Communal Aesthetic Experiences in Self-Writing: Reading Selected Kenyan Autophylographies (2002-2014)

By

KIVAI GEORGIADS MBOYA

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Subject

ENGLISH

at the

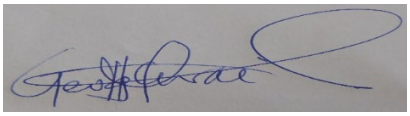
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (UNISA)

PROMOTER: PROFESSOR R.A. MUSVOTO

JUNE 2026

Declaration

I **Georgiads Mboya Kivai,** Registration No. 58528083 declare that **Communal Aesthetics and Experiences in Self-Writing: Reading Selected Kenyan Autophylographies (2002-2014)** is my original work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



29th June 2026

Georgiads Mboya Kivai (58528083) **Date**

Dedication

Dedicated to all the people fighting for democracy and for a just society across the world

Abstract

Self-writing is an area that has generated a lot of controversy in literary studies. The definition of the main strand of self-writing - autobiography - has eluded all definitions. The controversy has led to a situation where some critics and writers avoid labelling their stories autobiographical even when they exhibit characteristics typical of the genre. This scenario has generated other terms in an effort to explain certain modes of self-writing. Critics have also avoided the newer terms because of a desire to remain non-controversial and also to stick to established traditions. James Olney coined the term autophylography in the 1970s but abandoned it later after it was associated with Eurocentrism. Even though the term was meant to explain those forms of self-writing which carry in them a communal slant or valorise communities instead of the "I" narrator, many writers ignored the term and preferred to refer to their self-written stories as autobiography. My study engages and problematises the term autophylography to understand subjectivity in self-writing. This study explores how certain narratives are autophylographical and demonstrates that the selected writers register collective concerns and not private ones as expected in autobiography. Four Kenyan self-writers are selected for the study: Wangari Maathai (*Unbowed)*, Koigi Wa Wamwere (*I Refuse to Die*), David Gitari (*Troubled but Not Destroyed*) and Raila Odinga (*The Flame of Freedom*). These stories are selected as part of the discourses used in the construction of identity in the Kenyan space. The narratives are also studied as part of liberation discourses in a country where democracy, freedom and good governance have remained elusive since independence in 1963. The study utilises decoloniality and subaltern theories to understand the historical pursuit of freedom in Kenya since the colonial era and to equally interrogate the democratic processes. Re-imagining the tribulations of Kenyan people during the KANU party supremacy is the commonality that weaves together the selected narratives. Taken as part of nationalist discourses, the study argues that the four stories are part of liberation aesthetics, especially where big sections of the citizenry are disempowered contrary to the anticolonial promise. It is concluded that autophylography offers an opportunity for the expansion of liberation discourses in those societies where exploitation is still rife.

Key Terms

Aesthetics, Autophylography, Auto/Biography, Autobiography, autogynography, autography, autoethnography, autoautography, alterbiography, epistemic disobedience, communal subjectivity, cultural autobiography, cosmogram, Phyle, Ubuntu, coloniality, decoloniality, subaltern, testimonio, Kenya

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ATR - African Traditional Religion

CIA - Central Intelligence Agency

CMS - Church Mission Society

COWE - Consultation on World Evangelisation

FGM - Female Genital Mutilation

FORD - Forum for Restoration of Democracy

GBM - Green Belt Movement

GEMA - Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association

INFEMIT -International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission

KANU – Kenya African National Union

KAPE - Kenya African Preliminary Examinations

KBC - Kenya Broadcasting Corporation

KDF - Kenya Defence Forces

KLFA - Kenya Land and Freedom Army

KNHRC – Kenya National Commission on Human Rights

KPU - Kenya People's Party

NCCK - National Council of Churches of Kenya

NCWK – National Council of Women of Kenya

NDEFFO - Nakuru District Ex-Freedom Fighters Organisation

PAC – Public Accounts Committee

TED – Technology Entertainment Design

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

VoK - Voice of Kenya

Acknowledgements

PhD research takes a lot of time and several people offer immense support during the period. They may not all be mentioned because of the space available here but I appreciate all those who encouraged me in one way or the other during this arduous task. There are those who walked with me daily and made an indelible impression.

First, I appreciate my supervisor, Professor Musvoto Rangarirai, the lead academic advisor in this project who I think has an uncommon approach to life. Were it not for him, I would not have finished this study. He has a special way of telling you not to give up. He always told me to persevere even when my spirit was down. He offered invaluable insights that, in a very special way, produced quality work. I thank him from the bottom of my heart. I thank UNISA for their financial aid which helped me throughout the study period. I cannot forget my editor Professor Liberty Hove who did the editing work very fast allowing me to submit the thesis on time.

My wife, Adelaide Khavai, remains a beacon in all what I did and always uplifted my spirit with the words, “Dear, you will finish.” When I claimed I had no fees she took a loan and paid it. Without her support, the research process would have gone awry. I appreciate her role.

My family stood by me throughout this project and I remember my last-born daughter telling me that her prayers were that I graduate before she began her undergraduate studies. Ndendwa, Mueni and Ngina were always there for me, cheering when I wrote a chapter to completion. I thank these great daughters, the Kivai’s grandchildren.

Then there are these friends of mine; Prof. Jonathan Mwania, Prof. Felix Kioli, Dr Wafula Yenjela and Dr Matemu Kithyo. They always reminded me that I was a student and I was taking long to finish.

Asante Sana.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration ... ii

Dedication ... iii

Abstract ... iv

Key Terms ... v

Abbreviations and Acronyms ... vi

Acknowledgements ... vii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ... viii

CHAPTER ONE ... 1

Introduction ... 1

1.1 Background to the Study ... 1

1.2 Statement of the Problem ... 5

1.3 Aims of the study ... 5

1.4 Objectives of the Study ... 5

1.5 Research Questions ... 6

1.6 Research Assumptions ... 6

1.7 Justification of the Study ... 6

1.8 Literature Review ... 7

1.9 Theoretical Framework ... 15

1.10 Methodology ... 18

1.11 Delineation of the Chapters ... 19

CHAPTER TWO ... 22

Autophylography: A Review ... 22

2.1 Introduction ... 22

2.2 Self and Community in African Literature ... 27

2.3 Why Autophylography? ... 30

2.4 Theory: Decoloniality and Subalternity ... 42

CHAPTER THREE ... 54

Collective and Individual Identity: Community and Self in Maathai and Bishop Gitari's Narratives ... 54

3.1 Introduction ... 54

3.2 Wangari Maathai: *Unbowed in* Struggle ... 59

3.3 Onomastics and Identity: Supplementing the Cultural Cosmos ... 61

3.4 Gender Identity, Opposing Patriarchy and Voicing Subalternity ... 69

3.5 Ethnic/National Identity and Colonial Heritage 77
3.6 Bishop David Gitari and the Trouble with Oppression 85
3.7 The Christian Identity: Connecting with Africans 88
3.8 The Church: Guardian of the Weak 99
3.9 Conclusion 107
CHAPTER FOUR 109
Individual and Collective Experiences: Self and Other(s) in *The Flame of Freedom* 109
4.1 Introduction 109
4.2 The Ever-Burning *Flame of Freedom* 111
4.3 Self-Writing and Political Emotions: Change from Without 114
4.4 Colonial and Neocolonial Experience(s) 127
4.5 Betrayal of the Nationalists' Dream 137
4.6 Dead Bodies have no Tales: Political Assassinations in the Postcolony 144
4.7 The Pain of Exile: Leaving and Returning 151
4.8. Conclusion 155
CHAPTER FIVE 157
Telling How We Suffered: Narrating "We-Ness" in *I Refuse to Die* 157
5.1 Introduction 157
5.2 Confronting Oppression and Exploitation 160
5.3 Violence Begets Violence: Rewriting the Mau Mau Violence 169
5.4 Narrating Atrocities After "Uhuru" 174
5.5 Deprived at Birth: Land and Landlessness 183
5.6 Corruption and Tribalism: Our Time to Eat 190
5.7 Conclusion 196
CHAPTER SIX 198
Conclusion and Recommendations 198
6.1 Conclusion 198
6.2 Recommendations for Further Research 208
REFERENCES 209
Primary Sources 209
Secondary Sources 209

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Human beings have, over history and across cultures, engaged in the process of self-creation and self-discovery through the telling of personal narratives. Okyerefo (2023) argues that the interaction of a person with society and nature leads one to acquire experiences from which they can draw to tell stories about themselves or about the world around them. Howarth (2020: 6) attests that we "construct identity and communicate a sense of self through our stories" suggesting that stories about ourselves tell others of who we are. The assertions by the two scholars above suggest that people's experiences generate stories due to what Bourdieu (2000) calls habitus. There are stories where the narrator, author, and protagonist share an identity thus creating the genre: autobiography. Reece (2014) defines autobiography as "the practice of writing an individual's life story by its subject." Perhaps Lejeune has offered the most quoted definition of autobiography, "a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality' (Lejeune, 1996:4). Nevertheless, in auto/biographical narratives, authors create stories that produce coherent accounts of life/self – what Harrison (2002:63) calls "storied lives." The triad of author/narrator/protagonist in conceptualisation of autobiography suggests that all the three should be read as one and the same person (Masson, 2022). Narratives which oscillate between self *(auto*), life (*bio*), and writing (*graphie*) have emerged as an area of intense research interest although the term autobiography has defied concrete definition and remains relatively elastic (Smith & Watson, 2010; Berger, 2010). Critics have referred to self-writing as a term that captures the diverse range of forms where life is the subject (Smith and Watson, 2001; Huisman, 2021).

Over the years, autobiographical texts have often been labelled as the "unruly" genre, the "restless" genre, "the most elusive of literary documents" (Olney, 1980: 3). McCooey (1996) reveals that defining autobiography is notoriously difficult due to a sense of indeterminacy associated with post-structuralist literary theories. Despite the elusiveness, several scholars continue to engage in

the theorising of self-writing scholarship (Berger, 2010; Anderson, 2012; Eakin, 2014; Hove & Masemola, 2014). For instance, Eakin (2014:21) argues that autobiography is not a text but a "daily identity practice and expression of the rhythms of consciousness." Eakin deliberates on what autobiography does but evades giving a working definition. On her part, Anderson (2001: 7) asserts that autobiography is "a public exposure of private self" through a personal story where a person wants to justify past actions. However, Anderson does not explain the idea of public exposure to private life in autobiography, thus adding to the woes of conceptualisation characteristic of self-writing. Hove and Masemola (2014:1-3) opine that autobiographical narratives confirm, validate and interrogate issues of identity, nation and history, thus making the author a carrier of the shared socio-cultural memory. In Hove and Masemola's assertions, it can be argued that autobiography is not always about the self but there is a tendency to write the story of others even as the autobiographer (re)constructs self. Popular philosophical opinions on self-writing scholarship, though, outline that the term autobiography refers to "first-person narratives dealing with at least a major part of their authors' lives" (Popkin, 2017: 694). These varying positions regarding the definition of autobiography inform this study. The study disrupts the debates on self-writing with a proposal that, in some cases, self-writers project both self and community, thus creating what I call here as autophylography.

Okyerefo (2023: 230) observes that life as we live it "is more like a condensation of stories from multiple social worlds that seem disjointed and unable to fit together", hence autobiography is not simple, linear or monolithic but complex and intricate because it tries to capture complex realities of the narrator's experience. This implies that self-writing may offer a diversity of narrative perspectives and projections which produce a diversity of stories with various possible interpretations relative to the reading audience. Due to this analytical reality, it is credible to argue that self-narratives produce and promote a contestation of ideas such as subjectivity, self, culture, society and experience. Braziel (2003:87) observes that in the past few decades, autobiographical scholarship has deviated from studies based on the concept of *bios* (life). Thus, Braziel identifies recent conceptualisations and theorisations of autobiography within subgenres such as "autogynography, autography, autoethnography, autopsychography, autoautography, alterbiography and autophylography" among others. In line with these emerging discursive

perspectives, this study proffers a model autophylography to explain that mode of self-writing which injects "others" into the personal tale (Olney, 1973). Alabi (2005) identifies the key features of African autobiography as its political character and cultural orientation towards family and relatives. Therefore, there is need to interrogate self-/life-writing from different communities which has evolved differently due to the specific conditions in those societies. This study suggests that the term autophylography offers new perceptions regarding shared consciousness as contained in self-writing because writers emerge from specific communities which they write about as they compose their personal stories.

There has been a conscious attempt by scholars to demystify, contest, (re)imagine and disrupt the pre-existing narrative practices of self-writing and criticism in traditional autobiography (Braziel, 2003; Berger, 2010). Olney (1993:218) theorises on autophylography to explicate a type of autobiographical writing with "communal subjectivity where the narrator's life is intricately linked to the community making the narrated - self part of the collective-self." It is the kind of a narrative where the narrator purports to tell one's own history but instead recounts the larger history of his time (Okyerefo, 2023:230). This study underlines the need to expand discourses on self and society by interrogating the enduring relationship through a critique of selected texts in Kenyan self-writing. It examines how the individual narrator projects a communal voice and thus the autobiographical "I" becomes representative of the community. The research interrogates how one person's experience can be understood as a communal experience and thus personal history is re-imagined as part of collective memory in narratives traditionally analysed as auto/biography. Smith and Watson (2010:132) affirm that autobiographical writers are "proposing new concepts of subjectivity, as transcultural, diasporic, hybrid and nomadic. Such autobiographical acts move the "I" toward the collective and shift the focus of narration toward as-yet virtual space of community." This claim emphasises the centredness of community in certain personal narratives, hence the need for this current study. The way personal narratives (traditionally taken as auto/biographies) inject communal concerns hence generating what the study theorises as autophylography is a central focus of the study.

Autophylography is taken as any life/self-written text whose author exhibits increased engagement with the shared, collective, or social concerns, even as they attempt to write a personal story. The focus of this study is Kenyan self-narratives written between 2002 and 2014 which draw their spirit from colonial and postindependence experiences and politics of the Moi Era (1978-2002). Kenya's postcolonial history is analysed to explain how it informs and feeds the personal stories recounted by the selected writers. The study is premised on the idea that African literature seeks, among other things, to promote a common agenda and collective humanism due to the troubled history of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Thus, the study argues that autophylography is a prominent strategy of articulating personal and collective crises in times of great social change/s, especially when experiences and history shape the authors' personality and generate new insights about society.

This research postulates that autophylography captures the story of those excluded from the centre of power and those denied the means to voice their marginalisation. Within the Gramscian and Spivak paradigm of subalternity, the selected autophylographies can be taken as portraying experiences of the marginalised citizens in the post-independence Kenyan society. The texts are purposely selected across gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic identity and culture thus fairly representative of the Kenyan *mentalité* - that is, ways in which Kenyan people interact with and think about the world around them. The thesis draws experiences from four texts. First, it engages with Maathai's *Unbowed* (2006) which chronicles women's engagement with gender and political activism. This segment of the study interrogates environmental conservation and struggle for political space during the reign of President Moi and Kenya African National Union (KANU) party. Secondly, the study analyses Bishop David Gitari's *Troubled but Not Destroyed* (2014) which highlights how the church engages the nation on matters of basic freedoms, human rights, and democracy. Thirdly, the study analyses Raila Odinga's *The Flame of Freedom* (2013) which dwells on dictatorship, intolerance and the quest for a more inclusive politics in Kenya. Fourthly, the study problematises ideas of Kenya's liberation and independence in *I Refuse to Die: My Journey for Freedom* (2002) by Koigi wa Wamwere.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research is premised on the argument that self-writing in Kenya imagines both individual and collective experiences through the "personalised" narrative from a single member of society. This category of self-narratives can alternatively be theorised as autophylographies. The life/self and socially constructed narratives form a canon that defines individual and collective patterns of lives and selves in terms of culture, identity, freedom, politics, and power. Notably, even though the Moi era in Kenya was a monumental period that generated a lot of literature, the era's autophylography has been under-studied. Self-writing that re-imagines and narrates the Moi epoch, projecting both the individual and the communal subjectivities, gives the study unique and novel aspects, especially because that period has not received substantive critical attention. The study interrogates alternatives to the official narratives written for the decolonialisation process in Kenya which accord history a personalised interpretation and perspective.

This study discussed how selected autophylographies, written in response to the post-independence Kenyan politics, are ideological and experimental literary practices aimed at (re)constructing the collective identity and propagating a specific socio-political vision for the nation. The study theorises on autophylography because liberation struggles, the world over, have either utilised existing forms of literature, or created new categories to advance certain ideologies in the course of their struggle. Through autophylography, the study interrogates how identity, freedom, politics and power are experienced, imagined and aesthetically storied in ways that give alternative perspectives to the official narrative of President Moi's rule in Kenya (1978-2002).

1.3 Aims of the study

The aim of this study is to (re)read selected Kenyan self-narratives as autophylographies where the narrator fuses both self and community in personal narratives.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Appreciate how national, ethnic, and personal identities are (re)constructed, (re)configured, and (re)imagined in selected Kenyan autophylographies;
2. Interrogate how the selected texts narrate collective experiences through the life of the subject 'I' in the selected autophylographies;
3. Explore how particular lived experiences become narrativized in the selected autophylographies; and
4. Examine how the aesthetics of self-narration addresses the dynamics of power and freedom in selected autophylographies.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How is identity (re)constructed and (re)structured through the narrative process in Kenyan autophylography?
2. How does the text narrate the collective Kenyan experiences in the sampled autophylographies?
3. How are socio-historical and political realities and experiences converted to literary aesthetics in selected autophylographies?
4. How does autophylographical writing generate ideas about power and freedom in the Kenyan society?

1.6 Research Assumptions

1. Autophylographies are narratives of ongoing identity construction.
2. Autophylographies are written to articulate both individual and collective experiences.
3. Lived experiences are narrated in a way that makes self-narratives an art.
4. Autophylographical narratives address dynamics of power and freedom in society.

1.7 Justification of the Study

Braziel (2003:87) writes that recent theorisations on self-writing have shifted from "biographical studies grounded on *bios* resulting in innovative perceptions" and generating formulations

especially in non-Western cultural areas. Okyerefo (2023) stresses the need to frame African stories and debates within the larger project of emancipation from the colonial condition and Western knowledge production hegemony. Thus, in furtherance of these scholarly debates, this study collapses *bios* and instead exploits *phyle* to theorise communal concerns in selected Kenyan texts on self-writing. This is perceived as a way of making African forms of self-writing carry their African orientation. Autophylography is chosen over conventional auto/biography because the narratives selected weave the personal history and the communal eschewing the individualistic slant that characterise traditional and Western autobiography. In interrogating texts within such theoretical orientations, the study expands the existing critical corpus and horizons of life/self-writing in Kenya where a considerable amount of criticism has been directed at self/life-writing (Peterson, 2006; Ndogo, 2013; Muchiri, 2014). This significantly contributes to criticism on the Kenyan self-writing and general auto/biographical scholarship. Research on autophylography extends critical practices and injects fresh paradigms into the theory of self-writing especially in narratives where the self and the communal experiences are collapsed into a personal perspective. The research happens at a time when democracy, human rights, and freedom are still major challenges in the postcolonial world and so it seeks to interrogate how personal narratives re-imagine and restructure power for both self and society, thus enlarging the discourse on democracy. The selected autophylographies embody diverse ideas and present broad imaginations about democratisation and nationalism in Kenya – this is important for the citizens to understand history from individuals who participated in the anticolonial and decolonial process. The texts under scrutiny (re)imagine, recreate and narrate aspects of Kenyan political history and thus inform citizens about challenges of the democratising process and struggles for personal and collective liberties. This study explores the subjective experiences in self-narratives and interprets stories of individuals which project the collective vision of the nation.

1.8 Literature Review

Inquiry into autobiography, mainly the critical reception, has had a remarkable and sustained research centring on truth, fiction, stable subject, modes of representation, and identity among other concerns (Anderson, 2001; Smith and Watson, 2010). Some of the intellectual controversies relating to definition of autobiography have not been settled so far and thus the need for sustained

research into the genre. The slipperiness and elasticity of the term autobiography in terms of definition persists due to the variety of theoretical perspectives that different scholars have taken to analyse self, life, and life-writing (Braziel, 2003). Theorisations have seen contestations and mutations of self-writing happen due to contextual and thematic considerations (Olney, 1993; Douglass-Chinn, 2001; Braziel, 2003; Smith and Watson, 2010; Hove & Masemola, 2014). Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) theorise on Testimonio in Latin America stressing how this form of self-writing is inherently a South American document of liberation similar to memoir in America. Reyes and Rodríguez (2012: 528) argue that although testimonio is a personal account it "represents the voice of many whose lives have been affected by particular social events, such as totalitarian governments, war violence, displacement, or other types of broad social affronts on humanity." Testimonios began as oral narrations of experience and are thus different from autophylography which blends both personal and collective subjectivities.

Nyada (2022: 45) affirms that both "the individual and the community" are narrated in the African autobiography and therefore that shifts its criticism to the sub-form of autophylography. African scholars affirm that self-writing is culture specific and serves to capture the lived reality of a people in profound and creative ways (Ulogu, 2019; Nyada, 2022). Hence, this study argues that both testimonio and autophylography are sub forms of autobiography. The current study fits within the autobiographic mutations and proposes to employ Olney's term – autophylography, as a suitable alternative especially where the concerns of the narrator appear conflated with those of their community (Olney, 1973/1983). The study theorises self, life, community, and writing in narratives that use the self-narratives to advance personal and communal interests. Masemola (2016) maintains that autobiography in Africa flourished during decolonisation and picks on *Ake* by Soyinka to explore the complex relationship between colonialism and African culture. Masemola suggests that culture has a strong influence on African forms of self-writing and echoes Olney who argued that there was a peculiar form of self -writing that emerged from Africa, which is different from Western autobiography (Olney, 1983). Furthermore, Olney (1980: 28-52) notes that group identities constitute an essential quality of self-definition in the case of African self-writing. He coins the two terms to explain both Western and African autobiographical self-writing: "autoautography – Western mode of autobiography which exclusively focuses on the individual,

and autophylography – an African form which focuses on both self and community." He, however, emphasises that these two are variants of the autobiographical genre. Writing on Wole Soyinka's autobiography, Olney (1983: 80-1) argues:

> *Ake* - and here I think is typical of African autobiography in general - gives the story of African consciousness, the story of the universal event, the story of the nonspecific, non-singular community experience, and embracing not only the autobiographer's generation but generations past and generations to come as well. This is why I have elsewhere suggested that much African autobiography might better be understood as "autophylography", for the life, the "*bios*" that it records is not so much the life of the single and isolated individual as it is the life of the community, the life of the "*phyle*"; as is the life of a whole people, specifically including the past, the present, and the future of that people.

In this quotation, Olney suggests that in reading the personal life story, readers interact with the experiences of the community of the writer, intricately bound with personal story. Masemola (2016: 346) asserts that African self-writing "explores tensions between the individual and the cultural", giving it a specific character different from other literatures. The ways in which self-writing privileges communal concerns while positioning the individual at the centre of the narrative's experience and subjectivity is the key focus of this study. Nevertheless, this study disputes the propositions of pure African or pure European forms of autobiography advanced by Olney. Alabi (2022) captures the idea of autophylography, though fleetingly, in his analysis of the self-referential narratives of Wole Soyinka, declaring the strong influence of society on self-narratives in Africa. Alabi claims that Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* vacillates between the writer and his community which nourishes his existence thus qualifying the narrative as autophylography. The overriding argument in this thesis is that autophylography - writing self and community - is a feature of all human societies and variations occur mainly due to the uniqueness of the writer, their cultural milieu, as well as their motivations. On African autobiography, Alabi (1998:20) argues that the experiences and narrations of the individual writer can be "analysed as a way of discussing the community", thus crafting interpersonal narratives. Interpersonal narratives project stories regarding the self and the shared social processes responsible for

producing the consciousness of the narrated selves. This argument informs the current study since autophylography is conceived as a subtle tapestry of both personal and communal experiences in self/life-writing.

According to Austen (2015), African bildungsroman is more collectivist as opposed to European model where there is a strong sense of individualism and introspection. Austen's ideas suggest a sense of community which is quite marked in African autobiography. Austen argues that autophylography is a conscious construct produced by African authors and not something thrust on them by their African-ness. Austen imagines African bildungsroman as connected to the nationalist agenda in a colonial modernist world. This can be said of Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1961), perhaps one of the earliest political life narratives to emerge from Kenya, which evolved out of the nationalist vision. Kenyatta represents a culture that was stable and unified before the onslaught of colonialism. The ethnic Kikuyu identity is traced to the kinship and land tenure systems, initiation practices, traditional religion and marriages. Kenyatta's own identity is laminated to the communal identity and he defends these communal values because it is through the Kikuyu ontological ideals that his personality was formed. Austen (2015: 224) identifies that in MacGoye's *Coming to Birth*, the author weaves "the story of one young woman's tumultuous coming of age with the history of a nation emerging from colonialism", thus the story generates an allegory (Jameson, 1986). In traditional societies in Africa, the relationship with community is signalled at birth and throughout life one is constantly reminded of his belonging to the family, clan, and the nation (Ajah, 2017; Nweke, 2018).

Mbembe (2000), commenting on African modes of self-writing, claims that right from the time of enlightenment, Africans have had something unique, quite indelible and separate from all other human beings – communitarian existence. Mbembe maintains that the imagined ontological difference is what fuelled theories of physical, moral, and political regeneration during the dark times of enlightenment. The denial to belong to the human family is what drives Africans to move towards communalism in an effort to challenge the collective rejection and regain their ontological density. Mbembe argues that for Africans to engage in criticism and self-craft, they went into the

uncharted zones of dependence and used Western polemics and concepts to "tame what they perceived as modernity's threats" (Mbembe, 2000: 249). To totally delink Africa and Africans from Euro-America-centric logics of modernity a configuration around cultural uniqueness is welcome. For this reason, the study used autophylography to interrogate forms of self-writing with communal subjectivity.

Many scholars agree that communalism is a characteristic way of life which typify African existence (Mbembe, 2000; Mabovula, 2011; Odimegwu and Omazu, 2021). Ulogu (2019), too, argues that when Africans write about their own experience(s), it is not an individualistic act as is the case in the West, but instead they merge the personal with the communal, thus promoting collective concerns. Suggested in Ulogu's postulations is the fact that African literature emerges from African cultural background and can only be appraised within that cosmic context. The communal and communitarian aspects of African literature guide the discourse on autophylography in this study. It should, however, be stressed that autophylography is not a preserve of Africans but is found in other cultural locations. Paquet (1991:197-8), for instance, describes Caribbean autobiography as complex and varied. He notes:

> In each of these very different texts issues of self-identity merge with issues of West Indian identity. The individual predicament of the writer […] illuminates the collective predicament of the Island community. […] Self-inquiry is self-imaging and self-evaluation, but it is also cultural assessment. [The] self as a subject is transformed into a cultural archetype.

The complexity and generic variations suggested by Paquet in the Caribbean springs from the individual/communal sensibilities in many self-written narratives traditionally bundled under the genre autobiography. This study references the Caribbean texts due to similar experiences of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism and imperial exploitation, narratives from both Caribbean and Africa can be analysed in "the context of global power dialectics and the concept of minorities" (Hove, 2019: 1-2). Paquet's study scaffolds the current research through the proposition that the subject in the Caribbean text thrusts the collective predicament and, hence, such texts qualify to be read as autophylographies.

The critical trajectory in the critical analysis above resonates with Jameson's (1986:65) postulations concerning third world literature in the argument that "there is now an obsessive return to the national situation itself, the name of the country that returns again and again like a gong, the collective attention to us…this or that nationality, our unique characteristics, in short, to the level of the people." Jameson (1986:69) further states that "the story of the private individual is always an allegory of the third world culture and society." The individual story can be regarded as a metaphor of the social/national situation, hence the need to read self-narratives in Kenya as memories of collective experiences even when they purport to describe individual experiences. Autophylographies can be appreciated via the shared cultural, political and historically generated aesthetics as experienced and storied by individual writers. This study argues that self-writers interpret life by making sense of societal experiences and act as spokespersons of their people. Anderson (2001:7) affirms that personal narrative:

> … can become the text of the oppressed, articulating through one person's experience, experiences which may be representative of a particular marginalised group…*it* becomes both a way of testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through his / her inscription and recognition.

Self-writing has been used to formulate positions on socio-political and cultural ideologies as societies go through cultural and socio-political evolution (Mbembe & Rendall, 2002; Gaertner, 2002; Procida, 2002). Personal narratives project a social vision or the desired future and therefore enhance the understanding of the common dream/s of society. Berger (2010:47) captures the logic of the African self-writing thus:

> Must be both specific and global - and must account both for the synchronic realities that emerge from the localised experience of specific writers and for the diachronic, historical developments that presented different imperatives for different historically situated writers. If an autobiography is indeed, as Olney's romanticist-inflected analysis suggests, "a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition," then African autobiographies - part of an ongoing historical process - are Africanised metaphors, both *human* narratives attempting to construct an order from life and *African* texts crucially impacted by a global imperial system.

In Kenya, autophylography is taken as a carrier of history and a form of counter-story which constructs a progressive order and vision for the Kenyan people. The study argues that autophylography is a procedure of re-constructing both personal and collective Kenyan culture, history, destiny and identity. Therefore, through analyses of the selected texts, this study explores and investigates the political realities and the collective desires of the Kenyan citizens.

Communal focus is not entirely an African aspect but is common in those societies which historically suffered exploitation in the form of either slavery, colonialism or persecution. According to Wallach (2010), Richard Wright's *Black Boy* can be read as a story of all black boys during the Jim Crow years or as an allegory of human oppression. Elsewhere, Adelman (2004) observes that when Jewish women write about the self, they as well narrate their communities in their autobiographies. These studies attest to the fact that communal concerns are integral aspects in narratives of self and thus autophylography becomes a stylisation enacting the evolution of a self-conscious, community-conscious persona. Douglass-Chin (2001:17) underscores the fact that, in style and content, as well as the relationship between the storyteller and audiences, life stories have "a communal character" especially in societies that valorise communalism. Communal character in African literature cannot be disregarded as we critique and theorise on the African postcolonial modes of self-writing (Ngugi, 1986; Alabi, 1998; Roscoe and Al Mahrooqi, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The study recommends that literature in Africa, especially self-writing, should focus on society instead of the self in order to confront historical and contemporary challenges – a prominent feature of the selected autophylographies.

Ndogo (2016:7) attests that in the last two decades, personal narratives have become imaginative pathways through which individuals generate alternative voices in response to poor governance and political intolerance that characterise most post-colonial African states like Kenya:

> writers seem to play the role of whistle-blowers on particular aspects insofar as the well-being of the nation is concerned. In various ways they decry economic deprivation as an impediment to the achievement of the nationalist dream, challenging the political establishment and politics of exclusion.

Ndogo (2016) further argues that self-writing allows writers a chance to speak to those in power, and, accordingly participate in engendering the much-needed socio-political change. He, however, does not question how individuals insert the desires of their societies as theirs into self-writing to form the particular narrative category identified here as autophylography. Ndogo's view echoes Brown's (2013) assertion that there are flourishing autobiographical texts emanating from oppressive political regimes. According to Brown (2013:202),

> The writing of the self is undoubtedly impacted by the experience of living under an authoritarian regime. Such is the case of Cuba during the Castro government, Chile under Pinochet, and Brazil under military rule. Not only are there the obvious challenges of repression and censorship; autobiographical writers also evidence a cultural unconscious shaped by the discursive practices and narratives that create subjects of the state.

Brown's arguments suggest that the practice of self-writing is perhaps an outcome of prevailing ideologies and political power structures in a given political environment at a specific era in history. Brown talks of texts emerging from oppressive political regimes to disseminate the shared experiences of such living. The text that emerges from such spaces is what this study identifies and theorises as autophylography.

Indeed, self-narratives offer a way through which societies (re)construct their perceived collective identity. Muchiri (2014) demonstrates that autobiography narrates the self and in doing so weaves the personal story with that of the society of the author. In her study, she asserts that autobiography is so much intertwined with history that in its reading we encounter history and national events of the time. Her focus is on the nature of autobiography and how it is a social (re)construction of history. In an attempt to understand a people's history, we as well make sense of the collective experience which is a central thesis of this study. What Muchiri does not address in her study is how individual and collective experience(s) in self-writing merge and, accordingly, complicate historical and generic autobiography. Autophylography advances the collective struggle of an exploited community (dis)located from the centre of power and profoundly silenced at the margins. For instance, Naik (2015:280) identifies that in India, Dalit self-writing chronicles the suffering of fellow Dalits to express their anger over their marginalisation. Naik affirms that the Dalit self-narratives inject more prominence to communal life than personal life. Naik's argument on Dalit

autobiography notes that "through their autobiographies they want to start a revolt against the injustices, atrocities and violence inflicted against them." The personal narratives in the selected autophylographies are critiqued as metaphors of contestations, compositions, and (re)constructions of others and societal concerns through the counter-story of the narrating self. The study argues that poor governance, dictatorship, oppression, tribalism, corruption, political exclusion and disempowerment are communally experienced and artistically storied by the self in the Kenyan autophylography.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

In terms of theoretical frames, this study exploited the postulations and practices suggested by the subaltern studies and the decolonial perspectives. The choice and relevance of these two theoretical orientations to the current study is informed by the historical circumstances that Kenya, a post-colonial entity, finds itself in, in the democratisation process.

Subaltern epistemology underscores the need for collapsing socio-economic and political inequalities and bring justice and dignity to those marginalised by different forces (Thakur, 2025). Subaltern theory is an Asian offshoot and a branch of postcolonial studies. Gramsci (1971) initially used the expression subaltern to explain the "subordination and exclusion due to class, race, gender, caste, language and culture" (Prakash, 1994:1477) and to capture those groups excluded from the centres of power. Previously, the term had been used to refer to junior military officers but Gramsci's apprehensions were the common interests of all subordinated and oppressed fractions in the Italian nation. Louai (2012:5) argues that in postcolonial studies, usage of the term subaltern includes "all persons or groups of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of ruling elite that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same society. The social categories Gramsci had in mind at that time were Italian workers and peasants who were exploited, oppressed and discriminated by the leader of the National Fascist Party, Benito Mussolini and his political agents." Gramsci originally coined the subaltern idea to point to a consciousness that was pro-change; revolutionary and even subversive.

Although the term subaltern is associated with Gramsci, its theoretical development got its philosophical and intellectual thrust from Indian scholars (Guha, 1982 & 1988; Spivak, 1985, 1988 & 2000; Prakash, 1994; Chakrabarty, 2000). These scholars affirm that the model figure of the subaltern has been and still is the postcolonial world citizen and thus the task of subaltern historiography is to reclaim and restore this marginalised figure of history. Guha (2016) considers the Indian subaltern to denote all those peasants who live on the margins of the hegemonic power structure and always struggling against imposed and ingrained subordination. This study argues that subalternity can be conceptualised as a practice, history, or text highlighting individual, communal, or national conditions of marginalisation and the struggles to reverse the real or perceived exclusion. The selected texts are therefore read as aesthetic reconstructions or imaginations of the subaltern experience which give an alternative version of national narrative.

Spivak (1988) writes that in authoritarian historiography, subaltern subjects have no history and cannot speak or be heard because their voice is submerged under the dominant voices. Subaltern studies demonstrate that writing for the subalterns is one way of giving voice to those excluded from the centre of political power or "to recover the neglected underside of human experience and to announce that subaltern groups are also counted in the unfolding history" (Pandey, 2006:4736). Generally, the lives, history, politics and experiences of the subaltern minority have been distorted, suppressed, effaced, and neglected during the writing of the history of the Kenyan nation. Thus, the selected texts are efforts geared towards reconstruction of the histories that have been hitherto histories of exclusion and marginalisation. Spivak (1988:287) argues that colonialism acquired a bourgeois character in the third world countries, consequently re-producing social and political "inequalities that were prominent during colonialism" hence the need for pro-active subalterns. In her essay, "*Can the Subaltern speak*?" Spivak invites us to conceptualise the myriad impediments on the path of those excluded marginal groups as they strive to access or change the neo-colonial power matrix. Rather than denying subaltern agency or the efficacy of counter-hegemonic projects, subalternity insists on situating oppositional struggles in multiple fields of power.

Subalternity is critical in understanding the culture and history of societies that were created and continue to be recreated by Western power formations. Indeed, the subaltern position of the

Kenyan masses and their engagement with state power are interrogated through personal narratives theorised as autophylographies. Prakash (1994:1466) argues:

> The dominance of the nation-state, cobbled together through compromises and coercion during the nationalist struggle against British rule, became precarious as its programme of capitalist modernity sharpened social and political inequalities and conflicts. Faced with the outbreak of powerful movements of different ideological hues that challenged its claim to represent the people, the state resorted increasingly to repression to preserve its dominance. But repression was not the only means adopted. The state combined coercive measures with the powers of patronage and money, on the one hand, and the appeal of populist slogans and programmes, on the other, to make a fresh bid for its legitimacy.

Although Prakash's ideas speak of the Indian experience, they apply to Kenya where citizens and freedom fighters feel cheated at independence and in the freedom dream of 1963. In Africa, subaltern studies have taken the onus to look at the natives and their past struggles as active subjects involved in the making of their own history.

The subaltern theory is employed in tandem with decolonial ideas as argued by Dastile & Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a/b); Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986, 2009a/2009b); Grosfoguel (2011); Maldonado-Torres (2007); Mignolo (2007) and Quijano (2007). Maldonado-Torres (2007:243) identifies and delineates certain terms critical in decolonial aesthetics; coloniality, colonialism, decolonisation, coloniality of power, postcolonialism and postmodernism. He differentiates colonialism from coloniality in that, "whereas the former is the political and economic dominance of one nation by another, the latter is the long-standing power patterns that emerge as a result of colonialism." He further affirms that the power structures in coloniality define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations and knowledge production. According to Quijano (2007:171), decoloniality questions coloniality in discourses that uncover the very organisation of modern world systems – constitutive of "coloniality of power" where power organises exclusion, domination and exploitation.

Decolonial epistemology builds on the decolonisation process by re-examining the concepts of power, being and knowledge as they play out in coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:22) argues that decoloniality re-emerges in "the context of crisis of imagination of liberation, freedom, development and the future in those societies that once experienced colonialism." He also argues that the achievement of political freedom and withdrawal of the direct colonial control produced a vulnerable post-colonial state with decreased judicial freedom. Grosfoguel (2011:5) provides more insights on decoloniality, arguing that it identifies several forms of exploitation, oppression and domination in the post-colonial states emanating from difference: "class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical and racial." In this study, decoloniality helps to identify the various forms of exploitation, political exclusion and the quest for democracy during the Moi era in Kenya, as narrated in the selected autophylographies.

In Africa, decoloniality has been conceived as an epistemological paradigm for advancing ideas on human liberties and collapsing power hierarchies retained after colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). According to Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:116), the post-colonial states operate much like the colonial states – unleashing violence on their people who are treated as subjects rather than citizens by their leaders. Decoloniality is a theory useful in African liberation because it "seeks to unmask, unveil, and reveal coloniality as an underside of modernity that coexists with the rhetoric of progress, equality, fraternity, and liberty" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013c:5). As a cultural theory, decoloniality offers a lens in the analysis of cultural knowledge contesting and discrediting the myth of decolonisation and the illusion of freedom in the postcolonial world. The ideas of decoloniality largely inform the study in that they help the researcher understand the citizen's democratic struggles and dialogue(s) with authoritarianism in post-colonial Kenya.

1.10 Methodology

The study adopts both the constructionist and interpretivist paradigms. Constructivist and interpretivist method holds that the researcher must explicate the construction of meaning embodied in language and realised through social actors. The constructivist approach is where meaning is derived through interpretations of systems of symbolic representation in concepts and signs. This approach identifies that meaning in culture can be understood within two systems of

representation: firstly, through a set of correspondence between things – people, objects, events, abstract ideas and conceptual maps; secondly, through a construction of sets of correspondences between conceptual maps and sets of signs arranged to represent concepts (Fitzallen and Brown, 2016). Constructionist and interpretivist approaches guide the research to understand the personalised world of human experience due to the fact that the study interrogates selected narrators' views on what happened to their lives and societies.

This research relies on textual exegesis. Secondary materials such as books, journals, newspaper reports, documentaries and dissertations are used to aid in the analyses of the selected autobiographies. This qualitative methodology fits the nature of inquiry into autobiographical writing, which explores life and experiences from the subject's point of view. Through the deployment of qualitative inquiry, cultural contexts become invaluable as they enable life- writers make their own meanings about life. Dhobi (2022:181) argues that qualitative research is "designed basically for the identification and description of variables with a view to establishing the relationship between them". According to Myers (2009), qualitative research is the most effective tool of analysing cultural and social phenomena as it is concerned with understanding people and social contexts in which they live. Qualitative research allows for context-based evaluation of a text revealing things from the author's perspective.

Data for this particular study was collected from autophylographic life patterns, personal perceptions, experiences and textual strategies of identity formation narrated in the selected texts. Historical knowledge is exploited to complement the researcher's meaning-making of various narratives, especially the ones that highlight the democratic struggles of the Kenyan people.

1.11 Delineation of the Chapters

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Apart from the Chapter One which introduces the study and Chapter Six which is the conclusion, the other four chapters are conceived along the research objectives of the study. The opening chapter provides the introduction, delineation of the aim and problem of the study, objectives, justification, theories guiding the study, organisation of the

findings, methodology and the scope of the study. The study's contribution to knowledge is also discussed in this opening chapter.

Chapter Two is an extended literature review regarding autophylography. It explains the origin of the term and its relationship with autobiography. The general evolution of autobiography and the enduring debates around it are discussed to justify the theorising of autophylography. The chapter explains how self-narratives become autophylographies and discusses the main features which mark autophylography from other forms of self-writing. The chapter also provides an extended discussion of decolonial and subaltern theories and their suitability in appreciation of autophylography.

Chapter Three is entitled "Collective and Individual identity." It examines how specific self-narratives generate both personal and collective identity, thus becoming autophylographies. To achieve this goal, the chapter discusses Maathai's *Unbowed* (2006) and Gitari's *Troubled but Not Destroyed* (2014). It further interrogates the role of gender, religion, cultures and national boundaries in the construction of the identities of the selected public figures. For instance, Gitari's autophylography offers an opportunity to discuss the role of religion in propagating values and good governance as well as the church's mandate to defend the subaltern.

Chapter Four analyses Odinga's *The Flame of Freedom* (2013) to establish how certain experiences and narratives – personal and communal – are aesthetically storied. The history of colonialism and the exploitation of African people by the colonisers are significant concerns discussed in this section of the study. The chapter also focuses on Pan-African ideals about independence and freedom as it engages with the author's views that the post-independence leaders failed the citizens and frustrated their dreams for a better future. It specifically argues that Odinga's text focalises corruption, tribalism, and dictatorship during the presidency of Kenyatta and that of Moi who succeeded him, to reveal the various ways in which the two leaders authorised and promoted exploitation in the post-independence era. Detentions, assassinations, torture of

dissidents, exclusions and exile are discussed as part of the machinations of dictatorship which prevailed in Kenya during this time.

Chapter Five probes the role of context in the writing of autophylographies through the analysis of Wamwere's *I Refuse to Die* (2002). It examines how collective suffering motivates a generation of self-writing. The collective suffering intimated here includes colonial and post-colonial dispossession, exploitation that persists even after the attainment of independence in 1963, the question of land and landlessness, political detentions, corruption and negative ethnicity. As a way of making sense of the author's call for a renewed struggle against state injustices, the chapter also examines how the history of the Mau Mau upheaval affected individuals and communities.

Chapter Six concludes the study by recapping the main discussions made. It also consolidates the findings that emerge from the analysis of the selected four primary texts. The chapter terminates by making recommendations for further research.

NOTE: The titles of the four primary texts are abridged differently in this study to enhance word economy. Maathai's *Unbowed* is abbreviated as (WM), Gitari's *Troubled but Not Destroyed* will be captured as (DG) while Odinga's *The Flame of Freedom* is rendered as (RO) and finally Koigi wa Wamwere's *I Refuse to Die* (KW). The initials of the author of the primary texts are used for the abbreviation and wherever they are used in this study reference is made to their title. Any other text by the same author follows the Havard style of citation.

CHAPTER TWO

Autophylography: A Review

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter outlined and discussed the problem, research goals and conceptual framework guiding the study. The chapter also charted the structure of the study as well as the theories and methodology used. This chapter interrogates how certain modes of self-writing generate communal biography conceptualised in this study as autophylography. The chapter's discussion is guided by the need to understand a category of life narratives with substantial communal character even when the narrating author claims to write auto/biography. Theorising autophylography begins from the basic understanding that a big tree has different branches which are inimitable but supported by the same phyle. Autophylography, therefore, is conceptualised here as a unique branch of auto/biography.

As earlier noted, Olney (1973: 67) first coined the term in his efforts to explain a kind of self-writing which portrays shared life, rituals, legends, myths and memory. According to Olney, the term was primarily meant to create sub-genres in auto/biography to capture "the wide range of [self-writing] practices and intentions." In theorising the range of sub-genres, Olney strove to understand autobiography as a "mixed breed" wherein through the proposed autophylography, certain narrative qualities, non-literary and extra-literary, could be understood. Therefore, this chapter argues that autophylography explains those self-narrative configurations where both shared and individual experiences are storied in what has traditionally been designated as autobiography – a story that "perpetuates [a] common spirit" (Olney, 1973:67). Alabi (2021: 122) believes that there is need "to revise the meaning of the autobiographical genre . . . during this era of globalization and the re-evaluation of Western terms and definitions." Alabi confirms the existence of oral forms of autobiography which narrated the self and community in the Yoruba traditions long before the European model was introduced in West Africa. Alabi further highlights the differences between autobiography in the African context and that which exists in the Western world. Alabi observes that African autobiography valorises the symbiotic relationship between self and community and thus its criticism requires that readers explore collective imaginaries as

well. The study, therefore, investigates the selected self-narratives to appreciate the extent to which the stories accentuate communalism even when their authors attempted to write a self-narrative. This research demonstrates that in certain personal-narratives, the story of the protagonist is merged with stories of others and of the society, producing a narrative that can be circumscribed under the term autophylography. This chapter also surveys the theories of decoloniality and subalternity, demonstrating how they are applicable in the criticism of autophylographical stories and analysis of the selected texts.

The chapter begins by unpacking fundamental qualities which distinguish certain texts as autophylographies. As argued above, the term autophylography cannot be totally disconnected from autobiography, thus it is imperative to first engage with the theories of autobiography. Lejeune (1989:4) defines autobiography as "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality." Lejeune establishes key requirements for autobiography: author, subject, and narrator should be one and the same person and, thus, self-written or self-narrated. Still, Lejeune's calibrations suggest that it is improbable for autobiography to engage with issues outside the narrator. However, Lejeune fails to include in his definition other forms of self-writing which attempt self/communal representation like diaries, letters and autophylography. Smith and Watson (2010) criticise Lejeune's ideas as Eurocentric and excluding other forms of self-writing like the feminist auto/biographies, oral and digital life-writing. The current study argues that when readers encounter narratives where personal and public issues coalesce, then they should think of communal auto/biography where unlike Lejeune the story happens outside the narrator.

Various critics have debated the centrality of the individual's life, as narrated by self in autobiography (Eakin, 2019; Reece, 2016; Mascuch, 2013; Gilmore, 2001). These scholars limit autobiography to those self/life narratives where the writing-self is at the centre of the narrative but fail to envisage the occurrence of the stories about others and society commonly embedded in several autobiographical accounts. Reece (2014) contends that autobiography is a practice of writing an individual's life story by its subject, thus the genre is subjective – offering an individual's unique and felt experiences as written by that person. In Reece's definition, individual

life story is stressed without the consideration of the effect of socialisation on the individual autobiographer. Mascuch (2013) is more forthright in his affirmation that the definitive characteristic of individualist self-identity is the personal capacity to produce a unified retrospective autobiographical narrative, and stresses that this capacity was first demonstrated in England during the last decade of the eighteenth century. Mascuch ties autobiography's history to Europe as he postulates that self-writing is an outcome of certain social spaces. Mascuch takes us to earlier thinking that autobiography was male, European and an autonomous kind of writing not likely to exist outside the Western world (Olney, 1973 & 1983; Smith and Watson, 2010). From these debates, the study argues that traditional autobiography strictly focuses on self and excludes or marginalises other narratives about the writer's community.

The existence of this "hybrid autobiography," different from that theorised by Lejeune has brewed critical controversy for a long time. Olney (1973:52) raises pertinent questions regarding autobiography outside the Western world. He questions whether the autobiographer's singularity stands against or within a community. Although it may be erroneous and misleading to isolate the character of African autobiography, or to label Africa as communalistic and Western as individualistic, Olney argues that African autobiography is determined by "a special African-ness of the writer" (1973:52). Olney's study focuses on African autobiography and analyses it alongside the European models. His study, however, fails to account for idiosyncratic features of autobiographies from other once-colonised regions of the world with circumstances similar to those in Africa. Olney does not, as well, compare European autobiography with narratives from minority groups and women, thus imbuing his study with unpardonable bias. Nevertheless, Olney coins the term autophylography to explain the peculiar kind of autobiography he encounters in Africa which beckons for intellectual attention. Eakin (2020) illustrates how autobiography should help readers and researchers to ask questions about (re)production, and (re)construction of gender, cultural, ethnic and national identities, ideas not previously conceived in traditional autobiography. Eakin observes that autobiography should be involved in the creation of identities instead of just reflecting them. His concerns regarding self-writing inject fresh ideas into the study of personal narratives. Such unresolved propositions justify and offer a rationale for this study, arguing that in most self-narratives the monolithic identity of the autobiographical writer is obscured by the social

issues identified by Eakin, something which calls for theoretical extension of autobiographical inquiry.

The quest for other newer terms to explain the scope of self-narratives has been contested before by Smith and Watson (2001:132) who affirm that there is urgency for theorising newer concepts in situations where the focus shifts from "I" to community. Smith and Watson (2001) point to the necessity to expand self-writing scholarship and to allow autobiography to generate subgenres or coin newer terms which address the current changing terrain in writing and critical reception of autobiography. This study theorises on autophylography to assuage the critical predicament that characterises self-writing in contemporary scholarship. In autophylography, the writer deviates from private concerns and slides towards their community and, consequently, the protagonist becomes one of the many participants in the daily struggles of life in a given social space.

In Africa, self-writing intersects with class, gender, ethnicity, power, democracy and nationality, thus making scholarship on auto/biography broader and consequently encouraging the need for newer theorisations (Hove and Masemola, 2014; Huddart, 2008; Smith and Watson, 2001). Arising from this reality, I affirm that some self-narratives contain communal ethos and therefore need to be conceptualised as "collective biography." In some circumstances, the troubled past makes writers slide into the collective memory as they try to make sense of the past and so conflate the private story with collective history, thus producing autophylography (Alabi, 2021). The study identifies autophylography as a prominent form of self-construction in Africa due to history, cultural dictates and emerging political realities. This notwithstanding, the study also posits that autophylographical theory and practice is a universal exercise which is not only African because marginalised people are found everywhere in the world.

Location and space (setting) are significant in literature as far as interpreting the social experience is concerned. This aspect cannot be overlooked in self-writing. It is, therefore, not just in Africa where local milieu intersects with community in life-narratives or fuses the personal and communal but it is a universal feature in auto/biographical narratives. Several scholars have

documented autobiographies where communal and personal subjectivities have been dealt with in personal narratives outside Africa (Smith and Watson, 2001; Holden, 2008). Despite the debates by the various scholars on the communal nature of self-writing in certain texts, newer terms have been avoided to the detriment of self-narrated texts and literary scholarship.

Self-writing explains how we conceive ourselves and others. It is argued that with changing trends in the way we conceive ourselves, the means through which we communicate who we are (digital storytelling, the internet and other modern forms), globalisation and the making of global citizens, issues of history (place and time), it is incumbent upon scholars of life/self-writing genre(s) to develop models and explain emerging narrative trends. This thesis theorises on self-narratives which imagines both individuals and communities arising from those cultural spaces in which stories of representation project multiple subjectivities. Autophylography can enable members of a social group to reflect about individual concerns and apprehensions of their communities and document the hybrid views, both past and present, into a personal story. In that regard, this study submits that autophylography is a reminiscence of both personal and shared history. The study argues that through autophylography, readers interact with the communal character as well as individual disposition(s) generating common and personal identities. This is anchored in the understanding that persons and settings – selves and others – are mutually constituted through a dynamic engagement with the symbolic meaning system of language in its storied form. This composite of narrative subjectivities is utilised as an avenue where personal and communal experiences expand knowledge about communities in our contemporary and multicultural world. Through selected samples of Kenyan self-narratives, the study argues that the narrators recount their communities as they purpose to narrate their own lives thereby generating autophylographies. This study also dismantles a feature of postcolonial African literature which always seeks to write back, thus making African literature always a response. Autophylographical writing will manifest a great feature of African creative potentials and also present self-writing narratives which are culture specific.

2.2 Self and Community in African Literature

Scholars and critics take diverse positions in defining African literature. Megbowon and Uwah (2020) define African literature as "any material of artistic value produced by Africans about Africa and for Africans regardless of the colour of the writer or the linguistic tool through which it was produced." This definition has not escaped criticism no matter its patently balanced scope. Megbowon and Uwah's definition borrows from Premchand (2011:82-90), who argues that literature is connected with the realities of life, as it is preoccupied with the society as a social unit and its various problems. In *Oral Forms: Nigerian autobiography and Life Stories*, Alabi (2021) avers that stories in Nigerian culture are communal and part of the collective history of the people, thus autobiographies in that space are also communal (autophylographical). This study submits that African literature is built around the community even where the individual writer grapples with personal experiences. The narratives in this study qualify to be read as African literature because they delve into aspects of African life, society, history, philosophy and experience. Literature should depict the vision of the author's culture. Greenblatt (2013) postulates that the culture of a community manifests in a writer's overall vision, emphasising the relationship between literature and reality thus suggesting that the writer's vision derives from their social milieu. He further affirms that all texts are subsumed in a specific social context and cannot be read in isolation. It can be concluded, reasonably, that literature focusses largely on society to promote humanity and show sensitivity to others.

Okuyade (2013: 1) notes that a "storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale." This reveals the reality about literature and its communitarian existence. Literature itself has a relationship with those artists who generate it as well as those who consume it. Who produces a narrative, circumstances of production and consumption of the story – are all tied to community. Stories from a people are basically meant "to construct and praise themselves and their communities and to contest their representation by others as well as to teach communal history" (Alabi, 2021: 11). Every narrative bears a signature of its geo-cultural space and thus it is defeatist to ignore the "collective" mind of a narrative. The community-centeredness of the African people is conceived as a striking feature in African cosmology (Ajah, 2017; Ulogu, 2019; Munyangeyo,

2022). Indeed, Mbiti (1969:108) argues that people are not independent individuals but part of a community living in relationships and interdependence: “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am.” Mbiti suggests that we are all connected in the social web of humanity and that bond is more pronounced in one’s society.

Through communal stories and universal themes, African literature adopts a sense of connection for Africans on the continent and those in the diaspora (Taoua and Musila, 2023; Ulogu, 2019). Nkrumah (1972) offers compelling arguments on the communal alignment of African politics and society, suggesting that to confront the common social problems Africans need collective endeavours. Nkrumah (1972:441) notes that “a community in which each saw his well-being in the welfare of the group certainly was praiseworthy, even if the manner in which the well-being of the group was pursued makes no contribution to our purpose.” His contentions resonate with Ubuntu philosophy, which underscores the need for communalism and regard for others because humanity is interdependent. Mabovula (2011: 39) writes that communalism “signifies the human person as an inherently communal being embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, and never as an isolated, atomistic individual.” It can therefore be argued that the communal is valorised among African communities where the social aspect of humanity is emphasised and a collective world-view is cherished. Quijano (2007:177) writes that “all systematic production of knowledge is associated with a perspective of totality … the perspective of totality in knowledge includes the acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of all reality.” This study argues that collective conceptualisation of reality filters in personal narratives and, subsequently, the narratives acquire a mutually shared tenor. Although communal ideology has been confused with Marxist collectivism, this study demonstrates that African collectivism is built around the fact that one pursues and achieves their own good by promoting the good of others in society.

In the past, communal approaches and collective synergy have yielded results in the fight against challenges of colonialism, dictatorship, misrule, exclusion and sexism (Fagunwa, 2019). This study is sensitive to the fact that coloniality survives beyond colonialism and thus the post-independence national narratives continue to grapple with freedom in most of the African states.

In African literature, communal concerns have preoccupied artists from the times of primary orality to the present-day world of the graphemic word. Life/self-writing literary model is one way through which individuals engage in other important conversation(s) in their communities (Holden, 2008; Berger, 2010; Eakin, 2014; Alabi, 2021).

Apart from artistic beauty, improving and shaping the essentials for common co-existence, scholars affirm that literature reflects the ethos, norms and values of a given society (Ngugi, 1973; Nyamndi, 2006; Ogundokun, 2013). Literature's reflective quality can be traced back to Plato's arguments that art reproduces the external world through imitation. Aristotle's *Poetics*, conceives mimesis and distinguishes between art forms by virtue of the medium of representation used, the aspects of real and imaginary life represented, and finally the manner of representation. Aristotle believes that art is simply a mirror of reality. This reflection happens in different cultures, at varying levels and due to innumerable metaphysical conditions emanating from the author's experiences and shared history. I, therefore, argue that literature (re)produces reality and at times communal facets of reality are more pronounced than those of an individual in life/self-writing because one becomes "a person" in a community with others. This occurs in those societies where people have been "dismembered from the land, from labour, from power, and from memory" (Ngugi, 2009b:28). Thus, self-writing is understood as one way of (re)membering and launching a people into a new "world order that is human and inclusive" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:22).

The novel in Africa is believed to have evolved from the collective experience and reflects the collective memory due to the shared history (Heux, Rathbone, Gensburger, Clifford, & Souchay 2023). For instance, Ngugi's novels, The *River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977) and *Matigari* (1987) envision collectivism. The collective will of the people to fight colonialism triumphs over the desire to propagate Western ideals in *The River Between* as symbolised in the battle between Kabonyi and Waiyaki. Kabonyi has taken an oath to uphold communal solidarity and protect the purity of the tribe but Waiyaki thinks of integrating practices from the two cultures - European and Kikuyu. The Makuyu/Kameno divide is also symbolic of Western individualism as seen through Joshua, who stands in opposition to his people's culture

and disregards the local traditions to practise Christianity. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi disparages the disunity and disorganisation that characterises the freedom struggle where individuals are alienated from each other, thus showing differing allegiances. Ngugi blames colonialism for the disunity and fragmentation of African communities and propagates his vision for unity and communalism through the novel genre.

In life/self-writing, authors tend to occasionally project collective ideologies, histories and experiences as they construct their personal stories. Thus, there is a considerable manifestation of "we-ness" as authors of autophylography write about life and self in self-narratives, leading them to (re)imagine their shared history. It should be noted, however, that despite the sense of community in autophylography, individual uniqueness and agency manifest in ways that do not infringe on societal identity formations.

2.3 Why Autophylography?

North (2016: 2) argues that critics of self-writing normally face a herculean task because of "self, free will and voice" for the terms are amorphous and often contradictory. North proceeds to curiously process her ideas through the philosophy of "*eudemonia*" – a Socratic ideal which stressed man's responsibilities to the state and community. As such what we perceive as free will is informed by culture and the reality of a writer and therefore according to North, self-writing infuses collective reality and experiences even when writers struggle to project a uniquely personal voice. North (2016: 147) further observes that in self-writing, the author is "not free from third party concerns, considerations of social duty", suggesting an inclination back to the community even as we purpose to project the individual life.

However, according to Pascal (1960:9) autobiography involves the movement of a life and "its centre of interest is the self, not the outside world." Pascal distinguishes autobiography from the circumstances that produce it. He stresses on the centrality of self and disregards other factors or persons who could have had considerable influence on autobiographical-self. Similarly, Lejeune (1989:4) identifies the focus of autobiography as an "individual life, in particular the story of his personality." Lejeune's stance lays emphasis on aspects of individualism and hints at the

impossibility of the genre being communal. Pascal and Lejeune's avowals negate the fact that several life/self-writers from different cultures have written about their communities even when they had set out to write personal stories. The range of developments and practices in life/self-texts therefore need to embrace new approaches and open different theoretical vistas to understand the variety of subjectivities and intentions in self/life-writing. Indeed, scholars have debated on the communal nature of self-narratives from once colonised or marginalised spaces, where authors have written themselves and their societies in life stories (Alabi, 1998; Holden, 2008; Berger, 2010; Eakin, 2014). The once colonised people are what Quijano (2007:168-78) considers to be recipients of "negatives of modernity" which accords them a common experience. This study argues that as victims of colonialism, African people gain strength through collective efforts and that explains the communal subjectivity of their narratives. The communal resistance tradition is a common feature of minority and marginalised communities. Alabi (1998:173) presents a compelling argument in regard to the communal nature of self-writing with reference to Soyinka's autobiography. He notes:

> The communal nature of Wole Soyinka's *Ake* is symbolised by its title: *Ake: The Years of Childhood.* Ake is the part of Abeokuta where Soyinka grows up. By labelling his narrative after that community and not himself, he shows the importance of the community in his development […]. Despite the privileges of the members of Soyinka's family because of their education, many of their neighbours have relatively free access to their family, with some coming to live permanently with them. The communality of the society also allows for the direct influence of the neighbours on the growth of the children.

Alabi (2021) suggests that the fact that human beings are not independent and discreet but related to their communities is a special ontological perspective. Earlier, Alabi (1998:2) confirmed that black autobiographies "function not just as a record of individual activities in the various black communities but as a record of the struggle for survival and equality with other groups." Central to Alabi's argument is the idea that self-writing is crucial in understanding African culture and projecting the communal vision. This suggests that African autobiography has a slightly idiosyncratic character which differentiates it from the traditional Western autobiography. Alabi (2021) calls for new ways of thinking about selfhood and new approaches to African

autobiography because of the limiting Eurocentric definition(s) which do not account for the varieties of African self-writing.

Autobiographical texts have attracted research from a variety of perspectives and pertinent questions about boundaries of the genre have refused to go away (Olney, 1983). Some critics have called for the expansion of the limits while others have stuck to what is suggested by Lejeune (1989). It is because of these various theoretical standpoints that this study considers autophylography as an alternative theoretical avenue towards understanding the autobiographical genre, especially those texts where both the personal and communal coalesce in life/self-writing. Nakai (2011:1) describes a unique form of autobiography and labels it "autobiography of [the] other." He argues about a divided text with a free-floating individual who is always aspiring to return to the community, thus differentiating it from the Western autobiography as conceived by Gusdorf. Nakai's pronouncements hint on the need for scholars to theorise about the kind of a text where the personal and communal subjectivities blend and are narrated differently from the traditional European autobiography.

Gusdorf (1980:33) identifies autobiography as "a mirror in which the individual reflects his own image." He, however, fails to take into account other forms of self-writing in which readers get a bigger communal image – the collective picture. Gusdorf is perhaps thinking of the identity of the writer but then in writing their identity, writers script the collective identity thus producing a sub-genre - autophylography. Pascal (1960:22) observes that "autobiography is essentially European." This debate above fails to recognise those forms of self-writing from outside Europe, thus justifying the need to rethink the theory of autobiography. The term autophylography entails personal narratives which blend the personal and communal. Pugliese (1986:441) argues that in the Kenyan life-story, certain communal aspects stand out. He writes that collective ethos filters into the narrative of self:

> Generally speaking, the form of the life-story could be described as follows: dedication to the people of Kenya; description of the clan the author belongs to and the narration of several myths and legends; description of the circumcision ceremony; narration of the

author's schooling; often at the end of the book there are one or more appendices containing historical documents that give further information to the reader.

Pugliese distinguishes personal narratives where a shared outlook of a peoples' culture replays in the private life-story blending with the shared societal aspects and subsequently producing a newer genre which we call autophylography.

Writers from marginalised groups tend to write the common demoted existence in their personal narratives. For example, Nardi (2014:12) in his study of American slave narratives demonstrates that the journey from slavery was "a transformation…the choral accomplishment of an entire community, a painful act of ultimate survival." These postulations can also be used to explain the African situation in anti-colonial struggle where common survival is valorised. Nardi suggests that subject and vision in African-American slave narratives are communal even though specific individuals wrote the texts. The voices in the African narratives are representatives and the writers become ethnic guardians of the entire Black subaltern community. Elsewhere, Adelman (2004: 116) writes that Jewish women autobiography blends individual and communal experiences, contrary to the limits of traditional autobiography, thus becoming a contested genre. It becomes a contested genre because it disregards the boundaries imposed by Gusdorf (1956), Lejeune (1989) and Gilmore (2001). The American and Jewish debates about the communal nature of autobiography manifesting in various spaces highlight the hitherto undertheorised autophylography.

Beaujour (1980) collapses the term "autobiography" altogether and recommends other theoretical options like "autographie," "autoscription," and "autospecularisation," but with little passion settles on the term "autoportrait." Beaujour (1980:4) suggests that whereas autoportrait recreates the present moment of writing, autobiography presents a past narrative of experience. Beaujour's autoportrait proposes representation of self that is unique and adequate – having no relation to anything outside itself – something this study finds problematic because Braziel (2003:87) recommends alterbiography to conceptualise both personal and cultural representation in self-

writing. Braziel argues that there is a trend of moving away from *bios* that has seen different scholars theorise and coin newer terms:

> autogynography (Stanton, Bree 1984), autography (Perrault 1989); autoethnography (Lionnet 1990, Pratt, Reed-Danahay 1997); …with some important exceptions, of course: Lorde's (1982) biomythography, Derrida's (1985) otobiography, Gilmore's (2001) autobiographies, and Marcus's (1994) auto/biographies.

For the case of autophylography, the collective memory and individual memory fuse to inform the narrating self. In autophylography, the writer becomes what Peterson (2006:177) calls the "spokesperson of the collective whole," where the story of a community is narrated through an individual's life story. Autophylography can be comprehended in the context of JanMohamed's (1987:9) observation that:

> minor literature is necessarily collective. The writer more often manifests the collective nature … The collective nature of all minority discourses also derives from the fact that minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically.

Collective minority discourses emerge from social structuration occasioned by colonialism and subsequently collective consciousness finds its way into personal narratives, giving birth to communal biographies among subaltern groups (Mutie, 2020). This study further argues that autophylography is representational. Representative life/self-text(s) occurs quite often among communities inhabiting marginal positions (Smith and Watson, 2001). Although Smith and Watson's argument is based on accounts of marginalised women, their study is also informative in communities that were once excluded and oppressed by colonialism.

Olney (1973:53) coined the term autophylography after it occurred to him that the African autobiography had a distinct sense of community, deviating from individualism suggested in the traditional term – autobiography. Olney (1979:57-8) proposes that the African self-narrative can only be read as autophylography because the African writer gives a complete collective rendering of the African experience. In the term, Olney replaces the term *bio* with *phyle*, a Greek word

which means the "union among citizens of a state, a class or tribe, or a union according to local habitation." Olney's insights point to autophylography as a mixed breed, a kind of writing with synecdochic attributes, hence the need to understand the nature of one's life in relation to the whole (as is found in community). Olney further asserts that within the hermeneutical circles, there is need to understand the parts so as to understand the whole and again the whole as seen in terms of parts. Olney's arguments regarding the communal nature of African modes of self-writing are compelling and worthy of scholarly investigation. This study, however, acknowledges the risk of binaries of African/other and argues for a universal theory and reading practice of autophylography. The study suggests that we can understand societies through life/self-texts and autophylography can be theorised as one vehicle to such knowledge.

Ngugi (1992: ix) observes that "writers are the surgeons of the heart and souls of community", thus hinting on the possibility of blending the personal and collective. As souls of their societies, writers share a communal spirit in their narratives. Hence, interacting with the selected self-narratives we get to the soul of the Kenyan community through the narrators. Although Ngugi does not get into the politics of autobiography, his arguments suggest that writers should have a vision for their communities which should filter into their personal narratives as well. Alabi (1998:20) captures the compelling communal orientation of the African self-writing when he argues:

> Even when individuals seem to be privileged by the community as a result of their achievements, the privileges have to be exercised with a high degree of responsibility and respect for the community. This level of responsibility is vital because it is generally believed that individual successes are strictly determined and made possible by the community. Since individual achievements are determined and enabled by the community, individuals normally recognise the community's role in their success and respect it. The life of an individual, as recorded in African autobiographies, ultimately becomes a way of discussing the community especially the relationship between the individual and the community.

Alabi's arguments underscore the centrality of collectivism in all major aspects of African life where the individual is just one actor in communal undertakings. In a similar vein, Ngugi (1972: xv) submits that "literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society." Ngugi's observation supports the notion that artists are a product of societies and the challenges and realities of their societies are both personal and communal. The personal dimension is the way we perceive and analyse experience; the communal is the way the narrator and others are part of collective history. According to Ngweya (1996:2), the conventional theories which stress on the singularity of personal experience and stability of the narrating self "may not be suitable in the interpretation of marginalised groups." Ngweya suggests that most autobiographies from minority and marginalised communities tend to have communally based selfhood which happens only occasionally in the cases of Western autobiography. Africa's marginalisation is linked to its history and the degradation that happened after the continent's contact with the outside world. After independence, other challenges like ethnic and class conflicts, poverty, gender inequality, political instability, and poor governance have worked to marginalise sections of the populace thereby making some of the citizens subalterns. Through self-writing, these marginalised groups imagine a sense of their being (common identity) as well as their exclusion. Alabi (1998:1) notes that self-writing in black communities is a way of "keeping the record of the struggles for survival by many African societies." As part of self-writing, Mignolo (2011:275) calls autophylography a "changing [in] the terms of [the] conversation […] or *epistemic disobedience*" because it is a kind of authority imagined and composed by people who still dream of true freedom devoid of coloniality.

Scholars stress the impossibility of a single definition of autobiography. They cite the genre's relationship with biography, the novel and ideas about historical truth, the linearity of experiences and fictive (re)constructions. Olney (1980:7) notes that "no two observers, no matter how assured they may be, are in agreement" on the definition of autobiography. This explains why scholars have suggested newer terms to cover the range of texts in life/self-writing genre (Olney, 1982; Lejeune, 1989; Gilmore, 2001; Eakin, 1985; Watson & Smith, 2010). Huddart (2008:2) asserts that the term autobiography privileges a particular way of writing "that is masculine and Western." This means self-writing from non-Western societies and that which is done by women does not

qualify to be read as such. Because of this exclusion, Watson and Smith (2001) argue that there is need for a term which describes the range of genres and practices of life narrative outside the masculinised Western world. Watson and Smith's arguments find justification in Moore-Gilbert's (2009: xix) suggestions that an African self-writer, working within an epistemology of collective inner worlds is likely to have a different idea of psyche and selfhood to what obtains in the West. Moore-Gilbert believes that the attachment of autobiographical practice to the masculine Western male is part of the imperial project of discrediting non-Western societies, something challenged by decolonial scholars. Berger (2010:32-54), for example, proposes the necessity to decolonise African autobiography and for alternative perspectives through which to study African autobiography, especially the ones that allow self-writing to exist and evolve. Berger (2010) further suggests that self–writing should challenge the discourses of history, language, genre, modernity, colonialism and neocolonialism in order to work towards decolonisation. African self-writing cannot distance itself from the common struggles in a continent where corruption, poor governance, poverty and violence abound. From the discussion above, there is a need to expand scholarship on life-writing to encompass varieties of self-writing which are ever evolving. This could enable studies to explain the peculiar texture in self-narratives where the personal and the communal are merged. Scholars find it weird to continue in the same old theoretical path despite the prevailing and emerging realities.

In these debates, the term autobiography has its intrinsic weaknesses which do not address the variety of the concerns in self-writing. Berger (2010:5) observes:

> We need another perspective by which to examine African autobiography, one that allows it to exist and evolve - that is, to be historical - without fetishizing generic ambiguity and instability or insisting on the textual equivalence of narrative and criticism.

Berger's plea for renewed theorisation emanates from the realisation that we may have been using erroneous and inadequate approaches despite the emerging realities in self-writing. From the conceptual proclivities advanced by Beaujour and Berger, scholars in life-writing quest to identify newer and progressive practices of reading life/self-writing to capture the range of concerns and

variety of narratives from different cultural spaces. It is not easy to separate the individual and collective in African texts. Javangwe (2011:49) in his analysis of national autobiography argues:

> The transcendence of the individual story into a communal one is predicated on a "common" experience under both colonialism and post-independence for the subaltern groups. Under colonialism, the subaltern consisted of the African populace who were the subject natives, while in the post-independence it consisted of those who found themselves on the fringes of power- that is minority ethnic and gender groups. Nevertheless, the ability of the individual story to contain the group fate is imbued with conflictual strands that yarn the personal and the communal into one composite labyrinth.

Whatever Javangwe calls "national autobiography" in his study is the subgenre referred to in this study identifies as "autophylography." In his study, self/life narrative occurs out of colonial experience and conveys both personal and national experience. Javangwe's propositions on what he calls *national autobiography* are quite insightful and his study demonstrates that in expressing individuality, the Zimbabwean national autobiographies satisfy the requirement of self-writing as communal national experience. Therefore, it can be argued that autophylography offers a way in which the self is made less prominent, contrary to unqualified position of the self that is evident in autobiography.

The definition of autobiography and idiosyncratic features of categorisation into genre has remained elusive to many scholars. Eakin (2014:1) considers autobiography to be some kind of writing which he labels "cosmogram" and declares that autobiography is not a literary text but "a daily identity practice and even an expression of the rhythms of consciousness," a consciousness which comprises both the individual and the collective past. Eakin (2014) further argues that those identities consequent from autobiographical writing are socially derived and therefore the self in some of these stories is assigned an identity by the readers of the narrative. Eakin's arguments resonate with Bergland's (1994) views in his studies on American self-narratives during the civil rights era. Bergland establishes that the civil rights groups resorted to the use of self-narrative as a mode of voicing the general ethnic concerns, hence their narrative voices challenge the construction and meaning of national experience. Similarly, Willis (1987) whose focus is on how

black women's forms of self-writing inject a communal sense in their narratives argues that the story of the individual-self merges with that of selves external to the narrator. Willis suggests a theoretical deviation from what scholars have traditionally referred to as autobiography but she does not provide a plausible alternative.

These diverse discursive positions point to the intellectual frustrations scholars experience when analysing autobiographical texts. There is, thus, an implicit suggestion that self-writing requires complex, curiosity-driven and newer critical strategies. Therefore, this study considers autophylography as a possible alternative. The study operates from a premise that lives written are not lived in isolation but enmeshed with others within a community. The study contests terms such as "political autobiography" (Were, 2017), "national autobiography" (Holden, 2008), and "ethnic autobiography" (Bergland, 1994), where the focus is communal, thus complicating the definition of autobiography already in place.

Communities have always had stories to mark their successes or failures and thus according to Gikandi (2003:379-97) the African autobiography has individual stories which are used to represent and celebrate communal experience. Gikandi believes that many authors attempt to elevate their individual narratives in order to exalt their cultures, which they perceive as organic and collective entities, instead of focussing on their personal growth. Smith and Watson (2010:3) echo Gikandi's hypothesis above when they aver that:

> a growing number of postmodern and postcolonial theorists contend that the term *autobiography* is inadequate to describe the extensive historical range and the diverse genres and practices of life narratives and life narrators in the West and elsewhere around the globe.

Autobiography appears elusive and Frye (1957: 307-8) considers it to be a "subdivision of the novel," generating further critical controversy. Later, de Man (1984:70) declares that autobiography is "not a genre or a mode but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree in all texts." These claims regarding autobiography illustrate that life, self, history

and writing are fluid and unstable concepts which generate multiple ways of understanding, and reading life/self-narratives. This storm is essential for growth in the scholarship on life-writing because it is when scholars take oppositional views that new theories are born.

The study, therefore, recommends autophylography as a theoretical route for understanding the relationship between individual self-writers and their societies. Autophylography avails new ways of understanding the multi-voiced nature of autobiographical texts which challenge the inherited ideas about life/self as it enjoins the personal and communal. This thesis considers some forms of self/life-writing to be collective, intertextual and ever evolving where writers feel more connected to others in their society as they story their world. There is, thus, increased philosophical space when self-writing is analysed through a variety of terms and theories that capture all the peculiarities of this complex genre. This ensures that self-writing criticism does not restrict itself to narrow and perhaps ethno-paternalistic models of analysis which constrain scholarship. Rico (2016:77) remarks that:

> the universalising of experiences within African social life also commonly conflates the distinction between public and private lives within these texts. It is this conflation that calls attention to the differences between formulations of identity in Western and African autobiographies.

Perhaps the African life/self-writer has a clearer and bigger burden than the Western writer owing to the former's history having been shaped by traumatic events such as slavery, racism, colonialism, and neo-imperialism, among others. This study posits that autophylography opens fresh vistas for understanding how different models of personal narratives make sense of the subject "I(s)" in a socio-cultural milieu through self, family and society. Working on a project in postcolonial autobiography, Rodrigue (2014:728-30) affirms that in postcolonial becoming, we need to explore "transformed ways of imagining self and social relationships" due to history and cultural factors. Rodrigue further argues that in the assemblage of "I" in postcolonial autobiography is a compositional endeavour resulting from the self and the other evolving from configurations that contest individuality and autonomy. Rodrigue's arguments stress on the

existence of a communal worldview occurring from a shared history of colonialism and collective suffering which foment group solidarity.

According to Muchiri (2014), autobiography gives a record of history of the community of the autobiographer. She insists that by engaging with the personal history, self-writers become representatives of common history, thus their story, that of their community and that of the nation merge into auto/biography. She observes that the anti-colonial autobiography chronicles the collective struggle just like the postcolonial one which delves into the neocolonial predicament of the citizens. Muchiri (2014) further suggests that autobiography is not a strictly individualist venture as suggested by the Western theories but rather a mode of (re)presentation where individuals document both the personal experiences (failures and achievements) in the context of those of their wider community. In narrating the community, Muchiri (2014) observes, one is bound to narrate the self and vice versa. Drawing from Ngugi's memoir *Dreams in a Time of War* (2010), Muchiri (2014:87) states that "the condition of Ngugi's family is representative of many families at the time that lived in poverty and uncertainty." This conflation produces a sense of shared history that integrates both private and shared experiences and memories and adapts one to the broader community of all those who participated in the making of that history.

This study argues that human beings are products of human interactions, ceremonies, stories, practices, history and, thus, life stories narrate one's participation and experience in the activities of their societies. It can therefore possible to argue that a person's history can also be understood as the history of the collective which occurs in conjunction with the world around them. Thus, some instances of self-writing produce autophylography. Reading certain works within autophylographical frameworks stretches and offers new interpretative strategies which enrich the appreciation of self-writing. This study argues that the self can only be understood in relation to others – in family, society, gender, politics and religion because self-consciousness is knowledge of the self in and among others. In a significant way, African literature celebrates communalism and there is evidence that regard for community overrides concern for self (Olney, 1983; Soyinka, 1990; Ngugi, 1992; Berger, 2010).

Literature, as a form of inquiry, should progressively create and open polycentric worlds, enmesh multiple temporalities and situate practices eschewing rigid monolithic terms in order to enrich itself. To comprehend the polycentric world created by the variety of human stories, we need new theories to enable us to see that "other" world.

In the subsequent section, the research focuses on literature review regarding the theoretical framework used in this study.

2.4 Theory: Decoloniality and Subalternity

The discipline of literary criticism is best understood through critical theory (Eagleton, 1988). Neuman (2007) explains the role of theory in social research and strongly clarifies that theory frames how we think and look at a phenomenon. This study postulates that theory organises knowledge, explains and predicts, directs readers to important questions, and connects a single study to the knowledge produced by other researchers. Theory examines principles behind research; thus, it is a systematic explanation of a practice in broader framework. As already highlighted in Chapter One, this study utilises both decolonial and subaltern philosophies to interrogate the category of life, self, community and narrative conceptualised as autophylography. The researcher proceeds with analyses of decolonial theory and thereafter engages in a discussion of the subaltern theory.

2.4. i. Decolonial Theory

When Arturo Escobar presented a paper "Worlds and Knowledge in another Way" at the Third International Congress of Latin Americanist (Amsterdam) in July 2000, he proffered alternatives to Eurocentric modernity. At the core of Escobar's discussion was coloniality, modernity and how Europe was guilty of "cultural and epistemic subalternation of non-European cultures" during and after colonialism (Pachón Soto, 2023). Arguments from the above conference point out that colonialism planted systems among the colonised people which continue to shape the world long after formal empires ended, thus coloniality continues to shape "culture, the psyche, the mind,

language, aesthetics, religion and many others" (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, 2019: 6). The critique of coloniality is what scholars consider to be decoloniality (Quijano, 2007; Mignolo, 2007 & 2018; Grosfuguel, 2007 and Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Decoloniality is a theoretical practice which conceptualises reality from whatever has been normalised by colonial modernity which rubbishes other knowledges and instead propagates Euro-centric epistemology as the natural norm (Mignolo, 2011). It is part of the critique of colonial experience from the once colonised societies where the effects and feelings of that history continue to influence knowledge and knowing. Colonialism created worlds separated by abyssal lines where on one side there was Europe (visible and developed) and the colonised (invisible and subaltern), thus the subjects of colonialism were "invisible, unknowable and obscure" (Bonilla-Medina and Finardi, 2022: 827). Fanon (1963: xx) amplifies the ugliness of colonialism by suggesting that for the colonised "life can only materialize from the rotting cadaver of the colonist." According to Harruch (2024: 252), decoloniality serves to deconstruct the universalised Eurocentric ways of knowing and instead create "an alternative regime of knowledge, which may give rise to another social order." Thus, it revisits victims of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and other imperially imposed humiliations with the message that there is need to shift the geographies and architecture of knowledge which opens reason beyond the Eurocentric and provincial confines. Decoloniality seeks to understand the impact of colonialism "not as an episode but as a process of dismemberment, subjunctivisation, domination, control and exploitation" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:23). It is an ongoing practice of looking for better ways of explaining the meanings of liberation and freedom as well as taking the struggle to the next phase after direct colonialism. Decoloniality hence restructures liberation discourse by "unthinking" the restrictive and constrictive 19th century options which impede and cloud the analysis of the social world.

Decolonial thinkers aspire to deconstruct the colonial matrix of power or coloniality. According to Mignolo (2009:40), coloniality touches "all aspects and trajectories of" the lives of those who were once colonised. Coloniality, which is a part of the narrative of Western modernity, "must be unmasked, resisted and destroyed because it produces a world order that can only be sustained through a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013c:10). To

get back to the "zone of being" (a point where humanity is endorsed or remembered) decolonial thinkers focus on "delinking and re-existence" of the Global South citizens from the narratives of Western modernity which continue to place them in the "zone of non-being" (where they are dehumanised). Newer local knowledges and ways of voicing challenges different from modern epistemic structure which projects "Western rationality" as universal need to be developed (Harruch, 2024: 252).

All the global systems existing today in the Global South were created and entrenched during the colonial empire (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023, Harruch 2024; Quijano, 2007). During colonialism, the colonised were thrust into a zone of non-being where they lost their knowledge, power, land, culture, freedom, language and history. Thus, they were dismembered – sapped of their humanity. Decoloniality is part of modernist discourse which examines alienation, exploitation, and alterity. It interrogates the variety of ideas produced in the margins and whatever the dismembered people do to reclaim their humanity. Decoloniality rejects those obsolete knowledge and formulates new ways to analyse the world. Decolonial episteme can be understood within the analogy that the master's tools can never dismantle the master's house. Decolonial philosophy seeks to recover the humanity of the groups inhabiting the zone of non-being because they are the recipients of the negative outcomes of modernity. It creates new forms of knowledge and subverts Western logic which they claim is already stale and dysfunctional.

There is a danger in normalising and universalising coloniality as a natural state of the world. Decolonial epistemology affirms that the world is in deep crisis; thus, the need for a decolonial way of producing new knowledge to provide alternative solutions to the modern human challenges. Colonialism pushed the colonised people out of the human family and disconnected them from their history and memory. According to Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:107), a decolonial epistemic turn aspires to forge new categories of thought, construct new subjectivities and create new ways of being and becoming. Through decoloniality, the people are able to reclaim their humanity which was severed during imperialism and which stretches long after direct colonialism, making independence a mockery. Decolonial thinkers propose alternative ways of knowing,

producing knowledge and imagining a new understanding of the world. This study identifies decoloniality as a means of reading autophylography and understanding of certain forms of self/life-narratives, especially stories from the margins.

Furthermore, decolonial aesthetics promote inter-culturalism and transnational identities (Mignolo 2011). It ensures cultural dialogue where different cultures engage as equals. New identities formed across these cultures are henceforth expounded relative to their contexts. In such cases, decoloniality celebrates border-dwellers, pushing them in and beyond the borders thus emerging as a fundamental tool for understanding subalterns. The decolonial literature pushes art to the pluriversal world, consequently dismantling and reworking what has been produced by modernity. Modernity in art was built on a sense of lost community and civilisation and was made up of a series of contradictions. Modernism embraced multiple features of modern sensibility such as loss of traditions, search for national identities, revolution, and centralised political power. Decoloniality reworks modernity by pushing people from a "zone of non-being" to a "zone of being," by re-inscribing, embodying and dignifying the ways of living and sensing what was once devalued and demonised by the colonial order. This theory considers art not essential to our survival but integral to our humanity, a means through which the marginalised, rejected and repressed find the means to regain their lost humanity. The practice advocates for discursive dialogue between intellect, intuition, sensation and feeling to fight racism, ethnicity, oppression, sexism, xenophobia, and all deep values that guide us without thinking.

Decolonial ideology has it that coloniality (the power structure left after colonialism) continues to sustain asymmetrical power relations and conceptualisations of humanity through racial, gender, sex, religion, and ethnic hierarchisations. Grosfoguel (2007) writes that it is a myth to imagine that the elimination of colonialism amounted to decolonisation of the world. He further argues that what came after colonialism in the "politically independent states" is a newer form of European domination and exploitation (Grosfoguel, 2007:219). Decoloniality scholarship contests that coloniality is maintained through self-image, cultural patterns, common sense, and several other aspects which are generated from the colonial past (Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2006; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015/2023). With coloniality in practice, the knowledge, identity, and culture

of all non-Western people is consigned to obscurity and European knowledge taken as the model. Decolonial epistemology seeks to make the formerly colonised societies and those who have been pushed to the "zone of non-being" become visible. It could be conceptualised in what Spivak (1988) terms as the speaking subaltern or what Chimamanda Ngozi (2009) conceives as the narration of multiple stories because there is all the danger in a single story (Adichie, 2009).

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:22), decoloniality is built upon three units of analysis: coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being. The three decolonial divisions of analysis can be simplified as the ways in which political power is structured in the post-colonial spaces, how knowledge is generated and authorised (by who and for whom?), and how subjectivity is narrated and identities formed in the non-Western world. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that the continued use of American European models and languages continue to marginalise indigenous knowledge and makes the alien practice look natural in the formerly colonised world. Decoloniality presents a case for a continued search for a new world order and a challenge for the once colonised people to re-invent their knowledge and identities. In my study, decoloniality provides ideas through which self-narratives with communal subjectivities are understood.

Fanon (1963:240) conceptualises the need for decolonisation when he suggests creating new forms of life and escaping from the logic of repetition without change. Fanon's ideas are echoed by Ngugi (1986:87) who argues for the search for liberating perspectives through self-understanding. In this respect, Fanon and Ngugi suggest that after colonialism, the colonising powers left most institutions intact and new nations did not shift or create new humanistic structures. Mignolo (2011:15) contends that the liberation that Africans fought for was in a way "a fall from one empire to another" without the liberation movements domesticating independence. Therefore, this study argues that state power fortified by the military force in post-independence nations treats citizens as foreigners on their own soil where the ruling elite continue to operate like the colonialists. Liberation and democracy have been subverted by those in power, in the once colonised countries. Citizens rarely participate in governance. Mignolo (2011:56) recommends that government in the postcolony should not be a "property of Western thought and political theory, but rather one of the principles of coexistence, of good living, that has no owner." Hence, in decolonial understanding,

democracy, freedom, and liberation are communal and not individualised even when they are experienced and interpreted differently by members of the same community. Moreover, due to the coloniality of power, this study argues that political power has been personalised in most African states.

Regarding Mignolo's (2011:7-16) ideas on "epistemic disobedience," the study proposes alternative methods of reading personal narratives imagined from the margins. Epistemic disobedience occurs when inhabitants of the non-Western world begin to build democratic, just, and non-imperial societies. It is all the actions which happen in "places of non-thought" (Mignolo 2009:2) in an effort to re-order the knowledge as packaged from the West. The ideas contained in the model of autophylography bring into practice a new way of reading thereby expanding life-writing criticism. Deviating from the *bios* in autobiography and imagining the *phyle* is one way of revising the Western episteme in self-writing which consider autobiography as strictly Western and masculine. The original theories of autobiography hold that the genre cannot be found in other cultures apart from the West. These original assertions are highly flawed and contested, as a result, this study attempts a decolonial praxis with the aim of utilising autophylography as a sub-category of self-writing where subjectivity is both communalised and individualised. The study further argues that autophylography is a universal text and not just African as claimed by Olney (1973, 1980 & 1981).

Delinking from original Western terms applied in life-writing criticism is similar to "shifting the geographies" of experience and knowledge to understand life, self, and society (Mignolo, 2011). This study regards autophylographical practice to be an endeavour where scholars enter a world where other worlds are possible and are not limited or confined within Eurocentric models. Mignolo (2011:49) asserts:

> … epistemological decolonisation is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings, as the basis of another rationality which may legitimately pretend to some universality. Nothing is less rational, finally, than the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular *ethnie* should be

> taken as universal rationality, even if such an *ethnie* is called Western Europe because this is actually to impose universalism on provincialism.

Mignolo discourages the universalisation of Western knowledge and subsequent discrediting of all non-Western epistemologies, arguing that rationality is essential in today's multicultural world. Mignolo's arguments depict the reality of cultural and communal vision that is found in autophylography. This study valorises universality in the ideas of autophylography and recognises the practice as a form of intercultural communication and a way to moving experiences of those who occupy the space that Fanon (1963) calls the "wretched." The wretched are understood as all those people who have been marginalised and silenced by oppression. In my study, the wretched are taken as those groups in the margins of political power, victims of modern Kenyan state, with no political choice and limited voice to talk about the excesses of the state. Decoloniality succeeds in guiding this study because of the questions that it puts across: How can dismembered people recapture their power, freedom? How can they regain the authentic sense of self and reclaim an enduring identity? How is cultural knowledge and philosophy essential in the reclamation of democracy? How can these people actively thrust themselves back to the zone of being?

Decolonial criticism advocates for a variety of perspectives and does not claim a totality or completeness as far as analysis of cultural products is concerned. Thus, subalternity complements decolonial theory by addressing issues beyond decoloniality. Reading the Kenyan self-narratives within the lenses of decolonial aesthetics entrenches the voices of the marginalised and gives the nation's history a version of the rejected - the subalterns. The subsequent section offers detailed analyses of subalternity.

2.4. ii. Subaltern Theory

The word subaltern comes from the Latin word *subalternus* which denotes an under or alter (Dharmaraj 2014:36-8). In that way, the word subaltern implies the inferiority or subordinate position of one. Gramsci (1891-1937) first used the term subaltern in his work *Prison Notebooks* (1971) to talk about peasantry in southern Italy. Later, the term generally referred to all the groups who were subjects of the ruling class in Italy at the time. Gramsci identifies all those groups who

are not represented in the political power structure and those who occupy subordinate positions as subalterns. Several scholars associate the word subaltern with synonymous terms including subordinated, downtrodden, marginalised, and oppressed (Varghese, 2019; Azad, 2014; Dharmaraj, 2014; Mandal & Karan, 2014; Mashori and Zaib, 2015). Gramsci identifies slaves, peasants, and women as common subaltern groups. He identifies cultural, political, social, intellectual, religious and economic formations as responsible for the production and figuration of subalterns. He is convinced that the subordinated classes are subject to the initiatives of the dominant class and when they rebel, it is due to anxious defence. The ruling groups organise and maintain hegemony through their ideology, philosophy and ways of life which they shape to appear as natural.

Studies in subalternity began in India in the 1980s with the effort to restudy India's "history and society as a narrative" (Louai, 2011:4). Guha (1982a:4) uses the term subaltern to explain the dominant/dominated relationships in history and culture where the dominant are situated side by side with the dominated who were subject to their activities as well. In regard to India, Guha (1982a:4) identifies "another domain […] in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and the groups constituting the mass of the labouring population." The class identified by Guha is the subordinate group whose experience is rarely narrated and whose story the subaltern scholars struggle to recover. Guha seeks to expose the harmful intellectual processes by which colonial subjects and third world citizens are constructed as subjects and objects of Western knowledge. According to Prakash (1994:1480), focus on subordination is central in the studies of subalternity. He further postulates that the colonised past and nationalist discourse inform subaltern scholarship. Indeed, subaltern scholarship began in India and spread to other areas in the third world and serves to critique postcolonial nationalist politics. Guha's analysis of the subaltern charts a new orientation within which various styles, interests and expansive modes may find it thinkable to bond in their rebuffing of academic elitism. The study argues that subaltern scholarship should consider the various identity indicators of the subordinates.

Subalternity can be understood as an offshoot of postcolonialism which evolved from India and spread to other parts of the world targeting the once-colonised societies. In such societies, subalternity strives to recover the lives of people forgotten in narratives of global exploitation and national mobilisation. The writer who re-looks, re-imagines, re-writes and interacts with the post-colonial condition is a good example of one (re)storying subalternity. Subalternity goes beyond the colonial narrative and instead undertakes to challenge the nationalist historiography that emerges as a result of the nationalist and neocolonial struggle(s). It interrogates culture and knowledge authored and authorised by colonialism and Western domination in an effort to recover marginal voices suppressed by the colonial order. Notably, colonialism brought significant changes to the once colonised people in that it transformed their identity, altered the concept of religion and reworked their education, thus entrenching a sense of white superiority and inferiority of the "other" – the colonised. Both postcolonialism and subaltern scholarship have been studied as "historical revisionism" (Menon, 2015:16) where the past of the colonised is a point of reference for resistance, (re)reading and (re)writing. This study utilised subaltern theory to probe national narratives from those citizens relegated to the margins by the modern state.

After Subaltern Studies Group used the term 'subaltern' to study Indian peasantry and women, it was picked by other scholars like Spivak to explain those unrepresented groups inhabiting the margins of society. Quoting Spivak, Morton (2003:46) notes that:

> I like the word subaltern for one reason. It is totally situational. Subaltern began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism "monism" and was obliged to call the proletarian subaltern. That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor.

Spivak perceives subalterns to be those who have no voice to speak for themselves, otherwise, those who occupy the victim position and have no means to (de)register experiences from their liminal position. The key concern in subaltern thinking is radical socio-political transformation – the way subalterns can transform their consciousness. Spivak (1988:27) re-examines gender as a category by excavating the history of deprived women and concludes that in colonial discourse, women – as subalterns – have no history and cannot speak for themselves. She argues that under

subaltern lenses, womanhood is an embattled site where ideologies of caste, class, nation, empire and patriarchy shape both personal and social lives. Spivak's assertions are relevant to my study as far as women and democratic struggles in Kenya are concerned. Kenyan women are embattled by patriarchy, state power, culture and class as demonstrated in the subsequent chapter.

In her essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak*?" Spivak (1988) hypothesises that through representation, subaltern groups are relegated to the margins of society, that subalterns are lost in the politics of representation especially where the represented have no voice. Spivak deconstructs the idea of representation and highlights that the subalterns should find their voices and speak for themselves from the margins or their hitherto silent periphery. She suggests that it is difficult for anyone looking in from outside of the colonised group to grand speech for the marginalised from outside. This is illustrated by the fact that the power at the centre does not understand the "other" at the margins. Put simply, the privileged class cannot unlearn their status and speak for the subaltern subjects. With reference to literary representations, such truth is best clarified by Osofisan (1998:36) in the observation that:

> The artist's song … gain[s] wide acceptance only when the community sings along with him; it is when the other citizens add their voices that the song, born out of the artist's solitary genius can turn finally into a communal property, and becomes collectively regenerating.

The analogy advanced by Osofisan illustrates a community voicing its subalternity and inventing its own voice – the speaking subalterns. When the artist sings about freedom with the oppressed masses, then, the subalterns can afford to speak.

Life-writing has been given considerable eminence when voicing common challenges in several societies. African-Americans use the genres of self-writing to challenge white hegemony and to struggle for freedom and liberation of the black people. Through auto/biography, black people regain their voice and transformed the narrative of inferiority and triumphantly narrate the black subalternity arising from slavery and racial segregation in America. In these life-narratives, Black Americans demonstrate that being different does not necessarily translate to being inferior. The

subaltern position is a location of powerlessness and political insignificance. Wolfreys (2004:80) definition of subalterns as "proletarian and other working-class groups" suggest this powerlessness. Wolfreys' definition therefore works for this study in that it helps national subjects who write from the position of powerlessness to challenge those in power. Writing then is understood as a political act meant to reclaim, identities, lives and possibilities for the marginalised. Hsu (2014) argues that "self-naming", "self–invention" along with "new symbolisms" are a few processes that can empower subalterns.

In life/self-writing, marginal groups have used stories to have their voice heard and to challenge the patterns of mainstream society that have relegated them to the margins. McKay (1998:96-7) argues that in the black women autobiography, black women writers have been able to:

> Fight their battle against chattel slavery and to engage in the search for political and psychological freedom for all black people […] [and] using the white oppressor's language and black cultural tropes (like masking), they transformed the racially inferior, abstract African self of the master's text into the ultimately triumphant black experiential self.

Black women writing autobiography are speaking subalterns. As women of colour subdued by racism and patriarchy, the black women writers are examples of the subalterns challenging their subordination. As McKay argues, these women write their feelings and history from hidden marginal positions and by the use of the oppressor's language to challenge patterns of mainstream society. It is suggested in McKay's arguments that the black women are products of dominance, hegemony, subordination, insurgency, resistance and rebellion, thus their writing is a response to their situation. Based on the aforementioned ideas, my study posits that subaltern theory interrogates the stories and history of those people who lived and continue to live on the margins of power in postcolonial Kenya.

Life/self-writing is a process in which the marginalised groups create self and community out of historical situations fictionalised in their narratives. In writing autophylographies, minority groups, women, Blacks, homosexuals, Aboriginal peoples, and all other peripheral groups mitigate their

exclusion. This study argues that the selected narratives are ways of protesting the extremes of the ruling class in Kenya during a time when President Moi was in power (1978-2002). The study affirms that in the selected life-narratives, activists who confronted the state from very insignificant positions can be understood as subalterns. The study demonstrates that the writing of personal narratives from a subaltern position is one way of inventing subaltern voice and projecting the same back to the "centre." It is a process of reclamation. Further, the study demonstrates that it is not only through colonialism that Kenyans lost their voice, but the same tragedy visited the citizens in the post-independence period. The nationalist discourses of the state relegated the popular will of the masses and propagated the elite discourse through which the majority of the disempowered citizens were pushed to the margins – the zone of non-being. This study considers the selected autophylographies to be representing "the other history," the other version, the story from the margins – history from below. The thesis proposes that some forms of self-writing call for different strategies of (re)reading because of the variety of forces that continue to affect the postcolonial subject: gender, class, ethnicity, nationalism, religion, politics, democracy and other implicit forms of exclusion. The study posits that the selected self-narratives are composed with the intention of speaking against excesses of state power and reworking the national history which is normally written by those in power. Through subaltern inspiration, self-writing has been turned into a tool of retrieving silenced voices. This study, therefore, utilises subaltern concepts to interrogate how the Kenyan autophylography regenerates political agency to subvert dictatorship and entrench the popular will of the excluded masses.

In conclusion, this chapter analysed autophylography, engaged in an analysis of how self-writing blends both individual and communal subjectivities especially in communities that are marginalized and identified. The chapter also identified decolonial and subalternity as theoretical praxis through which texts are analysed. The subsequent chapter draws from the narratives of two Kenyan self/life-writers, Maathai's *Unbowed*, and Bishop David Gitari's *Troubled but Not Destroyed*, to interrogate how autophylography hypothesise identity through personal and group knowledge and experiences.

CHAPTER THREE
Collective and Individual Identity: Community and Self in Maathai and Bishop Gitari's Narratives

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, this study discussed how certain self-narratives could be better understood as autophylographies due to their self/socially conflated foci. The need to have a sustained debate on practice and theory of autophylography with a view of expanding criticism and scope of self-writing was undertaken; laying the ground for the discussion that ensues in the current chapter. According to Varga (2022), the autobiography genre is a "self-referential utterance and not a self-referential proposition." This claim opens up debates about truth and the nature of reference in autobiography. It is for this reason that the current study argues that self-narration is not a monologue of unitary utterances with an introspective gaze of a single subject. Rather, in self-narratives, society acquires a character which is unconsciously narrated by the author as s/he narrates the personal story. Writers are societal products that carry with them shared memories even as they craft stories of self (Heux, Rathbone, Gensburger, Clifford, and Souchay 2023). This is because memory, as previously highlighted, is not a personal but a communal phenomenon. Thus, self-writing can generate autophylography. Further, the study proposes an expansion of the discourse on autobiographical narratives through conceptualisation of newer approaches, suggesting flexible reading practices of self/social-narratives such as the autophylography (Olney, 1973; Holden, 2008; Hove and Masemola, 2014; Berger, 2016).

This chapter interrogates how self-writing is a practice in identity-making by examining how autophylographies serve to rework identities (Munyangeyo, 2022; Hnit and Almanna, 2025). The chapter delves into Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed, One Woman's Story* (2006) and Bishop David Gitari's *Troubled but Not Destroyed* (2014), as it problematises how identity at the level of self and community is narrated. This chapter enriches autophylography theory by focusing on identity formation where the "I" voice is polyfocal, polyvocal, representational, and laminated.

According to Hnit and Almanna (2025), identity is a situated concept for individuals at both personal and social levels. The term identity acquired pronounced prominence through the work of the psychologist Erikson (1968) who conceives identity as personhood, with similar attributes or continuity of the self across time and space. Erikson emphasises the role of environment in the development of identity. Hnit and Almanna (2025) are of the view that identity is what we make of ourselves within a society. They further argue that even though personal identity is constructed by both personal and social experiences, narrative identity is a continuous process. This study argues that identity is not a stable phenomenon but a fluid and problematic term that is unlikely to have one definition that can capture a range of possible conceptualisations. Perhaps defining identity is simplified by breaking the term into categories such as personal, social, gender, political, national, racial and ethnic. In these sub-divisions, we narrow the scope and there is the likelihood of a nuanced understanding of identity from these specific elements. Scholars make sense of identity by exploring similar characteristics and differences and raising fundamental questions about who we are (Woodward, 1997; Wilson & Rose, 2003; Hnit & Almanna, 2025). Hnit and Almanna (2025:5) assert that "identity is not a fixed essence but an ongoing, performative creation…shaped through the stories individual tell." Stories people write or tell (about themselves) is one way of understanding their identity and so the narratives under study can say something about the identities of the author and the community they come from.

Morales (2025: 595) submits that two beings occur in us: the individual being and the social being. Morales considers the individual being as that which represents the private universe of experiences and social beings as that which carries all the attributes that emanate from society. We can, therefore, adduce that there is evident dualism in personal identity due to the conflation of private and collective selves. According to Olson (2003:352), personal identity or individual identity is "all those attributes that make [one] unique as an individual and different from others or the way you see or define yourself which may be different from the way you are." In a nutshell, personal/ individual identity answers the question, *who am I*? and by extension *who are we*? However, a problem occurs when we realise that we have so many answers to this question occasioned by the fact that identity is not linear. The main argument in this chapter is that identity gives people a place in society and consigns their associations of similar characteristics and that self-writing is

one way of crafting personal and collective identity. In postcolonial societies, identity develops out of crises of history such as colonialism, liberation struggles, and nationalism (Mitullah, 2021; Hnit & Almanna, 2025). Colonialism imposed on the colonial subjects an alien/false sense of being, thereby altering the sense of self. Such historical experience affects how the colonised form relationships with others in the wider community. Due to the Manichaeism in colonial discourse, there are certain attributes identified with the coloniser(s) and those associated with the local culture which define the colonised (Fanon, 1963; Ngugi, 1986). What emerged from this colonial history is identity fissure(s) marked by "otherness" and difference. Kim (2026: 3170) writes that "in post-colonial societies, cultural heritage plays a pivotal role in reconstructing national identity, which is often fragmented due to the legacies of colonialism." Identity from once-colonised societies emerge as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question due to a number of varying intersecting discourses. This happens as writers craft stories to (re)create both individual and communal identities as societies pursue common struggles against colonial and neocolonial exploitation. There is concurrence in scholarship that identities are contested and hence struggles between different communities are represented by different identities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Seife, 2021). This chapter demonstrates that many narratives – personal and otherwise — written from once colonised world strive to claim and reclaim identity owing to the dehumanising experiences of colonialism and neocolonialism. Ngugi (1986: xii) avers that "the present predicaments of Africa are often not a matter of personal choice: they arise from an historical situation." Thus, historical framing of reality is critical in the appreciation of Kenyan self-narratives. It is for this reason that this study reviews the colonial and postcolonial history in order to critique the selected autophylographies.

Fosu (2025:71) argues that "the obligation and goal of African (elite) control of politics and economics in the post-independence era is to make freedom matter in ways that are different from life under colonial rule. However, several years after independence, the African people continue to shoulder the burden of those colonial designs inherited at independence. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009:5) captures it thus: the African national project is a terrain of struggles to realise freedom from colonialism meant primarily to regain lost African power and "shape their identity that was distorted by colonial experience." Ndlovu-Gatsheni further argues that nationalism is aimed at

allowing members of a political community to modify or articulate their identity. It is out of these arguments that scholars imagine identity amid crises, not just in the postcolonial world but even in the Western world and more so in the era of globalisation, where individual and collective definitions are overly elusive. Bhabha (1994:51) acknowledges that the process of identity construction is wholly dependent upon "the negation of any sense of originality and plenitude" and the subsequent process of displacement and differentiation which always renders identity "a liminal reality." These insights confirm that identity is a complicated process of access to an image of a totality of self. For this reason, this section avers that identities are not given but are always being reworked and negotiated by prevailing circumstances and forces in any society.

Understanding identities and their formation in different social and cultural contexts is an undertaking that occurs in many disciplines in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Seife (2021:271) argues that "identity politics, ethnic group formation, and the processes by which people identify as an imagined community within a nation-state occur concurrently with ethnic … formation being the most important." This resonates with Mamdani's (2012) ideas on ethnic/tribal affiliations, national belonging and the imperial creation and promotion of difference in his work *Define and Rule*. Mamdani believes that the *native* is a political identity created for colonial reasons but remains a hindrance to statecraft and nationhood in the postcolonial world. Mwapangidza (2014:86) corroborates Mamdani's statement above, especially in the argument that "identities sprout from a specific historical and cultural milieu. Thus, their construction, reconstruction and refashioning occur as people respond to social happenings and history." He further affirms that identities take shape within ever-changing discursive formations such as self-narratives. This way, he debunks the myth(s) that identities are located in a specific space or past where they can be retrieved. Arising from Mwapangidza's argument, this study maintains that identity is an outcome of agentive moves rather than givens. The research proposes autophylography as one of the discursive pathways in which people negotiate their identity and that of their communities. Further, this study posits that autophylography gestures a decolonial shift in the understanding of the Kenyan forms of self-writing (Fosu 2025; Stefano 2021).

Autophylographical narratives focus on group or collective experiences coalescing within a personal narrative describing an experience that is "simultaneously individual and collective" (Gutenberger, 2011:311). According to Gutenberger, there is "me-ism" and "we-ism," which are integrated with certain self-writing practices where collective identity is preferred over personal identity. This study asserts that writers in the sub-genre of autophylography place themselves at the centre of the text but often slip away to talk about their communities, hence integrating "I" and "We" which produces a uniquely personal/communal narrative (Olney, 1973). The stories oscillate between such subject entities enmeshing communal concerns, lifestyles, traditions and culture. Autophylographies are understood as socially and culturally derived narratives about us, others and our communities, hence they reveal the individual and collective identity (Munyangeyo, 2022; Eze, 2021).

This chapter submits that identity is a product of cultural processes, individual and collective experiences as well as shared history. In writing our stories, we write a lot about others, our communities, our cultures and our histories, producing the autobiographical sub-genre which Olney (1973) christened autophylography. Collective identity occurs in those personal narratives where the eyes of the individual (re)present a collective experience and, thus, a collective category as is the case with race, ethnicity or nation. This can well be understood within the frameworks of the theories of the collective advanced by Muchiri (2014) who asserts that a person's history is a history of the collective; it occurs with and in conjunction with the collective. Thus, cultural identity is part of collective identity, which finds expression through autophylography – a community biography told by one of its members.

Kenyan autophylography is a site where identity discourses coalesce with shared history, culture and socio-political issues as individuals make sense of both personal and collective experiences. In both theory and practice, writing and reading of the selected narratives provide a vista to examine the individual as connected and belonging to a community. The narratives under investigation provide models where the specific communities, their identities, histories, cultures and struggles are narrated by one voice that amalgamates I-ness and We-ness. Maathai's *Unbowed*

and Archbishop Gitari's *Troubled but Not Destroyed* are selected examples of the sub-genre of autophylography.

3.2 Wangari Maathai: *Unbowed in* Struggle

Unbowed: One Woman's Story is a personal narrative by Wangari Maathai (1940 - 2011), a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, environmentalist and a Kenyan scholar and politician with several achievements, locally and internationally. *Unbowed* captures the birth, growth, experiences and achievements of Maathai. Her journey to fame is long and torturous. She went to school during the colonial period and became the first Kenyan woman scientist to get a doctoral degree in Veterinary Sciences in 1971. Her stint in marriage was not without drama, but she soldiered on as a single mother after a divorce with her husband, Mwangi. She was jailed for expressing her opinion about the biased justice system in Kenya and lost her job at the University of Nairobi because of her gender activism. Karmakar and Byrne (2024: 159) affirm that Wangari's self-narrative is an "arduous journey from being an ordinary woman to a prominent and impactful advocate for environmental and social change" because her knowledge is born out of struggle.

Maathai undertook tree planting and forest conservation efforts within the umbrella of the Green Belt Movement (GBM), which were often mistaken as opposition to KANU by the party supporters. She was, however, sincere in the conservation of the environment which was receding faster than it was being replenished. Her conservation activities thrust her into the international limelight which attracted suspicion from president Moi's administration. Through GBM, she attracted funds from across the globe that she used to mobilise women to plant trees for conservation and fuel. When she rose to chairmanship of the National Council of Women in Kenya (NCWK), Moi was unhappy with her popularity. She was thus accused of being unpatriotic and working with foreigners to destabilise Kenya. Musila (2020:8) argues that Wangari had over the years pursued "freedom for communities stranded in precarious lives: women, rural communities, political prisoners, Kenyans, Africans, and citizens of the Global South" and so Moi's government marked Wangari as a public "enemy" and, on several occasions, subjected her to police harassment and brutality. Despite this, she planted trees, and trees became a symbol to mark all her activities – political and otherwise. According to her story, planting trees was a way of fighting poverty

among Kenyan rural women and ensuring that the environment attained a natural balance. According to Mutie (2020), her environmental restoration efforts conflate with democracy and feminist agency. Through GBM, Maathai proves that social harmony can only be realised through what Ndogo (2011:5) calls "the trinity of resource management, good governance and peace." In pursuit of this trinity, she openly admonished dictatorship, misrule and postcolonial Kenyan politics. She was one of the nurturers of multiparty democracy in Kenya. She championed the cause of citizens' freedom and healthy environment, and this propelled her to win the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. The narrator documents her life struggles and intertwines her story with the history of the Kenyan nation in *Unbowed*. Ndogo (2011:12) corroborates that *Unbowed* presents a story where "individual as well as communal memories are shared through history and culture." Though a personal narrative, Maathai's story projects a common voice and concerns of her Kikuyu/Kenyan society. *Unbowed* quite often uses the pronouns 'we' and 'us' instead of 'I' or 'me.' This regard for others in Maathai's narrative through the valorisation of 'we-ness,' unlike the 'I-ness,' makes the study theorise *Unbowed* as an autophylography. Although Wangari may not qualify as a subaltern, her autophylography "exemplify the acquisition of epistemological authority by subjugated individuals or social groups, who have been relegated to inconsequential categories based on the historical and epistemic frameworks of colonialism and capitalism" (Karmakar and Byrne, 2024: 160), thus her story can be analysed using subaltern theory.

As earlier noted in this study, identity is wrought in crisis. Nowhere is this crisis more marked than in postcolonial spaces where the writers (whether women or ordinary citizens) occupy subaltern positions in the new nation(s). Due to the experience of colonialism, writers tend to rewrite the suffering of their people by making their story a national allegory (Jameson, 1986). Maathai's aesthetic praxis pedestals her community even though everything is narrated through her eyes. Mutie (2020:100) claims that citizens in postcolonial states have always struggled to write the story of the "marginal or oppressed groups" thus generating voices of emerging subalterns. Identity crosses several lines that mark it off, making it unstable and shifting. Family, culture, gender, profession, ethnicity, religion, and nationalism are determinants that mark a person's unique identity (Ogechi, 2019; Mitullah, 2021). Engagement with the question of "Who am I?" or

"Who are we?" generates a diversity of discourses to a point where scholars speak of identity politics.

Indeed, identity politics refers to all actions undertaken by groups who think that they are marginalised to voice their subalternity (Spivak, 1988:271). Identity politics is equally concerned with experiences and the shared alternatives to overcoming oppression, exploitation and, or exclusion. Proponents of identity politics believe that certain labels lead to marginalisation, making certain groups vulnerable, thus the need to coalesce in the struggle against oppression and exploitation. In their identity politics, feminists have claimed that women are marginalised in most cultures. Thus, sex and gender have become avenues for understanding patriarchal oppression and exploitation. Although theorists concur that identity is a complex concept, I posit that one's name is the only single morpheme which is universally accepted as a basic mark of identity in all cultures in the world. Tahat (2019: 1) avers that "the practice of naming […] is based on a mutual relationship between the extra-linguistic factors such as age, gender, religion, identity, belief, tradition, culture, place of residence, among other factors and the surrounding of the speech community. Moreover, this study contends that names are the basic and most important markers of identity and, thus, call for serious interrogation. In the subsequent subsection, I problematise names in *Unbowed* in order to discover how they occur as a factor of culture and tradition.

3.3 Onomastics and Identity: Supplementing the Cultural Cosmos

> *'What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.'* (Shakespeare, W. *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, ii (47-48).

Shakespeare's rhetorics illustrate the epistemological questions that people have in relation to their names. Indeed, names are critical in determining a sense of self. Mensah, Inyabri and Nyong (2021: 3) argue that names are a "body of knowledge that reflect a wide gamut of African culture: language, history, philosophy, spirituality and worldview." Pointedly, therefore, names and naming practices reflect conceptions of individuality, family and community. Finch (2008:709) writes:

> My name has two dimensions. It marks me as a unique individual, and it also gives some indication of my location in the various social worlds which I inhabit. […] it reveals my gender and probably my ethnicity, it documents something of my family connections and, in my case, if I add my title 'professor' it states my occupation.

Consequently, this hint to the fact that there is I - identity and We - identity where double construction of names occurs in societies presented as forename (first name) and surname to tell who one is in the eyes of others (Mangena, 2024). To some scholars, names are an insignia that communicates about one's identity and relationships with both the physical and spiritual worlds (Nnyigide, 2016). This study, therefore, argues that names evolve from a culture and communicate experiences or give ideas about collective history. A name is an important statement of identity of a person, persons, a phenomenon, or a place. It can be a peg around which identities are constructed or deconstructed, formed or de-formed, erased or resuscitated, planted or dismembered (Pfukwa and Maganga, 2023). Culture can be understood as a modelling system built around language. The linguistic construct Wangari Muta Maathai, is also a cultural label connected to various other societal aspects of the heroine in *Unbowed.*

Maathai creates her own biography and that of her community, constructing several overlapping forms of identity in *Unbowed*. Her name is the most basic cultural identity marker. Studies in onomastics reveal that names carry a sociocultural identity and thus convey thoughts, traditions, fortunes, conditions, histories and other features (Adeyefa, 2022). Names allow people to talk of someone in a specific way because through them we represent or perceive the world around us. For instance, Mandela (1973:1) notes that among the many things, "my father bestowed upon me at birth was a name, Rolihlahla." Rolihlahla thus becomes a significant marker of his life struggles owing to its meaning in Xhosa language. Mandela affirms this in the very beginning of his autobiography to amplify the importance of names and how at times names mark people's destiny. This study, therefore, asserts that names are an essential element of our being, and different world cultures have various naming practices. Names and cultures are intertwined. Fitzpatrick (2012:4) opines that "names and naming among African peoples on the continent bore spiritual, psychological and physical significance." Fitzpatrick (2012:4-19) further observes that names

have been used as a way of assigning identity to an individual. He discusses the history of slavery and how names were immediately erased by the slaveholders once a slave was procured, thus effacing a critical component of their cultural identity and history. All these arguments underscore the fact that names are not just empty linguistic markers but they communicate a shared reality and worldview (Mensah et al., 2021; Ndiang'ui, 2025). In *Unbowed,* names connect the reader to the Kikuyu culture and significant aspects of the community's worldview.

Maathai claims that among the Kikuyu people the system of naming "is meant to make you feel as if you are a duplicate of the relative whose name you bear" (WM:49). Maathai is thus named after her paternal grandmother, and she informs her readers that she very much took after her. She holds the name in high esteem and believes that her mother was able to see all those traits of their late mother in the young Maathai. The Kikuyu community immortalises their loved ones by naming their new-born children after them (Ndiang'ui, 2025). In this long story about names and naming, Maathai alludes that some positive aspects of African naming were erased by colonialism and suggests an urgent need to recover this naming practice(s). Through her, the qualities of her grandmother are revived. Mensah et al. (2021) assert that "personal names are communicative devices that tell stories about historic events, familial conflicts, and the struggle with supernatural powers which are central to the notions of personhood and self-definition" and can considerably influence the bearer's personality. In most of the African communities, names given at birth belonged to the community and marked the bearer of the name in a special way.

Maathai notes that "when a baby joined the community, a beautiful and practical ritual followed that introduced the infant to the land of ancestors" (WM: 4). According to Ngugi (2010:16), naming among the Kikuyu was "informed by a symbolic system of reincarnation that meant each mother had children alternatively named after her side of the family … and hence many of the children had identical names…" In a way that echoes Ngugi's views, Maathai narrates that naming children after either living relatives or ancestors was good in that "children gave people a sense of immortality" (WM: 49). The new-born is supposed to be a copy of the long-gone ancestor in the family and ostensibly resurrect those traits dearly missed by the family. This study asserts that

through her name, Maathai celebrates her African-ness, injects a sense of pride in Kikuyu names and eschews Eurocentric bias and coloniality which renamed places and people in Africa. Thus, Maathai undertakes decolonial recovery and restoration of what the Kikuyu people lost during their encounter with colonialism and Christian conversions (Ndiang'ui, 2025).

Her father's name Muta, carries the family history and we are told that this name was from the Maasai who were Kikuyu neighbours. She recounts that her great grandmother was a Maasai woman abducted from one of the raids and upon being in the highlands adopted Kikuyu customs and named one of her sons Muta – after her father. This name finds a lifeline in the family and subsequent generations. In fact, Maathai names one of her sons Muta – that is, after her father. Gunner (2005: 118) writes that names foster a sense of belonging "through a multitude of references to place and to the names of homesteads and individuals, forebears, friends and foes." However, Maathai clarifies that despite the raids, a healthy relationship existed between the Kikuyu and the Maasai, . The name Muta reminds the family of Maathai about their mixed blood, something likely to foster nationhood in a country fraught with negative ethnicity. Brennen (2000:142) argues that names are linguistic acts which connect individuals to values, traditions, hopes and fears in a given society. This chapter argues that names in the Kikuyu community are not just linguistic signs used to refer to or identify people, but they are, instead, part of the people's culture, thus personal and communal. This calls for us to rethink of the relationship between language and society because each cultural group has unique language and naming patterns.

The name *Wangari* loosely translates to, "of the leopard" (WM: 3). Thus, the name becomes part of the ethnic genealogy whereby the use of animal names can be interpreted as appreciation of the rich flora and fauna around Ihithe. The name Wangari can also be understood metaphorically, especially when we decipher her as possessing qualities of a leopard. Metaphors occur in a community where the speakers and hearers are able to decode the meaning since, according to Steen and Gibbs (1999: 1-8), metaphors are determined by context and "shared by speakers and listeners at any one point in conversation." The metaphor of the leopard assigns in Wangari the personality of a strong and elusive fighter who commits to whatever she thinks is right. According to Smith (2021: vii), names "impute certain characteristics to its bearers or leans as if causally on

them to have those characteristics." It can, thus, be argued that the qualities of a leopard conveyed by Wangari's name make her a beacon of resilience in the midst of adversity to her community and the Kenyan nation as illustrated through different episodes of social and political struggles narrated in *Unbowed.* Names foster relationship between the owner and the struggles around them.

As argued above, names are a mark of identity; they emboss cultural information and the community ethos, history and traditions. Through *Unbowed,* the Kikuyu traditional names, common history and cultural information are recovered. According to Ndung'u (2013:3), "indigenous names are meaningful to each ethnic community that uses them since they represent their lineage, system of governance, history, relationship, culture, economy, creativity and the whole matrix of socialisation." Indeed, Wangari's name carries cultural history and assigns to her the primordial heritage as illustrated by the communal myth of origin she mentions. After some years in America, Maathai notes that she returned to Kenya with a new name, "I was Wangari Muta" (WM: 96). This sense of pride carried in this part of her narration corrects and entrenches whatever had been lost through English enculturation. At the time, she was re-orientating herself in her ordinary Kikuyu culture. Although Kadmon (2004:3) argues that names are "a personal property," the reality is that names belong to society and, that explains why one name is likely used to label several people in a single cultural group. This is corroborated by Were (2017: 107) when she argues that names are collective as well as personal. Regarding *Unbowed,* the narrator "embraces or rejects names given to her in the course of her life either to approve or subvert social and cultural practices." This assertion points to the reality that names belong not only to the named but also are cultural signs of where one comes from. Although Josephine Wangari Muta Ma(a)thai was a converted and baptised Christian, her name changes after she becomes aware of herself. In her name, there is her father's name and that of her husband and the ancestral name of her grandmother - all illustrating different stages of growth and consciousness.

Maathai, a Kikuyu feminine name has links to the Agikuyu myth of origin, thus connected to the common ancestry (Waita, 2021). Names with such mythic connections can be interpreted within the wider communal space. Ndung'u (2013:3) argues that Kikuyu female names represent the community clans and can be traced to the myth of Gikuyu and Mumbi. The myth goes: "together

Gikuyu and Mumbi had ten daughters – Wanjiru, Wambui, Wangari, Wanjiku, Wambui, Wangeci, Wanjeri, Nyambura, Wairimu and Wamuyu… the daughters made the clans matrilineal." (WM: 4-5). In this excerpt, Maathai illustrates how her name is a communal tag designed by the ancestral parents of her community. Her name has a complete cultural significance in this communal narrative where they mark traits and trades associated with each clan. From this myth, Maathai believes that her "clan is associated with leadership" (WM: 5). Njogu (2020:28) argues that, "the cosmos generated in the mythic narrative is primarily the world of man and woman […] brought forth into the cosmos to be the namers and moulders of the creation." The name Wangari assigns to women the names of the mythical nine daughters Of Gikuyu and Mumbi, thus demarcating cultural origins of the Kikuyu clan identity. Through the Kikuyu myth, Maathai validates her roots, womanhood, culture, and history as she links her readers to the relationships immanent among her people and undertakes a decolonial turn by recounting her cultural knowledge. Through her name and clan, we understand her strength and resilience which are portrayed in several leadership undertakings.

This study argues that myths give a people a sense of solidarity and harmony (Soyinka, 1976). They are quintessential in describing the foundations of social behaviour as a mark of identity. For instance, Soyinka (1976: 76) claims that one way of appreciating African literature and according it proper interpretation is by paying attention to African myth, which makes the African world unique. Soyinka's views enable this study to re-examine the Kikuyu myth of creation to understand the personal narrative and the way it encases the communal story, recounting the collective past, present and future. According to Levi-Strauss (1976:43), a myth is as diachronic as a historical account of the past and it is synchronic and temporarily reversible as an instrument of interpretation of the present or the future. Therefore, Maathai delves into the Kikuyu myth of creation to explain the origin of her name, excavate history and give meaning to naming practices in her community. Names serve to illustrate the shared values and attitudes in any given culture. As Ndogo (2011:16) writes, the art of storytelling and naming system is a way of remembering the past and perpetuating a sense of continuity. I therefore conclude that through the myth, Maathai recreates and validates the individual as well as the collective Kikuyu identity in *Unbowed.*

The Kikuyu naming practices conform to the logic of decoloniality which seeks to undertake an epistemic reconstitution of African identity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). European names given to Africans after the imperial encounter can be conceived within the wider cultural power systems of keeping the colonial order through alien names where the bearers of these names would forever remain strangers to themselves and their culture. To decolonise, Africans need to divest themselves of the undue Western cultural burden occasioned by the long history of colonial domination and exploitation. Maathai does not use her English or Christian name anywhere in her story. Hence, her writing is understood as contesting coloniality or reverse-discourse aimed at challenging colonial ideologies and legacies in Africans' pursuit of authentic cultural identity (Maldonado-Torres, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). The remarkable absence of her Christian name in her narrative subverts the whole colonial legacy and ideology of (re)naming African people. Furthermore, she assigns Kikuyu names to all her children.

There is an explicit suggestion in *Unbowed* that Africans should name themselves because being named by the coloniser consigns African people to a state of permanent cultural deformity. Igboin (2014:34) opines that "since names and naming are part of culture and heritage imposition and acceptance of European names by Africans caused 'cultural calamity' which affected African spiritual profundity in the struggle for independence." Igboin's arguments explain why most culturally conscious Africans discarded the Christian (Eurocentric) names and, instead, reverted to their African autochthonous names (Ndiang'ui, 2025). Such naming is evident in public figures such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinualogu Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Koigi wa Wamwere, Wanyiri Kihoro, and Raila Odinga. Indeed, Christianity was a major imperial design that assigned people newer names and altered the concept of self in most societies in Africa (Igboin, 2014; Ndiang'ui, 2025). Hence, *Unbowed* undertakes imaginative reconstitution of African identity through authentic African names (Mensah et al., 2021; Ndiang'ui, 2025).

Fitzpatrick (2012:15) writes that during the Black Power Era in the 1960s and 70s, many African-Americans and Afro-Caribbean individuals went through a process of self-identification and renamed and adopted names which were in line with their African heritage. Certainly, this was a process of pursuing their true identity lost through slavery, colonisation, and imperial domination.

This study argues that most of the culturally conscious Africans reworked their identities in an effort to decolonise the African identity decimated by colonialism (Fanon, 1963). Uluocha (2015:184) identifies two main reasons for the European renaming of Africa: "colonisation and revolution." Colonial powers had to rename the African continent to assert itself and give visibility to exploration and renaming as a confirmation of political control (Fitzpatrick, 2012). Furthermore, renaming the African people after Christian conversion was a way of cultural re-orientation for the converted Africans to fit in the colonial world. According to Ndiang'ui (2025: 75), Christian conversions and renaming people was a "means of integrating African individuals into a global system that prioritized Western ideals of rationality, progress, and civilization." Maathai narrates that the *athomi* culture heavily contrasted with the traditional Kikuyu culture, copied everything European, including names. *Athomi* attitudes captured in the autophylography are a part of cultural neocolonialism. She writes: "the *athomi* culture brought with it European ways and led to profound changes […] everything that represented the local culture was enthusiastically replaced" (WM: 11). This excerpt disapproves all imperial strategies which reworked African cultures and altered local identities (Fanon, 1963; Ngugi, 1986). The names of people and places resonate with the decolonial ideology where societies dismembered by colonialism through Western names can re-imagine their authentic identity and re-connect with that lost self. Maathai's autophylography engages in identity discourse through recreating the collective mythic past and connecting the lost history. She denigrates naming prejudices and cultural chauvinism characteristic of the colonial order through restatement of original African names. Furthermore, she disparages the irony of European modernity that proceeded to assign names to 'others' who had been removed from the human category, denied full humanity by the colonial order (Fitzpatrick, 2012. The power to define, dominate, oppress, exploit and place certain human groups in the margins characteristic of colonialism is contested in this narrative. *Unbowed* can be understood within the philosophy and praxis of 'Afrikology' which is described by Nabudere (2001:1) as "the search for human wholeness in a world that has been defined by loss of equality and denial of the full humanity of the conquered and oppressed." *Unbowed* re-members and reworks aspects of African culture, especially names and naming, which were dismembered during colonial domination. It rebukes the colonial imposition of foreign nomenclature with the aim of erasing African heritage and recommends a return to the roots (Ngugi, 1986; Nabudere, 2001; Igboin, 2014).

Intertwined with Kikuyu naming system is gender identity. The Christian Western men dehumanised women and perpetuated a kind of violence on the disempowered female category of humanity for the sake of keeping power, revealing what Mbembe (2006: 143-4) calls "phallic domination." African women have forever occupied a subaltern position in the colony and postcolony and, thus, most of their stories contest this marginalisation (Mutie and Goro, 2017). The gendered identity is problematised in detail in the subsequent section.

3.4 Gender Identity, Opposing Patriarchy and Voicing Subalternity

Gender refers to the social and cultural meanings ascribed to the male and female persons which is also the dichotomy upon which we build ourselves right from the moment of birth. Traditionally, individuals have been classified as either male or female in regard to biological identity. According to Wise (2014:48), sex and gender are essential components of one's identity; gender is the social identity whereas sex is the physical identity. Therefore, gender identity explains how individuals define themselves in line with their maleness or femaleness. Apropos the above, Wise (2014:49) writes that an individual does not have a clear sense of identity independent of how one thinks about one's anatomy. Hence, the biological reality, culture, language, and the society gradually confer labels and assigns its members gender identity. Gender identity informs people on how to conform to certain societal expectations, associate with others, accept or reject certain assigned roles and form a concept of who they are. I use *Unbowed*, to unpack how Maathai defines herself as a woman, how the society assigns her responsibilities due to her femaleness and how she contests unfair treatment of women in the Kikuyu and Kenyan communities.

African cultures were reworked by colonialism in profound ways thus, gender invites decolonial discussions (Ngugi, 1986; Pachón Soto, 2023; Lugones, 2023). Lugones (2023) argues that although coloniality is seen from capitalistic aspects of domination which exist in once colonised spaces, sex (its resources and products) is inscribed in designs of exploitation which cannot be ignored in the discourse of decoloniality. Drawing from Oyewumi (2002) ideas about postcolonial exploitation Lugones observes that colonialism initiated a disempowerment process where black women lost land, ability to lead and other important economic domains. In order to take a

decolonial turn, African women are supposed to reject Eurocentric feminist ideas in favour of homegrown epistemologies. This study interrogates how African women call out and confront the intertwined nature of coloniality and patriarchy. Maathai employs tropes, metaphors, and cultural symbols which clearly mark gender at different stages of a woman's development. From the story of her birth and socialisation, we understand that gender categories are learned early in life. Thus, they become part of an individual's identity. The myth of *Kikuyu* and *Mumbi* brings into focus gender differences which illustrate why the author wants to reclaim women's lost status. The narrator notes that "it is not explained how women lost their rights and privileges" (WM: 5). However, Kenyatta (1961: 6) explains how men staged a rebellion:

> It is said that while holding superior position in the community, the women became domineering and ruthless fighters. They also practiced polyandry. And, through sexual jealousy, many men were put to death for committing adultery or other minor offences. Besides capital punishment, the men were subjected to all kinds of humiliation and injustice.

Kenyatta (1961) observes that out of such oppression, men staged a rebellion and a new regime of patriarchy and polygamy was introduced. The myth of the nine daughters of Gikuyu and Mumbi gives a position contrary to the current reality where women are subordinate to men in the Kikuyu culture. There are gender binaries that the story illustrates, which engender different identities. This resonates with Butler's (2011) performative theory in *Bodies that Matter*, especially where she argues that gender is constructed through a constant iteration of gender binaries in language and everyday practice. According to Stuhlhofer (2022:4), the male/female binaries accompany everyone right from birth such that among the Kikuyu, "the birth of a boy was heralded with five ululations, whereas it was four for a girl child." This ritual at birth meant that girls were to travel a different path – that of subordination throughout their lives. In fact, as is seen when midwives announced the sex of the newborns, girls among the Kikuyu people were pronounced as inferior immediately at birth. Other socialisation practices would follow to pronounce the separate ways that men and women would travel throughout their lives. The narrator identifies that when you are the first-born girl, you "become like the second woman of the house" (WM: 13), you master even the subordinate position of your mother.

Maathai employs the analogy of her parents to demonstrate power differences that existed in her society, which evolves from the reality of being either man or woman. The differences are illustrated in the narrative where the narrator's father's "physical strength was legendary" (WM:12) whereas her mother was the exact opposite conceived within adjectives such as "thin and tall… fragile… quiet" (WM:12). She identifies her father as "overpowering…strong, powerful, invulnerable, immovable" (WM:20) and through this comparison we encounter a woman who is weak in the character of Wanjiru Kibicho – Wangari's mother. The association of the male gender with power and strength in *Unbowed* is remarkable. This is because, as observed by Tilly (2005: 21), gender is a site of "durable inequality." The physical differences between the narrator's father and her mother denote power (wielded by men) and/or lack of it (as exhibited by women). The connotations marked by the adjectives above hint on the power dichotomy between men and women in the Kikuyu community. The traditional gender binaries in the Kikuyu community are fixed in that men and women are projected through master/missus, strong/weak, provider/provided, bold/timid, or active/passive dichotomies. Women in the society as narrated by Maathai are subalterns in this patriarchal cosmos. Muta is contrasted with Wanjiru to draw the male/female positions and demonstrate privileges assigned to either gender in this society. The family unit can, thus, be understood as a space employed by the protagonist to validate gender power differences in her society. Therefore, in *Unbowed*, the familial space exposes the gender power variances that the narrator uses to contest the women's liminal position throughout her autophylography.

Muta was polygamous and the women in this culture appear comfortable with it because they are socialised that way. The narrator in *Unbowed* informs readers that in the Kikuyu society, "a man had the freedom to marry as many women as he wanted." (WM: 18). Maathai tells us that her mother was a second wife. With his four wives, Muta's compound is structured in such a way that he is at the centre where his *thingira* stands in the middle of the compound. *Thingira* is a male space and this is the domestic centre of power in the family and *thingira* "was the realm of men, boys and male visitors" (WM: 17). Maathai delves into the discourse on polygamy in order to contest white normativity where white weddings and monogamy were valorised and traditional polygamous marriages condemned by the colonial Christian culture. Oke (2024: 122) argues that

the polygamous structure has often been a stabilizing force, contributing to familial and communal harmony. Wangari corroborates this in the confirmation that her society was well-knit and pressure from peers ensured stability and child support despite the several wives and children among polygamous men. Nevertheless, Maathai's narrative recognises the alliances that happen with marriages arguing that it is not just a romantic contract between the couples. She still uses her autophylography to give voice to the divorcees who are rarely acknowledged as marginalised (Spivak, 1988).

Self-writing is one of the prominent pathways through which female authors collapse gender stereotypes and reclaim their voice in patriarchal situations. Ebila (2015:148) considers Maathai's narrative, "a powerful tool for self-identification that recounts her personal experiences and offers lessons to readers about the importance of being in control." Similarly, Swindells (1995:7) writes that self-narratives are the "text of the oppressed, the culturally displaced forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual." Although Swindells is writing about American women and people of colour, her insights can be harnessed to guide a discussion about Kenyan women who are victims of colonially generated -isms and patriarchy to varying degrees. Maathai chronicles gender reality in her community where men and women are associated with separate and fixed biological and psychological characteristics leading to social power imbalances. It is a documented reality in most cultures: women are at the bottom of the power pyramid; thus, their position equates to marginality (Spivak, 1988; Modupe-Kolawole, 2000; Oyewumi, 2002). In the society narrated here, identity is fixed by the dominant group since people from cultural minorities who disidentify with the society in which they live can end up separating from it, becoming marginalised and prevented from making any valuable contribution to their society.

The heroine in *Unbowed* challenges the assigned identity of a "true" African woman, who should "respect men and *is* quiet" (WM: 196). Maathai's voice cannot be suppressed. She wages war against all those who strive to exploit or oppress her. This includes the state which is constructed in patriarchal images. Her narrative strives to give the woman an alternative mirror to look unto herself so as to avoid becoming a pariah in her culture and country. Hence, self-writing for Maathai

is a political weapon designed to raise the consciousness of African women who have suffered colonial and patriarchal exploitation throughout history. Thus, in the Achebean sense "restores their dignity, personhood and humanity" (Mangena, 2026: 6). This resonates with Odhacha (2021:71) who argues that a female writer should do justice to her artwork, stay committed to her dream at all costs and talk about perceptions of women. As a result, female writers must confront male stereotypes and remain politically conscious in taking charge of their destiny (Were, 2017). *Unbowed* remains committed to confronting patriarchy through Maathai who provides women with an alternative vision of female freedom and nationalist democracy. Contrary to Moi's perception of "a good African woman" (WM:235), the narrator advances democratic ideologies in the Kenyan nation as she debunks the myth of men as manning the public space and women as tethered to the domestic sphere (Modupe-Kolawole, 2000; Were, 2017). Throughout history, the public sphere has always been a masculine space though feminist activism of the 1970s disrupted this notion (Kivai, 2010; Were, 2017). The gender experiences in *Unbowed* are fused with the Kenyan colonial and political narratives in order to catapult women into the limelight in regard to anti-colonial struggle. In *Unbowed*, women like Maathai design their political futures despite the various hurdles placed on their way by the male order.

In *Unbowed,* the society reminds women to get married and have children. Aunt Nyakweya is the traditional voice who constantly reminds the narrator that "a woman's biological clock ticks constantly" (WM: 105). This is despite the narrator's thinking that marriage marks the end of her freedom that she and her close friends enjoy as educated working women. Marriage has been criticised by various feminist scholars as a form of oppression on the part of women (De Beauvoir, 1949; Friedan, 1963; Chambers, 2012; Strickland, 2022) because in the marriage relationship, women are socialised to be subordinate to men. The value of marriage in Kikuyu culture is illustrated by aunt Nyakweya and Maathai's mother who are culturally conditioned to accept things as they are. When they receive the news of Maathai's marriage proposal, their joy is iridescent. The narrator notes: "as tradition demanded for a woman, she ululated four times in my honour" (WM: 106) on learning about this proposal. In many conservative cultures of the world, women are considered subordinate to men in marriage such that they surrender their name and identity to their husbands (Saaka and Luginaah, 2025). Maathai's commitment to Mwangi is culturally

sanctioned and therefore the collapse of their marriage becomes a subversion of oppressive cultural structures. The Kikuyu society assigns to the woman the role of serving the husband; to shoulder all domestic responsibilities, care for the husband's visitors and ensure that he achieves in all his plans. The relationship between Mwangi and Maathai is that of servitude where Maathai is constrained by the male-dominated culture.

Divorce in this autophylography is narrated as freeing women from male oppression (Mhoodar, 2023). Maathai aspires to be free and wants to stand for what she thinks is right. Thus, her story contests patriarchy in its manifestations. Despite divorce, Maathai refuses to be marginalised and silenced. She remains active and clears her own path to social, political and academic limelight even though she encounters "the challenge of venturing into what was considered a man's world" (WM: 139). One reason for the divorce with Mwangi was Maathai's failure to change her surname from that of her father to that of her husband. Although Maathai felt that the idea of using her husband's "surname was introduced by [the] British" (WM: 140) and Kikuyu women used their father's name even after marriage, Mwangi felt uneasy with this obstinacy. By associating this practice of using "Mrs followed by husband's name" (WM: 140) with the British, the narrator equates marriage with colonial oppression. Thus, her divorce can be read as a repositioning towards independence from patriarchy and the remnants of colonial ideologies (Lugones, 2023).

Maathai's husband Mwangi expected a wife who was culturally submissive. But Maathai was different – educated and independent. During the divorce proceedings, Mwangi told the court that Maathai was "too educated, too strong, too successful, too stubborn and too hard to control" (WM: 147). Mwangi's submissions during the divorce trial suggest that some men are scared of marrying strong women. Maathai laments: "nobody told me men would be threatened by [the] high academic achievements of women (WM: 139). *Unbowed* unsettles the obtaining prejudices against women and girls in a society which puts more value on boys than on girls: "Boys are provided education before girls and boys are expected to be greater achievers than girls" (WM: 139). In interrogating this logic of boys being ahead of girls, the narrative re-inscribes gender relationships and raises the status of women.

Latha (2004:60) opines that many African societies have devalued women's education because "too much education is believed to make a woman disobedient." This cultural reality is what influenced Mwangi to seek divorce now that his wife was 'uncontrollable.' Maathai's exploits in the academy were considered "too ambitious in the 1970s" (WM: 118), especially for a woman. By virtue of her being the first woman in East and Central Africa to get a PhD, her educational achievements became a reason for the marital challenges. Maathai blames the failure of her marriage on a society that placed pressure on men to demonstrate they were in control of their households. At the University of Nairobi, Maathai came face to face with sexism at the work place. She notes:

> the university's full benefits accrued only to men. […]. Married women were expected to be housed by their husbands and it was argued that they therefore did not "need" a housing allowance or insurance coverage or pension. […] Women should be paid less than our male colleagues of equal standing was very irritating to us. Because of that type of discrimination, junior male staff took home more than we did, despite our senior academic positions (WM: 115).

From the vignette above, it is clear that, at that time, the University of Nairobi failed to entrench gender equity in their human resources policies. Thus, female employees suffered discrimination and exclusion. *Unbowed* projects a woman who challenges the existing male order that marginalises womenfolk, demonstrating a case of the speaking subaltern. She challenges the institutionalised discrimination without support from fellow women at the university, who had been culturally conditioned to be content with the status quo. Most women who did not support Maathai claimed "they'd been advised by their husbands not to be part of that [infamous] struggle" (WM: 116). Emanating from frustrations from fellow women who are unable to speak against their oppression, Maathai notes:

> Fighting battles with women can be very difficult and sad, because both society and the women themselves often make it appear that most women are happy with the little they have and have no intention of fighting for their rights. I am often confronted by women who have waited until that security called "man" is no longer available to them to remember that they should have protected their rights (WM:116).

As a system of exploitation, patriarchy ensures that women are socialised in such a way that they accept their subordinate status (Kivai, 2010; Smith and Watson, 2010). This explains why Maathai's fellow workmates were not willing to challenge their exploitation. Despite women being unsupportive to her cause, Maathai won. She concludes that because the university wanted to maintain peace, it gave her and her workmate - Mbaya - a reasonable compensation. The inspiration to fight exploitation and a strong sense of agency is what energised her struggles whether in her work place, in the domestic arena, or in national politics. Maathai narrates her story and experiences to uplift women from the worst forms of marginalisation whether at the family level, career, or politics. According to Ndogo (2011:17), it is not easy to talk about Maathai without mentioning her Green Belt Movement (GBM) which was built around self-reliance and women empowerment. This is corroborated by Ochwa-Echel and Onyango (2018:104) who observe that:

> Maathai blurred the lines between environment, women and human rights and still managed to place women at the centre of her and their activism. […] Since Maathai believed that issues needed to be discussed critically and holistically, the last half of the speech highlighted fourteen obstacles related to political, economic, cultural issues including corruption peace and security, political and economic leadership, democratic process, international debt, flawed international market, poverty, population pressure, illiteracy, foreign languages and destruction of traditional heritage.

From the extract above, Maathai began with fighting for her rights, then the environment, freedom, poverty, debt crisis, democracy, and thereafter, put effort into improving humanity. These sites of struggle preoccupied her beyond comprehension, to the point that many thought she was obsessed. She did it with others for others, exhibiting a rare sense of altruism. In *Unbowed*, Maathai cuts the figure of a champion for women and human rights where her spirit embodies the other suffering women. She encourages sisterhood as revealed by her liaison with other women in promoting a sense of unity. Maathai situated her womanhood in the middle of various other communal struggles. Her resolve to change women's economic status under the GBM is internationally recognised by various bodies. What began as personal duty ultimately attracted the Nobel Peace Prize. In the subsequent section, I dwell on how *Unbowed* privileges ethnic and national identity.

3.5 Ethnic/National Identity and Colonial Heritage

The thrust of this section is to problematise how *Unbowed* narrates ethnic and national identity. Using the decoloniality and subaltern lenses, this section demonstrates that Maathai uses her personal narrative to (re)create both ethnic and Kenyan identities. The discussion affirms that in self-narration, Maathai imagines personal, ethnic, and national belonging. Aluko and Larey (2025) argue that national identity in Africa was frustrated by those who felt that they did not belong to a nation but instead wanted to revert to "micronations" which existed before the Berlin conference (Mukanda, 2025). Africans belonged to ethnic/tribal nations before the boundaries were redrawn thus most prefer to belong to the primordial identities; the ethnic.

Mamdani (2012) examines the origin of race, ethnic and tribe and concludes that these terms are modernist creations coined by the colonial West with the aim of defining the "other" and explaining difference. In the African world colonialists differentiated tribe from race in that "non-natives were tagged as races, whereas natives were said to belong to tribes" (Mamdani, 2012:47. The argument crystalizes around belonging or unbelonging and therefore races were said to "comprise all those officially categorized as not indigenous to Africa" (Mamdani, 2012: 47) thus, colonialism portrayed the native as a product of geography rather than of history. In the British empire, the races were subject to the British law whereas the tribes were guided by the customary law and this expanded the differences between the settler and the native (tribe). Africa has many tribes and therefore each tribe was ruled under separate laws, thus the enduring division were entrenched among the colonised. According to Kumar (2025: 245), tribe is attributed to the colonial dilemma of classifying the people who did not fit within the known social, cultural, ethnic and religious categories in the colonised world. Mamdani (2012: 52) avers that "the tribal identity in many cases coincided with… ethnic identity." The term tribe is regarded as colonial and derogatory in modern Africa, thus it has been replaced with ethnic community.

Wan and Van der Werf (2009:2) claim that ethnic identity relies on related terms namely: "ethnic group and ethnic identity." They assert that the ethnic group is the most basic from which others are derivative. The above arguments reify ethnic group and turn the abstract term into objective reality with the power of encompassing a collection. Ethnicity can be understood within three

anthropological perspectives: primordialists, instrumentalists and constructivists. Within the three anthropological paradigms, ethnicity is analysed as identification based on a deep primordial attachment to a group, on a people's historical and symbolic memory which is created and sustained by leaders and others in pragmatic pursuit of their interests (Mamdani, 2012; Kumar, 2025). Thus, ethnicity is not something people possess but something they *construct* in a specific social and historical context to further their interests. This study perceives ethnicity as a collective that has a shared common name, a shared myth of common descent, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific "homeland," and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population. An ethnic group, then, is subjectively-subscribed-to cultural collective that emphasises the role of myths of descent and historical memories (also regarding a regionally specific homeland) and that is characterised by one or more cultural differences such as religion, customs, language, or institutions (Robinson, 2009; Elliott, 2019). On the other hand, ethnic identity can be understood as *an affiliative construct* whereby individuals view themselves and/or are viewed by others as belonging to a certain ethnic or cultural group. The term ethnic acquired currency after the Second World War, otherwise tribe is the original term denoting what we refer to as ethnic.

Van der Merwe (2020) observes that the concept "nation" emerged from Western Europe in the 19th Century during the enlightenment age where to the term shifted political models from monarchs to rational democracies. The modern nation has, however, been conceptualised as an "imagined political community" (Anderson, 2006:6), wherein citizens do not have direct personal contact even though there exists a sense of comradeship amongst them. Bhabha's (1990:1) discourse on the nation compares the nation to a narrative and this demonstrates that the nation is usually produced through social imagination. Bhabha's perception hinges on the opinion that the nation can exist in the form of a discourse thus like a narrative it can be imaginatively constructed. Narratives, such as the one under study are some of the grounds through which people imagine their national belonging. Bhabha (1990: 4) borrows from Derrida when he describes a nation as a narration stressing the insistence of political power and cultural authority as the irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic. These ideas influence this study as it interrogates national

identity. Maathai - the heroine - imagines and constructs her national and ethnic identity. This corroborates Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2009:74) observation that:

> Nations just like heroes are not pre-existing entities but are imagined and created. …. forging a nation includes the instrumental use of the media, educational system, administrative regulations, propaganda, sometimes outright lies and selected fragments of history.

Thus, the protagonist in *Unbowed* envisions the story of the nation, which occurs within selected historical episodes marking important moments in Kenya. Maathai uses collective cultural myths as the bedrock of her autophylography to inscribe her ethnic and national consciousness. It is, therefore, important to also observe that literature offers boundless opportunities for reaching those who have the greatest responsibility of building the nation. In identity stories, when the narrator relives selected episodes, history and culture are brought to life, nationalist feelings are invoked, stereotypes are formed and equally challenged, heroes and 'others' are created and new cultural versions are constructed for the public to emulate (Munyangeyo, 2022; Mitullah, 2021). The story guides the hopes of the people in this 'imagined community' and revives in them a sense of national character. In the case of *Unbowed,* ethnic and national identity arise from a complex historical conjunction occasioned by multiple socio-historical factors like colonialism and neocolonialism.

Maathai perceives herself as belonging to the Kikuyu nation, which, as she states, existed long before the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 (Osborne, 2014; McNamee, 2019). The conference reworked the African landscape, heralding new configurations of nations and belonging. The narrator asserts that "prior to this superficial partitioning, many communities in Africa had identified themselves as nations, albeit micronations" (WM: 7). In this claim, the narrator indicates that her God-given identity, (primordial) which was violently reworked by the colonial enterprise, was Kikuyu. The narrative stages a decolonial effort of contesting the new political outfit that emerged in 1963 with independence. It theorises the origin of the word Kenya, claiming that the German missionaries, Johan Krapf and Johannes Rebmann, got the word *kii-nyaa* from their Kamba guide when they wanted to know the name of Mount Kenya. *Kii-nyaa* was later corrupted by the British and became the name Kenya for both the mountain and the country. Revealing how

a certain political space became Kenya can be analysed as a decolonial action where the origin of the nation is imagined. In her effort to connect with the basic story of her nation, the narrator exploits Kikuyu language to explain seasons and other cultural aspects whose veracity, depth and scope cannot be captured through the English language. Zeleza (2006:20) writes that "language is the carrier of a people's culture, it embodies their system of ethics and aesthetics, and it is a media for producing and consuming knowledge, a granary of their memories and imaginations." The Kikuyu language illustrates her ethnic and national affiliations. Indeed, *Unbowed* engages in decolonisation of the community's mind by proposing the use of the mother tongue to explain the totality of Kenyan experiences. Ngugi (1986:4) argues that apart from being a mark of cultural identity, language gets to the very soul of its users, connecting people in a way that a foreign language cannot. The Kikuyu language, for which Maathai in *Unbowed* advocates, connects the people, thus bringing about a sense of solidarity. Her advocacy for the language gives her story a Kikuyu character as it dislodges the Eurocentric notion that it is only through European languages that local people can carry out their human experiences. In her GBM and activism, Maathai resorts to the use of Kikuyu, so as not to exclude her fellow citizens in the affairs of the state and public life. This enables her to reach out to those who are not as literate as she is. Zeleza (2006: 22) argues that the use of European languages underscores the legacy of colonialism. Indeed, Maathai contests misconceived English universality in her story by using Kikuyu words where there is no exact English equivalent. Thus, the writer promotes the humanistic decolonial praxis of multilingualism (Ogechi, 2019).

Multilingual situations offer an opportunity for those who inhabit the nation and have shared colonial experiences to narrate their experiences in a language different from that of the coloniser. Maathai delves into the politics of language and rebukes the ways in which English was introduced and developed in Kenyan schools whereby learners were degraded if caught speaking their mother tongue in school during and after colonial days. She suggests that the colonial way of education undermined the self-confidence of the African children, thus altering their self-definition. She disparages the trivialisation of African ways of knowing propagated by the missionary teachers who plunged African learners into self-doubt and consequently, entrenched inferiority complex among the black people. Suggested in Maathai's observation is the fact that English should be in

a flat ontology with other languages and minds in order to generate material conditions for equality (Canagarajah, 2015). Use of English in communication should not be seen to relegate their languages to inferior roles as it happened during the colonial period (Ngobeni-Khubeka et al,. 2026). Fanon (1963:4) argues that once the natives encountered the "civilizing" group and were stripped of any cultural originality then doused with "white supremacy and black inferiority" what obtained was an enduring sense of inferiority complex.

Maathai chronicles the fragmentation of the individual and the collective identities resulting from the colonial violence in Africa whereby ambiguous identities arose among the natives (Mamdani, 2012). Ironically, the narrator observes that "those who had not embraced Christianity, who still held on to and advocated for local customs, were called Kikuyus, while those who had converted were called *athomi"* (WM:11). This dualism is similar to the British system of "divide and rule" perpetuated in the colonies and which produced a split-collective identity (Mamdani, 2012; Fosu, 2025). According to Maathai, *athomi* meant the educated ones or those who could read the Christian Bible. The *athomi* were closer to Britain than to Kikuyu cultural cosmos. It is true that during colonial incursion, the Kikuyu values were replaced by those of the coloniser with the sole reason of exterminating the local cultures and identity. The protagonist identifies the different lifestyles and identities which marked the two groups and notes that the emergent *athomi* were considered progressive. The traditional Kikuyu lifestyles and traditions were disparaged by both the *athomi* and missionaries. Yet Maathai herself is a product of *athomi* clique, and it is by being born in a family of *athomi* that she strides ahead of her contemporaries. But she wishes to be identified as a representative of the "new humanity" conceived by Fanon (1963:35-6), which is characterised by mutually coalescing modes of conduct, habits and the hybrid identity occasioned by colonialism. Maathai criticises colonial education for creating class and encouraging social stratification in Kenya. Athomi is a metaphor of colonial stratification witnessed by the protagonist in her Kikuyu community.

Unbowed valorises the ethnic diversity in Kenya with a view to celebrating the multi-cultural blend of the Kenyan nation. When marking World Environment Day on 5 June 1977 at Kamukunji

grounds, Maathai and other environmentalists "planted trees in honour of seven people from different ethnic groups, all of whom were community leaders in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century" (WM: 131). Maathai connects the planting of trees and issues of conservation to the local politics and liberation. She suggests to the readers that there is a lot to gain from inter-ethnic relationships which should be encouraged building a sense of nationalism. Several anecdotes point to an evolution of Kenya, later fraught with ethnic animosity and tribalism due to myopic and egotistic post-independence leadership. Maathai rebukes political leaders for using stereotypes to "divide Kenyans from one another" (WM: 23) along ethnic lines. She is an advocate of ethnic pluralism. For instance, the narrator observes that the Kikuyus, the Luos, and the Kipsigis lived and worked together in Neylan's farm, courtesy of the "labour system the British instituted" (WM: 22). However, McNamee (2019: 144) argues that "indirect rule typically took place through the institutionalization of ethnic divisions." Settler community in Kenya advocated that different ethnic communities should remain in different native areas for ease of labour exploitation. Through the story of Neylan, Maathai illustrates how colonialism marginalised the native populations thus power manifestations occasioned by race and class are critiqued.

Different ethnic groups form the nation of Kenya, even though ethnic mistrust has been occasionally aroused by the ruling elite for very selfish reasons (Ake, 1993; Kwatemba, 2008; Mitullah, 2021; Turinskaya, 2025). *Unbowed* attributes the enduring ethnic identity to colonialism but also blames the post-independence leaders for using ethnicity as a tool for economic and political mobilisation. Kwatemba (2008:80) notes that "postcolonial leaders … have approached ethnicity with the same intent as the colonialists, failing to infuse a national civic culture within the country's body politic because those at the centre of power pursued insular, sectarian and self-serving interests." Thus, for post-independence leaders' ethnic mobilisation was mainly a tool to consolidate political power (Turinskaya, 2025; Githuku, 2015; Osborne, 2014). Indeed, tribalism is a dominant system of creating national "others" in Kenya. Mukanda (2025: 242) opines that "ethnicity is not simply a descriptive term of cultural belonging, it has been politicized, manipulated and mobilized by the elites to define power, resource and opportunities." Mukanda's thinking is validated by Maathai in her personal story where she dissects the evils of tribalism in

Kenya. Maathai argues that ethnicity is a strategy used by African politicians to divide the people, just like the colonialists did. She disparages cases where both the Kenyatta and the Moi regimes used ethnicity to "displace some communities and in the process appease others" (WM: 237) especially those imagined as "they." Cordial inter-ethnic relations between Maasai and Kikuyu, where intermarriages occur (WM: 8) suggest the possibilities for ethnic harmony in a multi-ethnic Kenyan society (Mukanda, 2025). Throughout the narrative, Maathai valorises national identity over the ethnic one.

National history plays a crucial role in imagining identity because it connects the past and the present (Aluko & Larey, 2025). Aspects of Kenya's colonial history, which build on Kenyan identities form a considerable chunk of the isolated stories making up the autophylography. The history before Kenya's independence is revisited to make readers apprehend the political praxis and trajectory in the contemporary phase. While narrating the story of D.N. Neylan, a British settler in the Rift Valley, who employed Maathai's father, Muta, Maathai shows that British colonialism reached its zenith with the introduction of settlerism. Through the story of Neylan, readers are introduced to white settlerism and land alienation that occurred in the central highlands. The highlands were originally inhabited by the Kikuyu, who were later dislodged to other areas to make way for the British colonial settlers. According to Ochwa-Echel and Onyango (2018:96), "African people were forced to become squatters and labourers on British settlers' farms, receiving only substandard accommodation and food but no schools." Maathai helps us understand the squatters' lives through her account of her father's experiences on a settler's farm:

> Squatters like my father would also receive maize flour and about a quart of milk from Mr. Neylan as daily portion for the work done on the farms. Even then, the man, his wife and children were all required to provide labour. They were really glorified slaves, although of course they had freedom to leave if they wanted (WM: 15).

This excerpt explains the scale of economic and labour exploitation suffered by the natives on white farmer (Elkins, 2005a; Anderson, 2005). Maathai relives the story of Neylan in order to magnify the falsehoods perpetuated by Europe that colonialism was meant to civilise Africa while in actual sense it was bent on robbing and exploiting the African people. In fact, Mau Mau violence

was mainly as a result of land alienation, racial segregation, labour exploitation, and general repression of the black people (Elkins, 2005a; Anderson, 2005; Yenjela, 2020). *Unbowed* (re)imagines, remembers and justifies some violent confrontations witnessed between Kenyan natives and the colonial masters through the story of Mau Mau struggle because the war aimed at recovering the lost humanity of the Kenyan people thus the cause of the conflict is captured as "land, freedom and self-governance" (WM: 63). However colonial authorities and settler community interpreted the struggle as "anti-Christian, a reversion to tribal atavism, paganism and cultural barbarism" (Yenjela, 2020: 296). Nevertheless, to redeem the image of Mau Mau fighters, Maathai observes that the conflict was ignited by feelings of African soldiers returning after the war who:

> Not only did they receive any recognition or compensation for their service, but to add insult to injury their British colleagues were being showered with honours and even allocated land, some of it taken from the Kenyan war veteran, who were forcibly displaced. (WM:61).

According to Yenjela (2020:296), postcolonial writers engage with the Mau Mau discourse to reclaim a "tainted humanity" occasioned by the colonial preferential treatment of the white soldiers who were rewarded with tracts of land after World War II. Yenjela's arguments resonate with the main discourses in *Unbowed,* where the writer celebrates Mau Mau freedom fighters and applauds their struggle against colonialism. The way the Mau Mau struggle is portrayed in *Unbowed* contrasts to what is written by colonial writers and reporters. The independence era writers therefore chose to rewrite the Mau Mau story by glorifying the struggle as a "way of ushering in a new era, a way of signifying triumph over the protracted colonial bondage" (Yenjela, 2020:297). According to historians, the British colonial government either tried to conceal or rewrite the story of Mau Mau to cover the wounds but Kenyan writers reclaim the narratives in order to demonstrate to the future generations the nature of colonial brutality (Miyonga, 2025).

To create a national identity, *Unbowed* participates in the postcolonial imaginations where the anti-colonial crises created African states and nations. *Unbowed* reveals how Mau Mau was a peasants' collective decolonisation process which forced the British government to discard plans for settler

dominance. In rewriting Mau Mau memories, Kenyan scholars revisit the history of freedom struggle within positive terms thus reclaiming that part of history. It is noteworthy to remember that Kenyatta and Moi repressed the Mau Mau story mainly because they were apologists of the colonial system and so perpetuated and maintained colonial systems after independence. According to Javangwe (2011:44), European modernity "thrust African society in disarray, resulting in the experience being given subjective renditions in the form of life narratives." From the foregoing, personal experiences make meaning in the context of the collective experience thus Maathai's narrative give meaning to Kenya's collective history. *Unbowed* demonstrates that the personal history can only be appreciated in the context of that of the nation (Jameson, 1986).

Maathai's autophylography also re-examines the "transition of neocolonialism from colonial to neocolonial stage" (Ngugi, 1993:68) and should thus be deemed as part of the anticolonial struggle in the postcolonial phase in order to achieve a "meaningful national ideal" (Ngugi, 1972:50). The narrative is imbued with revolutionary aesthetics or what Chatterjee (1993:50) calls the "general form of transition from colonial to postcolonial national states in the twentieth century." Conceptualised from Chatterjee's insights, Maathai's narrative is able to sample Kenyan experiences after independence and question how they contributed to freedom consciousness. The autophylography adds to other several narratives which capture the end of British imperial rule and which can be read as decolonial efforts.

3.6 Bishop David Gitari and the Trouble with Oppression

While Maathai's *Unbowed* engages with environmental justice and conservation as well as the politics of decoloniality, Archbishop David M. Gitari's *Troubled but Not Destroyed* (2014) recounts his religious identity by examining the overt Eurocentric aspects inherent in African Christianity. Gitari further investigates the role of the church in promoting basic human freedoms in a society characterised by coloniality (Gathogo, 2007). He does that by first narrating his own birth and family history, religious background, and political troubles under KANU regime. His story is entrenched in his community by narrating his birth, family and national history.

Gitari was born on 16th September 1937 to Samuel Mukuba and Jessie Njuku at Ngiriambu, Kirinyaga District of Central Kenya. He was the fifth child in a family of nine. His parents were the first generation of Christians who were so committed that they had a chapel at home and observed regimented prayer sessions every morning and evening. Gitari narrates how he began his journey of Western education when he joined Ngiriambu Primary School in 1944 and sat for Standard Five National Examinations in 1950. He later joined Kabare Intermediate School where he sat for Kenya African Primary Examinations (KAPE) papers in 1953. He was then enrolled at Kangaru School in Embu where he founded the school's Christian Union. Because of his involvement in Christian activities, Gitari was nicknamed "the Man of the Bible" (DG: 13) by his dorm-mates at Kangaru School. In 1964, Gitari graduated from Royal Technical College (currently University of Nairobi) with B.A. (Hons) and thereafter obtained a Bachelor of Divinity in 1971 from the University of London. After some years, he was honoured by Ashley Seminary, Ohio, with a Doctor of Divinity. In 1998, Gitari was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Kent.

Gitari worked for the Bible Society of Kenya and was instrumental in translating the Bible into Meru, Luyia, Kisii, and Turkana languages. In this effort, Gitari was undertaking a "creative engagement of the African cosmological reality and the Bible" (Mbuvi, 2017:149) and also creating Christian identities among those communities where the Bible was available in local languages. He thus gave Christianity a "new lease of life in the predominantly religious worlds of Africa" (Bediako, 2011: 246). Gitari worked for several Christian organisations and sharpened his theological skills for the ministry and for the good of humanity. He writes that he devoted himself to spreading the gospel of Christ to high school students, university students, and Kenyan villages. He rose to become the first Bishop of the Diocese of Mount Kenya East, a position in which he served from 1975 to1990. Between 1990 and 1997, Gitari headed the diocese of Kirinyaga which was created after the split of Mount Kenya East. He initiated a lot of evangelical activities in his diocese which witnessed exponential growth of the church. He was later appointed the third African Anglican Archbishop and Bishop of Nairobi Diocese, a capacity in which he served from 1997 to 2002.

Gitari retired at a time when Moi's KANU party lost national elections to the opposition led by President Mwai Kibaki in 2002. During his working life as a church minister, he chastised Kenyan political leadership for human rights abuses, political intolerance, assassinations, corruption, tribalism, insecurity, land grabbing, and poor governance, among other national challenges. He rose to prominence after he gave Biblical expositions on the Voice of Kenya (VoK), which was later renamed Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). He narrates that the assassination of Josiah Mwangi Kariuki made him deeply reflect on the spirit of the first six lines of the Kenyan National Anthem. In doing so Gitari presented a nexus between Biblical salvation and political liberation where past atrocities are redressed through the story of Cain (Gathogo, 2007). He would boldly condemn the injustice through preaching the gospel of Christ and being a critical voice "to centre those who had largely been absent from history" (Boyle and Francis, 2021: 3) thus he transformed himself to a human rights crusader. As he writes, he openly rebuked the ruling elite for failing to guarantee peace, love and unity – part of *Nyayo* Philosophy and instead perpetuating "injustices in society" (DG: 35).

Gitari narrates an incident when his Philadelphia home was raided by state sponsored terrorists in 1989. Nonetheless, he narrowly escaped unharmed and remained unbowed. His approach to justice was a combination of theology and political activism, a strategy that made Christianity relevant to the context he was living in (Gathogo, 2007; Kapinde, 2025). The strategy coheres well with interlinking the personal narrative with socio-political experiences. Carey of Clifton, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1991-2002) described Gitari as "one of the giants of the Anglican Communion" (DG: blurb). Following regime change in Kenya in 2002, President Kibaki awarded Gitari one of the highest state honours, the Moran of the Burning Spear (MBS), for his unflinching service to the people of Kenya and for the pursuit of democracy. Gitari's life and history, together with the story of the Kenyan nation, are intertwined, hence producing an autophylography. In *Troubled but Not Destroyed*, Gitari constructs a Christian identity which is opposite and nationalistic and different from other traditional identities that define the Kenyan nation.

This study proceeds from the premise that contemporary African Christian thought is devoted to the struggle for social and political transformation in a continent grappling with poverty, foreign

debt, poor governance, corruption, insecurity, civil strife, famine, gender exclusion and ethnic intolerance among other vices. According to Ugorji (2009:47), "Africans have a religious outlook to life that orders their political, economic, social life and influences their morality." The search for authentic African Christian identity occurring amidst other religions, cultures, colonial history and turbulent political reality is a central subject in Gitari's personal narrative.

The autophylography can be divided into three sections, with the first segment narrating Gitari's birth, family, ethnic belonging and education. The subsequent part details his Christian beliefs and how Christianity should serve people in preparation for the eventual kingdom of Christ and finally, a third section which engages the nexus between the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms with focus on the church and politics. Gitari avers that Christian leaders should actively and boldly convey the prophetic message to the political leaders, especially where they have disempowered the citizens (Kapinde, 2025). These convictions confirm the resolve to read Gitari's life story as an autophylography, particularly where stories of Gitari's community are prominent and wholly intertwined with the story of individuality to a point that the reader cannot distinguish the personal from the communal slant. The narrative's three sections mark out converging and diverging discourses about an evolving Christian identity in Africa.

3.7 The Christian Identity: Connecting with Africans

According to Jennings in *Christian imagination* (Jennings, 2010) there is a particular time when Christianity became white and therefore "for every Christian in the world to find their Christian story is to find themselves in whiteness" (Munyao and Tanui, 2021: 2). This suggests that Christian theology, culture and practices have been Eurocentric because of the colonial connections (Kapinde, 2025). The dalliance between colonialism and Christianity is what prompted Ngugi (1972: 33) to declare that the church and colonial state were one in his Gikuyu saying that "*Gutiri muthugu na mubia*" (there is no difference between the European *settler* and the missionary priest). Moreover, Munyao and Tanui (2021: 2) succinctly assert that missionary work in Africa was part of "expansionist initiatives of whiteness." It is for this reason that David Gitari narrates how he was recruited into whiteness in his autophylography and the steps he took

to decolonise Christianity and make it universal and human. Lonsdale (1999:224) claims that Gitari is a child of two worlds:

> The persistent appeal of Old Testament prophecy makes Gitari a child of both Kikuyu history and Christian training, the product of a long, international conversation on equal terms.

Lonsdale assigns to Gitari both Christian and Kikuyu identity because he was considerably shaped by the European Christian doctrines and his African heritage. Identity has everything to do with situated-ness and experience (Manyangeyo, 2022). Zeleza (2006:14) argues that African identities are "inventions, mutually constitutive existential and epistemic constructions" thus signalling the situated-ness suggested above. Zeleza's postulations suggest that the identities in Africa lack primordial essentialism or natural authenticity. He insists that the process of identity construction is still ongoing. Identity is critical in human existence and it occurs through the prism of family, language, culture, religion, history, and nation. These are some of the factors that shape individuals' understanding of themselves and guide behaviour. Zeleza (2006:17) elaborates how discourses on African identity are displayed in the "colonial library." Thus, African Christian identity is intertwined with colonial history but borrows substantially from indigenous cultures. Both colonialism and Christianity thrust to Africans an estranged self with an amorphous identity in which the African psyche was uprooted thereby fashioning it into what Kaunda (2015:79) calls "pro-White and anti-African" outlook. Early Christian missionaries misguided the pioneer converts by chaperoning them to reject their African cultural practices and instead adopt European customs thereby losing their cultural identity (Bediako, 2011).

Christian identity in Africa is a new phenomenon and a twin to the colonial order and can thus be re-ordered through decolonial praxis (Fosu, 2025). Through decoloniality, a shifting agency happens where the Christian gospel is communicated by Africans and not the "white owners," thus altering the character of European Christianity and domesticating it in the African cosmos. Gitari is one such African theologian who takes the responsibility of spreading the gospel to his people who are still steeped in some traditional African lifestyles. Gitari avers that the Anglican Church has a responsibility to adopt a model of evangelism by penetrating communities and cultures where

"the customs of the community and culture are either endorsed, challenged, or transformed" (DG: 157). In simple terms, Christianity for Africans should float in their cultural cloud in order to be relevant (Bediako, 2011) and responsive to a people's reality. According to Nwafor (2016:8), "Christianity must become Africanised before it can influence Africans" and thus there is need to investigate the evolving African Christian identity. In the contemporary world, the finest Christian practices should encourage equality of all men and rework 'whiteness' in all its manifestations in order to move the marginalised and subjugated from the "zones of non-being" (Fanon, 1963).

Through decoloniality, the chapter probes "other-thinking, other-thought, and other-logic" (Mignolo, 2007:155-67) in order to explain the emergent African Christian praxis narrated in *Troubled but Not Destroyed*. Decoloniality identifies coloniality as a site of struggle for African identity. It questions why African Christians should celebrate postcolonial thinking while the majority have not reached the *promised land* or currently "remain mentally colonised" (Kaunda, 2015:77). According to Kapinde (2025), African theology in the 80s and 90s was a critical public theology concerned with experiences of apartheid and authoritarianism.

Gitari's father Mukuba's conversion and evangelisation presents the dawn of the African Christian values and identity in *Troubled but Not Destroyed*. The author recounts how Mukuba joined CMS in Mombasa where he acquired literacy and was introduced to the gospel of Christ. Thereafter, he "developed a desire to share the message with the people at Ngiriambu, 640 kilometres away back home" (DG:3). This conversion of Mukuba marks the nascent Christian identity planted in Kenya by the missionaries. The Christian identity was marked by non-African practices like baptism and acquisition of new names (Bediako, 2011; Ndiang'ui, 2015). The names Samuel and Jessie are a mark of Christian belonging already supplanting the Kikuyu culture which reworked the local culture in profound ways. Conversion in Africa involved rejection of local names and adoption of Euro-Christan names which was one way of asserting cultural dominance even though in the case of early converts the two names; one African and one Christian, were maintained to signal a new identity. This section argues that the Kikuyu names tied the people to their ontological roots and the philosophic spirit in their culture however, their retention conferred to them a hybrid identity.

Mukuba's family can thus be seen as the microcosm of the African Christian life. This is because the Christianity unfolds in the family which is perceived as the foundation of a community. It is in this space where one is likely to develop personal identity. Indeed, Gitari acquires a Christian identity under Mukuba's tutelage. Gitari's father kept a communal diary of the important happenings in his local community. He diarised "all children born in the area by name, the date of birth and the names of parents" (DG:5) thus he entrenched a sense of communalism as opposed to colonial individualism. Through keeping records for the people, Mukuba succeeded in attracting some respect for himself and thus created a Christian community in Ngiriambu. His actions and practice of Christianity show a blend of African ideals of society akin to Ubuntu worldview in which the "social dimension of [the] being human" is valorised (Gichure, 2015:131). Since Christianity journeyed the same road with Western education, Mukuba becomes educated and connects his people to the benefits of a Western education. He started a school and paid the teachers from his own resources to ensure that his community did not remain ignorant of the written word.

Influenced by Christianity, Mukuba condemned cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and the destruction of twins. In Gitari's view, Mukuba's work transformed his Kikuyu society for the better. For instance, Gitari highlights the story of Peninah Muthoni, his second sister who did not get circumcised to demonstrate how radical Mukuba was to the point of challenging deeply entrenched cultural practices. Even though the community claimed Muthoni would never get married, she married Kinyua Mutema and together had eight children. Mukuba defies the Kikuyu cultural logic of circumcising girls by denouncing the practice himself and then elevates his daughter's marital achievements despite the local culture's contrary teaching. This autophylography highlights that among the Kikuyu, if a woman gave birth to twins it was considered a bad omen. Consequently, "the two children were abandoned to die" (DG: 6). Mukuba contests this practice after he became a Christian because his new teachings saw nothing wrong with the birth of twins or an infant developing upper teeth first. Mukuba disparages what he now saw as inhumane practices and, through the story of Alfred Karanja who was saved from destruction, readers realise that the practices have no value. In his infancy, Alfred Karanja had developed the upper teeth first. Culture dictated that such an infant should be thrown into the forest to die. But Karanja was rescued and later grew up and became a respected pharmacist. Karanja

was considered a member of the Mukuba family because Jesie Mukuba saved him from the forest of hyenas. For Africans to convert, they had to discard these harmful practices, some of which impacted on their cultural identity. Mukuba's salvation is described as "liberating the people from superstitions, retrogressive culture and fear" (DG: 6) and the same is what the son inherits and practises in religion and social life.

The experiences of African people witnessed in the Christian missionary era, then during colonial and neocolonial periods, generated varying discourses regarding the changing African identity (De Merwe, 2016; Aluko and Larey, 2025). This happened because African people had their African traditional religions before Christians arrived on the continent. African theologians, like Bishop Gitari attempted to "Africanise Christianity" (De Merwe, 2016:599) and de-Westernise it for the sake of relevance. These efforts include the work undertaken by Gitari at The Bible Society of Kenya, where they translated the Bible into various Kenyan languages. Gitari ignored the colonial push to transform the local people into Europeans through the English language and culture, which was packaged in the foreign Christian Bible. His efforts to translate the Bible into African languages amount to an awareness that "God speaks the people's language." Lonsdale (1999:222) writes that "the Bible is the only universal literature Kenya possesses, telling the same stories, with all their contestable teleological possibilities, in all the main vernaculars." Thus, this section argues that Bible translation was an intervention to legitimise linguistic identities that had been scuttled or suppressed by imperialism. Vernacularisation of the Bible/Christianity, undertaken by Gitari, can be interpreted as going against the original culture of Christianity and unveiling ways through which local communities become Christians within their own linguistic and cultural contexts. The translation of the Bible into African languages "consigned primacy to black African originality and agency [as well as undermining] the arguments that seek to present Western cultural dispensation as superior" (Sanneh, 2001:17). Hence, Gitari's crucial role in the translation of the Bible to African languages repackaged Christianity for the targeted people, the Africans. This was a way of acculturation of Christianity in Africa. Fanon (1963:2) argues that "a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language." Thus, Gitari was out to express a worldview in the language of his people. The translations are read here as a struggle for life and salvation in a changing world and an effort to move the people from the

margins to the centre of Christianity. Seemingly, European languages used in the Bible had marginalised the emerging African Christians. Most people who could not understand European languages had been left out of the Biblical message. Religion, culture, language, and history are significant factors that directly influence identity configuration.

Vellem (2015:14) believes that "Black consciousness requires one to grasp the internal logics of Western superiority and debunk it." Black consciousness permeates Gitari's practice, especially when he admits polygamous families in the church thus making Christianity eschew coloniality. Gitari engages Christianity from the perspective of an African theologian to produce a new dialogue which accommodates African cultural realities. He sought to liberalise the African church from Western bondage by allowing cultural aspects "which were not contrary to the scriptures" (DG: 120) in the Anglican liturgy. Gathogo (2007: 341) argue that Gitari turned to "the use of ancestral resources to communicate his message of liberation and reconstruction of society." In the use of ancestral songs, Gitari reflected his local context and thus made Christian faith part of his Gikuyu culture. In so doing, he constructs African Christianity from a decolonial standpoint with the aim of producing homegrown Christians.

Gitari creates a discursive opportunity for the Anglican Church in Kenya to Africanise its theology. He affirms a religion rooted in community and recognises that African culture existed before Christianity was planted in the African soil. His overall vision, thus is "the mission of the church in a changing society" (DG: 116), especially where the converts had w a split identity occasioned by European modernity and Christian teaching on one hand, and African culture on the other. According to Magesa (2014:9), "no sane society chooses to build its future on foreign cultures, values and systems […]. Every society is obliged to search deep in its own history, culture, religion and morality in order to discover the values upon which its development and liberation, its civilisation and its identity should be based." Hence, Gitari grows the new faith amongst his people and reworks certain cultural practices to make Christianity relevant and practical. He inculcated oral story telling as a means of preaching, using animal characters to illustrate the biblical message thus he planted the gospel in the local milieu through African forms of communication (Gathogo 2007). He was alive to the fact that the African person oscillates between the precolonial African

past and European modernity, "thus having two warring ideals in one […] body" (Du Bois and Marable, 2015:5). This illustrates to the existence of a *doubleness* in identity for the lives of African Christians. This study argues that Africa needs a Christology which enriches the people spirituality, reclaims the lost self, and entrenches the lost treasured cultural values.

Gitari is privy to the reality that Christian missionary activities and colonialism changed African personality in profound ways. Therefore, he strives to embrace African cultures onto the Christian teachings. Within Christianity and the attending colonialism, the African personality was refashioned to conform to the demands of the empire and the acceptance of the Christian God. Thus, local identities were clothed in Western drapery, alienating the person and the faith. This resonates with Wariboko's (2018:60) postulation that "Christianity and colonialism squeezed Africans on every side trying to make them subjects of God and empire." Gitari's theology reworks the faith to make it culture friendly. In *Troubled but Not Destroyed*, the protagonist revises colonially instigated practices to make the 'new' theology relevant to Africans or "holistic gospel" (DG: 115) concerned about the body, mind, and spirit of all Christians. This resonates with Stefano (2021: 6) who argues that Christianity in Africa should be "rooted in the daily life of the people without any artificial separation between sacrum (liturgy) and *profanum* (daily life) *to* produce meaningful spirituality…" Gitari's theological orientation suggests that "African cultures can be legitimate host, home and container for Christ just as Europe and European-ness have been for ages" (Maluleke 1994:53). In so doing, African Christians meet their European brothers as equals without one looking at the other as inferior and vice versa. Gitari's writing, therefore condemns the discrimination of others based on race, class, power, ethnicity, gender, and religion in order to perpetuate a decolonial turn in African Christian practice. He calls for greater regard for others based on the Christian doctrine that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (DG:154). Here, Gitari challenges the Manichean binaries and promotes a sense of equality through his Christian vision. He endeavours to make African Christianity gentle, unlike the European Christianity which preached on setting humanity free but went ahead to enslave, colonise, and exploit blacks. He recounts the story of Martin Luther King Jnr. to illustrate the suffering of the black people in the USA and to entrench the spirit of humanising those dehumanised by the white man's culture.

Munyao and Tanui (2021:2) affirm that whiteness "as a way of life, positions itself as superior to other ways of life and is domineering over other cultures." *Troubled but Not Destroyed* is a story of a man trying to dismantle certain practices, which subjugated those from non-European cultures, mainly in the Global South. Through this story, Gitari reworks whiteness, patriarchy, heteronormativity, colonialism and other exclusionary systems of the missionary church through a narrative spanning from the early days of Christian evangelism to neo-Christian era of the second millennium. As an undergraduate student, Gitari saw the polarisation between the evangelicals and liberals – this prompted him to organise a forum at St. Julian's Centre at Limuru. From the debate with Tom Houston and Stanley Booth-Clibborn, Gitari concludes that the "evangelical position was more plausible" (DG: 27), even though evangelicals ignored the socio-political issues. He looked at Christianity as a means to "liberation of men from every kind of oppression" (DG: 27). Thus, there was need for the church to be involved in social and political activities of the nation. Gitari envisions an African friendly brand of Christianity which affirms the humanity of people regardless of colour, culture or economic status. He embeds the gospel of Christ in a new context, embracing some acceptable cultural ethos to conventional Christian values. To achieve "real" Christian reforms, he encourages the baptism of children born out of wedlock, made funerals culturally responsive, and accepted customary marriages without the demand to re-marry in church as a precondition for baptism. He builds his brand of theological praxis within the African ontology, philosophy, experience, and frameworks to make Christianity responsive to African cultural realities. Gitari makes Christian orthodoxy shifting and negotiable in every context, thus producing varying identities in diverse cultural contexts.

Wariboko (2018:70) observes that "in spite of the spirited efforts of colonialists and missionaries to reconstruct African personhood along the lines of Western personhood, the precolonial notion of personhood survived to shape African worlds both under colonialism and in the postcolonial era." Therefore, the African identity narrated by Gitari amalgamates the collective and the personal within African history, religion and culture to produce a local Christian identity. The study recognises that colonialism and Christianity produced in the African converts a complex identity. The African identity discourse evolved as an attempt to "reaffirm […] heritage and personality

collapsing under Western bias" (Kanu, 2013:36). Kanu echoes Jennings (2010: 33) who argues that European modernity positioned Christianity fully within white identity and fully outside black identity. This explains why African theologians were dissatisfied with resolutions of Consultation on World Evangelisation (COWE) held in Pattaya, Thailand, in June 1980, where a third of world evangelicals attending the conference wanted the summit to discuss social, political and economic issues affecting two thirds of the world Christians, whereas those from the developed world opposed it. This project argues that committed African theologians always struggle to deconstruct oppressive and humiliating practises in the Christian brand introduced by colonialism on the continent (Kapinde, 2025). This is because any humanitarian and enduring theological praxis should privilege the existential challenges of the people. Teklu (2024: 7) argues that any "critical voices of the prophets speaking out against human-made poverty reveal an understanding of poverty that is akin to the structural explanations that relate it to unjust economic relations, which are the product of socio-economic structures and political systems or arrangements." The failure of the developed world to discuss the myriad problems of the church in the third world led Gitari to start a faction named International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission (INFEMIT) in order to promote economic liberation of the people. The happenings in Pattaya arise from a warped colonial attitude, where African Christians have been regarded by those from the imperial West as inferior instead of a community of equals. The theological and pastoral style of Gitari is meant to lift those who had been thrown to the peripheries by coloniality and rendered invisible (Stefano, 2021).

Like Maathai, Gitari narrates the African Christian identity by linking it to the collective identity and placing it at the centre of African culture. Indeed, religion is an inextricable part of African societies and, thus, participates in identity formation of the African people. Basing his observations on African Traditional Religion (ATR), Mbiti (1969:1) asserts that "Africans are notoriously religious." This view is true not only regarding ATR, but also applies in other faiths such as Islam and Christianity. *Troubled but Not Destroyed* chronicles various conferences which engendered positive gender changes in the Anglican Church. Gitari re-narrates the symbol of Adam and Eve and emphasises that man and woman were created as "equal partners who have to complement each other" (DG: 200). He asserts that Adam and Eve were not two specific individuals but the whole humankind where none was superior or inferior. Here, Gitari conceives gender relations in

complementary terms similar to the womanist values as theorised by Kolawole (1997) and Ogunyemi (1985).

According to Gitari, conscious efforts to include the women clergy in the Anglican liturgy were necessary. He spearheaded the ordination of Women in Mount Kenya East long before the Provincial Standing Committee of the Synod held its first meeting in October 1980. His proactiveness point to a man determined to end inequalities in the society and promote inclusions which the Kenyan Christians had inherited from the Western church. He moved to every deanery in his diocese to discuss the ordination of women in order to collapse gender barriers which treated women as lesser Christians. Although his motion was voted down in 1979, 1981, and 1983, attitudes changed over time and his ideas regarding inclusion of women as clergy was finally adopted by the synod in 1986. Gitari had begun preparing women for priesthood in 1977. Immediately after his idea was approved, he was ready to appoint women ministers. He was a strong proponent of God guided democracy which was all inclusive with emphasis on "reconciliation, domestic violence, gender disparities, and the power of love and a sustainable society" (Gathogo, 2007: 341). His endeavours to mainstream women priesthood in the Anglican Church can be interpreted as moving the marginalised to a position of visibility, hence traducing gender exclusion. Gitari went against patriarchal normativity which had established skewed gender structures that consigned women to subaltern positions. Challenging patriarchy has been, over time, understood as an "attempt to undermine African culture and Christian values" (Pillay, 2017:8). Thus, Gitari goes against the dominant normative discourse by ordaining women, thus defeating theologically-induced patriarchy.

Gitari's brand of Christianity is also significant for initiating a dialogue with traditional African practices like polygamy (Oke, 2024). According to him, polygamy should not be demonised as early African Christian evangelists practiced it. He looks at the practice as part of African cultures which would not be phased out overnight. Although he regarded God's plan for marriage as that relationship between one man and one woman, he argues that the church should be sensitive to polygamy as it exists in many cultures in Kenya. He quips: "God's people for every good work" (DG: 44) by baptising polygamists and recognising marriages under customary law. *Troubled but*

Not Destroyed rewrites the African Christianity story, subverting those stereotypes and biases instituted by Western evangelists cemented by European racial attitudes. Tarus and Lowery (2017:307) affirm that the need for self-definition in Africa arose from the "challenges of the missionary enterprise, the colonial experience, especially the colonialists' ethnocentric attitudes towards Africans." The decolonial exercise of recovering an "authentic" African identity is at the core of contemporary Christian narrative. Tarus and Lowery (2017) call upon African Christians to reflect an identity which embodies particularity and universality, whereupon Christian values and ordinary experiences manifest in what local theologians practice. In line with this argument, this chapter states that the position taken by Gitari is "no longer a question of knowing the world, but of transforming it" (Fanon, 1963:1) and making it humanistic. Incorporation of African cultures into modern theology is a central element of defining African Christians because, although conversion implied a considerable cultural change, it did entail total erasure of cultural identity. Kirby (1994:60-1) writes that

> Missionaries saw African traditional religions as a morass of bizarre beliefs and practices …all mission founded churches insisted that their converts abandon all contacts with African traditional religions and cultures. These churches were poorly prepared theologically and culturally to accept any alternatives to their own way of praying, thinking and behaving.

Gitari's restoration of the troubled souls in the African church is a decolonial theology aimed at correcting Western logic and theological attitude which considered Africans inferior or even non-human. Gitari accepts Christian doctrines and teachings without the endorsement of every element of Western colonially inclined theology. In my view, however, there are some aspects of culture which are in conflict with Biblical teachings and which should be discarded in the emerging African Christian identity. Polygamy is one such practice, which Gitari stood against even though he accepted and baptised polygamous men because "the church must be pastorally sensitive to the widespread existence of polygamy [as] widely practiced and socially acceptable" (DG:117) in most Kenyan cultures. By so doing, Gitari shows sensitivity to the African cultural practices and accommodates the people in the new faith without destroying families. He affirms the other logic – the pluriversal view as opposed to the universal world enunciated by Western theology and conceived by coloniality.

Although polygamy is outlawed in most Christian dogmas, Gitari believes that it is unwise to exclude those who lived a polygamous lifestyle before Christianity was introduced in Africa. In *Troubled but Not Destroyed*, Gitari suggests an effective way of Christianising polygamists without disadvantaging women, children and society. Gitari succeeds in communicating about Christ in a changing culture, where varying norms cannot be accorded universal authority. In his theological practice, Gitari takes after the decolonial philosophy, contrary to Euro-centric missionaries who came to Africa with their habits and prejudices. He "undresses" the Christianity of the foreign culture and coats it with an African, culture-sensitive dress, consequently exhibiting African Christian identity. Largely, Gitari's theology considers local cultures so as to make Christianity meaningful and relevant to the local people in Kenya. Indeed, Gitari succeeds in creating an African Christian identity through his engagements (Kapinde, 2025). His story points to the overlapping identities where he demonstrates what it means to be a Christian and also what it means to be Kenyan. His interpretation of the Bible merges African Christian theology with gender, politics, governance, security, culture, community, language and humane-ness to take care of both soul and body, which appear "troubled but not destroyed." His autophylography engages in considerable debunking and conscious reworking of Western Christianity which is geared towards making African people appreciate their culture and relate it to Christian teachings. He maintains the critical philosophy of Christianity but decapitates the colonial face, thus making it one among many - pluriversal. He has availed theological standards in which the margin can speak to the centre as equals and avenues through which African Christianity is decolonised.

3.8 The Church: Guardian of the Weak

Bargar (2024: 6) asserts that Christianity is a public religion and relates to matters of "common concern (*polis*)" and thus it should strive to form, norm and sustain common life for human flourishing. Seen this way, therefore, Christianity should at all times promote the overall good as informed by the prevailing discourse in society. It should struggle against exploitation and domination of the weak and the marginalised. Bargar (2024: 9) avers that true discipleship should enact "commitment to the comprehensive well-being of individuals and communities, including the political dimension" by speaking against injustices. Similarly, Manchala (2017: 209-10) argues that "preaching salvation as marvellous life after death to those who are daily sold, enslaved,

tortured, raped, deprived of food, and killed is nothing but abomination done in the name of God" and thus the church in Africa should protect the *wretched* of their societies. Gitari's narrative propagates an impression that God should care for both social and political challenges of the believers and since God is represented by his messengers then the message of justice, freedom, equality and human progress should form the core of biblical teachings (Bargar, 2024; Kapinde, 2025). This explains why Gitari's sermons were geared towards transforming society for better especially to the weak and marginalised. He regarded politics as a spiritual affair meant to better leaders as well as the citizens. His theology outlined the possible attitude of churches toward political powers rebuking excesses of the political class whenever necessary. He delves into the resolutions of the World Council of Churches of 1976 and The African Theological Fraternity Conference of 1985, whose major theme was: "Witness to the living God in seeking just political, social and economic structures" (DG: 134) in order to humanise those who had been dehumanised by raw political power. He was out to engage in critical and constructive collaboration or resist state power in case those in power had transgressed on the rights of the weak. In fact, he chose to confront the state wherever it behaved contrary on the issue of justice and human rights. Gitari was apparently guided by Pope John Paul II's calls that:

> In the pursuit of progress, total progress, anything must be rejected that is unworthy of the freedom and the human rights of the individual and the people as a whole. Thus, are rejected such elements as corruption, bribery, embezzlement of public funds, domination over the weak, callousness toward the poor and handicapped (Quoted in Oluoch, 2003: 3).

Thus, Gitari preached against corruption, theft of public resources including land, disenfranchisement of the poor, intolerance, debt burden in the third world countries and dictatorship. He continually informs his readers that it was difficult for the church to give Moi's government and KANU unreserved backing because all along they were guilty of exploiting the citizens. This is the philosophy that guided Gitari's relationship with the state. Gitari recounts a story where one Rt. Reverend Gichuki had vowed to expel any member of his church who opposed the government and KANU to illustrate how the church leadership was, at times, parochial and partisan to a political system. In the story of Reverent Gichuki, Bishop Gitari rebukes those church leaders who condoned exploitation by failing to cause any uproar for the benefit of oppressed citizens. Gitari's autophylography censures the sad lifestyles of the political class "characterised

by personal interest, inequality, division and injustice" (Gesowan, 2024: 134) similar to the by-gone colonial era. His message, unlike the colonial missionary church, was that the contemporary church should be an eternal reminder of what the clergy ought to strive for as a nation.

One needs to imagine a community of Christians in the Kenyan nation in order to appreciate Gitari's sermon delivered on national radio (VoK- Voice of Kenya) after the assassination of Josiah Mwangi Kariuki in 1975. Gitari sees religion as an integral aspect of the public sphere with the possibility of crossing the public and the private and commenting on the socially acceptable and unacceptable political actions. The VoK sermon generated pertinent questions which led Gitari to imagine a brotherhood with J.M. Kariuki and by extension his shared Kenyan-ness with other citizens. The Biblical homily at the behest of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) resonates with the proclamations of Mwakabana (2002:11) that "community is the core in which religion is expressed." Thus, we should be our brother's keeper. After the assassination of J.M. Kariuki, the Kenyan nation was troubled because "his death caused a major political crisis […] likened to Cain killing his brother, Abel" (DG:33). By alluding to the biblical murder story of Cain and Abel, Gitari allows Kenyan people to see each other as Christian brothers. This establishes both a Christian identity and a national feeling in a country split along ethnic lines. Through the various Biblical exposition and analogy, Gitari imbues his autophylography with a sense of community of the Kenyan Christians. In fact, his perspective is built around an ontology that recognises the other as part of oneself or "Other as a relational identity" (Sanni, 2016:73). Here, Gitari advances the idea of taking care of others in the community since the self is always entangled with others (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Brewer, 2001).

In condemning J.M. Kariuki's assassination, Gitari used VoK (Voice of Kenya) radio to give Biblical dimensions of the political crisis at the time, guided by the words of the first stanza of the Kenyan National Anthem:

> *Oh God of all creation*
> *Bless this land our nation*
> *Justice be our shield and defender*

May we dwell in unity
Peace and liberty
Plenty be found within our borders (DG:33).

This stanza of the national anthem forms the basis of constructing a religious identity framed around Kenyan nationalism where our land, unity, peace and liberty are crystalised. The pronouns used express we-ness and propagate both the national and Christian ideals. Gathogo (2007: 336) notes that:

> In these talks for the NCCK, which he called "Lift up the nation" and delivered from the Nairobi Baptist Church on 20 April 1975, Gitari lectured the nation on the United Nations General Assembly's proclamation of 10th December 1948 on human rights.

The right to life informed Gitari's sermons, blurring the secular and the religious in a country where a majority of the citizens are considered Christians. The pulpit provided a platform for open discourse through which the murder of an innocent Kenyan could be criticised without fear of reprisal from state apparatuses. The nation had fallen into abyss of disgrace. Thus, Gitari's sermons dubbed *Lift up your hearts* were a kind of restorative message. According to Metz (2011:24), Africans' respect for human life grows out of religious thinking. Thus, the nation and the church have a duty to protect lives. This explains why Gitari went ahead to lift the nation from where it had fallen due to intolerance and assassinations.

Readers would recall that the Kenyan national anthem evolved from a colonial past and captures all that which is dear to the Kenyan people, especially that which had been denied to them across history: freedom, land, peace and unity. The Kenyan anthem is a typical example of a Christian prayer whose words are harnessed to promote nationhood in the postcolony by inculcating a sense of liberty and security. Gitari informed VoK officers that "every human being is created in the image of God and has sanctity for which they should be served and not exploited or eliminated" (DG: 34). These words champion the equality of men and contain the philosophy of community in Africa where people are "inspired by the notion of common good" (Gyekye, 2004:16). When these words are relayed by a priest such as Gitari, they acquire gravitas, force and possess an

affective thrust necessary that alters society for good. Bruce (1996:11) argues that religion is an autonomous force capable of creating order and stability by binding people together under a shared belief, cosmology and morality. This study sees Christianity as bearing the responsibility of rebuking political authority, especially when the communal good is threatened.

African Christian identity is not simply conversion; it recognises human challenges at the present moment and tries to alleviate suffering in all its dimensions. For instance, Gitari was aware that the police did not apprehend any suspect in connection with the assassination of J.M. Kariuki. As a result, himself and a section of the citizens accused the state of covering-up. Gitari told Kangwana Committee of VoK that "the gospel of Jesus Christ is very disturbing especially to sinners" (DG:33). He affirmed that the fact that the government was not doing enough to apprehend the killers was itself suspicious. The Kenyatta government was complicit in the assassination. He talked to the nation on values such as respect and sanctity of human life, thus condemning political assassinations. In the process of his spiritual engagement, the author-narrator is essentially immersed in community to project a sense of we-ness, thus revealing a shared identity.

Indeed, collective identities - whether national or religious - have the potential to provide security in areas where humanity is threatened (Mukanda, 2025). Here, Christianity becomes one of the collective identities presenting an alternative voice for those on the verge of being silenced by draconian political systems. J.M. Kariuki had been silenced for "challenging all injustices in society" (DG:35). Gitari believes that "a person who has found self-identity can go forward with confidence to seek fellowship with other people" (DG: 203), despite the diversity in terms of culture, race, gender or nationality. In his Christian identity, Gitari calls for the just use of political power. He readily condemns evil whenever people's basic rights are violated. This is something he passionately preached about in the Immanuel Church in Mutira on June 7th 1987, under the theme *"Harassed and helpless"* (DG: 207).

Gitari's community-centred theology stretches across boundaries and comments on the Idi Amin dictatorship in Uganda, the Rwandan genocide, apartheid in South Africa, poverty in the Philippines, debts in most third world countries, political unrest in Myanmar, the political

disintegration of former Yugoslavia, the Jewish holocaust and extermination of black farmers in Darfur, Sudan. In all these stories and histories, Gitari reiterates the need for true followers of Christ to "arrest societal decay" (DG: 153) occasioned by corruption, jealousy, hatred, immorality and other social ills. He recounts the history of genocide across generations, stressing on the need for tolerance and respect for human life because "every human being is created in the image of God" (DG:34). Themes of racism and racial segregation as was happening in apartheid South Africa are discussed to illustrate the extent to which some practices undermine humanity. Gitari remarks that apartheid crippled both blacks and whites alike, and that liberation from apartheid policies was good for all races in South Africa. Gitari recounts his meeting with a Boer clergy, Beyers Naude, who understood that apartheid was evil and could not be reconciled with the scriptures. Through this encounter, Gitari illustrates how Christians should confront evil even when it is perpetuated by our own brothers or accords us direct benefits. He reignites the spirit of Martin Luther King Jnr with his ideology of non-violent activism so as to inspire the struggle against the exploitation of the weak.

During his studies at Royal Technical College, the narrator became conscious of the Kenyan political realities such as "the state of emergency, [the] clamour for independence" (DG: 17) which later inform his brand of theology and resolve in, "*Challenging all injustices in society"* (DG:35). It is through the history of colonialism and exploitation that he opposes mistreatment of the weak and vulnerable. Gitari comes through as a disciple of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who once opined:

> What is the church, if not the defender of the defenceless? What is the church mission? If not like its master, it does not easily give its life to rescue the world …? What is the church minister's task, if not the identification and participation in liberating people from each kind of spiritual and physical slavery? (Qtd from Magesa, 1988: 115).

Gitari emerges as a strong defender of the voiceless, the weak, the poor and the marginalised in Kenyan society. He challenged the proponents of the *Nyayo Philosophy* of peace, love and unity to ensure they support whatever was "true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy" (DG: 190) to realise a lasting relationship with God and his people. The concern for

the community is prominent in *Troubled but Not Destroyed* and Gitari affirms that "humans are not isolated individuals; they are both one and many…the sin of one individual affect other family members or community" (DG: 201). This concern for others is a prominent feature of Ubuntu. Ubuntu designates human beings as individuals-in-community. Thus, the individual good is tied to the collective well-being (Letseka, 2000). In *Troubled but Not Destroyed* therefore, the Bishop emphasises the need for the church and Christians to move beyond evangelism and humanitarian aid to address the root causes of poverty, injustices and other societal evils which impinge on individual happiness.

In his rebuke of the poor political leadership affecting Kenyans, Gitari espouses greater communal ethos characteristic of Ubuntu, idiosyncratic to African Christians. He speaks against all threats to members of his society without the bounds of ethnicity owing to the reality that Kenya was a "multi-tribal society" (DG: 202). Letseka (2000:180) asserts that Ubuntu "encapsulates moral norms and values such as altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy and respect and concern for others." The autophylography reworks the Kenyan nation to promote an alternative community with fresh values and norms where regard for community and others informs Christian belonging eschewing coloniality designs found in the missionary brand of Christianity (Munyao, 2022). In this new identity, a subaltern tenet leads the narrator to expunge the male/female divide and create women clergy in the Anglican Church.

Gitari uses the pulpit to shepherd the flock of Christ and to "*Challenge injustices in society*" (DG: 35). He insists on social action through "seeking to transform the structures of society and the quest for justice" (DG: 130) by fronting Christian ideals before the Kenya government. He rebukes land grabbing in his home district and describes how councillors in Kirinyaga and Embu County grabbed all open land. Gitari satirises the greed of the political class in post-colonial Kenya as he draws analogy from the Biblical story of King Ahab in an exegetic analysis of the land theft. He challenges the Kenyan leadership: "Was there no Naboth to say NO!" (DG: 251). In relating the wanton grabbing with the Biblical King Ahab, Gitari castigates the president and his political party KANU for condoning outright theft of public resources which disadvantages the poor people and

future generations. He spoke truth to power criticising KANU government of human rights abuses and undemocratic practices (Gathogo, 2015; Kapinde, 2025). His pursuit of justice was unequivocal; it sprung from Biblical extrapolation to illustrate that human beings should be equal before the law. Gitari sharply re-interprets the Bible within African realities and the unique political milieu. He attempts to remove the wedge between evangelism and socio-political action and subsequently instigates the citizens to reject and rebel against poor leadership.

His overall concern is how the church should invest in the development of the faithful in four areas: mental development, physical development, spiritual development and social development.

Gitari writes:

> This holistic understanding of the gospel meant that we were not only going to evangelise and respond to the spiritual needs of the people, but we were also going to respond to the physical needs of God's people, for a human being is a psychosomatic (body and spirit) unit, and the two cannot be separated (DG:41).

This theological attitude is what drove Gitari to achieve considerable success wherever he was appointed to lead any diocese in his church. He gives statistical figures of growth, and as readers, we realise that he nurtures the church and undertakes to develop his people in a variety of ways. To him, Christianity was a way of life linked to people's lives, politics and economics. Health, agricultural development, social welfare and education were priorities in his diocese as he aimed at "equipping God's people for every good work" (DG: 44). He embarked on developing local clergy to bridge the deficit of trained personnel in evangelisation by setting up several colleges in his diocese. This focus illustrates a man who is ready to build others in the Christian ministry, thus being in favour with God and Man.

Christians, just like the followers of other religions, have always displayed a balance between the deity and the polity. Religion has been exploited over history to serve political ends and for colonialism it helped to create existential dualism separating African bodies from their souls and the people from their community hence hastened exploitation of the African people (Munyao,

2022). Religion in the colonial era promoted colonial policies and vice versa. The blending of religious and the state has existed from the history of ancient Christianity to the present time but with varying ramifications across cultures. According to Wood (2016:11), the "Bible accepts nations as legitimate forms of community" even though the meaning of nation might have changed over history. Wood (2016:12) further highlights that religion might have "supplied the most important long-term ingredient for national feeling" thereby becoming a source of crafting national identity. A nation has been defined as "a named community possessing an historic territory, shared myths, and memories a common public culture, and common laws and customs" (Smith, 2002:15). The community conceptualised by Smith is understood as a Christian community with a common history, norms and shared myths. Hence, when such community of Christians occupy a common geo-political territory, the national identity complements the Christian identity. One way of creating we-ness is through the creation of what Anderson calls the "imagined community" by erecting borderlines of a given group of people who envision a common belonging. Religion is intertwined with history, politics, culture, and place in certain narratives in order to tell identity (Munyao, 2022; Bediako, 2011). The chapter concludes that *Troubled but Not Destroyed* narrates the national and the religious, producing the evolving character I have labelled here as African Christian identity.

There are considerable efforts in *Troubled but Not Destroyed* to narrate what it means to be a Kenyan and a Christian. The Christianity advocated by Gitari should be conscious of the world around it. This is corroborated by Munyao (2022) who believes that African identity should be informed by the emerging social and political challenges. The discourse in Gitari's narrative is an African political theology whose aim is to re-imagine politics, Christianity and justice in same text. Biblical analogy used by Gitari in the autophylography fits within the political space creating Christian attitudes, thus highlighting an identity that is religious and Christian and another which is politically Kenyan.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter explored how identity is constructed and narrated by both Maathai and Gitari. I began by delineating how identity is constructed and performed in self-writing from a broad perspective.

Arguing from the premise that memory and experience are not personal but shared, I demonstrated that both *Unbowed* and *Troubled but Not Destroyed* are processes of identity formation even as the authors strive to reconstruct personal histories. I argued how identity springs from history, religion and culture. The fluid nature of identity notwithstanding, I probed the construction of personal, gender, cultural, ethnic, national and religious identity in the two autophylographies.

Names and naming and how people's names are inscriptions of basic personal and communal identity are discussed with reference to Wangari Maathai. Womanhood and the position of women in the African social set up was also discussed. Ethnic and national identity – what it means to belong to a certain ethnic group as narrated in Maathai's *Unbowed* - was interrogated in this chapter. Using the Kikuyu ethnic group, the study debated ethnic identity and how ethnicity relates to the nation. Kenyan history and how it created Kenyan affiliations to the people living in the Kenyan state was analysed. Political theology and how Gitari inserts an image of African Christian identity was also exhaustively interrogated in the chapter. Most of his sermons were seen as political since he used the pulpit to challenge the excesses of the political Kingdom of president Moi. Gitari's actions were analysed as part of liberal theology which promoted the fall of dictatorship and transition to multiparty politics. The chapter demonstrated that Gitari's autophylography imagined a more inclusive, culturally grounded, and contextually suitable expression of Christian faith that upholds and celebrates African identity.

The subsequent chapter examines how self-writing re-imagines communal experiences in personal narratives. Using Raila Odinga's *The Flame of Freedom* (2015) as a reference to my arguments, I discuss how Raila's narrative is a collective testament of the Kenyan people and common history. I selected Raila's autophylography for the subsequent chapter because of his legendary struggle for a second liberation and his role in the introduction of multi-party politics in Kenya.

CHAPTER FOUR

Individual and Collective Experiences: Self and Other(s) in *The Flame of Freedom*

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three analysed how Wangari Maathai narrates identity in *Unbowed* (2006) and David Gitari in *Troubled but Not Destroyed* (2014). It argued that self-narratives are ways through which authors perform their identity and that of their communities. From the two self-narratives, the chapter investigated how names, culture, gender, ethnicity, Christianity and national identities are performed. It concluded that names evolve out of a cultural reality in a given ethnic group and that through people's names, we can learn their history, traditions and gender representation. The chapter demonstrated how ethnic and national identities are storied in *Unbowed* by Maathai and, similarly, how African Christian ideals intertwine with human rights and nationalism in Gitari's *Troubled but Not Destroyed*. The chapter further discussed the vision of the two writers crafted into their autophylographies and concluded that these nation-focused self-narratives emphasise the inclusion of all the citizens regardless of their ethnic or gender differences. African Christian values which attach a higher premium on society and common good over individual good were explored through the analysis of *Troubled but Not Destroyed*. Thus, through interrogation of the African Christian identity, the chapter coherently discussed the church's position on human rights and good governance.

Narratives have played a key role in shaping consciousness and initiating collective action (Ajah, 2017; Ulogu, 2019). For that reason, this chapter examines the ways in which Odinga's autophylography, *The Flame of Freedom* (2015), rewrites major political happenings in Kenya and how the occurrences have a bearing on individual citizens and the nation as a collective. Odinga's text is selected because of his prominent role in the struggle for political inclusion, human rights and democracy in Kenya. Lynch (2006: 255) describes Odinga as a man who stirs up the strongest emotions in Kenya's politics – "be it Railamania or Railaphobia." This is corroborated by Yousef (2025) in the assertion that Odinga has "demonstrated astute capability to manage complex political landscapes while promoting democratic governance, accountability and human rights." His personal narrative, therefore, calls for critical interpretation in order to

comprehend his own perceptions of political practice and experiences of having been labelled anti-establishment ever since he joined politics in the 1970s.

According to Ndebele (2006:7), "literature cannot give us lessons, but it can only provide a compelling context through which we can … examine a number of ethical issues which have a bearing on the sensitisation of people towards the entire range of a culture." Any narrative, therefore, creates a spectacle of experience from the immediate milieu. Odinga's autophylography dissects social and political realities in the Kenyan nation and persuades the citizens to take action against their exploitation by the state. Every piece of his writing, whether fictional or otherwise, has a goal informed by social ideals and reality. This chapter maintains that Odinga draws from Kenyan history, before and after independence, on matters of good governance and basic freedoms. The chapter also argues that political intolerance during both the Kenyatta and Moi regimes pushed Odinga to write his own story of struggle for freedom and democracy – to foreground the more urgent need to reform politics in Kenya. His narrative is part of the wider struggle for a better society and, therefore, the experiences represented and critiqued in this chapter are categorised as emerging from subaltern spaces, especially when read alongside Kenya's political evolution. According to Mutie and Goro (2017), Odinga reigned but never ruled Kenya since he remained opposed to both the Kenyatta and Moi legacies. His narrative is a subaltern story because he questions political hegemony as he simultaneously champions for an alternative sense of identity and worldview because writing "in itself is always a particular way of viewing the world" (Hove, 2009: 53). Odinga has mostly been in opposition politics, criticising unfair government policies and speaking for the marginalised. His narrative is a tactic of contesting exclusionary politics. He strongly believes that "as an African nationalist, *he could never* tolerate politics dominated by either the West or the East" (RO: 42). The chapter, therefore, investigates how Odinga in *The Flame of Freedom* interprets colonialism, neocolonialism, independence, democracy and the evolution of the Kenyan nation. My main argument in this chapter is that in Odinga's text, self-consciousness, and imagination merge with history to produce an experience which is both personal and collective.

Raila Odinga died while receiving treatment in India on October 15th 2025, aged 80 years and was mourned and celebrated as a doyen of Kenyan politics. People of all walks of life and in their numbers witnessed the interment rituals in a ceremony conducted by the Kenya Defence forces (KDF) – a rare feat exclusively accorded to former presidents. World leaders sent condolences and prominent figures attended his funeral. He was eulogised by Kenyan press as:

> … a freedom fighter, a political prisoner, a reform crusader, a prime minister, a king maker – to his supporters, the people's president, to his family a father and to the Luo community, - he was the custodian of identity and pride (*Daily Nation*, 20th October 2025).

The irony of the whole spectacle was that the state that he fought so harshly and a political class whom he always had an antagonistic relationship with accorded him all the honours making him "an enigma in Kenyan politics" (Badejo, 2006). Odinga had received several pseudonyms of praise from Kenyans which marked his political influence. He was extolled as Agwambo, Nyundo, Arap Mibei, Jamba, Tinga, Jakom and Baba – names which hint at almost mythic relationship that Odinga had with the exploited masses. This also explains why Mbataru (2025:12) thinks that Odinga takes the credit for the basic freedoms enjoyed by Kenyans today, namely "free speech, good governance and devolution," which he fought for with rare resolve during his political life.

4.2 The Ever-Burning *Flame of Freedom*

The Flame of Freedom was published in 2015. The story documents major political events in Kenya and the experiences of Odinga across several decades. Born in January 1945, Odinga is the son of prominent Kenyan political leader, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Kenya's first Vice President, who later fell out with President Jomo Kenyatta a few years after independence. The ill-fated political relationship between Jaramogi and Kenyatta is storied in the former's autobiography, *Not Yet Uhuru* (1967). Both *Not Yet Uhuru* and *The Flame of Freedom* engage in the discourse of Kenya's failed liberation. It is, perhaps, from his reading of *Not Yet Uhuru* that Odinga chose to sacrifice his life in pursuit of democracy and freedom which have remained a mirage in post-independence Kenya. Odinga demonstrates that the Westminster model inherited from Britain was

antithesis of democracy because it installed leadership that was controlled by the West (Zunes 2022).

Odinga's *The Flame of Freedom* documents his family ancestry and the culture of the Luo people (his community) in a chronological way, which gives the impression of an ordered development of self and society. In giving the Luo genealogy, Odinga inspires to construct "a pure, pristine and or unadulterated social and cultural form before the colonial interruption" (Parashar and Schulz, 2021:870) in order to construct a different story of the Luo people – different from the colonial one. The initial episodes detail his birth in 1945, his stay in Germany as a student at Magdeburg, his return to Kenya in 1969, the harassment of KPU enthusiasts (especially his father Jaramogi and his supporters between 1963 and 1970s) by Kenyatta's government, thus charting a linear narrative structure. The narrative shows that Odinga joined politics in the 1970s after his father was detained by Kenyatta's government. His entry into the political furore began as a campaign to press for the release of Jaramogi and other KPU leaders who had fallen out with Kenyatta and KANU and remained opposed to his government. These initial episodes in Odinga's autophylography illustrate how citizens lost their basic freedoms as the Kenyan nation fell back into a state similar to what obtained during colonialism. Detentions, political harassment, and assassinations, tribal oathings, censorship and police brutality were major retaliatory methods used by Kenyatta's government to isolate or diminish the influence of all perceived political enemies and thus Odinga illustrates the strange form of coloniality build around colonial power structures and ethnic exclusion. *The Flame of Freedom* recounts the double hegemony of the colonial and postcolonial political praxis in order to critique "the hidden face of modernity" (Mignolo, 2011).

Other prominent events that Odinga recounts include the rise of Moi to the Presidency after the death of Kenyatta on 22nd August, 1978 and Moi's promise to follow the footsteps of Kenyatta. The transition from Kenyatta to Moi rule saw the term *Nyayo* (Swahili word for footsteps) become Moi's political slogan, embodying Moi's resolve to uphold the very political ideologies championed by his predecessor. *Nyayo* philosophy recommended "an endemic and indigenous spirit in African culture. This is the spirit from which emanates deep filial and societal love; the

spirit which nourishes and conserves the matrix of the invisible bonds of unity in the extended family … the clan, the tribe and the nation" (Moi, 1986:18). In his early years in power, Moi offered hope, promising an expanded democratic space as seen in the release of political prisoners in 1978. But this changed after a failed coup on 1st August, 1982, when he began a serious consolidation of power. As Odinga notes, "the only way now of subduing the nation completely and his sure way of staying in power was to crush all opposition" (RO: 94). Odinga's self-narrative, thus exposes actions of torture, police brutality, corruption, detention, arbitrary arrests, forced exile and assassinations as ways that Moi used to control the Kenyan people to illustrate how diabolical the remaining vestiges of colonialism were. In recounting the evil nature of Moi's government, Odinga illustrates the nature of postcolonial nations as "nothing more than a replica of the colonial states; the first and most apparent legacy of colonialism is how state apparatus and state power are imagined and exercised" (Parashar and Schulz, 2021: 870). The narrations by Odinga can be conceptualised as a form of quest for epistemic freedom.

The Flame of Freedom also captures how the narrator championed multiparty democracy together with other like-minded Kenyans who felt that single party politics narrowed the democratic space. These reflections pay special tribute to political figures such as Jaramogi (his father), Martin Shikuku, Paul Muite, George Anyona, Keneth Matiba, James Orengo, David Gitari, Masinde Muliro and Peter Nyong'o among others, for their role in the second liberation. Writing the role of these gallant men in history Odinga underscores the fact that decolonisation is better undertaken collectively. He describes his exile to Norway through Uganda, disguised as Joseph Ojiwo Wandeya, a Ugandan. He also narrates how he launched a campaign to repeal Section 2(a) of the Kenyan laws, which proscribed multiparty politics demonstrating how contrary opinion was demonised just like in the by-gone colonial period. He details of how pressure mounted leading to the repeal of section 2 (a) was similar to what happened during independence struggle where colonialist blamed freedom fighters to justify counterinsurgency violence. The repression of dissidents "encouraged popular support as seen in public's participation in mass demonstrations" (Zunes, 2022:7). It is through mass actions that section 2(a) was expunged from the constitution and FORD party was formed and registered on 31st December, 1991 and this marked transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The reforms in Kenya occurred due to "the capacity of

contentious actors to continue to mobilize collective action despite the actions of opponents aimed at constraining or inhibiting their activities" (Zunes 2022: 2). Zunes assertion allots Odinga the accolades for resilience with triumph witnessed with the introduction of multiparty politics.

After the repeal of section 2(a) Odinga and other exiles returned home to a joyous welcome from the citizens, who were suffering under KANU dictatorship. Odinga's political activities went beyond the struggle against Moi as he also writes of his efforts to ensure that all Kenyans attained social, economic and political prosperity. He elevates political liberty proposing that it is the bedrock upon which all other forms of social welfare are built. Zunes (2022) confirms that civil society groups, NGOs and workers' unions which had been suppressed by KANU were registered and became vocal after the constitutional changes. Thus, Odinga recounts how citizens confronted colonial and post-independence brutality and savagery, which had heaped misery, violence and poverty on the citizens. History and memory are transformational in *The Flame of Freedom* hence the author gets to propose a future of the Kenyan society by retelling the history of the nation from a vantage point and revealing the epistemic sites that received or exhibit the dark side of modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

4.3 Self-Writing and Political Emotions: Change from Without

In literature, which encompasses both language art and emotional art, the emotional expression remains a significant aspect which cannot be ignored during textual analysis (Parente, Conklin, Guyand and Scott, 2021; Li, 2022). Ahmed (2013) in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* argues that texts are born out of emotions and emotions are psychological as well as social. Further Ahmed asserts that emotions are part of world-making where narratives are formed by norms and social ideals. Suggested in Ahmeds ideas is the fact that literature works be legitimising certain characters and episodes as sources of emotions thus initiators of attitude and change. Li (2022: 2) argues that readers "experience, perceive, recognize, understand, and summarize things with an aesthetic attitude, so the emotional expression in writers is the key factor of literary" interpretation. This study therefore questions how certain emotions are central in the readers' appreciation of *The Flame of Freedom because* there are affective aspects of coloniality. Authors have, over history,

employed diverse approaches to express complicated emotions. This enables readers to forge reflective and emotional connections with characters and plots. Johansen (2020: 185) argues that literary discourse is "designed to arouse and form" feelings in the readers so that they get charged. Emotions like fear, grief, wrath, and worry not only propel a narrative but also elucidate character motivations and society concerns. Odinga harnesses emotions to capture the reality of coloniality in Kenya and rebuke authoritarianism because emotions like "fear, anxiety, anger, guilt, remorse, shame and sorrow – are central to how individuals and collectives come to term with violence and work towards establishing peaceful societal relations" (Hutchison et al., 2024: 2).

This study argues that emotions shape the lives of oppressed people and those who hear the story of oppression are victims of attendant sentiments as well. It is necessary to interrogate how anxiety shapes the lives narrated in *The Flame of Freedom*. Odinga's narrative constructs an emotional landscape that resonates with Kenyan readers, fostering understanding and empathy while prompting reflection on specific experiences. Emotions connect to catharsis, which ensures that readers get an emotional release and new insights. Catharsis in literature purges emotions of pity and fear. Thus, this chapter shows that through emotions, the author appeals for real change and healing for those suffering oppression induced by dictatorship and poor governance. Both dictatorship and poor governance breed anxiety (Gyimah-Boadi, 2021; Rheault, 2019). Anxiety can be understood as that feeling of being worried or concerned in the face of uncertainty (LaBar, 2016). Rheault (2019: 92) argues that "of the variety of emotions experienced by humans, anxiety ranks … among the most relevant for politics." This chapter posits that emotions have been under-theorised in the Kenyan political discourse despite the centrality of the feature in Kenyan writing. Koncewicz et al. (2019) argue that "emotions are a legitimate part of the democratic process and anger and fear are not to be removed from the realm of political discourse as any such attempt would be counterfactual and counterproductive." Therefore, utterances and performance(s) in self-writing allow readers to focus on emotions around the political systems and how these emotions influence actions for or against the political establishments. Speaking against state exploitation is an act of courage, especially where citizens are "forced to deny the uncomfortable reality in silence" (Akakpo, 2024: iv). In *The Flame of Freedom*, Odinga captures his anxieties of

the failed political project by contesting the policies of Kenyatta, Moi and KANU which constricted the basic freedoms for the majority of Kenyans.

The chapter argues that the narrative explores emotions of fear, anger, frustration and rejection which gripped the subaltern masses after independence and where dissenters are regarded as "others" by their government. According to Koncewicz et al. (2019), the "other" is an enemy and, a delegitimised political player, who is supposed to be harassed and persecuted with the full force of the law. The study shows that emotions in self-writing persuade readers to take proactive actions in pursuit of democracy as a marginalised players in the body politic. In the prologue, Odinga observes that Kenyans were "so oppressed for so long" (RO:3), which prompts the urgency to challenge totalitarian exploitation. The word "so" captures the longing for liberty, hence strong feelings are evoked, and this persuades readers to work hard to change their situation.

Odinga envisions individual and collective desire for freedom and democracy from a nation characterised by debilitating authoritarianism in order to engender positive political revolution. He recalls how the Kenyan nation was forged in the furnace of colonial modernity resulting to political actions which marginalises the citizens and thus the narrative conveys "protest, opposition, and intellectual resistance" (Filho, 2024) to the remnants of colonially induced exploitation and exclusion. For instance, the narrator recounts how the Berlin Wall divided East and West Germany to illustrate how freedom and humanity can become sufferers of politically-induced barriers. He writes: "the Berlin Wall became a hated symbol of repression…dividing families and friends…for 28 years" (RO:27). The Berlin Wall can be read as a metaphor depicting the discord in Kenyan politics where repression divided Kenyans during Kenyatta and Moi epochs, generating fear and anxiety. Odinga remembers the joys of independence when Kenyan students in Germany celebrated the lowering of Union Jack and felt that "a yoke had been lifted from their] shoulders" (RO: 25). He links the history of colonialism to the neocolonial reality in order to reveal how Kenyan woes are connected to the ideology of colonialism (Aluko and Larey, 2025).

To illustrate how leaders created acrimony and divisions Odinga explains how Kenyatta used uncivil language to incite the public against those who opposed his government, telling them that he would crush dissenters "like locusts" and trample [them] under … feet" (RO:47). Kenyatta whipped emotions against KPU and its leader, Jaramogi Odinga, for advocating for good governance and fair distribution of national resources. The autophylography blames Kenyatta for evoking fear and animosity among citizens on account of opposition. The narrative, thus, generates extraordinary passions, thereby amplifying the "role of literature [in bringing] about justice and contest[ing] totalising discourses" (Lara, 1998: 68). The language of the president was meant to intimidate and through the aggressive rhetoric exclude those perceived as enemies of the state which maps well with colonial politics of domination. Therefore, *The Flame of Freedom* recalibrates political experiences in Kenya and uses artistic emotions to advocate for change thus it can be analysed as contrasting narratives of the nation (Sabao, 2021).

Narratives from marginalised spaces are meant to pursue agency, define identity and challenge domination (Workneh and Steeves, 2019; Sabao, 2021). Braid (1996:20) corroborates that narratives are born out of experience and give shape and meaning to the same experience. From Braid's assertion, narratives can confirm, negate, contest, and negotiate what happened to those whom the author talks about and why it matters to the audience. Odinga's narrative draws from his political experiences in Kenya and he explains how the same reworked his personality and political vision. He also advocates for reworking of political praxis to make the citizen responsive to the coloniality of power. Angelo (2020:65) affirms that personal and national narratives serve to voice political grievances as they can be interpreted as "political acts" because they seek to assert authority over highly controversial leadership. The controversies of opposition parties, tribal oathing, political assassinations, the failed 1982 coup, and political detentions are narrated with a sense of fear and terror. Fear was exploited by the government to ensure conformity and scare state critics. Odinga notes that expatriate journalists who reported oathing in central Kenya were deported. Thus, media houses "were keen to avoid upsetting the status quo" (RO: 47). Consequently, many newspapers evaded publishing news and views that were critical of the KANU rule. The gagging of press and fear created by KANU are unbottled so that the author can initiate anti-oppressive discourse and engender "lasting effect on beliefs, attitudes and values"

(Matemba, 2026). Odinga narrates how the state machinery eroded any chances of the opposition to publicise its political ideologies by controlling the sate-owned VoK (Voice of Kenya) radio. The voice that was broadcasted across the nation was that of government because any other diverging voice was considered subversive. The weaponisation of press in Kenya during the last days of KANU rule was aimed at stifling democracy because it inhibited the liberal and neoliberal visions of freedom something rooted in coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2017).

,

Odinga shifts to the hierarchical relationship between the government and KPU party and captures Kenyatta scoffing KPU members as communists. Labelling them communists meant that opposition figures were enemies of the state and this made the opposition vulnerable to harassment from pro-government groups. The narrator observes that:

> KPU property, offices and vehicles were looted and destroyed. There was no arrests. KPU leaders were physically assaulted and Jaramogi was subjected to a strip search at the border on his return from a trip to Uganda. Passports were withdrawn. The KPU faced constant allegations of subversion and sedition. (RO:47)

This extract arouses pity from readers regarding how KPU was treated and inspires Kenyans to demand multiparty democracy which Kenyatta prevented. The excerpt also reflects how political intolerance invaded the body politic. Detention of the leaders allied to KPU is captured in a mood that signals exclusion, thereby suggesting the defeat of democracy. Odinga observes that when Jaramogi was arrested, he felt "helpless and desolate" (RO:51) and the same captures the general feeling in the country. A feeling of hopelessness is created where political competition was criminalised. In Luo Nyanza, "KANU supporters were promoted and […] KPU supporters were downgraded" (RO:47), creating inter/intra-ethnic animosity and eroding chances of a common struggle to end political exploitation. The narrator infuses the story with feelings of victimhood to disparage state-sanctioned exclusion and to reveal colonial matrix of power that characterised KANU party. The emotions in this story are personal as well as communal and the narrator is a conveyor of all these feelings. These emotions are wrought by Odinga to initiate political action against oppressive KANU regime by the politically excluded masses.

Literary sociologists argue that society and individuals are the resources of literature where the "real" outer world is interpreted by an author to produce a literary text (Eagleton, 1988). This school of thought considers literature a tool of reflecting society – history, culture, politics, economics and generally the social realities. This connects to the idea of mimesis advanced by Aristotle in his treatise; *Poetics*. Odinga's autophylography imagines, reflects, and interprets the Kenyan political mood from the perspective of the narrator to voice political grievances of isolation and marginalisation or acts which subjected the citizens to "oppression and repression" (RO:399). The narrator re-imagines citizens marginalised because of ethnicity, opinion, political orientation, race and class and how the same affect their relationship with the state. He suggests that a sense of patriotism was eroded by government actions and, thus, he recreates a victimised identity by narrating the attitude of the state towards its critics. For instance, the assassination of J.M. Kariuki and the insecurity which followed is blamed on those around Kenyatta. Odinga claims that it occasioned "anxiety and panic" (RO:65) as citizens were scared to ask questions. Those depicted as fearless like J.M Kariuki voiced strong anti-corruption sentiments and claimed that greed was transforming Kenya into "a nation of 10 millionaires and 10 million beggars" (RO: 65). These pronouncements by J.M Kariuki and the fate that befell him allow the citizens to connect with both the message and messenger forming an identity because narratives of trauma constitute communities (Hutchison et al., 2024). Thus, Odinga's narrative seeks to recover the identity of those pro-people politicians through art by recounting their experiences and feelings. Through the photo of Dedan Kimathi placed between page 98 and 99, the autophylography immortalises those who died in struggle and whom Odinga believes are "martyrs of … [the] liberation of our country" (RO:99). By listing Dedan Kimathi, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, Titus Adungosi, Tom Mboya and Pinto Gama among others, who lost their lives as they struggled for a better nation, the narrator historicises nationalistic efforts for those who did not live to tell their story thus generating an autophylography. *The Flame of Freedom* can therefore be read as a historical narrative conceived from a communal perspective with the objective of rewriting national history where citizens isolate the heroes from the villains. It evokes specific feelings to show heroic achievements aimed at promoting democracy and good governance. While commenting on opposition voice(s) in matters of good governance, the narrator recounts how Jaramogi answered Oloitiptip (Moi's Cabinet Minister) that he was "like the other collaborators, home guards and reactionaries during [the] colonial era" (RO: 85). In describing Oloitiptip as such, the narrator's intention is to provoke detest

against the minister (Oloitiptip) and the KANU system that he served. Associating Oloitiptip with colonial exploitation arouses in readers feelings of disgust and persuades them to resent KANU just like they detested colonialists. The narrator invites readers to associate the evils of neocolonial times with KANU leaders thereby expanding the discourse about political reforms. Epistemic turn and the ethics of decolonial reflexivity suggest that human beings are conditioned to feel the way they feel by a specific culture thus the emotions generated in *The Flame of Freedom* are cultural thus part of indigenous process (Hutchson et al., 2024).

Odinga's narrative merges both national and private concerns, consequently giving the author's overall vision of democracy and opening new frontiers for collective action. Political anxieties are incorporated in the story to inspire the people towards a shared demand for political inclusion. Charles Njonjo, the Minister for Constitutional Affairs, had advised those agitating "to form another party *or should* go elsewhere" (RO:91). Any avenue for fruitful engagement was closed. Expulsion from KANU meant one would remain in political oblivion as long as Moi was at the helm. KANU government actions generated new identities for those who opposed the government and it resulted in some critics going into exile because they dreaded state retaliation. Kenyan exiles faced several uncertainties because the exit was also some sort of fugitive-ness as narrated by Odinga when he escaped to Norway through Uganda. His journey from Nairobi to Kampala was marked by crafting convenient false identities to camouflage himself from the Kenyan police. In Kampala, he also feared that the "Ugandan government might deport him back to Kenya" (RO: 179) because the BBC radio had reported that "a leading Kenyan dissident wanted by Kenyan authorities had escaped to Uganda" (RO:179). From the analysis of this episode, the narrator's isolation had caused apathy, numbness and depression. Dissidents were all those who resisted KANU's unfairness. Thus, this narrative embodies political resistance. This is also supported by Mutie et al. (2018:477) who assert that self-writing from oppressed groups creates an identity quite unique from that assigned by the dominant group. The emotions the narrator inculcates through the story enable readers to conceive two binary identities: the exploiters and the exploited. Thus, he orchestrates "Us/Them" divisions. The exploited always struggle against the exploiters and hostile relationships abound. Although Odinga cannot be accorded the label subaltern, the concerns about governance which played out during the struggle were of benefit to the

marginalised citizens – who were subalterns. Odinga can be said to be amplifying the suppressed voices.

Odinga represents the excluded and thus constructs for himself the identity of the Biblical Joshua, (a leader) ready to lead the exploited Kenyan people to the land of "peace, unity, stability and prosperity" (RO: 4). Metaphors of redemption here translate the neocolonial exploitation and emphasise the urgency of decolonisation (Veracini, 2022). Veracini (2022: 26) argues that the use of metaphors "can support a revolutionary decolonial pedagogy" hence Odinga insinuates that previous governments had failed the citizens in realising the original independence dreams. He then offers himself to actualise those differed dreams unto the promised land. He however suggests that, like the journey undertaken by the Biblical Joshua, there are agonies on "the long difficulty road ahead" (RO: 4) and calls for determination. To marshal the emotional backing of the exploited, the narrator describes the exploiters using derogatory adjectives – this arouses disgust and anger towards them. He also invokes images of slavery, so as to comment on the depth of political and economic exploitation and to simultaneously mobilise the masses against these oppressive colonial practices. Odinga's analogies, in this regard, are best captured by Neutel and Kartzow (2020: 5) who argue that the Bible has been immersed in contemporary political struggles to comment on "fundamental political issues such as liberalism, rights and justice." It also ensures affective experience of the crisis for the exploited have always generated feelings against the exploiter because both inhabit zones of "reciprocal exclusivity" (Fanon, 1963: 38).

Emotions evoked from Kenya's past are critical in scaling up liberation discourse in Odinga's narrative. Drawing from a postcolonial world that has been transformed by colonialism and neo-colonialism, the narrator relies on history, contemporary dynamics and experiences to imagine aesthetics of revolution. Terry et al. (2024: 2) "affirm that the stories that we tell ourselves about the world create frames for how people live and act in the world. This resonates with Connerton (1989:1) who claims that "we conserve our recollections by referring to the material milieu that surrounds us. It is to our social spaces – those which we occupy, which we frequently retrace with our steps." Connerton's view suggests that memories are products of places and memory-generated-narratives are individually and communally meaningful if we relate the stories to both

personal and communal experiences. Connerton does not, however, explain the feelings associated with this space despite the fact that how people perceive, think and respond to the world eventually contribute to their habits and ultimately their actions. This section argues that in story-worlding, authors create spaces where they centre the past to challenge existing exploitation and hierarchical power structures.

In the arousal of varying emotions, Odinga's narrative contests nationhood, exclusion, powerlessness and neocolonialism because "emotions, positive and negative, have always been a fundamental element of acting politics" (D'Ambrosio, 2022: 102). His narrative uses emotions to initiate political change because "emotions play a key role in […] political and legislative action" (D'Ambrosio, 2022: 105). Mutie et al. (2018:478) argue that *The Flame of Freedom* has given Odinga an opportunity to re(de)construct the Kenyan elitist narrative, thus availing oppositional critical consciousness. For oppositional discourse to generate the required action, the narrative projects oppositional emotions as well. As part of the commitment to take Kenyans to political prosperity (promised land) or what he calls *Canaan*, Odinga scripts "a parallel between Kenya's second liberation and the Biblical journey of the Israelis from captivity" (Wabende, 2021:118). Odinga demonstrates that the joy of freedom and the fear of captivity are necessary emotions. The promised land that Odinga envisions has been that of "achieving the dreams of our founding fathers, eliminating poverty, ignorance, disease and bad governance…and establishing a viable democratic state" (RO:300), something which preoccupied Kenyan nationalists in the pre-independence days. Thus, the narrator suggests that these ideals, as envisioned by the freedom fighters, continue to be missing in the existing political order and thus arouses emotions of disgust among the citizens.

The ideology of freedom and democracy in Kenya has been a fertile ground for literary productions (Bargár, 2025; Taoua and Musila, 2023; Fagunwa, 2019). The colonial past is taken by various writers as the bedrock on which to advance the idea of inclusion, liberty and justice in the nation. For example, Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965*)*, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and *Dreams in a Time of War: A childhood Memoir* (2010) are stories that recount Kenyan

history, selecting from both personal and collective experiences. In these texts, liberty is a prominent thematic concern. Even though Ngugi's novels are fictional accounts, they have a common subject with Odinga's autophylographical narrative, *The Flame of Freedom*. From the two writers, there is an impression that experiences of the present are largely dependent upon knowledge of the past. Thus, history is a crucial aesthetic reservoir for literary writers. Indeed, emotions are an outcome of specific experiences and, as such, are connected to history. For example, Mutie et al. (2018:497) maintain that Ngugi's play, *I will Marry When I Want*, is a critique of the "poisoned gift of independence" in Kenya, where the promise of a better life has become a miserable present and uncertain future. In the title of the play, readers identify emotions of defiance as the author harps on the freedom of choice. Like Ngugi, Odinga utilises literature to serve his community and to recover the Kenyan past that was repressed, destroyed, and altered by colonialism. To do so, he captures the fears that the citizens experienced as they struggled for democracy.

In *The Flame of Freedom,* the story of the subjugated (subaltern) is heard as Odinga writes what Sylivia Wynter (2015) calls disasterscapes (the unparalleled catastrophe for our species) where human suffering is imagined. Glynn & Cupples (2024) argue that the people and communities inhabiting these disasterscapes have been struggling to develop counter-praxes of collective cultural resilience and survival in the face of the many catastrophes wrought over the centuries by coloniality. Thus, this project argues that Odinga documents political detentions and government purge on pro-democracy activists as a tactic of survival in the face depressing coloniality. For instance, the narrator describes *Nyayo House* dungeons as a "veritable hell on earth" (RO:142) to generate feelings of resentment, and fear of the place and unending anguish that prison had become. The narrator compares his situation to the one projected in Dante's *Inferno* with pain and suffering as integral to prison life. The grief experienced by those suspected of being KANU critics is made palpable in the manner in which they were "tortured until they died, others until they were unable to take anymore…or simply to get the agony to stop, they broke down and signed false confessions" (RO;142). Here, the narrator deliberately uses emotive and vivid language to make police interrogations petrifying. The resultant mood of hopelessness and despair created arouses pity in readers, who subsequently loathe KANU which always accused pro-democracy activists

"of seeking to provoke anarchy" (RO: 158). The emotions of fear impel readers to empathise with the exploited citizens-Kenya's political subalterns thus fear becomes a catalyst for revolution.

The ruling class and KANU government used terror to control and manipulate the citizens. Kuria (1991: 117) expresses his disgust of government actions against innocent Kenyans as follows:

> Journalists have been stoned, beaten, and jailed; magazines seized; and over 30,000 Nairobi shanty dwellers ruthlessly evicted from their homes. Even people seen doing nothing more than wearing T-shirts with multiparty slogans have been arrested!

In detailing the coercion, threats, violence, murder, detention and torture that Moi and his KANU government committed against all those who opposed the government, *The Flame of Freedom* instigates the people to rise against all common evils perpetuated by KANU. The writing is characterised by "repressed negative energy" (Scott, 2019: 15) which, nonetheless, generates a combative atmosphere captured by the narrator when he observes that the Kenyan activists "were thinking along the lines of the Iranian revolution" (RO: 89). A sense of revolution pervades the whole story as the narrator conveys the feelings of hate that the victims felt towards their tormentors. Subaltern studies attest to the fact that there are many versions of reality and Odinga's version is one among many others in the Kenyan political space. The reality expressed by Odinga is through emotions of "strong sentiments of disillusionment, unfulfillment, and depression" (Zani and Momesso, 2021:3) where citizens felt betrayed by their leaders. These paralysing emotions have consigned the citizens to despair and permanent silence because "the country was in too great a state of fear to pose questions" (RO:91). By injecting these national anxieties into his narrative, Odinga's story (re)writes the subaltern experiences and assigns them an attendant emotion so that the exploited take action to remedy their own suffering. In disseminating this revolutionary fervour, those who shared the same vision with the writer would rise against KANU dictatorship:

> Kenyans! If today you feel the same passion I feel for my country; if you want the same things I want, the same things I have fought for all my life; if you share my dream, if you share my will, if you share my determination; if you want us as a nation, to grow into what our forefathers dreamt of, WE CAN WIN. (RO:4).

The excerpt above catalogues specific emotions substantially meant to inspire the oppressed citizens to agitate for positive political change. Addressing the exploited in this way is also significant for the manner in which it identifies with them thus it infuses the story with a sense of communalism. In the same excerpt, Odinga engages with the "affective dimensions of revolution" (Lawson, 2021:2) by affirming his resoluteness to create a new humanity, devoid of power hierarchies bequeathed to the Kenyan people by colonialism and the subsequent neocolonialism. Therefore, in the process of writing a personal story, Odinga contributes to a performance of emotions aimed at undoing subalternity.

From a decolonial perspective, Odinga unmasks and critiques the continued power relations that took root during colonisation and the prolongation of these inhuman situations in the postcolonial period generally capturing the "incomplete decolonisation process" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:13). He notes that after independence the KANU government allowed the powerful to "accumulate *abnormal* wealth at the expense of the poor" (RO:40). Khamis (2018) believes that the narrative of corruption in Kenya is never complete without an account of British colonialism which introduced corruption and embedded it into the African society. Khamis narrates how Kenyatta was involved in every kind of corruption including poaching, land grabbing and fraud thus the first president was not able to control corruption. This situation entrenched inequalities and the masses felt excluded because they did not an avenue to benefit.

It is this unequal distribution of wealth which fuelled disenchantment and created a chasm between the powerful and the powerless that eventually shook the foundations of the new nation. The failed 1982 coup happened because of "a deeply repressive political atmosphere marked by brutal detentions" (RO: 95). The feelings surrounding the coup are captured as occasioning "a sigh of relief" (RO: 95), suggesting a huge burden on the nation. Odinga elevates the pluriversal story of the pain of Kenya's democratic struggle and disrupts the single story of liberation purveyed by the KANU government. To achieve this, he unites the sociopolitical and literary aesthetic world through invoking emotions to best capture exploitation of the masses and the urgency to battle totalitarianism. In *The Flame of Freedom*, the Kenyan nation emerges as socially constructed despite the "I" narrative point of view because the narrator is the voice of the silenced masses.

When the narrator visited Jaramogi at Embakasi Police Station he "felt sympathy and grief for his suffering and anger towards his tormentors" (RO: 61). This is what the citizens felt regarding the treatment of opposition leaders by government because Odinga writes from a weak position so as to discard the position. To fully convey the general feelings of the masses, Odinga revisits history from the colonial to post-colonial period showing where, how and when things went wrong regarding collective and individual liberties. He illustrates how Kenyans were gripped by various emotions such as hope at independence to postcolonial anxieties and despair. He advises that Kenyans take the torch of struggle from the previous generations, aware of the arduous task ahead:

> The task of keeping the flame of freedom burning had been passed to us …so that one day, the Kenyan dream, in all its glory, would become reality. It's the dream of fundamentally transformed society, not only in our land but across the entire African continent (RO:4).

The above vignette defines the title of Odinga's text and the overall spirit of his narrative as speaks from a marginal position (Mutie et al., 2018). This extract calls for a sense of courage and commitment to achieve the original independence vision. The narrator recounts national failures and political blunders as he rebukes the elite for their inability to guarantee the citizens their basic freedoms and political progress promised at independence. His voice becomes a crusade for social, political and economic justice where the "poisoned chalice of independence" (Nugent, 2012:7) brought nothing but grief and frustration to the majority of Kenyans. In this respect, the autophylography promotes the post-independence spirit of freedom and its readers appraise the very immediate concerns of the citizens by making the "unrecognisable resistance becomes recognisable" (Spivak, 2005:478). In picking the common feelings, the narrator succeeds in forging an identity couched in the collective hence he emerges as a freedom fighter and an advocate for positive change. Indeed, *The Flame of Freedom* recounts the personal experiences and those of the narrator's compatriots with the aim of rebuking the mistreatment of political opponents and illuminating the pitfalls of Kenyan nationhood. By identifying with the suffering masses, Odinga projects himself as part of "us," thus succeeds in appealing to the subalterns in demanding for change. Odinga may not qualify as a subaltern but he was in a privileged position to "see the effect of power on subaltern subjects (Mutie et al., 2018: 476) and his autophylography can be read as survival literature. His story invites readers to participate in condemning evils of dictatorship in

Kenya. He illustrates how emotions were crucial in wrestling with KANU authoritarianism. The narrator succeeds in creating what Rosenwein (2006) calls an emotional community with the exploited Kenyans thus propagating a shared ethic and vision for freedom. In conclusion, Odinga's autophylography demonstrates the importance of unique, inchoate internal states in shaping experiences by detailing the fundamental sentiments of marginalised individuals. The narrative speaks for the citizens who were betrayed by the political class and who could not be the subject of their story since to be marginalized to a dominant culture is also to have little or no say in the construction of one's socially acknowledged identity (Perkins, 2000). By harnessing emotions Odinga mooted for political change because affective decolonisation recognises the complex nature of coloniality and also shapes what "individuals and collectives can and cannot feel, think, be and do" (Hutchson et al., 2024: 16).

4.4 Colonial and Neocolonial Experience(s)

The legacy of colonialism continues to invite diverse emotions and philosophical reactions due to the lasting impact on Kenya (Ndege, 2009; Odhiambo, 2025). This historical episode was marked by grave violations of the rights of the black people, stemming from Britain's unwavering commitment to maintain hold of the colony. In addition to the political oppression experienced, colonialism also consolidated inequalities and modes of exploitation that persist to the present day. These colonial systems and their residues created a state of coloniality. In fact, African people are still chasing the "absent" present captured as "normalised abnormality whereby issues of African identity formation, nation-building and state-construction, knowledge production, economic development and democratisation remained unfinished projects mainly because of their entrapment within colonial matrices of modern global power" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a: xi). Hence, *The Flame of Freedom* delves into the history of colonialism so as to connect the past with the present and to craft a vision for Kenya's political future.

Odinga's narrative revisits the malevolence of colonialism when he recounts how racial segregation was a defining feature of African life at the time when the narrator and his brother Oburu began school. He observes that Komulo was "the only African school in Kisumu at a time when schools were racially segregated" (RO:12). Racial segregation in Kenyan schools was as a

result of the colonial system, which perpetuated and sustained the myth that Africans were inferior to the whites, thus suited to inferior education. Colonialism was premised around subordination, where non-European races were perceived as the antithesis of "reason, man, progress and the nation" (Mahmud, 1998: 1221). Racism thus affected Africans negatively. Odinga recounts the genesis of the frosty relationship between the narrator's father and the then Alliance High School Principal, Carey Francis, who promoted the policy of "unequal treatment for European and African staff members" (RO:15). This happened during the time when Jaramogi Odinga was a teacher at Maseno School where Carey Francis was the headmaster. The story of Carey Francis adds to the list of woes of segregation and hierarchical stratification of society based on race as perpetuated by the minority whites during colonial era. The colonial matrix of power is the basis of the friction between Jaramogi and Carey Francis and is also to blame for son's failure to get a good school, after he passed well in his primary school examination. The narrator remembers the episodes of racially induced marginalisation of the people so as to criticise Europe's liberal discourses of equality, rights, and inclusion which he could not reconcile within the colonial policies. The story also provokes readers to link the post-independence inequalities and rights violations to the colonial mindset which persisted after colonialism. Sharing lived experiences is one decolonial strategy of dismantling different forms of subjugation (Samuel and Ortiz, 2021).

The narrator's disdain for colonialism is further illustrated in the story of Ogot K'Ogot, who worked as a steward of a white man in Nairobi. Odinga describes how Ogot was well versed with European housekeeping customs but got tired of being a servant, and particularly of having to look after a cat which his employer kept. In case Ogot was late to feed the cat, his employer would scold him abusively. Finally, "Ogot cooked the cat and served it up for dinner. After his employer had enjoyed his meal, he asked where the cat was … He was fired" (RO: 11). This story illustrates the overall frosty race relations that existed between the natives and the whites and becomes a metaphor of resisting subjugation and exploitation. According to Thibodeau et al. (2019:1) metaphors are pervasive in everyday communication and serve to "help people communicate complex topics, communicate efficiently and influence others." Therefore, in the story of Ogot, Odinga invites his audience to see British colonialists as brutal, inhuman and exploitative thus deserving retribution from their oppressed subjects as illustrated by the actions of Ogot. The

narrative re-imagines such allegorical stories to illustrate how loathsome colonialism was, hence *The Flame of Freedom* is read as a decolonial effort of rehumanising a people already degraded by British exploitation and suppression. The narrative evokes the rhetoric of liberty to those people inhabiting the zone of non-being as illustrated by colonial patterns of mistreatment and through the account of Ogot, Odinga provokes action.

The arrest of Ochieng Oneko, alongside Kenyatta in what historically became the Kapenguria Six during the Mau Mau suppression, brings immense despair to the narrator. Mau Mau was a bitter armed struggle pitting Africans against white settlers mainly in the white highlands. Elkins (2005:22-4) argues that from an African perspective, "race based political and economic exploitation justified the war" against the British. The narrator criticises the wanton killing of African leaders during the struggle for independence (Elkins, 2005b). He recounts the assassination of Ambrose Ofafa, a prominent City of Nairobi councillor, to illustrate how colonialism was heartless and set to destroy those opposed to British occupation. The arbitrary arrests and destruction of African lives are narrated to express the general anger the people had towards colonial domination. The inclusion of Oneko and Ofafa in the Mau Mau narrative in this autophylography reworks the anticolonial history and gives it a national flavour as opposed to the narrow British history which analysed the revolt as a Kikuyu affair (Elkins, 2005b). Although the narrator was young when the armed conflict began, he revisits the discourse to applaud the Mau Mau spirit – a spirit of freedom. This watershed period in Kenya's colonial history later invigorated Odinga's dreams of freedom.

The narrator received education both at home and at school. He avers that in those days, education "did not depend only on school" (RO: 15), implying that he learned politics and what was happening in Africa from his father Jaramogi and other nationalists. He remembers that his father and other elders would talk about "what the white man was doing and what the black man was doing" (RO: 13). Their conversations illustrate unequal relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. The narrator recounts the activities of his father because the same would later define the political direction of young Odinga. He tells how his father travelled across East Africa, introduced him to the politics of the region and totally transformed his perceptions about liberation

politics. His political identity is well captured by Harris (1996:184), who argues that whatever "significant others encounter is crucial in the attempt to establish or achieve an identity." Thus, it can be concluded that the narrator's identity was shaped by the activities of his father. Sow (2010:499) argues that narratives of childhood "are responsive to historical junctures…exploring repressive situation, or racial, gender or/and class prejudice, recalling the drama of early life and character formation." These assertions illustrate that the masses in the colonial and post-colonial world play a great role in the formation of national and political identity.

In *The Flame of Freedom*, the narrator reclaims the political ideals of his father as contained in *Not Yet Uhuru* mainly because Jaramogi home-schooled Odinga in Kenyan politics. It thus elevates authoritative discourse which endured turmoil because it was "the word of the fathers" (Hove 2009: 53) – direct learning from the past generation. Odinga's narrative is structured around the political discourse of liberation where he contests the predominant power structure, primarily what was adopted from the colonialists. Political discourse persuades and influences people to take particular actions in life (Barasa, Moinani and Khasandi-Telewa, 2023). Thus, Odinga's liberation narrative excites the masses to promote and seek freedom and justice. From his autophylography, dedication to a revolution is a direct outcome of political isolation and exploitation. *The Flame of Freedom* can, therefore, be read as part of the broader rhetoric of African struggles against colonialism and neocolonial dictatorship. Through (re)membering colonialism, the text revisits the unfinished agenda of freedom in the post-independence phase and debunks coloniality.

Colonial education fostered nationalism and reworked identities in many African countries (Lancaster, 2025). To prepare for independence, Odinga chronicles how his father took him to East Germany for higher education. The narrator's father knew that education would prepare Odinga "for the future life means… give him command of himself" (Dewey, 1981: 457) and prepare him for Kenyan independence. During his sojourn, Odinga meets other students from Africa in Cairo who were also going to Europe for studies in anticipation of serving their countries after independence and "talked a lot of politics. It was the height of liberation era" (RO: 17). Okoth (1984:46) explains that "many young Kenya Africans did not have the opportunities in the racist colonial education system." Thus, studying in Europe ensured that Africans gained the necessary

skills to function in the civil service when Europeans exited. Jaramogi had the insights about the liberating power of education. Sanga (2017:2) states that education is a tool of liberation for both individual and society. Odinga's pursuit of education in Germany is a way of lighting 'the flame of freedom' even though scholars argue that colonial education produced agents of colonialism and promoted entitlement where the educated looked down upon the illiterate countrymen (Lancaster, 2025; Wamwere, 2002; Ngugi, 1986). *The Flame of Freedom* demonstrates how after independence, colonialism mutated into neocolonialism, thus extending exploitation beyond 1963. The narrator advises on the urgent need to reverse the situation through "quality leadership and citizen involvement" (RO: 402). By introducing a narrative of colonialism and subsequent resistance, Odinga crafts a resistance identity which is in active opposition to "alienation and exclusion" (Olivier, 2019:5). He illustrates how colonialism eroded the collective sense of "justice, peace, stability and true development" (RO: 398), hence the need for the counter discourse. The narrator re-engages with the discourse of colonialism to promote the ideology of freedom and to make citizens conscious because failure to acknowledge the "shared" history of oppression may result in grave failures even where the intentions are good.

To this end, the narrative attributes the post-independence crisis in Kenya to the colonial era as the new ruling class became "preoccupied in enjoying the pomp and splendour formerly reserved for the colonial master" (RO: 41). Odinga questions the significance of Kenyan independence because relationships between those who took the reins of power and ordinary citizens mirror the old story of master and native (slave) during colonial days. In fact, Odinga's narrative shows a "wave of democratisation, the end of the Cold War and the final decadence and obsolescence of colonialism and imperialism" (Balestrini, 2015:211) with the intention of dismantling internal colonialism and other negating Western isms. He attributes the "political, social and economic" (RO: xiii) challenges faced by ordinary citizens, persisting long after independence, to the impacts of colonialism and neocolonialism. The autophylography can then be understood as a process of literary worlding – creating spaces where others are valued and treated equally.

Political exploitation and disenfranchisement are illustrated in KANU's restriction of political participation to the majority of the citizens who were treat ed "as seditious agitators who must be

crushed" (RO: 40) in the post-independence period. Murunga, Okello and Sjogren (2014: 4) state that "When the presidency encountered resistance to its centralising agenda in parliament, not only were the dissenting voices hounded out of parliament, others were detained, assassinated or fled into exile, leaving behind a system of politics that reproduced exclusion and impunity." Consequently, the citizens felt frustrated by this upsetting reality and were disheartened by the entire post-independence national project. This came even as KANU lied that Kenya was a democracy and was "following the wishes of the people […] since 1963" (RO: 90-1). The autophylography unsettles the neocolonial misinformation to transform the condition of the subaltern Kenyans. This way, it spurs a new movement in pursuit of freedom guided by Fanon's philosophy that "each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it" (RO: 403). The narrative re-imagines true liberation achieved via self-discovery and then a restoration of humanity for all victims of state brutality. Therefore, the autophylography is "a bridge to the Kenyan dream" (RO:3) of freedom. In his foreword to the *Flame of Freedom*, Olusegun Obasanjo observes that that Odinga's story is about "Kenya's and Africa's political, social and economic emancipation" (RO: xiii). Obasanjo ties Odinga's narrative to that of his father in *Not Yet Uhuru* (1967) and the overall pan-African spirit of African independence. *Not Yet Uhuru* has been celebrated as an act of injecting a dose of Mau Mau rhetoric into Jaramogi's story of anti-colonial discourse to depict the collective amnesia after the post-independence government condemned the freedom fighters (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2003; Angelo, 2020). That way, Kenyatta's tyranny and repression is retold in *Not Yet Uhuru* to illustrate how his reign was a replica of colonialism. Odinga picks after his father and chronicles the evils of KANU under Moi and the oppression that confronted the citizens at the time. The narrative can be understood as a subaltern idealisation to "resist and mount a challenge to hegemonic structures that encroach and sustain the materiality of domination" (Mutie, Kamau-Goro and Rutere 2017:476). This, in turn, makes *The Flame of Freedom* a political act of resistance, which tells alternative experiences out of the unsuccessful project of Kenyan independence.

There is an intimation in Odinga's autophylography that true freedom has remained elusive after the 1963 political independence because internal colonialism engendered newer, worse and varying forms of "invisible colonialisms" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:5). Odinga shows that these

"invisible colonialisms" are linked to the core impediments of progress namely, "ignorance, poverty, disease and governance" (RO: 292) which have remained unresolved long after "flag independence" (Bandarage, 2003: 61). Odinga draws parallels between the colonial state and the post-independence nation to illustrate an elusive African freedom dream that was promised during the struggle. He blames the scenario for producing national "others" in the country. Crane (1998:61) considers ''othering'' as "a process …through which identities are set in an unequal relationship." The ruling elite and citizens in colonial and post-independence Kenya have consistently failed to regard one another as equals, resulting in the perpetual othering and marginalisation of the masses. Mutie et al. (2017: 478) assert that Odinga has always been treated as "the other" by Kenyatta and Moi governments, thus his autophylography is a narrative of resistance. Part of Odinga's project in *The Flame of Freedom* is therefore to 'de-other' those who live on the political margins in the post-independence state. The narrator demonstrates how colonialism bequeathed to Africa black exploiters and rouses the suppressed masses to resist mistreatment and march towards complete decolonisation because until liberty is achieved "*Uhuru* has no meaning" (RO: 42). The narrator and other like-minded citizens aimed to "open up the democratic space, resist political repression and replace a dictatorship" (RO: 89) through either constitutional agitation or popular rebellion. Political groupings and even civil organisations were denied registration "in the interest of peace, welfare or good order … likely to suffer prejudice by reason of your registration" (RO: 87), effectively curtailing the right to association. The situation obtaining in post-independence Kenya, then, is better captured by Langat (2008: 91), who opines that the "masses are still waiting for *Uhuru*." *The Flame of Freedom* restores national dignity by confronting "charlatans, quislings, philistines and … vultures" (RO: 131) likely to destroy collective freedom. From this perspective, Odinga's narrative is a story of heroes and villains of independence.

Odinga reckons that Kenya's independence re-engineered newer forms of domination and exploitation or what Nkrumah (1965) calls neo-colonialism. Neocolonialism occurs when Western powers continue to exploit and control their former colonies and, by so doing, ensure economic, cultural and political manipulation, which undermines independence. Odinga succinctly captures this phenomenon, when he observes that many of Kenya's challenges after 1963 were due to "over-

reliance on Western countries" (RO: 42). This view is shared by Meyer (2015: 66), who observes that after Kenya got independence,

> Kenyatta continued political lines created during British rule. Although there was a socialist party ideal, Kenyatta relied heavily on the West for economic support, and combined with his personal style of government and his retention of colonial systems, including the civil service, education, police, and administration, led to the belief that the African elite had replaced Europeans and little had changed for the population.

The situation described above, coupled with the retention of colonial home-guards and collaborators in the public service, angered those who directly fought for independence. The retaining of colonial legal structures and political systems ensured continued domination and exploitation of the masses by the ruling elite after independence. Consequently, the ordinary citizens felt politically frustrated, excluded, powerless and thus a renewed desire to confront this neocolonial oppression. These frustrations compelled those disgruntled with KANU's policies to form alternative political parties to campaign "against neocolonial authoritarianism that saw their leaders imprisoned tortured and killed" (Lockwood, 2026: 105). Jaramogi formed KPU and accused the KANU government of "forgetting those who had fought for freedom" (RO: 43). Kenyatta's ideologies changed immediately after independence and he changed the doctrine that was contained in *Facing Mount Kenya* (Lockwood, 2026) with the landless, the poor, the powerless and the marginalised remaining as such. Pre-independence concerns were swept under the carpet and new forms of coloniality or other colonialism thrived (Lockwood, 2026).

Detention without trial to quell dissent was a common practice after independence, and Jaramogi became the first casualty (Lockwood 2026). Prominent writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o was also arrested because his play, *Ngahiika Ndenda* (*I will Marry When I Want*) criticised the KANU government's capitalism and betrayal of freedom fighters. The narrator uses these two examples to illustrate how colonial habits crept back after independence where those who advocated for "popular support and popular mobilisation" (RO: 38) were branded enemies …they found themselves excluded and detained. The narrator especially blames the British government for the exclusion campaigns, which led to the "othering" of a section of Kenyans through the communal oathing. The narrative reveals how politicians were demonised for their politically progressive

ideas simply because they did not belong to "the House of Mumbi" (RO: 40), which meant entrenching political power in the Kikuyu community, thus ethnic mistrust began destroying the national fabric. Whoever disseminated dissenting opinions was vilified by the KANU machinery and afterwards became a candidate for detention under The Prevention of Public Security Act, a legislation which was similar to the one that "granted the colonial governor *powers to handle* Mau Mau emergency" (RO: 44). Odinga highlights the colonial law to disparage independence since KANU was using laws inherited from Britain to oppress its citizens after 1963 (Melles, 2025).

After Moi rose to power, he released all political detainees and promised "not to detain anyone, else except as a last resort" (RO:83). This promise was short-lived; not only because he was a faithful disciple of Kenyatta but also because he was exceedingly hostile to criticism. Adar (2000:75) argues that, like Kenyatta, Moi's style of leadership involved "centralisation and personalisation of power and the state apparatus … *which* laid the foundation for dictatorship, authoritarianism and human rights violations." *The Flame of Freedom* shows that between 1981 and 1982, the country witnessed increased corruption, workers' strikes, demolitions of kiosks by Nairobi City Council, muted debates in parliament, water shortage in the city, students' unrest at the University of Nairobi and economic downturn among other challenges due to the inefficiency of President Moi's leadership. Odinga, therefore, ridicules Moi for dismissing as purveyors of "some foreign ideology" (RO:85) those who questioned his cabinet ministers about government policies. He suggests that Moi was so "intoxicated" by power that he constantly appealed to parliament to confront what he termed "unfounded allegations, intended to mislead and create discontent" (RO: 86). It is the fear of critics that moved Moi to detain and brutalise all his opponents.

Odinga recounts the suffering of political activists who chastised the ruling elite over governance failures like corruption. He observes that "allegations of corruption…the feeling that some people were above the law and growing unease about clampdown on expression (RO: 83) were some of the reasons that Moi used to detain opposition figures. For Odinga, Moi had become paranoid. During all his national speeches, he hit out at "misguided critics of government policy" (RO:85) whom he openly labelled as KANU enemies. It is for this reason that "detentions, and political

trials, tortures, arbitrary arrests, and police brutality" (Adar, 2000: 81) became common during Moi's tenure especially for those who agitated for multiparty system. The narrator observes:

> We were blocked from forming any other party, and we could not go to court to challenge this because it was now law. Public demonstrations were banned; private criticism was outlawed and any protracted armed struggle would doubtless result in endless bloodshed. We were living with repression of opinion and choice and in fear of arrest and detention (RO: 92).

This excerpt captures the stifling political environment in Kenya during the rule of Moi. These various acts of repression became entrenched in the country's supreme law through various changes in the country's constitution. Hence, Charles Njonjo, who was the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs at the time, always defended these repressive practices by arguing that they were "constitutionally provided for" (RO: 91). Murunga et al. (2014: 4) observe that constitutional changes during Moi's rule served to "entrench powers in the presidency, as well as a concomitant process of building an authoritarian structure through the provincial administration." The presidential powers which Moi acquired is what Odinga blames for failed democracy and exclusion of citizens from participating in governance.

Odinga's narrative attributes the authoritarianism described above to the 1982 failed coup. Powel et al. (2019) corroborates the view that the defeat of the coup "galvanised Moi to strengthen his hold on power and eliminate most of the vestiges of democracy". It is this consolidation of power, which saw the detention of the narrator and other critics of the government, like Koigi wa Wamwere. The current autophylography should, therefore be appreciated within this debilitating socio-political milieu where citizens were choked by dictatorship. The narrator witnessed and suffered due to political excesses of president Moi and consequently writes as an observer, a participant and a victim, thus offering a reliable account about Kenyan political history. His narrative is a way of recovering from the trauma of the pervasive violence that characterised the post-independence state. Odinga looks back at the irony of a liberation struggle, where citizens got no stake in the "fruits of independence" (Odhiambo Atieno, 2003:37-45) because after 1963, Kenyan leaders excluded the masses. The story captures the general betrayal that permeated the

Kenyan populace who felt cheated by the independence elite since their tormentors were their own black brothers.

4.5 Betrayal of the Nationalists' Dream

The history of Africa is a story of betrayal (Khamis, 2018; Melles, 2025; Lockwood 2026). First, it was by the imperialists who enslaved, colonised, brutalised and exploited the natives then by post-independence leadership who plunged the people into crushing poverty, misery and debilitating misrule. African literature is littered with themes of political perfidy and despair that gripped the citizens immediately after independence where emerging African leadership betrayed the anti-colonial vision (Mutie et al., 2018). The dream of freedom became a curse as dissenting citizens were jailed, killed or exiled in the name of protecting hard-won independence. Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), Ahmadou Kourouma's *Suns of Independence* (1968), Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977), Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* (1976) and Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) are some of the literary representations which recreate the sense of betrayal that afflicted the African people after independence. Hornsby (2012) observes that betrayal in Kenya began right before independence and can only be discerned through the interrogation of alternative (his)stories of independence. At independence most nationalists did not share the same vision as illustrated in the conflict between Kenyatta and Oginga thus the independence leadership deflected the wishes of the people. Liberalism was exported to Africa without regard for lived history and communalistic orientations hence beneath independence there were hidden controls which continues to influence production of knowledge, power and agency (Farnia, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). Hence most writers in the African continent continue to challenge the existence of the colonial power designs inherited from colonialism.

In *Betrayal in the City*, Imbuga (1976:31) re-imagines the treachery, nepotism, corruption, intolerance and political executions which led to despair in post-independence Africa. Mosese captures the disillusioned masses when he says, "It was better while we waited. Now we have nothing to look forward to. We have killed our past and we are busy killing our future." This play, just like Odinga's narrative, exemplifies a form of resistance to hegemony. Nsabimana (2021:206)

corroborates this reality that although the masses thought of better changes in socio-political organisation at independence, "they were still undermined as in the colonial period." The freedom that they dreamt of was never actualised, thus the idea of empowerment at the post-independence era remained a mirage. Branch and Cheeseman (2006: 11) assert that "under Jomo Kenyatta, the post-colonial state represented a 'pact-of-domination' between transnational capital, the elite and the executive" and that explain why the majority opinions were ignored. This assertion by Branch and Cheeseman confirms the need by the ruling elite to silence any opposition, especially those who questioned the social and economic ideologies of the state. This is validated by Farnia (2023) who observes that after independence, most of the African countries entered a new era of "black imperialism" where the masses were exploited by their fellow Africans who had become the ruling elite. This state of betrayal is the cause of political, social and economic rot in Kenya, according to Odinga in his autophylography. Mutie et al. (2018) aver that "the victory of conservative "home guards" was a betrayal of independence" in Kenya and any attempt to reverse the same was met with brutal force by the ruling elite. *The Flame of Freedom*, thus participates in the discourse of political betrayal by narrating the vanished nationalist ideals and the conundrum of independence. The clash between Kenyatta and Jaramogi illustrate one major case of post-independence betrayals where tribal, capitalistic and elitist ideologies shaped politics. Odinga reminisces how his father was an ardent campaigner at the LegCo for the release of Kenyatta from detention and suggests that elite-driven power dynamics was the bane of new nations. He notes that Jaramogi Odinga declared "support for Kenyatta at a time when many dared not speak Kenyatta's name" (RO:36) which placed him in direct clash with the colonial authorities. The efforts by Jaramogi underscore the trust that he had in Kenyatta, even as the latter and other detainees remained in colonial jail. Jaramogi's passionate appeal for Kenyatta's release marked him as a hardliner, explaining why colonial authorities unleashed propaganda claiming that Jaramogi "was funded by communist countries that would become Kenya's political masters" (RO: 37). Odinga describes how, despite colonial authorities attempts to convince him otherwise, Kenyatta named Jaramogi his Vice President in order to show the degree of faith and dedication that Jaramogi had for the country. The same episode underscores how Britain continued to influence and control major political decisions even when they had granted independence to the country.

Jaramogi fell out with Kenyatta in 1966 and formed an opposition party - Kenya People's Union (KPU) to advance his decolonisation ideologies. After this fallout, the British government created and sustained a slanderous campaign of portraying Jaramogi as a communist "plotting to take over government" (RO:40), thus putting a permanent wedge between him and Kenyatta. The British narrative is what informed most government policies and actions thus external forces influenced local politics and relations. Odinga revisits his father's resignation letter where Jaramogi had complained that "Kenyatta had not treated him properly as his deputy in state matters" (RO: 40). The detailed reminiscence of this fall out in *The Flame of Freedom* illustrates the level of betrayal felt by the narrator, Jaramogi's family, his political base and the Kenyan masses. Ross (1975:292) notes that the fallout between Kenyatta and Jaramogi brought a feeling of "political estrangement and political powerlessness." *The Flame of Freedom* recounts Jaramogi's frustrations after he established that Kenyatta had different ideas about independence and the expansion of political space. The narrator observes that Jaramogi was disenchanted "with the president and his friends and their self-enrichment" (RO:39) at the expense of the masses (Meyer, 2015). Thus, Odinga (de)constructs mainstream narratives of Kenya's freedom struggle and in the process validates the "true" heroes of independence. He lauds his father for the struggle that had remained incomplete because Jaramogi was never celebrated despite his role in the struggle for independence. In excavating stories of those who were once othered by the state, Odinga crafts a story for them thus generating an alternative story about the nation. *The Flame of Freedom* upholds that Jaramogi stood for a fair society and championed for reasonable re-distribution of national resources like land something Kenyatta opposed (Veit, 2019).

The liberal socialistic ideologies pitted Jaramogi against Kenyatta who is portrayed as a selfish wheeler-dealer who forgot "those who fought for independence" (RO:42) but instead was "creating a new class of Blundells, Delameres and Briggs" (RO:40). Odinga claims that Kenyatta was "completely preoccupied in enjoying the pomp and splendour formerly reserved for the colonial master" (RO:41) suggesting that he treated the citizens just like the colonialists were treating them. The readers are therefore confronted by the question: whose story, Kenyatta's or Jaramogi's is humanistic and decolonising? The autophylography castigates Kenyatta for failing to achieve the promises that his KANU made at independence. Odinga amplifies what his father

did for the nation and the betrayal from Kenyatta's government (Meyer, 2015). His story is thus humanistic and aims to re-organise politics and society in a once colonised people who were robbed of their resources, including land by their independence elite. He illustrates how Jaramogi's KPU was keen on redistribution of land after independence whereas Kenyatta's KANU had different ideas. The narrator retells the resignation of Oneko from Kenyatta's government. Oneko accused Kenyatta of "failing to carry out the promises made in the KANU manifesto" (RO: 41). Seemingly, Oneko was telling Kenyatta that he had betrayed the citizens.

The narrator revisits the KPU's manifesto which he claims embodied true decolonisation and resonated with the masses. According to Kamau (2016), the betrayal of the Kenyan people was in the failure to return the stolen lands for those who were landless at independence. Odinga captures the popularity of KPU in that it had offices in "all districts of Central Province except Kenyatta's Kiambu district" (RO: 42) and its popularity was due to a progressive manifesto. The deliberate inclusion of Bildad Kaggia's story in the KPU formation creates the impression that the party was broad based and transcended ethnic divisions contrary to the misrepresentations by Kenyatta's KANU. Odinga compares the two parties to inform his audience that KANU hijacked the national project at independence and proceeded to marginalise the poor citizens due to parochial interests which characterised the Kenyatta government. Through this story, Kenyatta is accused of muzzling democracy and entrenching political intolerance by "carrying on where the colonialists had left" (RO: 41) thus subjecting the people to dictatorship. This is corroborated by Okoth et al. (2021:5) who argues that Kenyatta "did not shift the colonial, sociopolitical order" therefore his government failed to entrench democracy. The history of the fallout between Kenyatta and Jaramogi is recounted to explain how ethnic mobilisation was entrenched in political competition and has ever since remained a threat to nationhood. Self-writing can be understood as a form of artistic confrontation where authors re-imagine the failures of the state (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023).

History has a bearing on people's lives and also historical trauma is "inherited" and, in some situations, informs the emotions of individuals in successive generations (Mate, 2017:93). Odinga, therefore, appears to nurse the agony of this betrayal which was experienced by his father and other freedom fighters of yore. He parallels the individual betrayal to national betrayal and blames

Kenyatta for the dearth of political vibrancy and diversity that characterised post-independence years. Odinga focalises on these episodes of Kenyan history so as to contest the one-sided national story, which vilified Jaramogi as a communist working in cahoots with foreigners to destabilise the new nation. Okoth (2021:10) observes that although Kenyatta labelled Jaramogi a communist, "both of them ran a secret joint bank account with communist funds" and thus power struggles were the source of their differences. In destabilising the official one-sided story about Jaramogi, Odinga also attracts public sympathy for his father in particular, and in general, for the opposition politicians who were denied political space in the early years of independence. In crafting a different version of the official history, Odinga inserts the people's history of struggle to the national discourse and that way participates in decolonial turn. He illustrates how, despite coloniality, the people can generate their story of struggle against exploitative power.

Odinga's autophylography reveals alternative national narratives and applauds those who were never accorded space in the official history of the nation (Ferrari, 2020). The narrator revisits the nationalistic role played by figures such as Jaramogi, Munyua Waiyaki, Kaggia, Dennis Akumu, George Anyona, Tito Adungosi, Koigi wa Wamwere and Mukaru Ng'ang'a, whose participation in the struggle has been deliberately effaced by the post-independence state. Ordinarily, those in power have control of grand narratives about the nation and many-a-time they exclude voices of dissent. Thus, Odinga's narrative represents an alternative discourse about the nation. The role of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga in Kenya's freedom struggle and KPU's participation in democratic discourses have been muted in Kenya, yet that history informs the contemporary politics and thus *The Flame of Freedom* revives this forgotten history. Odinga retells the story of Kenyatta/Jaramogi tiff to demonstrate how some of the challenges that the nation encountered after independence were totally unrelated to colonialists. In telling all these betrayals, he opens up the historical wounds for healing so that Kenyans may face the future without bitterness.

Odinga castigates the Kenyatta government for "allowing those with land to acquire more while the poor remained landless" (RO:41). In the process, he demonstrates that Kenyatta was a double-dealer who aspired to occupy the political powerhouse left by exiting colonialists because he had "acquired vast tracts of land amounting to thousands of acres" (RO:42) despite his minister Mboya

having authored Sessional Paper No. 10 in 1965 which established a ceiling on ownership of land. The actions of Kenyatta's government betrayed most freedom fighters and the Kenyan masses because the Mau Mau struggle centred around land and the process by which the natives lost it (Miyonga, 2025). Lewis (2007) argues that the loss of ancestral land in the white highlands is what stirred Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) or Mau Mau fighters to wage war against white settlers and their collaborators. Therefore, this chapter argues that *The Flame of Freedom* rewrites and recovers the concerns of those who fought for liberation but were sidelined after independence. Odinga's story contests how British narratives about Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) or Mau Mau revolution downplay the causes of the war. Middleton (1953) for instance, blames Mau Mau leadership for brainwashing unsuspecting, innocent Kikuyu into taking oaths and convincing them they had unfairly lost their land to the British settlers. Leakey's text influenced the colonial interpretation and opinion of Mau Mau revolution because it avoided the real cause of the conflict, which essentially was land and freedom. At independence, Kenyatta ignored the freedom fighters and sided with the British version of history about the Mau Mau (Melles, 2025). Edgerton (1992:216) observes that during a speech in Nakuru in 1963, Kenyatta made the following statement: "We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred towards one another. Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again." On another occasion, also in Nakuru, Kenyatta scolded Mau Mau fighters labelling them as "cowards who had gone to the forest to hide" (Wamwere, 2002:128) thereby suggesting that they are not part of the people's history. In labelling Mau Mau fighters as hooligans, Kenyatta was admitting the British interpretation of the struggle. Kenyatta thus had failed to promote a different liberative story since he advanced the colonial narrative hence reversed nationalist ideals (Miyonga, 2023).

The betrayal of Mau Mau is taunted as the major cause of the rift that rocked Kenyatta/Jaramogi relationship in the early years after independence. Odinga accuses Kenyatta of "simply carrying on where the colonialists had left off" (RO:41) since Kenyatta had "assumed wholesale the mantle of colonial authority" (RO:40), a situation that led to the creation of a new class of black imperialists (Miyonga, 2023). The narrative indicts the Kenyatta government for failing to spearhead a just land redistribution and compensation system to help the landless masses

dispossessed by colonial settlers. Odinga's criticism, thus, echoes the condemnation in *Not Yet Uhuru* where Jaramogi blames Kenyatta because he ignored those who struggled for freedom but rewarded the loyalists and the moneyed former collaborators. *The Flame of Freedom* can therefore be read as a literary challenge to hegemony through the rewriting of Kenya's hegemonic history in the version of the subaltern (Mutie et al., 2018). In Jaramogi's anecdote, Odinga recreates the image of a visionary pro-people leader that Kenya needed but never had (Mutie et al., 2018). He further describes the betrayal of his father by Kenyatta's regime in order to frame this single betrayal within larger political betrayals of the Kenyan people in the post-colonial nation. He reproaches Kenyatta for favouritism of his community, the Kikuyu, for the failure of the independence manifesto where all communities were considered equal. It is suggested that the tribal exclusion was similar to the racism witnessed in the by-gone colonial era (Opondo, 2014). Odinga remembers how appointments of Luo people in "statutory boards were revoked" (RO: 47) to capture the gravity of the marginalisation in the Kenyatta government. Odinga appears "incensed at the callousness and barbarity" (RO:51) of Jaramogi's detention owing to his father's history of struggle. He captures the social and political isolation of his father and out of frustration wonders, "Why would Kenyatta want to do this to us?" (RO:51). The collective pronoun "us" meant not just Jaramogi and those close to him but all those Kenyans whom Kenyatta had internally incarcerated through draconian colonial laws. The narrator further captures the overall sense of despair that he felt after he escorted his father to a waiting police Land rover and bid him "goodbye, and then … stood, helpless and desolate" (RO:51). The incident does not only highlight the political frustration and despair that engulfed Jaramogi's immediate family but also the pain and fears of the Nyanza community who found themselves victimised by a government that they had fought hard to establish. After the arrest and detention of Jaramogi, the narrator observes that there was "a gaping vacuum" both in Jaramogi's house and in KPU; the party that he headed (Opondo, 2014; Mukanda, 2025).

After the arrest of the patriarch, Odinga had to undertake newer responsibilities – he had to fit in the shoes of his father because his elder brother Oburu was in Russia studying for his PhD. Odinga notes:

> Besides family members and students going to school, there were many disadvantaged people who had been gathered under the wings of Jaramogi's benevolence. I did not want this extended family to feel the sudden deprivation of its charismatic and vibrant head. Oburu was in Moscow…so it was up to me to find a way to continue meeting my father's commitments. (RO: 52).

Ostensibly, this explains why Odinga, even though he was not the first born, took all the family responsibilities and became the heir of the stool of Ramogi. These experiences placed Odinga in good stead to advance his father's political ideology; the pursuit of meaningful freedom. Indeed, *The Flame of Freedom* chronicles the unfulfilled promises made by Kenyatta to show how the Kenyan vision of freedom was thwarted by those in power. The story captures how landlessness, hunger, ignorance and diseases were entrenched by the Kenyatta government thus circumventing the hope for better lives. According to Mutie (2023: 7) "political betrayal began before the union jack was dropped and the Kenyan flag was upraised at midnight on 12th December 1963." Ethnicity, corruption, dictatorship, pilferage of public resources, political assassinations and suppression of opposition were some of the ways in which Kenyatta betrayed the nationalist dream (Melles, 2025). Odinga's autophylography thus exposes the myriad betrayals in order to engineer political change and inject good governance in the body politic.

4.6 Dead Bodies have no Tales: Political Assassinations in the Postcolony

> *After Mboya, Kenya's official languages: English, Kiswahili, and Silence…There was also memory… No one would emerge to ask after men who had been erased. It was as if they had never been born…But there was also memory.* (Owour, 2014: 108). 736739

State sponsored assassinations across the world occur to protect the "privileged status" (Perliger, 2015:14) of the ruling class. Perliger (2015:4) further argues that assassinations are a tool used by oppressive regimes to deal with dissenters and classifies the vice as a form of political violence. He probes the history of the vice and states that it is as old as when human beings began forming political associations. Perhaps the biblical story of Cain and Abel in the book of Genesis is the

oldest illustration of assassination that historians recognise. Across history, though, assassinations have been perpetuated to deter the spread of certain political ideologies or to protect particular factional interests. In the Roman empire, for example, Julius Caeser was assassinated in 44 BCE by Roman Senators who feared that he would revoke their privileges. Since the fall of the Roman Empire, other societies have experienced assassinations. Africa has registered most of its assassination cases after independence in the 1960s and 1970s (Brittain, 2006; Saul, 2020). These assassinations fend off political competition and silence dissenters. *The Flame of Freedom* re-engages the subject of political assassinations in Kenya and discusses how these killings obstructed the road to democracy. The narrator also demonstrates how cold war politics fuelled unhealthy political rivalries culminating in intolerance, assassinations, violence and political instability.

At the dawn of independence, the political ideologies in many African nations were shaped by forces and political competitions between the capitalist West and Communist East which generated the Cold War (Lellou, 2024; Moses, 2023; Kalu, 2023). The superpowers and their allies directed attention and financial support to newly independent countries in Africa as they sought to increase their global influence. Kalu (2020:11-6) argues that the Cold War rivalry between the USSR and USA had a direct bearing on the political culture that evolved in Africa after independence:

> Through the flow of financial and other material support, as well as training and scholarship, the major actors in the Cold War brought significant changes to Africa's politics and nationalist movements.

Like many African countries, Kenya was a battleground for these paralysing ideologies during the anti-colonial phase and even after independence (Kalu, 2023; Kendall, 2019). Although Odinga does not label his father a Communist, there is glaring evidence of his dalliance with Eastern European countries. For example, it is through Jaramogi's influence that Russians built the Nyanza General Hospital. Oburu and Odinga also studied in East Europe, which hints on Jaramogi's ideological inclinations. Nevertheless, Odinga's narrative blames the communist tag affixed on his father to a propaganda campaign mounted by Britain and Kenyatta loyalists meant to isolate Jaramogi and the Luo community. Jaramogi, however, saw nothing wrong with communism because, according to him, "the danger in Kenya has never been communism but imperialism and

its remnants" (RO:42). At once, this assertion unveils how the competing ideologies thwarted true freedom in Kenya's post-independence phase.

Okoth (1988:13) writes that the West/East ideological manipulation left independent Kenya with "virtually no right to determine its own form of government and economy" hence posed a threat to freedom and democracy in the new nation. Tom Mboya, a staunch supporter of Kenyatta, and political arch-rival of Jaramogi was a capitalist and established himself as such, attracting benefits like students' airlifts to American universities. As demonstrated by the hostile relationship between Mboya and Jaramogi, the rivalry created by the pro-West and pro-East manoeuvres generated massive hostilities within the ruling elite. All aspects of life in the new nation were analysed through the binary lens of East/West (Socialism/Capitalism). Thus, the narrator observes that Jaramogi's KPU was viewed as communist whereas KANU was regarded capitalist. As a result, KPU and KANU tried to outfox each other and at some point KPU "tabled a motion in the house asking for Mboya's removal, on grounds that he had received money from the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)" (RO:47). These accusations and counter accusations fostered deep animosity across the political factions, aligning Jaramogi as a foe of the people around Kenyatta who had amassed vast wealth while most citizens wallowed in extreme poverty. Sun (2019:3) contends that during the peak of this rivalry, KANU mandarins fabricated "red terror" tales to whittle the efforts made by Jaramogi to address inequalities in the country. *The Flame of Freedom* asserts that Jaramogi incessantly blamed the government because it failed "to use its power to improve the lot of the common man" (RO: 41). Here, we note that Odinga's autophylography is more concerned about the histories of the collective populace than personal experiences. Thus, Odinga engages with the Cold War history because it was during this era that the state became rogue and democracy suffered due to the conditions of direct aid that Kenya received from either capitalist West or communist East. Capitalism and communism gnawed at democracy and wrecked political havoc on the Kenyan polity because any time ordinary Kenyans criticised KANU excesses they were labelled promoters of "some foreign ideology" (RO:85). As a result, the police apprehended and preferred charges against them. From Odinga's narrative, Kenyan leadership at the time had simply and conveniently narrowed down the nation's challenges to East/West ideological competition hence its failure to craft realistic national solutions. This is better reflected

in the struggles between Jaramogi's KPU and Kenyatta's KANU where the former condemned the "unequal distribution of resources" because the latter's economic policies were "benefiting the few at the expense of majority" (RO: 41). Mutie and Rutere (2023:10) claim that in the early days of independence, Jaramogi opposed the government because he defended "the subalterns from the betrayal of Kenyan neocolonial comprador class," thus becoming a dissenter in KANU. Consequently, the opposition had to be repressed due to allegations of disseminating communist ideologies.

However, the muzzling of dissent by the Kenyatta's government re-energised KPU politicians in their quest for a freer and just society. Jaramogi emerged as a staunch critic of the government, even though he maintained very peripheral political significance following his resignation. He embodied the perspectives of dissenting voices, akin to what Moyo (2018:134) describes as "anguished outsiders looking in." The narrator recalls that when Mboya wrote the Sessional Paper No. 10 in 1965, Jaramogi's ally, Pinto Gama, planned to pen a counter paper. However, he was "assassinated as he drew up at the gate to his house with his six-year-old daughter in the back of the car" (RO:39). His death is attributed to ideological competitions that were at play in the new nation. Njogu (2018) believes that Pinto Gama was assassinated around the same time with the black American activist, Malcom X, by forces opposed to justice, freedom and equality. The parallels suggest that direct confrontation with hegemony is fraught with significant dangers across various societies.

The assassination of Pinto, who was a close ally of the narrator's father, reads as a scheme of intimidation, designed to suppress any oppositional voice. The same objective explains the shooting of Thomas Joseph Mboya on the 5th of July 1969, as he emerged from a pharmacy in Nairobi's central business area. However, unlike Pinto Gama, Mboya was eliminated by those "determined to prevent Mboya's possible succession to the presidency on Kenyatta's death" (RO:48). Mboya's murder affirms that in post-independence Kenya, political assassinations are "instruments of elite competition against those who threaten the ruling faction" (Mwaura, 1997:2). Therefore, in *The Flame of Freedom*, assassinations are storied to illuminate the government's attempt to subdue regional, ethnic, ideological and personal ambitions of all those who opposed

Kenyatta and KANU. Mboya was a threat to the Kikuyu elite who surrounded Kenyatta because he was the heir apparent of the political throne to the chagrin of ethnic supremacist who were also administering oaths "aimed at Kikuyu domination" (RO:48). Mboya's assassination was driven by ethnic competition for political power and resources because power and positions guided local politics. Njihia (2024:8) shows that Ndwiga Kathamba, one of the masterminds of Mboya's assassination, confessed that the "plot was hatched by a powerful group of high-ranking government officials from Kiambu." *The Flame of Freedom*, therefore, rebukes the government sanctioned Kikuyunisation of the public space, where promising politicians from other ethnic groups were either isolated or eliminated to ensure that power "remained within the house of *Mumbi*, the Kikuyu" (Gitari, 2014:185). Jaramogi (1967:264) observes that "the individuals surrounding Kenyatta cultivated the roots of ethnicity," and in so doing established it as a foundational element in political thought, including the practice of autophylography. The narrative demonstrates the connections between ethnic competitions and political assassinations and proposes tolerance as a strategy of dismantling the "colonial logics" typical in the Kenyan body politic (Quijano, 2007).

The extent to which those in power was harnessed to maintain the status quo is reflected in the shocking assassination of J.M. Kariuki, who was Kenyatta's first private secretary. Ironically, unlike Pinto Gama and Tom Mboya, J.M. Kariuki was a Kikuyu. But the narrator observes that he "had witnessed at first hand the greed of his fellow leaders, who were busy grabbing land and whatever else they could lay their hands on" (RO:65) after independence. According to Mwaura (1997:10), Kariuki's assassination was consequential in that

> the subsequent cover-up by government officials proved a greater threat to stability in Kenya than J.M. had posed while he was alive. J.M. Kariuki's murder ignited the country, University of Nairobi students rioted leading to its closure, and parliament witnessed highly charged debate of the government's implication in the murder - until Kenyatta agreed to appoint an Independent Commission of Inquiry into the murder of J.M. Kariuki.

J.M. Kariuki was a champion of the redistribution of national resources, who criticised authorities for creating "a nation of 10 millionaires and 10 million beggars" (RO:65). He believed that

capitalistic greed would plunge the country into chaos because, at some point, the masses would arise against the government and demand their dues. Harms (2021:18) affirms that around the time J.M. Kariuki was murdered, he had emerged as a defender of socialism, collectivism …a genuine champion of those whose voices were excluded from elite politics." His ideology resonated with that of Jaramogi: this piqued the authorities and those in power, who were averse to anyone who advanced the plight of the poor. For making such demands, the government conveniently branded Kariuki a communist, accused him of propagating the ideologies of the then USSR. However, ordinary Kenyans who attended J.M. Kariuki's burial, castigated the state on its stance against "the ideals of democracy, freedom and land equality" (Harms, 2021: 21) and that made J.M. Kariuki their hero. Kariuki was simply a crusader for the collective rights of the Kenyan subalterns suffering under Kenyatta. Odinga re-imagines these instances to criticise Kenyatta's administration for its indiscriminate and primitive wealth acquisition and for disregarding the broader public interests in favour of the political power. This is because Kenyatta's government had frustrated the original dream of the freedom fighters, who yearned to eradicate "ignorance, poverty and disease" (RO: 399). Thus, the autophylography entrenches an opinion that Kenyatta's government was determined to completely destroy all those who spoke against the leaders' rapaciousness because, as the adage goes, *dead men tell no tales*. Odinga criticises Kenyatta for using the weak legal and political structures which existed in the new nation to consolidate power and acquire wealth at the expense of the majority poor.

After Kenyatta's death, Moi took over the presidency and followed the footsteps (*Nyayo*) of his predecessor in regard to personalisation of power and political assassinations. In fact, scholars argue that Moi's reign laid the foundation for dictatorship and innumerable human rights violations, including the assassination of his critics (Adar & Munyae, 2001; Beaver, Chege, Grosz-Ngate, Hoon, Jones-Nelson, King, & Marr, 2000). Among the notable assassinations that occurred during Moi's administration is the case of Dr. Robert Ouko, who served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. His disfigured body was discovered at Got Alila hill on February 16, 1990, approximately four kilometres from his residence in Koru. Odinga observes that Kenyans reacted with "disbelief, anger and public demonstrations" (RO: 145). He asserts that "few were in doubt that this was a political assassination like that of J.M. Kariuki …Tom Mboya in 1969 …Pinto Gama in 1965"

(RO:145). In the case of J.M. Kariuki, the narrator observes that his popularity "posed a serious threat to those with succession ambitions" (RO: 65) and thus concluding that assassination was a means to eliminating political competition (Harms, 2021).

Following the murder of Robert Ouko, a new commission of inquiry was established, and the Kenyan police requested assistance from detectives from Scotland Yard to solve the assassination mystery. The police have never made any arrest in regard to all political assassinations in Kenya even after they had promised to leave no stone unturned. Although Ouko had zealously defended KANU programmes and Moi against all opponents, he was slain because he had criticised corruption, endangering the positions of the unscrupulous and powerful elite in Moi's administration. This is corroborated by Igbafe and Offiong (2007: 10) who argue that political eliminations occur when powerful people "see political positions as a means of making money… and they feel someone is standing between them and this position they become ruthless and destructive and resort to killing." Odinga, therefore, revisits these political killings to demonstrate the kind of callous leaders that the country had and the threat to life and democracy which Kenyans had to grapple with. He further underlines that all these assassinations have remained unresolved, thus simultaneously criticising the ruling elite of cover up and in the process inspiring the citizens for a relentless struggle. In retelling this dark chapter in the country's history, the narrator underscores the need to expand the democratic space by tolerating dissent. He suggests that the shrinking of the political space which happened mainly during the Kenyatta and the Moi regimes, was a threat to national security, development and stability. As the story develops, readers get the impression that had the first and second governments entrenched democracy, accountability, rule of law, equality and pursued inclusivity, the country would have been a paradise for all the citizens.

This chapter concludes that living in an environment where revolutionary voices were decimated in dastardly fashion must have toughened Odinga's resolve to continue with the struggle for freedom. *The Flame of Freedom* castigates the post-independence state for failing to actualise the ideals which the Kenyan people fought for during the struggle for independence, namely "peace, unity, stability and prosperity" (RO: 4). The narrator displays his disgust at the post-independence leaders for eliminating government critics and labelling them communists. The history of

assassinations allows the narrator to challenge neocolonialism, authoritarianism and advance the ideals of equality and democracy. The assassinations storied by Odinga have united the citizenry in examining the significance of independence and in promoting the freedom vision espoused by the victims of state violence. Moi era tyranny allows the narrator to explore the link between ethics, aesthetics and politics in Kenyan with the aim of resisting autocracy. Through his autophylography, Odinga makes a decolonial turn and opens new vistas for the liberation of the Kenyan people without utilising Euro-centric modes of self-writing like autobiography.

4.7 The Pain of Exile: Leaving and Returning

Edward Said (2000) conceives exile as the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place; between the self and its true home. Crowie (2022: 6) argues that exile has a paradoxical character "encompassing forms of political agency and mobility, on the one hand, and dispossession and forced displacement on the other." Similarly, Bromley (2008: 28) writes that "conflict, violence and rights abuses might drive people out of their countries of origin, but economic deprivation, lack of opportunity, and the desire for better life are also powerful motivating factors." Whether forced or self-imposed, exile suggests the migration "of an individual from the territorial boundaries of a political community leading to the loss of rights and privileges associated with membership" (Gibney, 2020: 279). In the case of Odinga narrative exile can be understood as an act of remembering, recreating and returning home – the anxieties of displacement and joy of return (Zeleza, 2005). It is the story of being unwanted, an outcast in your home country.

Waiyaki wa Hinga was tortured and buried alive at Kibwezi on his way to forced exile. Another prominent figures in the history of Kenyan exiles is Harry Thuku, who was banished to Kismayu by colonial authorities between 1922 and 1931. Thuku was detained in Kismayu (Somalia) by colonial authorities to thwart his spirited campaign against colonial exploitation (Gabay, 2018). After independence, one of the famous Kenyans to go into exile is acclaimed writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who fled Kenya in 1982 for fear of harassment following his detention without trial. His detention was occasioned by the performance of his co-authored play, *I Will Marry When I Want* at Kamiriithu Community Theatre, which reproached neocolonialism. Ngugi used exile as an

intellectual space to foster his criticism of neocolonialism. Exile thus was a part of the British colonial system of dehumanised those who opposed colonialism. The postcolony retained the practice either through detention or forced exile to deal with whoever was considered anti-establishment.

Odinga's idea of running into exile began on 5 October 1991 when the US Political attaché at the time, Alan Eastham, exposed a chilling message that the latter's opposition activities were sorely testing the government's patience and that they might kill him. Prior to this, Odinga had experienced three instances of detention. However, the authorities felt that incarceration was unlikely to dissuade him from his opposition to the government. Given this apparent threat to his life, Odinga chose to go into exile, and he exited the country through Uganda. The resolve to leave his home country was epitomised fear-inducing political environment exemplified by the details of how he remained holed up at his stepmother's house in Bondo, where his father came at midnight, and they "talked in whispers by torchlight" (RO: 175). They thought that the government security agents could infiltrate the meticulous exit scheme and arrest him. Nevertheless, Odinga embarked on a hazardous journey in a rainy weather as he sailed across Lake Victoria at night. Along the way, his helmsman advised that they lounge at an islet for safety due to the heavy downpour. He was slowly drifting into being stateless.

The journey into exile reconnects Odinga's story to other histories of the struggles for freedom in his country. In this islet, Odinga met a cousin of the late Robert Ouko, and so the history of government assassinations resurfaced, intensifying the fear for his life. In the isolated island in Lake Victoria, Odinga notes that the life of Ouko's cousin seemed "calm and uneventful" (RO: 177) contrary to his own uncertain status of "forced separation from family" (RO: 177) and friends. There were several other landmarks of exploitation on the lake which reminded Odinga why he was leaving home. The Mageta Islands, for example, made Odinga reminisce about the Mau Mau history. He writes:

> Site of infamous Mau Mau detention camp ... this rekindled memory for me. When I was a small boy, Mau Mau prisoners were brought from the camp by boat to work on road

> construction… The colonial officer in charge of the camp …Kamongo, came ashore with some prisoners who turned on him and killed him (RO: 176).

The narrator gives the history of Mageta Island to illustrate how oppression is abominable and should be resisted. The detainees at Mageta were exiles too but in the control of colonial authorities. The suffering that Odinga was going through mapped with that of the Mau Mau detainees and consequently his story connects the colonial quest for freedom with the postcolonial need for democracy. As these landmarks of oppression make their impressions on Odinga's mind, they enable him to link the collective past of exploitation to the post-independence suffering, thus inspiring renewed struggle. The history of Mageta is specifically connected to the independence struggle and is recounted to liken colonial oppression to what was happening under Moi leadership. This demonstrates that the colonial government's injustices of marginalising the majority of Kenyans had not changed for the better (Melles, 2025). The Ugandan space, which is the destination of Odinga's boat journey described above, is a metaphor for refuge and safety which is confirmed when he meets his host, Shem. Shem took Odinga to his house and immediately they began to pursue the latter's refugee status. This image of Uganda as a safe haven is also sustained by the reality that "KPU members fled *there* in…1968" (RO: 179) out of the fear of persecution by the Kenyatta regime. Exile was a creation of the colonial state to tame those who were radically opposed to domination but was retained by independent state so as to stabilise the body politic and ensure tranquillity.

Odinga recalls his anxiety, despite his optimistic outlook, which imbues the narrative with a motif of uncertainty. This is also evidenced by the advice from the High Commission for Refugees in Uganda for him to "lie low in the meantime" (RO: 179). The anxiety is captured through the paradoxical feeling that Odinga had consistently missed home but at the same time feared for his life. Odinga notes that "The whole experience of being hunted, being prey and trying to outwit your would-be killers is a terrifying one" (RO: 181). This ambivalence generated in him a "crippling sorrow of estrangement" (Said, 2000: 180), as displayed by the feelings of panic after the BBC news reported him as a leading Kenyan dissident sought by the authorities in Nairobi. This sense of estrangement, was exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding his potential repatriation to Kenya. However, he found reprieve when President Museveni provided assurance

that he "would have protection … until…granted asylum elsewhere" (RO:179). Thus, unlike numerous other critics of Moi's government, who were abducted from Uganda by Kenyan special security agents and detained in their home country on fabricated charges Odinga's stay in Uganda was secured.

It is significant to note that from the start of his journey into exile, Odinga's identity undergoes a series of identity changes. Some of these changes are due to the fact that the state of exile cuts the exiles off from their roots, their land and their past (Said, 2000: 140). This results in a sense of alienation, which is seen in Odinga when he moves around European capitals looking for other Kenyan exiles in order to connect. However, some of the changes that Odinga's identity undergoes, are borne out of the need to ensure his security. As a result, right from when Odinga left Nairobi, his identity was disguised so as to avoid detection from government authorities because President Moi had warned that "if arrested he would be charged in a court of law" (RO:174). This disguise is first seen when he arrived at the Kiboswa Catholic Mission, where he is introduced as Father Augustine from Machakos. After that, when he lands in Uganda, Odinga sheds the identity of Father Augustine "and became Joseph Wadeya, … [a] Ugandan in possession of his *misolo*" (RO:176). Afterwards, in Kampala, he was a refugee seeking asylum. This resulted in Odinga's isolation so as to ensure his security. The reworking of identity breeds helplessness (Ballentyne, 2024) and so Odinga nursed a sense of vulnerability as Uganda government processed him as a refugee. In this one episode, in Uganda and also in Norway Odinga was a subaltern, a refugee who lacked equal rights to other citizens. He was socially excluded and was always disguised until when he entered Norway. In Norway, he was a Kenyan exile with documents which allowed him to travel "anywhere in the world except Kenya" (RO: 182). Odinga had to contend "physical loss of home, loved ones and possessions, coping with a lost, changed or threatened identity, along with the loss of meaningful relationships through which new identities are formed with" (Ballentyne, 2014: 45) just like any other refugee. The Norwegian authorities were aware of KANU regime's penchant for torturing and imprisoning dissenters and thus they were protecting the narrator from the same would he travel to his home country.

Although exile resulted in Odinga's identity undergoing a series of changes, it also afforded him space to continue with his struggle for freedom. For example, in Norway, he got assistance to set

up an office to advance the struggle against KANU dictatorship which was the cause of his exile. This brought Moi's human rights abuses under the spotlight and made the violations in Kenya an international concern. While in Norway still, he met several other Kenyans living in Europe as exiles and formed a network of struggle. Stiftung Report (2003: 52) exposes that "exile also provided the activists with an opportunity to document the atrocities of the Moi regime and to produce magazines, newsletters, posters and other materials to inform the world about what was going on in Kenya and to agitate for change." The narrator, therefore, reminisces about how gained global influence from Norway and in the process drew the world's attention to the Kenyan government. As a result, the Stiftung report (2003: 52) notes that in "1990 Moi was having difficulties visiting any foreign country without the embarrassment of facing angry placard-waving demonstrators condemning his dictatorial rule." The global spotlight brought on the nation by exiles such as Odinga, isolated Moi's government and debunked the myth that "Kenya was an oasis of peace" (Stiftung, 2003: 51). The campaigns resulted in positive change because in December 1991, Moi led KANU delegates meeting at Kasarani where they accepted the repeal of section 2(a) of the constitution which proscribed multiparty democracy. The repealing of this section resulted in the introduction of multiparty democracy in Kenya in 1991 and eased the political pressure on KANU. Therefore, exile afforded Odinga an opportunity to triumph over dictatorship which he could not have achieved because as Ndlovu- Gatsheni (2013:79) observes those who opposed KANU "were either forced to flee to exile or were detained, if not liquidated completely."

This chapter demonstrated that Odinga's story is representative of many Kenyans who were banished from their country for voicing their nonconforming opinions. His success in this monumental struggle can be read as a victory for the citizens who endured dictatorship and human rights abuses. The chapter has discussed the tensions that existed between the state and citizens where those who spoke to power were destroyed in the name of maintaining stability.

4.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, Odinga narrates the individual and collective experiences in *The Flame of Freedom* to advance democracy and the Pan-Africanist agenda. The chapter analysed how Odinga generates

multiple local histories that are violently negated, silenced, or repressed by the machinery of colonialism/colonial (Mignolo, 2018) in his autophylography. The discussion was structured under various sections, namely self-writing and political anxieties, colonial and neocolonial experiences, betrayal of the nationalists' dream, political assassinations, and exile. The chapter argued that Odinga was the mouthpiece telling the stories of unsung heroes of the struggle who played a critical role in the second liberation. The chapter interrogated how Odinga wrestled with dictatorship and how through his autophylography, readers get an opportunity to appreciate Moi's intolerance between 1978 and 2002. To achieve its objectives, the chapter delved into Odinga's history of dissent after he realised what Kenyan people were going through regarding personal liberties and democracy. He chronicles how his father fell out with Kenyatta and the agonies that he endured throughout his life for just being in opposition.

The subsequent chapter discusses how a writer's milieu and shared history are quintessential components in the writing and interpretation of autophylography. The major concern of Chapter Five is how the historical context that Koigi wa Wamwere lived in, informed his personal narrative.

CHAPTER FIVE

Telling How We Suffered: Narrating "We-Ness" in *I Refuse to Die*

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed how Raila Odinga in *The Flame of Freedom*, imagines a common past and crafts a shared future for the politically exploited Kenyan masses. The autophylography was appraised as part of the suppressed narratives which have been muted in Kenyatta and Moi regimes. The chapter argued that Odinga's narrative is filled with revolutionary emotions from the onset. The chapter, however, acknowledged that Odinga does not take all the credit for the democratic struggle but, instead, shares the glory with those others who toiled to actualise positive political change at the time. The personal (hi)story was thus interrogated alongside other experiences of like-minded citizens, who were involved in the struggle for better governance. The discussion focussed on how the narrating-self is deftly immersed in "other" selves, thus generating a communal story and promoting a collective vision even as the author strives to compose a self-narrative.

Chapter Five analyses Koigi wa Wamwere's *I Refuse to Die* (2002) and interrogates how the author's own suffering and that of the politically excluded Kenyan masses motivated him to write an autophylography. Under the sub-title, "Relating How We Suffered," the chapter probes what the narrator and others experienced and how the prevailing socio-political milieu generated communal aesthetics in *I Refuse to Die*. This chapter posits that certain realities of life under certain situations produce stories like the one under study. The chapter also avers that self-writers inscribe certain occurrences and comment on the prevailing ideology in the composition of personal narratives. Ulogu (2019: 132) affirms that "African society is communal and collective in nature and structure, thereby 'the structure and functions of African society define the individual identity within a cosmic context which approximates." This assertion suggests that the individual and members of his/her community are always aware of political-cultural conditions which lead them to undertake certain discourses. Chapter Five, therefore, investigates how experiences become

stories and what these narratives recommend regarding the immediate environment of the self-writer (Eakin, 2019; Poletti, 2020). The guiding question in this chapter is: How does context influence the personal narrative under study? The chapter proceeds from the premise that the writer's struggles, values and worldview are a direct outcome of politics and ideologies of the day and hence Koigi wa Wamwere's narrative can better be analysed in line with context.

Context refers to the physical, historical, cultural, political, ethnic and gender situations that a writer emerges from, which influence the construction of their identity and worldview. Additionally, context equips readers with the tools of criticism, enabling their understanding of motivations, ideologies, norms and meaning systems in a literary work. Tuval-Mashiach (2014: 126) argues that people often reflect on the socio-historical context thus introducing collective events and public figures in the story of the self. Tuval-Mashiach (2014) further observes that culture affects narrative by imbuing tales with shared meaning. The discussion in this chapter is guided by the ideas advanced by Tuval-Mashiach (2014) to understand the collective vision in *I Refuse to Die*. It further makes reference to Hestetun (1993:28) who attests that contextualising theories establishes links between individual texts and the historical-cultural context and the systems of power. This chapter thus argues that in the analysis of self-writing, researchers employ strategies of ideological critique to understand the historical, social, cultural, and political spaces of literature. It is within contextualising ideas that analysis of *I Refuse to Die* focuses on extrinsic aspects of the text and foregrounds facets which are extra-textual. The core argument is that literary interpretation is partly a contextual enquiry and accordingly, understanding a narrative requires appreciating the reality around its production.

Using decoloniality and subaltern principles, this chapter investigates how living in certain historical periods and happenings serve as a catalyst for imagination which convey a common vision arising from shared past and prospective collective future or what Grovogui (2011:177) considers to be "a different world based on responsibility toward self and others." *I Refuse to Die* therefore readers experience an alternative world – the world imagined by Wamwere where the author and others thrive. Through the narrator, readers access information about the extended

family, the Kikuyu community, Kenyan people and general communal aspirations as the narrative unfolds. This chapter is hinged on the premise that Wamwere's autophylography is a record of the collective struggle and how the Kenyan people responded to exploitation. Javangwe (2011: 172), observes that in life-writing, "life experiences are affirmed through memory, cultural and ethnic perceptions, history, *collective* and personal disposition at the time of writing" (*italics mine*). The experiences of Wamwere as an individual, and those of the Kenyan people as a collective under different postcolonial governments, are the main themes discussed in this chapter. The autophylography engages with the colonial history from the perspective of the colonised in order to reclaim, history and memories that imperialism sought to erase thus colonial and postcolonial contexts are essential for analysis of *I Refuse to Die*.

Wamwere constructs his autophylography around the premise that right from the beginning of the human race, God gave people a sense of divinity making them gods like Him and accordingly when, "we create life and knowledge, we build machines, save life and push death back in our lives" (KW: 22), then we refuse to die. This reverberates with decolonial philosophy that when a people create any knowledge that shifts others from positions of exploitation and humiliation then humanity celebrates. This elucidates the title of the text, showing how Wamwere and others pushed death back or breathed life to ''lifeless'' masses by agitating for an end to the exploitation of the Kenyan people across different political regimes. The narrator believes that when individuals engage in activities which guarantee the well-being of others, then such individuals become immortalised. Wamwere's "refusal" to die is equivalent to his pragmatic efforts made towards the challenges of poverty, colonialism, neo-colonialism, exploitation, misrule, dictatorship and general political oppression of the people and the crippling hurdles which antagonise his interventions. He narrates how postcolonial Kenyan leaders entrenched coloniality disguised as progress, salvation and modernization but instead exploited their citizens and plunged them into suffering. The action of writing is therefore a design to restore the humanity of those who brutalised by dictatorship and coloniality of power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). The narrator acknowledges that the courage to live and propagate ideals of freedom occur "in both pain and pleasure" (KW: 12) and there is always the threat of death from all corners. This chapter, thus, argues that the author challenges human exploitation and, in the process, rubbishes the tag, "happy

slaves" (KW: 342) to reclaim personal and collective pride. Wamwere is a committed writer with vibrant intentions to rework society for the benefit of everyone. Ngugi (1982) argues that an African writer must be part of the struggle for the freedom of his people and thus any committed writer should strive to (re)order society. The critique of *I Refuse to Die* is premised on the reality that the narrator is a product of several experiences that he went through: "the age of the anti-colonial struggle; the age of independence; and the age of neo-colonialism" (Ngugi, 1993: 78). Wamwere experienced and survived these troubled times and understanding the same history is crucial in appreciating how Kenya evolved politically. The narrative challenges exploitation, colonialism and violence, neocolonial evils of intolerance, corruption, tribalism and land dispossession. Wamwere digs in his society to identify layers, episodes, and areas where coloniality is continually perpetuated in order to contest the same and create new men.

5.2 Confronting Oppression and Exploitation

As noted in Chapter Four of this study, colonialism is a defining factor of African history and as a result, African literature continues to generate a sense of catharsis and call for restoration or what Ngugi (2006) calls "remembering." Adeoti (2016:2) identifies neocolonialism experienced in most African countries as having, "done much to accentuate rather than alleviate the trauma of the past" thus extending the misery of exploitation after independence. Ouma (2026: 384) argues that colonialism was crafted around the "philosophy of three Cs; civilization, Christianity and commerce" and consequently Africans were supposed to bear the burden as labourers in settler farms. Mpofu (2017) corroborates the naturalisation of colonial difference insisting that it breeds subaltern politics whose dark side is game of the power of domination. The power of domination breeds coloniality, oppression and suffering especially for the victims of colonialism. It ensues thus African literature emerges as a forum for confronting oppression in a continent characterised by the power matrix of modernity/colonial world which "affects all dimensions of social existence" (Grosfoguel, 2011). The autophylography under study therefore narrates "common" misery and political subalternity and recommends a panacea of neocolonial woes now that independence did not "erase and sanitise the colonial disease" (Hove, 2009: 51).

In the introduction to his autophylography, Wamwere asserts that there is a human osmosis that makes one's misery dilute the life of others and that, as human beings, we are happier when our world is unchained and in celebration and thus "we refuse to die by fighting the oppression of one another" (KW: 12). In this submission, the narrator suggests that when we treat others unfairly, dehumanise them, demean or fail to confront oppression, then we either die or we lose the very prized aspects of our humanity. These words therefore imply that we should resist maltreatment and promote humanity of others at all times. One story in the text, which illustrates this philosophy is that of Lucia, who remarks:

> Why are you asking someone who is not dead not to speak? Are you not beckoning death for him? When Koigi dies, he will not speak. Now he is not dead, let him speak…I speak therefore I am. (KW: 226).

These words powerfully endorse that the living must talk, more so against the myriads of evils that degrade humanity and negate human happiness. The voice that the narrator is talking about is that resistant humanism which should dismantle all legacies of human exploitation. Wamwere's narrative advocates for altruism and concern for others in society. The narrator views his role as a member of Kenyan legislature in this light every time he spoke in parliament, where he championed for the common good of his voters and exploited citizens, despite the disparagement that he suffered from his own government for such a stance. The narrative confirms that the general good of other people is correspondingly the overall good of the author because society is balanced when every member flourishes. Wamwere strives for such a balanced society because he is a proponent of liberal humanism; he believes that people should be free to make choices in their pursuit of happiness. In this sense, the philosophy propagated shares tenets with the Ubuntu ideology as conceptualised by Tutu (2004: 25), that we need other human beings in order to be human. Gitari (2014: 201) corroborates the same in the assertion that human beings are not isolated individuals but both "one and many." Gitari (2014) further observes that all people have a common ancestry in Adam, and common destiny in death, thus the sin of one individual affect other people in society.

I Refuse to Die reiterates the communal resolve as voiced in his words, "the people's heroic history of survival shall not be sullied with the oppressor's history of shame" (KW: 344). This avowal is

a testimony of how the narrator's individual struggles are linked to the collective desire for freedom thereby making personal triumphs also a source of collective joy. The common story of the struggles of the Kenyan people is elevated and paired with the personal story and thus Wamwere becomes a vessel of recounting the frustrations of the subaltern. This way, Wamwere's name, loosely translated to mean "spokesman" (KW: 18) confirms that the autophylography is a collective voice of "voiceless millions who suffer and endure horrible terror in Kenya and around Africa under Western supported dictatorships" (KW: 10). This makes the story a subaltern narrative which censures colonialism, neocolonialism and any political order which alienates the masses from their nation. The narrative compares colonialism and "KANU democracy" to trigger radical debate about freedom and imagine a model of democracy which protects itself democratically. The autophylography seeks the "true" meaning of freedom across several historical contexts – traditional (pre-colonial) African societies, colonial period and the postcolonial season. Wamwere's account of precolonial African society, for example, dispels the false notion that the concepts of freedom, justice and democracy were introduced to Africa by the Western world. Participatory democracy, for instance, flourished in the narrator's community long before imperialism was introduced in Kikuyuland. In fact, the narrator observes that everyone in Kikuyu community was involved in collective decisions and that, "from the untroubled private citizen to the almost fabulous leader, there was [an] unbroken chain of understanding and trust" (KW: 67). This reality was distorted by European colonialism resulting in the loss of black people's dignity, freedom and happiness. Europe dispelled any idea of African history, language, politics and philosophy and that is why the colonisers termed Africa as the "dark continent" (Pimm, 2007: 567). This consigned Africans to what Fanon calls "the zone of non-being," heralding binarisation of superior White (the coloniser) and inferior "Other" (the colonised). Wamwere explores how the Kenyans have ever been placed in the "global condition of modernity" (Helgesson, 2022: 167) even after flag independence.

This European's sense of entitlement is demonstrated in Wamwere's narrative through the story of a white settler who once asked a British MP, "How can you ask us to regard Africans as equals? Every African is dishonest, a liar, lazy. Their language has no words for love gratitude and loyalty" (KW: 68) and is smack of "colonial philosophy of Eurocentric arrogance (Nayar, 2017: 14). These

epithets embody the general attitude of the white settlers at the time, which was largely meant to degrade Africans and make them subjects fit for colonialism. The world of the colonised was turned into a domain of violence, war, rape, diseases, death and mourning as they were denied full humanity and reduced to non-beings. Africa subsisted and lived within the underworld of coloniality (Mignolo, 2018; Quijano, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Escobar, 2007). The narrator illustrates the evils of colonialism when he observes that the white man "came to rob us. He came to enslave us. He came to eat us up" (KW: 67). The narrator suggests that such an unfair system should be confronted so that the people can regain their "ontological density" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 6) because colonialism entrenched unfairness.

Wamwere illustrates how virtues of fairness were part of socialisation as they grew up in the Kikuyu villages. Through the character of Mung'ura, we get an overall communal philosophy of equality in the wisdom he imparted into his children: "No children of the stomach and others of the back" (KW: 18). This adage illustrates the necessity for equal treatment of people, which entrenches a fair sense of justice and increases the joy of living thus "pushing death away." The adage implies that the Kikuyu society discouraged discrimination and treated each person with kindness. The author also recalls how equality and fairness were exercised when disciplining children, especially where they had disagreed:

> In children's fights, parents agreed never to take sides; they treated us equally and punishable and individually responsible for what we suffered. Instead of father and mother going to quarrel with other parents whose child bested me, they beat me and other parents did the same with their children (KW: 32).

The narrator uses the anecdote of Wangu (Koigi's mother) who in her youth, was stabbed by "strange spirits" to underline that the community believed in justice because the elders questioned her thinking that someone had attacked her. Despite Wangu's failure to convince the elders regarding the source of her injury, they ordered that she be taken to hospital, affirming the communal concern for others. Fairness is also seen when Wangu's father encourages "his children to choose their own partners in marriage" (KW: 20). The respect for a daughter's choice correspondingly demonstrates that the community was impartial, a characteristic of progressive societies. The practice of justice and freedom in the traditional Kikuyu community is juxtaposed

with that introduced by colonialists when they violently entered the former's country. The colonisers' sense of justice is imagined as perverted as it served their interests while marginalising Africans. For instance, the colonial settlers used force to acquire native lands, labour and tax. It is from the experience of living under colonial oppression and inequality that Wamwere rejects colonial injustice in all its manifestations. He notes, "this is why I have been saying no to oppression, injustice, racism and inequality and yes to freedom, justice and equality of all my life" (KW: 34). This resolve also explains why the narrator's life is one long string of struggle(s) with a strong inclination towards freedom, justice and equality.

In the narrative, Wamwere conjures and introduces the binaries of civilised and primitive which the colonisers used to privilege themselves at the heart of the colony and to negate all aspects of Kikuyu life, respectively. It is through this process of systematically degrading Kikuyu culture as backward that they committed what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) calls culturicide. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020), culturicide is the process in which certain cultures are destroyed or erased as happened with African cultures during the colonial period. For example, the narrator tells of how the colonial administration banned Kikuyu cultural practices and subsequently replaced them with English ways in their "civilising" mission. Wamwere rebuffs the gracelessness of the European mindset and captures the Manichean binaries introduced by colonialism as follows: "When we lived on our own, we were human beings. Since we started living with *Nyakeru*, they are the *andu*, human beings and we are their beasts of burden, *nyamu* and slaves, *ngombo*." (KW: 39). It is within such binarised discourses of coloniality that Africans lost their humanity and were relegated to the status of beasts, losing rights and freedoms thus narratives like *I Refuse to Die* can be analysed as reclaiming that lost humanity because they are alternative ways of "saying no" to British exploitation, and hence a statement of exercising communal and personal authority. This way, *I Refuse to Die* also deconstructs stereotypes of Kikuyu primitivity purveyed in colonial discourse(s) and similarly rejects all indignities occasioned by colonial policies. These indignities included labels such as *mboi* (*"*kitchen boy") (KW: 23), *nyamu* ("beasts of burden or slaves") (KW: 39), *ndia nyeki* ("grass eating animals") (KW: 48), *shenzi* ("primitive") (KW: 66). They were part of colonial violence meted on the natives, which according to Sartre (1963:15), "does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanise

them." Because of the systematic dehumanisation that colonialism visits on its victims, the narrator equates it to death, and therefore in rejecting it, Africans have "refused to die." *I Refuse to Die* is an expression of the universal human desire for freedom and justice, especially for individuals living under repressive systems of government.

The demeaning and harmful acts that colonialism unleashed against the people are articulated through the narrator's use of oral traditions (communal songs and oral tales) derived from his Kikuyu culture. For example, Wangu (Koigi's Mother) grieves about the people displaced in Olenguruone, where colonial authorities violently destroyed their huts and left them in the cold in a song passed down from previous generations.

> *There was great wailing in Olenguruone*
> *Even as we collected together our belongings*
> *The enemy was telling us:*
> *Hurry up, quick.*
> *Are you forgetting you are criminals*
> ……..
> *Even our homes have been destroyed.*
> *And our bodies exploited.* (KW: 26-7).

Songs and other forms of oral literature are legitimate form of knowledge and communication in African world (Mtshali and Thwala, 2026). This above song conveys the agony of the victims of colonial ruthlessness, which branded the Kikuyu people criminals even after dispossessing them. The narrator chronicles the collective grief and the need for some restoration or reparation. The collective loss is also captured when the narrator reminisces how the white settlers seized all the natives' fertile lands, rendering them squatters on their own land, from which for generations, they had derived a sense of community and identity. The ensuing sense of alienation is captured in microcosm through the personal experiences of Wamwere's grandfather loss:

> A European came …he had been told he was free to settle on our land…we were given seven days to quit. Seven days later the European returned on a horse and told us to remove all our belongings from our huts. He then burned them down to the ground….

> Grandfather and his family were then forced to live together with other Africans in a small area that was set aside for them called the African Reserve (KW: 23).

The loss of land plunged the people into poverty and hunger which, in turn, made them vulnerable and susceptible to colonial manipulation because they had been deprived of the basic means of survival. For example, the narrator recounts that the people, "had no land where they could farm or graze their animals" (KW: 23). This situation was made worse by the introduction of the cash economy, which operated differently from the batter system that Kikuyu people were accustomed to, prior colonial conquest. The fact that cash became the means of survival in the new economy pushed the black people to work as servants and labourers for the white settlers. To sustain this exploitative *habitus*, the colonial authorities used divide and rule tactics whereby those Africans who chose to work for the whites were considered loyal while those who refused were regarded as disloyal and untrustworthy. This created crippling mistrust among Africans and eroded their collective ability to fight off the invaders. Once the settlers had sown divisions among the Kikuyu, they forced the people to supply their labour for free or for extremely poor wages. The narrator observes that his "father was paid wages of one dollar a month" (KW: 35), a situation that reduced him to a "colonial slave" (KW: 23). What appears more disturbing for the narrator is that the mistreatment of the black people was superintended by fellow African overseers, *Nyapara* (KW: 25), who made the conditions really hostile for the plantation workers. The story of Wangu (the narrator's mother), who delivered her child under a coffee tree, after the overseer had denied her maternity off profoundly captures these indignities. Compounding such humiliation is the fact that the people were generally overworked:

> … always at work. Father woke up at four in the morning to go to work every day without breakfast, whether it was raining or not. By dawn he would be a long way from home, working. In the rainy season, his main work was carrying heavy boxes with seedlings on his back, digging holes, planting these young trees and covering them with soil. The planting of young trees was always done with rain pouring nonstop to ensure the seeds did not dry out (KW: 41).

The reader is further informed that despite the hefty workload, Africans were never compensated in case of accidents and if they were crippled by work-place accidents, they were sacked. These

awful working conditions make the story of colonialism violent or what Sartre (1963: 10) calls the "constant menace of imperialist aggression." The human suffering during colonialism is contrasted with the precolonial past recounted nostalgically by the narrator's grandmother: "we never allowed our lives to run out of joy. Every day we celebrated something - a birth, a marriage, an initiation of young men and women…we went to bed happy..." (KW: 69). The grandmother's romanticisation of the precolonial past reinforces the idea that colonialism was, "the bringer of violence into the home and mind of the native" (Fanon, 1963: 38). Wamwere's self-narrative amplifies the idea that colonialism brought the common agony of exploitation among the Kikuyu people to prick the conscience of readers so that they take a position against exploitation. This way, the account suggests that violence against the brutal imperial force was necessary and cathartic as suggested by Fanon (1963:93), who argues that "in order to win genuine respect, dignity, the colonised must force the settler's recognition through physical violence."

I Refuse to Die explores the uniqueness of each human being through the metaphor of *Hirizi,* - a talisman given to Wamwere by his father. The *Hirizi* was a wood carving with a smiling human face (KW:46). Wamwere's father had obtained the *Hirizi* from a Chinese merchant who informed him that it was, "for protection, luck and direction in our journey here on earth" (KW:46). Wamwere's father told the narrator, "The face on this *Hirizi* is not yours. It is a face you see on everyone. It will remind you that you share humanity with others. Whenever you look at it remember…your collective humanity" (KW: 47). Wamwere's father imagined that the *Hirizi* would make the son more human by always reminding him that he shares humanity with others, thus promoting an ideology akin to Ubuntu. Through the metaphor of the *Hiriz*i, the narrative recovers the people's humanity and reworks the collective and personal identities wrecked by colonialism. The phantasmagorical figure of *Hirizi* helps the narrator to construct a sense of communalism and destabilise colonial individualism. Conceivably therefore, the story is an attack on the debilitating treatment of other people and the indignities occasioned by exploitation of humanity. The concept of *Hirizi* and its culturally protective aspects is purely found African cosmology and can be read as one way of injecting a decolonial turn in African philosophy.

Therefore, the discourse of decoloniality in *I Refuse to Die* involves cultural re-orientation and reverses the alien ethos introduced by the West. This colonial culture was couched in the doctrine of Christianity, whose ideology derided most of the Kikuyu cultural practices such as polygamy, circumcision of girls, communal songs and practices (Oke, 2024). The British scorned the Kikuyu culture because they elevated European values as the standard that should be emulated by all. However, Wamwere debunks these Eurocentric views of the world by discarding his Christian name so that he can "recover humanity and sense of self" (KW: 155) - his African identity. For him, the need for Africans to pick European names upon conversion to Christianity is likened to branding them with a new identity – assimilating them to a European culture. *I Refuse to Die* suggests that discarding the local culture and boarding onto the Western cultural train was a way of making Kikuyu's perpetual slaves since the new converts would always remain inferior.

Wamwere also criticises the educated Africans who opposed independence and associated with Europe more than they connected with fellow Africans and their home continent:

> Offspring of colonial school, educated Africans did not belong to Africa. They belonged to Europe. Most opposed independence. […] For themselves, they desired complete alienation from everything black and African and total assimilation into everything white and European (KW: 147).

Some of these educated elite took over political leadership after independence and they are what Wamwere brands as black ogres. In many African oral narratives, ogres are grotesque creatures which are evil, destructive, gluttonous and selfish (Nandwa and Bukenya, 1983). It follows thus, in branding these educated elite as ogres, the narrator evokes in the reader the image of a hostile and exploitative political class that evolved in post-independence Kenya. This ruling elite suppressed fellow blacks and exploited the masses just like the colonial masters did. The "black ogres" did not understand why the African people took up arms and resisted colonialism risking their lives in revolts like Mau Mau. According to Armah (2010: 17), the African educated elite was "completely integrated into the status quo that they could not think of designing, much less of operating, an alternative system." Among other things, the new crop of leaders who took over after colonialists could not guarantee freedom and security and it is for this reason that Wamwere advocates a renewed violent struggle (similar to Mau Mau) against any oppressive post-

independence leadership. Ostensibly, Wamwere's autophylography attempts to bring about a "new man" (Fanon, 1967: 28) different from the *thingified* human existence through a "total destruction of the colonial system" (Fanon, 1967: 105). Wamwere's autophylography thus:

> …cries out in horror" in the face of the […] modern/colonial "death-world" and aspires – through the decolonial praxis of love, […], through an ethic of the liberation of life […], and through a decolonizing and liberatory politics inspired by the "decolonial attitude" – to create a transmodern world "in which many worlds fit" and where the global dictatorship of capital, property, and coloniality no longer reign (Maldonado-Torres 2008: 244).

Being a witness and a victim to colonially induced violence motivates the narrator to imagine a transformed future marked by unfettered freedom. *I Refuse to Die* is thus a decolonisation narrative, which celebrates any success against the oppressive forces of modernity.

5.3 Violence Begets Violence: Rewriting the Mau Mau Violence

Colonialism cannot be understood without background knowledge of the violence used to make the natives, "powerless, voiceless, confused and fearful of the alien order" (Sharifi and Chabot, 2019:252) and "fit" for manipulation. Accordingly, the humiliation, subjugation and discrimination associated with colonial violence brought a lot of misery to the colonised people. It is this abuse ensuing from this alien violence and dehumanisation that generated disgust and anticolonial agitation intended to eject the coloniser. The Mau Mau uprising (1952-1960) is an example of anticolonial violence at the peak of colonial rule in Kenya – it is understood as a form of organised peasant "violence [that happened] in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order" (Ngugi, 1972:28).

Indeed, *I Refuse to Die* indulges in the history of the Mau Mau revolt executed by the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) to contest colonial violence and reclaim the African's lost humanity. The autophylography represents some sort of "authoritative discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981:342) about the Mau Mau revolt because the narrator witnessed this violence first-hand in that his family members and community were victims in the uprising. The Mau Mau struggle was mainly carried out by Kikuyu peasants to agitate, militarily, for the freedom of the Kenyan people after suffering

decades of colonial rule (Elkins, 2005). Wamwere observes that KLFA "never called itself Mau Mau and nobody … knows what the name meant in Kikuyu" (KW: 92). The origin of the word Mau Mau is, however, associated with the mispronunciation of "*uma uma"* (Barnett and Njama, 1966:53-4), Kikuyu words that the British police heard from the local people, which meant "get out! get out!" (KW: 92). The term Mau Mau later came to be understood as an acronym deriving from the Swahili statement, "*Mzungu Aende Ulaya Mwafrika Apate Uhuru (Mau Mau)* which meant Europeans Return to Europe so the African can get Independence" (KW: 92). As a result, the Mau Mau war and the ideologies driving it sought to counter colonial-centred discourses that had declared that Kenya was, "a white man's country" (Adhiambo, 2002: 236). The uprising was therefore a black man's resistance against British colonialism in Kenya, which aimed to end labour exploitation, cultural alienation, land dispossession and forced taxation, among other grievances. Ngugi (1972) observes that the basic objectives of Mau Mau revolutionaries were to drive out Europeans, seize the government, and give back to the Kenyan peasants their stolen lands and wealth. Likewise, Wamwere in his autophylography identifies land as the prime source of the Mau Mau conflict: "land was confiscated from Africans and returned to those who denounced Mau Mau and supported colonialism" (KW: 103). This colonial manipulation generated divisions among the local people, which worked for the benefit of the settlers and to the detriment of the victims of colonialism (Elkins, 2005). Consequently, the majority who had rejected colonial policies and supported Mau Mau were labelled, "*itoi* rebels, *imaramari* terrorists, *washenzi*, primitive people as well as atavistic, cannibalistic and beastly" (KW: 99). These demeaning tags depict Mau Mau fighters as dangerous outlaws, who deserved to be crushed by the colonial police through brutal force. One of the narratives advanced by colonial authorities suggested that the Mau Mau fighters aimed, "to return to a past of primitiveness, darkness, death and evil" (KW:99) because, according to the white community, Africans did not know freedom. The narrator contests this British campaign by maintaining that the Mau Mau uprising was a justified cause intended to end "racial discrimination, unemployment and the hunger of the perennially underfed African child" (KW:99). As a result, Wamwere's account of the uprising suggests that the anticolonial struggle and its drive for freedom did not wither despite the British propaganda (Miyonga, 2025).

It is ironic that Mau Mau was banned after Kenya's independence in 1963 because Kenyatta, the first post-independence president, was uncomfortable with the past that it represented and had declared that Mau Mau was a "disease" which needed to be eradicated. The reason Kenyatta and Moi who succeeded him continued to proscribe Mau Mau discourses was because both had controverted the ideals of the freedom movement. The ban on Mau Mau was thus only lifted in 2003 after KANU was defeated by a united opposition. The story of the Mau Mau uprising in *I Refuse to Die* invites readers to empathise with the victims of colonial atrocities. For instance, the narrator recalls a case where a colonial policeman, who admired a local shopkeeper's wife, planted a bullet in a bag of rice, and proceeded to report to the authorities that the man was a terrorist. The policeman eventually killed the shopkeeper, under the guise that he was a terrorist. This deceit and treachery is evident in how the colonial administration employed the church, as one of the vehicles through which to unleash violence against the Mau Mau freedom fighters (Elkins, 2005a). For example, the colonial clergy demanded that all converts confess whether they had partaken in the Mau Mau oath with a promise that this confession would make them inherit the heavenly Kingdom. Gathogo (2014: 22) observes that the churches held an ecumenical meeting in Kiambu in 1953 and resolved to reject Mau Mau publicly because "their practices were anti-Christ and against government which was God ordained." The church was directed to expel those who had joined the rebels. This position is illustrated in *I Refuse to Die* through the story of Father Tui, a chaperon of the colonial system, who doubled as a police officer at night, though performing mass during the day. Like other members of search gangs, Father Tui wore a police or army uniform at night, and looked menacing. This not only contradicted the gospel of redemption that he preached in the church, but confounded many Africans and left them with lingering questions about true and enduring Christian doctrines of compassion. The narrator revisits the story of Father Tui to reveal the religious hypocrisy which aided the colonial government in the violent destruction of African communities.

It is telling that the destruction of African communities is captured using the most horrific images. The search teams, such as the ones Father Tui participated in, were known for their terror and committed atrocities against the local communities:

> They would beat our fathers and us children, raped our mothers and sisters and stole our sheep with impunity. For saying they had not seen Mau Mau, our fathers were beaten and taken to screening camps for more torture, deportation, detention and death" (KW: 104).

Elkins (2005a) details how the British forces in Kenya turned villages into concentration camps, where the Kikuyu people endured forced labour, disease, starvation, torture, rape and murder. Elkins (2005a: 3) chronicles how colonial authorities "launched several attacks that included wiping out an entire village of men, women, and elderly […] using bayonets, rifles, machine guns, and fire" to show the vicious colonial retaliation against Mau Mau. Wamwere corroborates Elkins' assertions by giving witness accounts of how Mau Mau search teams unleashed unfathomable physical and psychological terror on innocent villagers. The display at Mung'etho Trading Centre, for example, where the white forest officer forced people to view colonial horror, illuminates the cruelty of colonialism. The scene at Mung'etho is described as follows: "after the bodies were laid on the table, four heads with big and long dreadlocks, four pairs of cut arms were laid beside them" (KW: 108-9). The gory details are nerve wrecking and had the sole intention of scaring the villagers to surrender or betray the fighters. As if that was not distressing enough, the white forest officer also threatened people that if they did not report the "terrorists" then, "for each Mau Mau captured, I will pick… from among you either a man, a woman or a child to kill" (KW: 109).

Wamwere's narrative exposes these details of the violence that colonial authorities unleashed against the Mau Mau and the local communities so as to counter the colonial falsehoods and misconceptions about the anticolonial struggle, which as Parry (2016: online) argues, "portrayed Mau Mau as a descent into savagery … the face of international terrorism in the 1950s." In staging this counter-discourse, Wamwere simultaneously shows how the colonial administration ruined social cohesion among the local people. For example, he recalls how "rewards" given to those who arrested or reported sightings of freedom fighters, intensified suspicion and weakened the cultural bond among the local people. The realities of these social fractures are captured as follows: "when a brother - in the army, police or government - was fed and paid by the white man to kill his brother, he did so to keep his family and himself alive" (KW: 102). Elkins (2005b) also describes how the British authorities employed loyalism to divide the community and break the communal

fighting spirit. Wamwere therefore imagines the Mau Mau revolt as a story of collective hope for freedom and manifestation of the common spirit of struggle, survival and destiny. It is from these experiences of the Mau Mau freedom fighters, as etched in his mind, that the narrator partly draws his unflinching desire to fight oppression and exploitation in post-independence Kenya. This makes sense because as Maathai (2007: 69) explains, the trauma of the colonised is rarely examined until a time when the victims create stories to liberate themselves. As a result, Wamwere's story ameliorates the "shared" trauma experienced by those victims of the anti-Mau Mau purge initiated by the colonial government.

One of the ways in which Wamwere confronts this collective trauma is by foregrounding the fact that Kenya's independence did not usher into the freedom that people yearned for as practices such as oathing continued with the formation of underground movements like the People's Party - *Kiama Kia Muingi* which were opposed to the granting of independence under conditions that negated aspirations of the African people. The oathing after independence was occasioned by the government position and Kenyatta's insistence that people should simply forget the past instead of producing systems that would help them come to terms with the traumatic history. The narrative affirms that people wanted justice on account of the colonial atrocities and were not ready to forget the depraved past. Wamwere re-imagines the betrayal of Kenyatta's call to "forgive and forget" and hence his story illustrates the reality asserted by Jaramogi (1967) that independence (*uhuru)* was still a mirage. The history of Mau Mau is revisited by Wamwere not as an isolated experience but as part of the horrors of colonialism he encountered together with other members of his community. In this personal story, Wamwere chronicles the brutality of colonialism in the context of Kenyan history from the 1890s, when imperialists butchered Waiyaki wa Hinga to Mau Mau atrocities of the 1950s. In Kenyan history of anticolonial resistance, Waiyaki wa Hinga is often regarded as the first freedom martyr because he was killed while protesting against the mistreatment of his people by Captain Fredrick Lugard (Boender, 2023). Wamwere revives Waiyaki's philosophy and compares it to that of Jesus Christ: "They say Jesus died so that I may live. If I have to follow someone who died for me that person is Waiyaki wa Hinga whom the white people killed at Kibwezi, fighting for our freedom" (KW:71). The narrator therefore reclaims the spirit of "martyrs," such as Waiyaki, to give the Mau Mau struggle a communal meaning as the names of these early heroes of resistance have mythical significance among the Kikuyu people.

Wamwere autophylography suggests that the history of Mau Mau is critical because Kenya's predicament can be traced to the colonial past. Alam (2007: 226) affirms that Mau Mau history "informs and influences the politics of postcolonial Kenya."

I Refuse to Die therefore constructs a "simple" and linear account of resistance, which imagines early heroes such as Waiyaki who planted the initial seeds of revolt that culminated into the Mau Mau upheaval in the 1950s. The autophylography invests in Kenyan history to validate certain positions held by the author in regard to political liberation. The story is a dialogue between historical realities and personal experiences as the narrator amalgamates communal experiences with personal intentions mainly to correct certain misconstructions about the struggle for freedom. Through the story of Waiyaki wa Hinga, Mekatilili wa Menza, Oginga Odinga, Koitalele Samoei, Paul Ngei, Jomo Kenyatta and Mary Nyanjiru among others, Wamwere consistently collapses the colonial narrative that the Kikuyu people solely undertook the freedom struggle in Kenya. In doing so, he de-ethnicises anti-colonial agitation contrary to the narratives written by scholars of Kenyan history (Barnnet and Njama, 1966; Throup, 1985). Ultimately, the autophylography qualifies as counter-hegemonic narrative of colonialism in Kenya. It is an exercise in articulating a subaltern identity and part of reclaiming agency which is a prominent aspect of decoloniality. This autophylography can be interpreted as one of the ways through which stories serve "as a catalyst to identify, to instigate, and to provoke otherwise merely latent potentialities of" a subaltern group rendered invisible and silenced by coloniality (Nayar, 2017: 3). *I Refuse to Die* therefore is an active process of speaking to power and legitimising indigenous and subaltern ways of being through excavating the communal history of suffering and cultural modes of communication.

5.4 Narrating Atrocities After "Uhuru"

The struggle for independence was vindicated upon the removal of inhuman colonial systems in order "to achieve a just and an equal society worth of an African dignity which assured citizens of their equal rights and respect" (Sebola, 2019:1). In Kenya, as in other African countries, it is unfortunate that the post-independence elite reneged on the ideals of the liberation struggle as they began to amass the nation's wealth for personal aggrandisement (Ouma, 2019; Lockwood, 2026). To ensure complete control, the emerging elite perfected draconian legislations to silence the

discontented citizens and true freedom was largely compromised. *I Refuse to Die* chronicles the external invasion by Britain and consequently interrogates the internal factors generated by colonial culture which hitherto remains detrimental to the Kenyan masses. From this perspective, this autophylography is read as a decolonising process because it is "implicated in the larger struggles which define political life in wider society" (Amuta, 1989: 54) as the narrator pursues individual and collective freedom. The process of decolonisation, according to Fanon (1963:36):

> …transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity. Decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the "thing" which has been colonised becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.

In his futuristic analysis, Fanon dissects the postcolonial situation in the once colonised nations, where after imperial exit, structures of subordination and exploitation were inherited by the elite who ascended to power. According to Fanon (1963), it was necessary to destroy all aspects of colonialism before independence because coloniality would wreak havoc on the post-independence nation. However, the new post-independence leaders in Africa were inclined to follow the systems left by colonialists such that meaningful freedom remained unattained. The systems were Euro-centric in nature and they continued to perpetuate differences found in the old colonial world hence generating neocolonialism. It follows that what was colonialism translates into neocolonialism – just different players but same victims. This explains why the political elite who ascended to power immediately after "independence" switched their loyalty from the citizens to the former colonial masters leaving the citizens disillusioned and maltreated by their own government. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:486) notes that "African leaders continue to manage and maintain the global system after replacing direct colonial rulers." Colonial subjects remained subalterns in the postcolony (Pachón Soto, 2023) despite the bloody independence struggle. Wamwere narrates that independence gave the ruling bourgeoisie, "a better opportunity than colonialism to become Europeans [exploiters]" (KW: 147) and hence some colonial indignities were carried to the new era. His writing exudes, "a revolutionary consciousness congruent with

the objective of the oppressed class engaged in …struggle to change the status quo" (Uwasomba, 2006: 98) in a nation bedevilled with unfreedom.

In order to tell the reversed narrative of freedom, Wamwere reconstructs post-independence leaders through the imagery of "*black ogres,"* who were disguised as "true" political liberators. To illustrate the predicament of exploited citizens, he tells the story of an *ogre* which took over everything from its employer, disinherited him and the children, impoverished and enslaved him and forced him to forget the history of dispossession. In this analogy, the employer is seen as the Kenyan people, whose vision of freedom and prosperity was inverted by the ruling elite. For instance, the narrator reminiscences Kenyatta's clarion call after independence was to "forgive and forget" (KW:123), which was contrary to the wish of the citizens who wanted freedom and justice. Wamwere believes that in this call, Kenyatta abandoned his anti-colonial promise of ushering independence and fairness. He rebukes Kenyatta for suggesting that the people forget their history, stolen lands and other atrocities committed against them during the colonial era. *I Refuse to Die* therefore grapples with post-independence "realities of suffering, oppression, repression, domination and exclusion" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013d: 34) thereby unmasking the emptiness of political discourses authorised by the ruling elite, which projected the post-independence era as having brought prosperity to Kenyans. However, in unsettling these discourses, Wamwere also captures the dilemma of the masses who could not confront this ugly spectacle because the black ogres "were their own children and in part wanted to be like them" (KW: 148). Through the image of the *ogre*, the narrator also criticizes tribalism which has continued to corrode the national fabric and which seems to have replaced racism as a new form of discrimination after the end of colonial rule. The use of the image of ogres brings to life the reality African folklore thus entrenching afro-centric epistemologies and challenging colonial legacies. In the autophylography ogres divided the citizens along ethnic lines.

Wamwere recounts how colonialism fanned ethnic animosity something which created mistrust among Kenyans long after independence due to the British policy of divide and rule. Oduor (2022: 32) reiterates that ethnic mobilization is an escapable fact of Kenyan political life since it has been manipulated with the aim of "capturing or retaining state power," Ethnic cleavages in Kenya had

been created and sustained by the British to weaken and control the local populations (Khapoya, 2010; Ali Merima et al ., 2015) in pre-independence period and afterwards, they were appropriated by the unpatriotic black elite thereby undermining the shared national identity. The fragmentation along ethnic lines weakens ability to fight exploitation and the narrator attests that ethnic bias was employed by the elite so as to advance the idea of divide and rule and maintain political power (Mukanda, 2025). Wamwere's narrative criticises the problem of tribalism and exhorts the people to transcend the divisions and exclusions that it engenders as follows:

> When Kenyans embraced collaboration as a virtue … and set the stage for a new struggle …that would capture my attention and shape my destiny for the next thirty years (KW: 149).

The narrator is furious that unpatriotic leaders invaded and invalidated independence: instead of bringing progress, it ushered in new deadly struggles because it was a "refinement of the colonial systems" (Lazarus 1990: 5). From his convictions, Wamwere has remained inimical to the Kenyan political leadership and was arrested on several occasions and accused of incitement of the masses, publishing seditious documents, being subversive, being communist and raiding police stations, among other charges. Hence, the narrator accuses successive post-independence governments in Kenya of instilling pathological fear into Kenyans through the use of state machinery. Wamwere's courage to speak against Moi's government failures, even when everyone else was cowed was so surprising that G.G. Kariuki (Moi's Minister) wondered how "such a small man could have struck terror into the heart of … dictatorship" (KW: 211). Wamwere overcame fear of the state and his sustained campaign against police brutality, ethnicity, poverty and endemic corruption earned him the title "rebel" despite his humanistic vision in whatever he said or did. Wamwere demonstrates how the political system had perfected the use of fear to the extent that MPs were unable to interrogate certain decrees, some of which infringed on the rights of the citizens. For instance, the narrator recounts a case where Charles Njonjo (Moi's Attorney General) gave an order to the police to shoot and kill all those suspected of robbery with violence – no MP spoke against this edict, but Wamwere contested Njonjo's order despite calls by fellow MPs to drop it. The incident confirms the level of fear the people's representatives were subjected to and also shows how, through fear, Moi's government manipulated the nation. Wamwere's determination to fight this decree was thus

a way of shielding the citizens from the excesses of KANU government which had proved detrimental in all facades.

To illustrate how dissent was suppressed in all national discourses, the narrator recounts episodes in KANU's parliamentary meetings where MPs were forced to withdraw antagonistic motions or were threatened with expulsion from the party in case, the motions were unwelcome by President Moi (Melles, 2025). The president was so intolerant that he was personally involved in gagging alternative opinions. For example, Wamwere recalls an incident in which he was invited by Moi to Kabarak (Moi's Private residence in Nakuru) together with his wife, Nduta to demonstrate how Moi arm-twisted and even threatened those opposed to his policies. Wamwere narrates how Moi accused him, before his wife, of imagined political evils so as to disgrace him before his wife and by extension make him discard his ideologies. Ostensibly, Moi was convinced that Nduta would persuade her husband to drop his activism because it was dangerous in that he was calling for the redistribution of land. Moi was apprehensive that Wamwere was rousing the poor:

> … where will those who are calling for reform get land to give to all the people they are awakening? Those of you who have no land to lose must let sleeping dogs lie or you will lie yourself (KW: 218).

The narrator was threatened with death if he went on championing for land reforms and he knew too well that "the government used thugs to kill opponents" (KW:230). From the scenarios captured, it is clear that Moi's dictatorship was entrenched by either appeasing or repressing the citizens and critics. Dissent was also suppressed through blackmail:

> After taking rights and freedoms away from MPs, dictatorship struck terror into their hearts with the fear of detention, assassination and imprisonment through trumped up charges and blackmail. To the outside, the Kenyan MPs may have looked free. Inside they were frightened and cowed. Most MPs could not speak or vote without looking over their shoulders. Over the years President's friend Charles Njonjo had perfected the system of blackmail where MPs who were caught in a crime were never prosecuted or tried. They were held hostage and forced to toe the government line. Those who defied this blackmail were jailed (KW: 221).

One of the pro-democracy lawyers, Kuria (1991: 122) noted that "the president runs KANU with an iron hand, personally approving all candidates and expelling or even jailing dissident party members." For example, during the debate to outlaw multi-party politics, Moi held a KANU parliamentary group meeting and ordered:

> Every MP must condemn the formation of another party in this country…those who are silent are also planning to oppose …by keeping away from parliament during either the debate or the vote. Only three MPs have permission to miss the house during this time. Anyone else will face the axe of a woodcutter, *cha mtema kuni*. Under such a threat…MPs were so fearful that they were willing to entomb democracy. We were all prisoners of fear (KW: 230).

The metaphor of "*cha mtema kuni*" (the woodcutter's axe) in the above excerpt underlines the ruthlessness with which the president dealt with dissenters. As a result, parliament was reduced to a prison of fear – the MPs were the obvious inmates – and ceased to be a space where legislators engaged in vibrant debates to forge policies that benefited the nation. Adar and Munyae (2001: 4) argue that due to the personalisation of power around Moi "both Parliament and the Judiciary ceased to have the constitutional rights to control the excesses of the executive." Those MPs who escaped blackmail, were openly vilified and targeted for political harassment. For example, the 'Bearded Sisters' (a derisive tag given to seven MPs whose concern for the poor was prominent in parliament), were sent into prison, detention or exile. The label effectively categorised the MPs as communists who, as per the Cold War politics of the time, were seen as "dangerous" as Fidel Castrol of Cuba, a communist and an enemy of the West. During the Cold War years, Kenya's leadership aligned itself with the West and therefore anyone branded a communist became an outcast who was to be maligned using every political vitriol. The victims of such vitriol were then subjected to police surveillance and other forms of harassment.

Apart from fear, the government used detention of critics to thwart any effort of initiating political change. According to Adar and Munyae (2001: 6) "detentions and political trials, torture, arbitrary arrests and police brutality reminiscent of the colonial era … became common during Moi's tenure." Detention without trial, for instance, was inherited from the colonial system intact at independence but Kenyatta and Moi perfected it to deal with dissenters (Chege, 2017).

Incarceration was also meant to instil fear because the narrator observes that, "Kenyatta used the detention of a few to terrify and imprison the whole nation" (KW: 202) thus it was a tool of suppression. Angelo (2017) asserts that during colonialism incarceration systems were tools for colonizers to mark their authority over their territory and to control, discipline, and punish colonized populations and this explains why independence government kept the Euro-centric prison system intact. Angelo further writes that genealogy of detention in the pre-independence period reveals that detention nurtured a culture of violence that developed with, within, around and outside the colonial carceral structure. In postcolonial Kenya, the process of political incarceration itself involved humiliating treatment, such as the ritual of being blindfolded, isolation, undressing before prison warders and the orders not to sing, cough or talk. According to Kiai (2003: x), detention without trial is one of the heinous forms of human abuse that Moi's regime committed against the citizens because:

> It negates the very fundamental basis of democracy and short of execution, it is the ultimate form of repression. A nation that detains its own citizens without trial cannot be a democratic one. Rather, it is a sadistic one, which delights in the pain and suffering of its people. For detention without trial is grotesque, it is despicable.

Wamwere's story, therefore, condemns detention and the European oriented justice system and labels them all as outrightly dehumanising. Nagel (2008: 68) argues that carceral punishment in Africa is a "way of life — at least for those who are socially displaced or who are political opponents of anti-democratic regimes." Hence, for Wamwere the detention of those holding opposing political views is akin to holding a nation hostage:

> As political detainees, we were treated worse than convicted criminals. Clearly, while criminals injured, robbed and destroyed the lives of people and disturbed the comfort of the Kenyan elite, they did not question the ways of the government or its legitimacy. Political detainees threatened the very survival of dictatorship…To make detention serve as a lifetime nightmare for us and to cripple us so we would serve as scarecrows to potential transgressors, the Kenyatta government made detention extremely cruel…When we see Kenyans today paralysed by fear, it is because they have seen Wamwere lose all hope of employment after detention. They have witnessed Ochola Achola picking up

> papers in the streets, or the wealthy Kenneth Matiba released from prison debilitated by strokes... (KW: 201).

Therefore, the incarceration of Wamwere and others becomes the "detention" of the Kenyan dream, designed to deter people's freedom by silencing the voices in the margins. Moi's government saw pro-democracy proponents and activists as "unpatriotic, disloyal, and ungrateful individuals influenced by what he calls foreign masters" (Adar and Munyae, 2001: 6). This explains Moi's attitude towards groups, such as the outlawed *Mwakenya*, whose members were hunted and detained without trial because "the judiciary was recruited into the orgy and used as a tool for the defence of the regime" (Kiai, 2003: 4). Kuria (1991:117) notes that the evidence about existence of *Mwakenya* was nothing but "coerced confessions" suggesting that it was a creation of the government. It therefore follows that the citizens' rights to fair trial were suspended because the courts were used by government to pronounce any anti-establishment suspect guilty as charged. It can therefore be argued that Wamwere's narrative seeks "re-define the national ethos by entrenching rule of law, justice, equity, human rights, and good governance" (Chege, 2017: 408) by excavating the worst violations during Moi era Kenya. He narrates the disregard for people's rights reminiscent of the colonial legal system of the bygone era, which as Kuria (1991: 124) observes, served the interests "of the colonial elite, and showed little interest in either human rights or the rule of law." Effectively, Wamwere's narrative indicts Moi's government as having committed worse atrocities than the colonial administration, as illustrated by the numerous cases of torture that he chronicles – Mirugi Kariuki came out of police custody with punctured kidney, Danson Mahungu fainted and defecated on himself before the judge, while Jamlick Miano arrived in court on a wheel chair. Also, during Moi's rule, people were arrested on bizarre charges, such as the case of Gathagu, who was arrested on the accusation of dreaming that he was a King: "[d]reaming earned Gathagu five years in prison" (KW: 268)! According to Kiai (2003: v), the struggle for democracy in post-independence Kenya during Moi's rule had many casualties and the worst happened to "the people who committed their lives to social change and transformation… and paid the ultimate price with their lives and liberty." So vicious was Moi's rule that there was an attempted coup in 1982, with the hope that it would perhaps result in a leadership that was better than the intolerant KANU government that was in place. However, (Chege, 2017: 411) notes after the 1982 coup "the administration ruthlessly purged suspected culprits, triggering what would become a policy of systemic, brutal suppression of dissent" thus

the episode accelerated the process and solidified Moi's authoritarian rule. Hence, Wamwere recounts all these episodes in an effort to heal from the trauma because recovery "begins with telling the story in the survivors' own words" (Kiai, 2003: v) and also to reveal the "dark history" of the nation during Moi's rule to the wider Kenyan community. Through his story, Wamwere allows readers to "feel" the pain of oppression, detention, exploitation and share in the overpowering desire to remain heroic in democratic struggles.

This autophylography is, therefore, a story about how Kenyan citizens struggled for freedom and the atrocious suffering in post-independence Kenya. As a result, Wamwere's narrative affirms that the collective dream of freedom in Kenya cannot be isolated from the country's political history as it gives a version of an "insider" who suffered colonial exploitation, witnessed the struggle before independence, and was consigned to subalternity after independence. Mutie (2018: 477) argues that "marginalised groups reside in a negative relationship to power" hence self-writing is a part of subaltern eloquence likely to rework centre and periphery thus a form of struggle against hegemony. This study affirms that literary resistance is quite strong in that subalterns commit for change in both body and spirit. *I Refuse to Die* rewrites history rarely found in the official narratives and which would have been forgotten or forever remained hidden. The incarceration and intolerance witnessed in post-independence Kenya are conveyed through a "collective" narrative, with the aim of bringing focus on the role of certain personalities who have never been accorded or commemorated as heroes or heroines. In remembering his own tribulations, Wamwere tells stories of other people and their contributions towards the expansion of the democratic space that was restricted by Moi and his KANU party. The autophylography can be said to be a "microstoria" recounting the lifeworld of subaltern actors in Kenya's colonial historiography. Thus, the activities of various freedom campaigners, such as J.M. Kariuki, P. Muite, R. Odinga, M. Ng'ang'a, W. Maathai, K. Kibwana, T. Njoya and K. Kuria among others, converge in Wamwere's story as he narrates his own and collective encounters with Moi rule. The inclusion, in the autophylography, of other Kenyan people's experiences and their search for democracy, is a testimony to the "general" and "shared" quest for freedom in spaces characterised by coloniality. Therefore, the discussion in this section concludes that Wamwere's narrative has to be understood within aesthetics of revolution, where he celebrates freedom while advocating for total rejection of oppression, inequality, injustice and exclusion.

5.5 Deprived at Birth: Land and Landlessness

The land motif is a recurs in Kenyan literature primarily due its history with colonialism. In Ngugi's novels *Weep not Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965) and *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), land dispossession is a metaphor of colonial violence, spiritual and material loss that Kenyan people had to content with across generations. Dei, Karanja, and Erger (2022) theorise on land in Africa suggesting that land is a living entity and a source of indigenous knowledge and a manifestation of people's spiritualism. However, Western epistemology considers land as empty, abstract space fit for exploitation. This explains why Kenyan fertile highlands were feminised and considered virgin and thereafter appropriated to the white settlers to be exploited. Klaus (2015: 6) states that "land is life! If you don't have land, you have no life" and thus land remains one of the most sensitive concerns in post-independence Kenya and debates around it generates upsetting emotions among the Kenya people. Before colonialism, land was communally owned and managed "by a social hierarchy organised in the form of an inverted pyramid with the tip representing the family, the middle as the clan and lineage, and the base, the community" (Okoth-Ogendo, 2002: 108). Klaus (2015) links land to identity formation where some people see themselves as son-of-the-soil or migrants. In the same vein, Klaus looks at land as a political space that can be taken over thus dominated. During the colonial period land in Kenya shifted from the community to individuals and all unoccupied land became "crown land." The development meant that the colonial government held the land on behalf of the Queen of England (Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902). Thus, after Kenya became a British protectorate in 1885 (Gathogo, 2020:2), "land law was primarily designed to serve the interests of European settler farmers" (Gathogo, 2020: 4). The new land laws effectively dispossessed the Kikuyu people as they undermined their worldviews, especially the myth that "land was given to Gikuyu by Ngai, the lord of nature" (Kenyatta, 1961:27). This myth, among others, specifically gave Kikuyu people a spiritual connection with their land; a "communion with the ancestral spirits … perpetuated through contact with the land in which the ancestors of the community are buried." Hence, as Wainaina (2012:94) argues, "[t]he Kikuyu consider the land as the mother of the community." It is the severance of this spiritual connection which explains why Wamwere is astounded by the historical misfortune of land dispossession, which resulted in the Kikuyu people losing their autochthony. Autochthony describes the close ties of citizens born in a certain geographic area, same as their ancestors, and have a shared identity claim to the land (Kameri-Mbote and Kindiki, 2008; Médard, 2008).

Therefore, this historical loss explains how land in Kenya across history transformed into an issue of social and economic justice to be obtained violently. *I Refuse to Die* is an artistic imagination of land loss and the disconnection from the land that occurred during colonial period and was sustained by political elite after independence Edgerton (1992). In revealing land injustices, the narrator undertakes to perpetuate decoloniality by associating British colonialism with theft and dispossession.

Land remains at the centre of anticolonial nationalist struggles in Kenya and the Mau Mau uprising was conceived around landlessness. *Wiyathi* (Independence) discourses in Kenya parallelled the repossession of land to the attainment of freedom (Githuku, 2015). Therefore, the conflict in Wamwere's story revolves around the usurpation of Kikuyu land by white settlers and the failure to get it back at independence. The historical injustice occasioned by the act of dispossession were part of the major independence grievances. Nevertheless, independence government failed to compensate or resettle the victims of displacement. Wamwere observes that the post-independence governments of Kenyatta and Moi undermined the ideals of the liberation struggle and instead gave land to those blacks who collaborated with the colonisers during the colonial period while sidelining those who had sacrificed for independence. Likewise, Ongunyi and Gillies (2019) observe that land, which was formerly occupied by white settlers, was acquired by the government of Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978) and eventually sold to national elites who gained overall control and the trend was continued under Daniel Arap Moi's rule (1978-2002). Wamwere suggests that the failure of the independence regimes to initiate meaningful land reforms is coloniality per excellence.

The colonisers' sense of ownership and entitlement to land is highlighted through an incident when Winston Churchill (the then British Prime Minister) visited Kenya and declared to the settler community that, "this land is yours … in perpetuity, not only for you but also for your children and grandchildren" (KW: 23). This not only granted the colonists rights over the Kikuyu land, but also affirmed the colonial laws that favoured the settlers when it came to land ownership. The narrator observes that Churchill's words brutally scuttled any hope of the displaced Kikuyu people of ever getting back their "stolen land" (KW: 23) thereby plunging the whole community into

endemic poverty. This is illustrated by Ngugi in the Kikuyu worldview that "any man who had land was considered rich" and those who possessed no land were poor (Ngugi, 1964: 20). Michael Wainaina (2012: 94) echoes Ngugi's observation when he argues that land dispossession created extreme despair because the Kikuyu "people depended entirely on land for their survival". It is this scale of land alienation that subjected the narrator's parents to be poor wanderers who had to rely on selling their labour to the settler farmers for survival. These revelations initiate decolonial discourse about reparations and correct the history of land ownership in a country where squatter problem is still a national tragedy. The poverty and general misfortune that befell the Kikuyu people in the wake of land dispossession is expressed in Ngugi's novel *Weep not Child* (1964), through the symbol of *Muhoi* to explain how settlers' activities reduced Kikuyu people to serfs in their own land. The significance of land is captured by Ben Okri (2012: xii) as follows:

> … the land is the body of the ancestral deity. To lose it is to lose connection with the gods of people, to be unmoored and unhoused in time. Land here has profoundly different meanings to the colonist and to the colonised: to one it is a source of power, compared to the body of a woman - a haven, an escape from home, a new homeland, and an act of conquest.

I Refuse to Die revisits how the colonialists evicted Wamwere's community from their homes and forced them into the Rift Valley as wanderers. According to Ngelema Digumefele (2003:1870) "loss of land … is the sign of the broken axis of [a] given people. Land comes to stand for language, dignity, identity, independence, and freedom" contrary to colonial perspective that it was just a tool of production. In the process of narrating the displacement that his community suffered in the wake of land dispossession, the narrator simultaneously corrects colonial falsehoods which cast the Kikuyu people as land grabbers, who robbed the communities in the Rift Valley of their land (Boone, Lukalo and Joireman, 2021; Mumo, 2021). The righting of history is an "epistemic rectification" different from what is written in Kenyan history inherited from Britain. Through the story of colonial dispossession and dispersal, the narrator appeals for tolerance among different ethnic groups who reside in the Rift Valley and encourages a shared sense of nationalism. He specifically entreats the non-Kikuyu communities - the original inhabitants of the Rift Valley - to empathise with the Kikuyu who are victims of the brutal colonial history of dispossession:

> … Kikuyu people did not march into the Rift Valley as robber barons, as some people claim today, but were driven there as impoverished and wandering slaves looking for a place to settle and for money to pay British imposed taxes (KW: 23).

The British control of land also created a bigger conflict, where the natives were exploited for their labour (Veit, 2011). Wamwere himself was born into this debilitating landlessness, and he details his own experience to justify the communal desire of the Kikuyu to reclaim their original land. Karmakar and Byrne (2024: 162) argue that "the acquisition of land ownership and subsequent conversion of Indigenous tribes into hired labourers marked an enormous shift in social, economic, and environmental philosophy" and can generally be considered as part of "totalising and expansionist epistemology" (Lehuedé, 2023: 427). The land discourse in the narrative can thus be understood as part of decolonial confrontations because Kikuyu land never went back to the natives even after independence. After his birth, Wamwere was connected to the land by burying the placenta in the soil something that created spiritual, and psychological connections which could not be erased by the settler displacement. Mumo (2021:68) explains this ritual as follows: "during birth, the blood from birth of a child trickles into the ground while the placenta is buried in the ground, thus bonding the child to the ancestral family land." At once, this ritual establishes a cultural connection between the newborn and the land – this also explains why Wamwere portrays the loss of land in images that suggest both physical and spiritual disconnection. *I Refuse to Die* invests in Kikuyu myths, which gives the autophylography a religious perspective and underscores the communal sense of ownership of land:

> *Kikuyu was taken by Mwene Nyaga*
> *On top of Mount Kenya*
> *And asked, do you see all this land?*
> *I give it to you and your descendants* (KW: 24)

The myth signalled here is an account of how the Kikuyu people acquired and got connected to their land – which is claimed to have been given to them by *Mwene Nyaga* (Kikuyu God). The narrator revisits this myth to highlight the shared origins and past of the Kikuyu people thereby inspiring a communal identity and solidarity among them in the struggle to repossess what is divinely theirs. The myth is appropriated in the autophylography as a tool of decolonisation which

forms part of the discourses that reject the alien control of land and as a result. It inculcates a sense of irrevocable ownership and the need to reclaim what was stolen. The myth is also important as its version of landownership seeks to free Gikuyu people from the Christian power of the coloniser, who had considered *Mwene Nyaga* (Kikuyu God) a lesser deity. Hence, through Kikuyu orature, Wamwere persuades the readers to empathise with both the anguish of his people as well as partake in the decolonial struggles.

The most violent struggle against European settlers as storied in *I Refuse to Die,* was by Kenya Land Defence Army (Mau Mau), whose aim was to drive out the colonisers from the Kikuyu country and reclaim the land for Kikuyu people as highlighted in the song below:

> *Our people, I have been wondering*
> *Shall get back the lands*
> *Which were left to us by Iregi*
> *From Demi and Mathathi generations* (KW: 124).

The song references mythical figures; *Demi and Mathathi*, "the giants of the [Kikuyu] community" (Ngugi 1965: 28) to establish for black people, an ancestral connection to the land, which should in turn inspire them to a collective struggle against its expropriation. In the process, the song simultaneously fronts a strong need to repossess the land and also re-centres the communal narratives unappreciated by the Eurocentric epistemologies. Elevating the myths of *Demi and Mathathi* is can be analysed as a cultural validation that is not tied to European endorsement. Such mythical symbols demonstrate the value of land on the dispossessed peasants. Wamwere therefore rebukes the postcolonial government for its failure to compensate or even resettle those who were dispersed by colonialism. Kenyatta and Moi regimes are censured because they did nothing towards land restitution after independence. Githuku (2015: 206) argues that "after independence, Kenyatta's intolerance of extensive redistribution and land reform meant that the return of lost African land was pure political rhetoric." The post-colonial government is criticised for perpetuating the status quo of the colonial era in that Mboya's sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 was aimed at protecting private property and capitalism. Generally, as already noted, Kenyatta emphasised the need to "forgive and forget" (KW: 123) despite the people's clamour for "freedom,

equality, justice and restoration of stolen lands" (KW:123). The autophylography disapproves of Kenyatta's call to "forgive and forget" and instead insists that proper social redress and justice ought to have been pursued before persuading Kenyans to forget about the stolen lands and other traumatic experiences under colonialism. The narrator laments: "What did independence mean without land?" (KW: 123), to illustrate the emptiness of post-independence policies which were unsuccessful to recompense the sacrifices made by freedom fighters. On matters of the land, Wamwere generally portrays Kenyatta as a traitor, who sympathised with the colonial settlers while remaining indifferent to the plight of freedom fighters. His deceit is especially captured in how, on the one hand, "he begged colonial settlers to stay and farm" and on the other, warned the landless Africans that, "they would get no free land" (KW: 128). Several historians also argue that Kenyatta took advantage of his position as the President to amass large quantities of land for himself and his family (Angelo, 2019; Veit, 2019). Angelo (2019:95) argues that Kenyatta was the suitable custodian of the exiting colonial order and "would also inherit an advantageously designed institutional framework to control the most valuable political and economic resource in Kenya: land" thus he was not able to institute any people-friendly reforms. The failure to address the land issue is also attributed to the corruption of the post-independence leadership (Veit, 2011/2019). Wamwere notes that there were some leaders in post-independence Kenya who collected money from the poor squatters under the guise that they were buying land from the exiting settlers only to defraud them. He catalogues several land grievances where political elites like Kihika Kimani continued to amass more public land to illustrate how avaricious the post-independence leaders had become. He also illustrates how those in power were similar to the colonialist and could hardly sort the land problem. He condemns leaders for pursuing self-enrichment and taking communal land fraudulently (Githuku, 2015). Despite all the highlights of land corruption involving the land, Kenyatta's government did nothing to protect the poor by bringing the culprits to justice.

Such indifference created new dynamics in the post-independence nation. For example, it led to the formation of organisations such as the Nakuru District Ex-Freedom Fighters Organisation (NDEFFO) which emerged after Kenyatta's government failed to redistribute land to the landless ex-fighters after independence. Kanyingi (2015: 40) observes that the formation of NDEFFO brought the ex-Mau Mau fighters together and enabled them to share "their previous experiences; embrace each other to heal and live in harmony" after Kenyatta had failed their aspirations.

Through the story of NDEFFO, Wamwere's narrative illustrates how the landless poor came up with strategies that enabled them to combat the corruption of the government. In the process, the account underscores the fact that liberation can only be achieved through resistance, especially in spaces characterised by coloniality.

If the narrator projects Kenyatta as a corrupt leader, who acquired land through unscrupulous means, and in the process, subverted the ideals of the liberation struggle, under the Moi presidency, land grabbing was taken a notch higher and became a tool to buy loyalty from those who were critical of the government. For example, the narrator recalls an episode where Moi wanted to bribe Wamwere into silence with a piece of land in Nakuru North Constituency. Veit (2011:7) corroborates this when he observes that "Moi used land to reward loyalists and achieve short-term political ends." As a result, those like Wamwere, who advocated for land redistribution were criticised by Moi:

> This land you are talking about is a dangerous issue. Remember that when you call for reform, the people who will be first to oppose you will be your own Kikuyu, who have large tracts of land. Land in this country belongs to mainly the Kikuyu and Kalenjin. It is they who will lose when its redistributed. And for it they will hate you forever (KW: 217).

Wamwere clashed with Moi over land because he wanted a reversal of the status quo, whereby the bulk of the land in Kenya was in the hands of the minority, while the majority remained landless. Moi was not ready for a compromise and this subsequently culminated in Wamwere's detention. Wamwere's narrative thus imagines the land issue in Kenya as intertwined with politics because tribal clashes occurred where certain communities were evicted from certain areas. Veit (2011:7) argues that Moi "…evoked *majimbo* talk which, […] was interpreted as a "get the land back issue" or recover "stolen" land, […] thus igniting tribal passions and ethnic cleansing. Much of the violence was centred in areas where so-called "immigrant" groups were located." The narrator identifies Olenguruone, Burnt Forest and Molo as areas most affected by the clashes and reveals that the victims had earlier been displaced from their homelands by colonial settlers.

Wamwere radically alters the land narrative with the aim of changing the colonial order of things which continued in Kenya even after the attainment of independence in 1963. Wamwere's strategy for change is an artistic illustration of how settlers stole from the natives and how the same was repeated after independence by various political leaders. That way, he seeks to dismantle exploitation and promote justice which is the cornerstone of human dignity.

5.6 Corruption and Tribalism: Our Time to Eat

Mamdani (1996: 7) defines tribalism as "reified ethnicity. Tribe was used to refer to small groupings who had restricted power and who did not have any influence outside the cultural group. As this study noted earlier, the term tribe is pejorative but mainly used to condemn negative ethnicity. Yet, tribe and ethnic are sometimes used interchangeably to denote a group that shares language and culture (Ake, 1993; Mukanda, 2025). Ethnic and tribe is culture pinned to a homeland, culture in fixity, politicized, so that it does not move." According to Mamdani (1996), both terms tribe and ethnic were created by colonial modernity with the sole aim of defining and controlling the colonized people. Mamdani demonstrates that colonialism instituted inequality where, through white domination, monoethnic administration ruled over multiethnic societies. Ake (1993) attests that ethnicity is a constructed concept which, in the African situation evolved out of the need for solidarity to confront colonialism. Ake (1993: 1) argues that ethnicity is "a living presence produced and driven by material and historical forces" and thus colonialism created and promoted political ethnicity. Ake believes that decolonization followed ethnic lines in order to form a strong coalition against the challenge of domination. Looking at ethnic as a descendant-group, Ake confirms the existence of several ethnic groups in Africa which have a common language and culture. In essence, ethnicity is a primordial identity and thus different tribes share the national spaces created after partition of Africa. Shilaho (2017: 2) observes that when "ethnicity becomes more than an expression of cultural identity and gets connected to social status, it determines people's fortunes in life and becomes politicised." In the Kenyan context, ethnicity has been used as platform for political power since the years of yore. Before independence ethnicity had been manipulated to the advantage of colonial administrators creating mistrust and stereotypes against those who were culturally or linguistically "outsiders" (Mukanda, 2025). Ethnic favourism is one of the cheapest forms of corruption. Corruption – basically the abuse of power for private gain is intertwined with tribalism when one gives preference to those who belong

to his/her tribe either as a reward or inducement. Hartikainen and Szebeni (2024: 73) define tribalism as "a way of thinking or behaving in which a people are more loyal to their tribes than their country, friends or social groupings."

Odhiambo (2025) observes that there are two problems which work against responsible citizenship: corruption and tribalism. Corruption is rampant in Africa and it pervades various spheres of life: economic, social and political. In government and other public institutions, corruption involves the misuse of power by government officials, administrators and other key officers. PLO-Lumumba (2011: 5) asserts that corruption was introduced, nurtured, developed and entrenched by the West in Africa during the imperial venture of colonialism. PLO-Lumumba thinks that corruption is worse than prostitution because, unlike prostitution which destroys the morals of an individual, corruption destroys an entire country. This section argues that newer forms of Western corruption remained after independence and were nourished by the neocolonial leaders acquiring lethal character during the neocolonial period. Achebe (1984:14) in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, asserts that corruption has dangerously permeated society and anyone who thinks that corruption in Africa is not alarming is "either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this continent." Although Achebe's study was preoccupied with the Nigerian situation, the problem of corruption is a global one. Corruption breaks down the rule of law, twists the normal use of shared connections, networks and leads to increased personalisation of power similar to what happened in Kenya after independence. It becomes worse when it intertwines with tribalism. Achebe (1984) declares that no society can progress without eliminating the prejudice of tribalism as the practice inhibits social progress, especially when the state and the ruling elite display prejudice towards sections of their citizens. Tribalism affects the way people think, talk, oppose or support and therefore it forms and informs any national discourse. Throughout history, tribalism has been employed to harm, mock, irritate, and denigrate a particular ethnic group leading to catastrophic conflicts. According to Davis (2020: 433), tribalism is a threat to democracy because "democracy requires that we transcend … tribal attitudes and practices" thus the two remain incompatible.

The British authorities created and entrenched tribal animosities in Kenya making once good neighbours sworn enemies (Mwaura, 2010). Intermarriages and trade thrived between different ethnic communities but colonial authorities created divide and rule policy and made it illegal for

Kikuyu or Maasai to go onto each other's reserves, helping to create and promote ethnic differences (Robertson, 2008). This British policy applied to all the communities in the Kenyan colony thus different cultural groups remained separate and therefore mistrust was intensified. For Wamwere, the colonialists fanned tribalism to gerrymander the country in that they:

> Created a separate district or province of each ethnic community. And while Africans could not move in, out of, or between these ethnic regions without a passbook…the colonialist moved freely between them, gossiping and telling lies about communities to one another. Unable to meet, we could not expose the untruth of colonial gossip and lies and remained enemies, willing to follow the white man in any war he declared against any one African community…these colonial lies, falsehoods, prejudices, and stereotypes that were told, whispered…are the genesis of our current ethnic hatred for one another that we call *ukabila,* ethnicity (KW: 102).

Wamwere's autophylography exposes how the colonialists maligned the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru people by telling the other communities that they were cannibals and thus succeeded in isolating them from other Kenyans. The ethnic politicisation continues to wretch havoc in the nation due to the colonial stereotypes. Amutabi (2009: 61) captures the enormity of the challenge of tribalism in Kenya in the assertion that, "during the Kenyatta and Moi regimes respectively, the Kikuyu and Kalenjin possessed disproportionately large representation in all leading sectors of the economy such as agriculture, health, and education, among others." This reality meant that all those communities which did not produce the president did not enjoy the "fruits of uhuru" (Muriuki, 1965) thus ethnicity was used to consolidate political base (Ake, 1993). *I Refuse to Die* explores how, when Moi came to power in 1978, he had one primary objective: "to give the Kalenjin elite a chance and an opportunity to eat like the Kikuyu before them. His motto was *it is our turn to eat*" (KW: 219). The narrator illustrates how the political leaders in Kenya got obsessed with ethnic mobilization instead of nation-building after independence thus propping elites who took ethnic groups as their personal fiefdoms. This subsequently led to corruption, theft of public resources, grabbing of public land, fraudulent access to civil service jobs and unfair distribution of development projects by the political leaders. It also produced national subalterns in those groups,

which did not have their "son" at the top. Ake (1993) corroborates how ethnicity can be conflictual in ethnicised politics where a group struggles with other groups for self-interests.

Wamwere retells how Kenyatta entrenched tribal animosity after the assassination of Tom Mboya and went ahead to sanction ethnic oathing "swearing allegiance to Kenyatta, his government and Gikuyu rule" (KW: 149). The oathing was aimed at protecting Kenyatta's government from the Luo community and so Wamwere argues that "the dread the Gikuyu harboured for the Luo was built upon ignorance and strengthened by fear and greed of its leaders" (KW: 150). This underscores the claim that Kenyatta installed and nurtured negative ethnicity, which up to now remains a threat to national cohesion and a source of tensions. After ascending to power, Moi also followed in the footsteps of Kenyatta (*Nyayo)* and became a worse tribalist. Amutabi (2009:61) captures the mix of corruption and tribalism characteristic of Moi rule: "through a process of 'cronyism,' Moi [was] able to retain power by using his ethnic group as a support base." Amutabi (2009:61) further observes that, in "exchange for their support, the Kalenjin … [were] rewarded with resources from the public sector." *I Refuse to Die* blames this ethnic balkanisation and mistrust for the tribal clashes that rocked several parts of the country in the run up to the first multiparty elections in 1992. Wamwere remembers an incident at Kabarak High School, where Moi was heard saying that, "the only good Kikuyu is a dead one" (KW: 219) to illustrate how ethnic animosity was entrenched in Kenyan politics since the colonial era. These deep-seated tribal prejudices explain why the government failed to protect the Kikuyu people during the ethnic cleansing in Olenguruone, in the early 1990s where Kalenjini warriors displaced thousands. Therefore, the tribal clashes during the presidency of Moi threatened national security and promoted a sense of exclusion in the nation. Ake (1993) argues that ethnicity may come into being when political elites try to seek easy strategies to acquire or retain power. Thus, Wamwere criticises Moi for fanning tribal animosity for selfish political reasons.

Ethnicity created social pressures in Kenya and eventually pushed the elite to engage or condone corruption. Kiarie (2021:36) argues that corruption and tribalism are some of the ways in which the citizens get dehumanised because these practices promote favouritism and exclusion. In this regard, the narrator observes that, "under Moi's presidency everything would belong to the Kalenjin elite and only crumbs would go to … other communities..." (KW: 219). The resultant

marginalisation of other communities and ethnic groups which were not Kalenjin, led to formation of groups to agitate for inclusion. Opposition to Moi did not emerge from a single community and thus Moi's machinations produced solidarity across ethnics in Kenya. This is useful in understanding how ethnics are constructed just like the nation as conceptualised by Anderson (2006). *I Refuse to Die* thus reproaches political leaders who deploy tribalism as an instrument to: protect, promote and preserve their subterfuge interests (Salami, 2021). The autophylography suggests that corruption in Kenya is a consequence of the politicised tribal narrative, which was perpetuated by the ruling class in order to exploit national resources. Abdelrahim (2020a: 1069) argues that tribalism manifests in "the desire of a group or an individual to exploit, dominate or assault others." Wamwere unsettles the amoral of tribalism and constructs a sense of Kenyan-ness as he asserts that "it is suicidal to rally against one another" (KW: 150) as Kenyans.

Tribalism and the attendant favouritism are therefore constructed as a form of corruption in *I Refuse to Die* because they ethically fall outside the expected national norms. Abdelrahim (2020b:3) argues that "in a tribal collectivistic culture, individuals are responsible to take care of their relatives and close family members" which negates nationalism. However, although Wamwere belongs to the Kikuyu ethnic group, he does not celebrate the notion of "our tribesman" as he criticises both Kenyatta and Moi's governments for promoting narrow tribal interests at the expense of the broader national good. He is aware that in order to build a nation-state ideology that has the full backing of the masses, ethnicity, history, the language spoken at home are completely irrelevant to the definition and attainment of 'the nation' (Hobsbawm, 1992: 8). Wamwere's concern for the "ordinary" citizen is amplified throughout the text as he calls for the disbandment of a system that only protects the mighty. He fosters a vision that champions the security of the weak and the poor (KW:212), regardless of their ethnic extraction. In contesting the position of the tribe Wamwere injects some kind of rejection of coloniality exhibiting itself as tribe in Kenya. Ngugi (1972: 23-5) contends that:

> To look from tribe to the wider concept of human association is to be progressive. When this begins to happen, a Kenyan nation will be born. It will be an association, not of tribal entities, but of individuals free to journey to those heights of which they are capable. Nationalism, by breaking some tribal shells, will help.

I Refuse to Die advocates for a Kenyan nation devoid of ethnic tensions as conceived in the above assertions by Ngugi. Wamwere works for the "true" freedom of the Kenyan people as an MP in league with the already mentioned "bearded sisters" (Abuya Abuya, Onyango Midika, Mashengu wa Mwachofi, James Orengo, Lawrence Sifuna, Chibule wa Tsuma), all of whom were from different Kenyan communities and were committed to the common good of the nation. Wamwere's narrative therefore aspires to liberate the human spirit from fear and ethnic mistrust:

> As for every Kikuyu eating under Kenyatta, millions of Kikuyu people, like other Kenyan masses, ate absolutely nothing. Equally … despite a fellow Kalenjin being a president, millions of Kalenjin people … are as poor as church mice (KW: 219).

The excerpt above demonstrates that tribalism and corruption perpetuated class inequities and political disenfranchisement. In fact, Wamwere reiterates that tribalism and corruption are colonial creations and envisions a society where people come together as citizens and not tribes. Wamwere advocates for state-centric identity, one that promotes nationalism. According to the narrator, corruption was so endemic in Kenya, that "it felt as if corruption had only friends and no enemies" (KW:221) suggesting that the vice was a way of life. For example, President Moi was against the narrator chairing the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in parliament because most senior officials in government were corrupt and feared that Wamwere would use his position to witch-hunt. Moi was personally managing corruption in his government and like his predecessor, he was reluctant to arrest his dishonest friends thus those fighting the vice were sworn enemies. In other words, his perverted logic made Moi marginalise those who fought against corruption while rewarding those who perpetrated it while using conveniently limited interpretations of the Bible, (Isaiah, 59:14-5), "there is so little honesty that anyone who stops doing evil makes himself a prey" (KW:246).

In a nutshell, Wamwere reproaches Kenyan leaders for promoting negative ethnicity and corruption to the detriment of the nation. As the discussion demonstrates, these vices created national "others," (due to cultural or class differences) who found themselves excluded from the nation and feel politically sidelined. Wamwere suggests that all Kenyans should be placed at the centre of the nation, as the people struggle against national challenges and pursue shared

prosperity. According to the Wamwere ethnicity and corruption breeds disunity, disaffection and discontentment which are a threat to nation building (Salami, 2021; Mukanda, 2025). Through his autophylography, Wamwere urges citizens should thus form a united front against ethnicity and corruption.

5.7 Conclusion

Although *I Refuse to Die*, has been labelled an autobiography by several blurbs, it fits the frames of autophylography. The story is a communal one, with the evolution of the Kikuyu community and Kenyan nation all enmeshed in Wamwere's personal story of development. We read the birth of Kikuyu people from their cultural myths of creation, the creation of modern-day Kenya from the Berlin Conference of 1885 and of the birth, growth and history of Koigi wa Wamwere. Therefore, I *Refuse to Die* is read as an allegory of the Kenyan nation which chronicles the evils of colonialism and neocolonialism, KANU dictatorship under Kenyatta and Moi, tribalism, oppression and state sponsored terrorism against perceived opponents. Wamwere illustrates how the colonial culture affected the new African nations where it conditioned citizens to accept slave status and remain less worried about neocolonial exploitation. The discussion in this chapter also demonstrated that Wamwere is a subaltern writer, whose vision in *I Refuse to Die* is shaped by his experiences on the margins of the Kenyan society. The neocolonial corruption, oppression, exploitation, dictatorship, police torture and detentions, dispossessions, injustices and tribalism, among other evils, influenced and nurtured the desire in Wamwere to subvert undemocratic and inhuman practices. Therefore, Wamwere is not just a democracy activist as his story is a pack of humanistic ideals destroyed by the colonial order and neocolonial politics.

In (re)telling the story of his people and the nation, Wamwere confirms a reality that we are one with our communities and should be at peace with others to enjoy our own peace (Ulogu, 2018). The autophylography has succeeded to tell a collective Kenyan experience chronicling national failures and search for liberty. The postcolonial history is recreated and the evils of the past regimes exposed focusing on how they reproduced colonial apparatus to entrench hegemony (Chege, 2017). The narrator insinuates that although Moi used his influence to destroy all those who were opposed to him, this story informs us that Moi did not enjoy the comfort he yearned for as a

president. Moi suffered international humiliation emanating from negative publicity from those that he exiled. The label of a dictator invalidated his original philosophy of peace, love and unity (espoused in *Nyayoism*). The narrative hints that Moi spent the better part of his 24 years in office defending his government. Like Kenyatta, Moi preached democracy but instead dispensed hard and unrelenting dictatorship. Kenyatta detained, killed and isolated those who criticised his government while Moi - being a "student" of Kenyatta – followed Machiavellian principles to govern. This chapter therefore concludes that Wamwere is a mouth-piece for a communal pursuit of freedom.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This study analysed self-referential narratives by selected Kenyan writers with the aim of assessing how these stories conform to the definition of autophylography. Informed by the need to expand knowledge and discourses on self-writing, the researcher focused on the ideas proposed by James Olney (1983) in his research on non-Western autobiography. The effort was on re-evaluating the theories of autobiography from specific cultural contexts and highlighting the type of writing that emerges from shared experiences and histories in Kenya.

The study has argued that self-writers craft their communities (shared experiences) in the process of self-compositions hence they generate stories where the *phyle* or the community is equally highlighted in what has been generally labelled as autobiography. The study discussed different stories where authors laminate the personal and the collective, generating a new form of autobiography hence inviting newer methods of criticism. Alabi (1998: 318) demonstrates that African forms of self-writing are "communally-based" because the writers confront their own exploitation and that of their communities due to the shared philosophy of life. This study, therefore, emphasised that autophylography is a sub-genre of autobiography, where reading traces both the narrating "I" and their community. In working with the term autophylography, the study revised some views held by Olney, arguing that autophylography occurs across several world cultures and that all African self-narratives do not "partake of the same generic and narrativising elements" (Berger, 2010:33). The study concludes that personal and communal themes coalesce in the autobiographical genre to produce autophylography. It aimed to disrupt the critical practices connected to the "values and stereotypes of the first world culture" (Jameson, 1986:68) and decolonise autobiography.

The discussion focused on selected Kenyan personal narratives which rework the neocolonial history of the nation. It also aimed to appreciate how national, ethnic and personal identities are (de)constructed in the selected texts. In doing so, the study investigated how the collective story is

told by a narrator whose original desire is to compose a personal narrative. A major concern of the study was how lived experiences become stories and finally, this study investigated the role of self-narratives in contesting power, politics and dictatorship. Apart from Olney, the study was also informed by Braziel (2003) who argues that biographical studies deviate from studies based on *bios* due to the contestation of ideas in culture, experience, subjectivity, self and society and thus there is need to formulate newer frames of the genre.

Using stories authored by Wangari Maathai, Bishop David Gitari, Raila Odinga and Koigi wa Wamwere, the study has demonstrated that autophylography offers an alternative model of reading self-narratives. The study argued that self-writers slip away from writing autobiography and enter into the terrain of autophylography – where communal experiences are valorised. I demonstrated that the four writers (re)construct the communal (and also national) narratives as they juxtapose it with their own stories contrary to that "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular, the story of his personality" (Lejeune, 1989 :120) or the autobiography. The arguments in this study are built around the fact that "literature does not occur in a vacuum" (Pound, 2010:32) and hence the writers, the process of writing and subjects of the writing are connected to contexts (social, political and economic) of their texts. The history of Kenya helped place the study in specific axis by capturing the colonial and postcolonial circumstances and those plagues which characterise coloniality. Ideas about context aided the analysis of the selected texts thus local history was essential. The study discussed how the selected narratives move the "I" protagonist towards the collective and subsequently shift imaginations towards the community instead of completely dwelling on the self, thus, shifting our conceptualisation of auto/biography in the traditional sense. Consequently, the study proposes that critical scholarship should make a departure from Western theoretical positions by suggesting newer terms that expand the analytical horizons in the area of self-writing.

Decolonial epistemology and subalternity are the theoretical lenses. The former is considered suitable because African culture and identity were greatly altered by colonialism. The study argues that the neocolonial situation has continued to generate new conceptualisations about the

individual and communities thus there is need for new interpretative paradigms. A decolonial epistemic turn enabled the study to explain why dictatorship thrived in Africa after the end of Western colonialism and how freedom turned out to be nebulous after independence. Decolonial ideas were used to question Kenyan politics and illustrate how neo-colonial governments exclude the majority of the citizens from participating in governance. It is acknowledged that the citizens are marginalised by dictatorship and poor governance and remain marginal in the polity, something which in turn has created ethnicity and elevation of micro-nations. The study avers that decolonial narratives subverts colonial modernity and pushes oppressed people from the "zone of non-being" to the "zone of being" hence making them regain their vanishing humanity. The narratives analysed contest the reality of local politics by proposing inclusion of those inhabiting the margins of power.

Subaltern theory was also utilised to interrogate how alternative versions of history and selfhood are generated by those who live on the margins and to question stories of the nation which differ from the official national narratives. In interrogating the hegemonies of Kenyatta and Moi, subaltern epistemology helped the researcher to examine how unchecked presidential power destroyed those at the margins. In these narratives, it emerged that the president was "prince, autocrat, prophet and tyrant (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982: ii) and thus his authority presented a challenge to the ordinary citizens. The study showed that with increased presidential powers other institutions like the judiciary and legislature became weaker and malfunctional thus ordinary citizens, the church and civil society played the countervailing role. Subaltern theory provided the essential insights through which to analyse how marginalised citizens protest against the extremes of political authority. The selected writers were all victims of state-instigated abuses, and those who fortunately evaded imprisonment, like Bishop Gitari, became targets of political persecution. The study discussed how the selected writers made interventions as they campaigned for constitutional change and multiparty democracy in 1980s and 1990s. It further discussed the writers' role in the second liberation in Kenya after it became apparent that the ruling elite had undermined the little gains of Kenya's independence. The four authors are regarded as dedicated artists whose literary endeavours sought to improve society. Despite their pain, the writers turned their suffering to produce powerful narratives which shed light on injustices in Kenya.

Accordingly, the narratives address issues of human rights, politics, culture, history, as well as identity from a highly intimate perspective. The speaking "I"/eye in the sampled stories (re)presents all political subalterns during KANU era in Kenya. Misrule and the ideology of exploitation and exclusions that KANU promoted are questioned and exposed by the chosen authors.

The study was organised into six chapters. The first chapter highlighted the research problem, research goals, and conceptual foundations. In the same chapter, justification of the study, review of related literature, methodology and outline of chapters were discussed. Chapter Two discussed the ideas propagated by Olney (1981) regarding autophylography. The chapter identified several ways in which the personal story fuses with the communal (hi)story to produce autophylography. The chapter argued that there is a community focus in African self-writing emanating from the past traumatic experiences of slavery and colonialism. Autophylography has a representative function and "mediates collective memory of the community" (Nyada, 2021: 166). In *Tell Me Africa* (1973*)*, Olney asserts that Africans partake in self-writing to articulate the "peculiar African experience" thus, this study contends that neo-colonialism and dictatorship are integral components of the unique experiences Olney had in mind. The chapter was largely informed by the ideas of Alabi (1998: ii), who affirms that there is "self-in-service-of-community" in African self-writing, where the narrating life achieves a communal quality. The chapter concluded that the "hybrid autobiography" prevalent in several cultures, particularly from previously colonised cultural contexts, is best as termed autophylography.

The discussion in this chapter was guided by literature's community-centric ideas and also the principles of the Ubuntu philosophy. The broader societal concern for the welfare of others in the selected texts guided the discussion. Ubuntu values others and society and encourages stability and protection of others, especially the weak. It, thus, helps communities to navigate challenges and confront exploitation together as a collective. The chapter argued that collectivism is essential when communities are faced with problems like colonialism, misrule and exclusion, among others. It questioned ways in which communalism permeates in the selected self-narratives leading to the emergence of the sub-genre I have theorised in my study as autophylography.

Chapter Three investigated how autophylography (re)constructs both individual and collective identities. The main argument in this chapter was that self-writing is an exercise aimed at constructing selfhood. Using Maathai's *Unbowed* and Bishop Gitari's *Troubled but Not Destroyed*, it was argued that identity in Kenya is a product of the history of colonialism, liberation struggles, neocolonial experience, religious orientation, ethnicity and class, among others. This section also explored the complex identity crises that individuals and groups in formerly colonised societies experience. Through interrogation of how "I"/eye is immersed in "we" the study discussed the individualised-communal-self, cultural identity, corrosion of African identity during colonialism and the evolving Kenyan-ness (individual and collective). The national history and different "micronations" (WM: 250) were discussed for purposes of clarifying that "We" all belong and no one is more Kenyan than others when it comes to national belonging. Generally, the discussion in the chapter illuminated how communal identity is narrated and magnified above the individual identity and also clarified that the self always exists entwined with other in autophylographical narratives.

In an analysis of Maathai's *Unbowed*, the study focused on a critical examination of feminine identity and also examines how sexism marginalises Kenyan women across various spheres of life. Maathai was condemned as having failed to be a "true African woman" (Ebila, 2015:144) as per the patriarchal perceptions of Kenyan traditions. The discussion revealed that being a true Kenyan woman meant passively accepting the cultural prejudices against women. Challenging the system – especially by a woman – was considered "weird" and unacceptable by Moi's male-controlled government. Thus, by questioning Moi's style of governance, Maathai also challenges the stereotypes about womanhood at the time in Kenya. Although KANU MPs considered Maathai abnormal after she criticised Moi's ruthless government, she sturdily rebutted that "whatever was above the neck" (WM: 92) was more important for any meaningful debate. Her narration of personal suffering is analogous to the suffering of the citizens in the postcolony thus making her story an allegory. The ideas propagated in her story concerning women's freedom represent all Kenyan women. She suggests that Kenyan women are victims of double exploitation with domestic patriarchy and political exploitation weighing on them. For instance, her husband, Mr.

Mwangi, divorces her because she was too educated to be a "good" wife according to the masculine ideas of the time. Maathai merges the political discourse in Kenya with environmental issues and saw close parallels between poor governance, poverty, hunger and destruction of the natural environment. Maathai enlisted other women in environmental conservation with a view of recruiting them in national democratic campaigns to beget good governance. By uniting the subalterns, Maathai revitalised the fight against the diverse forms of exploitation that bogged down Kenyan women. The seeds, seedlings and subsequent trees and forests which were grown by women without diplomas can be comprehended as that power found in collectivism.

The analysis of *Troubled but not Destroyed* revealed that Gitari did not denounce some cultural practices of the African people like polygamy because he believes that such cultures could not be reworked overnight. Gitari suggested that polygamous men who were converted to Christianity should instead be dissuaded from acquiring additional wives, as Christian ethics opposed such practices. The analysis of the text has maintained that the narrator's actions were schemes of Africanising Christianity thus making it Afro-centric. The Bible translations were taken as an effort to allow Africans to communicate with God in their own language, instead of the Latin and English, thus make Christianity to have African cultural charm. The narrative recommends that Christian identity should not clash with African identity and holds the belief that the new faith should be culture friendly. The study argued that according to Gitari, Christians should live a comfortable life on earth even as they hope to live in great heaven and thus people should not be oppressed. The discussion of Gitari's autophylography also revealed how he used the pulpit to challenge misrule during Moi presidency. In unsettling exploitation and bad governance through his church sermons Gitari became an enemy of those in power and every attempt was made to silence him. He survived all attempts to his life and this is what gives his narrative the title; *Troubled but not Destroyed*. Gitari's individual voice speaks for all those Kenyans who yearned and dreamt of political freedom and progress. The study demonstrated how Gitari crafted his sermons to suite the political times in order to inspire positive change in Kenya's political landscape. The notion of employing the pulpit to critique inadequate leadership was similarly intended to provoke Christian leaders into denouncing wrongdoings and moral failings wherever they manifested.

Gitari's narrative was used to demonstrate that memory is not just a personal phenomenon but also a communal thus *Troubled but not Destroyed* deviates from the personal gaze suggested by Lejeune (1996) and instead slides towards the communal. Gitari avers that Christians should grow to be in favour with both God and man and therefore people need to always appreciate the humanity of others. Gitari criticises those politicians who continued to exploit the masses. The agony of the Kenyan people is compared to the Biblical story of the Israelites in captivity (Exodus 1-4) and thus the discourses of democratic struggles are analogised with the movement to the promised land. His narrative further demonstrates that exploitation brutalises both the perpetrator and victim. The inhumanity that was meted on the innocent citizens depicts the authorities as demonic. The chapter illustrated that in castigating the evils of president Moi's regime, Gitari aimed to make his flock relate the heavenly kingdom with the earthly one – Kenyan nation. Thus, the title of this story also exhorts individuals engaged in opposing dictatorships and oppression to maintain their resolve despite the apparent dire circumstances.

Chapter Four examined how individual experiences produce narratives which are autophylographical in nature through the analysis of Raila Odinga's *The Flame of Freedom.* The chapter investigated the activities of leading opposition activists and their woes during Moi's authoritarian rule. This chapter illustrated how the government's purge of opposition loyalists failed to dissuade proponents of change, who ingeniously devised alternative methods to contest misrule. Odinga's narrative reconnects readers with several other experiences and rewrites an alternative narrative of the second liberation unlike what one finds in official history. This text allows readers to engage with the experiences of various activists who endured suffering or lost their lives from police torture thus illustrating the reality that the second liberation in Kenya was a collective endeavour.

The shared experiences are recounted to honour the contributions of each individual in the struggle, even when their narratives had been suppressed by the state. The chapter, moreover, examined the transformation of experiences into narratives. Drawing upon the insights of Eakin (2001: 113),

which suggest that self-writing emerges from our fundamental rights to life, liberty, and happiness, this chapter discussed how *The Flame of Freedom* establishes a connection between readers and the principles upheld by the narrator in relation to good governance and personal freedoms. Eakin (2001: 114) contends that when writers discuss their identities, they inherently participate in "social accountability," and in the context of Odinga's narrative, the obligation pertains to both the self and others. Odinga produces what Eakin denotes as "relational selves" (Eakin 2001: 114) in self-referential stories. The "others'" narratives were also examined to discern the shared objectives and political aspirations. In Odinga's narrative, therefore, other political agitators appear just as significant as the narrator. The chapter posited that the narrator articulated narratives of individuals engaged in Kenya's second liberation, thereby rendering his account emblematic of those who endured the stifling political ecology engendered by the KANU dictatorship.

The discussion in Chapter Four also investigated how individuals in authority suppressed dissent through killing, public defamation, police intimidation, and unlawful detentions. The colonial and neocolonial nature of post-independence Kenyan politics was examined, focusing on how those in authority neglected the unfortunate individuals who continued to suffer from exploitation after independence. The section insisted that although Odinga may not be labelled subaltern proper, whatever concerns he had regarding Kenyan politics was to re-humanise those dehumanised by coloniality in the nation. In fact, he was speaking for the excluded subalterns. The government propensity to incarcerate critics and isolate freedom fighters after independence was thus revisited to elucidate the mirage of freedom for ordinary Kenyans. Odinga exile was analysed as part of the agonies of second liberation and also it confirmed that second liberation in Kenya was a collective enterprise that led to loss of several lives. His personal dedication to democracy manifests early in life when he learns from his father that the celebrated freedom following independence was an illusion, merely the obverse of colonialism. The study has appraised how Odinga shares a vision with his father as is storied in *Not Yet Uhuru*. It thus illustrated that Odinga was following in the footsteps of Jaramogi and perhaps producing "narratives of resistance" (Alabi, 1998: 302) hence making Odinga's narrative interventionist.

Chapter Five addressed the third objective on the role of context in crafting autophylography which was probed using the story of Koigi wa Wamwere. The chapter was guided by the question: How is politics and intolerance towards dissenting opinions recounted in *I Refuse to Die*? The section argued that certain social, cultural, political and economic realities push people to write stories which have both personal and collective dimensions. The chapter asserts that the narrator encapsulates the shared perspective of the Kikuyu people throughout colonialism as well as the post-independence Kenyan vision. He, thus, rebukes the greed of Kenyan politicians who championed self-aggrandisement at the expense of the poor masses. Landlessness, which was the main cause of Mau Mau war, is revisited as the narrator blames political leaders for doing nothing to address the problem. The discussion in this chapter demonstrated that historical injustices relating to land continue to haunt the nation and are also the cause of tribal clashes in different areas long after independence.

Wamwere narrates the disillusionment that gripped Kenyans after independence so as to persuade Kenyans to stand against all forms of exploitation. Eakin (2001:113) argues that life writing offers a natural extension of, "the right to life, liberty and …happiness" thus in unsettling exploitation in his Kenyan society, Wamwere was entrenching individual and communal rights. The atmosphere of resistance pervades his text, implying that justice and freedom were not achieved with political independence. The analysis shows that activists endured state detention and torture, while Wamwere implores readers to empathise with the victims of state cruelty. The text therefore injects in the national discourses the shared disgust of any exploitation perpetrated on innocent citizens by Kenyatta and Moi regimes. The chapter contends that I *Refuse to Die* aimed to re-humanise individuals who were dehumanised by unrestrained political authority from the colonial period to the Moi era in Kenya.

The discussion in Chapter Five also demonstrated that Wamwere's narrative restores a sense of patriotism and unwavering determination in the activists and proponents of multiparty system in Kenya. Wamwere chides readers to display commitment to the nation thus enhancing nationalism and patriotism. This way, the story also encourages successive generations of Kenyans to protect political gains won in the late 1990s with the introduction of multi-party politics.

The study interrogated how the selected self-narratives are in pursuits of democracy which is juxtaposed with the theme of freedom and justice which play out in the four stories. Kenyatta and Moi's crackdown on the advocates of change was a negation of democracy, fostering a system reminiscent of colonial exploitation. The first two presidents of post-independence Kenya exhibited conduct that was more detrimental than that of the colonialists, because they perpetuated "pervasive corruption, ineptness, authoritarianism, cavalier abuse of human rights, proclivity towards tribalistic exclusiveness" (Samatar and Samatar, 2002:4). The study subsequently shows that the four narratives explicitly castigated everything that negated freedom, justice, and equality in order to promote democracy and freedom.

This study demonstrated that through the story of an individual, self-narratives delve into the common story of a nation thus providing insights into shared history, fears, failures, triumphs and shared vision. The four writers allow their readers to interact with certain moments in Kenya's history and understand why certain people did whatever they did in the nation's history. The stories analysed in the study can therefore be said to offer self-healing especially where the narrators suffered the trauma of state torture and harassment. Their writing can therefore be described as "scriptotherapy" because through narrating their own suffering the authors poured out the "painful memories which serve as foundations for resilience, growth, and empathy, without automatically provoking trauma or duress" (Mayaki and Omobowale, 2019: 227).

Indeed, the process of self-writing was analysed as a documentation of experiences within authors' communities, where the distinction between subjectivities has remained consistently thin and blurred. The study was thus premised on various debates about self and community as sources of divergences and conceptualisations of auto/philography. I demonstrated that the narrating-self in what is traditionally taken as autobiography deviates from self-composition and instead recounts stories about their community. This study concludes that research on autophylography could expand scholarship in self-writing and herald new ways of reading the genre.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

From the study, it is recommended that:

i) Studies be undertaken to establish the role of gender, race, class and nation in the writing of autophylographies. These considerations have been a source of exploitation across history (Hogan, 2001; Gimenez, 2001; Demos, 2006; Hove 2009). These variables intersect in most lives to explain attitudes that people have regarding men and women, poverty and how they perceive others of different skin colour. A study on how people interpret lives from how others treat them due to their gender, class and race could thrust scholarship on autophylography to a newer level.

ii) Comparative analysis from across diverse cultures should explain whether autophylography is an isolated feature of some cultures and not others. This would test the validity of Olney's argument that it is only in Africa where autophylography thrives. Olney (1986) argues passionately that in Africa communalism filters into literature and so the *phyle* (community) is accorded prominence than the individual in self-writing.

iii) It is also suggested that self-writing scholarship should identify and analyse oral forms of autophylography and interrogate how communal concerns are narrated. This is because we have stories that are about self and community in oral forms.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

Gitari, D. 2014. *Troubled but Not Destroyed*. Isaac Publishing McLean, VA.

Maathai, W. 2008. *Unbowed: One Woman's Story*. Arrow Books, London.

Wamwere, K. W. 2011. *I Refuse to Die: My Journey for Freedom.* Seven Stories Press, New York.

Odinga, R. 2015. *The Flame of Freedom.* Mountain Top Publishers, Nairobi.

Secondary Sources

Abbott, H.P., 1988. Autobiography, autography, fiction: Groundwork for a taxonomy of textual categories. *New Literary History*, *19*(3), pp.597-615.

Abdelrahim, D. Y. 2020a. Tribalism and Corruption: Exploration beyond National Culture. *International Journal of Management*, *11*(9).

Abdelrahim, D. Y. 2020b. Why Does Tribalism Cause Corruption in Some Countries? In *36th IBIMA Conference Proceedings*.

Achebe, C. 1966. *A Man of the People*. Heinemann.

Achebe, C. 1984. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Heinemann.

Achebe, C., & Brooks, J. 1994. The art of fiction No. 139. *The Paris Review*, *133*.

Adar, K. G. 2000. The internal and external contexts of human rights practice in Kenya: Daniel arap Moi's operational code. *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, *4*(1), 74-96.

Adar, K. G., & Munyae, I. M. 2001. Human rights abuse in Kenya under Daniel arap Moi, 1978-2001. *African Studies Quarterly*, *5*(1), 1-18.

Adebayo W. 1996. "Literature in the Time of Tyranny: African Writers and the Crisis of Governance." *Third World Quarterly*, 17.2 (349-66).

Adelman, T. H. 2004. Self, other, and community: Jewish women's autobiography. *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, (7), 116-127.

Adeoti, G. 2016. Demystifying the future in Africa's (un)vanishing past: A study of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels. *Africa Development*, *41*(2), 1-22.

Adeyefa, D.E., 2022. A postcolonial insight into African onomastics in Europhone translation: a study of DO Fagunwa's selected Yoruba narrative names. *Yoruba Studies Review*, *7*(1), pp.1-20.

Adichie, C. N. 2009. *The danger of a single story*. https://www.google.com/search?chimamanda+ngozi+adichie

Agbiboa, D. 2012. "Serving the Few, Starving the Many: How Corruption Under develops Nigeria and How There is an Alternative Perspective to Corruption Cleanups" *Africa Today*, Vol. 58 Issue 4, p.114.

Ahmed, S., 2013. *The cultural politics of emotion*. Routledge.

Ajah, R.O., 2017. Nationalism and African Communal Identity in Marguerite Abouet's and Clément Oubrerie's Aya de Yopougon.

Akakpo, K. 2023. Postcolonial madness: The representation of dictatorship in selected novels by Nuruddin Farah and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Doctoral dissertation, Université de Haute Alsace-Mulhouse).

Ake, C., 1993. What is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa? *Transformation*, (22).

Alabi, A. 1998. Continuities and divergences in black autobiographies of Africa and the Diaspora (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Saskatchewan).

Alabi, A., 2005. the Autophylographical Genre. *Yoruba Creativity: Fiction, Language, Life and Songs*, p.155.

Alabi, A., 2021. *Oral Forms of Nigerian Autobiography and Life Stories*. Routledge.

Alabi, A., 2022. Wole Soyinka's Ori Olokun Emprise and Autobiography. *Yoruba Studies Review*, *7*(2), pp.1-18.

Alam, S.S., 2007. Women and Mau Mau. In *Rethinking Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya* (pp. 71-99). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Ali, M., Fjeldstad, O. H., Jiang, B., & Shifa, A. B. 2015. Colonial legacy, state-building and the salience of ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa. *The Economic Journal*.

Allen, G. 2000. *Intertextuality.* London.

Aluko, O.O. and Larey, D.P., 2025. Post-colonialism and identity in Africa: The Lingering Impact of Colonial Languages. In *The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2025, IAFOR Research Archive* (pp. 1-12).

Amuta, C. 1981. Ayi Kwei Armah and the Mythopoesis of Mental Decolonisation. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, *10*(3).

Amuta, C. 2017. *Theory of African literature: Implications for practical criticism*. Zed Books.

Amutabi, M. N. 2009. Beyond imperial presidency in Kenya: Interrogating the Kenyatta, Moi and Kibaki regimes and implications for democracy and development. *Kenya Studies Review*, *1*(1), 55-84.

Andersen, S. M. & Chen, S. 2002. The Relational Self: An Interpersonal Social–Cognitive Theory. *Psychological Review*, 109(4), 619–645.

Anderson S. 2006. Imagined communities. *Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory*, *49*.

Anderson, D., 2005. *Histories of the hanged: The dirty war in Kenya and the end of empire*. WW Norton & Company.

Anderson, K., 2012. *An autobiography: The personal and the political*. Southern Connecticut State University.

Anderson, L. 2001. *Autobiography*. London: Routledge.

Angelo, A. 2020. Kenyan Political Autobiographies: Reviving Generational Power and Masculine Authority. In *Gender and Authority across Disciplines, Space and Time* (pp. 59-81). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Angelo, A. 2020. *Power and the Presidency in Kenya: The Jomo Kenyatta years* (Vol. 146). Cambridge University Press.

Angelo, A., 2017. Landscapes of Colonial Detention Sites.

Anthony D. 1988 The Ethnic Origins of Nations. *Migracijske i etničke teme*, *4*(4), pp.514-521.

Armah, A. K. 1968. *The beautyful ones are not yet born*. Houghton Mifflin.

Armah, A. K. 2015. Remembering the dismembered continent. *Black Renaissance*, *15*(1), 106.

Austen, R. A. 2015. Struggling with the African Bildungsroman. *Research in African Literatures*, 46(3), 214-231.

Azad, S. 2014. Sea of poppies and burnt shadows in the light of subaltern studies. *Journal of Research* in REVIEWS 221 Social Sciences, 1(1), 59-69

Badejo, B.A., 2006. Raila Odinga: an enigma in Kenyan politics. Yintab Books.Lagos.

Bakhtin, M. 2014. 'Discourse in the Novel.' In The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays, 259–422, Selected 261–265, 268–275. Austin: University of Texas Press. In *The Discourse*

Studies Reader: Main currents in theory and analysis (pp. 28-35). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Ballentyne, S., 2024. *Identities in exile: social identity change and the experience of forced migration* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sussex).

Ballestrin, L. 2014. Coloniality and democracy. *Revista Estudos Políticos*, *5*(1), 210-228.

Baloyi, E. M. 2013. Critical reflections on polygamy in the African Christian context. *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies*, *41*(2), 164-181.

Bandarage, A. 2023. 'Flag Independence,' Left-Wing Nationalism and Decolonisation, 1948 – 1977. In *Crisis in Sri Lanka and the World: Colonial and Neoliberal Origins: Ecological and Collective Alternatives* (pp. 61-89). Berlin.

Barasa, M. N., Moinani, A. M., & Khasandi-Telewa, V. 2023. Conceptualising nationalism, revolution and opposition in political discourse by use of metaphors: The case of Raila Odinga in Kenya. *Journal of Languages and Linguistics Studies*, 2(1), 44-53.

Bargár, P., 2025. Threats to Democracy: A Theological Response. *Transformation*, *42*(1), pp.3-13.

Barnett, D.L. and Njama, K., 1966. *Mau Mau from within* (pp. 10-11). Monthly Review P..

Beaver, E., Chege, M., Grosz-Ngate, M., Hoon, P., Jones-Nelson, A., King, B., ... & Marr, S. 2000. E Staff. *African Studies Quarterly*, *4*(3).

Bediako, K. 2011. 'The Emergence of World Christianity and the Remaking of

Bennett, G. 1967. 'The Myth of Mau Mau - The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya. By Carl. G. Rosberg, and John Nottingham (eds.). New York: Praeger for the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, California, 1966. London: Pall Mall, 1967. pp. xviii + 427., *The Journal of African History*, 8(3), pp. 560–563.

Berger, R. A. 2010. Decolonising African Autobiography. *Research in African Literatures*, *41*(2), 32-54.

Bhabha, H. 1986. Foreword. *Black Skin, White Masks*. By Franz Fanon. London: Pluto Press, 1986. vii-xxvi. Rpt. in Williams and Chrisman. 112-123.

Bhabha, H. 1993. *Nation and Narration.* London and New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture.* Routledge, London & New York

Boender, N., 2023. “The Dregs of the Mau Mau Barrel”: Permanent Exile and the Remaking of Late Colonial Kenya, 1954–61. *Journal of Social History*, *57*(1), pp.128-155.

Bonilla-Medina, S.X. and Finardi, K., 2022. Critical race and decolonial theory intersections to understand the context of ELT in the Global South. *Íkala, revista de lenguaje y cultura*, *27*(3), pp.822-839.

Boone, C., Lukalo, F. and Joireman, S.F., 2021. Promised land: settlement schemes in Kenya, 1962 to 2016. *Political Geography*, *89*, p.102393.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2002. “Habitus.” In Habitus: A Sense of Place, ed. Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, 27-34. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Boyle, E. and Francis, P., 2021. " Cast Down The Mighty, Send the Rich Away Empty!": A Feminist Decolonial Critique of Liberation Theology and Fratelli tutti.

Braid, D., 1996. Personal narrative and experiential meaning. *Journal of American Folklore*, pp.5-30. Branch, D., & Cheeseman, N. 2006. Democratisation, sequencing, and state failure in Africa: Lessons from Kenya. *African Affairs, 105*(418), 1–26.

Branch, D. and Cheeseman, N., 2006. The politics of control in Kenya: Understanding the bureaucratic-executive state, 1952–78. *Review of African Political Economy*, *33*(107), pp.11-31.

Braziel, J. E. 2003. Alterbiographic Transmutations of Genre in Jamaica Kincaid's “Biography of a Dress” and Autobiography of My Mother. *A/B: Auto/Biography Studies*, *18*(1), 85-104.

Brennen, T. 2000. On the Meaning of Personal Names: A View from Cognitive Psychology. *Names,* 48(2), 139–146.

Brewer, M. B. 2001. Ingroup identification and intergroup conflict. In R. Brown & S. Gaertner (Eds.), *Intergroup relations* (pp. 91–108). Blackwell Publishers.

Brittain, V. 2006. They had to die: Assassination against liberation. *Race & Class*, 48(1), 60-74.

Brown, L.C., 2013. *Stating the Self: Contemporary Latin American Autobiography and Authoritarianism*. Vanderbilt University.

Brown. L.D. 2013. Stating the Self: Contemporary Latin American Autobiography and Authoritarianism. Unpublished PhD Dissertation Vanderbilt University.

Bruce, S. 2003. *Politics and Religion*. UK. Polity Press.

Butler, J. 2011. *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Routledge.

Cabral, A. 1979. *Unity and struggle: Speeches and writings*. Monthly Review Press.

Cabral, A., Wolfers, M., & africano da independência da Guiné, P. 1979. *Unity and struggle: Speeches and writings* (p. 138). New York: Monthly Review Press.

Canagarajah, S. 2025. Diversifying "English" at the Decolonial Turn. TESOL J, 59: 378-389. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3306

Cesaire, A. 2000. *Discourse on colonialism*. Trans. J. Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Chakrabarty, D. 2000. A small history of subaltern studies. *A companion to postcolonial studies*, 467-85.

Chakrabarty, D., 2000. Subaltern studies and postcolonial historiography. *Nepantla: views from South*, *1*(1), pp.9-32.

Chambers, C. 2012. Feminism, liberalism and marriage. In Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Washington DC.

Chatterjee, P. 1993. Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, 1986. *U of Minnesota P.*

Chatterjee, P. 2020. The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories.

Chege, M., 2017. The state of public discourse in Kenya's post-Moi era: Where are Kenya's organic intellectuals? *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue canadienne des études africaines*, *51*(3), pp.407-428.

Ciraj S. R. 2004. The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Western Cape.

Connerton, P. 1989. *How societies remember*. Cambridge University Press.

Crane, M. 1998. *Cultural Geography.* London: Routledge.

D'Ambrosio, M. 2022. Emotions in political discourse and social narratives: Sociological reflections on traditional and new media. *Society Register*, 6(4), 101–116.

Dastile, N. P., & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2013. Power, knowledge and being: Decolonial combative discourse as a survival kit for Pan-Africanists in the 21st century. *Alternation*, *20*(1), 105-134.

Davis, S. 2020. Tribalism and democracy. *William & Mary Law Review*, 62(2), 431–486.

De Beauvoir, S. 1949. 1952. *The second sex*.

De Castro, 2018. The role of second person pronouns in expressing social behaviour: An undocumented case in Zamboanga Chavacano. https://www.researchgate. net/publication/ 330467058.

de Man, P. 1984. *Autobiography as de-facement*. In: *The rhetoric of romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 67–81. *(Originally published 1979).*

Deborah E. R. 1997. *Rewriting the Self and the Social*. New York, OUP.

Dei, G.J.S., Karanja, W. and Erger, G., 2022. Land as Indigenous epistemology. In *Elders' cultural knowledges and the question of Black/African indigeneity in education* (pp. 113-126). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Demos, V., & Lemelle Jr, A. J. 2006. Introduction: Race, gender, and class for what? *Race, Gender & Class*, 4-15.

Dewey, J. 1981. *The later works, 1925-1953* (Vol. 3). SIU Press.

Dharmaraj, M. 2014. Indian writing in English: Subaltern literary concept - Oppression of untouchables in Rohinton Mistry's a Fine Balance. *International Journal on English Language and Literature*, 2(1), 36-38.

Dhobi, S., 2022. PhD research in humanities & social sciences: Methods & approaches. *Patan Pragya*, *10*(01), pp.179-187.

Digumefele, M.-J. N. 2023. Land conflict in postcolonial Africa in the novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Global Scientific Journal*, *11*(5). ISSN 2320-9186.

Douglass-Chin, R. J. 2001. *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues: The Autobiographies of Nineteenth-Century African American Evangelists*. University of Missouri Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B., & Marable, M. 2015. *The Souls of black folk*. Routledge.

Dumka B.P, 2017. The African Writer and Commitment in Art: A Critical Discourse of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Literature of Commitment, Social Vision and Stylistic Use of Satire in Matigari. *Schlege International Journal of Multidisciplinary & Allied Studies*, Vol.04, Issue 01 (2017) pp 11-16.

Durkheim, É., 1984. *The Division of Labour in Society.* Translated by W.D. Halls. London: Macmillan.

Durkheim, E., 2016. The elementary forms of religious life. In *Social theory re-wired* (pp. 52-67). Routledge.

Durrani, S. 2016. *Never Be Silent: publishing and imperialism 1884-1963*. Vita Books.

Eagleton, T. 1988. Two approaches in the sociology of literature. *Critical Inquiry*, *14*(3), 469-476.

Eakin, P. 2019. 2. Relational Selves, Relational Lives: Autobiography and the Myth of Autonomy. *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 43-98. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501711831-003.

Eakin, P. J. 2001. Breaking rules: The consequences of self-narration. *Biography*, 113-127.

Eakin, P. J. 2014. Autobiography as cosmogram. *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 6(1), 21-43.

Eakin, P. J. 2019. *How our lives become stories: Making selves*. Cornell University Press.

Ebila, F. 2015. 'A proper woman, in the African tradition': The construction of gender and nationalism in Wangari Maathai's autobiography *Unbowed*. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, *52*(1), 144-154.

Edgerton, R. B. 1992. *Mau Mau: An African crucible*. Free Press.

Elias, N. 1991. *The Society of Individuals*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elkins, C. 2005a. *Imperial reckoning: The untold story of Britain's gulag in Kenya* (pp. 22–24). Henry Holt and Company.

Elkins, C., 2005b. *Britain's gulag: the brutal end of empire in Kenya*. Random House.

Elliott, B. 2019. Examining Sojourner's adjustment, transition, and cultural identity: A military spouse's perspective moving to Italy. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, *26*(4).

Epstein, R.A., 2011. Direct Democracy: Government of the People, by the People, and for the People. *Harv. JL & Pub. Pol'y*, *34*, p.819.

Erikson, E. H. 1968. The life cycle: Epigenesis of identity. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, *7*, 91-135.

Escobar, A. 2007. Worlds and knowledges otherwise: The Latin American modernity/coloniality research program. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2-3), 179-210.

Eze, C., 2021. *Justice and human rights in the African imagination: We, too, are humans*. Routledge.

Fagunwa, T. 2019. Ubuntu: revisiting an endangered African Philosophy in Quest of a Pan-Africanist revolutionary ideology. *Genealogy*, *3*(3), p.45.

Fanon, F. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth,* Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963).

Fanon, F. 1967. *Black skin, white masks*. Translated by C.L. Markmann. New York: Grove Press.

Farnia, N., 2023. Imperialism and Black Dissent. *Stan. L. Rev.*, *75*, p.397.

Filho, T. W. 2024. On Decolonisation and its Correlates. *Anuário Antropológico*, *49*(1), 66-116.

Finch, J. 2008. Naming Names: Kinship, Individuality and Personal Names. *Sociology*, Volume 42(4): 709–725. Keele University.

Fish, J. S. 2013. Homo duplex revisited: A defence of Émile Durkheim's theory of the moral self. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, *13*(3), 338-358.

Fitzallen, N. and Brown, N., 2016. Turning Good Ideas into Quality Research. In *What is Next in Educational Research?* (pp. 3-10). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Fosu, R., 2025. Towards a critical decolonial turn/theory: Beyond the binary of the West versus Africa. *Africa Spectrum*, *60*(1), pp.69-83.

Foucault, M. 1984. *On the genealogy of ethics: An overview of work in progress* (H. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow, Eds.). *The Foucault reader* (pp. 340–372). Pantheon Books.

Fraser, J. A. 2014. Claims-making in context: Forty years of Canadian feminist activism on violence against women. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Ottawa).

Friedan, B. 1963. *The problem that has no name.* W. W. Norton & Company.

Gaertner, R. L. 2002. Prelude to a Text: The Autobiography of Abdelkebir Khatibi (Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Ohio University).

Gaston, J. R. 1979. Land Issue in Kenya Politics: Pre-and Post-Independence Development. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, *9*(2).

Gathara, P. 2018. What is your tribe? The invention of Kenya's ethnic communities. *The Elephant*, *5*.

Gathogo, J. 2014. Mau-Mau War and the Church in Kirinyaga, Kenya: Accounting for the tension and conflict (1952-1960). *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, *40*(2), 19-41.

Gathogo, J. 2020. Settler-missionary alliance in colonial Kenya and the land question. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, *46*(2), 1-20.

Gathogo, J.M., 2007. The history and nature of Gitari's leadership prowess (1986-91). *Churchman*, *121*(4), pp.333-347.

Geesey, P. 1997. Introduction: Why African Autobiography. *Research in African Literatures*, 1-4.

Gesowan, T.M., 2024. The Role of the Church in Kenyan Politics through Social Justice and Christ's Prophetic Office. *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research*, *9*(1), pp.134-146.

Gibney, M. 2020. "Banishment and the Pre-History of Legitimate Expulsion Power." *Citizenship Studies* 24.

Gichure, C. 2015. Human nature/identity: The ubuntu world view and beyond. [Online], Available: https://su-plus.strathmore. edu/bitstream/handle/11071/3758/

Gikandi, S. 2003. 'African literature and the colonial factor', in Irele, A. and Gikandi, S. (eds.) *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 379–397.

Gilmore L. and Elizabeth, 2010. Marshall Source: Feminist Studies*, Sex and Surveillance*. Fall 2010, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 667-690.

Gilmore, L. 2001. Limit-cases: Trauma, self-representation, and the jurisdictions of identity. *Biography*, 128-139.

Gimenez, M. E. 2001. Marxism, and class, gender, and race: Rethinking the trilogy. *Race, Gender & Class*, 23-33.

Gitari, D., 2011. *In season and out of season: Sermons to a nation*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Githuku, N.K., 2015. *Mau Mau Crucible of War: Statehood, national identity, and politics of postcolonial Kenya*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Glynn, K., & Cupples, J. 2024. Stories of decolonial resilience. *Cultural Studies*, *38*(4), 537–566. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2022.2144398

Goodwin, J. 1993. *Autobiography: The Self-Made Text*. New York: Twayne.

Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Grayson, H. and Baker, C., 2018. *Fictions of African Dictatorship: Cultural Representations of Postcolonial Power*. Peter Lang.

Greenblatt, S., 2013. Towards a poetics of culture. In *The new historicism* (pp. 1-14). Routledge.

Grosfoguel, R. 2007. The epistemic decolonial turn: Beyond political-economy paradigms. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2-3), 211-223.

Grosfoguel, R. 2011. Decolonising post-colonial studies and paradigms of political-economy: Transmodernity, decolonial thinking, and global coloniality. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso Hispanic World*, *1*(1).

Grovogui, S. N. 2011. A Revolution Nonetheless: The Global South in International Relations. *The Global South*, 5(1), 175–190.

Guha, R. 1982. "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." *In* Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, 1–8. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Guha, R. 1983. "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency." *In* Ranajit Guha, (Ed.), *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, 1–43. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Guha, R. 1987. "Chandra's Death." *In* Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies V: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, 135–65. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Guha, R. 2016. Subaltern Studies Today. *https:/ranajit_guha_and_subaltern_studies_sakar.pdf.* Retrieved on 24.8.2018. online.

Guha, R. 2019. Subaltern studies, space, and the geographical imagination. *Subaltern Geographies*, *42*, 1.

Gunner, L. 2005. Remapping land and memory: New directions in public history. In N. Murray, N. Shepherd, & M. Hall (Eds.), *Desire lines: Space, memory and identity in the post-apartheid city* (pp. 117–132). Routledge.

Gusdorf, G. 1980. Conditions and limits of autobiography. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, *39*.

Gutenberger, Y. 2011. Ethnic–Post ethnic–Transethnic? Black Identity in Contemporary African American Life Writing. *American, British and Canadian Studies*, (16), 67-87.

Gyekye, K., 2004. *Beyond cultures: Perceiving a common humanity* (Vol. 9). CRVP.

Gyimah-Boadi, E., 2021. Democratic backsliding in West Africa: Nature, causes, remedies. *Kofi Annan Foundation*, pp.1-36.

Habermas, T. 2019. *Emotion and narrative: Perspectives in autobiographical storytelling*. Cambridge University Press.

Hall, S. 1990. Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.

Harms, J. 2021. Disrupting ethnic politics and imagining alternative futures in Kenya, 1975: The JM Kariuki assassination (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia).

Harris, E. L. 1996. *Native stranger: A Black American's journey into the heart of Africa*. St. Martin's Press.

Harrison, M.D., 2002. Interpretation of Storied Lives: Fitting the Pieces Together. *Counterpoints*, *185*, pp.63-77.

Harruch, J. 2024. Decoloniality and the Spectre of Modernity: Notes for a Theoretical Critique. Bull Lat Am Res, 43: 251-262. https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.13576

Hartikainen, I., & Szebeni, Z. 2024. Exclusively our people: Defining tribalism through the Slovak case. *East European Politics and Societies*, 38(1), 66–89.

Hestetun, O. 1993. Text, Context, and Culture in Literary Studies. *American Studies in Scandinavia,* Vol. *25(pp 27-36).*

Heux, L., Rathbone, C., Gensburger, S., Clifford, R. and Souchay, C., 2023. Collective memory and autobiographical memory: Perspectives from the humanities and cognitive sciences. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, *14*(3), p.e1635.

Hnit, H. and Almanna, A., 2025. Constructing identity through narratives: Personal, social, and digital dimensions. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *12*, p.101692.

Hobsbawm, E. J. 1992. *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge University Press.

Hogan, R. 2001. Class, race and gender inequality. *Race, gender & class*, 61-93.

Holden, P., 2008. *Autobiography and decolonization: Modernity, masculinity, and the nation-state*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Hornsby, C. 2012. *Kenya: A history since independence*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Hove, M.L. & Masemola, K. 2014. *Strategies of Representation in Auto/biography Reconstructing and Remembering.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Hove, M.L. 2019. 'Africa in Brathwaite: The matrix of cultural quest, identity and history as poetic vision', *Literator* 40(1), a1493. https://doi.org/10.4102/ lit.v40i1.

Hove, M.L., 2009. Imagining the nation: autobiography, memoir, history or fiction in Peter Godwin's writings. *Journal for Language Teaching= Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi= Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig*, *43*(2), pp.51-66.

Hove, M.L., 2019. Africa in Brathwaite: The matrix of cultural quest, identity and history as poetic vision. *Literator: Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies*, *40*(1), pp.1-7.

Howarth, L.C., 2020. Narrative, Objects, and the Construction of the Self. *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, *4*(1), pp.5-19.

Hsu, C. Y. 2014. Love and the ethics of subaltern subjectivity in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. (Doctoral dissertation, Durham University).

Huisman, M., 2021. Autobiography and other life narratives. In *Essays on Theory, Method and Historiography*. Bloomsbury.

Hutchison, E. 2016. Representing Trauma and Collectivising Emotions. In *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (pp. 111–152). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hutchison, E., Bleiker, R., Bourne, J. and Hoang, Y.J., 2024. Decolonising affect: Emotions and the politics of peace. *Cooperation and Conflict*, *59*(2), pp.149-170.

Icaza Garza, R. (2022). Decoloniality, governance and development. In W. Hout, & J. Hutchison (Eds.), Handbook on Governance And Development (pp. 45-62). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789908756.00012

Igbafe, A. A., & Offiong, O. J. 2007. Political assassinations in Nigeria: An exploratory study 1986-2005. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, *1*(1), 9.

Igboin, B. O. 2011. Colonialism and African cultural values. *African Journal of History and Culture*, *3*(6), 96-103.

Igboin, B. O. 2014. An African religious discourse on names and identity. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, *3*(1), 26–40.

Imbuga, F. 1976. *Betrayal in the city*. Heinemann.

Jackson, R. H., & Rosberg, C. G. 1982. *Personal rule in Black Africa: Prince, autocrat, prophet, tyrant*. Univ of California Press.

Jackson, R. H., & Rosberg, C. G. 1985. Democracy in tropical Africa: Democracy versus autocracy in African politics. *Journal of International Affairs*, 293-305.

James, K. 2020. *The Bible, King James Version*. Otbebookpublishing.

Jameson, F. 1986. Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism. *Social Text*, (15), 65-88.

JanMohamed, A. R., & Lloyd, D. 1987. Introduction: Minority discourse: What is to be done? *Cultural Critique*, (7), 5-17.

Jaramogi O. O. 1967. *Not yet uhuru: The autobiography of Oginga Odinga*. Heinemann.

Javangwe, T. D. 2011. Contesting Narratives: Constructions of the Self and the Nation in Zimbabwe Political Auto/Biography. PhD Thesis, University of South Africa (South Africa).

Jennings, W. J. 2010. *The Christian imagination: Theology and the origins of race*. Yale University Press.

Johansen, J. D. 2020. *Literary Emotions and Narrative Dynamics*. Oxford University Press.

Johnston, M. 2005. *Syndromes of Corruption*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Josselson, R. 1996. *The space between us: Exploring the dimensions of human relationships*. Sage.

Kadmon, N. 2004. Toponymy and geopolitics: The political use - and misuse - of geographical names. *The Cartographic Journal*, *41*(2), 85-87.

Kagari, M., & Thomas, S. 2006. *The police, the people, the politics: Police Accountability in Kenya*.

Kalu, K. K. 2020. The Cold War and Africa's political culture. Vestnik RUDN. *International Relations*, 20(1), 11–21.

Kamau, C., 2016. Transitional justice as a path to distributive justice: a jurisprudential and legal case for land restitution in Kenya. *Strathmore L. Rev.*, *1*, p.25.

Kameri-Mbote, P., & Kindiki, K. 2008. Trouble in Eden: How and why unresolved land issues landed 'peaceful Kenya' in trouble in 2008. In *Forum for Development Studies* (Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 167-193). Taylor & Francis Group.

Kanogo, T. 1987. *Squatters and the roots of Mau Mau, 1905-63*. East African Publishers.

Kanu, I. A. 2013. African identity and the emergence of globalisation. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, *3*(6), 34-42.

Kanyinga, K., Lumumba, O., & Amanor, K. S. 2008. "The struggle for sustainable land management and democratic development in Kenya: A history of greed and grievance." In *Land and Sustainable Development in Africa* (pp. 100–126). London: Zed Books

Kanyingi, K. B. W. 2015. Ex-Mau Mau fighters and land issues in Kenya: The case of NDEFFO, 1968-2013 (Doctoral dissertation, Egerton University).

Kapinde, S. 2016. Pulpit Power and the Unrelenting Voice of David Gitari in the Democratisation of Kenya between 1986 and 1990. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, *22*(4), pp559-593.

Kapinde, S.A., 2025. Prophetic Christianity in Kenya: A call for the renaissance of critical pulpit theology. *Theologia Viatorum*, *49*(1), p.277.

Karmakar, G. and Byrne, D.C., 2024. "Knowledge Born in the Struggle": Activism, Decolonial Ecology, and Sustainability in Wangari Maathai's Unbowed: A Memoir. *Scrutiny2*, *28*(2), pp.158-179.

Kassem A. 2012. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* Vol. 2 No. 4; (pp.165-173).

Kaunda, C. J. 2015. The denial of African agency: A decolonial theological turn. *Black Theology*, *13*(1), 73-92.

Kenyatta, J., 1961. *Facing Mount Kenya. The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu.* With an Introd. by B. Malinowski. Mercury Books.

Khamisi, J., 2018. *Looters and grabbers: 54 years of corruption and plunder by the elite, 1963-2017*. Jodey Book Publishers.

Kiai, M. 2003. We Lived to Tell: The Nyayo House Story. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Citizens for Justice. Nairobi.

Kiai, M. 2006. An Evening with Mboya. KNHRC Report.

Kiarie, N. P. 2021. An Examination of Kenya's Fight against Corruption and Tribalism Through Education with Reference to Freire's Concept of Education for Liberation. School of Education in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for The Award of PhD of Kenyatta University. Unpublished PhD Dissertation.

Kim, H., 2026. *In-between Colonial Heritage: Postcolonial Heritage Perception by Local Society in South Korea* (Doctoral dissertation).

Kimani W. 2018. *The Kenya Socialist:* Durrani, S. and Waweru, K. eds., *No. 1 2019* (Vol. 1). Vita Books.

King, Martin Luther Jr. 1963. *Why We Can't Wait*. New York: Mentor.

Kirby, J., 1994. 'Cultural change and religious conversion in West Africa,' in T. Blakeley, W. Van Beek & D. Thompson (eds.), *Religion in Africa*, pp. 57–72, James Currey, London.

Kivai, G. M. 2010. The female voice and the future of gender relationships in the Nigerian nation in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun.* (Unpublished MA thesis, Kenyatta University).

Klaus, K.F., 2015. *Claiming land: Institutions, narratives, and political violence in Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Wisconsin-Madison).

Knighton, B. 2009. *Religion and Politics in Kenya: Essays in honour of a meddlesome priest*. (Ed). Springer.

Kolawole, Mary E. Modupe. 1997. *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Trenton, N.J., and Asmara: Africa World Press.

Koncewicz, T. T., Strother, L., & Logan, J. 2019. *The Role of Citizen Emotions in Constitutional Backsliding – Mapping Out Frontiers of New Research*. https://verfassungsblog.de/the-role-of-citizen-emotions-in-constitutional-backsliding-mapping-out-frontiers-of-new-research Retrieved on 22-03-2024

Kourouma, A. 1981. *The suns of independence* (A. Adams, Trans.). Heinemann. (Original work published 1968).

Kumar, R., 2025. Tribal communities and their role in sustainable development in India. *COMPUTER*, *25*(6).

Kuria, G. K. 1991. Confronting dictatorship in Kenya. *Journal of Democracy*, *2*(4), 115-126.

Kwatemba, S. W. 2008. Ethnicity and political pluralism in Kenya. *Journal of African Elections*, *7*(2), 77-112.

LaBar, K. S. 2016. The emotional brain: Fundamental questions and strategies for future research. *Emotion Review, 8*(4), 307–308.

Lancaster, K., 2025. Nationalism and Social Development in the Late Colonial Period: Perspectives on Education and Anti-Colonial Resistance in Nigeria. *The Mirror-Undergraduate History Journal*, *45*(1).

Langat, K. 2007. Deconstructing Neo-colonialism and liberalism: Kenya and the NGOs' A Discourse Analysis. In *Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society (ANZCIES) Annual Conference* (pp. 89-103).

Lara, M. P. 1998. *Moral textures: Feminist narratives in the public sphere*. University of California Press.

Latha R. 2004. Mariama Ba's *So long a letter* and the educational empowerment of Muslim women. *Acta Academica 2004 36(1): 54-83.*

Lawson, G. 2021. Revolutionary generosity. *International Politics Review* Vol 9. pp. 32-39.

Lazarus, N. 1990. Imperialism, cultural theory, and radical intellectualism today: A critical assessment. *Rethinking Marxism*, *3*(3-4), 156-164.

Lehuedé, Sebastian. 2023. "The Coloniality of Collaboration: Sources of Epistemic Obedience in Data-Intensive Astronomy in Chile." Information, Communication, and Society 26 (2): 425–440. https://doi.10.1080/1369118X.2021.1954229

Lejeune, P. 1975. Autobiographie et histoire littéraire [with Discussion]. *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 903-936.

Lejeune, P. 1989. *On Autobiography*. Translated by Katherine Leary, edited by Paul John Eakin. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Lellou, H., 2024. US Relations with Africa and the New Cold War. *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters*, *54*(4), p.8.

Letseka, M., 2000. 'African philosophy and educational discourse,' in P. Higgs, N.C.G.

Levi-Strauss, M. 1978. Meaning. *Barthes, I mage-Music-Text, 142ff.*

Lewis, A. E. 2007. A Kenyan revolution: Mau Mau, land, women, and nation (Master's thesis, East Tennessee State University). East Tennessee State University Digital Commons. https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/2134

Li, J. 2022. Emotion Expression in Modern Literary Appreciation: An Emotion-Based Analysis. Front. Psychol. 13:923482. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.923482

Lincoln, Y. S., & Denzin, N. K. 2003. *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief*. Rowman Altamira.

Lister, R. 1997. Citizenship: Towards a feminist synthesis. *Feminist Review*, *57*(1), 28-48.

Lockwood, P. 2026 Contextualizing Kenyatta Histories of anti-colonial struggle and decolonizing anthropology

Lonsdale, J. 1999. Kikuyu Christianities. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, *29*(Fasc. 2), 206-229.

Louai, E. H. 2012. Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical developments and new applications. *African Journal of History and Culture*, *4*(1), 4-8.

Louis Renza, 1977. "The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography." *New Literary History*, 9 p. 4.

Lynch, G. 2006. The fruits of perception: 'Ethnic politics' and the case of Kenya's constitutional referendum. *African Studies*, *65*(2), 233-270.

Maathai, W. 2009. *The challenge for Africa: A new vision*. Random House.

Mabovula, N.N., 2011. The erosion of African communal values: A reappraisal of the African Ubuntu philosophy. *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *3*(1), pp.38-47.

Magesa, L. 1997. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.

Magesa, L. 2014. *African religion: The moral traditions of abundant life*. Orbis books.

Mahmud, T. 1998. Colonialism and modern constructions of race: A preliminary inquiry. *U. Miami L. Rev.*, *53*, 1219.

Maldonado Torres, N. 2008. *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Maldonado-Torres, N. 2007. On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2-3), 240-270.

Maldonado-Torres, N. 2020. What is decolonial critique? *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, *41*(1), 157-183.

Maluleke, T. S. 1994. Christ in Africa: The influence of multi-culturity on the experience of Christ. *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, *8*(1), 49-64.

Mamdani, M., 2012. *Define and rule: Native as political identity*. Harvard University Press.

Manchala, D., 2017. Moving in the spirit: called to transforming discipleship: reflections from the vantage points of the marginalized people. *International Review of Mission*, *106*(2), pp.201-215.

Mandal, M., & Karan, T.K. 2014. Origin and historiography of subaltern studies from the West to the East. *Langlit*, 1(1), 183-94.

Mandela, N., 1973. *No easy walk to freedom.* Heinemann.

Mangena, T., 2026. Narratives of Shona divorcees: decolonial challenges to African feminist thought. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, pp.1-18.

Mangena, T., 2024. Personal names, naming and identity (Re) negotiation among Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *59*(5), pp.1571-1584.

Marshall, E., & Gilmore, L. 2015. Girlhood in the gutter: Feminist graphic knowledge and the visualization of sexual precarity. *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, *43*(1), 95-114.

Mascuch M. 2013. *The Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591 – 1791*. Wiley.

Masemola, 2016 in *The Novel in Africa and the Caribbean since 1950* (Vol. 11). Oxford University Press. Gikandi, S. ed., 2016.

Mashori, G.M. & Zaib, S. 2015. Subalterns can speak: Shahraiz's message of hope for human equality in "wife." *ELF*, 17, 183-196.

Masson, S.Z., 2022. Autobiography and the Autobiographical Mode as Narrative Resistances. An Interdisciplinary Perspective. *European Journal of Life Writing*, *11*, pp.AN1-AN10.

Mate, A. M. 2017. Interrogating masculinities in selected Kenyan popular fiction. Thesis, University of South Africa.

Matemba, Y. H. 2026 'Turning decolonial rhetoric into anti-colonial praxis in religion education Africa South of the Sahara', *Oxford Review of Education*, pp. 1–20. doi: 10.1080/03054985.2026.2635401.

Mayaki, J. A., & Omobowale, E. B. 2019. Scriptotherapy in Ndlovu's *Invisible earthquake*. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, *32*(2), 109-120.

Mbataru P. 2025. We should pray for a new Champion of democracy. *Daily nation* 20th October 2025. Nation Media Group. Nairobi.

Mbembe, A. 2006. On the postcolony: A brief response to critics. *African Identities, 4*(2), 143–78.

Mbembe, A., 2000. African modes of self-writing. *Codesria Bulletin*, (1), pp.4-19.

Mbembé, J.A. and Rendall, S., 2002. African modes of self-writing. *Public culture*, *14*(1), pp.239-273.

Mbiti, J. S. 1969. *African religions and philosophy*. Heinemann.

Mbuvi, A.M., 2017. African biblical studies: An introduction to an emerging discipline. *Currents in Biblical Research*, *15*(2), pp.149-178.

McCooey, D., 1996. *Artful histories: modern Australian autobiography*. Cambridge University Press.

McKay, N. Y. 1998. The narrative self: Race, politics, and culture in Black American women's autobiography. *Women, autobiography, theory: A reader*, 96-107.

McNamee, L., 2019. Indirect colonial rule and the salience of ethnicity. *World Development*, *122*, pp.142-156.

Médard, C. 2008. Key Issues in Disentangling the Kenyan Crisis. Evictions, Autochthony and Land Privatisation. *Les Cahiers d 'Afrique de l'Est/The East African Review*, (38), 375-391.

Melles, K.J., 2025. Kenya's Emergency Powers: Legal Continuities in the Post-Colonial State, 1959–1969. *Law and History Review*, *43*(1), pp.25-48.

Mensah, E.O., Inyabri, I.T. and Nyong, B.O., 2021. Names, naming and the code of cultural denial in a contemporary Nigerian society: An afrocentric perspective. *Journal of Black Studies*, *52*(3), pp.248-276.

Mesbah, H. 2019. Collective identity in national anthems: Investigating commonalities and differences among African and non-African Arab countries. In *Music and messaging in the African political arena* (pp. 45-64). IGI Global.

Metz, T. 2011. Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, *11*(2), 532-559.

Meyer, K. 2015. Kenya: Decolonisation, Democracy and the Struggle for Uhuru (Doctoral dissertation).

Mhoodar, R.A., 2023. Sexual Oppression in Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook. *(Humanities, social and applied sciences) Misan Journal of Academic Studies*, *22*(45), pp.329-343.

Middleton, J., 1953. Mau Mau and the Kikuyu. By LSB Leakey. London: Methuen & Co. 1952. Pp. xi+ 115. 7s. 6d. *Africa*, *23*(3), pp.262-263.

Mignolo, W. D. 2007. Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2-3), 449-514.

Mignolo, W. D. 2007. Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking. *Cultural Studies* 21(2-3): 155 – 67.

Mignolo, W. D. 2011. Epistemic disobedience and the decolonial option: A manifesto. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, *1*(2).

Mignolo, W. D. 2018. Border thinking and decolonial cosmopolitanism. *Routledge International Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies*. Routeledge

Misch, G., 1951. *A history of autobiography in antiquity*. trans. Georg Misch. Routledge.

Mitullah, W.V., 2021. Identity in Kenya: Tolerance and trust deficits point to opportunities for progress.

Miyonga, R., 2025. Old wounds: embodying the Mau Mau war in post-colonial Kenya. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *19*(4), pp.693-710.

Moi, D. A. 1986. *Kenya African nationalism: Nyayo philosophy and principles*. Macmillan Kenya.

Molobi, Masilo VS. 2014. The Black Church and family empowerment in South Africa. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, *40* (Suppl. 1), 195-211. Retrieved October 24, 2022, from http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1017-04992014000200012&lng=en&tlng=en.

Morales, F.X., 2025. Self/other: Guiding distinction for the social theory of the self. *Current Sociology*, *73*(4), pp.595-612.

Morton, S., 2003. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. Routledge.

Moses, U.U., 2023. Peace building in Africa. *African Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, *6*(4), pp.60-74.

Moyo, T. 2018. The Unsettling of Colonialist and Nationalist Spaces: John Eppel's Writings on Zimbabwe. PhD Thesis, University of South Africa (South Africa).

Mpofu, W., 2017, August. Decoloniality as travelling theory: Or what decoloniality is not. In *Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research Seminar* (Vol. 7, p. 26). Johannesburg, South Africa: University of the Witwatersrand.

Mtshali, B. and Thwala, G., 2026. Exploring Orality: Decolonizing knowledge through the praise poetry of Zulu Kings, Shaka and Cetshwayo.

Muchiri, J. 2014. The intersection of the self and history in Kenyan autobiographies. *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*, *1*(1-2), 83-93.

Mukanda, S.W., 2025. Origins, nature and the development of ethnic identity in Kenya since 1963. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, *2*(4), pp.242-248.

Mumo, P.M., 2021. Resilience of ancestral lands culture in Kenya: A religious discourse. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, *11*(1), pp.65-80.

Munyangeyo, T., 2022. Intersecting and Contiguous Identities in African Narratives: Ontological and Anthropological Perspectives.

Munyao, M. & Tanui, P. K**.** 2021. Whiteness in Christianity and Decoloniality of the African Experience: Developing a Political Theology for 'Shalom' in Kenya*. Religions*, 12(11),

Munyao, M., 2022. Decolonial Conversations in African Christianity: Developing a Public Theology for Kenya. *Transformation*, *39*(4), pp.235-242.

Murithi, T. 2007. Institutionalising Pan-Africanism: Transforming African Union values and principles into policy and practice. *Institute for Security Studies Papers*, *2007*(143), 16.

Muriuki, G. 1965. The Fruits of Uhuru in African Today. E. repository. Uonbi.ac.ke

Murunga, G. R. 2003. Ethnicity, community relations and civil society in contemporary Kenya: Trends and field experiences. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, *29*(2-3).

Murunga, G. R., Okello, D., & Sjogren, A. (Eds.). 2014. *Kenya: The struggle for a new constitutional order*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Murunga, G.R., Okello, D. and Sjogren, A. eds., 2014. *Kenya: The struggle for a new constitutional order*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Musila, G. A. 2020. "Her Life." In Wangari Maathai's Registers of Freedom, edited by Grace A. Musila, 3–79. HSRC Press.

Mutie, S.M. 2020. Contesting the Subaltern Narrative: The Trickster Trope in the Kenyan Political Autobiography. *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*, *6*(2), pp.98-118.

Mutie, S. M. 2022. Re-membering Wangari Maathai's Feminist Scholarship in her Autobiography *Unbowed*: One Woman's Story. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa/Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique*, *20*(1), 67-84.

Mutie, S. and Goro, N. K. 2017. Subalternity and Resistance in the Kenyan Political Autobiography: A Critical Look at *Not Yet Uhuru* and *The Flame of Freedom. Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies (JAIS)* (online), Volume 1, (3).

Mutie, S., & Kamau, N. 2018. Ideographs of Resistance and Identity Construction in the Kenyan Political Autobiography. *Coretrain Journal of Languages, Humanities, Social Sciences and Education*, *1*, 23-40.

Mutie, S., & Rutere, A. 2023. (Un)even Cultural Productions:(Re)theorising Silences in the Kenyan Political Life writing. *English Studies in Latin America: A Journal of Cultural and Literary Criticism*, (25).

Mutiso, G. & Rohio, S. 1975. Readings in African Political Thought. Heinemann, London.

Muzorewa, G. H. 1985. *The Origins and Development of African Theology*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

Mwakabana, H. A. O. (Ed.). 2002. *Crises of Life in African Religion and Christianity*. LWF Studies 2. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation.

Mwaniki, I. N. 2007. Oral Narratives - Social cultural repository of namers and naming practices of Agikuyu of Kenya. University of Nairobi Press.

Mwapangidza, S. 2014. In search of desired selves: Constructions of self-identities in Barack Obama's *Dreams from my father* and Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to freedom*. *Latin American Report*, *30*(2), 85-97.

Mwaura, C. N. 1997. Political succession and related conflicts in Kenya. University of Nairobi Press.

Mwaura, S. W. 2010. Colonialism and ethnic conflict in post-colonial Africa: A case study of Kenya 1963-2007. Erepository uonbi.

Myers, M. 2009. *Qualitative Research in Business & Management.* London: Sage Publications.

Nabudere, W. D. 2011. *Afrikology, philosophy and wholeness. An epistemology*. African Books Collective.

Nagel, M. 2008. *'I write what I like'*: African Prison Intellectuals and the Struggle for Freedom. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, *2*.

Naik, S.A. 2015. Contradicting Monologue: Dalit Autobiographies as a Counter Discourse. *Research Journal of English Language & Literature*. Online, www.rjelal.com, Accessed on 20.05.2018.

Nakai, A., 2011. Autobiography of the other: David Dabydeen and the imagination of slavery. *Postcolonial Text*, *6*(2).

Nandwa, J., & Bukenya, A. 1983. African oral literature for schools. Heineman. Nairobi.

Nardi, P., 2014. Runaway Women Slaves: From Slave Narratives to Contemporary Rewritings. *L'Analisi Linguistica e Letteraria*, *22*(1-2), pp.77-86.

Nayar, J., 2017. Some Thoughts on the "(Extra) Ordinary". *Alternatives*.

Ndebele, N. S. 2006. *The rediscovery of the ordinary: Essays on South African literature and culture* (2nd ed., p. 7). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Ndege, P. O. 2009. Colonialism and its Legacies in Kenya. Lecture delivered during Fulbright–Hays Group project abroad program: July 5th to August 6th, 2009.

Ndhlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2013. Empire, global coloniality and African subjectivity. New York: Bergan Books.

Ndiangui, P., 2025. Is Peter Your Real Name? An Autohistoria-Teoría Exploration of Self-Identity Conflict through Cultural Naming and Colonial. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, *8*(2), pp.64-96.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni S.J, 2023a. Resurgent and insurgent decolonization of the twenty-first century – a foreword. In: Andrews N, Khalema NE (eds) *Decolonizing African Studies Pedagogies: Knowledge Production, Epistemic Imperialism and Black Agency*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, v–ix.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2013. *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa*. African Books Collective.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2013b. *Empire, Global Coloniality and Subjectivity.* New York & Oxford: Bergan Books.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2013c. Perhaps decoloniality is the answer? Critical reflections on development from a decolonial epistemic perspective. *Africanus*, *43*(2), 1-11.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2013d. Decolonial Epistemic Perspective and Pan-African Unity in the 21st Century. *The African Union Ten Years After: Solving African Problems with Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance. Pretoria:* Africa Institute of South Africa, 385-409.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2015a. Decoloniality as the future of Africa. *History Compass*, *13*(10), 485-496.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2015b. Decoloniality in Africa: A Continuing Search for a New World Order. *ARAS Vol.36 No.2 December 2015.*

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2016. Nelson Mandela and the Politics of Life. In *Governance and the Crisis of Rule in Contemporary Africa: Leadership in Transformation* (pp. 23-47). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2019. Discourses of decolonisation/decoloniality. *Papers on Language and Literature*, *55*(3), 201-226.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. 2013. Why Decoloniality in the 21st Century? *The Thinker*, 48, 10 -15.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2020. *Decolonisation, development and knowledge in Africa: Turning over a new leaf*. Routledge.

Ndogo, S. 2010. Women's Life Worlds 'In-Between' in An Introduction to BIGSASworks! (Eds) Daniel, A., Fink, K., Kroeker, L., & Schütze, J.: *Bayreuth*, 2.

Ndogo, S. 2011. The Personal as a Challenge to the 'Old 'Political Order in Autobiography: Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: One Woman's Story* (2006). *Bayreuth*, 10.

Ndogo, S. 2016. *Narrating the self and nation in Kenyan autobiographical writings*. LIT Verlag Münster, Vol. 63.

Ndung'u, M.I. 2013. Oral Narratives: Social Cultural Repository of Names and Naming Practices of Agikuyu in Kenya, *International Journal of Education and Research*, 1(8), pp. 89–100.

Neubauer, C. E. 1983. One Voice Speaking for Many: The Mau Mau Movement and Kenyan Autobiography. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, *21*(01), 113-131.

Neutel, K. B., & Kartzow, M. B. 2020. Neighbours Near and Far: How a Biblical Figure is Used in Recent European Anti-Migration Politics. *Biblical Interpretation*, *29*(3), 358-380.

Ngobeni-Khubeka, M., Letsoalo, P. and Ntombela, B.X., 2026. Decolonial contestations of multilingualism and translanguaging in English for Academic Purposes: A case of the University of Limpopo. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, *44*(1), pp.53-64.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1967. *A Grain of Wheat*. Heinemann.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1972. *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*. London: Heinemann

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1977. *Petals of blood*. Heinemann.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1993. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. London: James Currey.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, N. 2009a. *Re-membering Africa*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. 1966. *The River Between*. Heinemann.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 1986. *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Oxford: James Currey

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. 1987. *Matigari*. Heinemann.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, & wa Mĩrĩĩ, N. 1982. *I will marry when I want.* Heinemann.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2010. *Dreams in a time of war: A childhood memoir*. Harvill Secker.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. 1964. *Weep Not, Child*. Heinemann.

Ngweya, T. 1996. Ideology and Form in South African Autobiographical Writing: A Study of the Autobiographies of Five South African Authors. Unpublished PhD Dissertation: UNISA.

Nissim, H. 2006. Mau Mau and the decolonisation of Kenya. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, *8*(3).

Njihia S. 2024. DCI probes Alleged Purchase of Pistol that Killed Tom Mboya. *Nairobi Law Monthly* July 24, 2024. Online.

Nkrumah, K. 1965. *Neo-colonialism the last stage of imperialism*. New York: International Publishers.

Nnolim, C. 2009. "The Writer as Patriot." *Issues in African Literature*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.

North, P., 2016. *Unlocking the self in self-writing* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Greenwich).

Nsabimana, T. 2021. The ills of colonial and post-independent Kenya as reflected in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City*. *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science*, 6(6), 200–213

Nugent, P. 2012. *Africa since independence*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Nwafor, M. I. 2016. Integrating African values with Christianity: A requirement for dialogue between Christian religion and African culture. *Mgbakoigba: Journal of African Studies*, *6*(1).

Nweke, C.C., 2018. African identity: the nature-culture perspective.

Nyada, G. 2022. Remembering Beyond Africanity: Displaying Postcolonial Identities in "African" and "European" Childhood Accounts. *Stichproben (19928610)*, (42).

Nyamndi, G.D., 2006. Prospective commitment in African literature. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, *15*(4).

Ochwa-Echel, J., & Onyango, R. 2018. African Women and Social Transformation: Exploring Wangari Maathai's Activism.' *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *12*(6), 93-109.

Odimegwu, I. and Omazu, E., 2021. African communalism in African societies in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Philosophy: Religion and Peace Studies*, *10*(1), pp.198-215.

Odhacha, P. N. O. A. 2021. Autobiographical Portrait of Subversion of the Normative Gender Identity in Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* (Doctoral dissertation, Maseno University).

Odhiambo, E. A., Ogembo, J., & Magak, K. 2013. Literary Commitment in Bessie Head's *Maru*. Mmarau.

Odhiambo, E. C. 2025. Decolonising the History of Kenya's Political Governance: Critical Reflections on Linguistic and Cultural Imperatives. *Africa Review*, *17*(3), 282-305.

Odhiambo, E. S. 2003. Matunda ya Uhuru, Fruits of Independence. *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority, and Narration.* Ed. ES Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2003-37.

Odimegwu, I. and Omazu, E., 2021. African communalism in African societies in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Philosophy: Religion and Peace Studies*, *10*(1), pp.198-215.

Oduor, R.M., 2022. The History of Ethnicised Politics in Kenya and its Impact on the Management of the Country's Public Affairs. *Thought and Practice*, *8*(2), pp.29-62.

Ogechi, N.O., 2019. Ethnicity, language, and identity in Kenya. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, *7*(1), pp.111-135.

Ogot B.A. 1995. Transition from Single-Party State to Multi-Party-Political Systems. In Ochieng W. (Eds) *Decolonisation and Independence in Kenya 1940-1993*. Ohio University Press.

Ogot, B. 2003. "Mau Mau & Nationhood: The Untold Story." In E.S. A. Odhiambo & John

Ogot, B.A. and Ochieng, W.R. eds., 1995. *Decolonization & independence in Kenya, 1940-93*. Ohio State University Press.

Ogundokun, 2013. Literature and Society: A New Reading of Sembène Ousmane's Le Mandat. *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*. Volume 5, Number 1, 2013, 120-134.

Ogunyemi, C. 2014. *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian novel by women*. University of Chicago Press.

Ogunyemi, C.O. 1985. Womanism: The dynamics of contemporary black female novel in

Oke, O.E., 2024. Rethinking Polygamy: Its Impact on Stability and Harmony in African Family Structures.

Okoth, G. O., & Jagero, J. A. 2021. Thinking Through the Crisis of Intra-Party Democracy in Kenya: Reflections on Kenyatta's KANU Leadership (1963-1978). *Journal of Historical Studies*, *2*(1), 1-29.

Okoth, P. G. 1984. US Foreign Policy Toward Kenya, 1952-1960. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, *14*(1).

Okoth-Ogendo, H. W. 1988. *Constitutions without constitutionalism: Reflections on an African political paradox*. American Council of Learned Societies.

Okoth-Ogendo, H.W.O. 2002. "The Tragic African Commons: A Century of Expropriation, Suppression and Subversion." *University of Nairobi Law Journal* 12003 (1): 107–117.

Okuyade, O., 2013. Continuity and renewal in the endless tales of a continent: New voices in the African novel. *ariel: a review of international english literature*, *44*(1), pp.1-24.

Okyerefo, M.P., 2023. The autobiographical self as an object for sociological enquiry. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, *48*(4), pp.229-247.

Olivier, B. 2019. Decolonisation, identity, neo-colonialism and power. *Phronimon*, *20*(1), 1-18.

Olney, J. 1973. *Tell me Africa. An Approach to African Literature*. Princeton University Press.

Olney, J. 1979. The Value of Autobiography for Comparative Studies: African vs. Western Autobiography. *Comparative Civilizations Review*, (2), 52.

Olney, J. 1980. Autobiography and the cultural moment: A thematic, historical, and bibliographical introduction. *Autobiography: Essays theoretical and critical*.

Olney, J. 1981. *Metaphors of Self. The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton University Press.

Olney, J. 1993. The value of autobiography for comparative studies: African vs. Western autobiography. *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 212-223.

Olney, J. 2014. James Olney-Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography. In *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (pp. 236-267). Princeton University Press.

Olson, M. H. 2003. *Self in society*. Pearson Education.

Oluoch, J. A. 2003. The Christian political theology of Rt. Rev. Dr. John Henry Okullu, Bishop of the Diocese of Maseno South of the Anglican Church of Kenya (1929–1999)

(Master's thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg). University of KwaZulu-Natal ResearchSpace. https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/handle/10413/4371

Onguny, P., & Gillies, T. 2020. *Land conflict in Kenya: A comprehensive overview of literature*. Journal of Eastern African Studies.

Osborne, M., 2014. *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race among the Kamba, c. 1800 to the Present*. Cambridge University Press.

Osborne, M.2015. 'The routing out of Mau Mau from the minds of the Kikuyu is a formidable task': Propaganda and the Mau Mau war. *The Journal of African History*, *56*(1), 77-97.

Osofisan, F., 1998. Reflections on theatre practice in contemporary Nigeria. *African Affairs*, *97*(386), pp.81-89.

Ouma, S.O., 2026. *Africa Unbound: Decolonial Pathways to Sovereignty and Liberation* (Vol. 4). Brill.

Oyewumi, O. 2002. Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenge of African Epistemologies *In: Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies, 2, 2002, 1, [np]*

Pacho, T.O., 2016. African Churches and Good Governance in Africa. *Anthology of African Christianity*, pp.1107-1111.

Pachón Soto, D. (2023). Decolonial theories: Origin, categories, and critical intents (K.

Pandey, G. 2006. The Subaltern as Subaltern Citizen. www.jstor.org/stable/4118914 Accessed on 2.06.2018.

Paoletti, G. 2012. Durkheim's' Dualism of Human Nature': Personal identity and social links. *Durkheimian Studies*, *18*(1), 61-80.

Paquet, S. P. 1991. "West Indian Autobiography." *African American Autobiography* 196-211.

Parashar, S. and Schulz, M., 2021. Colonial legacies, postcolonial 'selfhood'and the (un) doing of Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, *42*(5), pp.867-881.

Parente, F., Conklin, K., Guy, J.M. and Scott, R., 2021. The role of empirical methods in investigating readers' constructions of authorial creativity in literary reading. *Language and Literature*, *30*(1), pp.21-36.

Parry, M. 2016. Uncovering the brutal truth about the British empire. *The Guardian*, *18*, 2016.

Perkins, M.V., 2000. *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Perliger, A. 2015. *The rationale of political assassinations*. Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point. (pp1-93).

Peterson, D. R. 2006. Casting characters: Autobiography and political imagination in central Kenya. *Research in African Literatures*, *37*(3), 176-192.

Pfukwa, C. and Maganga, A.T., 2023. Marechera's world: naming people and places in Marechera's Black Sunlight. *Nomina Africana: Journal of African Onomastics*, *37*(1), pp.87-97.

Pillay, M. N. 2017. Women, Priests and the Anglican Church in Southern Africa: Reformation of Holy Hierarchies. *Consensus*, 38(1).

Pimm, S. L. 2007. Africa: Still the" Dark Continent." *Conservation Biology*, *21*(3), 567-569.

PLO–Lumumba, P. D. 2011. Fighting corruption in Africa: The case for an African association of anti-corruption authorities. Paper presented during the AFRICAN ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE held in BUJUMBURA, BURUNDI from 20TH TO 22ND JUNE 2011

Poletti, A. 2020. *Stories of the self: Life writing after the book* (Vol. 27). NYU Press.

Popkin, J.D., 2017. History, Historians, and Autobiography Revisited. *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, *32*(3), pp.693-698.

Pound, E. 2010. *ABC of Reading*. New Directions Publishing.

Powell, J., Chacha, M., & Smith, G. E. 2019. Failed coups, democratisation, and authoritarian entrenchment: Opening up or digging in? *African Affairs*, *118*(471), 238-258.

Prakash, G. 1994. Subaltern studies as postcolonial criticism. *The American Historical Review*, *99*(5), 1475-1490.

Premchand, M., 2011. The nature and purpose of literature. *Social Scientist*, *39*(11/12), pp.82-86.

Procida, M. A. 2002. “The greater part of my life has been spent in India": Autobiography and the crisis of empire in the Twentieth Century. *Biography*, *25*(1), 130-50.

Pugliese, C. 1984. The Life-Story in Kenya: A Bibliography (1920-1984). www.jstor.org/stable/40760028 Accessed on 13.04.2017.

Quijano, A. 2000. Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, *15*(2), 215-232.

Quijano, A. 2007. Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2-3), 168-178.

Rani, M. 2022. Linguistic decolonisation in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind*. *Asian Journal of Basic Science & Research*, *4*(4), 106-109.

Reece J. 2014. Autobiography. *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research*. Sage. Coghlan, D. and Brydon-Miller, M. eds., 2014. *Research in Values and Philosophy*. pp. 115–45.

Reyes, K.B. and Curry Rodríguez, J.E., 2012. Testimonio: Origins, terms, and resources. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *45*(3), pp.525-538.

Rheault, B. 2019. *Emotion and political behaviour*. Cambridge University Press.

Rico, A. R. 2016. Seeking balance: African autobiography as philosophy in Malidoma Patrice Somé's of water and the spirit: Ritual, magic and initiation in the life of an African shaman. *Research in African Literatures*, *47*(1), 76-94.

Robertson, C. 2008. Beyond 'Tribes': Violence and Politics in Kenya. *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, *1*.

Robinson, A. L. 2009. *National versus Ethnic Identity in Africa*. University of California, Berkeley.

Rodrigues, E. 2014. Antjie Krog and the autobiography of postcolonial becoming. *Biography*, 725-744.

Roscoe, A., & Al-Mahrooqi, R. (Eds.). 2012. *Literacy, Literature and Identity: Multiple Perspectives*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Rosenwald, G.C. and Ochberg, R.L., 1992. *Storied lives: The cultural politics of self-understanding*. Yale University Press.

Rosenwein, B. H. 2006. *Emotional communities in the early Middle Ages*. Cornell University Press.

Ross, M. H. 1975. Political alienation, participation, and ethnicity: An African case. *American Journal of Political Science*, 291-311.

Saaka, S.A. and Luginaah, I., 2025. Do women's autonomy lessen the brunt of unequal household responsibilities in the patriarchal context of semi-arid Northern Ghana? *PLoS One*, *20*(10), p.e0335142.

Sabao, C., 2021. Moments of re-writing? Obert Mpofu's On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider and the politics of auto/biographical Truths. *National Question*, p.39.

Said, E. W., 1988. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. "Foreword." Ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak.

Said, E.W., 2000. Invention, memory, and place. *Critical Inquiry*, *26*(2), pp.175-192.

Salami, O., 2021. Karl Popper's Critique of Nationalism: Exorcising Tribal Mentality in Modern African Society. In *Karl Popper and Africa: Knowledge, Politics and Development* (pp. 161-167). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Samatar A.I and Samatar, A.2002. An African State: Reconsiderations (Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Sandbrook, R. 1985. *The Politics of African Economic Stagnation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sanga, I. 2017. Education as a tool for liberation: Seeking Nyerere's understanding. *African Research Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, *4*(1), 1-87.

Sanneh, L. 2001. 'The African transformation of Christianity: Comparative reflections on ethnicity and religious mobilization in Africa,' in D. Hopkins, L.A. Lorentzen, E. Mendieta & D. Bastone (eds.), *Religions/globalisations: Theories and cases*, pp. 1–79, Duke University Press, London.

Sanni, J.S., 2016. Religion: A new struggle for African identity. *Phronimon*, *17*(2), pp.1-13.

Sarbin T.R. 1986. *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct* (Ed). New York: Praeger Publishers.

Sarbin, T. R. 1986. The narrative as a root metaphor for psychology. *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*, 1-27.

Sarker, S. 2014. Subalternity in and out of time, in and out of history, in *Gramsci and Foucault: A Reassessment* (Ed.) Kreps. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Press. 91-109.

Saul, J. S. 2020. The African hero in Mozambican history: On assassinations and executions–Part I. *Review of African Political Economy*, *47*(163), 153-165.

Scott, B. 2019. *Affective Disorders: Emotion in colonial and postcolonial literature*. Liverpool University Press.

Sebola, M. P. 2019. African states' post-colonial dream - Tough battles won in the bush, simple war lost in the public office. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, *11*(1), 1-13.

Seife, K., 2021. Being, belonging and becoming in Africa: a postcolonial rethinking. *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, *43*(2), pp.260-283.

Sepota M.M. 1998. The Destruction of African culture by Christianity. S.A. JNL folklore studies (9)2. *Mgbakoigba, Journal of African Studies. vol.6 no.1. July 2016.*

Shakespeare, W. 2004. *Romeo and Juliet* (B. A. Mowat & P. Werstine, Eds.). Simon & Schuster.

Sharifi, M., & Chabot, S. 2019. Fanon's new humanism as antidote to today's colonial violence. In D. J. Byrd & S. J. Miri (Eds.), *Frantz Fanon and emancipatory social theory: A view from The Wretched* (pp. 251–271). Brill.

Shilaho, W.K., 2017. The Kenyan State and the Ethnicity Challenge. In *Political Power and Tribalism in Kenya* (pp. 29-49). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Shivji, I. G. 2003. The rise, the fall and the insurrection of nationalism in Africa. In *Keynote Address, CODESRIA East African Regional Conference, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia* (pp. 29-31).

Smith, A. D. 1991. *National Identity*. London: Penguin.

Smith, A. D. 1991. The nation: Invented, imagined, reconstructed? *Millennium*, *20*(3), 353-368.

Smith, G. W. 2021. *Names as metaphors in Shakespeare's comedies*. Vernon Press.

Smith, S. & Watson, J, 2010. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life- Narratives.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Smith, S., & Watson, J. 2001. The rumpled bed of autobiography: Extravagant lives, extravagant questions. *Biography*, *24*(1), 1-14.

Sow, A. 2010. Political intuition and African autobiographies of childhood. *Biography*, 33(3), 499–510.

Soyinka, W. 1976. *Myth, literature and the African world*. Cambridge University Press.

Soyinka, W. 1989. *Aké: The years of childhood*. Vintage.

Spivak, G C. 2005. "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular." *Postcolonial Studies*, 8: 475–486.

Spivak, G. C. 1985a. "Can the Subaltern Speak: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice." *Wedge* 7–8: 120–30.

Spivak, G. C. 1985b. "Discussion: Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *In* Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, 330–63. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Spivak, G. C. 1994. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Retrieved from, www. jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/ Can the Subaltern Speak/ on 12.05. 2018.online

Spivak, G.C., 1988. Can the subaltern speak? In *Imperialism* (pp. 171-219). Routledge.

Spivak, G.C., 2005. Scattered speculations on the subaltern and the popular. *Postcolonial studies*, *8*(4), pp.475-486.

Steen, G. J., & Gibbs Jr, R. W. 1999. Metaphor in cognitive linguistics. Torossa.com.

Stefano, G., 2021. Social Transformation: a Decolonial Paradigm. *Africa Journal for Social Transformation*, *1*(1), pp.1-12.

Strickland, D. H. 2022. The female presence on the Hereford World Map. *Different Visions: New Perspectives on Medieval Art*, *8*, 1-57.

Stuhlhofer, E. W. 2022. Black, Female, and Divorced: A Discourse Analysis of Wangarĩ Maathai's Leadership with Reflections from Naleli Morojele's Study of Rwandan and South African Female Political Leaders. *Societies*, *12*(1), 23.

Sun, J. Y. 2019. Historicising African Socialisms: Kenyan African Socialism, Zambian Humanism, and Communist China's Entanglements. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, *52*(3), 349-374.

Swindells, J. 1995. The Uses of Autobiography. *Gender & Society: Feminist Perspectives on the Past and Present*. Taylor & FrancisBristol, PA

Tahat, A., 2019. Parents 'attitudes toward the practice of personal naming: a mixed method comparative study between urban and rural societies in northern Jordan. *e-BANGI*, *16*(8), pp.1-13.

Taoua, P.C. and Musila, G.A., 2023. Of freedom and literature in Africa and the diaspora. *Journal of the african literature association*, *17*(1), pp.1-13.

Tarus, D. K., and Lowery, S. 2017. "African Theologies of Identity and Community: The Contributions of John Mbiti, Jesse Mugambi, Vincent Mulago, and Kwame Bediako." *Open Theology* 3 (2017): 305–320.

Taylor, J. V. 1979. Christianity and politics in Africa. Greenwood Press.

Teklu , T.A., 2024. Theology and poverty. *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Theology.' In William R. Burrows, William R., Mark R. Gornik and Janice A. McLean,

Terry, N., Castro, A., Chibwe, B., Karuri-Sebina, G., Savu, C. and Pereira, L., 2024. Inviting a decolonial praxis for future imaginaries of nature: Introducing the Entangled Time Tree. *Environmental Science & Policy*, *151*, p.103615.

Thakur, P., 2025. THE CONCEPT OF'SUBALTERN'. *Dalit Women's Autobiographies: Voices of the Unheard within Subalterns*, p.1.

Thibodeau, P. H., Matlock, T., & Flusberg, S. J. 2019. The role of metaphor in communication and thought. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *13*(5), e12327.

Throup, D.W., 1985. The origins of Mau Mau. *African Affairs*, *84*(336), pp.399-433.

Tilly, C. 2005. Historical perspectives on inequality. *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities*, 15-30.

Torres, N. M. 2011. Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique: An introduction. *Transmodernity*, *1*(2), 1-15.

Turinskaya, K.M., 2025. Tribalism in Kenya: "our time to eat". *Ètnografičeskoe obozrenie*, (3), pp.206-220.

Tutu, D. M. 2004. *God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for our Time*. Random House, UK: Rider Books, Ebury Publishing

Tuval-Mashiach, R., 2014. Multiplicity and Commonality in Narrative Interpretation. academia.edu.

Ugorji, U.M 2009. The Context for the Emergence of African Christian Identity: An Africa Reconciled to Christ. *Hekima Review,* No 41 Dec 2009

Ulogu, N.D., 2019. African Literature and The Changing World: The Antithetical Ideologies Of Individualism and Communalism in Chinua Achebe's Novels. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, *1*(3).

Uluocha, N. O. 2015. Decolonising place-names: Strategic imperative for preserving indigenous cartography in post-colonial Africa. *African Journal of History and Culture,* 7(9), 180–192.

Uwasomba, C. 2006. The politics of resistance and liberation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of blood* and *Devil on the cross*. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, *1*(6), 94-108.

van der Merwe, D. 2016. From Christianising Africa to Africanising Christianity: Some hermeneutical principles. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, *2*(2), 559-587.

van der Merwe, R. L. 2020. We are not South African: Decolonising National Identity in a Post-Apartheid State. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder).

Varga, Z., 2022. *The acoustic self in English modernism and beyond: writing musically*. Routledge.

Varghese, S. 2009. Art and activism: A study of Arundhati Roy's writing from a subaltern perspective. (Doctoral dissertation).

Vellem, V.S., 2015. *Black Theology of liberation: A theology of life in the context of Empire*. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36(3), a1470. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i3.1470

Veit, P. 2011. Rise and fall of group ranches in Kenya. agris.fao.org

Veit, P., 2019. History of land conflicts in Kenya. *Gates Open Res*, *3*(982), p.982.

Veracini, L., 2022. Colonialist and decolonial metaphors. *Law Text Culture*, *26*, p.21.

Wabende, K. 2021. Imagining the Kenyan *Canaan* dream journey in cyber space. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde, 58*(1), 118–126. https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.58i1.8391

Wainaina, M. 2012. Land as Story and the Place of The Story: A Contemporary Kenyan Illustration of Landscape as Text. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *2*(23).

Waita, N. 2020. Ngugi wa Thiong'o 'Cosmogenic Meta-Myth in *The Perfect Nine: The Epic of Gikuyu and Mumbi*. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, *8*(7), 28-34.

Wallach, J. 2006. Building a Bridge of Words: The Literary Autobiography as Historical Source Material. *Biography, 29*(3), 446-461. Retrieved from http//www.jstor. on 24.06. 2018.

Wan, E., & VanderWerf, M. 2009. A Review of the Literature on Ethnicity, National Identity, and Related Missiological Studies. enochwan.com.

Wariboko, N. 2018. Colonialism, Christianity, and personhood. In *A companion to African history*, 59-75.

Were, M. N. 2017. Negotiating public and private identities: A study of the autobiographies of African women politicians. (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).

Willis, S., 1987. *Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Wilson, A., & Ross, M. 2003. The identity function of autobiographical memory: Time is on our side. *Memory*, *11*(2), 137-149.

Wise, S. R. 2014. Sex and gender identity: A new perspective for college student development. PhD, University of Kentucky.

Wolfreys, J. 2004. Critical Keywords. In *Critical Keywords in Literary and Cultural Theory* (pp. 1-256). London: Macmillan Education UK.

Woodward, K. (ed.). 1997. *Identity and difference* (Vol. 3). Sage.

Workneh, T.W. and Steeves, H.L., 2019. Anthony Bourdain: Parts unknown in Africa: Cultural brokerage,"going native," and colonial nostalgia. *International Journal of Communication*, *13*, pp.23-23.

Wynter, S., and McKittrick, K., 2015. Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? Or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. In: K. McKittrick, ed. Sylvia Wynter: on being human as praxis. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 9–89.

Yenjela, W. 2020. Restorying Kenya: The Mau Mau war counter-narratives. In *Routledge handbook of counter-narratives* (pp. 294-306). Routledge.

Yousef, B. 2025. Why Raila Odinga is the best candidate for the African Union Commission post. HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Zani, B., & Momesso, L. 2021. Can the subaltern feel? An ethnography of migration, subalternity, and emotion. *Emotion, Space and Society*, *39*, 100786.

Zeleza, P. T. 2006. The inventions of African identities and languages: The discursive and developmental implications. lingref.com.

Zeleza, P. T. 2006. The Troubled Encounter Between Postcolonialism and African History 1. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, *17*(2), 89-129.

Zunes, S., 2022. People-powered and non-violent social movements: forcing gradualist democratic reforms in authoritarian societies. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *3*, p.721055.