry of "Disgusting beast!" was accompanied by a sharp blow to Matthew's shoulders, and other insults and blows rained upon him when he was knocked to the ground, doing his best to protect the vulnerable parts of his body. A vicious kick to the head from a booted foot put him beyond all pain. (p. 106)

This is the point at which he is saved by the Reverend Abel who commands the mob to stop assaulting him. This passage makes it clear that the characters' attitude to child prostitutes like Matthew is diverse: while there are people like the Reverend Abel who see the prostitutes as people at risk, that is as victims, there are also those, like the teenagers who attack Matthew, who consider child prostitutes as a problem, that is, as the risk itself, that needs to be got rid of. Sharon Stephens (cited in Giroux "Youth", p. 691) succinctly captures this point thus:

There is a growing consciousness of children at risk. But ... there is also a growing sense of children themselves as the risk—and thus of some children as people out of place and excess populations to be eliminated, while others must be controlled, reshaped, and harnessed to changing social ends. Hence, the centrality of children, both as symbolic figures and as objects of contested forms of socialization in the contemporary politics of culture.

In other words, young adults like Matthew and Daniel are doubly vulnerable: first, they are vulnerable to being sexually abused by European entrepreneurs like Spencer and tourists like Olaf; second, they are vulnerable to being attacked by their fellow citizens who consider them a symbol of moral decadence. This problem needs to be addressed. In the real world, organizations like ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism), also known as End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of children for sexual purposes (O’Grady, 2001, p. 125) are helping to make people aware of the double risk that young prostitutes face.

There are some weaknesses in the depiction of child prostitution in *Prettyboy, Beware*. The obvious one is that it presents the problem from only the perspective of the male young adult child, leaving the reader to wonder if the plight of the female child is any better. The second problem, perhaps more serious than the first one, is that it presents the sex predator as an outsider—the tourist from Europe specifically or the Western world generally, thereby giving the impression that sexual abuse is an imported sociological issue, not an indigenous one. Maggie Black cited in Montgomery (2011, p. 151) speaks to this problem when she argues thus, in the context of Thailand:

No society wants to admit that it practices “child prostitution”. And where the evidence is undeniable, it is more bearable to blame the “unclean other”—decadent foreigners with their incomprehensible tastes and misbehaviours. Where there is an overlay of North-South exploitation—the Western tourist ruining innocent paradise with his credit card and unleashed libido—this aversion plays easily in certain well-meaning ears.

While it is true that “[t]he existence of others is crucial in defining what is ‘normal’ and in locating one’s own place in the world” as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (*Key Concepts*, p. 169) argue, there is a problem with the view that child prostitution is a North-South issue, viz-a-viz, the child sexual abuses that are committed by the indigenous people against their own people go unreported, which makes it difficult to eradicate child prostitution and related abuses within the country.

Finally, the novel risks being labelled homophobic, given the fact that it describes the homosexual act in a gruesome way, particularly when Olaf injures Matthew’s anus, causing wounds and bleeding. However, Kimenye is careful enough to dispel this charge in two ways. First, she makes Jamani acknowledge that homosexuality happens in different societies:

We've known such things before—men being attracted to each other and even living together. It occurs in every community; Arabs. Asians, European, and yes, among us Africans, although our people don't care to admit it. That ain't to say that we understand, agree or approve, but neither do we judge or criticize. Everybody is entitled to his own way of life and is eventually answerable to God (Kimenye, 1997b, p. 42).

Kimenye also goes to pains to explain, through Peter, that homosexuality is different from pederasty, for although “often people automatically assume that all homosexuals are interested in seducing children [this] is in fact very seldom the case” (p. 41).

Both *Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy, Beware* make it clear that the young protagonists' vulnerability in these texts is exacerbated by their naivety: they are too naïve to recognize the fact that the attention they are getting from some of the adults in their lives is a result of these adults' selfish interests—material enrichment, in the case of Adela's sister Ujeni, Joe Banda and Maxi, and sexual gratification in the case of Matthew's “friend”, Mark Baker, Olaf and Jax. Naivety makes them unaware that they are in exploitative and manipulative relationships; by the time they realize this, it is quite too late. Adela realizes that she has been taken advantage of when she is flown back to the poorly equipped and staffed hospice run by the nuns; it is perhaps this realization that makes her remove “the oxygen mask away from her face” (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 156), so that she passes on quickly.

As for Matthew, he mistakes Baker's interest in him for genuine kindness and care. Having lost his foster family (Jamani, his two sons and his house help Ezra) to a fire lit by a family that had a grudge with Jamani over his sons' attempt to rape their daughter, Matthew manages to escape from the burning house and finds himself at the beach:

[He] staggered around aimlessly, dazed and exhausted. At some stage he collapsed or threw himself down and cried himself to sleep on the sand. It was daybreak when a cold, wet, inquisitive muzzle, sniffing his ankles, caused him to curl into a tight ball and refuse to open his eyes. He fought against waking and facing reality, even if the snuffling creature currently inspecting him turned out to be a man-eating monster (Kimenye, 1997b, p. 54)

Here, Matthew is homeless and has nowhere else to turn—a fact captured by his refusal to open his eyes and face reality, even when a man-eating monster, in this case the dog called Tobu, snuffles him. At a symbolic level, however, it is not the dog who is the man-eating monster, but Mark Baker himself, the man who rescues Matthew, feeds him, washes his wounds and bandages them, takes him to the hospital where he is attended to, and offers him accommodation. He pretends to be concerned about Matthew's welfare to the extent of telling him, “Young man, I don't want you to worry about anything, or feel any guilt at being alive when your friends are dead. I'll look after you” (p. 58)—a wonderful declaration of care for a homeless boy whose parents are more than 500 miles away from the coast

where he is. The omniscient narrator informs the reader of Matthew's reaction to this wonderful declaration:

Gratitude robbed Matthew of speech. Young as he was, life in a series of squatters' settlements had taught him that the world was seldom a kind place, yet it seemed that since arriving at the coast he had received more than his fair share of kindness from comparative strangers. For the first time since the fire, he managed a trembling smile, and experienced a surprising flow of affection from this good man who returned his smile and reached out to him and hugged him (p. 54).

This passage arouses the reader's suspicion that Mark Baker's concern for Matthew is not out of altruism but selfish intentions. There are at least three clues. The first one is that Mark Baker has clothes that fit 12-year old Matthew perfectly, yet he is unmarried and without children. Secondly, Matthew drowsily hears a man mocking Mark Baker about being a lucky man since he has got himself a "beauty" (p. 57). Finally, the mocking man says that Matthew is "a great improvement" on Mark Baker's "last little friend" (p. 58), indicating that this is not the first time that he, Baker, is having young adults of Matthew's age in his house. This suspicion serves as a tell-tale sign the narrator gives to the reader about the possibility that Baker's generosity might be false, since he could be a pederast who is waiting for the right moment to molest Matthew. This in fact turns out to be the case, but because of Matthew's naivety, he does not realize it. The stylistic technique used by Kimenye here is suspense, for the reader keeps wondering if Matthew is not in danger of being sodomised.

The major point to underline here is that Mark Baker betrays Matthew, who thanks him for his generosity thinking it is genuine. But it is not; it is a mere bait that the old man is using to hook the little boy whom he uses for his selfish satisfaction, with no qualms whatsoever on the effect this will have on his (Matthew's) life. By introducing 12-year old Matthew, a minor who has not yet reached the age of consent (which is 18 years in East African countries) to homosexuality, Mark Baker becomes the man-eating monster that the novel invokes when the dog Tobu sniffs at half-conscious Matthew lying in the sand at the beach. The power of this symbolism lies in the fact that this introduction to homosexuality sooner or later launches Matthew into the world of child prostitution. It is therefore not an exaggeration to argue that Mark Baker has something to do with the fact that Matthew later on contracts HIV and dies of AIDS. In any case, it is not clear from which man he got the virus; it is possible that it was from Mark Baker himself.

In both *Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy, Beware*, both economic and sexual exploitation take place with the aid of substance abuse—drugs or alcohol—given to the young adults by the adults who are keen on exploiting them. The next section delves into this point.

3.5 Drug Abuse as a Precursor to Sexual Exploitation in Kimenye's Beauty Queen and Prettyboy, Beware

In both *Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy, Beware*, Kimenye establishes a direct link between HIV infection and substance abuse, particularly alcohol. This link has been articulated by social scientists, for instance Christine Cynn (2011, p. 104) who reports that in the HIV education programmes targeting young people in Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire, the message given is that "alcohol and drug use increase vulnerability to sexual advances". Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (2003, p. 558) argues that in the context of HIV transmission, "[a]lcohol consumption is a risk factor, both for male patrons and for the young women who serve them [for] men are less likely to use condoms when drunk". Finally, in a study on poor parenting practices in eastern Uganda, Richard Sekiwunga and Susan Reynolds Whyte (2009, p. 118) report that some of their respondents, particularly the school teachers and local leaders saw a correlation between the parents' failure to "sufficiently monitor their daughters' whereabouts" [to the extent] that adolescent girls had freedom to go to night discos where they learnt bad habits like taking alcohol and engaging in sexual activities" (p. 118), thereby exposing them to early pregnancies and HIV infections.

In *Beauty Queen*, Adela sleeps with Byron Warlock and contracts HIV from him as a result of two factors. The first one is the over-protection or rather control that the trio (Banda, Ujeni and Maxi) exercise over her, what the narrator calls Adela's "protective net" (p. 100). When she wins the Pan Africa oil beauty competition, she is invited for a sumptuous dinner at Chief Atalifu's penthouse, but Banda, Ujeni and Maxi are not allowed to attend, for a different dinner has been organized for the contestants' crew. This is more or less the first time she is left alone without the three or at least one of them being with her or hovering around her, ever since she started training to become a beauty queen. She drinks quite a lot of champagne without restraining herself, for the influence of her trainers have distorted "her development as an adult" as the medical doctor, Sam, puts it (p. 115).

This failure to restrain herself from taking too much champagne brings us to the second factor—drug abuse, a practice she has been thrown into by the trio, with neither her knowledge nor her approval. It is true that she is aware that she is given white tablets by Maxi each time she gets nervous, but she does not know what these are, or what their effect on her health is. When she takes a lot of champagne in the penthouse, her head slumps on her chest as she talks to Warlock, thereby necessitating him to walk her away from the penthouse to her room, so that she does not embarrass her host, since she is the guest of honour at the dinner, as the newly crowned Miss Africa Oil. It is in her room where she grips him "tightly around the waist" and declares him as her "best friend" whom she has "Loved all my life"; and when he attempts to escape from the room, she coils herself around him and holds him "in a vice-like grip which belied her fragile appearance" until he gives in to her, helpless as he was "against the attraction of that beautiful nubile young body" (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 95). To show that all these actions were drug-induced, Adela does not have a clear recollection of what happened the following morning,

but “a cloudy, vague memory connected with Byron Warlock [which] teased her mind” (p. 101). Indeed, when Warlock’s name is mentioned later on, Yoweri sees “bewilderment across Adela’s face, swiftly followed by an expression of someone trying hard to recapture details of a dream. It was plain to him that the girl was not at all clear of what might have taken place during the previous night” (p. 102). Yoweri Wamala, we should remember, is the one person who knows what actually happened between Adela and Warlock, for he saw the latter leaving the former’s room on the night the sexual intercourse happened.

As for what happens in *Prettyboy, Beware*, on the evening when Baker rescues Matthew from the beach and takes him to his house for a meal and to the hospital for medical care, he persuades him to take some wine. Matthew refuses, for “[i]n his family, alcohol was considered the devil’s most wicked weapon” (Kimenye, 1997b, p. 59), but being much younger and naïve, he is no match for the experienced Baker who claims that “wine isn’t listed as strong drink” and that it has certain health benefits like aiding digestion:

Giving in to Mark’s powers of persuasion, Matthew eventually consented. He took a tiny sip and was surprised that it tasted deliciously refreshing; not at all the fire-water he had been brought up to expect. Arguing that his parents could not object to such an innocent beverage, he drank the contents of his glass and made no objection to Mark refilling it. Two glasses of wine later, his head seemed to be floating away from his body, and he suffered a strong urge to throw up. Mark assisted his stumbling progress to the bathroom, and held his head over the lavatory bowl. Then he washed Matthew’s face, made him rinse out his mouth, and supported him to a bedroom.

It was not the room in which Matthew had slept earlier in the day. This one was larger and contained a double-bed. Matthew was in no condition to question the change. He dropped mindlessly while Mark undressed him and put him to bed. Nor was he aware of Mark slipping in beside him and holding him in a tender embrace throughout the night. (p. 60)

This is Mark Baker’s careful way of introducing Matthew to the world of homosexuality. At this particular moment in the text, however, Matthew is still naïve enough to believe that there is nothing wrong with him sharing a bed with Mark Baker since “he and his brothers had been forced to share a bed until one by one the older ones left home to marry” (p. 61). But the differences between the two contexts is different: Mark Baker is a stranger who is old enough to be Matthew’s father, while the siblings who shared beds were blood relations, and not as old as Mark Baker is.

It is not only Mark Baker who drugs Matthew before luring him into homosexuality: more or less it seems to be the rule in the world of the novel. For instance, on the day Daniel introduces Matthew to Spencer’s party, he is given a cigarette which he accepts, well aware that he was being daring because “[h]is father would have thrashed him within an inch of his life” had he known that he was capable of

doing this (p. 90).

He lounged in a cushioned chair, crossed his legs and inhaled with the ease of a veteran smoker. But it was quickly apparent that this was no ordinary cigarette. He recognized the smell of *bhanghi*, pot, marijuana, or whatever people chose to call the weed which some of the poorest shanty-own dwellers used to take their minds off their miserable existence. One part of him wanted to stub-out the disgusting thing and politely explain that he did not care for it. Another more insistent part, was curiously elated, enjoying a growing feeling of carefree optimism. Instead of being embarrassed, he grinned broadly as Spencer asked Olaf and Kurt to agree that he, Matthew, was something special. And he joined in the general laughter when Olaf remarked that Matthew was prettier than most girls. (p. 91)

What follows is predictable: “Matthew, unaccustomed to narcotic, lost track of time, where he was, who he was with, and what he was doing” (p. 91); it is a few hours later that he comes to his sense, “disturbed to be lying naked on a low divan, and to see the man Olaf getting dressed” (p. 91). Technically, this is a rape, as there is no discussion and consent between him and Olaf about what the latter has just done to him—sodomising him and bruising him in the process. The *bhanghi* was given to him to dull his senses so that Spencer gives him away to Olaf at a price, without him, Matthew, being consulted in the matter. In other words, he is commoditized.

Drugging young adults also exposes them to financial exploitation. In *Beauty Queen*, we see this when Maxi drugs Adela when she is too weak to appear at the launch of the cosmetics promotion for which she is paid 5 million US Dollars. When Maxi gives her an injection which revives her “sufficiently for her to take a bath”, Adela declares that she feels great, to which Maxi replies, “You’ll feel even better after swallowing these [white pills]” (Kimenye, 1997a, p. 122). The injection and the pills make it possible for Maxi to transform Adela’s “gaunt face into a vision of almost ethereal beauty, and hide her neglected hair under a high, flattering turban” (p. 122). It is significant that the narrator makes it clear that on this particular day it is “the pills [that] succeeded in reducing Adela to a more manageable commodity” (p. 122). Kimenye’s diction is apt here: Adela is imagined as a commodity as I have already explained, but the pills reduce her to being a more manageable one. In other words, without these drugs, she is capable of questioning the actions and decisions of Banda, Ujeni and Joe, but when she is drugged, this possibility vanishes. This means that the drugs take away her agency, thereby making her vulnerable to all forms of exploitation such as bodily, sexual, emotional, and financial. It is important to note that for a businessman who has no qualms over drugging a sick girl so that she appears at the launch of a beauty product, it is hard to imagine that forging a birth certificate and a false Curriculum Vitae is a thing to worry about. Moreover, there is a link between these two: because Adela cannot handle the pressure of an international beauty contest because she is just 16, she has to be drugged to “solve” the problem of anxiety and lack of confidence.

In *Prettyboy, Beware*, drugging exposes Matthew to robbery. While on the bus from the coast to his parents, some strangers claim to know him. When they offer him a sweetmeat, he accepts it out of politeness, but sooner than later, he feels “decidedly ill”:

At first, he thought that the stuffiness inside the vehicle was responsible for the dizziness in his head and the dryness of his mouth. Suddenly he sensed a blackness descending, and as he fought against it, he heard the man beside him shout, ‘Our young brother is sick! Stop the bus—he needs air!’

Despite Matthew’s panic-stricken struggle, the blackness overwhelmed him.

When eventually he surfaced to the pain of a blinding headache, he was mystified to be lying on short, prickly grass under a night sky out of stars. Nothing stirred in his immediate surroundings, but he caught a faint smell of wood smoke from a cooking fire. He sat up and made an agonizing attempt to rise to his feet, shocked to discover that they were bare: his socks and smart leather shoes were missing. Moments later, as soon as his mind began to clear, he found that his watch and the wallet of which he was so proud had also disappeared. Of his bags there was no sign either (Kimenye, 1997b, pp. 80-81).

It is significant that it is this robbery that makes it impossible to reunite with his parents, making it necessary for him to return to the coast, where he meets the young boy, Daniel, who introduces him to the life of child prostitution. The point to emphasize here is that had Matthew not been drugged and robbed on the bus, it is possible that he would not have ended up as a prostitute, since Mark Baker had given him some money to help him resume his studies on returning to his parents. The absence from parents is a very big issue in both novels, for it is this that exposes the young adults to exploitation. In the next sub-section, I explain this issue.

3.6 The Link between Parental “Distancing” and/or Parental Irresponsibility and Young Adults’ Vulnerability

In this section, I examine how parental distancing enhances the vulnerability of the young adults depicted in the selected fiction. By parental distancing, I mean a situation where the young adult is evacuated from his or her home by particular circumstances, and placed in the hands of a guardian. In the case of Adela, the evacuation arises from her father’s incestuous inclinations: he attempts to rape her, and when her sister Ujeni Kampare hears of it, she takes her to live with her, since she herself was a victim of the same vice. The incestuous trait of the father robs him of his authority as a parent; instead, he metamorphoses into a beast that has to be kept at bay so that it does not hurt Adela. I have already explained this point.

For Matthew, the evacuation is a result of the Municipal Council’s demolition of the shanty town where his parents were leaving, thereby necessitating them to go to the village where life is bound to be difficult, without a good school where Matthew is to study. This makes his father, Joseph Wangala,

send Matthew to a friend at the coast (most likely Mombasa, although this name is not given in the text), Jamani, but when Jamani, his house help Ezra and his children Ibra and Mo are killed in a fire, he ends up homeless and penniless, and vulnerable to exploitation as I have explained above. But even before reaching Jamani's home, Matthew is warned by several parent-figures about the dangers that the coastal town poses for young boys like him. An old man, Mikki Kikumu, tells him:

Too many youngsters are turning up here from all over the country, thinking there is an easy living for them. Be very careful about the company you keep in this town—and steer clear of tourists [who have] come here for the sole purpose of meeting little boys like you. You just take my word for it and have nothing to do with that disgusting business (Kimenye, 1997b, pp. 8-9).

When Matthew arrives at Jamani's house at the coast, Jamani tells him the same thing: "This town can be a dangerous place for youngsters" (p. 12), and soon, when Matthew walks with Ezra in the coastal town he notices that a certain bar was occupied by a group of young locals, girls and boys. Most of them were mere children, and they were giggling and laughing with some white men, while a little man wearing a purple cassock harangued them in a shrill voice.

"Hell and damnation await all fornicators!" he yelled, as Ezra and Matthew paused to listen. "I beg you little ones to forsake these evil men who come to our country to degrade you! Follow me to a place where you will be housed and fed and trained in a respectable occupation! To those men intent upon evil I say—begone—go back to wherever you came from! We can do without your tourists' dollars when you come with the sole purpose of destroying the innocence of our youth!" (Kimenye, 1997b, p. 16)

When Matthew fails to understand what is going on since he is from the hinterland where child prostitution is not public knowledge, Ezra candidly explains the matter to him:

I suppose you can't understand why Jamani and I are making such a fuss about keeping you away from the beach hotels? Well, Matthew, although you're only twelve years old, you must know that there are many bad people in the world, and they include people ready to take advantage of youngsters like you. Unfortunately, some of the worst types take their holidays at our beach hotels. (p. 32)

When Matthew asks if Ezra is talking about the tourists as he wonders what Ezra's words have to do with him, Jamani adds his voice:

To be blunt, our part of the coast attracts the sort of men who prefer ... to go with children rather than grown women. They tempt the children with presents and money until this town and several other places along this coastline now face a serious problem of child prostitution! (Kimenye, 1997b)

To make the point clearer, Ezra adds:

You're a good-looking boy and a target for men such as the German who I had to see off with a few sharp words in his own tongue. It isn't that we don't trust you. We simply do not want you to go anywhere near that type of person or the hotels where they stay. (Kimenye, 1997b, p. 32)

It is significant that it is only when Jamani and Ezra perish in a fire that Matthew is netted by the pederast, Mark Baker, who soon introduces him to homosexuality. When Baker returns to Europe and Matthew is robbed on his way back to his parents, he returns to the coast, where he ends up with the child prostitute, Daniel, who plunges him into the deep world of child prostitution, so much that sooner than later he gets to know "beyond doubt that he had sunk as low as he could go, and later on, he shivered at the recollection of the things he had done and taken part in" for the sake of getting money (p. 99). He also develops "a boldness in bargaining over the price of his services and demanding payment in advance" (p. 101), showing that with time he accepts his status as a child prostitute. Jojo, himself once involved in sleeping with European tourists for money but now settled down as a painter and a travel agent, serves as a parent figure to Matthew when he advises him thus:

Get out of it [child prostitution] while there's still time for you to lead a proper life. I'm talking as an older brother. Think of the shame you are bringing on our people. Go home to your family, no matter how poor they are. If you continue in this vile game, you'll end up diseased and unwanted by anybody! [...] I'm sure your parents would much rather have you with them and know you were safe than find out what you are up to in this town. All the money in the world can't compare with the pride parents feel in having done their best for their children, and seeing those children grown into respectable, honest people. I'm taking you to my house, and tomorrow you're going home. (p. 103)

Indeed, Matthew listens to Jojo and actually buys a bus ticket to return to his home. Unfortunately, it is when he is on his way back from buying the ticket that he is attacked by a mob of teenagers who consider him a moral pollution to the coastal city where the novel is set. It is from this mob that the Reverend Abel rescues him. The point to emphasize here is that because of Jojo's intervention, Matthew had accepted to reform and to return to the village. This shows that had he continued having a parent figure in his life (like Jamani and Ezra), his life would not have degenerated into the practice of child prostitution. Jojo comes on the scene a little too late, despite the fact that he had the chance to impact on the youngster's life much earlier—the time he saw him with Mark Baker. Unfortunately, he believed Baker's word that he did not intend to sleep with Matthew, which ended up not being the case.

4. Discussion

The situations that Kimenye imagines in *Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy, Beware* remind us that teenagers are a delicate fictional demographic group, and for this reason, they need to be protected from the wild, evil world of wicked adults whose interest is self-gratification and self-enrichment. While Kimenye might be accused of being sensational in the sense that she ‘kills’ both her protagonists in order to highlight her message—that teenagers need to be careful lest they lose their lives as easily as Adela and Matthew do—it is clear that her work testifies to the power of literature in communicating health messages, that is to say, highlighting the dangers that come with pre-marital sex (in the case of Adela), and homosexuality (in the case of Matthew), moreover in situations where the protagonists are drug-induced. In both texts, Kimenye weaves her plots around young adult characters who ultimately lose their lives so that her readers may see how dangerous and fatal it is to gamble with life. She hopes that the real life young adults who read her books will be careful about the way they live their lives and the kinds of decisions they make so that they avoid treading those paths that could lead to a fate like Adela’s and Matthew’s.

There is also a message for the parents: that they should beware the consequences their actions can have on the lives and the futures of their children. Had Adela’s father been a responsible man who does not sexually abuse his children through the repugnant practice of incest, he would have had the moral authority to save Adela from the schemes of her selfish, opportunistic elder sister, Ujeni, who allows her protégé Joe Banda, and herself to treat Adela as personal property, disposable after use. As for Joseph Wangala, Matthew’s father, he is certainly not responsible enough to keep in touch with his friend, Jamani, about the welfare of his son, for had he done this, he would have found out about the death of Jamani and his family—a tragic event that required him to find new accommodation arrangements for his son.

It is true that both *Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy, Beware* remind the reader of the dictum that “the serpent hisses where sweet birds sing” as the blurb of the former novel says, but this hissing of the dreaded creature becomes particularly menacing when the child finds herself and himself alone in a wide world full of sexual predators. What this comes to are three inter-related things. First, that parents should be more mindful of their role as the nurturers and protectors of their children over and above paying their school fees. They must take it upon themselves to educate them on how to take charge of their lives, which entails making judgments that are pro-life. Second, parents must strive to be good examples so that they win the respect of their children. Adela’s father’s loss of face and respect before his children because of his incestuous proclivities calls upon all parents to behave themselves, so that they are in a moral position to effectively guide their children.

Finally, the novels, particularly *Prettyboy, Beware*, calls upon the parents, as voters, to change the status quo of their countries, by ensuring that the people they put into office are those who care about the safety and health of the young adults, and not those who advertise the countries to foreign tourists

as nests for paedophiles and pederasts. These voters must ensure that politicians who promise tourists the “[f]ulfilment for those interested in youthful activities, particularly in connection with the very young” (*Prettyboy* 110)—a thinly veiled reference to young adult prostitution—are removed from office, so that the safety and health of young people is not sold off for US Dollars. In this sense, Kimenyé’s novels serve as tools meant to bring about social change in the East African countries where they are published, and hopefully elsewhere on the continent where they are read. In other words, the novels serve as a tool of critical conscientization, which is the premise upon which the liberation of the people suffering systemic and ideological exploitation and oppression is based, as Paulo Freire famously argued in his seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), since critical consciousness could lead to praxis. In the context of Kimenyé’s novels, this praxis would take the form of parents as citizens pushing governments to put in place laws and policies that protect young adults from dubious employment and sexual exploitation and abuse.

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