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KENYA'S COMMUNITY HEALTH AWARENESS PUPPETEERS

Thomas Riccio

Shoeless children in tattered clothes scattered, helter-skelter, running down compact, unpaved and garbage-strewn streets. Their screaming was a blend of fear and excitement, their faces going from shock to beaming smiles as they turned, their runs alternating between flight and leaps of playfulness. Infants wailed with spasms of tears, adults stood curious, amazed, and bemused. All of the action on the street came to a halt as an eight-foot tall puppet topped by an enormous cartoon-like head shocked the grim reality of the slum into the surreal with a perfect equatorial blue sky as backdrop.

The “mobilization” puppet stooped to shake hands with shop owners selling everything from live chickens to herbal medicines to used clothing. The puppet performer hugged grandmas, chased children, greeted unsuspecting shoppers, pushed carts, and directed traffic. The puppet did what it was supposed to do, namely cause a stir and draw attention, mobilizing an audience to see a performance by CHAPS—Community Health Awareness Puppeteers. The Nairobi-based puppet company has pioneered the application of puppets to convey vital information to the semi-literate and uninformed masses of Kenya. A March 2002 performance was their third at the notorious Korogocho slum outside of Nairobi dealing with HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. Primarily refugees fleeing the ongoing Sudanese civil war occupied the 20-year old Korogocho slum, one of many illegal slums occupying outlying Nairobi City Council land. Although the residents of the slum were considered “Kenyans” the slum was essentially self-governed and a world unto itself. Because of the Sudanese connection the slum was known for its availability of black market guns and criminal activity. “The police don’t come here,” CHAPS puppeteer Simon Musau informed me as we drove down a maze of dusty streets.

The tall, gray puppet was instantly recognizable as being associated with CHAPS and its Puppets Against AIDS program. The puppet head, Styrofoam covered with *papier mâché* was created by and for Kenyans with the assistance of Gary Friedman, a South African puppeteer who originally applied the use of puppets during the apartheid era. Friedman has since expanded puppetry use to serve education and social change throughout sub-Saharan Africa. “Large gray puppets can be seen by huge crowds on a busy street and are a sure way to gather people to watch the show.

Their gray skin-tones rid the performance of any racial and cultural stigmas and taboos associated with AIDS being transmitted from one particular group of people to another,” Friedman told me. In addition to the large, community mobilization puppets, he introduced and trained Kenyan puppeteers in the use of Muppets, glove, and rod puppets. Though the puppets had their origins in a Euro-American tradition, Kenyans quickly adopted and transformed the form to suit local aesthetics. “Kenyan puppeteers are not simply passive and accepting of puppetry models and modes of performance. They must consider local conditions, traditions, and audiences, they are evolving the art form of puppetry,” Friedman said.

Puppetry in Kenya has flourished because it is non-threatening and has the uncanny ability to entertain and communicate simply and directly. Curiously, puppetry, or the animation of figures within a narrative context, was never developed into a performance tradition in Africa. Puppetry per se is not indigenous to Africa except for a few West African traditions, most notably the thousand year old “kotébe” from the Niger River area of Mali. The absence of puppetry from the otherwise vibrant and varied African performance traditions is most likely due to Africa’s use of totemic, fetish, and mnemonic figures which have been associated with witchcraft in a number of ethnic groups. Puppetry was originally introduced to Africa during the colonial era and then used sporadically, in combination with Theatre for Development activities, since the 1980s. However, the fact that puppets have no history or tradition in Africa is a part of its success. Because there are no preconceived notions, expectations, taboos or traditional contexts attached to puppet performance in Africa, puppets remain a novelty, neutral and free to define their own place, expression, and function.

In Nairobi, which has seen massive urban migrations from Kenya’s rural areas, puppetry has become an ideal way to communicate across potentially contentious ethnic identities. Rural areas have similarly experienced traumatizing economic, health, and political disruptions—which are concomitant with the long-term demise of traditional cultural practices—serving to elevate puppetry to a viable and acceptable communicator of issues of vital importance. The role of puppetry has grown to such an extent in a nation undergoing disruptive flux that Simon Karaija, from a Riff Valley group, saw puppetry as, “A way to preserve traditions and our stories.”

Globalization and technological modernization has made its presence felt in Kenya, a country dependent on international commerce and tourism. Young people are eager to be a part of the world community: the cell phone, international television programming, and the Internet are ubiquitous. This eagerness however, also bespeaks Kenya’s urge to free itself from the spiral of corruption, poverty, and an impending AIDS catastrophe. Kenya was once the shining example of Africa’s future and potential and being the most stable, prosperous, and well-educated of countries in the sub-Sahara instilled a pride and sense of nationalism that still burns in the hearts of Kenyans. In this way, puppetry is seen as a means by which Kenyans can affect change.

Each one of the dozens of puppets built by CHAPS were decidedly African in aesthetic with recognizable features depicting, for example, a Massai, an old man, a young woman, and sad children. Similarly, play content, language, narrative structure, and use of traditional and popular music reflected local tastes. “They know us in the slums, they know we are like them and understand their problems. We are almost like relatives,” remarked Michael Mutali, a diminutive and proudly forthright CHAPS puppeteer I accompanied to the Korogocho slum.

CHAPS is sponsored by FPPS (Family Planning Private Sector), a local NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) founded in 1984 on the principles of community-based and participatory development, organizing, and self-help. The CHAPS program was part of a folk media initiative which included a neighborhood mural and educational calendar program to raise community awareness of issues. In addition to its folk media programs, FPPS has also sponsored community clinics and planned parenthood programs dealing with issues such as diabetes education, living with AIDS, HIV/AIDS testing and counseling, sanitation, social-economic empowerment, and human rights awareness. Each of the CHAPS puppet plays were created from interviews and the personal experience of the puppeteers, many of whom came from or still lived in one of the many slums surrounding Nairobi. “Each show is different and I adjust what I say and do according to the location, the crowd and atmosphere,” said Peter Mutie, the performance’s Narrator. “We have also presented performances on sanitation in this slum,” added CHAPS puppeteer Fidelity Wanjirm, because they have a problem with flying toilets here. Since this is an illegal slum the people have no toilets, only a few holes here and there. At night they use a plastic bag and then send them flying. They don’t care where it lands as long as they get rid of it. That is why it smells so bad.”

The play begins with the appearance of two Muppet-inspired puppets (named Edupuppets) celebrating a traditional wedding. A traditional song, accompanied by drumming, made it easy for the cast to encourage the audience to join in the celebration. The wife, Sofia, and husband, Tom, carved Styrofoam heads atop diminutive clothing similar to what the audience was wearing. One hand of the puppeteer operated the character, the other gloved hand served as the puppet’s hand. Sofia, wearing a veil, and Tom, wearing a tie, were “married” by the narrator storyteller, who stood in front of the draped puppet booth. Because of street noise the narrator used a microphone plugged into a public address system powered by an automobile battery.

In 1993, before AIDS pandemic had manifested itself in Kenya, Eric Krystal, the director of FPPS, traveled to South Africa to investigate HIV/AIDS education/prevention programs. It was there that he was introduced to Friedman’s successful AREPP (African Research and Educational Puppetry Program.) Friedman, along with “Muppets” creator Jim Henson, had the idea of making a documentary film on the indigenous puppetry and mask theatre in Sub-Saharan Africa. “At that time AIDS was not being taken seriously, by both governments and people alike, in the region,” states Friedman, a diminutive man with a shaved head and fire in his eyes.

However, once in the field he saw the specter of AIDS first hand, so he then redirected the efforts of AREPP, forming an educational touring puppet company conceived with the purpose of simultaneously entertaining, educating and conducting research.

The organization subsequently became a non-profit educational trust and a pioneer, taking the AIDS message to underserved communities. Krystal immediately realized the viability of puppets in getting out the AIDS message to communities with limited media access, and little, if any, information on AIDS awareness and prevention. Krystal invited Friedman to Kenya to train a core group of puppeteers who in turn became trainers in what would become a nationwide program of puppets against AIDS. The program remains a community-based training program which has resulted in the establishment of forty puppetry troupes performing throughout Kenya.

“Sustainability is the key to our success. Many programs are started but are unable to sustain themselves. FPPS provides the infrastructure essential to support CHAPS activities, things like administration and funding procurement,” stated Krystal, a gentle, soft-spoken man in his seventies. Although the FPPS office is in Nairobi, the goal is to establish several regional offices throughout Kenya to be more responsive to the regional troupes. To assure the sustainability and circumvent the possibility of the organization becoming dominated by any one group or personalities (a tendency in Africa that invariably leads to corruption), Krystal, in his wisdom, established a technical advisory council enlisting the heads of both government agencies and private sector NGOs alike, creating a credible and knowledgeable resource for the program.

This strategy avoids divisiveness as it helps to build a stronger network of agencies able to collaborate using limited resources. As a consequence CHAPS receives ongoing support from the Ford Foundation, the Finnish and Royal Netherlands Embassies, International Center for Research and Development, the World Bank, and British AID. Other organizations such as Family Planning Organization of Kenya, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the Lutheran Foundation, Action AID have all used the regional CHAPS groups to promote their particular message to a target community. “Puppets have become an important part of their extension work, showing we are having an effect and it is recognized,” Krystal emphasized.

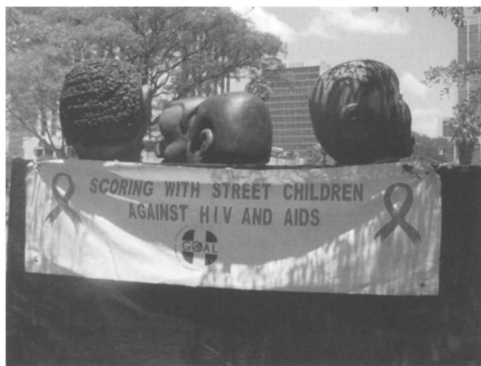
The primary topics for CHAPS remain HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, particularly adolescent fertility issues, and contraception, violence against girls and women, and drug addiction. Other topics have included sanitation, conservation, and most recently, a campaign against corruption. CHAPS also facilitates ongoing workshops and training of regional puppeteers. “Edupuppets: International Puppetry Festival” held in February, 2002, was FPPS’s largest undertaking to date, bringing to Nairobi over three hundred puppeteers from Kenya and East Africa to participate in workshops with puppeteers from Japan, Indonesia, England, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, South Africa, Israel, and the United States.



A 2002 CHAPS performance on the theme of environmental awareness, protection, and poaching. In this scene the water buffalo gives the hyena a present depicting how the animals “work together.” They are using Muppet-styled “Edu-puppets.”



A 2002 CHAPS performance on the theme of spousal abuse presented by a Masai group in rural Kenya. Using glove puppets, this scene depicts how abuse escalates and disrupts an entire family.



CHAPS mobilization puppets wait behind a banner prior to the start of a performance for street children in Nairobi’s Uguru Park.



Two CHAPS mobilization puppets, a husband and wife, dance prior to a performance to warm up their audience in a Nairobi park.



CHAPS mobilization puppets parade in Uguru Park to gather an audience for a special performance presented for Nairobi’s street children.



CHAPS mobilization puppets dance to entertain street children in a Nairobi park performance. Photos: Gary Friedman, courtesy Thomas Riccio.

Workshops were conducted on subjects such as marionette manipulation, scriptwriting, message development, puppet construction, mobilization and facilitation skills. The international puppeteers gave performances in a wide range of traditions, from Javanese Wayang Kulit to participatory puppet theatre to Punch and Judy to finger puppets. Performances were presented in a variety of venues and included hospitals, clinics, hotel conference rooms, city parks, and the National Theatre of Kenya. I presented a series of workshops on “The story of AIDS” and “Performance Creation” at the festival and later for the National Theatre of Kenya.

For Brenda Togo from Kisumu the festival was an overwhelming experience, “The festival was a very good for me and my company. We have learned much and we have so many ideas that it is hard to sleep at night.” Lawrence Keboga echoed her comments, “The Kenyan puppeteers know now that they are a part of an ongoing puppetry tradition that is international. We have a place and we are not only participating in this art form but also contributing to it. Now they will not feel so lonely when they return home.”

Superstition, poor education, denial, socialized machismo, and cultural stigmas have all contributed to the necessity of large-scale HIV/AIDS education programs in sub-Saharan Africa. Though HIV/AIDS pandemic has spread throughout southern Africa, infecting rural and urban Kenyans alike, its cause and prevention has remained a mystery to many Africans. “Many are not aware of how it is caused the symptoms and how to recognize it,” Lawrence Keboga said, as we walked in the downtown streets of Nairobi. “Many still think it is witchcraft, others will not even talk about it for fear of evoking the disease.”

A group of rag tag street children approached us, their dirty hands outstretched for coins. When I reached into my pocket Keboga stopped me, “Don’t give them money, they will only fight and buy glue with it.” The unfocused eyes of the street children were swimming in a yellow murk, their movements languid, disoriented, and erratic. At their mouths were plastic bottles partially filled with tan colored industrial glue. The street children lived in the nearby city park; by day they begged, waited for handouts, sifted through garbage, and did what they had to in order to survive. The street children, numbering in the thousands, were the direct result of the AIDS epidemic. Most were AIDS orphans, their parents dead, their extended family, a grandparent or other hard-pressed relative, unable to support them or themselves an AIDS victim. Many were the orphaned children of prostitutes, born with or contracting HIV/AIDS. To survive they form erstwhile families with other children aged five to late teens. Several young girls had given birth to children while living on the streets and were nursing.

Because of the harsh reality of living on the streets many do not make it into adulthood. Since my last visit to Nairobi in 1999, the number of street children had grown considerably, becoming a daily reminder of how HIV/AIDS has grown, ravaging Kenya medically, socially, and spiritually. One day, after coming from a puppet performance for the street children presented by CHAPS in the city park, I

saw two policemen put the body of a small boy into a plastic garbage bag. Other street children stood by looking lost, afraid, and stoned, their plastic bottles of glue held at their nose, dulling the pain of hunger and emotion.

Kenya has forty-two major ethnic groups, most patriarchal traditions with cultural-social origins shaped by hunter-gathering and warrior identities. Although many groups shifted to a horticulturalist and herding lifestyles, culturally-inscribed identities still provide the touchstone for many Kenyan men. This culturally ingrained, socially codified machismo identity is at the core of Kenya HIV/AIDS epidemic and the major obstacle for awareness programs. “We are fighting a deep tradition in Kenya. Traditionally, men can have many women but women can have only one man. This was and is expected. Even today a woman is not allowed to question. This is why we have so many people infected,” Keboga asserted.

FPPS recognized long ago that it must direct its efforts to Kenyan men in order to develop awareness and facilitate changes on issues such as family planning. “For Africans, sex is for men. The man’s job is to dominate and the woman’s job is to bring forth children.” Keboga spoke to me in his cramped office, “We are not afraid to speak to men about the difficult issues like vasectomy, abstinence, same partner sex, and safe sex. We must speak to them.” Manhood and wealth in a traditional Kenyan context was linked to the number of wives and children a man had. It doesn’t take much to make the connections between male identity and HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Following in turn are the issues of over population, poverty, environmental degradation, family planning, violence against women and children, corruption, and drug and alcohol abuse. Almost all of the major social, political, and economic issues confronting Kenya today can be linked to traditional male roles and the reluctance to adjust in the face of emerging situations begot by modernity. Kenyan males, like the males in other traditional and non-traditional societies, are reluctant to change for fear of the unknown. Traditions are by their nature conservative, meaning they conserve and hold on to an essentially patriarchal social-cultural matrix. They do so at the risk of self-annihilation.

Even the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM) can be linked to the traditional, institutionalized behavior of men. In the Kisu region of Kenya FGM is still widely practiced though it has been declared illegal by the national government. Keboga, a Kisu born and raised in a rural area where his family still resides explained the relationship between FGM, African machismo, and HIV/AIDS. “The influence of the fathers, brothers, uncles, and the girl’s eventual husband is strong. The men believe when the woman’s clitoris is removed she will be less sexually active. They think removal “tames” the girl so the father or husband can control their sexuality. So ingrained is the tradition of female circumcision the girls themselves want it to signify their transformation into a woman.”

Fidelity Wanjirm, a CHAPS puppeteer spoke of her own experiences, “They think, because the woman cannot gain satisfaction from sex she will be more devoted and controlled by the man. Maybe this was true in traditional times when people only

lived in one village area, but today with transportation, magazines, and television girls grow up early and it has the opposite effect. They are girls twelve to fourteen years old and know nothing about sex or AIDS, but they are willing because they want to become a woman.” With alarming increases in HIV infection rates among young girls, CHAPS has developed several FGM awareness education performances. Though dealing with a highly sensitive and often contentious issue, their puppetry programs have been able to publicly broach the subject, talking about the practice openly, creating a forum to express consequences and alternatives, something never before attempted.

In Kenya, where there is more than 60% unemployment and limited possibilities for education or skills training, puppetry has also had a small but significant social, cultural, educational, and economic impact. To date CHAPS has trained over 400 puppeteers nationwide who are employed either part or full-time. For many the practical education gained from the workshops (it includes travel, exposure to new people, reading, writing, craft, performance, social, and interpersonal skills) has had a very positive effect on self-esteem and sense of purpose. “I am doing something and can be proud of myself. I am learning about the troubles facing our nation and now I can do something about it,” remarked puppeteer Samuel Otieno. In Kenya the positive effect of CHAPS resonates loudly.

The name of the Ziawah Puppetry Team in Kisumu, a city of 500,000 located on the shore of Lake Victoria, was named to reflect its location and participants. “Ziwa” means lake in Luo and “Jah” means god, reflecting the Rastafarian membership of the group. The group of ten applies puppetry, acting, and mask performance to deal with issues such as HIV/AIDS, health, and environmental issues plaguing the lake region. Because Ziawah is a small group, funding, bookings, and administration are coordinated by the Western Association of Puppeteers, a regional network, which was, in turn, supported administratively by FPPS in Nairobi. The Ziawah Puppetry Troupe includes three trainers who achieved an “advanced level,” determined by experience and the workshops they have participated in on the regional and national level.

George Wambaya, a Ziawah trainer in puppet making and manipulation, was “certified” by FPPS and was one of nearly 100 puppet trainers from throughout Kenya invited to participate in the “Edupuppet International Puppetry Festival” in Nairobi. The FPPS sponsored Festival provided transport, housing, and a subsistence allowance. Wambaya told me FPPS set the fees for their puppet performances at 3000ks (\$37.50) for a 15–30 minute show. From the fee 20% is deducted and goes to the group account, the rest divided among performers. Depending on how often the group performs a group member can earn \$40 to \$80 per month. “It is not enough, but you can survive. The money is motivation and there are many who want to learn puppetry because there are few jobs in Kenya. Sometimes we perform for birthday parties for children and events for banks and other businesses during the holidays. We have even done performances to advertise a casino business and a dance contest,” Wambaya added. The organizational diagram, fee schedules, and

accountability mandated by FPPS have gone far to instill good business practices, cooperation, social responsibility, and entrepreneurial innovation-all of which have provided alternatives to the corrupt models exemplified by the government.

When I asked Daniel Otieno, also from the Lake Victoria region, why puppets were so effective, he replied, “Puppets are the best way to deal with sensitive issues. They are soft and do not threaten people. It is like children or like magic so they can say many difficult things.” However, problems often arise with the police, “Especially when we are talking about corruption. They harass us and charge us with disturbance,” related Wamgaya. “They ask for your ID and they always find something wrong so they can take you to jail and hold you for a while,” Otieno cited a recent experience. “You must always ask permission from the assistant chief. Sometimes they want money, but we never give it to them, because then they will want more,” Wambaya corroborated. Just weeks before Wambaya had been jailed and fined for doing a show about corruption. The charge: “Inciting the public against the law and police.”

Simon Karanja, a large jovial man and leader of the Noriva Group north of Nairobi, was also attending the Edupuppet International Puppet Festival. Karanja, was a full-time puppeteer for Coca Cola, which quickly recognized the effectiveness of the puppetry in communicating to rural residents. Monday through Friday Karanja’s group traveled the region performing fifteen-minute narrative puppet plays extolling the benefits of drinking Coca Cola. After each performance the group hands out samples. Simon, a father of three, receives 300 KS per day (approximately \$3.75) as a supervisor. Others in the group receive 250 or 200 KS per day, which was about average. All of the group were men because, “It is difficult for women to work with men-especially married women, because their husbands get suspicious,” Karanja added. “This limits the kind of stories we can tell.” On the weekends the group presents, without compensation, performances dealing with, AIDS, FGM, and violence against women.

As the Korogocho puppet performance progressed about two hundred men, women and children gathered-including mothers with babes in arms, children in school uniforms, and an occasional deranged person. Some gathered close around the puppet booth while others watched from the shade of tin awnings from across the road; umbrellas opened for protection from the scorching mid-day, equatorial heat. The draped puppet booth was situated a the side of the slum’s main road next to a makeshift Catholic missionary, the only open space available in the crowded area. As the performance unfolded however, the beehive-like life of the slum continued. Cars beeped their horns for passage, medieval-looking wooden pushcarts and bicycles preposterously laden with goods crept through the audience. The curious stopped momentarily to take in the show as others, like women in burkas, paid it no heed whatsoever. Throughout the performance a nearby tinsmith continued to pound out a metal footlocker paying no attention to it and the performers were unfazed by his constant hammering. The smoke from charcoal fires blended with the smells of urine and rotten garbage.

In the story that unfolds, Tom again comes home drunk and complains about his wife always wanting to beat him. When Sofia enters an argument ensues. The Narrator quells them, asking them to talk it out. Sofia begins to list her complaints but soon realizes her husband is asleep and snoring. “I want to go back to my parent’s house! Married life is not for me!” Taking the microphone from the Narrator, Sophia asks the women in the audience for their advice, “What should I do?” One woman suggests, “Be patient and stay with your husband, he will realize what a good woman you are.”

Sofia’s dialog is cut short by the entrance of Oman, a clothing peddler. Sofia confides to Oman and soon they are talking about sex and disappear behind the booth, their comic lovemaking sending the audience into fits of laughter. With the love making sounds as a backdrop the Narrator asks audience, “If you have so many sexual partners what can be the result?” The audience is quick to respond. “She will get AIDS.” The Narrator asks the men, “Are any men here willing to go with Sofia?” “Yes, she is an easy woman.” The Narrator responds, “But how about disease? How about your own wife and family?”

Tom enters besotted, calls for Sofia, and realizes she has betrayed him. “But you have betrayed me with so many women!” Sofia cries. “But I am a man!” Tom proceeds to beat her. The Narrator intercedes and Tom and Sofia agree to be interviewed by the audience. The discussion gets around to the traditionally accepted behavior of men. “A man is not a man unless he has many women!” A man yells out with others shaking their heads and disagreeing. “What is wrong with this way of thinking?” The Narrator is quick to counter. “There are too many diseases.” “That is old fashioned!” “Things are different now,” come the replies. The Narrator concurs, “In traditional times it was important for a man to have several women to produce many children because so many children died and many children were needed for planting and herding. In traditional times a man’s wealth was the size of his family, but today, in the city, how many cows does a man have?”

Then Tom tells Sofia he has a STD and recommends she go to the local clinic for a test. A nurse from the clinic identifies herself to the audience and directions are given, the clinic’s services are listed, and the process of testing and counseling demystified. At the clinic Tom and Sofia test HIV positive. “But HIV does not mean that they will die! Many people live long and natural lives with HIV.” The Narrator asks the audience how people catch HIV/AIDS and how families can deal with someone living with it. The reconciled Sofia and Tom enter, vowing to be faithful and take care of one another. “We still have each other’s love,” Sofia says.

Daudi Nturibi, Interim Director FPPS, explained the function of the post-show discussion. “The puppetry performances themselves primarily serve as catalysts for discussion. The real goal is to raise issues and educate, which does not mean the show cannot entertain.” When Friedman initially presented his “Puppets Against AIDS” program he took his troupe village-to-village in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and

South Africa. “But after the performance, the troupe would simply move on to the next village, leaving nothing more than a health message. There was no presence left in the village. The FPPS strategy has been to leave seeds.” Nturibi continued.

The Narrator asks for the adults to create a tight circle around him for the final part of the presentation. “This last part is for adults only.” The Narrator then presents “ABC: A: Abstain. B: Be faithful. C: Use a Condom. You should maintain one sexual partner. If not, you should always use a condom. I know many people complain about the condom because it does not feel good or it is not manly.” The Narrator holds up a condom package to demonstrate proper opening and removal. “A condom is only good for five years. If you use an old condom you run the risk of it breaking or small holes developing. It is latex and has a limited life.” The Narrator then holds up a model of a penis. “You must put on the condom only when the penis is erect.” There is much giddiness and the Narrator encourages them to, “Get out all your laughter.” “When you put the condom on you must do so carefully otherwise it will break,” and then put the condom on the model. “Use a new one for each time and do not wash them out. Never reuse a condom! Then turn off the light if you are uncomfortable. Any questions?”

One hundred boxes of condoms, donated through the joint effort of the National Council of Kenya and British High Commission, were handed out to men and women. At about that time a man became a little rowdy because of my presence. The man who had tried on several occasions to disrupt the presentation with his provoking remarks had finally focused on me, a white man, the symbol of wealth and privilege, an object of envy and spite. “Why is the muzungu (white) only bringing us condoms, not food? They do not want Africans to have children!” The CHAPS puppeteers advised me to lock myself in the vehicle as they dismantled the booth. The man and others started pounding on the window, motioning me to roll down the window. CHAPS puppeteer, Pastor Wamoi, knew that admonishing the men would only provoke them, so he put a cassette into the vehicle’s player and turned up the volume on a festive dance song. “Don’t worry, they will go away. They are just hungry.”

When I returned to Daudi Nturibi’s office at FPPS later that hot afternoon I was greeted with a warm handshake and knowing smile. “You have seen it work now, at least as a crowd puller you can say there is something there. That is the tradition of Africa, to involve people, that why we have so much song and dance because we like to be a part of things. You see now the puppets are a new kind of African tradition, but just like the old.”

With the Edupuppets Festival over the cramped FPPS offices were back to normal and the organization’s many ongoing programs. In the conference room several CHAPS puppeteers and administrators were meeting to review videotapes from the Festival in order to determine how best to create a resource library. In the downstairs shop new puppets and props were being built and repaired. In the parking area

behind the offices the group I had accompanied to Korogocho was rehearsing for a performance occurring the next day, their day off. The performance was for disabled children and the group would volunteer their efforts. The towering oversized heads were dancing, smiling and bobbing together under large shade trees.

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