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## Towards a language reconceptualization of education in Africa: A review of the film *Otis Janam*

### Abstract

In this era of cultural renaissance, communities increasingly employ innovative approaches to educate themselves while preserving their cultural identities. Indigenous language films, such as *Otis Janam*, are powerful tools for revitalizing cultural heritage and asserting identity amidst the pressures of global development discourses. This chapter examines how *Otis Janam* functions as an educational medium that facilitates participatory learning, cultural awareness, and local adaptation to transformation. Through qualitative content analysis, the study reveals how the film engages community audiences in understanding global influences' socio-economic, political, and cultural implications. While traditional media formats are often critiqued for their limitations, this chapter argues that narrative films still possess immense potential as localized educational resources. The paper concludes that *Otis Janam* exemplifies how culturally rooted media can promote critical reflection and community-led learning through participatory storytelling.

**Keywords:** Film, community, education, culture, globalization, Homa Bay

### Introduction

‘Otis, I want to fly high above the skies.’  
(Api, in *Otis Janam*)

The above quote from the film *Otis Janam* signifies the determination and quest for cultural change that Dr. Zippy Okoth’s film aims to contribute to Kenya’s Luo-speaking Homa Bay society. This chapter analyses the film to demonstrate its relevance as traditional local language

media for educating and empowering communities to appreciate and harness the benefits of cultural transformations. In this context, education and empowerment enable communities to co-learn, become aware of, own, and control the processes of cultural and social change for their development. For development to meet the needs of people within their contexts, the debate around it crucially centres on what opportunities exist for communities to engage with and contribute to development processes. According to Adéníyí & Bèllò (2006), development involves material abundance and encompasses concepts such as education, social, cultural, and indigenous linguistic maturity. This implies that, as a powerful tool in the local development agenda, indigenous-language media can educate people and influence their mental development and social relations. Thus, it is essential to consider how the media operates to advance or hinder these development dimensions (Adéníyí/Bèllò 2006). Mass media undoubtedly plays an important role in all societies, in reconstructing their cultures (Chikaipa 2023), and in the circulation of ideas (Bonvillain 2000: 1, cited in Adedeji 2015). Thus, media such as films, documentaries, television, social media, and print are important spaces for communities to engage with and to shape their development trajectories.

However, the benefits of media for community development are immensely enhanced when these media are participatory (Adedeji 2015; Salawu 2006). Mobilization of community people is imperative for participation in development. For its broad reach, media stands as one of the most effective tools for social mobilization and enhancement of the capacities of communities to engage and challenge development discourse and processes (Chikaipa 2023). Besides, indigenous-language media also sustains people's cultures, a means of the vitality of any society. Bringing media and language together, filmmakers have explored innovative communication methods, such as storytelling in indigenous languages. Film as media has become a means of communication and an effective medium for transmitting cultural values and their transformations (Ogbe et al. 2020). Some stories, like *Otis Janam*, with their participatory settings and local language, only make sense as participatory media for charting a development path for communities.

Meanwhile, Nyabuto (2023) highlights advances in new media technologies and interactive web-based applications like social media, which

have been identified as promoting inclusivity and interactive communication. Its instructiveness also offers opportunities for social groups, such as women's participation in societal decision-making (Ongo Nkoa et al. 2023; Tawangar et al. 2025). However, in many communities, weak regulation of social media platforms means that the necessary constraints are often absent, which ultimately compromises the proper and credible access and use of information required to meet the communities' communication needs (Guerola-Navarro et al. 2023). Moreover, social media can effectively promote political participation and empowerment in Africa, especially when elemental energy and information communication technologies are accessible to the majority (Ongo Nkoa et al. 2023). In these circumstances of new media, this paper reviews the inclusivity, content, and language used in *Otis Janam*, produced in the Luo language by Dr. Zippy Okoth. Language, in this context of indigenous languages, stands out as a core element of the cultural substance of a people, essential for imagining their futures (Greene/Gupta 2022). In this respect, there is an almost insatiable appetite for authentic local language use in African media, where participation in development discourse is limited. Therefore, using the indigenous language – or the mother tongue – enables people to respond enthusiastically to their cultural transformations and development.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that, although traditional media is considered less interactive, one-off, and unidirectional, without involving much feedback from audiences, as discussed in Boeren (1992), *Otis Janam* offers a participatory and revolutionary way of creating awareness and encouraging learning among the people about their cultural milieu. This is relevant for communities participating in and refining their development processes. In this participatory approach to setting the various scenes in the film, Dr. Zippy Okoth identifies the problem of patriarchal control over women and sets a tone for collective solutions together with the people. The film departs from the dominant agenda-setting framing of the media, McCombs & Shaw (1972), understood as the hegemony of the media in unilaterally creating events and, with it, specific sets of meanings. Instead, *Otis Janam* incorporates various groups in the Homa Bay society and is in the local Luo language. Thus, the film offers an opportunity for the people of Homa Bay to collectively trigger an active discussion and awareness about the transformation of their cultures and

their outcomes (Boeren 1992). This participatory response justifies the review and discussion of the film in this work.

Drawing on the framework of media education for social change communication, combining Morris (2009), who expounds on social justice and communication, and Dutta (2018), who adequately captures how to centre social change communication culturally, this work contributes to a new way of seeing films as a crucial participatory medium for communicating and triggering transformation for empowering communities. Also, drawing from Brown & Collins (2007), participatory media involves the community whose story is being told in the development and execution of the story, for a more nuanced representation of the cultures of that society. For example, in an interview with Lodeki on the Cinema & Theatre Break Show (CTB),<sup>1</sup> Dr. Zippy Okoth shares that shooting the film *Otis Janam* involved getting the input of the fishermen, boat racers, and the older adults in the village who are custodians of the culture that the community ascribes to. In the boat racing scene, the people cheering are members of the community and not people cast from a different place who may not fully grasp the essence of boat racing within this community.

Such participatory media enables communities to reconstruct and redefine their cultures and social relations, which Pettit et al. (2009) refer to as structural, social, and political changes to address social exclusion. While globalization transmits norms, ideas, values, and practices to local societies that transform these societies, these changes and their underlying ideologies and benefits or effects may be poorly understood by societies. This partly results from a lack of participatory media, which has limited societal learning, appreciation, and awareness. Moreover, Diang'a (2017) highlights that many films about Kenya's society are produced in English, denying local people opportunities to learn and engage in development processes. *Otis Janam*, however, provides an indigenous-language-based participatory pathway to media education and learning that revitalizes local cultures and enables people to participate in and adapt to ideas and practices of empowerment. This way, *Otis Janam* is an empowering media tool for communities to imagine and act on cultural

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttPa\\_k1dN\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttPa_k1dN_E)

transformations that promote equitable social relations. As Milan (2009) notes, community media is symbolic.

... as a means of empowerment: giving people the possibility to take initiative on the local scale, they show that change is possible. They represent a way to exercise and express the imagination and to translate this imagination into practice by voicing it. (Milan 2009: 601).

In Kenya, many of these films represent events in other societies. Besides short TV series episodes, it is uncommon to find participatory films about traditional societies in their local languages. While this may not hold for other societies like Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa, where the film industry is relatively large and films about traditional societies are numerous, Igili (2017) notes, the film industry in Kenya has not performed at par to showcase traditional values and social change (Diang'a 2017). Moreover, the media in Kenya has been weak due to constraints on press freedom and the media's inability or unwillingness to hold governments accountable for not promoting democratic development processes that reach the communities (Nyabuga 2017).

These media challenges in Kenya have constrained the participation of communities in their development. While the 2010 Constitution progressively promotes women's participation in political, social, and economic life, fundamentally providing for upholding women's rights and gender equality, *Otis Janam* shows that deep cultural constraints still affect women. Despite these constraints, society acknowledges women's contributions to community livelihood and reproduction. Thus, there are calls for supporting women's integral inclusion in forms of media that enhance their participation in communication for development (Mlama 1991; Musubika 2008). In the context of this work, *Otis Janam* contributes to meeting this call. It is a participatory means for men and women to discuss cultural constraints on women's lives.

## **A framework of media localization for education and development**

The intersection of indigenous language media with sectors of the African economy has become central to discussions around media and

development (Tshabangu/Salawu 2022). Community-based platforms such as print, radio, and podcasts serve as tools for participatory communication and foster social transformation from within communities (Milan 2009). This paper responds to growing scholarly concerns over the dominance of foreign language media in Africa and its adverse effects on local participation. The overwhelming presence of foreign language media undermines the effectiveness of indigenous media in promoting participatory development rooted in local sociocultural contexts. Bucholtz (2011) notes that foreign media often impose external ideologies and belief systems, restricting community agencies. This form of cultural imperialism contributes to the decline of indigenous languages (Godsgift/Obukoadata 2008) and favours foreign over local modes of expression (Usua 2018).

In this context, *Otis Janam* serves as a counter-narrative that affirms the vitality of indigenous languages and promotes community-based development. As supported by Chikeka (1982), Villeneuve and Battiste (2001), and others, language is not merely a communication tool but a vessel for cultural meaning, symbols, and knowledge systems. When indigenous languages are marginalized, stereotypes are perpetuated, and authentic development is hindered (Onyenakeya et al. 2021; Guiberson/Vining 2023). It is important to recognize that the influence of globalization on development should not be mistaken for genuine progress. As Ademowo (2016) warns, externally imposed models often ignore the lived realities of African communities. Therefore, this chapter argues for systems that centre indigenous languages as a strategy to ground education and development within culturally relevant frameworks (Srinivasan 2013; Meighan 2021; Chew et al. 2022).

## **Media localization for education**

In education, localization involves the linguistic and cultural adaptation of educational content, such as texts, visuals, audio, and interactive elements, for a specific target audience. Pym (2004) further indicates that localization supersedes mere translation, as it goes beyond making content understandable to ensuring that it is culturally relevant and appealing to its subjects. Under this explanation, media localization for

education is framed to help understand how local media, such as films produced in local languages, support community members in participating in their development on their own terms. While *Otis Janam* is not strictly a community-based medium, it serves as a regional educational tool due to its use of local language and incorporation of the people's livelihoods and communal social structures in Homa Bay County.

It therefore follows that this analysis provides an overview of the film's background. It briefly presents the people of Suba in Homa Bay County as a communal fish-producing community in Kenya. According to Mhando (2008), the Suba migrated from Uganda to settle in Rusinga, Mfangano, Gembe, Kaksingiri, and Gwasi in Homabay County. Mhando further highlights that the original name of the Suba is Abakunta, but the Luo people, with whom the Suba intermarried, gave them the name, Suba. This description explains the cultural mannerisms and the Luo language that the Suba have borrowed from long periods of living alongside the Luo. The section This first section of this discussion explains boat racing, co-wife norm, cattle wealth, and other essential contexts, making the film a participatory and locally contextualized experience. Accordingly, the subsequent section presents an extended summary of the film, reconstructed through detailed transcription and repeated viewings by the researcher. The reproduction of the summary transcript aims to present the film's nearly complete narrative to readers, enhancing their understanding of its participatory approach as an educational tool.

The following section analyses how *Otis Janam* supports participatory learning, awareness and adaptation among community members to their culture. This section explains that the cultural transformation of Luo patriarchal culture is not intended to annihilate its values, but rather to enhance them, particularly for the empowerment of women empowerment, and the benefit of the family, community, and society. The penultimate section situates *Otis Janam* within the context of globalization, noting how the film's narrative draws on the global flow of feminist ideas in the 1990s (Schaffer/Song 2017). The paper concludes by reassessing the film's role as a community educational tool. The conclusion re-emphasizes the unique participatory approach of *Otis Janam* in this regard, adopting the people and their existing language, livelihoods, and communal values in its narrative and production.

## Background of *Otis Janam*

Dr. Zippy Okoth's *Otis Janam* film is an educational piece cast in the Luo language of Kenya. Key characters around whom the film revolves around are Api, the daughter of Jaduong' Okoth, the wealthiest man in the village, and Otis, who started life as a lazy drunkard unable to find a wife until the chance came to take Api as his wife. The story takes place on Rusinga Island, Homa Bay, Kenya. According to Obonyo (2012), Rusinga Island is home to the *Abasuba*, a group of Suba people who are said to have originated from the Baganda or Basoga in Uganda, thus forming a heterogeneous group of non-Luo people in South Nyanza. During this migration, most of the Suba people intermarried and adopted many aspects of the Luo culture, including their language. Homa Bay is a rural community on the western shores of Lake Victoria. Its people are crop farmers and fishers. Men, as a mainstay, catch fish from the Lake, while the women sell the fish and crop harvest on the local market. To further highlight this, Abuso (1980) and Obonyo (2012) explain that, in addition to this gendered division of labour, social life in Homa Bay is guided by local customs and norms that celebrate gendered social reproduction roles, the chastity of women, hard work, and family unity. Cultural values also acknowledge the man as head of the family, respect for the woman as a supportive wife, and a mutually beneficial communal living that connects everyone and minimizes individualism and exploitative liberal competition (Obonyo 2012; Abuso 1980). Culturally, the Abasuba are patrilineal and patriarchal, where men control resources and make significant decisions at home. The cultural background of the Suba helps to understand the film's characters and how gender justice is portrayed.

The film is a means to help the community better understand the benefits of cultural transformation. It seeks to communicate the tension between the values of gender equity and empowerment in social relations, on the one hand, and the traditional norms of patriarchy, on the other. Globally, most societies have enhanced women's civil, reproductive, economic, and political rights (Adawo et al. 2011). Understanding the film within the context of contemporary globalization explains why a boat race welcomed women's participation and why Otis initially did not stop his wife, Api, from working at her shop. Socio-culturally, Adawo et al. (2011) and hooks (1984) further note, this wave of femi-

nism globally equally raised concerns about cultural and social equality for women and campaigned heavily against the social and cultural stereotyping of women as “only capable of becoming housewives” and nothing more. However, *Otis Janam* shows that women can inherit their families, engage in productive labour to support their families, and earn social respect. The film, however, does not wholly adopt global feminist notions in opposition to Luo cultural values. For example, respect for the elderly’s approval of marriage, women living as co-wives, social sanction and rewards for behaviour, communal social security and support, among others, still strongly prevail in the film. The film demonstrates a discursive flow in promoting gender equity and justice, emphasizing the worth of women to inherit their fathers’ property just as men do, and teaching consensus building around justice in gendered relations as a valid Luo cultural norm regulating family life. This approach enhances social cohesion and promotes development in general. This way, the film avoids a more profound, broader clash between globalization and indigenous cultural values.

### **An abridged transcript of *Otis Janam*<sup>2</sup>**

The following discussion highlights the film *Otis Janam*, scene by scene, to create the context for discussing the role of the film as participatory media for education. It also provides a detailed overview for the audience that may not be able to access the film beyond the trailer, enabling them to understand its relevance in the discourse on the media’s role in education. The film starts with a scene somewhere along the shores of Homa Bay in 1991. Api is finishing serving a client in her tailoring shop (Tumaini Tailoring Centre). Her father, driving a not-too-old car, pulls up in front of the shop and honks for Api to close it so they can drive home together.

**JARIEKO’S COMPOUND – DAY (SCENE 2):** Otis and his friend Jarieko are seated on Jarieko’s compound, drinking a local brew. They discuss life in general as they recall their school days together. Jarieko’s family comes

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsuthDOiaxQ>

over to greet Otis. After chit-chatting, Otis seeks to leave, but Jarieko requests he stay longer. Otis obliges, and Jarieko's wife serves them the local meal of gruel (*ugali*), fried tilapia fish, and sauce. They eat as Jarieko talks about and praises his wife, saying she is beautiful and prepares excellent meals. It should be noted that Otis is unmarried and is looking for a wife.

This scene is followed by an early morning as dawn breaks at the lake shore, and men and children empty their nets and boats after a full catch of fish. Women load their pans with fresh fish.

**JADUONG' OKOTH HOUSE – MORNING (SCENE 3):** Api is taking care of her father at home. She serves her father, Jaduong' Okoth, bread, tea, and fruits for breakfast. Jaduong' Okoth starts eating, then calls Api over to tell her something. He begins reminding Api how good he has been as a boat racer. He explains to Api that someone must inherit his boat racing skills, but he does not have a son. Api tries to encourage her father that, though there is no son, the community will remember him. However, Jaduong' Okoth is not satisfied with Api's response. '*So, what do you want, Papa?*' Api asks. He continues, '*You are yet to get married...*'. Her father tells her. '*I want you to marry the best boat racer in the village so that my legacy will continue, even through my son-in-law.*' After some hesitation, Api agrees. They continue their conversation over food, medication, and rest. Api helps her father to take the necessary medicines, and she clears the table.

To introduce the next scene, we see Jarieko helps his wife to carry a basket load of fish from the water to the shore. After a brief, friendly chat about the catch, they discuss Otis's current state as a bachelor and his drinking habits. Jarieko's wife convinces him to do something to help Otis out of drinking and find something to do with his life. Jarieko agrees to pass by Otis' home to check on him.

**OTIS' COMPOUND – MID MORNING (SCENE 4):** Otis has just woken from sleep in his one-room home. He drinks water from the earthen pot, takes a small quantity of uncooked potatoes, and dislikes them. Otis lights the firewood to boil local tea (*chai*), which he drinks with leftover *ugali*. As he eats, he descends into deep thoughts about the possibility of marrying. Two women chit-chatting near his home capture his attention with

their voices. He engages them from a distance and invites one of them, Achieng'e, to get closer to him. Otis engages Achieng'e in discussing his marriage to her, and she scorns him, walking away with her friend.

A few minutes later Jarieko visits Otis at his home, talks about his laziness, and laughs at his failed attempt at wooing Achieng'e. Otis laments that he has not refused to marry, but the women in the village deny him. He walks out on Jarieko in anger.

**THE LOCAL BREWER'S COMPOUND – MID DAY (SCENE 5):** Otis joins his friends at the local brew. Otis, though in debt, orders more drinks for his friends at the displeasure of the seller, who insists Otis must settle his earlier debts first. Just as they drink, one of the men tells them about the impending boat race Jaduong' Okoth, Api's father, the wealthiest man in the village, is organizing. For this race, the winner takes Jaduong's daughter, Api, a wonderful and educated lady, as a wife. Otis' friends encourage him to take part in the race and give him some money to register.

After speaking with his friends Otis heads to the Boat race registration centre near the shores of the Lake where he finds a large crowd and a queue of interested contestants registering for the race. He meets a friend there who dissuades him from registering because he cannot defeat the reigning champion. Otis, however, insists on being the one who will win this race. He and his friend argue, and they fight at the registration grounds. When they are separated, Otis runs away from the registration grounds.

**API MEETS OTIS – AFTERNOON (SCENE 6):** Api, while walking along a path, finds Otis in the bush, sleeping and hurting from the bruises he sustained from the fight with his friend at the boat race registration centre. Apis dresses Otis' wounds and helps him to his feet. She sits beside him and engages him about who he is and what has happened to him. Api tells him that perhaps she has seen something good in him. Otis, however, dismisses that, insisting that he is of no value as everyone in the village despises him. Api leaves Otis in the bush.

Later in the scene we see Api in the bush with the same man Otis fought with at the boat race registration centre. He is showing Api a note in the bush about how much he loves her, to be his second wife. Api

rejects him and walks away. It is revealed in this scene that they are past lovers. This scene transcends a later incident in which Api goes back to the same man to help her defeat Otis, her husband.

**THE BOAT RACE – NEXT DAY (SCENE 7):** It is the day of the boat race and the day the winner gets to marry Api. The crowd cheers the competitors on as the first set of boats row out and about, warming up. Excitement is visible on the faces of the crowd as the boats row back and forth, warming up. Among the boat racers is Otis. Eventually, as the boat racers row out away on the lake, each determined to win, Otis's thoughts go back in time about his childhood days with his father preparing fishing nets, rowing, and fishing out on the lake in the dark, with his father instructing him on how to steer and row a boat successfully. With the scene back on the shore from Otis' childhood, Otis wins the race, with Api and his father cheering him on the dais.

The following scenes show Otis and Api get married and receive blessings from Jaduong' Okoth. As they are blessed, Otis proclaims, '*Api, I love you; you are mine*'. They go on honeymoon, taking strolls along the shores of the lake and have dinner.

These scenes are followed by their transition into marriage. Otis returns home with fish for his new wife. Api, to make dinner for the family. Otis replicates Jaduong' Okoth's routine with Api, picking her up from the tailoring shop so they can head home together at the end of a busy day. Next, we see a heavily pregnant Api receiving Otis from work and he offers to cook the fish, insisting that his pregnant wife cannot do heavy chores.

**A DARK CLOUD LOOMS – OTIS AND API'S HOME – DAY (SCENE 8):** The scene starts off five years later when Otis and Api have two children, a boy and a girl. Otis returns home in his car and finds Api sitting on the veranda, preparing their children for school. He plays with the children, and the scene fades off. In the following scene we still see a close knit family as Otis, smiling, picks Api up in his car in the evening from her shop.

Later that evening, Otis and Api lie in bed, awake in the middle of the night. Their house lights up in the dark. Api begins a conversation about how her tailoring customers are increasing, taking a toll on her

and affecting her duties as a wife at home. They continue the discussion, and Api suggests that Otis take a second wife. Otis scrambles and sits up on the bed, surprised at Api. He replies that he is happy with Api and their children alone and does not need a second wife. Api insists he does, explaining that a second woman will help with chores at home, allowing her to find time for her work. She also claims she is bored at home and needs another woman to keep her company. She assures her husband that everything will be fine between them; with a second wife, their marriage will be spiced up. Otis asks where he would find a second wife if he were to accept her suggestion. Api assures him she has already found one for him, Katoto, a beautiful, hardworking, and respectful woman in the village, she claims. Api further reassures her husband that she will pay for the dowry with some of her father's cattle.

While Otis is still hesitant about this suggestion, Api convinces him, and he gives in.

**JADUONG' OKOTH'S HOUSE – DAY (SCENE 9):** Otis and his family visit Jaduong' Okoth, Api's father, who is now very old and lies in bed, relatively weak. He calls Otis to advise him on living a good life and caring for his daughter, Api, and grandchildren. Otis promises to do just that. Jaduong' Okoth tells Otis he supports Api's idea of a second wife. Jaduong' Okoth also bequeaths half of his wealth to Otis and Api, requesting Otis not to refuse Api anything she needs. As Otis and his children leave Jaduong' Okoth to join Api in the kitchen preparing tea, Jaduong' Okoth slumps and passes on in his bed. Api, who was bringing her father tea, finds him gone.

This scene is followed by a funeral ceremony for Jaduong' Okoth.

In another brief scene Women in a neighbouring household winnow beans and gossip about Otis's plans to take a second wife, just when Jaduong's Okoth died. They also gossip about how Otis has become very wealthy. They gossip about Otis for a while. The scene is followed by a quick scene of a happy Otis and Api having an evening meal at home while talking about their children. Perhaps a sign that their marriage is still intact. At this time Otis has taken in a second wife, following his Api's advice and Jadoung' Okoth's last request to him before his death.

**ACHIENGE’S FATHER’S HOUSE – DAY (SCENE 10):** Preceding the two women (Achienge’ and her mother) who were gossiping about chances of Otis taking in a second wife, two elderly men pay Achienge’s father a visit. They talk about the possibility of Achienge’ (who had initially scorned Otis) getting married to Otis as a third wife. The two older men convince Achienge’s father that she is Otis’s rightful first wife since Otis professed his love for her when he was single. Later when the visitors are gone, Achienge’s father attempts to convince Achienge’s mother that their daughter is fit for Otis as a third wife.

**STORM OVER PARADISE – OTIS’ HOMESTEAD – MID DAY (SCENE 11):** This is a year later, Otis sits in his compound and is served supper, *consisting of ugali and fish*, by Katoto, his second wife. Just then, Api appears with a meal and is ready to serve Otis. However, he refuses Api’s meal, rebuking her sharply for being sluggish. He tells Api to learn how to prepare a better meal like Katoto does. In a kind tone, Otis calls back Katoto from the house to help Api take back her meal. Api, still standing with her meal, dejected and confused, refuses Katoto’s help and sits as Otis walks away. Api sits for a while, lamenting and confused about the rejection she had just experienced from Otis.

Later that day Otis is visited by his long-time friend Jarieko. As they engage, Jarieko strongly warns Otis that he disapproves of his marrying Achienge’ as a third wife, insisting that Achienge’ and her family are only interested in his wealth. However, Otis reminds Jarieko of his advice some time ago: that men should earn respect for marrying more women. Jarieko insists his friend is making a mistake in marrying a third wife, moreover, disrespecting Api, who has supported him all the while. After arguing with Jarieko for a while, while insisting on marrying Achienge’ as a third wife, Otis leaves his friend in a rage.

**THE LOCAL MARKET – DAY TIME – (SCENE 12):** Api is at the local market to buy something and meets Jarieko’s wife. They exchange pleasantries and step back from everyone to discuss an issue. It is about Api’s business and the developments in her home. She reports to Jarieko’s wife that Otis refuses her food and has used her business capital to sell her sewing machine to feed the family. Api then sells Jarieko’s wife a scarf that she has stitched by hand for 100 Kenyan shillings. Jarieko’s wife

appreciates and acknowledges how much Api's business has declined, to the point where she can now sew with her hands. Just then, a boy runs by and tells his nearby friends that someone is organizing a new boat race with a 100,000 Kenyan shilling prize for the winners. Stopping the boy in his tracks, Api and Jarieko's wife get interested in the race and decide to give it a try themselves. They encouraged each other, knowing that although women had never registered as competitors in a boat race, they were determined to register and try their luck for the prize money.

**THE LOCAL BREWER'S COMPOUND – DAYTIME (SCENE 13):** Otis and his old friends, with whom he drinks, sit and enjoy local drinks at the seller's homestead. Again, they inform Otis of another boat race organized by a company shooting documentaries about boat races, which has permitted women to compete. One of them goes on to tell Otis, to his surprise, that women are registering for the race. However, he also gets interested and jokingly replies to the admiration of his friends that he is going to race as a reigning champion and use the money to marry Achienge.

**A MEETING IN THE DARK – EVENING (SCENE 14):** In the late evening, Api secretly meets her friend, the man Otis fought with during the registration for the earlier boat race, which Otis won. While being careful not to be seen or heard together with this man at night in the bush, Api requests that he teach her how to row a boat. Api tells her friend, to his disbelief, that women are permitted to compete in the boat race this time. After a while, cajoling him, Api's friend agrees to teach her to row a boat successfully, enabling her to compete. That same night, Api learns how to row the boat. She informs her friend, who is teaching her to row, that she does not have permission from her husband, Otis, to compete in the race but believes she has the right to compete just as he does. They are both in the boat, rowing, and the scene fades off.

**HELL BREAKS LOOSE – OTIS'S HOMESTEAD – DAYTIME (SCENE 15):** Otis's home second wife, Katoto, prepares to start a meal while gossiping with Achienge', the third wife-to-be. Otis arrives back home in his car. In a rage, he paces up and down the compound, looking for Api and yelling her name. Katoto and Achienge' try to calm him down. Still in a rage, he informs the two women how '*... that woman [Api] left here to register for*

*the boat race...*’ against the cultural norm of the village and without his permission. Just then, Api returns home, singing to herself. Otis confronts her angrily, calling her a *‘foolish woman’*. Otis angrily confronts Api about her registration for the boat race. She replies *‘... My husband, if I win, haven’t we all won?’*. However, Otis is more furious that she did not deny it. He warns Api to remove her name from the registration list the next morning. Api stands dejected and confused. Having warned his first wife, Otis leaves in his car with his third wife-to-be, *Achienge’*. Katoto goes over to console Api.

**OTIS’ HOUSE – NIGHT (SCENE 16):** Api is doing her clothes stitches in the living room when Otis suddenly storms into the room in a rage. He snatches the cloth from Api, tears it, and confronts her about not removing her name from the boat race register as he instructed her earlier. A fight ensues between them, and Api finally laments to Otis about him using up her sewing capital. Thus, she must compete in the race to win the money and revamp her business for the sake of her family. However, Otis warns Api that this is not her father’s home, which infuriates Api, and she reminds him that he is the lazy one and not her. Api refuses to remove her name from the race. Otis laments in fury *‘... What do you think the whole village will say when they see me competing with you?’* Api reminds Otis how she has worked hard and served him as a diligent, dutiful wife, and of his promise to her father, *Jaduong’ Okoth*, on his deathbed that he would take good care of Api. Otis, still angry, attempts to convince Api to de-register for the race. However, Api responds *‘... Otis, I want to fly high above the skies’*. Hell breaks loose, and Otis pounces on Api with rage. Katoto rushes in and tries to hold Otis off. Api manages to escape into the dark.

In the followings scene Api runs for safety to her friend’s house. While *Jarieko’s* wife massages her husband in their home late at night, they are startled by hard, persistent knocking. *Jarieko* opens, and Api rushes in, crying. She reports to the couple that Otis had beaten her up and warned her not to return to the house if she does not remove her name from the boat race. The couple admits Api to spend the night with them. *Jarieko’s* wife assures her that she is also in the race and that there is nothing wrong with Api competing.

**THE BOAT RACE II – THE SHORES OF THE LAKE – DAYTIME (SCENE 17):**

At the shore. Competitors are preparing to start the boat race. A large crowd has formed. The Master of Ceremonies cheers the crowd on, chanting, *‘My people, this never happened ... For the first time, a person is racing against their spouse ...’* The microphone is handed to Otis to speak before the race begins. He promises that if he wins, he will fetch all the young men in the village and buy them alcohol. When it is Api’s turn to speak, she promises that if she wins the race, the money will revamp her tailoring business, and this will not only help her but also enable all women in the village to learn tailoring for their livelihood. She exclaims to cheers from the crowd, *‘If I win, I want my father to know that I can also carry on his legacy’*. The race begins with Api leading an all-women’s team in one of the boats. Eventually, she wins the race with her team, to loud cheers! While the crowd rejoices with Api, Otis remains glued to his boat, utterly disgusted and disappointed, watching the whole scene of his wife winning the race unfold before him.

Homa Bay village fades off from the shore, and the film ends.

***Otis Janam* as participatory media for education**

In the context of the film sparking conversations among people about transformations in their culture, the film serves as a tool for participatory and collaborative learning, awareness, adaptation, and communication opportunities for community members. It enables them to better understand and appreciate transformations to their cultural norms. Studies identify traditional mass media as a means of transferring information and knowledge to people without their active participation (Boeren 1992). However, though the categorization places the film within traditional mass media, *Otis Janam* employs a participatory approach. For example, the market, the boat race registration centre, the boat race with the cheering crowd, and even the various gossip points where men or women introduce new gossip, all show numerous groups of people. It uses many community people who appear in most scenes as core participants and in collaborative scenes. In this participatory scene, community people actively discuss changes confronting their culture. In the scenes where the men are drinking at their local joint, they share the latest news

about changes to the boat race, where women are either key attractions or key participants. At the community market, Api and Jarieko's wife find time to share the latest developments in their respective families and the community. During one of their usual gossip sessions, Api and Jarieko's wife get news about women participating in the boat race. Moreover, the boat race always attracts crowds to the shore, indicating that the community people were essentially part of the film. As they cheer their compatriots on to victory, the crowd on the beach collectively shares the joys and pains affecting their community and families.

Dr. Zippy Okoth's film utilized boat racing, a skill, tradition, and livelihood that people already practice and are familiar with, to stimulate participation. The village boat race, in a sense, symbolizes a long tradition of entertainment, livelihood, and community cohesion. However, the race also presents a gendered smothering of women's capacities and the quest for self-development disguised in patriarchy. Until the 1980s, boat racing was a male-dominated sport. Zippy Okoth attempts to demystify this in the film by introducing women into boat racing. Through a competition, Zippy Okoth also teaches that Api's desire to participate, win the race, and use the prize to support her business, family, and community does not necessarily undermine the communal value in social relations in Luo culture. Instead, it aims to demonstrate the potential for the community to adapt to and benefit from cultural transformation.

Participatory media development communication is crucial. Salawu (2023) demonstrates how indigenous media communication has been utilized across Africa, the Americas, and Asia over the decades, enabling societies to adapt to or contest social change. The film features different generations of people in different scenes. This further demonstrates participation. Both adults and younger people participated in the movie. We see how a young boy introduced the second boat racing competition to Api and Jarieko's wife. Again, at the boat race, young people, the aged, and middle-aged people cluster together to cheer their competitors.

The film thus promotes intergenerational learning and social cohesion among community people. Older people often possess a deeper understanding of the symbolic meanings inherent in their culture. Therefore, by including young people in the film, Zippy Okoth contributes to community participation, passing down valuable wisdom, and developing new values, attitudes, and skills of engagement and social harmony in

communities. Although simple, the film effectively teaches the importance of social cohesion. It seeks to demonstrate women's worth in society as equal partners to men. For example, in the film, Api, despite being educated and having the choice to leave the marriage when Otis mismanages their finances, enters the boat race so that she can revive her business and continue to support her family. Social cohesion is also evident in how Jarieko and his wife intervene in Otis and Api's situation when Api runs to them after the fight with Otis.

In another scene, Jarieko and his wife can be seen working together by the lake. However, the film highlights the struggle to attain this recognition of women's worth, particularly in the family in contemporary Homa Bay. While the Luo society is patriarchal, it does not necessarily trample on women's self-development and expression. The film presents Api, a learned woman, who still adores traditions, as she listens to her father's will to marry the best boat racer. Jarieko's wife, on the other hand, encourages Api to join the boat race, citing that she and her husband, Jarieko, are also participating in the event. When Otis begins to disrespect Api, Jarieko visits him to try to talk to him about his behaviour change. All these scenes reflect the Luo society, which holds women in high esteem despite its patriarchal nature.

The *Otis Janam* film presents a profound dilemma in Luo society through its use of the indigenous Luo language, bringing education and learning about this struggle surrounding cultural transformations and the need for people to adapt. Dr. Zippy Okoth, through the film, teaches that in the Luo culture, patriarchy does not mean women cannot make meaning and decide how they want to develop themselves. It instead points out that women can inherit their families just as men do. To this end, the film is a valuable educational piece that showcases the ways local people can learn and revitalize their cultures to promote development on their terms. Zippy Okoth seeks to convey, through her film, that patriarchy in Luo culture is not solely about gender injustice. The film also emphasizes that cultural practices frowned upon in other societies are practiced daily in Africa and are effective. For example, the Abasuba predominantly practice polygamy because they measure a man's social standing by such things as the number of wives, size of livestock herd, number of children, number and size of houses, granaries in the homestead, and land size, among others (Obonyo 2012).

## ***Otis Janam* on media education in globalization**

As globalization continues to pressure traditional societal values, as noted by Hornberger & McCarty (2012), and Smith (2021), it is essential to acknowledge the vital role that indigenous-language media plays in preserving culture and local education. Films like *Otis Janam* are an example of the relevance of indigenous-language media for local education and learning as globalization takes a toll on the cultural values of the society. Films as agents of media education in globalization demonstrate the cultural relevance of the media in terms of sustaining cultural identity. Local people, including those without formal education in Homa Bay and across Kenya, can see, appreciate, learn from, and respect their indigenous cultural values, to contest dominant development discourses.

Gender roles may shift due to globalization (Sassen 1998), and communal and other cultural values are breaking down in the fast urbanizing and globalizing world (Berger 1997; Bergeron 2001; Buhmann 2015). In globalization, family violence and chaos in society partly occur through the infiltration of indigenous cultures and a misreading of their values. Even though globalization threatens the cultural values and linguistic diversities of indigenous societies in its quest for homogeneity (Hornberger/McCarty 2012), films like *Otis Janam* show that indigenous-language media education can confront the influences of globalization and revitalize cultural values (Ginsburg 2008).

Through the production and dissemination of content in their native languages, many communities utilize these media platforms to preserve their culture, facilitate intergenerational transmission, and promote cultural resurgence. *Otis Janam* thus supports education and consensus-building around these issues. It teaches the diverse people of Homa Bay about the progressive attributes of their cultures, on which to understand, engage with, and contest development discourses to meet their sociocultural and material needs. The film demonstrates consensus and unity around development debates regarding cultural values such as gender equity. The boat race, though competitive and might appear an individualistic endeavour, is a public event that fosters consensus about women's worth in society as partners of men. *Otis Janam* shows how the elderly, women, youth, men, farmers, fish farmers, and sellers, among others, debate and react to various notions and events, such as specific

skills – boat racing – being a male only domain, and also the notion of only men inheriting their families (Jaduong’ Okoth directing his wealth to Otis because he had no son of his own); of formal education being a barrier to adhering to local values (Api’s humility), or women being objects of men (Otis’ notion). Thus, the film demonstrates the value of communalism as a crucial social support system.

## Conclusion

Particularly insightful about *Otis Janam* is the participatory approach in developing the film. Zippy Okoth utilizes the community’s people, in their language and traditional livelihoods, to promote inclusivity and participation in learning and awareness about cultural transformations. Even though critics criticize traditional media such as film for being non-interactive and a one-way communication, it is methodologies like participatory videos, encouraging community involvement in the process of making films, highlighting their languages and cultural living, that showcase the power of media in advancing participatory communication (Ginsburg 2008; Brown/Collins 2007).

This chapter’s key contribution to academic discourse on media localization for education is to practically highlight, through films like *Otis Janam*, that these filmmaking approaches, which invite community people into films and use their languages and livelihoods, can promote participatory communication and trigger responses to an issue. Without such local content<sup>3</sup> in community development communication media, the danger exists that local media may merely exclude community members from their development processes and perpetuate globalizing influences on local people.

This paper thus presents *Otis Janam* as a useful indigenous-language participatory and inclusive local media (film) through which local people debate, evaluate their cultural values, and build consensus to learn and develop themselves on their terms. As an indigenous language medium,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/business-and-economy/2023-02-21-native-multichoices-str-ong-investment-in-local-content-is-shaping-african-entertainment/>

*Otis Janam* emphasizes the non-competitive, communal values of Luo society, which are also prevalent in other African cultures. Thus, the film is not a call to reject tradition, culture, globalization, or any values that may appear new to local people. Instead, it provides a local participatory space for education, learning, awareness, and consensus-building around cultural transformations and the necessity of adapting to a better society.

## Further study

Since *Otis Janam* is a one-off representation of cultural transformation in Homa Bay, it is essential to follow up in any form of research, be it interviews, small theatres, or social media interactions, among others, to identify how far such revolutionary ideas by Dr. Zippy Okoth have been sustained or are affecting the community.

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