

FROM CINEMATIC ABSURDITY TO STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: BECKETTIAN AESTHETICS AND POSTCOLONIAL CONFLICT IN DAUDI ANGUKA'S MVERA

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Abstract

Contemporary African cinema has increasingly moved beyond conventional realism to explore fragmented histories, political disillusionment, trauma, displacement, and the psychological consequences of structural violence. Yet scholarship on African conflict cinema has tended to privilege historical realism and sociopolitical representation, while the potential of absurdist form to produce an alternative understanding of postcolonial experience remains comparatively underexamined. This paper examines Daudi Anguka's *Mvera* (2023) as a cinematic reconfiguration of absurdist aesthetics within a Kenyan postcolonial context. Rather than treating absurdity simply as a stylistic departure from realism, the article conceptualizes structural absurdity as a condition in which political, economic, and social contradictions become experienced by individuals as repetition, uncertainty, communicative breakdown, spatial confinement, and disrupted temporal coherence. Drawing on Beckettian aesthetics, postcolonial theory, trauma studies, and African film scholarship, the paper employs qualitative close textual and audiovisual analysis of the film. Particular attention is given to fragmented temporality, silence and minimal dialogue, spatial confinement, visual estrangement, repetition, characterization, and the relationship between historical memory and contemporary exploitation. The analysis argues that *Mvera* does not simply represent conflict as an external political event; it transforms conflict into an aesthetic and experiential condition. *Mvera*'s entrapment within a system that disguises exploitation as opportunity, together with Thabiti's conversion of economic vulnerability into political power, produces a world in which ordinary categories of choice, progress, security, and freedom become unstable. The film's absurdist structures therefore reveal a deeper contradiction within postcolonial subjectivity: individuals are invited to pursue mobility and economic liberation while simultaneously being incorporated into systems that reproduce their vulnerability. The paper concludes that *Mvera* reconfigures Beckettian aesthetic principles through specifically Kenyan

social realities, demonstrating that absurdity can function not merely as an existential category but as a cinematic grammar for representing structural violence, postcolonial dislocation, and the persistence of unresolved historical contradictions.

Keywords: Cinematic Absurdity, Structural Violence, Beckettian Aesthetics, Mvera, Postcolonial Cinema, Trauma, Repetition, Kenyan Cinema

1. INTRODUCTION

African cinema has long occupied an important position in the cultural representation of colonialism, political domination, social inequality, violence, displacement, and the unfinished business of postcolonial nationhood. From early post-independence filmmaking to contemporary African digital cinema, filmmakers have used the moving image not simply to reproduce social reality but to interrogate the structures through which that reality is produced and experienced. As Dovey observes, African cinema and its scholarship have increasingly opened alternative ways of thinking about African histories, identities, and cultural representation. The contemporary African film therefore cannot be reduced to a documentary record of political circumstances; it is also a site in which formal experimentation becomes a means of thinking through historical experience (65–80).

One of the dominant modes through which political and social conflict has traditionally been represented is realism. Realist cinema is particularly powerful because its recognizable settings, causal structures, social institutions, and historically legible characters allow viewers to connect cinematic events with identifiable political realities. Such a mode is indispensable for representing war, political repression, displacement, poverty, and other forms of social violence. However, realism is not the only possible aesthetic response to conflict. The psychological consequences of violence frequently exceed the coherence of chronological narrative. Trauma, memory, fear, alienation, and uncertainty do not necessarily conform to the logic of beginning, development, climax, and resolution. As Higgins suggests in her discussion of trauma and African cinema, contemporary African filmmakers increasingly confront the problem of representing not only the event of violence but also its lingering psychological and social consequences (91–111).

It is at this point that absurdist aesthetics become analytically significant. The absurd is traditionally associated with the contradiction between the human desire for order and meaning and a world that refuses to provide either. Martin Esslin's influential account of the Theatre of the Absurd identifies fragmentation, circularity, breakdown of communication, anti-teleological action, and the destabilization of conventional dramatic structures as central characteristics of absurdist representation. Beckett's theatre is particularly important to this tradition because his characters frequently inhabit situations in which action produces little progress, speech fails to establish stable communication, time becomes repetitive, and the possibility of meaningful resolution remains uncertain. Recent Beckett scholarship by Hashemipour and Ponomareva continues to emphasize discontinuity, failed communication, recurrence, and the destabilization of narrative expectation as significant aspects of the Beckettian form (67–76).

The relevance of these characteristics to African cinema, however, should not be assumed automatically. There is a danger in applying European aesthetic categories to African cultural production as though African texts merely reproduce European forms. Such an approach would reproduce precisely the asymmetrical intellectual relationship that postcolonial scholarship seeks to challenge. The question is therefore not whether a Kenyan film is “really” European because it can be interpreted through Beckett, but rather what happens to absurdist aesthetics when they are reconfigured within a specifically Kenyan social, political, and historical environment.

This paper addresses that question through Daudi Anguka's *Mvera*. Released in 2023, *Mvera* is a Kenyan feature film directed and cinematographed by Anguka. The film centres on Mvera, a young woman searching for her missing mother who becomes entangled in an organ-trafficking operation disguised through promises of employment and economic opportunity. Thabiti, a wealthy and politically ambitious figure, operates at the centre of this system. The film connects personal vulnerability to broader questions of poverty, corruption, political power, exploitation, and the commodification of human bodies. The Kenya Film Classification Board describes the film as a story of corrupt leadership, poverty, an employment scheme, and organ trafficking, while festival documentation identifies Thabiti's political ambitions and Mvera's attempt to return to her community and expose the danger.

This combination is crucial. *Mvera* does not construct exploitation merely as an isolated criminal act. Its narrative places exploitation within a social environment in which economic desperation, political ambition, promises of employment, and the search for mobility intersect. The apparently rational promise of a better future therefore conceals an irrational and violent structure. People pursue employment to escape poverty, only to discover that the very institution promising mobility has transformed them into commodities. Political leadership is presented as a mechanism for public advancement, yet the political figure at the centre of the narrative is implicated in exploitation. The language of opportunity therefore becomes inseparable from the machinery of violence.

This paper argues that this contradiction constitutes the basis of what I term structural absurdity. Structural absurdity differs from a generalized understanding of the absurd as meaninglessness. It refers to a condition in which social structures produce contradictions that become experienced at the level of everyday existence. The individual is not simply confronted by an incomprehensible universe; rather, she inhabits institutions whose declared purposes contradict their actual operations. Employment becomes exploitation. Mobility becomes entrapment. Political representation becomes domination. Community becomes vulnerable. The search for a better future becomes a mechanism through which the subject is captured. The paper therefore argues that the film formalizes structural contradiction through its cinematic organization of time, space, silence, repetition, and character experience. Absurdity is not merely an aesthetic surface placed upon an otherwise realist narrative. It becomes a way of making structural violence perceptible.

The central argument is consequently threefold. First, *Mvera* transforms fragmented temporality into a representation of historical and psychological instability. Second, its use of silence, minimal dialogue, spatial isolation, and visual estrangement makes communicative and institutional breakdown experiential rather than merely thematic. Third, repetition and narrative stagnation convert individual suffering into an image of structural recurrence, thereby linking the existential condition of the individual to broader postcolonial contradictions. The paper thus contributes to African film studies by bringing together three bodies of scholarship that are too often discussed separately: African cinema studies, absurdist/Beckettian studies, and postcolonial trauma theory. The purpose is not to argue that *Mvera* is a Kenyan version of Beckett. Rather, the film demonstrates how an aesthetic vocabulary associated with Beckettian absurdity can be refunctioned within an African context to expose the absurdity of social structures themselves.

2. ABSURDITY, POSTCOLONIAL CONTRADICTION, AND *MVERA*

The application of absurdist theory to *Mvera* requires a distinction between existential absurdity and absurdity produced through social structures. Camus locates the absurd in the tension between the human desire for meaning and a world that offers no corresponding guarantee. Esslin similarly identifies the disruption of conventional causality, communication, and resolution as central to absurdist aesthetics. Beckett develops these tensions formally through repetition, suspended action, silence, and frustrated

progression. Connor identifies repetition as particularly important to Beckett's disruption of conventional narrative movement, while Gontarski draws attention to silence, interruption, and the instability of speech and meaning.

These formal principles provide a useful point of departure for analyzing *Mvera*, but they require modification within its postcolonial context. The film's uncertainty does not arise principally from confrontation with an indifferent universe. It emerges from economic vulnerability, political power, restricted mobility, and exploitation. Characters pursue recognizably rational objectives—employment, security, mobility, and improved social conditions—yet the structures through which these objectives are pursued repeatedly produce contradictory consequences. The resulting condition may therefore be understood as structural absurdity: a situation in which institutional and socioeconomic arrangements systematically frustrate the legitimate aspirations they appear to facilitate.

This distinction is important because it prevents *Mvera* from being reduced either to a conventional realist account of social problems or to an imitation of European absurdism. Beckett provides a comparative vocabulary for understanding repetition, uncertainty, suspended progression, and communicative instability; he does not provide a genealogy for the film. The relationship is consequently formal and conceptual rather than genealogical. *Mvera* refunctions recognizable absurdist strategies within a social world shaped by specifically Kenyan and postcolonial contradictions.

The film's treatment of employment illustrates this reconfiguration particularly clearly. Employment conventionally signifies economic independence and mobility, yet in *Mvera* the promise of employment becomes connected to exploitation. The contradiction does not result from irrational individual behaviour. Rather, poverty and restricted opportunity make legitimate opportunities attractive even when those opportunities conceal structures of exploitation. The absurd therefore emerges from the gap between the rationality of individual aspiration and the destructive consequences generated by the structures surrounding it.

This contradiction extends to the film's representation of political power and mobility. Opportunities for movement and advancement coexist with conditions that restrict meaningful agency, while institutions associated with social order become implicated in insecurity and exploitation. Recent scholarship on African cinema has increasingly challenged approaches that confine African filmmaking to political documentation or realist representation, emphasizing instead the formal diversity through which African filmmakers negotiate historical and contemporary realities (Martin et al.; Tcheuyap). *Mvera* participates in this broader development by making political contradiction perceptible through its narrative and aesthetic organization.

The body provides the most material expression of this contradiction. Organ trafficking transforms the human body from an instrument through which economic agency might be exercised into an object of economic extraction. The conflict is consequently not only psychological but material: the pursuit of economic survival exposes the subject to the commodification of the very body through which that survival is imagined. Fanon's account of domination is relevant here because it draws attention to the ways structures of power shape the subject's possibilities for action and self-definition. Although *Mvera* does not reproduce the colonial situation represented in Fanon's work, its depiction of constrained agency resonates with the broader postcolonial problem of negotiating autonomy within unequal structures.

The concept of structural absurdity shifts the analysis from meaninglessness to contradiction. *Mvera* does not depict a world without meaning; rather, it depicts a social order in which legitimate aspirations such as employment, mobility, security, and economic advancement produce outcomes that undermine those very aspirations. The absurdity therefore emerges from the gap between institutional promise and lived

experience. Through repetition, uncertainty, frustrated movement, and communicative instability, the film makes these contradictions formally visible. Structural absurdity consequently explains how *Mvera* transforms what might appear as individual uncertainty into an experience produced by the social and political conditions within which its characters live.

3. FROM EXISTENTIAL ABSURDITY TO STRUCTURAL ABSURDITY

The movement from existential absurdity to structural absurdity begins with a shift in the location of contradiction. In Camus, absurdity emerges from the tension between the human desire for meaning and a world that provides no guaranteed correspondence between desire and reality. Esslin extends this philosophical contradiction into dramatic form through disrupted causality, frustrated communication, repetition, and the breakdown of conventional narrative resolution. Beckett's dramatic practice is particularly significant because these formal disruptions become persistent conditions of suspended action and uncertainty.

While these formulations remain useful for understanding absurdist aesthetics, they do not fully account for situations in which uncertainty and contradiction are produced through historically and materially specific conditions. This limitation becomes particularly important in African contexts, where absurdity may be inseparable from the political, economic, and historical structures within which subjects negotiate their lives. Vogel's concept of the "Africana absurd," for example, demonstrates the value of locating absurdity within historically produced structures rather than treating it exclusively as an abstract condition of human existence (19–35). His intervention provides an important basis for reconsidering how absurdity operates within postcolonial experience.

Building from this perspective, this paper proposes structural absurdity to describe a condition in which social, political, and economic structures produce contradictions between legitimate human aspirations and the outcomes generated through their pursuit. The distinction from existential absurdity is therefore analytical rather than absolute. Existential absurdity foregrounds the individual's confrontation with uncertainty or the instability of meaning; structural absurdity asks how particular social conditions produce and reproduce that uncertainty. This distinction is central to *Mvera*. The aspirations of its characters are not inherently irrational: employment, economic security, mobility, and improved social circumstances are legitimate objectives. Their absurdity emerges from the structures through which these objectives are pursued. The promise of opportunity can become a mechanism of exploitation, while mobility can produce entrapment rather than freedom. What appears initially as an individual crisis is therefore connected to broader arrangements of economic vulnerability and political power.

Structural absurdity consequently provides the conceptual link between absurdist form and postcolonial social experience. Repetition can signify the recurrence of structural vulnerability; suspended movement can register constrained mobility; and uncertainty can reflect unequal access to knowledge and power. The concept therefore allows the analysis to move beyond identifying absurdist features in *Mvera* to asking what those features reveal about the conditions in which its characters act.

The intervention is deliberately limited. The article does not claim that *Mvera* imitates Beckett or that structural absurdity replaces established theories of the absurd. Rather, it argues that absurdist aesthetics acquire a different analytical force when interpreted through the material conditions of a postcolonial society. Structural absurdity thus provides a way of explaining how *Mvera* transforms social contradiction into cinematic experience.

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This article employs a qualitative interpretive approach grounded in close textual and audiovisual analysis.

Such an approach is appropriate because the study is concerned not with measuring audience responses or establishing causal relationships, but with interpreting how cinematic form produces and communicates meaning. The primary text is Daudi Anguka's *Mvera* (2023), a 117-minute Kenyan feature film directed and photographed by Anguka and written by Voline Ogutu and Kahindi Yaa. The film is treated as an integrated audiovisual text in which narrative, performance, cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, sound, spatial organization, and temporality operate relationally rather than as isolated formal components.

The study adopts close audiovisual reading as its principal analytical procedure. This approach permits attention to the ways formal choices generate meanings that may not be reducible to dialogue or plot. The analysis therefore concentrates on sequences in which repetition, temporal instability, spatial restriction, silence, interrupted communication, visual estrangement, and frustrated movement become particularly significant. Rather than treating the film as a single undifferentiated object, the analysis moves between individual sequences and the broader narrative structure in order to establish how recurring formal patterns contribute to the representation of structural absurdity.

The selection of *Mvera* is purposive. Its narrative places economic aspiration, political power, poverty, mobility, and organ trafficking within the same social and dramatic configuration, making it particularly suitable for examining the relationship between absurdist form and postcolonial structural contradiction. Contemporary accounts of the film similarly identify its central concern with a community affected by poverty and corrupt leadership and its representation of young people being drawn into an organ-trafficking scheme through the promise of employment. The film therefore provides a productive case through which to examine how apparently ordinary aspirations can become entangled with structures of exploitation.

Analytically, the study proceeds through three related movements. First, it examines the narrative organization of the film, particularly recurrence, interruption, uncertainty, temporal dislocation, and frustrated progression. Second, it examines the audiovisual construction of these conditions through framing, mise-en-scène, performance, sound, silence, editing, and the spatial positioning of characters. Third, these formal observations are interpreted through the combined framework of Beckettian absurdist aesthetics and postcolonial theory to determine how the film converts individual experiences of uncertainty and entrapment into representations of structurally produced contradiction. The method thus moves from formal description to interpretation and finally to conceptual explanation, rather than merely identifying examples of absurdist technique.

Interpretive rigour is maintained through analytic consistency and textual grounding. Claims are derived from identifiable scenes, recurring formal patterns, and relationships between narrative events and audiovisual construction rather than from assumptions about the filmmaker's intentions. This is particularly important because the film's publicly available production information identifies Anguka as director and cinematographer, while other production credits identify separate writers and editors. The analysis consequently distinguishes between what the film formally presents and what may be inferred about its significance.

Finally, the term "Beckettian" is used comparatively rather than genealogically. The paper does not claim demonstrable authorial influence, direct adaptation, or intentional borrowing from Samuel Beckett. Instead, the designation identifies formal affinities—particularly repetition, suspended progression, communicative difficulty, uncertainty, and frustrated resolution—that become analytically productive when placed alongside the social contradictions represented in *Mvera*. This methodological distinction is essential to the article's argument: the purpose is not to prove that Anguka imitates Beckett, but to demonstrate how recognizably absurdist formal tendencies can acquire a distinct postcolonial structural

significance within Kenyan cinema.

5. FRAGMENTED TEMPORALITY AND STRUCTURAL ABSURDITY

One of the film's most significant formal strategies is its disruption of a straightforward separation between historical memory and contemporary experience. *Mvera* invokes Mekatilili wa Menza as a historical figure of resistance before relocating the logic of resistance into the contemporary social world. The connection is significant because the film does not present the historical past merely as background information; it uses the memory of resistance to frame a present characterized by poverty, political manipulation, and exploitation. Contemporary accounts of the film similarly identify Mekatilili as an important source of inspiration for the character of Mvera, while positioning the narrative within the present-day realities of economic vulnerability and organ trafficking.

This movement between historical memory and contemporary exploitation produces what may be understood as temporal recurrence. The film does not suggest that colonial domination and contemporary exploitation are historically identical. Rather, it places different forms of domination within the same interpretive field, allowing the viewer to consider how the problem of power may persist even when its institutional forms change. This reading resonates with postcolonial scholarship that treats historical rupture and continuity as mutually implicated rather than as mutually exclusive categories. Fanon's account of colonial domination is particularly useful here because colonial power operates not only through political institutions but also through the transformation of social and subjective relations.

The temporal significance of *Mvera* therefore lies less in chronological fragmentation for its own sake than in the relationship established between past resistance and present vulnerability. The appearance of Mekatilili at the beginning of the narrative acquires retrospective significance when Mvera subsequently confronts a contemporary system in which economic deprivation makes young people susceptible to exploitation. The historical reference consequently functions as more than commemoration: it establishes a genealogy of resistance that the contemporary narrative reactivates. The film's own production discourse confirms this relationship; Anguka has described the project as emerging from his interest in Mekatilili and subsequently transforming into a contemporary story centred on exploitation and organ trafficking.

This temporal arrangement also complicates the assumption that historical progress necessarily entails the disappearance of earlier structures of domination. What changes in *Mvera* is the form through which vulnerability is produced. Colonial resistance belongs to one historical moment, while contemporary economic exploitation belongs to another; yet both are connected by the problem of unequal power. The film consequently creates a productive tension between historical difference and structural continuity. It is within this tension that its absurdity becomes structural: the social world changes sufficiently to suggest progress, while conditions of vulnerability continue to reproduce themselves in altered forms.

The connection with Beckettian aesthetics becomes significant at this point, but only comparatively. Beckett's manipulation of time frequently unsettles linear progression by returning characters and situations to conditions that appear to have already been experienced. Scholars such as Connor have consequently treated repetition and frustrated progression as central to Beckett's formal practice. *Mvera* does not reproduce this temporality in a strictly Beckettian sense. Rather, it adapts the logic of interrupted progression to a specifically postcolonial situation in which historical transformation does not necessarily produce corresponding social emancipation.

The result is historical non-resolution. The past is neither simply repeated nor finally overcome; it remains available for reinterpretation within the present. This is precisely what makes the film's temporal structure relevant to the concept of structural absurdity. The absurdity lies in the contradiction between the

expectation of historical advancement and the persistence of vulnerability. *Mvera* therefore uses temporal relations not merely to complicate its narrative but to suggest that political and social transformation remains incomplete when the structures producing vulnerability continue to assume new forms.

6. OPPORTUNITY, ENTRAPMENT, AND THE ABSURDITY OF POSTCOLONIAL MOBILITY

The relationship between opportunity and entrapment provides one of the clearest manifestations of structural absurdity in *Mvera*. The film constructs employment and mobility as legitimate aspirations within a context of economic vulnerability, yet the promise of mobility becomes the means through which vulnerable subjects are drawn into exploitation. The Kenya Film Classification Board identifies poverty, corrupt leadership, employment opportunities, and organ trafficking as interconnected dimensions of the film's narrative, confirming that economic aspiration is not incidental to the trafficking plot but central to its organization.

The significance of this contradiction lies in the fact that exploitation does not initially present itself as the opposite of opportunity. It operates through the language of opportunity itself. *Mvera* and other vulnerable characters seek economic advancement for rational reasons; what destabilizes that rationality is the structure through which the opportunity is offered. The promise of work abroad suggests movement away from poverty, yet movement ultimately produces confinement. Economic independence is pursued, but the body becomes an object of economic exchange. The future is imagined as a space of possibility, yet it becomes the mechanism through which vulnerability is reproduced. Structural absurdity therefore emerges not because the characters act irrationally, but because rational aspirations encounter a system whose outcomes contradict the meanings attached to those aspirations.

This dynamic complicates conventional understandings of postcolonial mobility. Migration, employment, education, and economic advancement frequently signify attempts by postcolonial subjects to negotiate material inequality and expand their agency. As postcolonial scholarship has demonstrated, however, mobility is never simply an individual matter; it is mediated by unequal economic, political, and institutional structures. In *Mvera*, this contradiction becomes particularly acute because the desire for movement is converted into a technology of control. The film consequently shifts the question from whether the subject can move to what forms of power determine the conditions under which movement becomes possible. The character of Thabiti intensifies this contradiction by connecting political authority to the organization of opportunity. Rather than presenting exploitation as an entirely private criminal enterprise detached from public structures, the film places political power within the same field of economic vulnerability. Thabiti consequently becomes important to the paper's concept of structural absurdity because his position exposes the disjunction between public legitimacy and private exploitation. The figure associated with authority and the provision of opportunity is simultaneously implicated in a system that makes vulnerable subjects exploitable. The resulting crisis is therefore one of political trust as much as individual morality.

This representation also complicates the distinction between coercion and consent. The subjects drawn into the trafficking network are not simply passive victims who encounter violence without prior agency. Their decisions are shaped by aspirations for employment, mobility, and economic security. The film thus locates exploitation within the space between choice and constraint. Their agency is neither completely absent nor fully autonomous; it is exercised within conditions that have already narrowed the range of viable alternatives. This is precisely where a postcolonial reading of subjectivity becomes important. The problem is not merely that individuals make dangerous choices, but that structural inequality makes exploitative choices appear reasonable.

The film's treatment of mobility gives concrete expression to the concept of structural absurdity developed

earlier. Its central contradiction lies in the reversal of social expectations: mobility produces confinement, opportunity produces exploitation, and the pursuit of economic independence results in bodily dispossession. These contradictions extend beyond individual experience to the socioeconomic and political conditions that shape the characters' choices. *Mvera* therefore moves beyond a conventional representation of organ trafficking to interrogate how economic precarity can make legitimate aspirations for mobility sites of vulnerability. Thabiti's position further extends this critique into the political sphere, revealing how structures of authority can blur the boundary between public opportunity and private exploitation.

The significance of the film's absurdity, therefore, lies not in the absence of social order but in the contradictory operation of that order. The system functions sufficiently well to organize labour, mobility, political authority, and economic exchange, yet it produces outcomes that undermine the human purposes those institutions ostensibly serve. *Mvera* consequently transforms the absurd from a condition of individual existential uncertainty into a critique of the structures that make exploitation appear as opportunity.

7. SILENCE, MINIMAL DIALOGUE, AND THE FAILURE OF COMMUNICATION

Silence and minimal dialogue constitute important elements of *Mvera*'s representation of uncertainty and constrained agency. Rather than functioning simply as indicators of psychological distress, moments of silence frequently withhold information and require the spectator to interpret gesture, facial expression, spatial distance, and behaviour. The film consequently shifts meaning from what characters explicitly say to what remains unspoken. Silence becomes part of the film's narrative organization rather than merely an absence of dialogue.

This strategy has an important affinity with Beckettian aesthetics. As Beckett scholarship demonstrates, speech in Beckett does not necessarily secure communication or narrative resolution; repetition, pauses, interruption, and silence can expose the instability of language itself. Connor's account of repetition and Gontarski's work on Beckett's performance practices are particularly useful in understanding how verbal absence can become formally productive. *Mvera* translates this principle into cinematic rather than theatrical terms: the image, gesture, pause, and spatial relationship between characters acquire communicative significance where dialogue proves insufficient.

The relationship between Mvera and Thabiti makes this dynamic particularly significant. Their limited and guarded communication reflects an unequal distribution of knowledge. Thabiti occupies a position from which information about the structures surrounding Mvera is more accessible to him, while Mvera must interpret circumstances whose full implications are initially concealed from her. Her uncertainty is consequently not simply existential. It is produced by an asymmetrical relationship in which one subject possesses knowledge that another lacks.

This distinction is central to the concept of structural absurdity. The failure of communication in *Mvera* does not arise because language is inherently incapable of producing meaning. Rather, meaning is destabilized because access to information is itself structured by power. Silence consequently becomes an epistemic condition: the vulnerable subject is not merely unable to speak but is denied the knowledge necessary to understand the situation in which she is acting.

The film therefore transforms a recognizably Beckettian problem—the inadequacy of communication—into a specifically social and political problem. Silence simultaneously functions as a narrative device, an interpersonal condition, and an index of power. By making the spectator reconstruct meaning from what characters withhold or cannot articulate, *Mvera* turns communicative uncertainty into

an experience of structural uncertainty.

This is where the film's absurdity becomes distinctly postcolonial. The characters inhabit a social environment in which information, opportunity, and power are unevenly distributed. Communication fails not because the world is inherently meaningless, but because the structures governing that world make complete knowledge inaccessible to those most vulnerable to its consequences. Silence therefore becomes one of the formal means through which *Mvera* renders structural absurdity perceptible.

8. SPATIAL CONFINEMENT AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF POWER

Space in *Mvera* functions not merely as a backdrop for action but as a material organization of power. The film's houses, compounds, interiors, and forested environments regulate visibility, movement, and interaction, thereby transforming geographical space into a condition of social constraint. Such spatial organization is significant to the article's concept of structural absurdity because characters may occupy physically open environments while possessing very limited capacity to determine what happens to them.

The ambiguity of enclosed spaces is particularly revealing. Spaces associated conventionally with security, residence, or employment acquire contradictory functions: the domestic environment can become a site of surveillance and exploitation, while the workplace becomes a mechanism through which economic vulnerability is intensified. The contradiction is not simply symbolic. It demonstrates how familiar social institutions can operate against the purposes they ostensibly serve. What appears to offer protection may produce confinement; what promises economic participation may facilitate dispossession.

The forest extends this spatial contradiction. Its physical openness does not necessarily correspond to freedom. A character may move through an expansive landscape while remaining constrained by fear, misinformation, economic dependence, or the authority of others. The resulting tension between physical mobility and restricted agency is central to the film's representation of entrapment.

This spatial logic also resonates with the broader absurdist concern with confinement and frustrated movement. Yet *Mvera* gives that condition a distinctly social dimension. Entrapment does not depend upon literal imprisonment; it is produced through the unequal distribution of resources, information, and power. Cinematic space consequently makes structural violence visible without requiring violence to appear as physical restraint. The film's architecture of space thus reinforces its larger argument: the subject can remain physically mobile while becoming structurally immobilized.

9. VISUAL ESTRANGEMENT AND THE POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECT

Visual estrangement in *Mvera* emerges through the relationship between the body, space, movement, and power rather than through symbolism alone. The film's isolated landscapes and spatial dislocations acquire significance because of how they position characters in relation to their social environment. An apparently open landscape, for instance, does not necessarily signify freedom; its meaning changes when the character occupying it lacks the knowledge, resources, or agency required to determine the direction of movement. The visual field consequently becomes a means of exposing the contradiction between physical presence and social vulnerability.

This contradiction is particularly significant in relation to *Mvera*'s mobility. Movement initially appears to signify possibility—employment, departure, escape, and economic advancement. Yet the film repeatedly unsettles the assumption that movement produces liberation. Characters move across spaces while remaining subject to structures that constrain their choices. The body is therefore mobile at the geographical level but restricted at the structural level. This tension transforms visual composition into a representation of postcolonial subjectivity: the subject is not simply displaced but positioned within conditions that make meaningful agency difficult to achieve.

The visual strategy consequently extends the film's treatment of absurdity. What appears to be movement becomes another form of stasis; what appears to be openness becomes vulnerability. This is not merely psychological alienation represented through landscape. Rather, *Mvera* uses the organization of bodies within space to materialize the contradiction between mobility and entrapment. In this sense, visual estrangement becomes integral to structural absurdity: the subject can occupy an apparently open world while remaining unable to escape the structures that determine the conditions of movement.

10. REPETITION, STAGNATION, AND THE LOGIC OF STRUCTURAL RECURRENCE

Repetition is central to the film's construction of structural absurdity because recurring conditions repeatedly frustrate the possibility of meaningful progression. Connor's analysis of Beckett is useful here in understanding repetition not simply as the recurrence of an action but as a disruption of the expectation that narrative movement should produce transformation. In Beckettian form, recurrence can therefore become a condition of suspended progress. *Mvera* adapts this logic to a social environment in which vulnerability is reproduced through changing but structurally related circumstances.

The distinction between repeated events and repeated structures is crucial. The film's significance does not lie merely in showing that characters experience fear, uncertainty, or exploitation more than once. Rather, these experiences are connected to conditions capable of producing similar outcomes across different situations. Economic precarity creates the need for employment; the promise of employment creates dependence; dependence increases vulnerability to exploitation. What recurs, therefore, is not necessarily the same event but the social logic that makes particular outcomes possible. The trafficking network becomes particularly significant within this structure. Its power derives partly from its capacity to exploit aspirations that are themselves reasonable. Characters seek employment because they require economic security; they pursue mobility because remaining in conditions of deprivation offers limited alternatives. The system appropriates these legitimate aspirations and turns them into mechanisms of control. Structural recurrence consequently operates through the repetition of vulnerability rather than through simple repetition of plot.

This is where the film's absurdity acquires its distinctive political force. The characters' actions are not inherently irrational; they become dangerous because they are undertaken within a social arrangement whose outcomes contradict the purposes of those actions. Rational individual choices repeatedly encounter structurally irrational consequences. Repetition therefore becomes more than a Beckettian aesthetic affinity. It becomes the formal expression of a postcolonial condition in which changing circumstances reproduce familiar relations of vulnerability.

Mvera consequently transforms repetition into a critique of stalled transformation. The characters move, choose, and pursue alternatives, yet the structures surrounding those choices continually reproduce constraint. What appears to be narrative movement therefore becomes structural recurrence: the repetition of vulnerability beneath the appearance of change.

11. CHARACTERIZATION AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECTIVITY

Mvera's characterization is most productively understood through the concept of constrained agency rather than passive victimhood. She possesses desires, makes decisions, seeks mobility, searches for her mother, responds to emerging danger, and attempts to regain control over her circumstances. Yet these actions occur within conditions shaped by economic precarity, incomplete information, exploitation, and unequal power. Her subjectivity is therefore neither fully autonomous nor entirely determined. Agency exists, but its possibilities are structurally restricted.

This contradiction is central to the film's representation of the postcolonial subject. *Mvera*'s pursuit of

mobility initially signifies aspiration and self-determination, but the social conditions surrounding that aspiration repeatedly transform it into vulnerability. Her experience consequently exposes the limits of an individualistic understanding of agency: choices cannot be separated from the material and institutional conditions in which they are made. As Fanon argues, domination penetrates the social and psychological organization of the subject rather than remaining external to individual experience.

Thabiti provides an important counterpoint to *Mvera*. While *Mvera* encounters the structures of power from a position of vulnerability, Thabiti occupies a position from which those structures can be exercised and reproduced. The contrast demonstrates that structural absurdity is unevenly distributed. The same socioeconomic arrangements that restrict one subject's agency can enlarge another's capacity to act. *Mvera*'s constrained agency and Thabiti's instrumental power therefore constitute two positions within the same structure rather than two unrelated character types.

The characterization consequently prevents *Mvera* from becoming a generalized narrative of postcolonial victimhood. The film differentiates between those who experience structural vulnerability and those who benefit from, manipulate, or reproduce it. Its absurdity is therefore fundamentally political: subjects pursue agency within structures that distribute the capacity to act unequally. Through *Mvera* and Thabiti, the film reconfigures postcolonial subjectivity as a contested relationship between aspiration, constraint, and power.

12. THE POLITICS OF THE BODY

The organ-trafficking narrative gives *Mvera* a material dimension of structural absurdity by making the body itself a site of economic and political power. The promise of employment initially positions the body as a productive resource through which the subject can labour, earn, and pursue improved social circumstances. Trafficking radically reverses this expectation: the body that is expected to generate value for its owner becomes an object from which value is extracted by others.

This reversal constitutes a form of material alienation. The central contradiction is not simply that the characters are exploited, but that the very aspirations through which they seek greater control over their lives expose them to the loss of control over their bodies. Marx's analysis of commodification provides one useful way of understanding this transformation, while postcolonial theory draws attention to the unequal structures through which bodies become available for extraction and exploitation. The film brings these dimensions together without reducing bodily exploitation to an abstract economic process. The body consequently becomes the point at which *Mvera*'s political and absurdist registers converge. Economic aspiration promises greater autonomy, yet the system converts that aspiration into bodily dispossession. The subject seeks to use the body as a means of securing a future but encounters a structure that treats the body itself as the commodity. The absurdity therefore lies in the reversal of the relationship between agency and value: the pursuit of self-improvement becomes the condition through which control over the self is threatened. Through this bodily economy, *Mvera* extends structural absurdity beyond psychological uncertainty. Absurdity becomes materially embodied. The film suggests that when economic and political structures are organized around extraction, the postcolonial subject may become both the agent of her own aspirations and the object of forces that appropriate those aspirations.

13. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that Daudi Anguka's *Mvera* reconfigures absurdist aesthetics within a specifically Kenyan postcolonial context. Rather than presenting absurdity solely as an existential confrontation with meaninglessness, the film locates absurd experience within economic precarity, political power, restricted mobility, and bodily exploitation. Its fragmented temporality, communicative silences, spatial confinement, repetition, and characterization consequently transform social contradiction into cinematic form.

The concept of structural absurdity provides the article's principal intervention. It describes a condition in which rational individual aspirations encounter social structures that produce contradictory outcomes. In *Mvera*, employment becomes a route to exploitation, mobility produces confinement, political authority becomes implicated in vulnerability, and the pursuit of security exposes the body to commodification. The absurdity therefore resides not simply in the absence of meaning but in the contradiction between what social institutions promise and what they produce. The paper further demonstrates that Beckettian aesthetics can be productively refunctioned within African cinema without reducing *Mvera* to an imitation of Beckett. Repetition becomes structural recurrence, communicative uncertainty becomes an effect of unequal knowledge, and entrapment becomes a condition produced by social and political structures. This reconfiguration extends the analytical possibilities of absurdism in African film studies by demonstrating how formal disruption can operate as a mode of political critique.

Ultimately, *Mvera* reveals the disturbing paradox at the centre of structural absurdity: the legitimate pursuit of freedom, mobility, and economic security can itself become the pathway through which vulnerability and confinement are reproduced. The film's contribution lies precisely in making that contradiction visible.

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