

# Weighing Fear against Respect in School: The Relationship Between Students and School Administration in Barbara Kimenye’s Moses Series

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## Abstract

This article seeks to explore the depictions of the relationship between students and school administration in the selected novellas of Barbara Kimenye’s Moses series. The Moses series comprises eleven novellas, all of which narrating school life. Two novellas are sampled, namely Moses and Mildred and Moses in Trouble. The data was obtained by close reading of the two selected novellas and results indicate that the relationship is characterised by a mixture of fear and respect. The students respect the deputy headmaster who is qualified and professional but fear the headmaster who is not qualified but takes the title because of being the owner of the school. The relationship between the students and the rest of the staff is more of informal and personal than formal and professional. It is concluded that students respect staff that handles them professionally. The recommendation is that all owners private schools should employ professional experts to head the schools in order to offer technical advice.

**Key words:** School life, relationship, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, fear, respect, Barbara Kimenye; Moses series; novella; narrative; school administration.

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## Introduction

In this paper, I explore and expose the nature of the relationship that exists between students and the school administration in the selected novellas of the Moses series and how this relationship impacts on school life. The novellas I analyse for this purpose are Moses and Mildred and Moses in Trouble. The former novella was selected so as to introduce the relationship between school holiday life and school life and the role that the school administration ought to play as students are reporting back from school holidays. The latter novella is set around the school and its

neighbourhood and has been selected to capture the role of the school administration in ensuring school welfare. The analysis and discourse in this chapter is still guided by Reader Response literary criticism, particularly the tenet of intertextuality which asserts that there is a triangular transaction between the reader, the text and the content. I use this principle to establish the relationship between students and school administrations based on what is written, its interpretation and what it suggests in relation to previous or subsequent events in the plot.

The concept of school administration is not without problems. It is not easy to establish, for instance, whether school prefects are part of the school administration or not. Similarly, it may not be obvious for student to know whether or not the non-teaching staff such as the night watchmen, the school matrons, the gate keepers and other such persons are counted under school administrators or not. Students might be tempted to disregard them as not being part of the school administration, yet they are part.

The concept of relationship is also broad in perspective. In the context of this paper, relationship is the nature of interactions between students and the school administration through words, action and attitude as well as the way they respond to one another.

### **Relationship Between Students and School Administration in *Moses and Mildred***

Moses and Mildred relates the story of Moses Kibaya and how he discovers a snake near her uncle's home towards the end of the school holidays and decides to tame it, bring it to school and keep it as a pet snake. One by one, the students get to know about the snake but somehow keep the information away from the school administration except for the dorm prefects. In the end, the snake gets the students in trouble when it is spotted on the grass thatched roof of the dormitory and the roof collapses as they are trying to kill it not knowing it is not dangerous at all.

Below are the depictions of the relationship between the students and school administration, the attitude of the students towards school authority as judged from their speech and action; and the way they respond to one another in both formal and informal situations.

### **Moses and Mildred as an Allegory**

Kimene uses the voice of a student, Kibaya to expose the administrative weaknesses at Mukibi's and how students take advantage of the weakness to carry out their mischief. For instance, one of the students returns with a snake and others return with loads of drinks some of which are alcoholic. It is not known where they pass with those items but if they pass through the main gate as it is supposed to be, then it suggests that the checking is not thorough.

If Moses and Mildred were to be read as an allegory, then the interpretation of the snake can be taken on

differently by different readers who identify and empathize with the different characters and events in the texts.

To the students, the chief snake is probably the headmaster and proprietor of the institute, Mr Mukibi. He is depicted as a person whose interest is mainly to get money from parents of troublesome children and pledge to "make a man" of them. The school that comes under the names of Mukibi's Educational Institute for the sons of African Gentlemen is in such sorry state that one wonders what category of African gentlemen the school is intended for. The snake is also symbolic of students and student leaders who lack solidarity and report their colleagues to the school administration behind their backs.

The snake could also be interpreted to mean education in general. Note that the narrator in the opening paragraph confesses that on seeing the snake, the first instinct is to kill her, but on a second thought, curiosity leads him to wait and see how it will all end, especially when the snake has shown no signs of hurrying to glide away. In the same way, the initial instincts of Africans regarding western education and religion, and colonialism that came with it gave rise to resistance, but it was later realised that western education was eventually not as dangerous as it was initially feared to be (Johnstone and Lee, 2022).

Kimene uses a witty blend of irony, estrangement and familiarization, foregrounding, humour, suspense and dialogue to narrate school life experiences as an extension of or transition from holiday to school days. The snake appears out of nowhere, causes considerable excitement and trouble to a section of students and finally disappears to an unknown place. The narrative juxtaposes the student interests with the administrative and academic demands of the school and narrates them alongside the snake, Mildred.

### **Methodology**

**Research Design:** This study adopted a qualitative approach and used the interpretative design to examine the quality of school life depicted in the selected texts; the language used to depict the issues and the style used to present the issues. I then used the Interpretative design to discuss and analyse the school life challenges raised by the author in the text.

**Sources of Data:** Sources of Data were basically interaction with the reading materials, both in print

and online. Journal articles and books written by other literary scholars and critics about Kimenye's works and the Moses series were also studied for purposes of cross-referencing and insights. The study closely analyses primary texts by Barbara Kimenye written between 1967 and 1970, but relevant secondary sources from 1969 to 2023 are also reviewed. The primary texts by Barbara Kimenye were written in East Africa but texts reviewed are drawn from any part of the world according to their relevancy. While the primary field of study is Literature, a few texts from other fields such as Psychology, as well as general policy books are consulted.

### Methods and Sampling Techniques

For data collection, data was generated majorly from a close reading of primary sources which consisted of the selected story books of Barbara Kimenye's Moses series: *Moses*, *Moses and Mildred*; *Moses in Trouble*; and *Moses in a Muddle*. Other relevant secondary sources were consulted for more insights on the topic and the specific objectives.

The sampling technique used was purposive. The first three books in the series: *Moses*, *Moses and Mildred* and *Moses in trouble* were selected due to the assumed interrelatedness of their major events happening within and around the school. The fourth book, *Moses in a Muddle* was selected for featuring a female character. So, I believed that sampling four out of the eleven novellas for close reading would give a sufficient image of the portrayal of school life by the author of the series. This is not to claim that the other novellas of the series are not relevant. They were also read for general insight and impression but were not analysed for discussion in this study.

Secondary sources were selected depending on the objective being handled. They include journal articles written about Kimenye as an author or school life as a subject. Books about Reader Response Theory were also consulted.

Data collecting instruments included note books, note cards, a pencil and a rubber, a textual checklist, a four-quire counter book; a smart phone and a computer tablet. These were collectively used for convenience. A computer, smart phone and computer tablet would often be used concurrently for purposes of cross-referencing and sharing data via Bluetooth.

### Data Collection Tools

**Literature Review Gap Identification Template.** This tool was specifically developed to help me identify the gaps in the literature reviewed. It is a tabular template with the elements of objective, scholar, the study, year of the study or publication; and possible gap to be filled by my study.

**Intertextual Comparison of Relationships between Students and School Administration.** I developed this tool specifically to guide me in collecting data relating to the relationship between students and the school administration as required by the specific objective of this paper. It is a tabular template with the elements of an aspect of administration such as top administrators, the similarity and the differences in the depiction of the aspects in the two texts, *Moses and Mildred* and *Moses in Trouble*.

**Data analysis:** Data was analysed using descriptions and illustrations in form of quotations from the primary and secondary sources consulted. The discussion and analysis of data was guided by the ideas of Reader Response theorists. Cited works in the reference sections are presented using MLA 7th edition.

### Results

#### The Role of Non-Teaching Staff in Student Order and Welfare

The non-teaching staff list at Mukibi's consists mainly of the gate keeper, the kitchen staff and probably the cleaners, but it is only the gate keeper that features much in the narrative. The school employs no school nurse but instead there is a female teacher in charge of the sanatorium. The text doesn't indicate whether she is trained as a nurse, but it suggests that she is not trained as a teacher either, since according to what is known, Mr. Karanja, the deputy headmaster is the only qualified member of the teaching staff.

Kigali the school gatekeeper is depicted as an old man who is friendly to the two students that feature predominantly in *Moses and Mildred*. Kimenye portrays him as a weak old man who is easily compromised by students. In fact, he is so friendly to the students that they even know his secrets. For instance, the narrator, who is a student knows that Kigali is courting some rich widow somewhere in the

village. The text does not indicate how the narrator got the information, but it is possible that the gatekeeper himself could have told the students since he often sends them on errands in the village, especially to buy him alcohol in exchange for food that he often serves them.

### **The Relationship between Students and the Teaching Staff**

The teaching staff at Mukibi's as depicted by Kimenye is dedicated to work, evidenced by their attending to students following a time table. There is no evidence in the text that students have not been attended to by a particular subject teacher. However, if the attitude of the narrator and protagonist is taken to represent that of all the students there is a problem with the way the teachers handle their content or how the students perceive the content delivery of almost all the teachers apart from Mr Karanja, the deputy headmaster. For instance, the students describe Mr Lutu's lessons as boring and Miss Nagendo's expression as scornful.

*Mr. Lutu was not conducting his usual boring lesson. Instead, Miss Nagendo sat at the teacher's table, and when we entered the classroom, she tried her best to look scornful, her nose twitching slightly as though she expected to smell the reek of alcohol. Clearly she considered us a pair of thoroughly evil characters. (MM: 29-30)*

Three concerns about teacher-student relationship can be pointed out from this excerpt. First of all, the student respect their teachers by mentioning them by their official names and formal titles, unlike in some schools where teachers are referred to by nick names, whether the teachers are liked by students or not. Secondly, the teacher "tries her best" to look scornful, suggesting that she endeavours to show the students and the class that she does not like those particular two students.

Finally, the students do not learn much from the teacher's attitude, judging from the way the narrator describes it. This raises the issue of self-awareness and its role in character building and behaviour change. Mr Lutu, for instance, is depicted as being so unprofessional that he accepts drinks from students at

a bar outside school, even when the students have gone out without permission, moreover at night. The narrative goes:

*With each fresh drink, Mr. Lutu grew livelier. He gave us a tune on Magara's mouth organ, and hesang a traditional hunting song. Finally, he tried to do a trick which he told us he had once seen done by a magician. It resulted in three glasses getting broken, and got us all turned out of the bar. (MM: 22)*

This spectacular part of the narrative demonstrates Kimenye's power of humour and vivid imagination, but exposes the unprofessional conduct of the teacher. One wonders what impression the teacher's conduct makes to the community and whether the community can be able to respect such a teacher. The narrative goes on to indicate that the drunk teacher later falls in a ditch and gets injured as he is being supported back to school by the same students he has been drinking with.

Much as the students at Mukibi's are credited for respecting their teachers, there are incidents when students play tricks to teachers as in the case of the deception of Miss Nagendo by Kibaya and Mulutu intended to divert her so that the students can be able to get Mildred out of her house before she gets scared to death by the reptile (MM: 49).

Another relationship concern worthy of mention is the "silent treatment" syndrome whereby students conspire and agree to deliberately refuse to talk to the person they consider to have behaved in an undesirable or unfriendly way to them. This practice is generally employed by students to show individuals that they have done something against the good of the group. It is a form of disciplinary measure at start, but it turns political when it shifts from Mulutu to Rukia shortly after the latter has regained the title of dorm prefect.

The prefects, if the conduct and attitude of Rukia represents all of them appropriately, are depicted as practising double standards and slander in the way they exercise their authority. A case in point is where Rukia designs a weekly dorm cleaning rota that begins with Mulutu and Kibaya and compels them to clean up the mess of a dormitory party they have not been invited to attend. At the same time, Rukia is physically present when Magara is bullying fellow students into

doing his prep for him and beating up those who object. Kimenye narrates:

*“You will do as you are told,” Magara threatened. He grabbed one of my wrists and twisted it until I had to bite my lip to prevent a cry of pain from escaping.*

*“Yes, Holy Moses, I think you would be wise to do as you are told,” Rukia laughed. “Come on, Magara, Let’s get back to the classroom and put the rest of the mob in their places.”(MM: 54)*

The above excerpt points out the attitude of Rukia towards fellow students. We are not told much what goes on between prefects of other dormitories and their subjects, but Rukia’s conduct here suggests that power and authority can be misused. Magara uses power in form of physical strength while Rukia misuses authority by using Magara as a sort of co-prefect, which neither the students who elected him nor the higher school administrators to whom he reports would approve of.

There is unfair treatment of students by some prefects. However, individual students do not respond uniformly to this unfair treatment. For instance, when Rukia makes Mulutu and Kibaya to clean up the dormitory in which a party has been held excluding the two, Mulutu is hell-bent not to accept such kind of torture, but Kibaya advises his friend that they do it since it is their responsibility by virtue of being the ones on the cleaning rota for that week. Mulutu declares that he won’t clear the mess of a party he has not attended, even if it means getting expelled for refusing to (MM: 39). Kibaya convinces him to comply, reminding him that the two of them would never be favoured by the deputy headmaster considering that they have already received last warning from him.

The relationship between students and school authority is also depicted as exploitative. For instance, Miss Nagendo exploits Kibaya and Mulutu by subjecting them to lifting heavy crates of assorted stuff into her house. MrLutu is also seen to enjoy the drinks of a group of students he finds at the bar within the school neighbourhood, who he promises to buy a few other drinks for, but later changes his mind and doesn’t fulfil his pledge.

## **Relationship between Students and Top School Administrators**

The relationship between students and top administrators of Mukibi’s Educational Institute for the Sons of African Gentlemen is characterised by orders on the part of the headmaster as well as a mixture of fear, respect and resentment on the part of the students. All the students fear the headmaster, MrMukibi. For instance, Mukibi’s return to school after some long absence due to illness is seen as judgement day. The students resent the headmaster and some of the unprofessional teachers like MrLutu. It is only Mr Karanja, the deputy headmaster that the school students accord respect.

Another important issue to note is that MrMukibi gets little opportunity to interact with the student. As such, he is unpopular in a school he owns. For instance, as Mukibi is recovering from the illness that was a result of thrashing students, he meets another accident whereby a student mistakenly hits him mistaking him for a snake emerging from the thatches that had collapsed.

At the same time, the top administrators of the school are depicted as trusted by the students. This trust is mostly vested in the deputy headmaster who is depicted as the best administrator that has the students interest at heart. The students’ attitude towards the deputy headmaster compared to towards the headmaster can confirm it. For instance, when Magara is bitten by Mildred, the pet snake, he believes he was bitten by a green mamba and therefore, runs desperately calling out to MrKaranja for help. He does not call out MrMukibi or any other school administrator. (MM: 60)

When it comes to MrMukibi, he is portrayed as unpopular among the students who describe him with all sorts of negative attributes not only in appearance but also in character. For instance, the narrator describes him as ugly:

*Looking down, I saw the surprised faces of Mr. Karanja and the headmaster, Mr. Mukibi staring up at me. Mr. Mukibi was no beauty when seen at ground level, but seen from a height he was even uglier than I remembered. (MM: 61)*

It is clear here that Mr. Karanja is the more favoured of the two. This is further elaborated during the

accidental collapse of the dormitory roof, where the protagonist is glad that Mr Karanja is unharmed.

I was glad to notice that Mr Karanja had escaped unscratched, although I began to wonder what he would have to say to me later on. However, at the moment he was busy shepherding the other boys to safety.

(MM: 65)

The top administrators, of which MrKaranja is part, are depicted as showing concern for the safety of the students. For instance, when Magara escapes from school and runs home following a bite from Mildred, the pet snake, we are told that it is Mr Karanja himself who leads the search for him. (page 68)

The uncontrolled cheer of the school boys after being told that Mukibi isn't returning to school points to the fact that there is a negative relationship between the headmaster and the school boys. We are for instance told the students cannot help but break out into loud cheers. The narrative goes:

*We couldn't help it. We broke out into loud cheering. And to our utmost astonishment, we realized, that the staff, too were winking and smiling among themselves. Mr. Karanja, shaking his head slightly, and desperately trying not to grin, hurried out of the dining hall and the other members of the teaching staff rapidly followed him.* (MM:71)

This excerpt demonstrates that Mukibi, as a proprietor of a school, is not popular among the students and seems not to attract much sympathy from the teaching staff either.

### **Relationship Between Students and School Administration in Moses in Trouble**

Moses in trouble relates the series of predicaments that befall the protagonist as he tries to negotiate her welfare and survival at Mukibi Educational institute for the sons of African gentlemen. The boys have been sending dead cockroaches they find in school food to the ministry of education which has prompted the headmaster to castigate the cooks and tell them he won't be increasing their salary. The cooks have gone on strike and it is now the students to take turns to prepare meals for themselves and the rest of the school. Below are the depictions of the relationship

between school boys and school administration as narrated by the protagonist.

Mukibi is depicted as an administrator who usually makes rare appearances before the students. He usually leaves most of the administrative work to his deputy, Mr. Karanja. You would expect that when such a central person in an institution does not appear to the students very often, his appearance would be greeted with excitement and cheers but this is not what we see. His rare appearance is actually greeted with silence, which I argue suggests fear and pessimism on the part of the students as he does not usually deliver pleasant news whenever he makes such an appearance. Besides, as a boss and proprietor of the institution, he usually leaves the routine update to students in the hands of his active and trustable deputy, Mr. Karanja. The narrative captures the details as follows:

*Then one morning, our headmaster, Mr. Mukibi made one of his rare appearances in the school dining hall. There was no need for Mr. Karanja, the deputy head to rap sharply on a table for silence since we all sopped eating and talking the moment the old vulture darkened the doorway. We stared like frightened rabbits at the tall, gaunt figure with hooded eyes, wrinkled, sagging cheeks and tight, cruel mouth to whose care our loving families had so willingly entrusted us.* (MT: 1-2)

The above excerpt constitutes not a mere description of the headmaster but also reveals the students' attitude to him as represented by the protagonist. Kimenye uses irony and sarcasm to bring out the students' attitude towards Mr. Mukibi.

Mukibi is also depicted as a crafty clever leader whom takes advantage of learners mistakes to extract free labour from them. For instance, he subjects all the students to kitchen duty as a punishment, yet in actual sense he has refused to pay the cooks and they have had no choice but to go on strike and since this is a boarding school, there is no way he can keep the students without providing meals to them. The clever and manipulative way Mukibi can think of to manage the crisis is to subject them to kitchen duty as "punishment" is noted:

*“Well, if no boy is man enough to come forward and admit to this disgusting trick, all of you must be punished.” He licked his dry lips. “Yes, all of you. As from tomorrow, each dormitory in order of dormitory numbers will do one week’s kitchen duty. Kitchen duty will include the preparation and serving of every meal, from breakfast to supper, as well as the washing up and cleaning of kitchen utensils. (MT: 2)*

Another depiction worthy of mention that reflects or influences the relationship between the students and school administration gossiping. The gossip between the students and some of the members of the school administration is another characteristic of relationship that I wish to describe as informal and unprofessional. For instance, there is extensive gossip between the gatekeeper, Kigali and the two school boy friends, Kibaya and Mulutu.

*“Here,” he said, “you’ll be needing a decent meal inside you, now that the school cooks have gone on strike!” (MT: 3)*

The above statement is from the gatekeeper to students. What is suggested in the statement is that the students are not aware of the crisis in the school until they visit the gate. It also implies that the strike was not violent or at least was handled not to escalate into violence. It could also suggest that the location of the kitchen, and probably the dining hall is some distance from the classrooms where the students spend most of their time. However, the gossip about the staff whether teaching or non-teaching would be expected between staff and staff or between student and student, but not from staff to student and vice-versa since it undermines the respect accorded to the staff member that is the subject of the gossip.

Moreover, Mukibi is depicted as a selfish opportunist who takes advantage of the students’ mistake to exploit them into offering free labour to the school. This is what the protagonist narrates:

*I interrupted him with, “Oh Kigali, you’ve worked for Mukibi long enough to know he won’t care what happens if he is getting cheap labour. We have played straight into his hands by getting up to a piece of silliness which*

*gives him a real excuse for making us do all the kitchen work, and, incidentally, save money on staff wages.” (MT: 5)*

It is noted from the above excerpt that the students are cynical about Mr. Mukibi. One can as well argue that they understand him as a mean administrator who takes advantage of the students’ mistakes. In this, the relationship between Mr. Mukibi and the students is depicted as exploitative. We note that the students are aware, but they have nothing to do about it.

Mukibi is also depicted as an improvident school administrator. For instance, he provides ingredients which are barely enough for the students on kitchen duty to use to prepare meals, and expects students to make do with what has been provided. Similarly, even when the students on kitchen duty run short of supplies, Mukibi castigates them for being wasteful, insisting that he bought enough supplies for a month and cannot be expected to order for more. The teacher in charge of stores, Miss Nagendo has no say in determining how and when the stores are to be refilled. The narrative goes:

*The headmaster did nothing to help the matters when, after making a spot check on the amount of food being thrown away, he gave Gekonyo a good telling off for being wasteful. Gekonyo then threatened the rest of us with all sorts of tortures if we did not eat everything on our plates at every meal. (MT: 10)*

From the above excerpt, it is seen that students had lost confidence in the ability of Mr. Mukibi to provide for their welfare. To them it is about survival for the fittest. Note that the prefects extend torture and threats to the rest of the students whenever they get threatened by the headmaster as the highest authority in the school.

There is notable disrespect for some of the teachers from how they are described and responded to. For instance, where students fight for food in the dining hall in total disregard or oblivion of the presence of the teacher on duty, Mr. Bakole as narrated below:

*Everybody had forgotten the teacher on dining hall duty, and it was something of a surprise when Mr. Bakole bravely appeared in our midst, stopped the*

*fight and sent us to wait outside Mr. Karanja's office. (MT: 15)*

Here a situation where students can afford to forget that there is an administrator overseeing an activity is displayed; which, I argue is an indicator of disrespect. The fact that students take it upon themselves to solve their disagreements through violence could point to the fact that they have lost confidence in the fairness and justice systems the school authorities employ. We note also that the teacher does not demand an explanation why the students are fighting but instead sends them to wait outside Mr. Karanja's office, which probably suggests that Mr. Karanja is the only administrator beside the headmaster that has authority to directly punish the students.

Mr. Karanja uses both violent and non-violent means in handling student discipline. For instance, he uses verbal admonition and guidance but finally employs the cane as well. Kimenyé narrates:

*He sent the cooks back to the kitchen and as soon as they had filed out, smirking maddeningly at us, the deputy head reached for the familiar cane. Everything was over in a few minutes but the stinging pain of the strokes he gave us lingered on for the rest of the afternoon. (MT: 16)*

This excerpt captures the traumatising effect of corporal punishment on students (Heekes et al, 2022). Note that the cane is described as familiar, which reminds us that it is a routine practice at this school for students to be caned as a punishment. The narrator's declaration that everything was over in a few minutes, yet the pain lingers on suggests that the students do not reflect on the warnings and advice of the authorities, and therefore cannot remember them the way they remember, or rather feel the pain inflicted by the strokes of the cane.

The administrative involvement at the handover of weekly kitchen duty from one dormitory group to the next is depicted as ineffective. For instance, the outgoing kitchen duty students hand over directly to the incoming without the presence of any authority. Likewise, the kitchen store inspection is conducted by the incoming kitchen duty group led by the teacher in charge, but in the absence of the outgoing duty group, yet it should have been done in the presence of the outgoing group representative (page 18). In this,

school life is depicted as chaotic and slanderous when the administrators are not keen to ensure order and minimise student mischief.

As for the relationship between students and school administration at dormitory level, it is depicted as smooth and strong. The students work efficiently under the leadership of their dormitory prefects. For the case of Rukia of Dorm 3, he even leads the way when they are out to steal pawpaw from the headmaster's shamba (MT: 19).

Regarding students' attitude towards the headmaster, their words are inconsistent with their actions. For instance, while the students claim to fear Mr. Mukibi as demonstrated by their silent tension whenever he shows up in the dining hall, they still dare to steal pawpaw from his garden and then serve it to the whole school. Even Mr. Karanja does not question where the students got the pawpaw from. There is no mention of fearing to be questioned when they have served fruit to the school, yet they had been afraid while taking the fruit from the garden. I am at this point reminded of Johnson Denise's view of children literature that it stimulates imagination and creativity, inviting young readers to explore new worlds and ideas (Johnson, 2023). It is not clear whether Mr. Mukibi is aware of the stolen fruit but somehow chooses to ignore; whether the students do not care what the headmaster makes of their stealing as long as they are serving the whole school and not just themselves as individuals or whether it is the students' deliberate action to show the headmaster that there is hardly any food left in the food store. Whatever is at the back of the students' minds, the text does not explicitly point out; and as Iser Wolfgang asserts, (Wolfgang, 1976: 90), reading is the process of gap filling by the reader beginning with anticipation and ending with satisfaction. It is left upon us as readers to figure out, which adds interesting suspense to the plot of the narrative.

Again the rather unprofessional personality of individual teachers is commented on by Kimenyé in the narrative of Moses in Trouble. For instance, Miss Nagendo fails to hide her attitude or manage her temper when she directly insults Kibaya for accidentally throwing a pawpaw to her. (MT: 28). Students wait for her to get out and then begin to laugh instead of feeling sorry.

The student's attitude toward the deputy head as a model administrator is depicted as deteriorating as

time goes on. The protagonist, for instance begins to describe Mr. Karanja's advice as sermons as in the excerpt below:

*There followed the usual sermon, or rather list of threats which were as well known to me as the National Anthem, complete with the inevitable "final warning". I was relieved though that there was no mention of corporal punishment (MT: 31).*

Here is a situation where the verbal warnings are taken as mere preliminaries to corporal punishment. Mr. Karanja has been so much associated with corporal punishment that it becomes a relieving surprise to end any interaction with students in his office without using a cane on them. This is the extent to which the use of corporal punishments can spoil the relationship between students and administrators.

However, corporal punishment is not the only mode of punishment employed by the school as drawn from Moses in Trouble. There are other alternatives the most common of which is digging in the shamba. For instance, when Kibaya accidentally hits Miss Nagendo in the face with a piece of pawpaw, he is subjected to hard labour to dig in the shamba for lunch vegetables as punishment. (MT: 32)

Karanja's policy of not criticizing other members of staff before students makes him a role model in professionalism and school leadership (MT: 33). However, he at times offers no solution but leaves it in the hands of students. Here we see a school in crisis.

*"Hmmm!" he said at last. "Yes, I can see your difficulty. I had no idea that stocks were so low. Of course the store is really Miss Nagendo's responsibility." Then, because he remembered his personal policy never to criticize other members of staff in front of us students, he hastily added, "I suggest you do what you can with what is here, and meanwhile I shall see Miss Nagendo and find out what arrangements are made for getting fresh supplies."*(MT: 33)

The above extract constitutes a shift in narrative style from first person narrator to omniscient narrator. Much as we realise the need to maintain a good image of Mr. Karanja as an epitome of professionalism, the

shift raises concern of how the narrator, who is a student can possibly know the personal policies of individual members of staff. I wish to argue that the author realised that she had erroneously attributed to Mr. Karanja some unprofessional trait of gossiping to students about staff and was quick to rectify it.

Miss Nagendo's error of judgement is also worthy of mention. She is depicted as making decisions based on what one would describe as illogical conclusions. For instance, when she finds the boys with running noses cutting onions, she bundles them up and takes them to the school sanatorium as having severe flu. One would only wonder what she would expect from boys cutting onions without soaking them in water first. (MT: 36)

Gender bias is also discernible in the narrative especially from the way the relationship between the students and the school administration is depicted. The deliberate twist of the boys' attitude to introduce the idea of gender when Mulu, the protagonist's friend is describing their confinement to the sanatorium by Miss Nagendo is unmistakable:

*"Yes" King Kong put in, "and if we hadn't gone to the deputy head about you, you would've been in the San for a week. Like all women, Nagendo will die rather than admit to a mistake. She swore that you all had temperatures!"* (MT:39)

From the above excerpt we note the students bias on a member of staff based on their gender. This is probably the only time in the entire novella where a teacher is addressed by surname without a title. She is described as Nagendo unlike elsewhere where she has been addressed as Miss Nagendo.

There are also inconsistencies and double standards when it comes to the treatment of students. While the students who felt unwell in the first week were given a special diet of milk, those who fell sick in week 3 were instead taken to the sanatorium and given no attention apart from isolating them on suspicion of them having flu. Note, however that they are not given any special attention while they are in the Sanatorium. In fact, they are not even given food and they miss it because their colleagues have not even been notified, and therefore, have no idea of their whereabouts. They are regarded as having abandoned duty since they have not sought permission to leave their assignment. (MT: 36)

Added to the list of accusations to Miss Nagendo regarding her error in judgement is the inconsistency in the treatment of students. For instance, we are told that the students from Dorm One who feel unwell in the very first week of kitchen duty are taken to the Sanatorium and put on a special diet of milk while those from Dorm 3 who are suspected to be having flu are confined to the San but not given much treatment. There are also verbal insults to Rukia by the boys who have been detained in the San due to hunger and neglect. The narrator confesses:

*For about five minutes we stood there calling Rukia and King Kong every horrible name we could think of until King Kong said, "Oh, be quiet. How were we to know you were locked up in the San? Come on, let's go to tea and we'll make sure you have a good meal at supper time." (MT: 40)*

This kind of exchange would have passed as ordinary inter-peer complaint if the subject was not a person in authority. However, Rukia is the dorm prefect of dorm 3, the dormitory on kitchen duty of the week. The reader would expect a leader in such a capacity to be seeking out for solutions that ensure student welfare in a balanced and inclusive way, but Rukia decides to be part of the group and not make much initiative regarding student welfare.

Nicknaming Mukibi as an old fox is highly notable. Nicknaming is not new among students; but it is not a habit of students at Mukibi's to nickname people in authority. We notice that the description of Mr. Mukibi by the narrator is mostly negative. One would take it as an indicator of bias on the part of the narrator, but I wish to argue that it is not bias, considering that all the students unanimously regard Mr. Mukibi not only physically ugly but also morally questionable. However structurally, one observes that the description constitutes more of a metaphor than a mere nick name. Mr Mukibi is described as an old fox is his den probably to refer to his exploitative behaviour of students to save finances. Like a fox, his hunger for financial gains is so insatiable that he charges the parents highly but does not want to spend on buying food or paying staff.

Mukibi is also depicted as not only a poor administrator but also poor at problem solving. The excerpt below from *Moses in Trouble* attests to that:

*"Don't lie, boy," he hissed at last, and I was sure he was going to strike us when King Kong blurted out, "But it's true, sir. There isn't enough food in the store to feed the school for another day"*

*"And what do you expect me to do about it, eh? The headmaster's mouth was jerking in a way which indicated that he was fast losing his temper. "I told you that each dormitory on kitchen duty was to take full responsibility for everything. I bought a month's supply of food, and I don't intend to buy any more." (MT: 43)*

It can be noted here that the headmaster is deliberately abdicating his duty of ensuring the welfare of the students by threatening them instead of advising them on what to do. A good administrator would, for instance, have the teacher on kitchen duty measure out food rations and give them to the student cooks at the beginning or close of each day, so that the rate of consumption is continually and consistently monitored and assessed. Secondly, declaring that he does not intend to buy more food would suggest that he is deliberately starving the students. This is interpreted as simply refusing to solve the problem.

Some of the teachers are depicted as having bad memories. For instance, Mr. Bakole does not remember whether he has left his door open or has remembered to lock it; so he has to send a student there to check. At about the same time, Miss Nagendo remembers that she has mislaid her pulse at the village duka and is seeking for someone to escort her back so that she can be able to check. I interpret this as mental instability on the part of the teachers, probably due to the goings on at Mukibi's. I wish to argue that this may affect the relationship between the students and those teachers, especially the way they respond and react to the teachers considering that they now question not only their memory but sense of judgement.

The case of Miss Nagendo and the mislaid pulse constitutes some sort of controversy. A female teacher clinging on a male student for company late in the evening might raise some eyebrows. We recall that Miss Nagendo has shown open apathy for Kibaya as a person due to the recent disagreements. It is, therefore,

not likely that Kibaya could have been the most preferable boy for company, especially with no third person present. The protagonist narrates:

*I looked at her in horror and drew back.*

*“What? Now? Tonight?”*

*She was too quick for me, though. Clutching my arm, she cried, “Come, it won’t take long \_ and it’s not safe for women to walk alone along that road after sunset.” (MT: 47)*

The above excerpt points out three controversial issues regarding the relationship between the students and the school administration. First, the relationship is situational and, as long as it is convenient and beneficial to the teacher, there is no point a teacher holding grudges with a learner. Secondly, it demonstrates the social dilemma surrounding women in a male dominated space. For instance, Miss Nagendo considers it safer to be escorted by a boy of fifteen years of age than to walk alone after sunset. Finally, it illustrates, in a subtle way, the trust that this female teacher has towards the male student despite the unsteady interactions the two have recently had. Ultimately, it can be seen as a point of reconciliation between student and teacher, a conspiracy of events to cause the teacher and pupil to focus on the positives and ignore their difference in character and personality. Like Kahveci (2023) points out, the negative attitude of a teacher towards students hinders their academic progress.

Overall, there is evident irresponsibility regarding students’ welfare and security. For instance, the entire dormitory gets out of school on three occasions, each without being noticed by the gate keeper or any other person in authority.

The deception of the school administrators regarding the quality of school life at their particular schools also features in the depictions narrated in *Moses in Trouble*. For instance, Mr. Mukibi resorts to deception about how he feeds his students well. He says

*“I assure you my boys have all the possible attention. My school is run on the most modern lines. I take a personal interest in every boy placed...” (MT: 71)*

The above quote indicates the extent to which administrators can go to make a false impression. It

also makes it clear that they know the ideal situation; but the actual situation they present in schools is contrary to what is claimed or expected. For the case of Mukibi’s, the deception is extended practically and temporarily at school when the police inspector visits the school some time later. Mukibi does all it takes to create a good impression about the school and student welfare. However, after being sure that a good impression has been successfully created, he makes it clear to the student that things are to return “back to normal”. The reader can’t help but wonder what feature of Mukibi’s he regards as normal.

### **Comparison of Relationship Between Students and School Administration in *Moses and Mildred* and *Moses in Trouble*.**

In this section I present a comparison of the relationship between students and the school administration in the two novellas, *Moses and Mildred* and *Moses in Trouble*. My comparison and contrast is based on four factors or elements of school administration: the top administrators, the teachers; the non-teaching staff and the prefects. In the next paragraphs, I compare and contrast the relationship between students and the school administration as depicted from the two novellas.

#### **Students and Top School Administrators**

The two top administrators are perceived differently by the students. When the headmaster is upset by something, he is seen as losing temper. When the deputy headmaster, Mr. Karanja gets upset, the students perceive it as being strict with discipline. Both leaders are actually strict as far as discipline is concerned but the deputy headmaster is calm and tactful unlike the headmaster who has professional and temper issues. Mr. Karanja is presented with attributes of a professional and morally upright person in sharp contrast with his boss, the headmaster, who is presented with attributes of a selfish manipulative school owner.

In the attitude of the students toward the two top school administration, the difference between respect and fear are demonstrated: Mr. Mukibi, the headmaster, is feared by the students while Mr. Karanja, the deputy head, is respected by the students. Even when Mr. Karanja extensively and passionately uses the cane on the students, there is no bad talk to or

about him by the students, whether he is present or absent in school.

In *Moses and Mildred*, the plot presents the headmaster as out of school for the most part, which allows the deputy headmaster to take full charge of the school and show his competence in running the school. As such, the deputy headmaster is presented as the epitome of professional and moral conduct. The headmaster, on the other hand is presented briefly in *Moses and Mildred* in a humorous way of insinuating that the school can ably be run by the deputy and that the students are actually happier in Mr. Mukibi's absence than they are when he is present at school.

In *Moses in Trouble*, Mr. Karanja stays in the background. All the initiatives are taken by the headmaster himself, and Mr. Karanja only comes in to intervene in a crisis or to show that there is an administrative dilemma. Mr. Mukibi, on the other hand, assumes full control in his capacity as the headmaster and he is presented as more of a problem than a solution on every occasion. Where he is presented as nice, there is a quick exposure of his motives for the temporary pseudo-goodness.

On the whole, the relationship between the students and top school administration is characterised by mixed attitude. The students generally exhibit a positive attitude towards the deputy headmaster in *Moses and Mildred*; and then show the full extent of their negative attitude and resentment towards the headmaster, Mr Mukibi due to his administrative faults in *Moses in Trouble*.

### **Students and the Teachers**

The relationship between the students and teachers in both novellas focuses on a few individuals and this has the effect of infusing humour in the text or providing suspense to the story. In *Moses and Mildred*, the relationship, as represented by Mr. Lutu focuses more on the informal interaction than on the formal one. This relationship is so collegial and informal that a teacher and the students can buy one another drinks at the village bar without feeling uncomfortable.

In *Moses in Trouble*, the focus is on Miss Nagendo, whose role in the plot is to show Mr. Mukibi's dictatorial tendencies. Miss Nagendo also provides the reader a window into the social needs and dilemma of an only female teacher in a school for boys.

In both novellas the students are depicted as cooperative to the teaching staff, in and outside class.

As such, the plot in each novella views the relationship of the teachers and students within the broader perspective of the community in terms of attitude and impression. For instance, in *Moses and Mildred*, the wide community comprises the different towns and villages where students had gone for holiday and from which they return with different items from their homes. The teachers expect the students to volunteer to keep the food items away from the dormitories to discourage rats from invading the dormitory. In *Moses in Trouble*, the wider community includes the neighbouring dairy farmer from whom the boys attempt to steal milk at night and the nearby town including the police station where the students are taken for picking materials that have been dropped by a speeding vehicle.

On the whole, students are depicted as obedient to teachers; and teachers are depicted as supportive to students in both novellas. Only on rare occasion are teachers reported as not attending to the learners' needs. The school routine, guided by the bell, is followed as an indicator of seriousness in the school.

It is worthy to note that the teachers play an informant's role when it comes to students' discipline. The texts do not give sufficient information why the discipline of learners at Mukibi's is handled this way. I conclude that it is intended to minimize wastage of time by the teachers. Still, I wish to point out that the management of discipline is concentrated both at the top, and at the bottom. The top administrators play a key role in discipline of learners at class and school level just like dorm prefects play a vital role in managing discipline at dormitory level. I wish to argue at this point that the overall leadership of students, say the head prefect is considered vital in the hierarchy of leadership at Mukibi's Institute for the Sons of African Gentlemen.

### **Students and the Non-teaching staff**

The relationship between the students and the non-teaching staff is depicted as more of informal and personal than official. The only member of the non-teaching staff that features extensively in the novellas is Kigali, the gatekeeper. There are also the cooks that are mentioned generally, and there is a mention of a cleaner in *Moses in Trouble*.

In *Moses and Mildred*, Kigali plays a key role in the plot by keeping the pet snake, while in *Moses in*

*Trouble* the role played by Kigali is to gossip to the students and provide a window through which we get to know the views of the school community about the school and the way it is managed.

The strike of the cooks in *Moses in Trouble* is significant as it introduces the possibility of solving problem through striking when demands are not met. In this we appreciate the fact that the students never think of striking against the school administration, even when it is clear that they have become innocent victims of the situation. Although one might argue that the act of sending dead insects to the ministry of Education itself constituted a strike, I wish to argue that this is mere whistle blowing demonstration that someone needs to come to their rescue regarding their feeding. Otherwise, a violent strike by students in a situation where they are subjected to kitchen duty would have been possible. Therefore, the relationship between the students and cooks is so shallow that the students don't even know about the strike until it has happened. Similarly, the cooks have so little influence on the students that the latter do not emulate the former's idea of seeking solutions in strikes.

### Students and Prefects

In *Moses in Trouble*, the relationship between students and student leaders as represented by Rukia of Dorm 3 is solid and impactful on the students' wellbeing. In *Moses and Mildred*, the relationship is toxic, characterised by malice, intrigue and double standards. This is probably due to the fact that the narrator's friend, Mulu (King Kong) has been an interim dorm prefect of dorm 3 and he loses the position to Rukia, the original bearer in what Mulu regards a planned strategy of character assassination.

In *Moses in Trouble*, the relationship between the students and their leaders is so solid that they speak the same voice and are guided by competence and merit when assigning tasks. Looking at the Rukia of *Moses in Trouble* in comparison with the Rukia of *Moses and Mildred* would give an impression that they are different individuals, yet it is one and the same person. This resounds with the common saying that in politics, there is no permanent friend, and neither is there a permanent enemy. Rukia and Mulu, regarded rivals in *Moses* and *Moses and Mildred* exhibit inseparable friendship in *Moses in Trouble* probably due to the fact that they have a

common problem to solve as a group, which is the task of planning and preparing meals for the rest of the boys in other dormitories.

### Conclusion

In line with the objective of this paper which was set to establish the relationship between the students and the school administration, I hereby conclude that the relationship varies with the situation. Four elements of school administration are considered: top administrators; teachers; non-teaching staff and Student Leaders. It was generally established that the relationship based more on the person than the office or title. While the headmaster is feared, the deputy headmaster is respected. The deputy headmaster makes extensive use of the cane but one may not be quick to conclude that it is this use of corporal punishment that earns him respect. The headmaster uses the cane as well, but the students do not respect him. They instead fear him, and their resentment of him is unmistakable.

### Recommendations

First, Barbara Kimenye's *Moses Series* should be included on the schools Literature set books to encourage as many students as possible to read the books so that they can be able to judge the impact of their own behaviour on their learning as well as appreciate the physical, human and learning environments that their schools are able to provide.

Secondly, the *Moses Series* should be acted out into a film to give them a visual impact and enable students and members of the society who may not have interest in reading to also benefit from Barbara Kimenye's message to students and schools.

School administrators should be encouraged to delegate roles to their assistants and deputies in order to give them the opportunity to practice and get skills in school administration.

All owners of private schools should employ professional experts to head the schools in order to offer technical advice.

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