

Defying Expectations: *Rafiki* and the Paradigm of LGBTQ+ Portrayal in African Cinema

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Abstract

This article examines *Rafiki* (2018), a groundbreaking Kenyan film by Wanuri Kahiu, as an important shift in the representation of LGBTQ+ narratives in African cinema. This study investigates the film's narrative, thematic components, and social setting, positioning *Rafiki* as a cultural artifact that defies cinematic traditions and societal standards in Africa. In contrast to the mostly negative portrayals of LGBTQ+ life in African media, which often emphasize themes of marginalization, tragedy, and ostracization, *Rafiki* offers a nuanced tale of love and perseverance between two young women, Kena and Ziki. The film explores the connections of religion, class, politics, and familial relationships to illustrate the challenges of same-sex relationships within a mostly homophobic culture. The article analyzes the wider ramifications of *Rafiki*'s global response and the restrictions imposed by the Kenyan Film Classification Board (KFCB), which first prohibited the film due to its "gay content." This ban emphasizes the socio-legal obstacles encountered by LGBTQ+ populations in Kenya and demonstrates the transformational capacity of film in promoting inclusion and acceptance. This paper examines *Rafiki*'s intersectional themes, its portrayal of LGBTQ+ experiences, contribution to discussions on cultural representation, queer visibility, and creative freedom in African cinema, and argues that *Rafiki* transcends mere cinematic representation, serving as a key cultural statement that shows the capacity of African cinema to catalyze social transformation, advocate for variety, and stimulate worldwide discourse on equality and human rights.

Keywords: *Rafiki*, African Cinema, LGBTQ+ Representation, Kenyan Film, Censorship In Cinema, Queer Visibility, Intersectionality, Homophobia

1. Introduction

In recent times, African cinema has grown as a powerful cultural force that challenges stereotypes, reshapes public awareness, and provides a platform for marginalized voices. African cinema, despite its vitality, has frequently been marginalized on the global stage, overshadowed by prevailing Western film industries. African filmmakers face numerous social dynamics, financial limitations, and deep-rooted cultural conservatism within the continent. The representation of LGBTQ+ identities continues to be a sensitive issue, strongly stigmatized in several African communities and often subjected to official restrictions. Based on this context, Wanuri Kahiu's *Rafiki* (2018) marks an important and transformative moment in

the history of African cinema. This film goes past a simple love narrative, serving as a daring political and creative assertion that challenges the boundaries of cinematic depiction, ethical legitimacy, and legal structures within postcolonial African societies.

This paper examines *Rafiki* as a primary case study to see how modern African cinema might serve as a vehicle for cultural resistance and social transformation. Although the majority of African films addressing LGBTQ+ topics often portray gay existence from a tragic or didactic perspective, frequently culminating in punishment, exile, or death, *Rafiki* distorts this trend. It presents a visually captivating, emotionally impactful, and politically audacious film that depicts joy, intimacy, and resistance in the lives of two young Kenyan women. The film's existence and the criticism it garnered from the Kenyan Film Classification Board call for important questions of who gets to tell the African story, the legitimacy of many kinds of love, and the possibility of cinema to redefine African identity.

This paper is significant for its participation in cinematic and social debates. *Rafiki* is both a pioneering artistic endeavor and a locus of conflict, where issues of creative liberty, human rights, and LGBT representation intersect. It compels us to confront the cultural fears that African nations impose on LGBTQ+ individuals and to examine how queer African narratives might reshape the continent's challenges related to postcolonial identity, religion, gender, and democracy. This paper analyzes the ongoing misrepresentation of LGBTQ+ in African cinema where Queer characters are often depicted as abnormal, demonically possessed, or doomed. This pattern promotes social homophobia and conceals the authentic lives and experiences of LGBT Africans. *Rafiki* confronts this representational dilemma by offering a compassionate and optimistic narrative that defies moral fear and victimhood stereotypes.

This paper has four objectives. Initially, it examines the narrative and visual techniques employed by *Rafiki* to construct its LGBT love tale within a hostile cultural setting. Secondly, it analyzes the interconnections of religion, class, politics, and gender in influencing both the film's content and its audience's reception. Third, it assesses the social ramifications of the Kenyan government's censoring of the film and the present legal structure regulating artistic expression and LGBTQ+ rights in Kenya. Lastly, the paper positions *Rafiki* among an expanding movement of African filmmakers who are redefining the continent's cultural and ideological limits through acts of artistic resistance. This paper critically analyzes *Rafiki* to illustrate how African cinema functions not just as a reflection of society but as a perspective through which new worlds, identities, and possibilities are envisioned. The film reveals the transformational capacity of storytelling to defy conventions, resist authority, and broaden the scope of African cinema.

2. The African Cinema

The origins of African cinema may be traced back to the colonial period, during which European filmmakers captured the essence of the continent with a focus on its unique and distinct qualities. However, it was only during the era after independence in the 1960s and 1970s that African filmmakers started to express their own perspectives and stories. Ousmane Sembène from Senegal and Med Hondo from Mauritania, influenced by movements like Negritude and Pan-Africanism, emerged as pioneering filmmakers who used cinema as a means of cultural expression and political freedom (*History of African Film Industry*, 2013).

African film extends beyond the screen, including storytelling. Oral traditions are crucial in the context of films since they often integrate proverbs, myths, and tales. Music and dance are tightly bound inside the plot, enhancing the emotional depth and cultural importance. These components provide a distinctive cinematic encounter that profoundly connects with African viewers and provides a look into their rich cultural legacy. Nevertheless, African filmmaking has substantial obstacles. African films have constraints in terms of finance, distribution networks controlled by foreign producers, and the constant risk of censorship, which hampers their ability to reach a wider audience and make a significant effect. Notwithstanding these challenges, filmmakers persist in pushing limits and narrating their tales with exceptional ingenuity.

The *Cultural Diplomacy Website* examines what the movie industry in a few African nations looks like. In the late 1990s, after the end of apartheid, South Africa emerged as the dominant force in finance and technology in Africa. It successfully overcame previous limitations on foreign access and production. The South African production *Tsotsi* (2006) was the first African film to receive an Academy Award for Foreign Language Film. Nigeria's film industry, known as Nollywood, produces a vast number of films each year and has emerged as a dominant force in the worldwide film business. The rapid rise of this industry, starting from modest origins and becoming a prevailing influence, serves as evidence of the potency of narrative, cultural heritage, and an unquenchable drive for business success (Onuzulike, 2009).

During its inception, Nollywood encountered substantial obstacles. Insufficient financial resources resulted in poor production quality, and the narratives often relied on well-known clichés and overly dramatic storylines. The distribution of films in Africa was restricted since they were only available on VHS cassettes. However, Nollywood is strongly connected with local viewers. The narratives, immersed in the rich tapestry of Nigerian culture, addressed universal topics such as family conflicts, corrupt behavior, and the quest for prosperity. The performers, most of whom hail from a robust theatrical lineage, presented compelling performances that deeply connected with audiences.

The advent of digital technology revolutionized the Nollywood industry. The advent of cost-effective filmmaking equipment and the emergence of direct-to-consumer video streaming platforms such as iROKOTV has brought about a significant transformation in the distribution of films. Nollywood films have been easily accessible on the internet, hence

reaching a broader diaspora audience outside the African continent. The proliferation of satellite television and the growing prevalence of mobile internet have significantly broadened the audience of Nollywood, gaining a worldwide following.

The expansion of Nollywood is driven not just by technological advancements but also by its enterprising nature. The sector is mainly controlled by independent producers, who cultivate a culture of creativity and willingness to take risks. Narratives are constantly developing, assimilating novel genres such as thrillers and comedies in addition to conventional melodramas. Nollywood is progressively addressing societal topics such as child trafficking and governmental corruption, therefore portraying the modern Nigerian society.

The emergence of Nollywood has profound ramifications for the worldwide film industry. It provides a compelling alternative to Hollywood's overwhelming influence by presenting different viewpoints and narratives. Nollywood films prompt audiences to go outside their comfort zones and actively interact with other cultures. In addition, the success of Nollywood has served as a catalyst for the growth of other thriving film industries across Africa, resulting in the emergence of a genuinely global cinematic scene in the southern hemisphere. "The Nigerian film industry is indisputably diversifying its economy by creating jobs in a country that depends principally on oil and agriculture. The Nigerian film industry is known to be the most popular on the African continent. The estimated annual revenue of Nollywood is \$590mn" (*History of African Film Industry*, 2013).

The Egyptian film industry is an integral element of the Arabic-speaking film industry and is invigorated every year by the Cairo International Film Festival. Egypt has produced about 4000 films since 1896, representing 75% of the total Arab cinema output worldwide. Egypt has the distinction of being one of the largest film producers in the Middle East (Gaffney, 1987). In Kenya, where the first African same-sex movie with a happy ending that will be examined in this paper is produced, the film industry is still pretty small, and most of the movies made there are documentaries about how bad life is for people in the country's towns. The government does not have enough money to make bigger movies and pay skilled performers. In response, the Kenyan government has worked hard to make the Kenyan film industry well-known and successful. In 2006, the Ministry of Information and Communication created the Kenyan Film Commission, whose job is to make people worldwide more aware of the country's growing film industry to attract investors (Akinyi & Samoei, 2002). Also, the Hot Sun Foundation is now based in Nairobi. This is a group whose goal is to find and develop new young talent in poor areas that do not have access to schooling or professional acting training. The Kenyan film business has a lot of promise, as shown by the famous 1985 movie *Out of Africa*, which is about Kenya's colonial past. A movie called *Nairobi Half-Life* (2012) was also up for Best Foreign Language Film (*History of African Film Industry*, 2013). The controversial *Rafiki* has caught international attention. In 2018, it became the first Kenyan movie to be screened at the Cannes Film Festival, and "it has won the audience and jury awards for Best Narrative Feature at the TWIST: Seattle Queer Film Festival, and was awarded the Silver Hugo award at the Chicago International Film Festival" (Kelleher, 2019).

Overall, the emergence of digital technology presents African filmmakers with new prospects. Independent projects are thriving, circumventing conventional intermediaries and reaching internet viewers. African cinema is gaining more exposure and reputation through its participation in international film festivals, which promote cooperation and worldwide awareness.

3. Censorship in African Cinema

A major debacle to the creativity of many African filmmakers is censorship that is imposed based on the conservative views of many Africans. There is a lot of variation in censorship in the African movie industry. This is because each country has its government system, cultural norms, religious views, and laws. Some countries have strict filtering rules and government bodies that are in charge of controlling what is in movies, while others may have less strict or decentralized systems of oversight. In Nigeria, where the government laws are built on religious tenets, Movie banning has been a point of contention for a long time, showing how complicated the relationships are between religious, political, economic, and cultural forces. Nigeria's film industry, which is often called "Nollywood," is one of the best in Africa. It makes a huge variety of movies for viewers both in Nigeria and around the world. However, there are strict rules that make movies follow morals, cultural concerns, and national security concerns.

The National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) in Nigeria limits movies and TV shows based on a lot of different factors, such as violent scenes, sexual content, drug use, blasphemy, and political content. If a film is found to break these rules, it could be cut, edited, or even banned completely. The board also rates movies based on their appropriateness for different age groups, using grades from "G" (General) to "18+" (Restricted) to make sure that everyone can see material that is suitable for their age (Adelakun, 2018). Like every other African country, movie censorship in Africa might go beyond regulatory bodies to the clamors of aggressive religious extremists who can attack filmmakers for showing anything that contravenes their beliefs in movies. In the scenario reported by Adelakun, in August 2007, outrage swept through one of the Islamic states in Nigeria, Kano. News of a leaked video featuring prominent Hausa actress Maryam Usman (Hiyana) sparked fury, with angry mobs demanding a complete ban on home videos. The explicit content of the video triggered a wave of strong reactions across the Northern Nigerian public, threatening to spiral out of control. According to Adelakun (2018), "this issue showcases how strong the impact of home movies could be on a country's national security" (p.195), emphasizing that the reaction of society to the home videos goes beyond individual conduct, reflecting deeper concerns regarding the capacity of visual media to affect public ethics and social order. In this sense, the word "national security" transcends conventional worries of violence or external dangers; it includes the perceived threat to cultural and religious values.

Kenya, the setting of the movie examined in this paper, has seen major changes in cinema control over the years. These changes reflect the country's changing culture, politics, and rules. From censoring movies during the colonial era to current arguments about artistic freedom and cultural expression, Kenya's history of movie censorship shows how government, identity, and social change have affected movies. According to Wesonga (2022), in 1912, when Kenya was a British colony, the British government controlled the making, distributing, and showing of movies "through the Stage Plays and Cinematography Exhibitions Ordinance, which became effective after Sir Henry Conway Belfield placed a notice in the gazette marking the first time the British colonial government considered regulating cinematic performances" (p.206). This is where movie banning in Kenya got its start. There were strict rules about cinemas, and movies that were seen as politically or subversively offensive were often blocked or edited to stop the spread of anti-colonial feelings. As a form of cultural imperialism, the colonial government used control to force European morals and tastes on Kenyan viewers while shutting down native voices and points of view.

When Kenya gained independence in 1963, the Kenya Film Classification Board (formerly the Kenya Film Censorship Board) continued to manage the movie industry under the new government. The board's job was to watch movies and decide what content was appropriate for different cultures and to protect national security. However, political factors often play a role in editing choices. Films that were critical of the government or dealt with sensitive social problems were closely watched or even banned (Wesonga, 2022). After the release of *Rafiki* in 2018, the authorities of the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) prohibited the film *Rafiki* due to its inclusion of same-sex scenes, violating Kenyan legislation and the cultural and moral norms of Kenyan society. Wahuri Kahi, the filmmaker, filed a lawsuit and said in court that the prohibition infringed upon her fundamental right to freedom of speech and creative liberty (Wesonga, 2022). Wesonga reports that Kahi emphasized the diversity of individuals and their imaginations in Kenya. There ought to be liberty to articulate these mental creations as imagination is boundless. The Supreme Court concurred with her and affirmed her right to disseminate and display the video, although within a designated timeframe. The prohibition of the film garnered public attention and sparked a discussion about the country's censorship regulations, specifically questioning their alignment with the Constitution.

4. A Forbidden Romance Tale Told in Africa: The Defiance of *Rafiki*

Rafiki serves as a bold symbol of resistance in the typically conservative realm of African Cinema. The Kenyan film, released in 2018, made significant progress by depicting an intimate love story between two young women, Kena and Ziki. *Rafiki* stands to confront the lack of diverse portrayals of LGBTQ+ experiences in African cinema and overcomes the obstacles it faces. Before *Rafiki*, African films often lacked or portrayed LGBTQ+ subjects in a negative light. Movies portraying same-sex relationships often depict them as sorrowful narratives where gay people are marginalized and punished for their sexual identity. This is a reflection of the social and legal circumstances in several African nations, where homosexuality is considered a criminal offense and there is a strong cultural disapproval. *Rafiki* summons the courage to deviate from the norm. The film, directed by Wanuri Kahi, embarks on a daring journey of normalization. The film fearlessly depicts the obstacles that Kena and Ziki face as a result of their sexual orientation while simultaneously emphasizing their aspirations, desires, and the pure pleasures derived from their love.

There were problems with making the movie itself. Funding was hard to come by because the industry was nervous about LGBTQ+ topics. The Kenyan Film Classification Board (KFCB) also initially banned *Rafiki* because it had "homosexual content" (Ofoma, 2022). This caused a stir around the world, bringing attention to the movie and making people more aware of LGBTQ+ rights in Kenya. Notwithstanding the prohibition, *Rafiki* made its debut at the Cannes Film Festival, receiving high praise from critics and securing global distribution. Due to international attention, the KFCB had to reassess its position, finally permitting a restricted screening in theaters with an age restriction for adults.

Although Kena and Ziki's story does not follow the conventional happily-ever-after narrative, they attain tranquility and embrace themselves and their love. Despite facing social condemnation, this optimistic movie provides a solid and empowering reminder of perseverance and self-acceptance for LGBTQ+ communities throughout Africa. *Rafiki's* influence beyond the borders of Kenya. It ignited discussions around LGBTQ+ portrayal in African film, opening opportunities for sharing a broader range of narratives. Despite the existence of obstacles, *Rafiki* serves as a testimony to the influential role of storytelling in questioning established standards and establishing an environment that embraces diversity. This film serves as a symbol of optimism, not just for LGBTQ+ groups in Africa but also for anyone who wants a film industry that is more inclusive and open-minded.

Rafiki portrays the journey of sexual awakening experienced by two young women named Kena and Ziki. The movie unfolds in the vibrant city of Nairobi, where the two protagonists fall in love shortly after completing their high school education. Kena, who is from a low-class family, eagerly anticipates her examination outcomes as she aspires to enroll in a nursing institution. In contrast, Ziki, who is from a wealthy family, spends her time socializing with her companions and devising choreographed dance moves. The two characters' paths cross a few times before they become drawn to each other.

When the relationship between Ziki and Kena blossoms, they are confronted with the difficult decision to prioritize their happiness or safety. Their love perseveres despite the challenges posed by their differing socioeconomic backgrounds, political rivalry, paternal discord, religious attitudes towards same-sex orientation, and the nation's stance on same-sex relationships. While exploring other areas, they come across a variety of people like Blackstar, a committed motorbike enthusiast and Kena's closest companion, Mama Atim, a talkative and busy-body, a friend of Blackstar who is intolerant towards gay people, and

Ziki's group of dancing female friends, and others. The film is intriguing due to its tension, the sense of seeking and being absorbed in the process, the vivid portrayal of colors in various situations and characters, the organic closeness between Kena and Ziki, and the creation of their unique universe.

5. Intersectional Thematic Components

From the title sequence, one immediately realizes that religion plays a huge role in the movie. The image of the crucifix vividly gives the audience an idea of the role of religion in shaping the lives of the protagonists, Kena and Ziki. Religion is both a hindrance and a source of comfort in their struggle for love. Kenya is predominantly a Christian country (Droz & Gez, 2021), and the movie depicts how religion shapes the everyday existence of many Africans. Josephine, Kena's mother, exemplifies this deep religious commitment. She often participates in religious services and depends on prayer to overcome difficulties. The main reason for her dislike of Kena's connection with Ziki is her religion. As Baker (2014) asserts, "religious groups, predominantly from a Christian-based faith, seem to be the single most influential force in the attempts to keep same-sex marriage illegal" (p.189). This finding reflects a wider socio-political reality throughout most of Africa, where Christian churches have considerable cultural and political influence and frequently agree with governmental authority in establishing moral parameters. In Josephine's situation, her religion surpasses mere private belief; it is an ideology that drives her to perceive her daughter's identity as both a spiritual problem and a societal problem.

In *Rafiki*, religion transcends human boundaries and extends its influence beyond individual beliefs. The film depicts the considerable influence that religious leaders have. Kena and Ziki suffer increasing societal criticism as a result of a passionate sermon delivered by the community's preacher who spoke vehemently about the evil of same-sex relationships. The preacher's statements not only strengthen the negative perception held by society but also have the potential to provoke acts of violence against LGBTQ+ persons. Nevertheless, *Rafiki* refrains from presenting a biased portrayal of religion. Despite receiving external criticism, Kena and Ziki find comfort in their understanding of religion. Their affection for one another serves as a powerful source of resilience, which may be seen as a radical bond that challenges conventional understandings of religious doctrines.

Although Kena tries to find comfort in her own beliefs, she is compelled to undergo an exorcism arranged by her mother. This incident reveals the bitter truth of how religious dogmas may be used to discriminate and stigmatize persons who do not adhere to the hegemonic heterosexual standards (Allen & Mendez, 2018). It emphasizes the detrimental impact of such activities on one's emotions and mental well-being. The movie presents an open-ended portrayal of the influence of religion on Kena and Ziki's destiny. Although the characters experience temporary bliss at the end of the movie, the social pressures persist. While it may be considered "the opium of the people" (Omonijo et.al, 2016, p.2), religion continues to be one of the causes of inner turmoil and will not cease to be open to public criticism.

Furthermore, "Class" also intersects with other themes in the movie. Although *Rafiki* primarily focuses on the love story between Kena and Ziki, it also quietly examines the influence of social status on their lives by comparing the representations of their fathers, who are political opponents. Kena's father, John, is a renowned local politician who epitomizes their community's conservative principles and cultural norms. Throughout the film, he is shown as a man who strictly follows conventional gender norms and moral principles. However, Kena's father's response to the revelation of her relationship with Ziki exemplifies the difficulties encountered by LGBTQ+ persons in communities that stigmatize and condemn homosexuality. He grapples with reconciling his affection for his daughter with the cultural expectations and religious doctrines that denounce same-sex relationships. As the story unfolds, he challenges his prejudices and preconceived notions, struggling to understand that his daughter's pleasure and satisfaction may exist outside conventional norms. Although he forfeits his political ambitions in the process, his characterization provides a little sign of hope for the possibility of reconciliation and comprehension of same-sex relationships in Africa.

On the other hand, Ziki's father, Okemi, represents a stark contrast. Mr. Okemi is shown as a respected character in the community. He has a position of power and esteem, often using his influence to maintain conventional ideals and social standards. Mr. Okemi is portrayed as a very religious individual who follows the church's doctrines with great dedication, especially when it comes to concerns of ethics and principles related to family. Mr. Okemi's conservatism and strict commitment to religious ideals, especially concerning Ziki's relationship with Kena, are central conflicts in the movie. Upon discovering his daughter's bizarre intimacy with Kena, Mr. Okemi responds with fury and disapproval, seeing their connection as a transgression of ethical and religious tenets. His rage increases Ziki and Kena's difficulties as they navigate their love in the face of society and family constraints.

Another important intersection is the expression of same-sex desires and the homophobic society. *Rafiki* explores the problematic relationship between lesbianism and cultural conventions, offering insights into the larger society's views towards LGBTQ+ identities in Kenya. The film depicts the conflict between individual needs and cultural norms, particularly about gender roles, sexuality, and family relationships, inside the traditional culture of Nairobi. The societal norms shown in *Rafiki* are firmly grounded in conventional values and religious doctrines, often denouncing same-sex partnerships as immoral and abnormal. Within this particular framework, lesbianism is not only subject to social disapproval but also seen as a forbidden topic, resulting in extensive prejudice, exclusion, and even acts of violence against LGBTQ+ persons. Kena and Ziki, the protagonists, negotiate a challenging social environment, struggling with the apprehension of being judged and rejected by their family, friends, and community.

The film showcases the convergence of lesbianism and societal conventions through the characters' encounters and relationships. The connection between Kena and Ziki violates the societal norms of heterosexual marriage and motherhood, hence undermining the conventional gender roles imposed on women in Kenyan culture. Their love challenges societal conventions of respectability and conformity, revealing the strict limitations of acceptable behavior enforced by society. The families of the protagonists also have a substantial impact on molding their experiences of lesbianism on the grounds of societal conventions. Kena and Ziki encounter resistance from their parents, who adhere to traditional and religious beliefs and see their daughters' relationship as a threat to the dignity and reputation of the family. The conflict between societal expectations based on family connections and individual aspirations emphasizes the difficulties that come with revealing one's true self and declaring individuality in a society that values adherence to set standards.

In addition to the widespread impact of societal conventions, *Rafiki* also portrays instances of defiance and determination as Kena and Ziki establish their autonomy and question the existing state of affairs. Their affection evolves into a means of opposing the repressive influences of cultural norms, fostering optimism and unity among excluded groups. Kena and Ziki's bold rejection of societal conventions establishes a path for more recognition and tolerance of LGBTQ+ individuals within the Kenyan society and in Africa.

6. Conclusion

Rafiki is more than just a cinematic narrative of forbidden love; it is a significant intervention in African cultural production, prompting a confrontation with the ideological, theological, and legal constraints that have historically limited LGBT expression on the continent. By challenging cinematic and cultural norms, the film reveals the lived realities of LGBTQ+ persons in Africa and reimagines African cinema as a platform for resistance, compassion, and political critique. By depicting a homosexual relationship as a narrative of pleasure, perseverance, and self-discovery rather than sorrow, *Rafiki* challenges the entrenched stereotypes that have historically characterized LGBT visibility in African media.

This paper explores how *Rafiki* confronts prevailing structures, religious orthodoxy, patriarchal authority, and governmental censorship through its narrative, artistic decisions, and legal confrontations. The film serves as a case study on the transformative capacity of art to provoke dialogue, advocate for rights, and alter society's perspectives. It shows how African filmmakers, while functioning in sometimes hostile contexts, are creating audacious and complex storylines that not only mirror the continent's diverse realities but also enrich worldwide dialogues on freedom, identity, and justice. In a cultural context where representation, inclusiveness, and creative autonomy are subjects of worldwide debate, *Rafiki* functions as both a reflection and a challenge. It reflects the ambitions of oppressed populations seeking acknowledgment and respect, while challenging a broader audience, both within and beyond Africa, to confront the unsettling realities of exclusion, censorship, and moral hysteria. As African cinema progresses, films such as *Rafiki* challenge conventional limits, presenting a portrayal of the continent as a realm of radical imagination rather than repression. By doing so, *Rafiki* solidifies its position in cinematic history and the continuous fight for human rights, rendering it a significant subject of analysis for scholars, activists, and researchers.

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