

Narrated Histories in Selected Kenyan Novels, 1963-2013

David Wafula Yenjela

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Supervisors

Prof. Grace A. Musila

Dr. Godwin Siundu

Department of English Studies

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Declaration

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March 2017

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Dedication

For my lastborn sibling, Oscar Yenjela.

For my father, Peter Malaba Yenjela, who believed in education more than I did, then allowed me no excuse to skip school.

Abstract

This thesis explores the novel's potential to interrogate, reimagine and reflect on the histories of nations, particularly the Kenyan nation. It engages with selected Kenyan novels written in both English and Kiswahili for a period of fifty years of post-independence Kenya in a quest that reveals the novels' contributions in imagining, shaping, and reflecting on the nation's histories. The temporal space under focus — 1963 to 2013, provides a sufficient canvas that enables identification of shifts and continuities, transformations and regressions, and how novelists make sense of the changing times. The task of approaching Kenya's narrated histories through the two dominant national languages, Kiswahili and English, is productive since it taps into not only histories that are language oriented, but also various narrative patterns resultant from the Kiswahili and English literary traditions in Kenya. Furthermore, as opposed to focusing on one novelist's portrayal of the nation, the thesis explores texts from a range of novelists from different generational and geographical locations. This offers diverse insights into Kenya's histories as it is anchored on the belief that an assembly of various "artistically organized" (Bakhtin 262) voices from carefully chosen novels offers a richer portrait of Kenyan novelists' conversations with their histories.

The thesis foregrounds how novelists "reflect, and reflect on, extant perspectives in understanding reality by creating new maps of existence through ideas that not only generate, but also transcend existing possibilities and ways of apprehending those possibilities" (Adebanwi 407). Reflections on the nation's represented histories presuppose a quest for transformation of values, policies, and laws that govern society. This is the motivation of re-imagining and reconfiguring troubled, often suppressed, histories of Kenya, which at times erupt in form of violent conflicts, as seen for instance in the 2007/2008 post-election violence.

In an attempt to understand contemporary Kenya's gender and socio-economic inequalities, ethnic tensions, particular regions' quests for secession on various grounds, and state malpractices on the one hand, and certain individuals' sacrificial campaigns for a transformed society on the other, the thesis charts through the precolonial, colonial, and post-independent Kenyan continuum. The thesis focuses on selected novels' subject and themes and comments on style and structure where into or supports the argument being advanced. Through this approach, the thesis emphasises interrogation of inhibitive structural and perceptual foundations by reading novels that engage Kenya as a contact zone, Kenya's state histories, socio-political histories embedded in romance novels, and the urban novel's engagement with

impoverished but resilient urbanites. Overall, the thesis convenes a reflection on the interface between Kenyan histories and artistic engagements with these histories.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die potensiaal van die roman se ondervra en besin oor die geskiedenis van die Keniaanse nasie. Dit betrek met geselekteerde Keniaanse romans geskryf in beide Engels en Kiswahili vir 'n tydperk van vyftig jaar van pos-onafhanklikheid Kenia in 'n strewende dat bydraes die romans 'in verbeel openbaar, vorming, en besin oor die geskiedenis van die land. Die tydelike ruimte onder fokus - 1963-2013, bied 'n voldoende doek wat identifisering van skofte en kontinuïteite, transformasies en regressies stel, en hoe skrywers sin maak van die veranderende tye. Die taak van die naderende Kenia se verhaal geskiedenis deur die twee dominante nasionale tale, Kiswahili en Engels, is produktief, aangesien die fokus is op taalgerig en geskiedenis. Verder, in teenstelling met die fokus op die uitbeelding van die nasie een romanskrywer se proefskrif ondersoek tekste uit 'n verskeidenheid van skrywers uit verskillende generasies en geografiese plekke, wat verskille insigte bied in Kenia se geskiedenis. Dit is geanker op die oortuiging dat 'n vergadering van verskeie "kunstig georganiseerde"(Bakhtin 262) stemme uit versigtige keuse van romans bied 'n ryker beeld van gesprekke Keniaanse skrywers saam met hul geskiedenis.

In die tesis, word dit uitgelig hoe skrywers "weerspieël, en besin oor, bestaande perspektiewe in die verstaan van werklikheid deur nuwe kaarte van bestaan te skep deur die idees wat nie net genereer nie, maar ook om te bowe bestaande moontlikhede en maniere van diegene se moontlikhede"(Adebani 407). Refleksies op die land se verteenwoordig geskiedenis veronderstel 'n soeke na transformasie van waardes, beleid en wette wat die samelewing regeer. Dit is die motivering van voorstelling en weer instelling ontsteld, dikwels onderdruk, geskiedenis van Kenia, wat by tye uitbars in die vorm van gewelddadige konflikte, soos gesien byvoorbeeld in die 2007/2008 pos-verkieping geweld.

In 'n poging om die huidige Kenia se geslag en sosio-ekonomiese ongelykhede, etniese spanning, bepaalde streke te verstaan 'n soeke na afstigting, en die staat wanpraktyke aan die een kant, en sekere individue se opofferend veldtogte vir 'n getransformeerde samelewing aan die ander kant, die proefskrif dokumenteer verbindings tussen koloniale en pos-onafhanklike Kenia met die klem op die behoefte om striemende strukturele en perseptuele fondasies te ondervra. Dit lees romans wat Kenia betrek as 'n kontak sone, Kenia se staat geskiedenis, sosio-politieke geskiedenis ingebed in romanse en die stedelike roman se betrokkenheid met verarmde maar veerkragtig stedelinge. Algehele, die tesis belê 'n besinning oor die wisselwerking tussen Keniaanse geskiedenis en artistieke betrokkenheid by hierdie geskiedenis.

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* * * * *

The article “Invoking Memories of Legendary Women: a Reading of Rocha Chimera’s Trilogy Siri Sirini” published in *Pathways to African Feminism and Development* 1. 3 (2015) was developed from the first section of Chapter Two of this thesis.

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Chapter One

Introduction: The Kenyan Novel and History

Introduction

In his reading of Zimbabwean novelist Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, historian Terence Ranger remarks on her "refusal to draw upon works of history or anthropology" (203). To Ranger, *The Stone Virgins* "is not a book that establishes a deeper truth through myth and invented ritual. It is a book that confronts the reality of History and transcends that reality by means of confrontation" (206). Ranger's reading here underscores fiction's potential to engage with, re-imagine, reconfigure and interrogate history. This thesis offers a critical evaluation of representations of Kenya's histories in selected Kenyan novels published between 1963 and 2013. It engages with novels written in English and Kiswahili by novelists from different generational and geographical locations, which offer diverse insights into Kenya's histories. The selected timeframe — fifty years of Kenya's flag independence — has seen Kenya's literature in the two national languages flourish, where earlier, the field was primarily dominated by Kiswahili fiction at the Kenyan coast and later, settler fiction and memoirs by figures like Elspeth Huxley, Karen Blixen, and Robert Ruark¹. Over these fifty years, the Kenyan novel has problematised various strands of Kenya's histories, reconstructed, and even contested them in different ways; prompting me to break with tradition in Kenyan literary studies, by reading Kenyan novels in English and Kiswahili alongside each other. The convention is to study these two bodies of literature separately. This new approach proves productive as it reveals different patterns of fictional engagements with Kenya's histories.

The Kenyan Kiswahili novel provides unique contributions in a scholarly work exploring Kenyan novelists' engagement with the nation's histories in two dominant literary languages: English and Kiswahili. Kiswahili is indispensable in literary engagements with Kenya's histories because the language is central to the country's construction of nationhood. For instance, the language was key to political mobilisation in the struggle for independence, whereby "the Swahili word *uhuru* (freedom), which emerged from this independence struggle, became part of the global lexicon of political empowerment" (Mugane 4, original emphasis and bracket). Kiswahili also promises rich histories germane from its evolution. This is because the "language was not only an outcome of a thousand years of dynamic

¹ Huxley's *The Flame Trees of Thika* (1959), *Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya* (1962); Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1937); Ruark's *Something of Value* (1955), *Uhuru: a Novel of Africa Today* (1957).

history on Africa's eastern coast but also a means of forging a sense of collectivity for all the diverse people who settled [at the Swahili coast]" (Mugane 5). Furthermore, Kiswahili literature "has a certain history of continuity and fusion with the Arab-Islamic world that continues to influence and shape its modern composers" (Alamin Mazrui, *Swahili Beyond the Boundaries* 6). Besides, there is the aspect of audience whereby the Kiswahili novels potentially resonate with more Kenyans than those in English. But at the same time, novelists writing in English have made great strides in their writing of Kenya's histories. Hence, an equal footing study of these novels yields more than engaging them separately. Since the thesis is in English, I provided effective translations of excerpts from Kiswahili novels. In my translations from Kiswahili language, I considered the concerns raised by Yongfang Hu on culture-sensitive socio-semiotic translation approaches: that style and message should be given equal significance in translation of a literary text (Hu n.p.).

The Kiswahili novel is a genre that has metamorphosed with time beginning with the works of Shaaban Robert to those of Euphrase Kezilahabi. Alamin Mazrui notes that "if Shaaban was the greatest inspirational figure in the emergence of Swahili prose fiction, it fell to [...] Euphrase Kezilahabi to raise it to greater heights of artistic achievement" ("The Swahili Literary Tradition" 211). Tom Olali in a study of Mohamed Said Ahmed's novel *Babu Alipofufuka*, "The Reincarnation of Grandpa", charts the new horizons that the Kiswahili novel has reached. He states that through anti-structure, the new Kiswahili novel "dramatizes the condition of Africa and situates its problems in history and politics" (82). For Olali, the new Kiswahili novel's "complex and heightened thought process that acknowledges the plurality of reality enables the reader to visualize existence in its manifestation of angst and joy" (82). Katama Mkangi's *Walenisi* (1995), "Those-Are-Us", which I critique in this thesis, uses the same mode of anti-structure as Ahmed's in capturing Kenya's complex state histories. However, I explore these Kiswahili magical realist novels alongside the ones in the realist mode hence generating more insights that can possibly emerge from deployment of various generic modes.

The thesis brings on board different authors from different backgrounds and examines various histories of Kenya under different epochs, primarily the colonial and post-independent eras but occasionally stretching into the precolonial. In the post-independent era, the regimes of Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978), Daniel Moi (1978-2002), and Mwai Kibaki (2002-2013) feature as temporal markers. The thesis engages with different novelists' senses and philosophies of Kenya's histories produced in a period of half a century, 1963-2013.

The thesis aims at unravelling and appreciating novelists' visions of Kenya's pasts and futures. It foregrounds how novelists "reflect, and reflect on, extant perspectives in understanding reality by creating new maps of existence through ideas that not only generate, but also transcend existing possibilities and ways of apprehending those possibilities" (Adebanwi 407). This task is also motivated by the idea that "fiction may give us special insights into how culture and history intersect with and reshape, or are reshaped by, the lives of people, ordinary and extra-ordinary [hence providing] a precious and indispensable window into a society, a people and an era" (Diamond 435).

The aspect of genre is important in this work. Harry Garuba argues against the anthropological model of knowledge production and advocates for the concept of genre "because genre at once inscribes origin as discursive and thus erases the fixity and truth claims of singular origins, while simultaneously disclaiming and de-authorising any notions of singular determinations" (240). In this context, the novel form productively refigures histories of colonial Kenya as it questions notions that informed colonialism, settlerdom, post-independent dictatorship, corruption. This thesis explores how the novel genre, in both English and Kiswahili languages, facilitates as well as broadens conversations on the various strands of Kenyan histories.

The thesis' focus on the novel, in part, is inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's reflections on the novel's potential. Bakhtin foregrounds the polyphonic nature of the novel, noting that "the novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (262, original brackets). A critique of the selected novels opens one into the worlds of the underclass and the powerful, the marginalised and the celebrated, and even those who dwell in the in-betweens too. In their fictional representations of Kenya's histories, different authors illuminate different strands of Kenyan histories. These strands open one to the plurality of Kenya's pasts. The thesis claims that an assembly of various "artistically organized" voices from carefully chosen novels offers a richer portrait of Kenyan novelists' conversations with their histories. This is in tandem with Clare Colebrook's observation, in another context, that "Foucault's complex and diverse oeuvre [...] is a resistance to the idea of a single author as a generator of intellectual developments in a history of ideas" (30).

This thesis demonstrates the novel's potential to interrogate as well as remake histories of a nation. Here, I engage with selected Kenyan novels in a quest that reveals the novels' contributions in imagining, shaping, and interrogating Kenya's histories. Reflecting on Ngugi

wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, Lewis Nkosi writes, "so strong is this historical sense, so pervasive the influence of the Mau Mau uprising that [...] it is possible to argue that history itself, as it unfolded in the Kenya struggle for freedom and independence, becomes the true 'hero' of the novel" (31). Colonialism features as one of the major historical burdens that not only Kenyan fiction but indeed African literature spiritedly grapples with. Tim Woods in *African Past*s shows that "African literatures represent history through the twin matrices of memory and trauma", and argues that colonialism "is a history [...] whose repercussions are not only omnipresent in all cultural activities but whose traumatic consequences are still actively evolving in today's political, historical, cultural and artistic scenes" (1, original emphasis).

Lewis Nkosi explores the African novels' pre-eminence in "recover[ing] for us the essential meaning from the 'supple confusions' of history and to guide us with a firmer hand than we have been accustomed to through history's 'cunning passages'" (30). Nkosi also gestures at the overbearing nature of definitive moments in the trajectory of African histories, and how a few writers grapple with it. Among the few writers that Nkosi mentions are Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Sembene Ousmane, "whose works have sometimes dramatized moments in history when events seemed to loom larger than individuals" (30). Such traumatic moments are recognisable across Africa, from Cape-to-Cairo, not only in the spectre of colonial violence and plunder, but also in the post-independence ruptures witnessed in many African nations, sometimes to gut-wrenching proportions².

Reflections on the represented human deeds presuppose a quest for transformation of values, policies, and laws that govern society. Roland Barthes argues that "historical discourse is essentially a product of ideology, or rather of imagination, [since] it is via the language of imagination that responsibility for an utterance passes from a purely linguistic entity to a psychological or ideological one" (153). The ideology or imagination serves a purpose: to make use of events in transforming the society to the historian's ideal. Barthes posits, "reality is nothing but a meaning, and so can be changed to meet the needs of history, when history demands the subversion of civilization 'as we know it'" (155). Hence, history is an ideological search for meanings in particular encounters in time. Elsewhere, in an attempt to define history, Wole Ogundele emphasises two distinct aspects:

history as reality, existence, or being generally, and history as the deeds of human

² For instance, genocides in Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia, Darfur among others. See *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (2003).

beings, done by particular individuals or groups at specific moments and places, with discernible motives, causes, and consequences. The first meaning tends to align history with myth; the second sees history as process, its rationality knowable through investigation, and knowledge of which illuminates the past. (129)

Part of this definition foregrounds human agency in the shaping of the world while the other seems beyond human power. Yet the novel penetrates mythical spaces, confers supernatural qualities to human beings, and fosters a world where nature is in harmony with a given society's ideals.

The histories represented in the selected Kenyan novels enable a re-imagining of Kenya, which has troubled, often suppressed, histories that at times erupt in form of violent conflicts, as seen, for instance, in the 2007/2008 post-election violence. In "Foreword" to *Mau Mau from Below*, John Lonsdale writes:

past conflict between social movements and ruling powers [...] creates abundance of evidence, often about the sort of ordinary people on whom the past is normally silent; it stimulates questions about the nature of social order as much as disorder; and its supposed lessons may often inform — or foreclose — the decisions of today. (xvi)

This observation aptly speaks to violent conflicts that Kenya has witnessed over the years. The TJRC Kenya documents massacres committed by state security agents against civilians in both colonial and post-independence Kenya³. Hence, "the many perceived wrongs the government had committed to its citizenry" tremendously undermines Kenya's nationhood (Wekesa 52). This acrimonious relationship between the state and aggrieved citizens would prove costly in the Al-Shabaab war as the terror group use Kenyan Muslim youth in major terrorist attacks in the country⁴. These problematic histories, as well as both state and citizens' attempts at building a stable, all-inclusive nation at various times, provides compelling need to explore how the Kenyan novel imagines as it makes sense of the diverse

³ The TJRC Kenya findings indicate state security agents committed the following massacres in colonial Kenya: Kedong Massacre, Kollowa Massacre, Lari Massacre, Hola Massacre, and the massacre committed during the Giriama Rebellion. These massacres occurred in the context of suppressing communities' resistance to colonialism. In post-independence Kenya, the TJRC singles out Northern Kenya as the region that has faced the brunt of state violence, with the following massacres to book: massacres committed during the Shifta War; the Bulla Karatasi Massacre; the Wagalla Massacre; Lotirir Massacre; and Malka Mari Massacre. State agents committed these massacres "during the stated purpose of, among other things, combating cattle rustling and disarming the population" (TJRC Kenya 16).

⁴ Kenyan military led an incursion into Somalia in 2011 to fight against acts of terrorism by Somali's Al-Shabaab, which had spilled into Kenya where the terrorists were kidnapping tourists and government officials in their desperate search for funds. See *Contact: Operation Linda Nchi* (Oduor et al. n.p.); *The Inside Story: Wolves at Westgate* (Namu n.p.); *Inside Kenya's Death Squads* (Aljazeera Investigative n.p.).

Kenyan society.

Kenya's Literary Terrain: a Review

Literary engagements with Kenya's histories have happened not only in the Kenyan novel, but also in other literary genres such as short stories, drama, poetry, life narratives, and oral narratives. To establish the foundation for my study, I tease out various earliest writings at coastal Kenya before highlighting other regions' literary works, showing how creative artists engaged with archiving Kenya's histories. I begin with poetry, the earliest written genre in Kenya, then theatre, short story, and finally the novel. Kenya's written literary terrain has its roots in the Lamu and Mombasa Kiswahili literary tradition, which spans centuries before the advent of British colonialism. Alamin Mazrui observes that the works of Kiswahili poets and authors have been in existence "before the 17th Century" ("The Swahili Literary Tradition" 200). Echoing Alamin Mazrui's observation, Simon Gikandi states that the "substantial literary culture in African languages such as Swahili in Kenya and Tanzania [had] literatures [that] dated as far back as the fifteenth century [and] they often had a local and regional authority and reputation that writing in English could not easily match" ("East African Literature" 427). In *Swahili Beyond Boundaries*, Alamin Mazrui traces histories of earliest literary compositions: the 1652 AD *Hamziyya*, and the 1728 AD *Utenzi wa Herekali* (The Epic of Herakleios) by Mwengo wa Athumani⁵. In the 18th Century, remarkable Kiswahili works include Sayyid bin Nasir's *Takhmisa ya Liyongo*, "The Epic of Liyongo", Abdalla Masud Mazrui's *Utenzi wa Al-Akida* and Mwana Kupona binti Mshamu's *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona* (Alamin Mazrui, *Swahili Beyond the Boundaries* 16-17). These epics that mostly depict Portuguese and Arab conquest wars archive histories of coastal Kenya in a manner that challenges imagining Kenya from the dawn of British colonialism or only through Kenyan Anglophone literary imaginaries.

In the same vein, poets writing in Kiswahili and English have critically engaged with Kenya's histories in multifaceted ways⁶. For instance, John Habwe revisits the pioneer and legendary Muyaka wa Muhaji's poetry, who lived between 1776 and 1840 and produced "lofty and well-crafted poetic compositions" (81) in war-time, "when Swahili communities at the Kenya Coast were rising against one another in the 19th century" (82-83). Habwe sees

⁵ Hamziyya is an epic poem that celebrates the life of Prophet Mohammed. It is performed annually in Lamu, Kenya, during cultural festivals known as Maulidi. See Tom Olali's "Performing the Swahili Hamziyyah and the Pyeongtaek Nongak: A Comparative Analysis of Community Dance and Rituals" (43-48).

⁶ Kiswahili poets whose works are rich in Kenya's histories include Nassir Juma Bhallo's *Malenga wa Mvita* (1971), "The Bard of Mvita"; Wallah bin Wallah's *Malenga wa Ziwa Kuu* (1988), "The Bard of the Great Lakes"; Kithaka wa Mberia's *Bara Jingine* (2002), "Alternative Continent" among others.

Muyaka as “a court poet” whose works endeared him to the Arab conquerors of Mombasa (85). Nevertheless, Kiswahili literary critics still hold Muyaka in high esteem, referring to him as the “19th century poet of high reputation” (Khamis, “Whither Swahili Literature?” 37). An equally prominent Kiswahili poet whose works hover with a revolutionary spirit on Kenya’s histories is Abdilatif Abdalla, “the first political prisoner in post-independence Kenya” (Bakari 45). His masterpiece *Sauti ya Dhiki* (1973), “Voice of Agony”, which explores disillusionment with post-independent Kenya, is “the first poetic anthology written by a detainee and smuggled out of prison to be published and read by common readers and academics” (Khamis, “World Recognition of Abdilatif Abdalla’s Sauti Ya Dhiki” 37).

In poetry written in English, one major poet who engages with Kenya’s histories is Jared Angira, especially in his eight poetry volumes.⁷ Angira unmasks Kenya’s postures to greatness, especially in “The Hero”, in which the persona declares himself “the trouncing hero/ Whose success at failures is unrivalled/ Whose abortive attempts in life’s span are/ unsurpassed” (Angira 14). Here, Angira employs verbal irony, “his artistic epitome [which] contributes immensely towards the enhancement of his vision in the portrayal of social realities” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 87). In his reading of this poem and others Ezenwa-Ohaeto remarks that the “society emerges as confused and insincere, glorifying trivialities. Thus the poet, by his use of irony, sensitizes the reader to this insincerity and lack of awareness in order to reverse these trends” (89). Ezenwa-Ohaeto also reads “On the Market Day at Ugunja”, with keen interest in the lines: “It may be peacetime we know/ but under the fig tree/ are clubs and shields/ ropes for our bulls/ axes and jembes for our farms/ and all for/ nationbuilding” (Angira 21). In Ezenwa-Ohaeto’s view,

[t]he reference to peacetime may not portray the poet’s real motive but when he catalogues all the weapons under the fig tree, it becomes clear that they are not items for nationbuilding. The clubs and shields are obviously implements of war. The ropes which could be used tie the bulls have other uses, just as axes could be used on the farms and also for destroying homes. (89)

Through verbal irony, Jared Angira speaks to histories of violence, where communities symbolically trade violence in a public space — the Ugunja market on a market day. At the same time, the poem travels across the years, four decades on, to present Kenya where a violent state still exhorts the rhetoric of nation-building. This will be evident in Chapter 3 that

⁷ Jared Angira’s poetry volumes: *Juices* (1970), *Silent Voices* (1972), *Soft Corals* (1973), *Cascades* (1979), *The Years Go By* (1980), *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* (1996), *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* (2004).

explores Kenya's state histories represented in selected novels.

Kenyan theatre has also been a major player in Kenyan histories. Apart from indigenous theatrical performances that invoke “the beliefs and worldview of the people about the relationship between human beings and the cosmos, as well as the relationship between human beings and the supernatural” (Chesaina and Mwangi 206), Kenyan theatre confronted Kenya's repressive state histories right from the early years of post-independence.⁸ But the plays of Francis Imbuga seem to have been different from those of the other playwrights, which were seen as a threat to the state, especially in the 1970s and 1980s⁹. Ciarunji Chesaina and Evan Mwangi point out that Imbuga's plays, “[w]ithout directly attacking the powers that be, [give] a candid picture of what ordinary people have to go through at the hands of autocratic African dictators” (221). In *Telling the Truth Laughingly: the Politics of Francis Imbuga's Drama* (1992), John Ruganda explores how Imbuga satirises Kenya's state agents and society in political and cultural spheres. Whereas Imbuga catalogues histories of state assassinations and militarisation of the society in *Betrayal in the City*, he “dichotomizes gender politics and explores the polarities of dominance” in *Aminata* (Ruganda 10).

Although a recent form in Kenyan writing, given the poetic tradition that flourished at coastal Kenya and the autobiographies and settler novels in colonial Kenya, short stories have made important contributions in imagining Kenya's histories¹⁰. Hellen Mwanzi in her PhD thesis on style in the pioneer short stories of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Leonard Kibera, and Grace Ogot, acknowledges “the richness of the short story both as a medium for social commentary and as an aesthetically satisfying entity” (vi). But, surprisingly, she concludes that “a short story is a

8 Among the plays subversive to autocracy, neo-colonialism, and economic exploitation of the poor in Kenya include Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Black Hermit* (1962) and *Maitu Njugira* (1981) ‘Mother Sing for Me’; Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1979); Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I will Marry When I Want* (1982); Alamin Mazrui's *Kilio cha Haki* (1981) ‘The Cry for Justice’; Ongeti Khaemba's *Visiki* (1984), ‘Hurdles’.

9 Francis Imbuga's plays: *Betrayal in the City* (1976), *Aminata* (1988), *Man of Kafira* (1984), *The Married Bachelor* (1973), *Games of Silence* (1977), *The Successor* (1979), *The Return of Mgofu* (2011).

10 Some of the autobiographies that tease out Kenyan political histories include Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2006); Wanyiri Kihoro's *Never Say Die: The Chronicle of a Political Prisoner* (1998); Oginga Odinga's *Not Yet Uhuru* (1968); Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981), *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir* (2010), *In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir* (2012). Esther Owuor's *My Life as a Paraplegia* presents social histories as it re-members her rupturous encounter with a road accident that rendered her disabled. Grace Ogot's *Days of My Life: an Autobiography* (2012); Bethwel Ogot's *My Footprints in the Sands of Time* (2003); and Benjamin Kipkorir's *Descent from Chereng'any Hills: Memoirs of a Reluctant Academic* (2009) outline career life journeys infused with social and political histories. There are also many short story anthologies that reflect on various histories. Earliest anthologies written in English include Grace Ogot's *Land Without Thunder* (1968), Leonard Kibera & Sam Kahiga's *Potent Ash* (1968), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Secret Lives and Other Stories* (1975), Billy Wandera Ogan's *Days of Glamour* (1975), Rebecca Njau's *The Hypocrite and Other Stories* (1977), Jonathan Kariara's *The Coming of Power and Other Stories* (1977), Shamlal Puri's *The Dame of the Twilight* (1978), and Sam Kahiga's *Flight to Juba* (1979).

compressed fast-pleasure yielding narrative in which artistry stands out more prominently than the message” (271). Indeed, there is more to the stories than aesthetics, as latter studies would show¹¹. In “The Short Story in Kenya”, Alina Rinkanya builds on Mwanzi’s foundation and advances the insightful role that the short story genre in Kenya plays in critiquing the nation’s histories. One important observation she makes is: “the Kenyan short story of the 1970s and 1980s was doing something similar to what the Kenyan novel of the period did — giving a kind of social documentary, drawing a vast panorama of the Kenyan society, consisting of social reality highlighted in each of the stories” (30).

The same issues feature in the short stories written in Kiswahili. One complex short story anthology — *Mayai Waziri wa Maradhi na Hadithi Nyingine* (2004), “Mayai the Minister of Sickness and Other Short Stories”, employs diverse modes of representation such as magical realism and satire to reflect on various East African histories. Rayya Timammy explores gender dynamics in Kiswahili short stories selected from the anthology in an article on forced marriage and established patriarchal norms that relegate a wife to “a spectator as her life ebbs away in a male-dominated world” (113). This genre is more accessible to majority of ordinary people due to brevity and use of Kiswahili.

Yet the novel has more capacity to reflect on a society’s histories as compared to the short story, which often intensely illuminates a single incident in history. The novel traces the changing times and ascertains the consequences of certain decisions. In *What is Literature?*, Jean-Paul Sarte agonises over the importance of prose over poetry. He makes a radical conclusion:

[t]he art of prose is employed in discourse; its substance is by nature significative; that is, the words are first of all not objects but designations for objects; it is not first of all a matter of knowing whether they please or displease in themselves, but whether they indicate a certain thing or a certain notion. (11)

Even though David Caute, responding to Sarte’s views, points out that a “reader enters the poem through word associations and references which are linked, however indirectly, to everyday significative language” (viii), the novel possesses a greater advantage to discourse than other literary genres. This gives novels an edge over other literary genres. Most novels speak profoundly on situations affecting society, and this is effectively disseminated into

11 See for instance, “Romance, (In)visibility and Agency in Grace Ogot's *The Strange Bride* and "The White Veil" (S. Macharia 261-280) and “Narrative and Nationalist Desire: Early Short Stories and *The River Between*” (Gikandi 39-97).

worldviews of the readers. In the subsequent section, I offer more insights on the significances of the novel in rendering histories.

Several scholarly works evaluate Kenyan novels concerning the country's histories. However, most scholars of Kenya's literary landscape have tended to either ignore Kiswahili literature, or study the two literatures as separate entities. For instance, David Maughan-Brown in *Land, Freedom & Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya* (1985) focuses on novels that engage with the Mau Mau struggle, and how Mau Mau informs post-independent Kenya's histories. This seminal text exclusively features Anglophone Kenyan novels. Hence, it misses Peter Kareithi's *Kaburi Bila Msalaba* (1969), "A Grave Without a Cross", and Peter Ngare's *Kikulacho ki Nguoni Mwako* (1975), "The Enemy Within", some of the earliest texts examining Mau Mau, which would have provided perspectives emanating from the Kiswahili literary tradition. Similarly, Roger Kurtz's *Urban Obsessions, Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel* (1998), "an important contribution to the examination of distinctive national literary traditions in Africa" (Okunoye 310), leaves out Kiswahili novels. The text illuminates the development of the Kenyan novel written in English, and assesses its appropriation of the city in its narrative.

There is also another challenge in literary scholarship on Kenya — marginalisation of Kenya's Kiswahili works by Kiswahili scholars. Kyallo Wamitila contends: "Kenyan Swahili creative writing has been in the shadow of Tanzanian creative works for a long time" (117). This observation can be ascertained in Xavier Garnier's *The Swahili Novel: Challenging the Idea of 'Minor Literature'* (2013) which gives extensive readings of Tanzanian literary luminaries Shaaban Robert, Euphrase Kezilahabi, Muhamed Suleiman Muhamed, and Said Ahmed Muhamed. But Wamitila's critique of Elena Bertoncini's *Outline of Swahili Literature* (1989) as "the only recent attempt at redressing this critical neglect and imbalance [despite her] inclination and preponderance of seeing the Kenyan works through the Tanzanian mirror by classifying Z. Burhani's novel *Mali ya Maskini* under the Tanzanian mainland sub-group" (117), must have influenced the production of a second edition in which the oversight is addressed. The revised edition, *Outline of Swahili Literature: Prose, Fiction and Drama* (2008) is also co-authored: Elena Bertoncini-Zubkova, Mikhail Gromov, Said A. M. Khamisi, and Kyallo Wamitila. It also classifies literary works into three regions: Kenya, Tanzanian mainland, and Zanzibar.

James Ogude in *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation* (1999) examines Ngugi wa Thiong'o's representation of the history of Kenya and Africa at large, in which he

shows that Ngugi “privileges the history of the subaltern” (*Ngugi's Novels* 9) in reconfiguring “Africa’s history which he believes had been repressed by colonialism” (*Ngugi's Novels* 2). In *Ngugi wa Thiong’o*, Simon Gikandi situates Ngugi’s oeuvre in specific Kenyan contexts. Gikandi suggests a productive reading of Ngugi through two prisms. The first one is to read the texts “as specific commentaries on the African experience as it emerges from colonial domination and moves into the theatre of independence and postcoloniality” (*Ngugi Wa Thiong’o* 1). The second one is to critique the texts “as a series of experiments in narrative form, experiments driven by the author’s search for an appropriate style for representing an increasingly complex social formation” (*Ngugi Wa Thiong’o* 1). Through these two prisms, Gikandi meaningfully interprets Kenyan histories as encoded in Ngugi’s novels. In *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa* (2001), Tirop Peter Simatei examines how eight novelists in East Africa have intervened “in the making of history” (9) by articulating and projecting “the complex interplay of the forces shaping the destiny of the African people” (9)¹².

With these studies in mind, my work illuminates the literary representations of social histories alongside metahistories in selected Kenyan novels, by engaging with novelists who have been reconstructing, engaging with, and interrogating Kenya’s histories in both English and Kiswahili. Building on earlier studies that re-imagine Kenya’s histories, I chart a unified exploration of literary engagements with history by bringing on board a range of novels drawn from across the five decades under study.

The Place of the Novel and History

The relationship between history and the novel often stimulates interesting intellectual debates. For instance, Ursula Brumm in “Thoughts on History and the Novel” asks, “Why do artists turn to history, when its given reality necessarily restricts the possibilities of the imagination? [...]. What is this service that history renders for the imagination?” (331). To these provocative questions, Brumm affirms, “[h]istory, like life, is, of course, an informing force for the imagination of the novelist, at least for a certain kind of novelist” (321). Here, Brumm refers to the writer of a historical novel, which taps from memorable factual events. In such a novel, “the service that history offers to the writer’s imagination is that it creates parts of the plot or constellations of events which express an insight into human life” (321). Indeed, most novelists reconfigure the events as they grapple to render a particular ideology

¹² The eight novelists that Simatei examines are: Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Leonard Kibera, M.G. Vassanji, David Rubadiri, Peter Nazareth, Mary Okurut, Oludhe MacGoye, and Margaret Ogola.

in their narratives.

In a study of the origins of the novel, John Tinkler notes pioneer novelists' resistance to claims that negated the factuality of the novel: "Defoe tended to claim outright that his books were factual" (510). Further, Tinkler submits:

the specific conditions for the emergence of the novel lay not so much in a distinction between fact and fiction in the *mentalité* of the age, as in social and political developments that had created a large reading public removed from political involvement. The novel developed as 'the private history' of people who were removed from significant political participation and thus from 'public history.' (512)

The idea of 'private history', which refers to social histories, is important in this thesis since it foregrounds reconfigured histories of voices marginalised in metahistory. In a way that links histories represented in novels with formal histories, Martin Battestin emphasises, "the writing of history is necessarily a personal and poetic act; the historian is not a slave of time, but its judge and master, binding the centuries together through 'webs of reference' [...] and achieving coherence through the continuous presence of a personalized narrator" (509). Just like the novelist, the historian uses imagination to reconstruct events.

Hayden White, a seminal thinker in historical imagination, makes explicit links between history and fiction in *The Historical Imagination* when he explicates the process of making history from a particular event. White debunks the notion that the historian explains "the past by 'finding,' 'identifying,' or 'uncovering' the 'stories' that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between 'history' and 'fiction' resides in the fact that the historian 'finds' his stories, whereas the fiction writer 'invents' his" (6). Since the historian constructs a particular event through "explanation by emplotment" (8), "explanation by formal argument" (11), or "explanation by ideological implication" (22), s/he, like a fiction writer, actively participates in invention. Above all, both the historian and the novelist embrace the advantage of narrative which is, as White states, "a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (1).

On her part, Susan Gallagher underscores the importance of conversations on the relationship between history and the novel when she argues for a kind of novel that invents and constructs its own reality rather than one that is relegated to a documentary role. Invoking J.M. Coetzee's contestations in "The Novel Today", Gallagher posits, "the issue for Coetzee is

how to engage with historical reality as a writer, not whether such reality exists¹³. [History is] a myth, a metanarrative, which might be resisted, reconstructed, or even destroyed by a rival discourse of the novel” (377). For Coetzee, Gallagher insists, a preoccupation with the reality renders the novel a supplement to history. Ursula Brumm too defines history as “a product of the mind, highly complex but of a doubtful resemblance to what really happened” (329). She thus advocates for a novel that transforms rather than merely chronicle the past. Indeed, most of the novels I study here engage with Kenya’s social realities in complex ways: by submitting to the reader forms of invented realities that appeal to the dignity of the represented people.

Terence Wright notes that even in novels that are not historical, the novelist invents a far-reaching sense of human experience. Wright believes that Thomas Hardy presents a richer history by “the way in which he thinks of history, the weight he gives to individual ‘histories’, the emotions aroused in him (and by implication in us) by a consideration of what has made us how we are” (42, original brackets). Even though Hardy’s last novels deal with the period of the Napoleonic wars, Wright opines, the past, present, and future are all contained in the narratives¹⁴. He notes that Hardy highlights ‘big history’ in order to emphasize individual histories. The significance of the people neglected by narrators of ‘big’ history takes centre-stage in the novel as opposed to metahistory. Citing William Godwin’s unpublished essay — “Of History and Romance”, Karen O’Brien states: “the novel, Godwin insists, must now be recognized as a serious kind of historical endeavor, one that renders history palpable by demonstrating the pressure of external events upon individual subjectivity” (412). These observations show that the summoning of the weight of “big history” in the novel purposes to give voice to individuals’ histories.

This study suggests that histories reconfigured in the selected novels present alternative understandings of Kenya’s socio-cultural and political terrains. Here, I steer away from valorising the lives and times of presidents and generals to the inclusion of ordinary people’s experiences. The novels I study here provide sufficient opportunity to think deeply through the nation’s histories. As Mikhail Bakhtin observes, the novel “reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding [and] it is the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it” (7). The novel is a

¹³ JM Coetzee in “The Novel Today” as cited by Michael Green (1997) asserts that history and the novel are both discourses; however, the authority of history lies in the consensus it commands but still remains a story that people agree to tell each other. He also contends that if the novel’s goal is to fill us with a certain density of observation, then it is secondary to history.

¹⁴ *The Trumpet Major* and *The Dynasts*.

privileged form in its responses to histories compared with other genres, since, as Bakhtin argues, “it is the only genre that was born and nourished in a new era of world history and therefore it is deeply akin to that era” (4). The uniqueness of histories represented in the novel can also be seen in Okot P’Bitek’s belief that history rendered in art is “an integral part of culture [which is] carried inside the head to enliven the entire body of the individual in the society” (46). This is because people encounter art in its beauty; in the provocative aesthetics of the language of rendition, or the textures of display, or performance generally. Hence, the critiques rendered through art become part of society, which identifies with, digests, memorises the represented histories.

From the very adoption of the novel form in the 1950s, East African novelists, like novelists elsewhere in Africa, have greatly invested in the histories of their nations. For instance, Ngugi wa Thiong’o posits powerful connections between literature, politics, and history in *Writers in Politics*. To him, a “writer’s subject matter is history: i.e. the process of man acting on nature and changing it and in so doing acting on and changing himself” (*Writers in Politics* 72). The kind of history that Ngugi refers to is similar to the one that “enlivens the entire body”, in P’Bitek’s words. Ngugi writes: “literature has often given us more and sharper insights into the moving spirit of an era than all the historical and political documents treating the same moments in a society’s development” (72). This thesis gestures to such a ‘moving spirit’ of Kenya’s changing times: it demonstrates how novelists have agonised over the nation’s survival despite all odds.

In an epigraph to *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi makes explicit the centrality of history in his literary engagements: “all the characters in this book are fictitious. [...]. But the situations and the problems are real — sometimes too painfully real for the peasants who fought the British yet who now see all that they fought for being put on one side” (*A Grain of Wheat* ii). In these words, Ngugi reveals the novelist’s sense of urgency to not only give a portrait of the sad state of the Kenyan postcolony, but also to shape it, to revolutionalise the histories. Actually, Ngugi’s belief is that a writer has no choice but to “depict reality in its revolutionary transformation” (*Moving the Centre* 73). To this cause of revolutionary histories, James Ogude asserts that the novel has provided Ngugi wa Thiong’o with “the space to imagine Africa’s history which he believes had been repressed by colonialism” (*Narrating the Nation* 2). Taking note of Ngugi’s pertinent contribution to imagining Kenya’s histories, this thesis has stated that there is a need for viewing Kenya’s histories from lenses of various novelists in the hope of grasping broader conceptions of the nation’s realities.

The thesis brings on board different authors from different backgrounds and examines various histories of Kenya under different epochs, primarily the colonial and post-independent eras but occasionally stretching into the precolonial. In the post-independent era, the regimes of Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978), Daniel Moi (1978-2002), and Mwai Kibaki (2002-2013) feature as temporal markers. The thesis engages with different novelists' senses and philosophies of Kenya's histories produced in a period of half a century, 1963-2013. But the analyses here demonstrate that, at the time of their conception/production, particular works engage with the nation's histories of the time while others are preoccupied with the nation's long past.

The thesis aims at unravelling and appreciating novelists' visions of Kenya's pasts and futures. It foregrounds how novelists "reflect, and reflect on, extant perspectives in understanding reality by creating new maps of existence through ideas that not only generate, but also transcend existing possibilities and ways of apprehending those possibilities" (Adebanwi 407). This task is also motivated by the idea that "fiction may give us special insights into how culture and history intersect with and reshape, or are reshaped by, the lives of people, ordinary and extra-ordinary [hence providing] a precious and indispensable window into a society, a people and an era" (Diamond 435).

Theoretical Framework and Point of Departure

Since this thesis explores a period of half-a-century of post-independent Kenya, postcolonial literary theory proved useful in "unsettling and reconstituting standard processes of knowledge production" (Bhabra 115). Through a critique of novels that employ magical realism mode, this thesis posits that fiction confronts as well as reconstitutes engagements with reality. This is because, as Wendy Faris writes, "magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them" (Faris 1). Besides, magical realism's "inclusion of different cultural traditions [...] reflects, in both its narrative mode and its cultural environment, the hybrid nature of much postcolonial society" (1). Reflecting on magical realist Kiswahili novels, Said Khamis writes, the "shift in aesthetic and thematic orientation(s)—is indeed an indication that a drastic socioeconomic and cultural change in society 'may' influence artists and impel them to innovate so as to subvert a mode that 'may' have become inadequate in capturing the contemporary situation" ("Signs of New Features in the Swahili Novel" 91). In order to disrupt the seemingly invincible powers of dictators in postcolonial states, novelists

such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Wizard of the Crow* and Katama Mkangi in *Walenisi*, "Those-Are-Us", respectively employ the carnivalesque and the magical realist modes in charting alternative ways of conceptualising egalitarian polities. Furthermore, postcolonial thinking "is more about re-inscribing 'other' cultural traditions into narratives of modernity and thus transforming those narratives — both in historical terms and theoretical ones — rather than simply re-naming or re-evaluating the content of these other 'inheritances'" (Bhabra 115).

In "Colonial Violence, Postcolonial Violations: Violence, Landscape, and Memory in Kenyan Fiction", Tirop Simatei demonstrates how fiction presents transformative histories by re-writing memory and landscapes that British imperialists transgressed claims that they (landscapes) were wild and empty. He contests: "[t]erritory targeted for colonization is first reproduced in the imperial imagination as an empty space that must be regimented [and thereafter orchestrating] immeasurable disruption and erasure of local systems of meaning that guide the ownership and use of land" ("Colonial Violence, Postcolonial Violations" 86). The thesis offers insights on the imagined subalterns who, through the space that creative literature provides, speak. In this regard, Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" offers important pointers for my analyses. Spivak invokes Rani Gulari's life history, and asserts that Gulari, as a woman involved in Indian anti-colonial struggle, "tried to be decisive in extremis, yet lost herself in the undecidable womanspace of justice. She 'spoke', but women did not, do not, hear her" (28). At the same time, Spivak's caution against the native informant is vital in reading novels that critique post-independent Kenya, especially the condemnation of the Africanisation policy, a nationalist corrective policy that was formulated at independence to address socio-economic inequalities at independence.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak "traces the Native Informant through various practices: philosophy, literature, history, culture" (*Postcolonial Reason* ix). Initially, she observed "a colonial subject detaching itself from the Native Informant" (*Postcolonial Reason* ix). But "[a]fter 1989, [Spivak] began to sense that a certain postcolonial subject had been recoding the colonial subject and appropriating the Native Informant's position" (*Postcolonial Reason* ix). It is this situation that informs her pronouncement: "Postcolonial studies, unwittingly commemorating a lost object, can become an alibi unless it is placed within a general frame" (*Postcolonial Reason* 1). Key figures in this theory include Achille Mbembe and Frantz Fanon. Their critiques of the excesses of the postcolony come in handy in my analysis of state histories.

The aspect of language is important to postcolonial critiques. Obiajunwa Wali's "The Dead

End of African Literature” polemical article greatly jolted African writers and critics into rethinking the decolonising power embedded in language. Wali contests that a “writer who thinks and feels in his own language must write in that language” (Wali 14). Admonishing pioneer African writers in the English language who had excluded Amos Tutuola, for writing in ‘sub-standard’ English, Wali poses a fundamental question: “why should imaginative literature which in fact has more chances of enriching a people’s culture [than linguistics, which was investing in African languages], consider it impossible to adventure in this direction?” (14). Ngugi wa Thiong’o took up this idea with zeal. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi writes: “[l]anguage as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history” (*Decolonising the Mind* 15). Therefore, “culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next” (*Decolonising the Mind* 15). These politics of language, some of which are polemical, indicate the importance of reading both English and Kiswahili novels in a project that aspires to grasp half-a-century period of Kenya’s histories reconfigured in selected novels.

New Historicism theory, which critically engages master histories, provides important ideas in my reflections on the histories of Kenya as reconfigured in the selected novels. Although the theory acknowledges other voices as history, William Palmer observes that the “New Historicist project [is] revisionist; simultaneously widening and deepening and archeologically discovering new dimensions of the accepted master texts” (7). The New Historicist does not just accept the metanarrative of history, but, as Palmer suggests, “re-examines the extant master texts of history and the documents from which those master texts were composed, but also digs up and translates new documents, artefacts, social attitudes and situations, and, by studying them, adds to the master text” (7). These ideas feature prominently in Annemarie van Niekerk’s problematisation of history in “Liberating Her-Story from History” in which she contests history’s marginalisation of women’s stories. She remarks: “[r]ewriting history takes one back to the two basic facets of history: the so-called facts as far as it is possible to exhume them, and the various representations of those facts in historic documentation” (137). Here, van Niekerk casts doubt on the ‘facts’ of history and invites incisive readings of every claim of history. Her aim is to position women’s stories in history productively. This reading shows the intersection between postcolonial and New Historicism theories.

Clare Colebrook casts some doubts on literature’s ability to generate alternative histories. She

argues:

there is often a sense that the literary or aesthetic will provide an ‘other’ to history. Literature is often seen as a privileged site where the determinism of history is disrupted, questioned or opened. New Historicism, on the other hand, has constantly demonstrated the malleability, contingency and contested character of the category of literature. (2)

Yet, literature, indeed, enables insightful contributions to history for it employs empathetic gazes on human existence. According to Palmer, the writer, when faced with the “big event/great man ‘story’, has a pivotal role of “exploring the various agendas emplotted in that history” (9). The novel proceeds with suspicion against the heroic master narrative, especially by unearthing devastating effects on the ordinary people. The best example would be Njoroge’s socio-economic deprivation, torture and victimisation in the hands of colonialists, and disillusionment in the midst of a thriving settler economy in colonial Kenya, as represented in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child* (1964). Most of the novels I analyse in this thesis approach history from the perspective of ordinary individuals. The criticisms aim at unearthing systematic traditions that lead to unfortunate conditions of ordinary individuals. Through this theory, the study proceeds to inquire how Kenyan novelists have engaged with, discovered and rediscovered various histories, and how they have redefined the narrative.

As a reader and interpreter of the histories imagined in the novels that I study, with regard to contemporary situations of Kenya as a nation, I find New Historicism valuable in guiding my reading of Kenya’s various represented histories. Apart from placing the novels in context, I explore how they have been read by different people. A better understanding of texts, as Dwight Hoover observes, “is conditioned by experience, expectation, race, class, and gender” (357). This leads me into the sociological literary theory, which contributed largely in the arguments I presented in this thesis. Epifanio Juan Jr. categorises literature as a historical archive in his survey of the Western sociological literary theory. He writes: “[a]s historical document, literature embodies the motives of civilisation” (44). Juan Jr. embraces Mikhail Bakhtin’s views on the relationship between literature and society in his observation that the “novelistic genre [...] incarnates the fullest intertextual play and heterology (diversity of languages and voices) possible” (52-53, original brackets). Notably, Juan Jr. shows that “[c]hanges in genre always register social transformations” (53). These observations lead to his (Juan Jr.) conclusion, in which he pays tribute to Bakhtin:

comprehending a literary work requires alterity, the Other without whom we cannot speak, dialogue, and intertextuality, all of which exceed the limits of formalist hermeneutics, Bakhtin deserves to be credited for confirming once more the truth of the indivisibility of culture, society and history in all human disciplines. (53)

An inquiry into the represented histories in the selected novels is in itself a quest at grasping alternative experiences with various histories. This enables a broader understanding of Kenya as a nation.

Selection of Texts and Chapter Breakdown

I analyse a trilogy and five Kiswahili novels as well as a sequel and ten novels written in English. I selected novels that exemplify particular strands of histories: transnational histories, state histories, social histories in romance novels, urbanization histories. The thematic approach to the selected novels employs close textual reading and analysis method. Ivor Armstrong Richards, the proponent of close textual reading, identifies ten principles under which a literary text should be analysed critically. What stands out for my work are his suggestions that a critic should be capable of “sensuous apprehension” (13); be able to embrace a text’s “feeling, its tone, its intention” (12). In *Techniques of Close Reading*, Barry Brummett defines close reading as “*the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings*” (3, original emphases). He proposes: “[a]s public citizens we [...] need to be vigilant as to the meanings and possible effects of the messages we encounter” (3). In this respect, Brummett claims, “the ability to read closely is a public, civic responsibility for all of us” (3). According to Brummett, a “reader is a *meaning detective*”, and asserts that “the meanings [readers] detect are plausible, defensible, [and] socially shared” (8, original emphases). However, the meanings generated from a text are dependent on “the *historical* context and the *textual* context” (10). By historical context, Brummett refers to “what is going on socially, politically, in the day’s event”; while textual context the style that an author uses, such as irony, satire, humour (10).

This thesis is divided into six chapters, which include the introduction and conclusion. The introduction offers conceptual and theoretical underpinnings to the study, as well as charting the Kenyan literary landscape especially concerning the relationship between the Kenyan novel and Kenyan histories. It also identifies the gap necessitating the research.

Chapter 2 focuses on transnational connections at play in the making of the local histories of the East African coast. Here, I explore the contact of Kenya’s indigenous people with other

cultures and nationalities, especially from North Africa, the middle and far East, and Britain. Here, I read Rocha Chimera's trilogy, *Siri Sirini*, "Secret in the Secret", which revisits the Swahili interactions with the Indian Ocean migrant societies. In the second section, I read Marjorie Macgoye's *A Farm Called Kishnev*, which reflects on the European colonialists' evictions of the Nandi and Maasai people in the Rift Valley to create 'empty land' for European settlers. The third section focuses on Mwangi Gicheru's *The Mixers*, which engages with European settlers' histories with the people of central Kenya. The last section explores women novelists' re-membering of the world wars I and II and their devastating effects on the Lake Victoria Basin communities. This section reads Marjorie Macgoye's *The Present Moment*, Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land*, Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*, and Yvonne Owuor's *Dust*. It shows the meaninglessness of the imperial wars to the communities at the Great Lakes who were adversely affected.

Chapter 3 explores Kenya's state histories. Here, I read Mwendah Mbatiah's *Wimbo Mpya*, "A New Song", and Yvonne Owuor's *Dust* in a section that revisits Mau Mau histories and their appropriation fifty years after independence. I also read Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* as a critique that unmasks political sycophancy of the political class. In the third section, I read Owuor's *Dust* as I interrogate the fate of whistle-blowers in state corruption schemes. Lastly, I critique Katama Mkangi's *Walenisi*, "Those-Are-Us," with an interest in martyrdom as a strategy of confronting autocracy.

In chapter 4, I explore social histories embedded in Kenya's romance novels. Here, I read Katama Mkangi's *Ukiwa*, "Desolation", in an attempt to understand how Christianity and Mijikenda cultural logics intersect, and how young people negotiate the two different logics for their benefit. In Zainabu Burhani's *Mwisho wa Kosa*, "End of Wrongs", I focus on a paradigm shift in negotiating love relationships and marriage after the new generations' exposure to higher education in Europe and America. I also read Mwangi Gicheru's *Across the Bridge* with an interest in how economic inequalities affect human relations in post-independent Kenya. Lastly, I read Yusuf Dawood's *One Life Too Many* with a focus on the representations of economic corrective policy for Black people, Africanisation policy which was formulated upon Kenya's independence.

In Chapter 5, I deal with Kenya's urbanisation histories. Here, I focus on the socio-economic turmoil of the 'urban outcasts': slum dwellers, prostitutes, and drunkards. I read Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*, which maps the Nairobi city's spaces for the said 'urban outcasts'. In Yusuf Kinga'la's *Anasa*, "Overindulgence", and Charles Mangua's sequel, *Son*

of Woman and *Son of Woman in Mombasa*, I explore the represented socio-dynamics of prostitution in the 1970s and 80s Nairobi and Mombasa.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by reflecting on the represented histories of Kenya as it shows Kenyan novelists' contributions to the construction of the nation's histories. It also offers comparative insights emerging from reading novels written in English and in Kiswahili.

Chapter Two

Mapping Kenya's Literary Transnational Histories

Introduction

This chapter explores Kenyan novelists' engagements with the complexities of the convergences of different nations, races, and cultures in the country through different eras. Here, I locate Kenya as a contact zone where communities and cultural practices beyond the present borders, particularly with its intersections with Tanzania, Ethiopia, North Africa, Middle East, Portugal, and Britain. Due to its strategic geographical location as the 'gateway' to East and Central Africa via the Mombasa and Lamu ports, Kenya provided a significant contact zone whereby sea merchants, explorers, settlers, indentured labourers and colonialists among other immigrants added to the country's cultural textures. These cultural convergences sparked various experiences for both the indigenes and the immigrants, as is usually the case with contact zones. In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination — such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (Pratt 7). In most cases, the novelists I study here demonstrate that even though contact zones are not homogeneous, indigenes experience major disruptions at the time of contact and thereafter. The novels relive and revive the past through the power of narrative, as they humanise the formerly marginalised or misrepresented people. In this analysis, I draw from Hayden White's reminder that "[i]f every fully realized story [...] is a kind of allegory, points to a moral, or endows events, whether real or imaginary, with a significance that they do not possess as a mere sequence, then it seems possible to conclude that every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats" (*The Content of Form* 14). The morality that White refers to is a fair "legal system, which is the form in which the subject encounters most immediately the social system in which he is enjoined to achieve a full humanity" (14). Embracing an imagined social system that elevates the humanity of people in socio-cultural intersections, this chapter dissects represented conflicts, tensions, and struggles in selected novels as a way of re-remembering Kenya's fragmented pasts, with the hope of charting alternative histories engendered in fiction.

The chapter examines contact in three ways: through representations of maritime trade at coastal Kenya; portrayals of land occupation in the then White Highlands; and meditations on the effects of the two world wars on the Lake Victoria Basin communities. The first section

focuses on Rocha Chimera's *Siri Sirini* trilogy, which maps Kenya's encounters with the Indian Ocean trans-cultural histories. Although published in 2013, Chimera delves into a deeper temporal space of Kenya's coastal histories, presenting the making of its civilization in the midst of a vibrant ancient Indian Ocean World, which is arguably the earliest capital power in human history and is often considered "the core of the first global economy" (Campbell 173). This is testament to memory's capability to reconstruct and re-circulate people's histories as well as rekindle new conversations on significant pasts. As mentioned in the introduction, *Siri Sirini* presents a typical case of language-oriented histories, whereby Kiswahili novelists commit themselves to re-scripting coastal Kenya's interactions with the Indian Ocean World. As a descendant of coastal Kenya, Chimera takes it upon himself to rewrite the Swahili histories. Indeed, Chimera's work is inclined towards re-imagining the centrality of indigenous people in the histories of the Swahili coast, which, as I argue elsewhere, had been denigrated¹⁵.

Notably, the Kenyan coast is one of the spaces in Africa that has experienced vigorous transnational contacts "within a large African and Indian Ocean world system, from the first millennium B.C. onward" (LaViolette 25-26). Indeed, the East African coast's contacts with worlds across the Indian Ocean can also be seen in the histories of

Solomon and his Tyrean allies [who are] reputed to have dispatched trading fleets to the coast of eastern Africa. [...]. By the late nineteenth century when East Africa came under British and German rule, the Swahili had already experienced over 350 years of colonial control. As a result, their culture and ethnic identity underwent great transformations, from once-autonomous towns and villages, to cities projecting a loose hegemony over their hinterland areas, to colonial subjects of King of Portugal and the Sultanate of Oman. (Kusimba, *Rise and Fall of Swahili States* 19, 27)

Because of these ancient contacts, Alamin Mazrui argues that "the Swahili experience demonstrates that hybridity is a configuration that is not at all new to the human condition" (*Swahili Beyond Boundaries*1). These transnational cultural exchanges of human interaction at coastal Kenya attributable to the Indian Ocean, "transported, kept afloat and drowned ideas and concepts [and] became a pathway dividing as well as connecting people"

¹⁵ See "Rethinking Memory in Valerie Cuthbert's *The Great Siege of Fort Jesus*" (Yenjela 118).

(Gupta 3). The Kiswahili trilogy I analyse here relives these confluences as it enables vital connections to the retrieved memories from the Indian Ocean.

The second section focuses on how land defined relationships between the indigenes and imperial cultures. Here, I explore Marjorie Macgoye's *A Farm Called Kishinev*, which revisits the British Empire's violent evictions of indigenous people for the occupation of settlers. The analysis unveils brutal histories that precede the settlement of Jews, Afrikaner trekkers, and British officers in Uasin Gishu. Macgoye gives insight into the question of land during colonialism and the emotions this issue brings about despite inter-racial marriages. In section three, I examine Mwangi Gicheru's *The Mixers*, which reflects on the histories of settler occupation of the then White Highlands. Here, I explore racialprofiling, and how this defined existential relationships for the conquered indigenes and various conquerors after the establishment of the White Highlands. The term White Highlands "was derived from official policy that certain agricultural lands in Kenya should be reserved for settlers of European origin" (Morgan 140) because the lands were of high agricultural productivity. The analysis contests that the sentimental and seemingly progressive settler, though a cultural translator (Samuelson 20), was as much a conqueror as outright racist settlers and colonialists. Whereas *A Farm Called Kishinev* contests colonial conquest of African land by the rifle in efforts to empty the land for European habitation, *The Mixers* contests European socio-cultural domination of the conquered land. In both cases, I identify and explore how anti-conquest, a term Mary Pratt uses "to refer to the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (Pratt 9), plays out in the contact zone.

In the fourth section, I explore how World War I and II defined Kenya's transnational histories. Particularly, I focus on four women novelists' reflections on the devastating effects of the wars on the Lake Victoria Basin social-cultural canvas: Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land*, Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*, Marjorie Macgoye's *The Present Moment*, and Yvonne Owuor's *Dust*. These novelists foreground the calamitous effects of the wars on the Luo nation. The section seeks to glean insights from women's representations of the trans-cultural impacts of these wars on the Lake Victoria basin. Meg Samuelson's study of women and nation histories in the South African context argues that "female authorship [is] disruptive, its meaning unstable as it spills out uncontrollably, and its effects disastrous" (75). The section reveals a pattern established by women novelists in memorialising the Lake Victoria Basin communities. Apart from African troops from the then Nyasaland, present

Malawi, Luo men's colossal participation and traumatic loss of lives in World War I and II is on record¹⁶. The war fronts were spaces of cultural contestation, 'home' and abroad. As the section demonstrates, memories of the two imperial wars feature in the women's novels in a manner that is different from Kenyan male authors who strategically extract revolutionary figures from the wars. This section shows that the two world wars were part of the imperial project that mapped Kenya's transnational histories. For instance, the trigger for World War I was Britain and Germany's rivalry for global power, driven with its concomitant economic gains¹⁷. Writing about World War I in Africa, Richard Rathbone states: "[w]ar was inseparable from imperialism, and Empire. To oppose war was to be unpatriotic, and patriotism and Empire became more and more synonymous" (Rathbone 4). Similarly, Bill Nasson writes thus: "[c]olonial territories were drawn into [World War I] in a variety of ways because they were ruled by European powers at war with one another, and because the [African] continent was of strategic significance" (160). A critique of the wars reveals compelling imperial strategic interests worth revisiting.

The wars fit perfectly in the imperial project in Africa for several reasons. For instance, the end of World War I "marked the period in which [...] colonial rule proper begins" (Rathbone 4). This signals some kind of preparation of the contact zone for imperial domination. Moreover, World War I ravaged Africa for a longer period than any other part of the world¹⁸. The trigger for World War II was German's "invasion of Poland in 1939" (Weinberg 659) followed by conquering France in 1940. But even before this, in "1931-2 Japan occupied Manchuria, in 1933-4 Hitler's Germany was rearming" (Reynolds 34). Britain with its colonies and America joined the war against Germany and Japan on the claim of asserting world democracy (Reynolds 40). In the war fronts, racism against African troops revealed the imperial nature of the conflict: the racism distinguished the real family of the empire from servants. John Morrow Jr. discusses "the often forgotten contributions of black African infantry to the French and British war efforts from Europe to Asia" (12) showing how racism played out against Black soldiers. Even the "Senegalese infantry [who] enjoyed a prominent place among the ranks of the victorious French army" (Morrow Jr. 13) were soon reminded that they were 'inferior': the French "army [...] attempted to 're-Senegalize' the men using an

¹⁶ See "African Manpower Statistics for the British Forces in East Africa, 1914-1918" (Hodges 105, 107).

¹⁷ See "The Origins of Two 'World Wars'" (Reynolds 32).

¹⁸ Nasson writes, "[t]he first guns which went off at the beginning August 1914 were fired by British West African colonial troops in the Anglo-French invasion of German Togoland. Hostilities also continued beyond the Armistice of 11 November 1918. [...]. Germany's last infantry column hung on until a final surrender to British forces under South African command on the Southern edge of Lake Tanganyika on 25 November 1918." (Nasson 160).

amalgam of created cultural rituals to prepare the soldiers for their imminent return to Africa” (Morrow Jr. 13). Yet, Black people’s struggle against dehumanisation by Empire featured prominently in the global conflicts and thereafter, in the colonies and America. Morrow Jr. identifies cases where African soldiers in Burma resisted firing squads or lashing by white officers on many occasions: “these African soldiers clearly feared neither their white officers nor death, potentially an ominous portent for postwar relationships in British East Africa” (Morrow Jr. 24). In Kenya, “Waruhiu Itote, one of a few Kikuyus in the battalion, became ‘General China’ in the Mau Mau military command structure” (Morrow Jr. 24). However, the novels I study in this section disrupt these masculinist re-memberings of the imperial wars. I explore these histories in the final section with emphasis on the wars’ effects on the Luo nation as represented in the mentioned novels.

This chapter brings together histories of social, cultural, and military contact in pre/colonial Kenya and shows that Kenyan communities experienced colonial trauma in diverse and complex ways. An analysis that brings together various novelists’ engagements with diverse contact histories enables a somewhat inclusive reflection on Kenya’s transnational pasts. This chapter demonstrates that aspects of language, gender, and geography play an important role in enabling a rich portrait of Kenya’s transnational histories.

Secrets from the Sea: *Siri Sirini* (2013) Trilogy

Chimera sets the trilogy, *Siri Sirini*, in Shanga, and connects it to the broader Indian Ocean World which, as Gwyn Campell observes, “encompasses the entire region from Africa east of the Cape-to-Cairo axis, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, to Australia, Eastern Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan and Korea”(173). Here, the trilogy ‘moves the centre’ by foregrounding inter-African and Africa-Middle East/ Far East contacts¹⁹. The trilogy’s reconfiguration of Swahili peoples’ contribution to the first global economy in a manner envisioned by TiyaambeZezeza in his hope for “the project and process of reclaiming and rewriting African history [that proceeds], as they did with the nationalist generation, not only through critiques of prevailing silences in western Africanist historiographies, but also vigorous reconstructions of African histories that have temporal depth and spatial breadth by African historians” (“Banishing the Silences” n.p.), is its thrust. Chimera locates the narrative

¹⁹ Atieno Odhiambo contends the situation where “World History [has become] European History” (187).

on the imaginary Barazinji, which comprises of East African Indian Ocean coastal states stretching from present-day Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, down to Mozambique²⁰.

Through *Siri Sirini*, Chimera can be read as contesting Eurocentric approaches to coastal Kenya's histories. For instance, Erik Gilbert claims that "[m]any of the Swahili towns trace their origins to Arab or Persian founders [and that despite African scholars' contrary opinion,] in some of [the towns] the rulers could trace their origins to Hadhramaut" (164-165). Campbell safely observes, "Azania (the present-day Swahili coast) was probably drawn into maritime trade from around the fourth century BCE [and] there is some debate as to whether this was owing to Arab, African or even Indonesian influence" (181, original brackets). His verdict is that the Swahili city-states were founded by Arab and Egyptian merchants by "BCE/CE changeover" (182). Atieno Odhiambo speaks very acutely to such contested histories in his article on cultural diversity and multiculturalism, remarking that

[t]he colonized people [...] were labelled as inferior peoples. Their very civilizations were despised, then denied. Their very achievements were attributed to foreigners, a vivid example being the claim that the Zimbabwe civilization of Central Africa was built by the Phoenicians or even by South Indians. ("Multiculturalism" 186)

Chimera's trilogy revisits these histories by writing the Swahili into the Swahili stone towns' histories, thereby laying claim to histories that have over time been re-directed to the Arab, Persian, and Indonesian worlds. In the trilogy, it is the Swahili that build, live in, and guard Shanga jealously from foreign invasion. This is a creative venture into repossessing transcultural memories from the Indian Ocean rim.

Chimera frames his narrative on the tragic Swahili legend, Fumo Liyongo. Apart from Swahili oral narratives, this legend is also narrated in Kimani Njogu and Rocha Chimera's *Ufundishaji wa Fasihi: Nadharia na Mbinu*, "Teaching Literature: Theory and Style", in which they outline Liyongo's genealogy and heroism (Njogu and Chimera 165). The legendary trope is significant especially in the way it appropriates historical veracity and magical realism in conveying a people's worldview. Njogu and Chimera show that every society that has invented legends believes that their stories are true and historical (Njogu and Chimera 162). This form of narrative that searches from the depths of mythological epic

²⁰ Barazinji is Kiswahili for Zinji continent. Zanj is the ancient name of this region. See Boxer (13) and Kusimba (*Rise and Fall of Swahili States* 20).

symbolically redeems histories of the marginalised in a region that encountered vigorous cross-cultural contacts.

The *Siri Sirini* trilogy is divided into three books: *Mshairi na Mfungwa*, “A Poet and a Prisoner”; *Mpiga Mbizi Kilindini*, “A Deep Waters Diver”; and *Mtihani wa Mwanamke*, “The Test of a Woman” which I respectively refer to as *Siri Mfungwa*, *Siri Kilindini*, and *Siri Mwanamke*. *Siri Mfungwa* focuses on Liyongo’s detention, his eventual jail-break, and his escape to neighbouring Ozi; the imprisonment and censorship of subversive poets in Shanga; and the government delegation’s travel to Egypt. *Siri Kilindini* highlights the cruel assassination of Mfawidhi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs but secret advisor of an anti-government revolution; the king’s agents’ attempts to assassinate Liyongo in exile; and Liyongo’s new life in exile. *Siri Mwanamke* foregrounds King Mringwari’s agents’ assassination schemes against Liyongo amidst escalating dissidence against the king’s reign in Shanga; Liyongo’s cruel assassination; and a successful revolution led by Abanoye, Liyongo’s second wife from Ozi, that deposes the king and establishes a new order. Through this epic trilogy that depicts the heroic and ambitious struggles of Liyongo against King Daudi Mringwari, we are led into the intricacies of Swahili culture and governance; its transformations through challenging times; its inter-state relations with the Wagalla, Egyptians, Omani, and Portuguese.

Chimera reinvents Fumo Liyongo by making him the father of a legendary Lamu Swahili poet Mwana Kupona binti Mshamu (in the trilogy she is Mwanakupona), the wife of Mataka who lived from 1810 to 1860 CE. These two Swahili legends existed separately. The merger of Fumo Liyongo and Mwana Kupona into a family is remarkable — it draws on two iconic legends embodied by gendered hegemonic tropes of military masculinity and poetic imagination respectively, but which emphasizes their respective transnational referentiality. Furthermore, Mwana Kupona’s husband, Bwana Mataka was a political threat to Arab domination of the Swahili coast, a cause for which he paid with his own life. Mohamed Bakari writes:

Bwana Mataka, the nineteenth century local ruler of the town of Siyu in the Lamu archipelago, is arguably the first Kenyan political prisoner. [Mataka was] cunningly lured to Zanzibar after defying the then ruling Sultan [and] jailed at Fort Jesus prison, where he was to die in detention. (45)

In *Siri Sirini*, it is Fumo Liyongo who is detained for defying King Mringwari. Yet, prison does not triumph over him; he breaks out and pursues his mission. This incident demonstrates how the Kiswahili epic rewrites history by suggesting that Fumo Liyongo's revolutionary spirit was not confined in a single individual: Bwana Mataka too was a Fumo Liyongo to the people who identified with his cause. To the people of Siyu, Mataka's death in prison was but a rebirth.

Mwana Kupona's *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona* "has begun to generate some controversy as to its ideological orientation [because] it affirms and reinforces the patriarchal order in Swahili society, while others see in it a subversive, if disguised, antihegemonic discourse" (Alamin Mazrui, *Swahili Beyond Boundaries* 18) given the poem's idea that a wife should treat her husband in the same way she treats her children. Chimera inserts Mwana Kupona's poem in the novel and imagines the society at a time when the poem was written, the controversies it elicited, and women's participation in the histories of the Swahili coast.

In this section, I explore transnational convergences through transoceanic trade, Islamic education, and special skills' exchanges amongst Swahili city-states, Egypt of antiquity, and Arabian states. These convergences, when compared to Portuguese and British arrival on the Kenyan coast and hinterland, respectively, were generally creative and progressive regardless of racial, cultural, and religious differences²¹. For example, in a retelling of his life to Abanoye, Liyongo notes that his father travelled to Oman when he was a small boy and grew up to become a great sailor (*Siri Mwanamke* 42). Due to connections established by his father, Liyongo finds an opportunity for military training in the Oman Sultanate. Liyongo's acquisition of special military skills is embedded in the Indian Ocean trade where the Swahili towns were a major link between the African interior and the Indian Ocean world²². He narrates to Abanoye that "[t]ulipokuwa Manga, niliingia katika jeshi la Sultani wa huko [na] nikaondokea kuwa mahiri sana katika mikakati ya bangu na mapambano ya ana kwa ana" (*Siri Mwanamke* 50), "while in Oman, I joined the Sultan's army [and] proved myself lethal in war and in close quarter combat". The military skills that Liyongo acquires in Oman change not only the trajectory of his life, but gradually, though at a high cost of life,

²¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o observes that "Africa peacefully traded with China, India and Arabia before the arrival of the Portuguese who turned this creative trade into a traffic of destroyed cities, cultures and human beings for a little silver to fatten the coffers of bourgeois Europe" (wa Thiong'o 102). I discuss the British encounter in the next chapter sections.

²² Goods from the African interior "passed through Swahili towns and into a hemisphere-spanning trade network — through the Red and Mediterranean Seas to Europe, across the Indian Ocean to India and Persia, and to China via sea and land" (Patel 44).

transform Shanga's governance from totalitarian to egalitarian polity. Even though most African soldiers in the Oman Empire were slaves, Liyongo joins the Omani military as a free man and an ally. This suggests a time of mutual and friendly interconnections between Oman and the Swahili Coast during centuries of productive and flourishing Indian Ocean trade.

The setting of the trilogy in Shanga is Chimera's quest for memories of human contact before the age of Portuguese and Arab conquests so eloquently narrated in Charles Boxer and Carlos Azevedo's *Fort Jesus and the Portuguese in Mombasa: 1593-1729*. The existence of ancient cities and markers of Islamic religion reveal mobility of people and ideas in the region's pasts. Abanoye's firstborn son who accompanies Liyongo from Ozi to Shanga is surprised by the stone town's development: "[s]asa aliyaona majumba makubwa... marefu ya ghorofa! [...]. Tena mji mkubwa kupindukia!" (*Siri Mwanamke* 149), "[t]hen he saw great buildings... tall storied buildings! [...]. It was an unbelievably great city!" The growth and expansion of Shanga is definitely a result of Indian Ocean trade. Samir Patel posits that the "Swahili stone towns [...] grew spectacularly wealthy on this trade" (44). Archaeologists have established Shanga as the oldest Swahili stone town with connections to the Indian Ocean world: "[t]he earliest known mosque on the Swahili Coast is at Shanga, [it] was built in the mid-ninth century" (Kusimba 134). Jeffrey Feysler also recognizes Shanga's early establishment, writing that it was "an early 8th-century village [that] grew incrementally over 700 years of settlement [with] the increasing influence of Red Sea and Persian Gulf architectural styles [which] can be seen in these houses and mosques that are largely unique to the eastern African coast" (4).

Women's histories in the Indian Ocean trade feature in Chimera's novel. This is achieved through narration of Queen Hatshepsut's centrality in the trade networks between Shanga and Egypt²³. King Mringwari sends a delegation to Egypt which establishes that Egypt is willing to revive ancient trade links with Shanga as it was in the "utawala wa Malkia Hatshepsut wa huko huko Misri, na Barazinji", "reign of Queen Hatshepsut of that very Egypt, with Barazinji" (*Siri Kilindini* 33). By showing that a woman was the architect of a great and creative Indian Ocean trade, the trilogy is not only contesting Britain's domination of East African histories, but also male domination in Indian Ocean trade. Kara Cooney, Hatshepsut "is a woman of antiquity [...], the first woman to exercise long-term rule over Egypt as king [...] for almost twenty-two years" (1) during which time Egypt's economy flourished. This

²³ See "Invoking Memories of Legendary African Women" (Yenjela 58-60).

referentiality is a political strategy that seeks to demonstrate women's participation in the trade. Generally, the trilogy shows that there are some instances when contact occurred on grounds of human equality and dignity, which affirms the claim that the "development of diasporas [in the Indian Ocean trade] was an enriching experience culturally and economically" (McPherson 39). However, the situation kept shifting from time to time. Of much value is the trilogy's inscription of women's contribution to the Indian Ocean histories.

The challenge in the narration of women's contributions in the trilogy, however, is that the memorialisation is executed by highly educated men. This seems to reflect the patriarchal nature of the Swahili society that, until the recent past, was replete with gendered Islamic beliefs. Chapter Four's section on *Mwisho wa Kosa*, "End of Wrongs", offers a specific analysis of women's experiences in the Swahili society and the transformations thereby. But in the trilogy, the absence of women in the delegation to Egypt poignantly reflects the novelists' struggles to write women into power in situations where they have been excluded for many centuries. At the same time, the novelist expresses a desire, nostalgia, for women's presences in the Indian Ocean.

Transculturation not only occurred in contacts between dominant and subjugated cultures, but also between groups that were intersecting on equal footing. Transculturation is a term that describes how subjugated people "determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own [culture from what the dominant culture submits to them], how they use it, and what they make it mean", hence an important "phenomenon of the contact zone" (Pratt 7). This phenomenon was, on many occasions, prevailed upon by opinion leaders of communities. In the trilogy, the invocations of the Queen of Sheba and Alexander of Macedon demonstrate this²⁴. Through caravan and maritime trade, historical cultural nourishment between the Swahili coast and the ancient histories of Ethiopia occur. The trilogy focalises the legendary life of the Queen of Sheba and shows that her reign and exploits did not occur in isolation of the thriving city-states of the present Kenya. Gwyn Campbell notes the caravan and maritime connectivity of ancient Ethiopia, the Swahili coast and the rest of the Indian Ocean world:

²⁴ Sheldon writes that Queen of Sheba's real name is Maqeda, "often referred to as Queen of Sheba [but] in Arabic legends she is known as Bilkis [and that] she was the founding ruler of Ethiopia in the 10th Century BC" (Sheldon 142). Atieno Odhiambo refers to Alexander the Great as Alexander of Macedon, seemingly in a postcolonial way of contesting Alexander's greatness ("Diversity and Multiculturalism" 185).

The BCE/CE changeover witnessed a boom in global trade in which Axum (in present-day Tigray, Ethiopia) fully participated, developing a major maritime commercial empire in the first 500 years CE. From highland Ethiopia, Axum controlled caravan routes to the Red Sea, Central East Africa, Upper Egypt, Sudan (180)

In the flow of commodities between these regions, there is also the active exchange of ideas and values. But the trilogy demonstrates that cultural custodians attempted to censor ideas and values in order to preserve a particular controllable template. For instance, in *Siri Mfungwa*, Dhabina demonstrates mastery of histories of the Queen of Sheba's reign in ancient Ethiopian Empire, but urges Shanga's citizens to guard against women's potential rise to power. In a schizophrenic analysis of Mwanakupona's epic poem, Dhabina claims that one line in that poem is capable of causing a revolution such as that of the Queen of Sheba:

Sasa hapo... Binti ya Mwanakupona, katika ushairi huu, anapewa ushairi mzuri wa kumtii mumewe na kumtendea kila lililo jema... Sawa hapo; hakuna lililoharibika! Walakini, twaambiwa mishororo michache baadaye, asilani binti huyo asiroje, wala asijidanganye, ama tuseme asijaribu hata kuwaza kufanya lenye uwezekano wa kumwudhi Mwenyezi M'ngu! (*Siri Mfungwa* 226)

Now there... Mwanakupona's daughter, in this epic poem, is given great advice to obey her husband and do him good... Up to that point it's fine; nothing the matter! However, we are told a few lines later, in her submission to her husband, never should that daughter imagine, nor be deceived, or should we say she should never even attempt to dream about doing, for the sake of her husband, anything that displeases God Almighty!

Dhabina argues that Mwanakupona intentionally avoids mentioning specifically the things prohibited by God, and claims God is against so many things. He warns that overlooking what seems to be minor provisions in poetry, law, and societal perception could lead to a state where a woman rises to the throne, as it happened in the Queen of Sheba's case (*Siri Kilindini* 29).

In the case of Egypt and Swahili coast's cultural intersection, the trilogy shows how Shanga's cultural custodians greatly embraced Islamic intellectual exchange while castigating histories of Alexander of Macedon's conquests. When a delegation is set to leave for Egypt for

purposes of reviving trade networks, Dhabina observes that “Misri ndicho kitovu na usuli wa elimu ulimwengu mzima; sivyo?” (*Siri Mfungwa* 184), “Egypt is the hub and origin of knowledge in the entire universe; not so?” and, “nchi hiyo imekuwa sio chimbuko tu, bali pia mnara mkuu wa elimu kwa miaka ngana chungu nzima na hata kikwi kadha, kama sikosei” (*Siri Mfungwa* 185), “that country has not only been the spring, but also the greatest pillar of knowledge for many centuries and even several millenniums, if I’m not wrong.” These views, which show reverence for Egypt in matters of knowledge, point to the histories of Islamic intellectual exchanges between North Africa and East Africa. Mfawidhi, who is the guide to the king’s delegation to Egypt, studied at the Zutafindaki ya al-Azhar, “University of Al-Azhar,” in Egypt. Meir Hatina observes that “[t]he best-known madrasa in the Muslim world is Cairo’s al-Azhar, established in 972 C.E. [and that] for centuries, al-Azhar occupied a prominent religious status as the bastion of Islamic learning in Egypt and throughout the Muslim world” (Hatina 51). Michael Rheimer similarly observes, “the mosque-college of al-Azhar [is] Cairo’s first and foremost mosque, the apex of Egypt’s Islamic educational system, and an Islamic university of worldwide renown” (Reimer, 54). Through reference to al-Azhar, the trilogy revives Islamic intellectual civilisation that had tremendous influences on the Swahili coast hence giving rise to the Swahili gentry.

In a speech to the Egyptian hosts in Cairo, Mfawidhi states that without Egypt’s role in human civilisation, humanity would be languishing in savagery (*Siri Mfungwa* 277). Chimera presents Mfawidhi as a cultural broker between Egypt and Shanga, one who draws from his diasporic experience — mastery of Islam, cultures, terrain, and contemporary Arabic language in Egypt’s public discourse during his studies and stay at al-Azhar in Egypt — to facilitate transculturation in Shanga. This major role is reflective of the Swahili participation in cultural mediation in the Indian Ocean transnational histories²⁵. According to Lakshmi Subramanian,

[t]he growth and emergence of literate diasporic groups, often bilingual in their skills and adept at deploying modern channels of communication, facilitated the articulation of a transnational sphere, with imperial cities of the Indian Ocean emerging as nodal centres of cultural exchange and intellectual debate. (48)

Mfawidhi’s command of Islam, Arabic, and Egyptian cultural and historical terrain excellently positions him in the cultural and social networking of Egypt and Shanga. He is

²⁵ See “Cultural Brokers in the Early Modern Indian Ocean” (Pearson, 42).

therefore emblematic of the connectivity that the Indian Ocean facilitated in the golden age of the Swahili city-states.

Siri Sirini explores how Alexander of Macedon's transnational military exploits travelled to coastal Kenya. Even with Egypt's monumental influences on the East African coastal states, Chimera demonstrates the dangers of hasty mimicry of histories of different nations. Prince Ngwari's travels in Egypt, compounded with Mfawidhi's lectures, transform him into a reckless warmonger. Ngwari returns to Swahili-land determined to be 'Alexander the Great', to conquer neighbouring Swahili states and have a great city named after him, and to assert his worth through fierce killings. While at the city of Alexandria, Mfawidhi narrates to Ngwari the histories of Alexander of Macedon's conquests of various empires, and radicalises him by maliciously insisting that

[k]ama unataka kutambuliwa karibu na mbali, na katika mpito mrefu wa dahari, basi huna budi bali kuwa mgumu wa moyo, kuwa imara wa dhamira, pamwe na kuwa mkali... na aidha kuua watu kiasi cha kutisha kabisa! Hivyo ndivyo himaya kubwa kubwa zinavyopatikana! (*Siri Mfungwa* 312)

if you want to be famous far and wide, and through a long passage of time and age, then you have no choice but be heartless, be strong-willed, besides being fierce... and also, be prepared to kill people in shocking massive numbers! That's how great empires are founded!

Mfawidhi's lecture to Prince Ngwari is intended to recruit the prince in an underground militant anti-government group campaigning for better governance in Shanga. This act reinforces the view that cultural translators were traitorous to their nations (Samuelson 15). His target is to use Ngwari to kill his father, in the same way Alexander of Macedon did in a quest for power and expansionism²⁶. But Ngwari hastily embraces these extremist tendencies; he returns to Shanga ready to conquer and subdue for the sake of power and fame. The results of this transformation are devastating because he eventually assassinates his uncle Fumo Liyongo who trusted him. However, this action leads to a revolution led by Abanoye. Ngwari is killed in the battle and his father and mother are captured and later banished thus marking the end of Mringwari's monarchy. Here, cultural and transnational ethos contributes to the occurrence of the revolution: the constructed Swahili belief that a king's nephew is the

²⁶ See *Alexander the Great* (Freeman 153).

preferred heir to throne; Liyongo's military training in Oman; the travel of Alexander of Macedon's conquest histories.

The trilogy further engages with clan wars amongst the Swahili but contests the idea of colonial intervention. In his critical reflections on "colonial ideologies of legitimation" (96), Peter Ekeh writes that "[t]ribe against tribe' is the common theme in colonial accounts of African struggles [which] gave the colonial administrators the image of benevolent interveners, who came to Africa *because* they wanted to establish order" (98, original emphasis). Through Dhabina who distinguishes himself as the custodian of the Swahili states' histories, Chimera shows that endless conflicts amongst the Swahili actually hampered development and caused anguish among them: "Malindi: Bangu ya tangu jadi ililigawanya vipande vipande taifa kubwa lililokuwa na majivuno sana wakati wa kilele chake cha maendeleo" (*Siri Kilindini* 171), "Malindi: battles from ancient times divided into bits a great nation that stood with pride in its golden age of development." He also mentions the case of Jomvu and Pate which faced the same fate. However, Chimera revisits these histories of clan wars through what Hayden White refers to as making history through ideological implication in which "a historical account reflects the ethical element in the historian's assumption of a particular position" (10). This is particularly evident when Dhabina, after listing the Swahili city-states that were on the verge of collapsing due to clan wars, remarks that it is not reason enough to relinquish power and leadership to foreign hegemonic cultures (*Siri Kilindini* 173). Dhabina makes this remark at a time when Arabs and the Portuguese have separately conquered and subdued Pate, Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, Jomvu, Zanzibar and Kilwa.

In an attempt to rewrite 'tribe against tribe' histories, the trilogy presents complex circumstances between the Wagalla in imaginary Ozi and the Swahili in Shanga that lead to war. Instead of the Wagalla and the Swahili warring against each other, they unite to topple King Mringwari's totalitarian regime. Remarkably, the Wagalla get into this war because of familial ties with the Swahili after Liyongo and Abanoye's marriage. In fact, Liyongo's exile in Ozi among the Wagalla is itself a political message that the trilogy submits: ethnic groups co-existed and only went to war when their interests were threatened or invaded. But this is contrasted with the Swahili's relationship with the Arabs and Portuguese, which, in the age of

conquests, became acrimonious²⁷. The trilogy suggests that the Swahili city-states became wary of people with strong familial ties with Arabs/Portuguese. In a carefully thought out propaganda, Dhabina remarks that the Omani Arabs are plotting to raze down Shanga, but

[n]ijuavyo ni kwamba wanamtumia jamaa yao...ndugu yao damu, Liyongo, kunyakua madaraka yote ya utawala hapa Shanga ilimradi waweze kututawala, kutumiliki na kutukanyaga, toka kuko huko Manga! (*Siri Kilindini* 192)

what I know is that they are using their kin... their blood brother, Liyongo, to seize power here in Shanga with the intention of ruling us, possessing us, and trampling upon us according to orders from Oman!

This statement is meant to dent Liyongo's influence in Shanga. But it foregrounds two pertinent issues. Firstly, it positions Liyongo in the category of traitorous cultural translators: he trained in Oman; married an Arab woman, Zahara; his father's identity is situated in the in-between Swahili and Arab. Secondly and more momentous, it exposes tense relations between the Swahili and Arabs. Historically, the 1964 Zanzibar revolution in which indigenes targeted Arabs (former slave masters) would show shallow Omani assimilation on the Swahili coast: "Arab identity which had been associated with social and economic privilege, suddenly became a tremendous liability" (Gilbert 169-170). The Swahili coast projects insights into understanding the contact zone as a space prone to drastic changes in power relations. The power shifts on the Swahili coast can be encased in the logic of defeat where societies "understand world history as a series of rises and falls", in the "recognition that what triumphs today will be defeated tomorrow [hence reversing] the traditional tendency to identify with the great and powerful" (Schivelbusch 2).

This analysis has shown that African people were at the centre of histories in the Indian Ocean World. Using a trilogy that covers a vast canvas of histories, Chimera demonstrates that the coastal city-states developed as an initiative of indigenous people. According to Ekeh, one of the "ideological weapon[s] employed by the colonial administrators in emphasizing the necessity of their rule in Africa consisted of downgrading the contribution by Africans to the building of African nations and to history generally" (97). The trilogy

²⁷ Chaparukha Kusimba mentions 1500-1950 as a period when "East Africans lost control of their territory and self-determination to a series of foreign powers. These powers included, at one time or another, the Portuguese in Mozambique from the sixteenth to twentieth century; the Omani Arabs in Tanzania from 1770 to 1884; the British following the Omanis in Kenya until 1963; and the Germans claiming mainland Tanzania from 1884 until they were replaced by the British after the First World War" (39).

redeems the image of the Swahili people who in other representations had been portrayed as helpless victims of their histories²⁸. More so, *Siri Sirini* retrieves African histories from the Indian Ocean in an attempt to restore the monuments, the martyrs, and memory of the Swahili as envisioned albeit in a different context, in Derek Walcott's poem, "The Sea is History". The poem is relevant here even though it specifically addresses Caribbean memories of slavery:

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs? / Where is your tribal memory?
Sirs, / in that grey vault. The sea. The sea/ has locked them up. The sea is history.
(Walcott 364)

It is from the sea that Chimera retrieves transoceanic memories of Fumo Liyongo, Mwana Kupona, Queen of Sheba, Queen Hatshepsut, and above all, ordinary Swahili people. Writing in Kiswahili greatly aids in this memorialisation since names of events, places, and people trigger the re-memberings of the transnational contacts analysed here.

I now move from exploring transnational contacts on the sea to conquests of land. In the next section, I reflect on how the Britain exerts its dominance in Kenya's upcountry several centuries after the Swahili coast has experienced conquests.

Habitation of Shepherds: Marjorie Macgoye's *A Farm Called Kishinev* (2005)

This section foregrounds the remarkable ways in which Marjorie Macgoye uses the novel to retrieve and re-circulate two fragments of Kenyan history that had largely been overshadowed by the overwhelming emphasis on Mau Mau and the British in Kenyan literary imaginaries: the Nandi resistance and Maasai victimhood on one hand; and on the other, Eldoret's connections to Jewish histories. *A Farm Called Kishinev* (hereafter *Kishinev*) connects the Jewish pogroms and the Nandi massacres in different spatial but similar temporal spaces. The novel narrates the ways in which Britain staged a form of atonement for afflicted Jews but at the expense of Kenyan colonial subjects. Yet, in remarkable ways, the histories of the Jews and that of colonial subjects are similar. Macgoye uses *Kishinev* as a trope to underscore Kenya's turbulent histories resultant from the settler economy in the so-called White Highlands. (I return to the histories of the so-called White Highlands shortly). Here, I focus on the imperial violence of emptying the then Kenya Colony for settler economy. The novel presents an opportunity to examine the Bible as a major player in land

28 See The Great Siege of Fort Jesus (Cuthbert).

alienation by colonial authorities in Kenya in the late 19th C/ early 20th C. My argument here is that in *Kishinev*, Macgoye projects the contact zone as a complex and treacherous space where ‘victim’ settlers — Jews facing persecution in Eastern Europe and in search of a homeland, and who eventually settle in Uasin Gishu, Kenya — become perpetrators of injustices against indigenes through their complicity with and benefit from imperialist systems. This is anchored on the knowledge that the Zionist Movement that was committed to finding a homeland for Jews was itself imperialist.²⁹

Macgoye’s literary works consistently reflect on various histories of Kenya. Her novel *Coming to Birth* (1986), which won the Sinclair Prize for fiction, traces the journey of a naïve village girl, Paulina, to an assertive city woman. Paulina’s story parallels the story of Kenya in the sense that she emerges from patriarchal bondage at a time when Kenya is also emerging from the bondage of colonialism; she miscarries her first-born due to socio-economic constraints and stays without a baby for long before her turning-point pregnancy. This symbolises Kenya’s histories; the nation’s challenging attempts at economic and political freedoms. In a study of Macgoye’s second novel, *The Present Moment* — which I revisit later in the study — Roger Kurtz underscores Macgoye’s conviction that “history and literature offer complementary ways of exploring the same subject [since] all of her fiction investigates how key moments in the history of East Africa would have been experienced by those who were living through them, and the result is decidedly a historical emphasis to her prose” (37). Kurtz’s remarks are inspired by his reading of Macgoye’s commissioned history school text titled *The Story of Kenya: A Nation in the Making* (1986) and her literary works that imagine Kenya’s various histories. For Kurtz, Macgoye’s “many hours of historical research [...] yielded all manner of fascinating material that might serve well in a novel” (37), thus resulting to *The Present Moment* and, inevitably, the heavily historical *Kishinev*.

Kishinev is based on notes from a fictional pioneer settler’s diary on which the narrator ruminates as he comments. This double-voicing complicates the text as it merges the first generation and third generation settlers’ views on the question of conquered land. In the novel, a long-dead Isaac Wilder leaves behind his diary which his grandson, Benjamin Kiplagat, stumbles upon. It is from the diary entries that the narrator struggles to make meaning of the past, especially the question of British land allocation to European settlers and

²⁹ Mwangi wa-Githimo writes that “between 1900 and 1917, not only did the Zionist leaders seek to enter an alliance with European imperialism, but they also began negotiating with various European ruling classes, seeking to convince one of them that the establishment of a Jewish state in the colonial world would be in their interest” (96).

consequent dispossession and displacement of indigenous people. Wilder is a Polish Jew who in his youth migrates to London, and eight years later migrates to Kenya upon reading a British Government report to resettle Jews. The settler becomes the first owner of a farm he later names Kishinev in the larger Farm 64, present day Eldoret in Uasin Gishu. During the first days of immigration, Wilder “wrestles for a long time over the choice of a name for the farm” (*Kishinev* 11), from Shalom, Zion, Refuge, Canaan, and finally settles for Kishinev. According to the narrator, Wilder drops the name Canaan because “[t]he promise of Canaan had been misused” (11), especially by the Boers who “consider themselves alone to be God’s Chosen People” (45).

The novel calls attention to reading Kenya as Kishinev because Kishinev is a turning point in memory, if the “Kishinev pogrom [of 6-7 March 1903 which] represented a resurgence of anti-Jewish violence in the Russian Empire to a degree unprecedented” (Klier 49), with more than 50 Jews massacred in two days, is read metaphorically. This pogrom led to Britain’s depiction of Russia “as a barbarous oppressor of political dissent and a savage persecutor of religious, national, and ethnic minorities” (Zhuravleva 43). The potency of this memory is encoded in the re-awakened consciousness of the Jews: “[a]fter Kishinev, Jews had to ask themselves if they could ever be safe from mass violence in the Russian Empire” (Klier 49-50). In some respects, the same consciousness prevailed among the Nandi and other ethnic communities who were uprooted from their lands by the King’s African Rifles (KAR) during relentless colonial conquests aimed at emptying the land for British settlers and creating refuge for persecuted Jews³⁰. If, as the previous section indicates, contact along the Kenyan coastline is represented as a largely peaceful process mediated by the spread of Islam and trade networks, in Macgoye’s Uasin Gishu, this contact is heralded by unprecedented violence.

The Kishinev trope reconfigures the Nandi’s experiences during violent removals from their lands by KAR. Macgoye seems to knit the Jewish persecution, including the Holocaust, with the massive loss of Black peoples’ lives during British expansionism. Empire’s conquests of Uasin Gishu and other parts of Kenya could be understood from the influence of “[t]he scientific mission of the Eugenics Movement [that affirmed] the eradication of inferior and unfit ‘races’ and the elevation of superior ‘races’ (Ifekwunigwe 13). Reflecting on the

30 Richard Wolff shows that “British authorities mounted punitive raids against the Nandi [...] in 1895, 1900, 1902, 1903 and finally in 1905. [...]. The defeated Nandi lost many lives, a large proportion of their livestock, and the greater part of the land in the southern section of the territory that they had come over the years to consider their domain” (Wolff 63).

Kishinev pogrom, Klier brings to light a Hebrew proclamation written by Ahad Ha'am asserting that "Kishinev [...] had demonstrated that the Jews were not only rightless, but defenceless as well" (55) given their lack of resistance against the murderous Russian mobs. The gist of Ha'am's proclamation, as quoted by Klier, is: "[t]he blood of our brothers in Kishinev calls out to us: rise up from ashes and supplications, cease to hold out your hands to your enemies, [...] let your hands help you" (55). This is a call to self-defence as opposed to relying on prayer as they are killed. It resonates with Malcom X's call to Black people to unite and defend themselves in the 1950s and 1960s America when they faced widespread persecution from White supremacists, including the Ku Klux Klan.

The Kishinev histories resonate with the Nandi and Maasai histories in *Kishinev*. Here, the Nandi resistance to the conquest would cost many lives and loss of their territory. In the case of the Maasai, the conquerors would use treachery to solicit their (Maasai) complicity to conquest through signing treaties. Reflecting on the colonial perfidy against the Maasai on the question of land, the narrator in the novel asks, "How could a people skilled in military and civil order have failed to know what threatened them?" (5). He then asserts that "[i]n fighting the British and retaining their own territory the Nandi have been not completely successful but a good deal more successful than the Maasai" (5). In this perspective, the narrator shows similarities between the Nandi and the Maasai with the Jews in Kishinev.

Moreover, the novel articulates legacies of ethnic violence germane to the underhand methods the colonisers used in their conquests. For instance, the Maasai in their victimhood to the coloniser's treachery also become perpetrators of injustices against the Nandi. The narrator observes that the Maasai "ventured into lawsuits and treaties and even from exile offered 200 warriors for the British campaign against the Ketosh" (5). Setting the Maasai nation against the Nandi nation features here as the divide and rule method that dominated the colonial period. This exacerbated historical ethnic tensions that still manifest in Rift Valley, the former White Highlands. According to Parselelo Kantai, at

[t]he dawn of the twentieth century [...] many Maasai military units had become guns for hire, fighting other people's battles and getting paid in stock. [...]. For instance, Maasai auxiliaries accompanied Meinertzhagen during his infamous expedition against the Nandi in 1907. (Kantai 108)

The irony of the Maasai nation's involvement in punitive expeditions against other ethnic groups, and the loss of their territory to the colonial powers they were fighting for, reveals lasting legacies of ethnic/ racial violence that the contact zone establishes³¹.

A devout Christian missionary and writer, Macgoye uses the Bible to subvert Britain's cult of sovereignty on land. The novel is divided into two parts, and has ten chapters each with a thematic Biblical epigraph. Peter Mwikisa persuasively shows that "the Bible is a colonizing text, [but] it can also be read in ways [that advance decolonisation hence making it] a highly conflicted cultural icon" (Mwikisa 253). The epigraphs in the novel submit incisive critiques of both British and Jewish occupation of the land and the violence that precedes this occupation. Part One of the novel is titled "Habitation of Shepherds" with an epigraph: "*Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, shall be an habitation of shepherds. Jeremiah 33:12*" (1, original emphasis). The epigraph in Chapter One reads "*And the earth was without form and void. And the Spirit of God moved. Genesis 1:2*" (3, original emphasis).

The first epigraph satirises the coloniser's patronage of Africa while the second epigraph exposes a sacrilegious approach to the colonies thereby mocking the coloniser's 'invincibility' exhibited through plundering civilisations, economies, and the indigenous communities. It is also ironical that the aftermath of the invincible spiritual move of God is the plunder of defenceless people. For instance, Wilder, on arrival in Uasin Gishu, noticed that "[t]he Uasin Gishu Maasai — *Kobwokob* they were called — had gone away, everyone agreed, though different assertions were made as to where they went and why. In fact, a few survivors were living in Eldama Ravine" (4). Here, the narrator points to the Maasai as some of the casualties of British onslaught after the violent evictions. Wilder wonders: "And what was there about this positive, menacing emptiness to prevent the Nandi — now expanding, consolidating, concentrating their new ascendancy on the western margins of our promised land — from using it as regular pasture?" (7). The "newcomers were taking a wary look at why [the land] had been abandoned" (4).

The novel also underlines markers of land utilisation before the arrival of settlers: "[e]very visitor to Uasin Gishu noticed the stone kraals as evidence of recent occupation [and] so the settlers, whether British, South African or Jewish, were not laying claim to the land because it

³¹ Today, "the two million-acre site of the former northern Maasai Reserve [is] now home to a handful of ranches largely in the hands of the remnant white settler community" (Kantai 107).

was empty” (4). The stone kraals mentioned here indicate the killed or dispersed owners of well-established homesteads. Further, the narrator states: “my grandfather, rational and optimistic as he was in general, sometimes felt as though the landscape had fallen under a spell or a curse. It was as though some test had to be passed, some humane gesture registered, to bring the sleepy tract to life” (4). Here, Benjamin Kiplagat, the grandson, who is of both Jewish and Nandi origins, identifies with his grandfather’s guilt over the horrendous evictions of indigenes. He finds himself trapped in the horrors of history yet reluctant to let go the benefits the very horrors yielded. As a ‘mixed race’ individual, he identifies with the atrocities his mother’s people went through, but he seeks to understand circumstances that forced his grandfather and his kind to settle in annexed territories.

Britain oversaw not only the violent evictions of the Nandi and the Maasai in Uasin Gishu, but also commissioned Zionists to take up conquered lands in the region. *Kishinev* revisits these histories by unmasking imperialism engendered in the 1903 British and Zionists’ original plan to establish a Jewish ante-Chamber in Uasin Gishu which was followed by Zionists’ expedition in the region to ascertain the suitability of the land³². It reconfigures this imperial act through the epigraph: *So they brought to the people of Israel an evil report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone, to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants”*. Numbers 13: 32. (21, original emphases). Here, depictions of Uasin Gishu as “a land that devours its inhabitants” powerfully reveals the criminal nature of Britain’s expansionism, which mows down original inhabitants of the land in order to settle a ‘superior race’, in many parts of the world.

But the narrator’s empathy for Jewish settlers is mainly influenced by Christianity’s declaration that Jews are God’s chosen people. Hence, his imagining of Wilder as a seemingly innocent settler caught up in the mischiefs of Empire. Wilder asks himself, “Did the Zionist mission ever know that they had seen Uasin Gishu only during a lull in a protracted war?” (28). Here, Wilder projects himself as an innocent beneficiary of an imperial system. This is appealing to the grandson who assumes that Jewish settlers were not privy to the conquests of African communities in the land-emptying campaigns. At best, Wilder is a conqueror well understood in Mary Pratt’s definition of ‘anti-conquest’, a term she uses “to

³² A grant of 3,200,000 acres was allocated to the Jews who would form an autonomous Jewish state in the White Highlands. British settlers in Kenya strongly opposed the project of settling Jews in the colony, exercised “vituperative anti-Semitism”, and seem to have shown the Zionists emissaries an arid section of the land (Wa-Githumo 87, 94-95).

refer to the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” (Pratt 9).

Despite the narrator’s allegiance to the Jewish myth of inheriting promised lands, Wilder remains a conqueror. In the first place, “the farm called Kishinev [in its vastness was] buttressed with title-deeds” (7). This was a self-preservation gesture because the Jews in Eldoret were wary of “the British government [which was] already under pressure to divert the territory to those more white in their manners and less farouche in their doctrines” (15). This reveals how problematic ‘whiteness’ was in land politics in the White Highlands. But at the same time, the Jews, by buttressing their farms with title deeds, were “assert[ing] European hegemony” (Pratt 9), making them participants in the histories of dispossession of the indigenes in Uasin Gishu. Even without land title deeds, “[e]ach [African] society has, at least traditionally, its own geographical area, its own land and its own country [and] pastoral [communities] naturally, move over a large stretch of land in their nomadic life searching for water and pasture” (Mbiti 100). Establishing the settler economy in the pretence of indigenes’ underutilisation of prime land is something that has been contested: land “is a resource whose cultural and symbolic value by far outstrips the economic logic that has tended to stall any attempts at rationalising access to and ownership of land to cater for the cultural and symbolic needs of many of us” (Siundu, "The Unanswered Question" *Daily Nation* n.p.).

Apart from conquest campaigns, the novel also depicts atrocious encounters between the settler and the indigene. In this case, it echoes Frantz Fanon’s observation that the colonized people’s “first encounter [with the settler] was marked by violence and their existence together [...] was carried out by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannon” (Fanon 28). In the novel, the narrator identifies in Wilder’s diary events that follow Nandi warriors’ attack on a “Boer farm and [...] trading caravan headed by Mr. Foaker, [after which], on 25 March [1905] the Nandi Field Force arrived at Kaptumo (Nandi Fort) under the command of Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen [and a] brutal punitive expedition followed” (27). The expedition that the novel alludes to is explained in detail by David Anderson in “Visions of the Vanquished”, in which he shows that more than 1, 400 Nandi men including their prophet and leader Koitalel arap Samoei were killed in British campaigns to vanquish Nandi resistance against colonialism³³. Nandi resistance included disruption of the construction and

³³ Anderson states that Richard Meinertzhagen led to a “military campaign against [the Nandi] in November 1897, July 1900 and March 1903. [...]. The fifth military expedition, which began in October 1905, was by far the largest and was intended to finally deal with ‘the Nandi problem’” (“Visions of the Vanquished” 169).

operation of the Kenya-Uganda Railway, which was crucial to the settler economy. These histories of war after war against the Nandi draw acute parallels with anti-Jewish violence in Russia where “in the terrible period from 1881 to 1882, [...] over 250 pogroms took place in the south-western provinces of Russia” (Klier 49), culminating with the Kishinev pogrom in April 1903.

The ironical imperial gesture of displacing the Nandi and Maasai to settle Jews and other settlers overseen by Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, have been condemned by Kenyan historians and other scholars. For Mwangi wa-Githumo, this move was,

from its inception intrinsically imperialistic, rather than humanitarian. To begin with, Chamberlain himself was not a devout humanitarian; he was an imperialist and an ardent believer of the cult of the British Empire, which fed itself on the blood of the colonized and on the natural resources of their illegally annexed lands. More poignant, Chamberlain was a political leader who regarded colonial wars as indispensable if the economic prosperity as well as national prestige of the British was to be maintained. He also believed that colonial activities were a historic responsibility, sacredly assigned [...] to the British people by heavenly Providence. (95)

In this contestation, wa-Githumo too perceives the role of religion in Britain’s pervasive expansionism. The narrator’s religious conservative outlook on the question of Jewish settlers in Kenya is further revealed in the following statement: “all [settlers — British, South African, and Jewish] had reasons for moving from where they were before, but the Jews could think of more reasons than anyone else” (4). In what appears to be the author’s controversial plea to Kenyans to sacrifice their socio-political claim on the land alienated by settlers, the narrator submits a special case for Jewish settlers:

The shifts of power in Europe, over these four years, may prove as overwhelming as the shifts of power in Africa over the last fifty, changing the boundaries of what is human, what is recognisable, what is recoverable. Perhaps these Kenyan brothers — like the envoy of Candace, like Simon of Cyrene — will be the ones to preserve Torah and Tabernacle for us, to link their own return to Canaan with ours, for all of us are wandering peoples. (101)

Here, the narrator, who is a third generation settler, presents a self-serving reading of the Bible. In the same way his grand-father buttressed Kishinev with title deeds, he buttresses his inherited property with religious appeals. There are two outstanding Biblical allusions: Simon of Cyrene who was forced to carry Jesus' cross; and the envoy of Candace, the Ethiopian eunuch, whom Philip converted to the Christian faith in the desert of Gaza³⁴. Peter Mwikisa, in his analysis of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's contestations and appropriations of Christianity, observes that there are several cases when Ngugi presents the Bible "as a central text of the imperial culture from which the African mind is in dire need of liberation" (251). Even though the missionary burden weighs heavily on her shoulders, Macgoye uses the Bible to contest British hegemony over land and non-European communities during colonialism. At the same time, she critiques cultural imperialism propagated by Christianity. By suggesting that Kenyans forego reparation of land injustices for the sake of the preservation of 'Torah and Tabernacle', the narrator exemplifies what Ali Mazrui refers to as "the puritanical factor in Calvinism [which] prepared the grounds for economic accumulation [in which] the pious were encouraged to acquire more and more" ("Cultural Forces" 25). This was the hallmark of capitalism. Throughout the novel, Kiplagat does not show any desire to atone communities that were dispossessed, and he steers far from Biblical scriptures that advocate recompense³⁵. This suggests that the contact zone is a space for self-gratification on the part of the beneficiaries of former conquerors.

This section has shown that hierarchical structuring of races and inventions of the other contributed to the conquests of land in Kenya. It exposes hypocritical humanitarian efforts in Britain's attempt to create a Jewish ante-Chamber in Kenya and comments on the legacy of violence in the areas that were conquered. The analysis unmask the sacrilegious nature of the imperialist project and questions the innocence of European beneficiaries of the scheme.

The next section examines imagined human relations on the White Highlands that had been conquered in the manner elaborated here.

The 'Sentimental-Liberal' Settler in the White Highlands: Mwangi Gicheru's *The Mixers* (1991)

This section uses Mwangi Gicheru's *The Mixers* to examine socio-cultural and political histories of indigenous Kenyans and European settlers' contacts in what was referred to as the

³⁴ See Mark 15:21 for Simon of Cyrene. See Acts 8: 26-39, Julia Rubanovich (123-125), Samson Uytanlet (128) for envoy of Candace.

³⁵ See the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector in Luke 19: 1-10.

White Highlands. The novel employs a social realist tragic mode in its critique of the problematic White Highlands. A tragedy instrumentally leads to “a clarified understanding of tragic matters through the arousal of [...] the emotions of pity and fear [rather than helping] the spectator get rid of [them]” (Minsaas 174). Tragedy also seems to convey the novel’s ideological standpoints on the symbolic deaths of the casualties. By so doing, inspires the political nature of the events that occurred in the racialised White Highlands.

Here, I read the two facets of imperialism: conquest and anti-conquest and explore how the novel reflects on these histories in a space where the settler economy flourished during colonialism. I examine the complex socio-economic and racial relations in the occupied lands with special emphasis on the sentimental-liberal settler’s complicity with the racist imperial project in the White Highlands. The novel shows that the settlers were not homogeneous, but by virtue of their occupation of the exclusive White Highlands, and their utilisation of forced/cheap labour for their prosperity, they collectively and actively invented the other at the contact zone. Karuti Kanyinga demonstrates that “the former white highlands have left a legacy that is responsible [for] political violence” (326) which reached its peak during the 2007/2008 post-election violence. This analysis shows that the colonial government fostered a racialised and ethnicised landscape in the White Highlands. Similarly, the post-independent Kenya state facilitated an ethnically unfair redistribution of the said land, especially by giving landholding preference to the Kikuyu, the first president’s ethnic group, in disregard of the original owners of the land. As Kanyinga argues, “reforms pursued through the settlement schemes and the land purchase programme ethnicised the land question and laid a firm foundation for political conflict” (326).

The Mixers raises pertinent issues including land alienation, inter-racial sex, racial ‘contamination,’ animal inter-breeding, segregation, and cultural imperialism. The White Highlands was a definitive site of contact between the indigenes and the European colonisers and settlers, especially considering the gradual but tense racial and socio-economic crises that this space engendered. Set in this complex space, *The Mixers* begins with an “inter-racial adultery” (Gicheru 1) conflict when “Kibogo, the African native bull [which is] wobbly, rickety, and tick-infested” (1) is caught mating “an English thorough-bred heifer [...] named Victoria” (1). Victoria belongs to Jonathan Muturi, “a progressive native” (1) who later becomes a colonial chief. He is also the father of Wanja, a beautiful girl who is among the

first indigenes to get Western education, become a teacher, and later marry Mark, a white neighbour keen on surviving racial animosity when revolution against settlerdom begins³⁶.

There is also Ngobia, a Kikuyu teenager who grows up on Robinson's farm tending horses and is later conscripted to fight in World War II in which he loses his arm. He returns from the war determined to lead a military campaign against the settler and colonial systems. His motivation to join the war is to avenge the injustices the settlers have inflicted on him and his family: "This is my opportunity to kill a white man for another white man. Then one day I'll kill a white man for the black man" (*The Mixers* 74). As a teenager, Ngobia had faced Kevin's (a settler whose farm borders Robinson's) cruel floggings for failing to prevent his (Ngobia's) hunting dog, Shimba, from mating with the farmer's 'pedigree' dog. Kevin "killed the offending dog and nearly did the same to its master [while] the bitch was rescued by [his] wife" (17) but he still intends to kill it. This aggression against animals' sexual contact, which precedes inter-racial sex among people in the novel, is a strategic way to entrench the idea of white supremacy in the White Highlands: "[a]ny interbreeding across 'racial' borders was said to threaten the assumed purity and supremacy of the 'white race' (Ifekwunigwe 9). By beginning the novel with racial sex conflicts, where 'inferior' animals dare to mate English 'thorough-bred' species, Gicheru frames the White Highlands as dangerously racialized space.

The construction of indigenous male animals as sexually aggressive, inferior and diseased, and European female animals as superior, vulnerable, and pure allegorises human gender relations between the settlers and indigenes of White Highlands. In "Intersections of 'Race,' Sex and Gender" in apartheid South Africa, Tamara Shefer discerns "the construction of the black male body as dangerous — as a sexual and violent threat particularly to white femininity" (171). This validated the violence occasioned on Black bodies by white men in the name of protecting the idolised white female. Grace Musila puts it thus: "[l]ong before the colonial project took root in Africa, the myth of the black rapist had claimed countless lives both through lynching and prosecution in the United States" (*Julie Ward Murder* 66). Therefore, the cinematic introduction to *The Mixers* where domestic animal inter-breeding is forbidden projects the contact zone as a sexualised and gendered space. Here, indigene males exist in utter cruelty of the settler who affirms his authority by his unrestricted access to

³⁶ Edward Tiryakian observes white men who married chief's daughters were keen on establishing "ties with influential Africans" (213).

indigenous women's bodies yet prohibits any intimate contact between white women and indigenous men.

The novel presents cultural brokers, in the broader “terms of facilitating linguistic transmission [...], cultural exchange [and] genetic transmission” (Samuelson 16), as existing in the in-between space of the contact zone. Victor Robinson, a liberal settler, disrupts the white supremacy project by strategically integrating with indigenes and their culture in Kuu Valley, learning their language, and conveniently marrying Lilian, a Kikuyu girl who is one of his servants on the farm, after the post-natal death of his wife Susan. This forbidden marriage exacerbates the rejection and isolation of Robinson from white circles in the White Highlands, but endears him to the Black folks who see him as part of their community. Lilian becomes a cultural translator when she evades female circumcision by taking refuge at the Catholic mission where she gets pregnant out of wedlock, before Father Antonio, an Italian priest in charge of the mission, gives her to Robinson as a domestic worker. Conversion into Christianity and evasion of female circumcision make Lilian the antithesis of Muthoni in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. Simon Gikandi, writing about Muthoni (and Waiyaki's) circumcision, underlines “the rite of circumcision [as] the essence of a Gikuyu community; it is the process by which one enters into an associative relationship with the governing *polis*” (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 55). This means the more Lilian strives towards European culture, the more she degenerates socio-culturally from her Kikuyu roots. The same applies to Robinson who is widely known as “a monkey lover” (64). Hence, the ‘mixer’ family — consisting of Robinson and Susan's son Mark, Lilian's premarital son Muthami, Robinson and Lilian's children Paulina and Lenon — also exist in the in-between space of the contact zone.

The White Highlands settlers' liberal façade is an important socio-historical aspect the novel interrogates. For instance, Robinson's seeming open-mindedness remains largely framed within the limits of the British imperial project: first, his sexual access to a Christianised Lilian and second, his friendly set ups with farm labourers, but not as equals. The logics of capitalism in intimate inter-racial relationships feature in the White Highlands through tapping into Lilian's body as a wet nurse for Mark upon Susan's death. Actually, Robinson's marriage to Lilian occurs in the form of a master's reward to her for breast-feeding his orphaned son. This reveals the irony of ‘rescuing’ her from female circumcision, Christianising her, using her as wet-nurse, and eventually, as Robinson's sexual partner. Ultimately, Lilian's breastmilk and eventually, her body, is available to the Robinson family

in ways in which a white young woman's body wouldn't be available to a Black family, in colonial Kenya, or indeed, anywhere else.

In reading apartheid narratives on race, Tamara Shefer identifies “the construction of black women as nurturant, ‘surrogate mothers’, yet also subservient” (174). In the novel, Lilian's subservience is facilitated and maintained through Christianity. Hence, the sentimental-liberal settler's choice of marrying a Christianised ‘native’ positions him as a strategic capitalist. Anna contests Lilian's act of breastfeeding Mark by claiming it is “a great violation of God's classification of His creatures” (*The Mixers* 51). In this statement, Anna satirises the parasitic nature of whiteness that survives on Black bodies' land, labour, and now, breast-milk, but which still insists on inferiorisation of the Black race. She even suggests that the Christianised subservient Lilian should seek purification from Thinua, the medicine-man, because by breastfeeding a white child, she had “offered [her] blood to the race of demons” (52). This foregrounds her resistance to the dominant system that legitimises its exploitation through Christianity: Anna “nearly became one until [she] realised that the slave master is a Christian” (52).

Therefore, the marriage between Robinson and Lilian seems a variant of conquest rather than companionship. Pratt makes this point clearer:

[s]ex and slavery are great themes of [...] sentimental dramatization of the contact zone, many of them generated by the abolitionist movement. [But] the two invariably appear together in allegorical narratives that invoke conjugal love as an alternative to enslavement and colonial domination, or as newly legitimated versions of them. (84)

Reading Robinson's narrative with Pratt's views in mind, one perceives that, after conquering the landscape, the seemingly liberal settlers who married ‘native’ women in the White Highlands were exploring new grounds of conquest. Therefore, when the squatters in the White Highlands begin a military movement to evict settlers, the Mau Mau militants kill Robinson and Lilian in what appears to be a mistake. However, the social realist tragic mode that the novel employs weaves the ‘undeserved’ deaths in the ideological standpoints of the histories of the settler economy whereby the cultural translators precipitate their own tragedies.

The Mixers also unmasks the sentimental-liberal settlers' treachery through dramatization of settlers' proxy wars as they devalue indigenes' belief systems. In the novel, Kevin and

Robinson debase Thinua, the medicine-man of the indigenes in Kuu Valley, and his office, in their rivalry. Thinua comes to the scene in the settler economy when Kevin coerces him to sabotage labour production on Robinson's farm. This result from a chain of events: Robinson intervenes in a squabble where Kevin is flogging Ngobia, as explained above; both settlers nearly engage in a gunfight but Kevin realizes he is the intruder and secretly resorts to coerce Thinua to sabotage Robinson's farm. In fear of his own life, Thinua succumbs to Kevin's demands and pronounces Robinson's farm bewitched forever because of the presence of an uncircumcised girl, Lilian. This leads to a mass exodus of workers on Robinson's farm. Robinson investigates the matter and, through his trusted Christianised servants, quickly establishes the cause of the labourers' exodus. He too coerces Thinua at gunpoint to summon back the labourers, and in their presence, reverse the 'curse' in a ritual. The mockery of this belief system is further revealed in Robinson's attitude after the 'cleansing' ritual:

Robinson noticed a general look on the workers' faces. They believed anything the witchdoctor said no matter how absurd it might look and no matter how whimsical. Today he may say the farm is permanently bewitched and yet remove the curse on the morrow; but still the workers believed him! (*The Mixers* 34)

This locates Robinson, a sentimental-liberal settler, among Europe's agents determined to erase indigenous knowledge systems. He too "belittles the whole concept of mystical power" (Mbiti 189) and, like other settlers, invents the indigenes of the White Highlands as people without religion.

The novel portrays the sentimental-liberal settler as a beneficiary of a racially regimented landscape. For instance, in the narration that shows Robinson riding "his grey horse down the intricate footpath which connected the lush white settlers' areas to the rustic native reserves of Kuu Valley" (*The Mixers* 6), the novelist is foregrounding the existence of the colonizer's and the colonial subjects' disparate worlds hence provoking reflection on how this state of affairs came to be. The previous section demonstrates that military expeditions facilitated the emptying of the land for the occupation of white settlers. But *The Mixers* calls attention to colonial policies that sustained the racialized landscape in the White Highlands. This is particularly evident in Kevin and other settlers' dissatisfactions with the Legislative Council (Legco), the parliament of the Kenya colony:

"Legco has proved to be nothing but a desert for us to cry in [...]. What good has it done us since it was established twenty years ago? It became another platform for

Asians and Africans to shout murder. Jevanjee wants his gang of coolies to have equal rights with white settlers — even to be allowed to buy land in the White Highlands. The natives complain of forced labour. [...]. You start hearing of Native Land Trust Ordinance to protect the Natives, Central Association, Kavirondo Association, [...], all big guns aimed at us. We end up being victims of the Colonial Office, the kaffirs and the coolies. Do we just sit back and watch?” (*The Mixers* 20)

These views betray the settlers’ opposition of Asian and African struggles against white dominance, which informed the formation of a racially regimented landholding in the White Highlands and the rest of the colony. The clarity of this is found in various colonial policies that were crucial to the sustainability of the White Highlands: the 1897 “Land Regulations (of the East African Protectorate)”; the 1902, then 1915 Crown Lands Ordinance; the 1923 Devonshire White Paper; the 1932 Wyn Harris Commission (Morgan 140-141). The 1897 regulations encouraged Europeans to settle in identified lands of great agricultural potential; the 1902 Crown Lands Ordinance provided grants for European settlers in the designated areas while the 1915 Ordinance prohibited the farmers from instituting non-Europeans in charge of their farms. There is also the “Colony’s 1919 soldier settlement scheme [that settled 1,031] British subjects of ‘pure European origin’ who had served in any officially recognized imperial service unit in World War I” (Duder 71). The 1923 Devonshire White Paper purported to advocate for Africans’ landholding by establishing “the paramountcy of African interests over all but the essential requirements of the minority European and Asian communities” (Harbeson 232). However, this policy “concentrated less on increasing African control over the country than on entrenching each rural racial and ethnic community, including the Europeans, in land areas reserved for their exclusive control” (Harbeson 232). The 1939 Wyn Harris Commission reiterated the 1933 Kenya Land Commission, which authoritatively advocated for “the exclusion of African right-holders in the Highlands” (Morgan 141). Notably, White Highlands were the crucible for the peasant revolution dubbed Mau Mau, which strongly challenged the legitimacy of European occupation, exploitation, and oppression of indigenous people in Kenya.

The Mixers critiques somewhat progressive settlers who selectively embraced indigenous peoples’ language, beliefs, and other cultural institutions, but stopped short of reconsidering their claim on large chunks of land and capital production. Even in the post-independence situation, Tom Mboya writes: “the European ‘liberal’ is often mistrusted, because he will not completely accept the new order” (107). Robinson is archetypal of colonial Kenya’s

'liberal' settlers. He owns a "four-thousand-acre farm [and depends on Sr. Muthami], the headman of over five hundred workers drawn from various ethnic groups" (*The Mixers* 11) to oversee maximum labour input. The labourers on Robinson's farm live in the "labour quarters, a collection of round huts with thatch roofs and white-washed walls" (11). What was a homestead before colonial contact is now a labour camp with objectified bodies, labour machines.

Further, the novel exposes Robinson's lordship over the indigenes. For instance, his farm consists of different nations of black people including pastoralists such as unnamed Maasai, Matebele, and Zulu who herd Robinson's cross-breed cattle; Nkulumana who "trekked with his master from the South" (15) and offered to Robinson as a gift from a late white soldier (shortly before he died); other labourers from varied ethnic groups in the then Kenya colony. Peter Davis in *Darkest Hollywood* writes, "[i]n taking the land, the white farmers took the Africans' livelihood, and compounded the outrage by establishing the master/servant relationship, a relationship of dependency, of vassalhood" (19). The dependency situation is what has consigned the mixed nationalities, whose squatting privileges constantly shifted, under the lordship of Robinson. The squatter system, such as the one depicted on Robinson's farm, was the initial relationship between the settlers and indigenes on the White Highlands, and lasted between 1902 and 1923. This was a tenant-landlord system in which case the squatters were agricultural producers. However, "[t]he period from 1923-29 saw a general assault by settlers on the [...] squatters' 'way of life'; this took the form of decreasing the livestock the Africans could hold on the farms and increasing their labour obligations" (Furedi 491). This reveals gradual but consistent depletion of the economic potential of indigenes for the purpose of making them dependant on the settlers.

The Mixers provides an incisive depiction of the 'liberal' settlers, showing them as patriarchs over the indigenes. While on a daily basis of inspection of his farm, Robinson interacts lovingly with his labourers who "loved and respected him as one of their own if not more. But they knew better than to cross his path when he was angry; for the humblest can be the harshest when provoked" (12). Besides, *The Mixers* portrays the liberal settlers' friendliness to indigenes as a labour strategy to increase productivity of their farms rather than their firm belief in human equality. Roger, one of the settlers on the farm gives a succinct depiction of Robinson: "He has the making of a Lord Shaftesbury or Robert Owen. The two gentlemen proved that generosity to workers resulted in higher production as opposed to oppression of

labourers” (*The Mixers* 41). The goal here was maximisation of economic exploitation³⁷. The illegitimacy of this patriarchal settler system lies in the resultant economic incongruity between the settler and the labourers. For instance, during World War II, “high world prices were bringing in unprecedented prosperity for Europeans in the Highlands” (Furedi 491) as compared to the degenerating living standards of labourers.

World War I features in the White Highlands where its occurrence invades wombs. Relating women’s reproductive bodies to women authorship, Meg Samuelson states that the womb “is made to speak both the terrible cycle of violence gripping the transitional state and messianic hopes for a redemptive future” (76). Anna, one of the domestic workers on Robinson’s farm, demonstrates that child-birth among the Kikuyu in the White Highlands’ settler economy has lost its original meaning, partly because of the world wars. She raises this at a time when Lilian, who later becomes Robinson’s convenient wife, has delivered her first-born son:

“This womb is the white man’s warehouse. Whatever came out of it was taken by the *Mzungu*. My son was born strong and healthy like your son but, perished in the war between *Mzungu* and *Mzungu* in the First World War. Another one went to look for work in Nairobi and got arrested because he didn’t have a *kipande* on his person. He died in jail because he didn’t have a piece of paper made by the *Mzungu*. We are the *Mzungu*’s property and our children will inherit our yokes unless [...] our men come out of women’s clothes and face the *Mzungu* [...]. The *Mzungu* must be chased out of the land he seized from us and pay for the blood our sons have shed because of him”.

(*The Mixers* 46)

Here, the novel expounds on the capitalist exploitation that underpinned settler colonialism in Kenya. It reveals how the *kipande* system, with which even the most seemingly liberal of the settlers was complicit, reinforces and magnifies forced labour³⁸. This is part of the larger logic of commodification of Black labour: as military labour to fight white wars; as farm labour confined in the rural farms and out of the cities which were considered whites-only spaces.

³⁷ Peter Davis mentions a similar situation: “[t]he role of ‘good’ Africans in [dark South African] films is to help whites in their exploitation of the mineral wealth, either in protecting that wealth from marauders, or in digging it out of the ground” (19).

³⁸ *Kipande* was Black people’s passbook overseen by white employers, and was made important in determining the holder’s movements in the colony. See Tiyambe Zeleza’s “Strike Movement in Colonial Kenya” (6).

Through the ‘mixer’ family, the narrator explores the segregation laws of colonial Kenya but foregrounds the limits to which a liberal settler could go in his confrontation with the unjust system. Segregation made Nairobi “the white man’s haven and the black man’s hell” (*The Mixers* 211). This historically alludes to the 1913 Public Health Ordinance devised in the pretence of protecting Europeans from ‘contagious races’³⁹. I engage more with these histories of segregation in Nairobi in Chapter Five. The ‘mixers’ family tour to colonial Nairobi exposes the indignity encased in the Public Health Ordinance. Although Robinson does his best in negotiating the city’s racialised spaces for his survival, his access to Norfolk Hotel, which was exclusively white until the rise of Mau Mau, symbolically compromises his liberalism. This is because, by dining with his friends in a space where his wife Lilian, his adopted son Muthami junior and his mixed race children are prohibited, he participates in a system that undermines multiracialism.

Furthermore, Robinson and Ngobia agree on their standpoints on the city’s toilet segregation laws but differ on the question of land. When the ‘mixers’ children go to the public lavatories, they discover their hierarchical differences — the toilet attendant directs Mark to the ‘Whites Only’ toilet, Lenon who is of ‘mixed race’ to the ‘Asians Only’ toilet, Muthami to the ‘Africans Only’. As a way of affirming difference, the segregated public lavatories differ in the degree of hygiene, the ‘Africans Only’ being the dirtiest. Like the case with sexual transgressions amongst indigenous and exotic livestock discussed earlier in this section, the novel dramatises the transgression of toilet rules through a confrontation between Muthami junior and law enforcers. Overwhelmed with the filth in the ‘Blacks Only’ toilet, Muthami junior storms into the ‘Asians Only’ toilet and relieves himself. This crime leads not only to his assault and arrest, but also to another crime when he fights the city law enforcers. Robinson expresses shock at the incident: “[i]t never occurred to me that we not only segregate our colour but our shit too. I thought shit was shit, whether black or white” (94). But segregation of shit serves an ideological purpose of mystifying whiteness, something which Ngobia, whom Muthami stumbles on in the police cell, subverts while commenting on his (Muthami junior’s) mishap:

“I used to think that the *Wazungu* did not excrete and when I learnt that they do, I thought their excreta was something special, something superior to ours. Hah! Theirs smell worse than ours on account of the garlic and onions” (100)

³⁹ See Godwin Murunga’s “Inherently Unhygienic Races” (2005).

In his efforts to release Muthami junior, Robinson learns of Ngobia who had not returned to his farm since he (Ngobia) left for World War II. But when he learns that Ngobia is on the police radar as a ‘terrorist’, a radical member of Mau Mau freedom movement, Robinson embraces police precautions against a man who grew up on his farm.

This analysis has shown that the White Highlands was a breeding ground of difference during the settler era. It unmaskes the ‘sentimental-liberal’ settler by portraying him as a calculating conqueror in the contact zone. The discriminatory histories and the land question that bedevilled the former White Highlands in Kenya are now a platform to interrogate present histories of ethnic violence in the same space. What MwangiGicheru does in this novel is reflect on the past as he imagines a new future. Writing about postcolonial thinkers who contest imperial narratives, Gurminder Bhambra states that such writers bear “witness to different pasts [though not as] passive observer[s] but [are] able to turn from interrogating the past to initiating new dialogues about that past and thus bringing into being new histories and from those histories, new presents and new futures” (Bhambra 116-117). New dialogues derivable from *The Mixers* show how various ethnic identities in the Rift Valley, and the rest of Kenya, with disparate political affiliations and economic inequalities, are traceable to colonial historical injustices.

World Wars and Trauma: Lake Victoria Basin Women Novelists’ Reflections

This section examines four women novelists’ depictions of World War I and II. Grace Ogot in her 1966 novel — *The Promised Land*, laid the foundation for revisiting the traumatic disruptions that the Luo people of the Lake Victoria basin faced in the two imperial wars. The trope of World War trauma also tellingly defines the Lake Victoria basin indigenes’ contacts with the imperialists in Marjorie Macgoye’s *The Present Moment*, Margaret Ogola’s *The River and the Source*, and Yvonne Owuor’s *Dust*. Earlier, in the first section, I showed that maritime trade defines coastal Kenya’s contacts with foreign cultures. The second and third sections above reveal that in Kenya’s hinterland, land was the major point of contestation between the Kikuyu, Nandi, and Maasai nations on the one hand, and the British, Jews, and Boers, on the other. But the Luo nation’s land had low agricultural potential; they “occupied land that the British had little need of; it was not suitable for European settlement” (A. Odhiambo, "Hegemonic Enterprises" 233). Located outside the White Highlands, the “Luo preserved their relative autonomy from the state during the colonial period [except that they] were a manual pool, categorised and labelled ‘Kavirondo labour’ at the workplaces in the

settler plantations and in the Mombasa dockyards” (A. Odhiambo, "Hegemonic Enterprises" 233).

Notably, the settler economy in Kenya quickly established networks with World War I through the 1915 “Native Followers’ Recruitment Ordinance [which] gave the government the power to conscript Africans for the carrier corps” (Savage and Munro 320). The settlers in the White Highlands lobbied for this ordinance “to allow conscription of labour for European farms” (321), something which the War council granted. At this point in history, it seems able-bodied men had two choices: to work on the European farms or be recruited in the carrier corps. The ‘Kavirondo labour’ that Atieno Odhiambo refers to was controlled more effectively in war-time through the pass-book, *Kipande*, with which the settler could punish ‘unproductive’ labourers by recommending their conscription to the war⁴⁰. This situation presented to the indigenes a contact zone that was extremely treacherous and catastrophic; it occasioned a traumatic disruption in their ways of life.

This section examines the Luo people’s encounters with imperialism through the traumatic World Wars and how women novelists’ iteration of the same have borne witness to it as they contribute to the Luo ‘ethnic memory’, and Kenyan memory by extension⁴¹. Here, the Lake Victoria Basin communities’ memorialisation of the world wars seem typical demonstrations of a defeated nation’s belief in its “cultural and moral superiority over” its conqueror (Schivelbusch 19). In essence, the novels I read here offer an opportunity to reflect on the contact zone as a space of military defeat but moral and cultural rejuvenation. I read defeat not only in the Luo people’s conscription to fight for the empire, but also in the colossal loss of able-bodied men from a relatively small community, if compared to the Kikuyu or Luhya communities in Kenya. Akiko Hashimoto in *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory and Identity in Japan* poses fundamental questions: “how do memories of national trauma remain so relevant to culture and society long after the event? Why do memories of difficult experiences endure, and even intensify despite people’s impulse to avoid remembering dreadful pasts and to move on?” (1). Indeed, the novels I study here nurture the relevance of the memories of the world wars; they contest the discarding of catastrophic memories. This is a task that is productive in a nation’s histories:

⁴⁰ See Savage and Munro (322).

⁴¹ See David Davis’ reference to African American literary works’ contribution to ‘racial memory’ of the Blacks in the face of lynching returning black soldiers (Davis 479).

[m]emories of wars, massacres, atrocities, invasions, and other instances of mass violence and death become significant referents for subsequent collective life when people choose to make them especially relevant to who they are and what it means to be a member of that society. (Hashimoto 4)

Although Hashimoto's views stem from Japan's traumatic experiences following atomic bombings, one of the most memorable spectres in the matrix of World War II, they resonate with the transnational histories of the Lake Victoria Basin communities. The novels I critique here memorialise the traumatic world wars as part of the Luo nation's consciousness. These novels engage with the memory in various times of their publications: Grace Ogot in 1966, Margaret Ogola in 1994, Marjorie Macgoye in 2005, Yvonne Owuor in 2013. This "retelling manifests an attempt to gain mastery over elusive or defeating histories and their narration" (Morgenstern 101). Furthermore, "[t]rauma and repetition compulsion ask one to think about what it means to transmit a culture, to share a story, to pass it on. Repetition constitutes and consolidates identity" (Morgenstern 103).

The previous discussion on *The Mixers* illuminated Ngobia who returns from World War II and leads a land and freedom revolution resistance movement in the White Highlands. This depiction is in tandem with what Ngugi wa Thiong'o refers to as Mau Mau's "heroic and glorious aspect [in succeeding] to drive out the Europeans, seize the government, and give back to the Kenya peasants their stolen lands and property" (*Homecoming* 28). But there are many cases of world war returnees confounded with disillusionment: "[w]recked and insane, they return in African literature to assume other identities as Sergeant Burma, Home Boy, and The Fool. They return with a pandemonium in the brain whose revolutionary possibilities are suggested, and typically mocked" (Johnson 189). This situation is archetypal of the Lake Victoria Basin literary representations of returning soldiers: they are too traumatised to lead any revolution against colonialism.

The novelists I discuss here draw from the Luo nation's traumatic memories of World War I and II. Women's authorship of these histories is productive, since it unsettles male authors' monopolisation of voicing imperial histories. More so, it transcends masculinist representations of traumatic events hence charting alternative glimpses into the contact zone. These representations elucidate "the wish to mourn losses and recover from censure; the longing to find meaning and dignity in the face of failure; [...] and the urge to minimize the event or pretend it never happened" (Hashimoto 5). By so doing, the novelists redesign as

they archive the memories of the global wars in ways that are meaningful to their societies. In World War I, the Luo people “raised half the E.A.P. (East African Protectorate) total of carriers” (Hodges 105, brackets added). Statistics show that the E.A.P. colonial office conscripted over 92, 037 able-bodied men from Nyanza region between 1914-18 (104). This was mainly because colonial military officials “regarded [Luo men] as incapable of military service [hence embarked on making them] one of the major supply for the carrier corps” (Savage and Munro 324).

Carrier corps were porters of military equipment, food, and carried out other non-combatant duties, but through dangerous terrain and poor living conditions. The military officers categorised communities such as the Nandi as warlike, hence recruited them into the combatant force in British East Africa, the King’s African Rifles (KAR). In both cases, colonialists enforced drastic methods of recruitment: raids, tricks, compulsion⁴². War officials saw compulsory recruitment of indigenes as necessary for protection of the protectorate, but the affected people thought “[t]hey were being compelled to leave their homes and families to undertake labour in a war between Europeans which they did not fully understand and the origin of which was very remote to them” (Savage and Munro 325). Unlike World War I where African soldiers and carriers alongside British allies fought Germans in the then German East Africa, present day Tanganyika, several novels ruminate on the vicious war that occurred in Burma during World War II⁴³. It is valorised that “African soldiers proved to be highly capable troops in the difficult conditions of Burma” (Morrow Jr. 20). Yet Burma remains an enduring memory in African literature because it captures the horrors of war in extreme terrains of the jungle as West and East African soldiers sacrificed their lives in the empires’ assault on the Japanese forces.

Margaret Ogola in *The River and the Source* revisits memories of World War I through the conscription and disappearance of three young men from Sakwa Village, among them Obura Kembo, the eldest son of Chief OwuorKembo and Akoko daughter of Chief Odero Gogni of Yimbo. *The River and the Source* is an epic novel steeped in Luo mythology, a genre that exhaustively engages with constructed heroic social histories of the region. Ogola uses this genre to rewrite Luo women’s histories in “the tale of Akoko, the matriarch whose unrelenting struggle against patriarchal tyranny ensures the survival of her lineage. Akoko

⁴² Among these were the Malindi night raid of Swahili young men; Nyanza administrator’s tricking of young men into station then forcibly recruiting them; and punitive expedition to coerce the Giriama to supply 1000 men for the corps (See Savage and Munro 316- 318).

⁴³ World War II was “the costliest and most extensive conflict in human history” (Morrow Jr. 12).

finds a matriarchy that stretches through her daughter Nyabera, her granddaughter Elizabeth, to her great granddaughter Veronica” (Simatei 157). The novel can also “be described as a landmark in Kenya’s postcolonial literary history, especially because of its unapologetic privileging of women and womanhood. [It tells] a symbolic narrative of struggles by women placed within different historical moments to articulate alternative ways of seeing womanhood in Kenya” (T. Odhiambo, "Writing Alternative Womanhood" 236).

The novel portrays men’s conscription in World War I and other tragedies as ways of gradual disintegration of patriarchy, a situation juxtaposed with women’s socio-economic advancement in the imagined Luo nation. In fact, it is disreputable men who trick Obura into World War I. The narrator shows how, at the beginning, the Luo nation vicariously encounters colonialism through vagrants: a “footloose wanderer by the name of Ambere K’ongoso who went as mysteriously as he came had brought stories of *Joroche*, white skinned people who now ruled most of the land. Their magic was incomprehensible for they could kill with a mere puff of smoke and a bang from something that resembled a pipe” (Ogola 48). Ambere, who recruits Nyaroche Silwal in his wanderings, also narrates to his listeners about vehicles and money, things which could be found in the White Highlands. Whiteness, the rifle, power of mobility embodied in vehicles, and the tendency to put a price on everything feature here as ingredients as well as catastrophic allures of Empire. Despite Chief Owuor Kembo warning Ambere and Nyaroche against filling Obura’s “head with idiotic ideas about seeing the world” (50), the three escape to a train station in Gem where they are recruited into the King’s African Rifles and taken to fight German forces in Tanganyika. Only Nyaroche survives, but “[h]e lost a leg in the war and is now a beggar in the great market of Kisuma” (61).

Nyaroche’s sorry state as a beggar, yet a former soldier in the King’s African Rifle, suggests the disposability of Black lives during the imperial war. This is more evident when one understands rewards such as land extended to European soldiers after WWI through the 1919 soldier settlement scheme (Duder 70-71) mentioned in the preceding section. For the bereaved Akoko and Owuor, colonial messengers offer them a bracelet with Obura’s name: “OWUOR, OBURA KEMBO: KAR MIA 1918” (65). This bracelet is supposed to be an honour to the deceased who served in the King’s African Rifles and who is missing in action by 1918. Yet this gesture is meaningless to the grieving family. The ostensible military acknowledgement encased in the bracelet is irrelevant since it memorialises a war that was of no honour or relevance to the Luo nation.

Since the loss of an heir to the chieftain is enormous especially considering that affected communities did not identify with the war, Chief OwuorKembo's act of hurling away the bracelet in the face of the colonial government's agents is not only suggestive of resistance against the logics of the imperial war, but also a symbolic attempt to discard memory. Hence, Nyabera, sister to the deceased Obura, participates in keeping Obura's memory alive when she discreetly retrieves the hurled bracelet, buries it for the long mourning period, and later "unearthed it from where she had buried it and took to wearing it on her arm along with her bangles [even though] some markson it held no meaning for her" (65). The unintelligible but inerasable inscriptions are emblematic of the senselessness of the imperial war that would be passed from one generation to the next. Although the bracelet is worn with other bangles; it is more than an adornment: it is definitive of Nyabera's identity with the loss.

Through the epic genre that archives a traumatic rupture in the histories of the Luo people, especially by foregrounding the tragic loss of the chief's son, the novel establishes the fact that contact with the imperial powers hacked at the core of the Luo people's sovereignty. Reconstruction of the memory is an attempt to mourn a societal injury, which cannot be wished away.

Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land* is a tragic novel that revisits Luo people's histories of migration to Mwanza region of Tanganyika during the British colonial era in Kenya. The tragic genre seems effective in advocating for Luo nationalism as it warns against migrations to distant regions removed from ancestral ties. The genre also participates in re-membering World War II's disruption of the Lake Victoria basin's social fabric. *The Promised Land* has been described as "a pioneer African feminist novel" and Africa's "mother text" (*Contemporary African Literature* 58)⁴⁴. In it, Ochola the son of Owiti Kasero marries Nyapol and is persuaded by his neighbour Ochwonyo's visitors to migrate to Tanganyika to occupy "wide expanses [of] virgin territory" (Ogot 6). But on migrating to Mwanza and then Musoma, where he economically flourishes, Ochola encounters resistance from a Tanganyika indigene, a Nyamwezi man who reminds him that Musoma was not a virgin land, and uses magical powers to eventually drive Ochola back to Seme in Kisumu. In reference to this 'occupation' of Nyamwezi territory, Stratton writes that Ogot "discredits Ochola by representing Luo migration as a form of colonization analogous to the British form in its

44 It is "the first Kenyan novel to feature a complex female character and the first to offer a fully sympathetic portrayal of women's concerns" (Kurtz *Urban Obsessions* 133). See also "Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land* as a Pioneer Feminist Text" (A. Wanjala 44).

underlying ideology and in the consequences it has for the people indigenous to that place of settlement” (*Contemporary African Literature* 70-71).

In this text, I focus on one incident that Ochola and Nyapol encounter on their way to Musoma, which evokes memories of World War II. While on a steamer to Tanganyika, a harpistsings emotionally in remembrance of the Luo men who had died in Burma:

Listen, Sons of Ramogi, listen! / [...]. It was a day like this. / The sun was warm and the fields were red with millet. / [...]. The brides were ripe for marriage. / Then the hour struck. / It was the year 1939. / The chief’s drum throbbed. / The people gathered and the chief spoke to them. / Hear, all of you, Sons of Ramogi. /The white man is at war with his brother across the seas. / Orders have been forced down my throat. /Let your people go across the seas to help me fight my enemy. / [...] Opiyo went. Adhiambo was left behind heavy with a child, their first child. / Oigo went, he left a bride weeping. / Nyanyiwa went. He was strong and brave, he had paid dowry but his bride had not come to him. / Sigana went, his children clung to him weeping. /He soothed them, Papa will come home after the white man’s war. (39)

This portrays Luo men who, in their submission to the imperial orders conveyed through the chief, surrender themselves to be sacrificed in an imperial war. This presents histories of a predatory contact zone. This harpist’s war dirge also foregrounds cultural disruption of the imperial war. The millet harvest season was also the Luo people’s marriage season, but instead, colonial conscription of able-bodied men disrupts this social order. More so, the colonial authority deals a blow to the Luo nation’s administrative authority by forcing the chief to supply Empire with his subjects⁴⁵. This is problematic to a society where, as Margaret Ogola writes in *The River and the Source*, “people held a good chief in high esteem, [one who] was ready to listen to their problems at any time of day or night. [The chief] also led them (not sent them) to battle, or if he was too old, his eldest son” (Ogola 57, original brackets).

Further, the harpist expresses a deep sense of collective loss to the indigenous communities of Lake Victoria basin, which, like Gambian poet Lenrie Peters in *Satelites*, “pronounces a requiem and raises a memorial to the victims of war — those who died” (Johnson 192):

⁴⁵ According to Killingray and Mathews, “[c]hiefs forced to act as Government agents [were] faced with a choice of obeying the authorities while losing the respect of their people which, consequently, contributed to the weakening of the system of indirect rule” (21).

But they never came back. / The white man's battle swallowed them up. /The Kipande they had carried was returned — but they remained. / They remained in the land where there was no sunshine nor the warmth of a woman nor the cry of a child. / Sleep on, sons of the soil. Sleep on. / You were taken from us young and strong. (40)

Here, the novel portrays a broken society whose traditional familial bonds are disintegrating in a wave of migrations to Tanganyika, a situation reminiscent of World War I and II's conscriptions. The harpist's performance in the steamer seems a strategic way of mourning on vessels that were instrumental in transporting away Luo men to war: the steamer, the train, and trucks. The performance shows that the Lake Victoria Basin communities are traumatised, any mass movement of people in vessels of European origin rekindle memories of the wars. Akiko Hashimoto writes that "cultures remembering negative historical events are driven to *overcome* the emotions and sentiments that accompany them [as] an ongoing project not only to refashion memories but also to mend a broken society" (Hashimoto 5, original emphasis). The performance in the steamer is aimed at mending a society whose traumatic memories are still fresh.

The harpist demonstrates his closeness to the 'rawness' (Woods 19) of World War II when he "sighed and wept as he played the last notes [and] people wept with him [for he] lost two brothers and a cousin [and is aware of] hundreds of Luo men who went to Burma [but] never came back home" (40). The *kipande* that returns from the battlefield, in replacement to the bodies of the soldiers, memorialises the bondage of Black bodies to imperialism. Hence, while Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes triumphantly of the "African writer who emerged after the Second World War", and who went "through three decisive decades which also mark three nodal stages in his growth", that is, "the age of the anti-colonial struggle; the age of independence; and the age of neo-colonialism", and proceeds to list victorious revolutions across the world including the 1949 Chinese Revolution, the 1947 independence dawn of India, Cuban revolution against Batista (*Moving the Centre* 60), women writers such as Grace Ogot were reflecting more on the heavy cost of the war, especially on disposable lives such as those of the Luo nation, than, say, the revolutionary spirit that World War II occasioned.

I now focus on reconstructions of World War II in Marjorie Macgoye's *The Present Moment*. This is a historical novel that depicts social histories of women with diverse experiences of different eras of Kenyan histories: from the 1922 Harry Thuku strike in Nairobi, the 1940s Mombasa dockworkers' strikes, to the 1982 Kenya Air Force abortive coup d'état. The novel

is set in Nairobi in the Refuge, an imaginary home for elderly women run by a Christian organisation. The women in the Refuge hail from various communities of Kenya, and they spend their time reflecting on their lives, especially on how they ended up destitute hence necessitating the Refuge's intervention. The lives of these women are themselves archives of Kenya's histories, especially because these women's bodies bear markers of societal or state oppression. Roger Kurtz comments that

The Present Moment is arguably [Macgoye's] most accomplished in its craft and scope, since it deploys a more technically demanding structure, it features a less pragmatic and more personal view of the interaction of the individual and the nation, and it represents a further step in the development of Macgoye's narrative repertoire by moving beyond the Luo experience to include representatives of other Kenyan communities in major roles. ("Historical Perspective" 40)

Through the recollections of Rahel, a Luo widow who is among elderly women residing at the Refuge, Macgoye brings to life soldiers who returned alive from Burma. Rahel's father fought in World War I in Tanganyika, her brother and husband fight in World War II. She recollects overwhelming traumatic transformations on her husband's life after the war. He is unwilling to speak about the battlefields in Somaliland, in India, in Burma because, as he asserts, "[t]hese are not women's matters" (*Present Moment* 11). But when he is provoked by a neighbour, who insists on revealing to him that one of the children born when he was in the war is not his, the ex-soldier counters the 'informant' by regurgitating the horrendous nature of the war in Burma. His words, which are rare to come by, demonstrate the absurdity of the imperial wars:

"Have you ever seen a woman with a big belly and her head shot off? [...]. You, who love to slither and slide, have you ever marked a trail by counting the dead men near the path, and picked up their weapons to use against their brothers as you go forward? [I]n a real war, that aims to destroy rather than get, every weapon is a weapon pleasing to war, and every fighter is a sacrifice to war". (*Present Moment* 12-13)

Further, when his daughters and son keep asking him what gifts he brought them from the war, Rahel's husband responds:

"I have come back to you. No one can ask for more than that." Later that day he called Vitalis and showed him the big scar on his left thigh, and said to him, "This is

the best present you can get in a war. Do you know that? It is worth two weeks in bed and four weeks of not being directly shot at. It is therefore a very valuable experience". (12)

The war remains incomprehensible to Rahel's husband even after its closure. By telling his children that his return is the greatest gift to them, the returnee soldier offers a glimpse into the wanton wastage of life. His big scar can also be symbolic of a nation scarred by imperial wars. Writing about depictions of the world wars in African literature, Lemuel Johnson posits, "[t]he absurdity and the logic of Empire and War [...] played out against the backdrop of 'native' incomprehension and participation and misery" (178). To the Luo community, the killing of pregnant women and using weapons of fallen enemy soldiers in war are not only taboo but also absurd. As Rahel's husband discovers in WW II, the unfamiliar in Luo community is celebrated in the battlegrounds of Burma. These narrated experiences of Lake Victoria Basin indigenes with empire show the contact zone as a space where transgression of a people's norms and taboos is predominant.

Lastly, I look at Yvonne Owuor's *Dust*, which invokes memories of World War II in a way that draws parallels with the Mau Mau war. This historical novel can be read as an autopsy of Kenya's 2007/2008 Post-Election Violence (PEV): it examines historical injustices during Kenya's colonial and post-colonial periods, and draws from violent state connivances against the populace through ethnic mobilisations and/ or ethnic cleansing to ascertain how deep-seated the PEV was. In pursuit of his father and brother who went to Burma, orphaned Nyipir Oganda escapes abuse from his uncle and ends up in a Mau Mau counter-insurgency camp where he becomes an informer, later a security agent rising in ranks. He later settles in North Eastern Kenya, marries Akai-Ma, and gets Odidi and Ajany. I offer more detailed analysis of this novel in Chapter Two with particular interest in the Mau Mau war, and Nyipir's son's activism against corruption. Here, I look at how *Dust* connects Nyipir's violent histories to World War II. Owuor writes, "able-bodied men in Nyanza were summoned for King George's war by persuasion of the paramount chief; [t]he steam train taking men to foreign battlefields stopped in Kisumu" (Owuor 155) and families were torn apart. From his childhood, "Nyipir memorized journeys his brother and father took: Madagascar, to fight against Vichy France. Back to Kenya. Mombasa to Burma and the 1944 Monsoon Campaign" (155).

The novel reflects on the war's lasting impact on the Lake Victoria Basin communities: it shattered people's genealogies. Nyipir's family in Wuoth Ogik, Northern Kenya, for instance, cannot trace their lineage to the Lake Victoria Basin since his father and brother died in the war and close relatives dispossessed him before disowning him. Even though Nyipir's presence in the hostile North Eastern region is a consequence of the Kenyatta regime's persecution of the Luo people, World War II appears to have broken up his geneology. His children struggle to trace their origins:

They lived in the absence of elders afflicted with persistent memories: no one to tell the children how *it* had been, what it meant, how *it* must be seen, or even what *it* was. Because of this, they re-created myths of beginnings. "The first Oganda was spoken into existence by flame," Odidi once told Ajany. She believed him. (7, original emphases)

Here, I read *it* as a reference to history: the events that defined the Luo community in general, events that shaped Nyipir's life, i.e. World War II, Mau Mau war, post-independent state violence and victimisation of particular communities in Kenya. Hence, the post-independent generation invent their own genealogies. This shows a generation that has been stripped of the treasures of history: their very origins. It is for this purpose that *Dust* proceeds to demonstrate how history unfolded, how World War II reduced communities into scattered fragments.

Baba Jimmy, a World War II veteran who returned with war medals, a Spanish guitar, and a maimed body, tells "Nyipir to direct his questions to God" (155) when Nyipir asks about his missing kin. On noticing Nyipir's endangered existence at the uncle's home, Baba Jimmy takes Nyipir to a Catholic mission school and advises him never to return to Kisumu. The war had fostered comradeship between Baba Jimmy and the departed Luo soldiers, he therefore takes it as his responsibility to save the orphaned boy from, as he analogises, a greedy hyena who swallows his brother's home and even "tries to swallow the brother's son, except this son was bigger than the hyena's mouth" (156). At this point, Nyipir is the only survivor in an adopted home where he is mistreated and overworked, his young sister Akoth had died of hunger and neglect, his mother too had died of a snake-bite.

The novel highlights these incidents to underscore the trials that the war veterans' orphaned children went through. Years after World War II, during the PEV, Nyipir tells his daughter, Ajany, "Our people. Went for King George's war. Didn't come back" (69). The fragmented

sentences here underscore the fragmenting impact of the imperial war on the Luo people. According to Morgenstern, “trauma as a force [...] is not meaningfully experienced: to be traumatized is to be haunted by the literality of events” (Morgenstern 103). This is derivable from Nyipir’s sentiment as well as in the inscriptions on Nyabera’s bracelet concerning Obura’s service in the King’s African Rifles. Moreover, this outlines the emergence of fragmented, displaced families such as Nyipir’s. Through the depiction of an unprecedented war that seems to have escaped the world’s restitution to affected communities, Owuor charts the Luo people’s traumatic encounters with Europe as she weaves linkages of the largescale violence with Mau Mau, Shifta war⁴⁶, and later, PEV.

Baba Jimmy signifies the irony of the wars’ honour to the Lake Victoria Basin war veterans. Through his brief biography that *Dust* flips through, we encounter defeat and despair. He returns from the war, but he remains cut off from the cultural mainstream in the Luo community. The narrator points out:

[c]hanged men like Baba Jimmy, who brought a Spanish guitar that he plucked like the *nyatiti*. Baba Jimmy was a giant with a hoarse, tearing voice, a descendant of musicians who make the lyre weep. Gangrene had eaten Baba Jimmy’s toes during the war, and now he hobbled. He never explained why his body lurched in twisted angles as he moved. (155)

Baba Jimmy is changed because he has forsaken his culture: in the place of the *nyatiti*, he plays a Spanish guitar. Gangrene infestation symbolises abandonment: the empire he fought for on the frontlines disowned him. Even a child can read Baba Jimmy’s sorrow since a young Nyipir could hear “the condensed sadness in Baba Jimmy’s voice, the source of music” (156). Furthermore, Baba Jimmy’s war medals could awe no one else except an orphaned child: “Nyipir walked backward, ahead of Baba Jimmy, staring at the gleaming medals” (157). These depictions of a World War returnee demonstrate that the veterans were a miserable, orphaned lot. By conscripting them in the war, the empire took away their physical, socio-cultural, economic, and even political lives.

⁴⁶ The Kenya Army enforced the Shifta war counter-insurgency through “mass killings of civilians, [...],large-scale confiscation of livestock belonging to civilians, [...],shooting of especially camels [which the army believed] were used by the Shifta to transport guns and other supplies, [establishment of] restricted or protected villages or camps in which residents of Northern Kenya were essentially detained and their movement severely restricted (TJRC Kenya 12-13). Mau Mau counter-insurgency used similar methods.

This section has shown the literary portraits of the devastation the world wars visited upon the Luo nation through conscription of most able-bodied men. The wars also affected the community's socio-cultural systems. The women novelists reflecting upon the war show the resultant disillusionment of the wars on the affected families. Whereas male novelists would portray war survivors as macho and pro-independence revolutionists, as the case with Mwangi Gicheru's *Ngobia*, female novelists engage with the dehumanising nature of such a war. This serves to condemn violence in the Kenyan nation since it disrupts heroic portrayals of the imperial wars as well as militant liberation campaigns such as Mau Mau.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a survey of representations of Kenya's transnational histories from coastal, central, Rift Valley, and western regions of Kenya. These contact histories contribute to the mapping of Kenya's transnational histories. From the coastal region, Rocha Chimera rewrites the ancient Swahili histories by centring the Swahili in the stone cities. Literary engagements with the question of land in Rift Valley and central Kenya also subvert Empire's othering of indigenes in contact zones. In western Kenya, especially from the Lake Victoria Basin, women novelists revisit traumatic memories of world wars as they archive imperial atrocities in the region. The analysis in this chapter demonstrates the destabilisation of African communities occasioned by Arab, Portuguese, and British cultural and capitalist invasions. It also redeems images of African communities, which were distorted through European logics of mapping Africa and other contact zones. The imperial atrocities archived here are foundational to the understanding of Kenya's troubled post-independence realities discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three

Literary Reconfigurations of Kenya's State Histories

Introduction

This chapter explores selected Kenyan novels' reconfigurations of state histories through three regimes: Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978), Daniel arap Moi (1978-2002), and Mwai Kibaki (2002-2013). Across its first fifty years, the post-independence Kenyan state has been largely repressive, and portrayed as an "assassin state" (Musila, *Julie Ward Murder* 31) and as oscillating "between hope and despair" (Branch, *Hope and Despair*). Maina wa Kinyatti sees Moi's regime as the "reign of terror" (1). In an indicting examination of the state's criminalisation of political dissent, Atieno Odhiambo argues that Kenya's "political arena has been a contested terrain, even if the same arena has been shrinking. The instrumentality for depoliticization has been the state, while its justifying ideology has been order" (A. Odhiambo, "Democracy and Ideology of Order" 189). The state's excesses can be seen in the sense in which "[t]he people are perceived as a danger to order because they insist that there ought to be accountability in society" (189). This is the point of divergence between the Kenyan state and the public. The novels I study here present transformative dissenting voices against various forms of state malpractices.

Although shielded by the euphoria for independence and political rhetoric on the public's indebtedness to heroes of freedom, Jomo Kenyatta's regime laid the foundation for the ever-mutating ethnicity and corruption that haunts every aspect of Kenyan society. Yet, due to its excesses and longevity in power, the Moi regime features more prominently in critiques of state repression than the Kenyatta and Kibaki regimes. In a critique of Kyalo Wamitila's play *Wingu la Kupita* (1999), "A Passing Cloud", which satirises disillusioned individuals who thought Moi's regime would be shortlived, Tirop Simatei writes:

[i]f Moi's regime was expected to last shortly and impact lightly like a cloud that blocks the sunshine only briefly before it passes over, then its persistence throws into disarray — theoretically, at least — the insights that the metaphor of the passing cloud is meant to encapsulate. ("Politics and Gender in Kiswahili Drama" 113)

Moi's regime is conspicuous because, "[a]lthough Moi inherited both the infrastructure of repressive state security and the culture of selective distribution of state resources, his regime is perhaps the one that perfected the culture of selective paternalism" (Musila, "Phallocracies and Gynocratic Transgressions" 48). This is a regime that normalised state violence in the

forms of torture, assassinations, and state ratified militia groups' coercion of the public's political alignment with the state (Musila, "Phallocracies and Gynocratic Transgressions" 49). The Kibaki regime was envisioned as an alternative regime: his inaugural speech promised an end to the ineptitude of the presidency and a radical transformation of the government. However, less than two years into the presidency, he had retrogressed into the very malpractices he had condemned upon assuming power. This problematic context informs incisive literary engagements with the Kenyan state.

Kenyan novels provide insightful lenses with which to make sense of Kenya's state histories. As Rickie Sollinger *et al* in *Telling Stories to Change the World* observe, "people create narratives that identify obstacles to freedom, to health, to safety, to dignity. In response to the obstacles, these [people] develop 'stories,' vehicles for voices and visions that implicitly or explicitly claim a better world" (5). The novels challenge totalitarian governance, which constitutes assassinations, criminalisation of dissent, normalisation of corruption and impunity. MSC Okolo proposes the capabilities of literary writers to "offer critical appraisal of the existing political situation and in this way [...] mould or redirect the actions of society, its beliefs and values [hence] influence people's perception about politics and about the best means of effecting political change" (Okolo 1). This centrally positions the novel in the political theatre. The mission of the Kenyan political novel is to reveal state agents' malpractices and societal complicity, factors that hinder the attainment of a transformed society where values such as human rights, democracy, justice, and accountability are upheld.

In a compelling review of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Larry Diamond argues that the novel not only portrays "the pervasive corruption of power" but also unveils "a chilling measure of anticipation and forewarning of the dangers of unaccountable and repressive power" (435). The novel dramatises political events as it invites the reader to evaluate each participant's role towards the degeneration of salient visions. Because writers respond to shifting political climates accordingly, literary depictions of governance also engage with arising obstacles to a nation's socio-political progress. Ngugi wa Thiong'o believes that a writer "responds, with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of a sensitive needle, he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society" (*Homecoming* 47). Due to the writers' various sensibilities to society, and the ways in which the Kenyan state responds differently to the needs of different communities in different regions, a reading of several authors promises "a vast panorama of the Kenyan society, consisting of social reality

highlighted in each of the [novels]” (Rinkanya 30). This chapter reads Yvonne Owuor’s *Dust*, Mwenda Mbatiah’s *Wimbo Mpya*, “A New Song”, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow*, and Katama Mkangi’s *Walenisi*, “Those-Are-Us”, as visionary and critical voices that speak to Kenya’s pasts, presents, and futures.

The novels are critiqued in four different sections. The first section focuses on representations of the Mau Mau freedom movement and its relationship to different regimes of the Kenyan state. This freedom movement enabled the reformulation of the colonial declaration that Kenya was “a white man’s country” (A. Odhiambo, “Hegemonic Enterprises” 236). But in post-independence Kenya, Mau Mau memory became not only a basis for legitimising exclusionary entitlement to state resources and power, but also reincarnated various forms of state violence. Owuor’s *Dust* engages with the trauma of Mau Mau liberation war, and ponders on how its valorisation has hampered national unity in Kenya. The novel’s unapologetic portrayals of Mau Mau war as “an intra-Gikuyu civil war” (A. Odhiambo, “Hegemonic Enterprises” 236) seems to locate origins of ethnic and state violence in Kenya in the uncritical perpetuation of Mau Mau memory. On the other hand, Mwenda Mbatiah’s *Wimbo Mpya* engages with Mau Mau fighters’ plight after independence; and contests the ethnicisation of Mau Mau memory mostly attributed to the Kikuyu in literary and public memory. Mbatiah shows that Meru and Embu people actively participated in the Mau Mau liberation war, and the building of post-independence Kenya. Most communities’ contest for Mau Mau memory is motivated by non-Kikuyu ethnic groups’ desires for state recognition in resource and power distribution. But Mbatiah’s *Wimbo Mpya* appeals for a new order where citizens’ selfless contribution to the country is prized more than the other way round.

In the second section, I critique sycophancy in postcolonial Kenya as represented in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow*. The section shows how sycophancy interlinks with histories of assassinations in Kenya, especially during the Moi regime. The analysis shows that sycophancy in a tyrannical state is a brutal trap since it provides illusionary political powers to sycophants who eventually fall victim to the systems they serve. In his earlier fictional works, Ngugi “privileges the history of the subaltern” (Ogude 86). But in *Wizard of the Crow*, he foregrounds “the ruling elite, exposing their infighting, insecurities, paranoia, and fear” (Colson 134). The incisive critiques of the Ruler and his henchmen unmask the hollowness and monstrosity of power in a morally bankrupt dictatorial state. The key issue in this section is the reading of Kenya’s sycophantic political class as caricatures of poor

governance, but also as an illegitimate group whose powers can be disrupted by visionary citizenry.

The third section analyses how Katama Mkangi in *Walenisi* taps in the magical realism mode as he employs martyrdom to subvert state injustices against individuals who advocate for good governance. The analysis shows that martyrdom is an ideological strategy employed in subversion of repressive states' exercise of power over life through capital punishment. Such states use capital punishment to coerce subjects to submit to policies or executive orders that are, in many cases, oppressive and exploitative to the wider public. State execution of political dissidents can be understood through Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault's reflections on sovereign power and bio-political power. On sovereign power, Anthony Giddens observes that "many traditional rulers have possessed 'complete' power over their subjects, in the sense that those subjects are supposed to obey their every command 'under pain of death'" (10). For instance, "one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power," writes Michel Foucault, "was the right to decide life and death. [But this] power of life and death was not an absolute privilege: it was conditioned by the defense of the sovereign and his own survival" (135). Reflecting on bio-political power, Foucault asserts that "power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population" (137).

So, in order to persuade citizens to embrace the murderous perversity of the state, death sentences are sustained by "invoking less the enormity of the crime itself than the monstrosity of the criminal, his incorrigibility, and the safeguard of society" (Foucault 138). In light of Giddens' view, the ruler administers death when demanding compliance to his authority. Foucault, on the other hand, shows that the ruler administers death on the claim of eliminating an existential threat against, first and foremost, his life and power, and then that of the entire society under his reign. However, in the African context where taboos and other social injunctions generally informed decisions, most leaders did not enjoy the right over life. Jomo Kenyatta argues that murder was not tolerated in Gikuyu society — the council of elders "was not concerned with the motive of the crime or the way in which the crime was committed, but with the fact that one man had taken another man's life" (227). Even though this claim was disrupted by the Mau Mau war, governance through Kikuyu council of elders did not approve the right over life. The section critiques state executions portrayed in *Walenisi* based on the Kenyan state's violent histories against political dissidents. Through

the spectre of capital punishment, the novel invites reflections on the state of affairs in a dictatorial polity.

In the final part, the chapter examines the figure of whistle-blower, which is a new way of confronting state corruption. This figure enables a critical engagement with actual mega corruption scandals, especially Goldenberg and Anglo-Leasing, and the fate of those who expose them. Briefly, Goldenberg was a mega corruption scheme formed on the pretext of “bonus payment and export credit schemes for the benefit of the company’s owners” (Branch *Hope and Despair* 219). But through it, top government officials conspired with rich businessmen, Kamlesh Pattni and James Kinyotu, to swindle over a billion dollars of the public coffers by the end of 1992. During the Kibaki regime, whistle-blower John Githongo exposed “a series of suspect deals involving huge sums of public money [estimated to be over \$ 1 billion] paid to fictitious companies, including Anglo Leasing” (Branch, *Hope and Despair* 253) with the full knowledge of the president. Following threats to his life, Githongo fled into exile in 2005 for “three years in Oxford” (Branch, *Hope and Despair* 254). Further, Wangari Maathai’s activism against the Moi government’s attempts to construct a sixty-storey building in Uhuru Park, and palatial residential houses in Karura Forest speak to the same histories which the whistle-blower figure helps explore.

Overall, this chapter critiques represented state injustices to particular individuals and communities. The chapter illuminates legacies of fictional individuals who confront state malpractices and link them to actual historical personages in Kenyan histories.

Mau Mau and Jomo Kenyatta’s Regime: *Wimbo Mpya* (2004) and *Dust* (2013)

David Maughan-Brown in *Land, Freedom and Fiction* discusses novels that approach Mau Mau from different ideological lenses. He analyses settler novelists such as Robert Ruark and Elizabeth Huxley whose works are conscious “vehicles — for propagandising [...] the settler view of Mau Mau” (Maughan-Brown 108), and freedom novels of Meja Mwangi, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and Charles Mangua which attempt to provide “a positive image of forest fighters and a negative image of colonial forces” (209). Settler fiction on Mau Mau sought to legitimise colonial rule and settler economy, while freedom novels aimed at redeeming the freedom fighters from colonial misrepresentations. The latter can be seen in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s belief that “[t]o most Africans, Mau Mau [...] was a heroic and glorious aspect of that mainstream. The basic objectives of Mau Mau revolutionaries were to drive out

Europeans, seize the government, and give back to the Kenya peasants their stolen lands and property” (*Homecoming* 28).

This section reads novelists’ engagements with Mau Mau and its relationship to the post-independence Kenyan state in *Wimbo Mpya* and in *Dust* four and five decades after independence, respectively. Mbatiah’s *Wimbo Mpya* revisits the marginalised Mau Mau contributions of the Meru and Embu as it chastises state neglect of the freedom fighters. On the other hand, Owuor’s *Dust* problematises Mau Mau by tracing the post-independence state’s violence to the insurgency and counter-insurgency. While *Wimbo Mpya* is interested in paying tribute to the forest fighters and showing how much post-independence Kenya is indebted to their sacrifices besides historicising the Meru and Embu participation in the liberation war, *Dust* questions Mau Mau’s heroic myth as it invites reflection on the movement’s reincarnations in post-independence state violence manifest, for example, in ethnic cleansings and the Shifta war⁴⁷.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o sees Mau Mau “as a cultural, political and economic expression of the African peasant masses [...] in its revolutionary context” (*Homecoming* 30). One of the Mau Mau detainees, Maina wa Kinyatti, believes that it was the Mau Mau fighters “who made our country honored in the progressive world through their determination, courage and great sacrifice” (xxvi). But the post-independence state held different views. In Jomo Kenyatta’s words, “Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again” (*Suffering Without Bitterness* 80). This section’s argument is that Mau Mau narratives not only expose contestations of national identity, but also unmask ironies of the Kenyan state that violently solicits the public’s subservience.

Wimbo Mpya can be read as a response to novels that privilege Kikuyu participation in the quest for Kenya’s liberation while excluding the Meru and Embu people who were similarly profiled during the State of Emergency⁴⁸. Yet, while it includes the Meru and the Embu to the memories of liberation struggles, it excludes other communities’ struggles such as the Nandi’s discussed in Chapter One. In a critique of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s selective historicisation of the Kenyan nation, Jairus Omuteche contends that “hegemonic historical remembering has systematically undermined the multiplicity of Kenya’s historical experiences during the colonial displacements and anti-colonial nationalism across the

⁴⁷ I offer details about this below.

⁴⁸ The Mau Mau counter-insurgency launched Operation Anvil in 1954 in Nairobi, forcibly removing the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru from the city (A. Odhiambo, “Contours of Leisure in Nairobi, 1946–63” 254).

country” (Omutече 108). Hence, a reading of various novels memorialising different communities’ struggles against colonialism disrupts the hegemony constructed by Ngugi and other novelists on Mau Mau. Published in 2004, *Wimbo Mpya* enters the terrain of Kenya’s literary histories with the author’s critical understanding of the contested re-membering of Kenya. Mbatiah’s reconfiguration of pertinent memories of the Meru and Embu peoples’ anti-colonial campaign can be well grasped in Tirop Simatei’s view that “African novelists do conceive themselves as their nation’s conscience” (*The Novel and Politics* 9). Furthermore, Peter Wekesa’s perspective that the creation of new narratives from memory “is not the designation of certain versions as erroneous and the upholding of others as factual and correct, but rather to appreciate that memory work can never be total or complete” (58) invigorates Mbatiah’s exercise. This novel demonstrates ways in which communities make sense of their traumatic pasts.

The novel uses an epic form that borrows from Meru people’s mythology. This is a pattern common in Kiswahili novels. As discussed in Chapter One, Rocha Chimera employs a similar pattern in *Siri Sirini* when he invokes the memories of Fumo Liyongo. Mbatiah, himself a Meru, invokes a Meru legendary tale of Kamaangura whose extra-ordinary military skills set him apart in the society, especially when he single-handedly rescues the Meru people’s thousands of cattle rustled by the Mianzi, a warrior community. This feat is achieved after *Njuri Ncheke*, the Meru community’s governing council of elders, deliberate on the danger the Mianzi pose to the Meru people and decide to employ the supernatural gifts of Kamaangura. Here, the narrator shows the centrality of the council of elders in the governance of the Meru people in the pre-colonial era. This council proves productive in handling the community’s Mau Mau veterans’ grievances against the post-independent state. More so, the Kiswahili novels’ backward glance to communities’ cultural institutions serves a decolonial function.

The narrator traces the protagonist Meja Marete’s genealogy to Kamaangura, suggesting Mau Mau heroes’ redemption of the Kenyan society’s stolen treasures — freedom and land. Through revisiting forest combat histories, *Wimbo Mpya* illustrates the hardships and sacrifices of the Mau Mau fighters. Most memorable of this is the 1952-1956 season of “Gharika la Damu” (7) “the Flood of Blood”, the peak of military contact between Mau Mau and the King’s African Rifles. In one incident, Meja Marete’s troops ambush forces on transit, kill hundreds of enemy soldiers and loot weapons, but hours later, fighter jets launch a retaliatory offensive causing major casualties among them. Apart from warfare sacrifices and

betrayals, the novel revisits the post-independence state's neglect of the freedom fighters; foregrounding the illegitimacy of loyalists' socioeconomic prosperity represented in Marete's neighbour M'Keambati, his son Nthambori, and daughter Miriamu.

Wimbo Mpya invokes Harambee, Jomo Kenyatta's rallying call and motto that he proclaimed in a swearing-in ceremony on 1st June 1963, upon attainment of Kenya's internal self-governance:

[a]s we participate in pomp and circumstance, and as we make merry at this time, remember this: we are relaxing before the toil that is to come. We must work harder to fight our enemies — ignorance, sickness and poverty. I therefore give you the call: HARAMBEE! Let us all work together for our country, Kenya. (*Harambee!* 7 original emphasis).

To Kenyatta, Harambee represented Kenya's solution to the "challenge of the future" (*Harambee!* 13). *Wimbo Mpya* is a title that implies erasure of an old song. The old song that entailed demand for land and freedom portended some disaster to Kenyatta's regime. Land was the colonised people's symbol of socio-economic progress and the major drive for the liberation war. The new post-independence state seemed to counter the old song with its emphasis on "uhuru na kazi," "freedom and work" that was the slogan of the ruling party KANU (Kenya African National Union). But the slogan seemed inappropriate because the impoverished and unemployed majority, especially in the urban centres, could see through the pervasive economic inequalities. They therefore reformulated the slogan to "uhuru na taabu" (freedom and suffering). [...]. Here, then, was a clear statement of the demand for redistributive politics" (*Hope and Despair*, 35, original brackets). Further, the Kenyatta state thwarted peasants' aspirations to landholding by emphasising "privileged purchase of land and transfer to those who had the ability to pay" (Kanyinga 332). As a pre-condition to independence, the British Empire "required Kenyatta and his followers to compromise on the historic nationalist principle that Europeans had no just claim to the land they were about to try to sell" (Harbeson 244). This was reinforced by appeals to honour title deeds and private property, which ostensibly favoured the economic prosperity of a few elites. Little was done for the majority public dispossessed by colonialism. It is in this context that Mau Mau veterans represented in *Wimbo Mpya* feel aggrieved: their mission to redeem Kenya from colonialism and restore stolen lands was incomplete.

The represented Mau Mau veterans' resistance to post-independence Kenya reveal difficulties in founding of nations. Experiences with the colonial state, which had its remnants in the post-independence state in form of structures of power and its clienteles, had taught the colonised subjects to be suspicious of government. In the Tanzanian case, for instance, resistance to post-independence state had its roots in "the colonial state [that] claimed the right and obligation to count and classify its population, to define what constituted social improvement, and to intervene in social affairs in order to achieve it" (Maddox and Giblin 4). *Wimbo Mpya* explores difficulties encountered in attempts to foster state-citizen relationship in an environment where the colonial regime had demonstrated to the public that the state exploits, oppresses, and even commits large-scale atrocities such as the ones discussed in the previous chapter, especially in *A Farm Called Kishinev*.

Wimbo Mpya suggests that individual citizens should aspire to diligently and selflessly develop their country rather than expect the state to improve their socio-economic statuses. This is an allusion to JFK Kennedy's inaugural speech "Ask Not What Your Country Can Do for You" to which the narrator explicitly refers when explaining the meaning of freedom (63). Malcom X laid bare the hypocrisy embellished in this speech by pointing out JFK Kennedy's inaction while the African-Americans were facing racial persecution in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, among other states⁴⁹. In the novel, the bearer of this new song is Mariamu who mobilises the community to build schools and set up development projects in Gaito village, in Meru. On his part, Rogere, a Mau Mau veteran who left the forest upon independence is troubled by the reluctance of his comrades to join and develop the new country: "[u]kitaka uhuru na ardhi upate uhuru tu, upokee, mambo mengine uyafuatilie baadaye. [...]. Imba wimbo mpya wa uhuru. [...]. Labda watoto wetu ndio watakaofaidika kutokana na uhuru" (Mbatiah 74-75), "if you fight for freedom and land and achieve freedom alone, embrace it, afterwards you can pursue other things. [...]. Sing the new song of independence. [...]. Maybe it is our children who shall reap the fruits of freedom." Here, the novel optimises freedom as opposed to the culture of entitlement that characterised the early years of post-independence Kenya. Through Rogere, Mbatiah's redefines heroism in post-independence Kenya's socio-political landscape: selflessness. This in itself is an incisive critique of individuals who engaged in amassing wealth upon independence at the expense of the impoverished majority.

⁴⁹ See Malcom X: Make It Plain (Full PBS Documentary) (2013).

Further, the philanthropic acts of Mwathi, an elderly man in Gaito with expansive land who donates part of it to Mariamu's school project and promises to resettle Marete and his family as an alternative solution to forest fighter's grievances against the state, reinforce the novel's vision of fostering nationhood, a new song. Mwathi's philanthropy speaks to nationhood because it intervenes where the state, due to neglect or economic constraint, fails to provide land to the war veterans. This happens in a time when Mau Mau veterans still in the forest are facing imminent assault by Kenya's post-independence forces for the former's refusal to disband the militant group. By offering land for the building of a pioneer school in his village, Mwathi extends his contribution to the future generation. In these two cases, the narrator broadens the understanding of Harambee, the new independence song whereby the rich in the community are assigned duties of honouring freedom heroes as well as building the futures of young people rather than relinquishing all responsibility to the state.

Despite advocating for 'a new song' in a manner that mitigates the post-independence states' betrayal of Mau Mau freedom fighters, the narrator reveals a sharp moral dichotomy that indicts 'loyalists'. This exposes the tensions that characterised the early years of post-independence Kenya. 'Loyalism' is an element of post-independence state-citizen relationship whereby perceived traitors of Mau Mau movement rose to leadership positions and reaped greater economic gains. *Wimbo Mpya* presents this conventional narrative through Marete's neighbour, M'Keambati, a colonial police officer who actively participates in hunting down Mau Mau suspects and having them detained or executed⁵⁰. The colonial government rewards him with Marete's and other Mau Mau suspects' land. M'Keambati, who represents agents and supporters of the Mau Mau counter-insurgency, also holds expansive coffee plantations and is a progressive urbanite with highly educated children; in sharp contrast to bitter, poor, landless former freedom fighters.

The narrator's disdain for 'loyalists' is best demonstrated through the words of Marete during the struggle. When the colonial government offers amnesty for Mau Mau fighters who would willingly surrender, Marete scoffs at the logic of amnesty:

“Kusamehewa na nani? Sisi ni watu wa kusamehewa? Tumemkosea nani? Hatutaki msamaha. Hawa mbwa wanaoramba matako ya mkoloni ni watu wa kutosamehe sisi?” alilipuka, akasahau tahadhari ya kuzungumza kwa mnonong'ono. (Mbatiah 11)

⁵⁰ See David Anderson's *Histories of the Hanged*.

“To be forgiven by whom? What sin have we committed? What crime have we committed? We don’t need amnesty. Are the dogs licking the dirty buttocks of the colonialist worth extending amnesty to us?” he exploded, forgetting the caution of speaking in whispers.

Meja Marete’s stance elicits memories of the Lari Massacre where Mau Mau fighters targeted the lives and property of loyalists⁵¹. However, the Emergency landscape was too entangled for such sharp dichotomies. As Branch reminds us, these positions were a lot more fluid than such dichotomies would suggest: “[a]t one point or another [...], most were both Mau Mau and loyalist, sometimes even simultaneously in response to the changing balance of power in localities” (“Loyalists” 292-3). There were also cases of compulsory enlistment (293) of loyalists and strategic enlistment as a defence strategy from the imminent danger posed by the war.

As the latest engagement with Mau Mau history across the four regimes, Yvonne Owuor’s *Dust* has the benefit of a longer historical tracking of the shifting fortunes and ab/uses of Mau Mau rhetoric. Owuor uses Nyipir as the ultimate allegory of both Kenya’s and Mau Mau discourse’s shifts over the years. It is Nyipir who flies the new Kenyan flag the night the Union Jack is lowered. This signifies betrayal of Mau Mau since Nyipir was an active agent of colonialism. Nyipir’s biography is an encoding of the continuity of histories of state violence: he was an active member of Mau Mau counter-insurgency in the colonial state; he is also an indomitable post-independence state soldier during the Shifta war. When Tom Mboya is assassinated, he suffers ethnic victimisation and narrowly escapes execution. This prompts him to renounce his allegiance to the Kenyan state as he becomes an active member of cattle rustling in Northern Kenya. Nyipir is a character whose allegiances have shifted according to different forms of political expedience over the years. As discussed in the previous chapter in a section on world wars’ impact on the Lake Victoria Basin communities, violence define Nyipir right from the time colonial powers conscript his father and brother in World War II.

⁵¹ The Lari Massacre targeted “the loyalist community’s senior statesman, Luka Wakahangare” (Anderson *Histories of the Hanged* 127), the family of the head of Home Guard patrol and “other prominent members of the Home Guard” (128). This massacre claimed about 500 lives in a single night, making it “the greatest bloodletting of the entire Mau Mau war” (119). However, most of the killings were as a result of the loyalists’ forces retaliatory attacks on families suspected to be Mau Mau sympathisers.

Dust situates the 2007/2008 post-election violence in the destructive nature of Mau Mau⁵². This is done through allusion to the murders of a Luo family in which eight children and two wives of a fisherman were among the 300 people from Luo and Luhya ethnic groups hacked and burnt to death in their house in Naivasha during the Kikuyu reprisal attacks at the peak of PEV (Ochieng *Daily Nation* n.p.). This incident is remembered by Nyipir, a Luo character, who does not say anything about the Kiambaa church arson in which the Kalenjin in Eldoret targeted the Kikuyu, killing 35 people (Odunga *Daily Nation* n.p.). This selective remembering seems to portray the Luo as the most wronged community by the Kikuyu ethnic hegemony during the post-election violence. But what is important is that the novel links the callous graphic depiction of the atrocious incident to Mau Mau:

“...Nyipir has seen this before. / Touched it. / Hidden it. / His mind tumbles back to a different time, when brother, son, mother, father sealed family members in rooms and huts and set these alight in honor of covenants of terror that guaranteed silence: *If I speak, may the oath kill me*. Much later, the horror was painted over and replaced with myths of triumph, repeated, repeated again, then adorned in all seasons of retelling. Nyipir waited for the inheritors of these silences to call out the names of their undead dead. Not a word. Now, fifty years later, the murdered were shrieking from earth tombs of enforced, timeless stillness, wailing for their forgotten, chopped-up lives. They seemed to accuse every citizen inheritors of their haemorrhaging. Nyipir shivers, chilled. He looks over his shoulder. (Owuor 83-84, original emphasis)

Here, Owuor portrays Mau Mau as a hereditary covenant of death, and one that threatens the existence of the Kenyan nation. This depiction contests heroic narratives of Mau Mau, viewing them as myths that mask the viciousness of the internecine war not only at the height of Mau Mau’s war, especially in the Lari Massacre mentioned above, but also in its reincarnations in the 2007/2008 PEV.

Dust archives the reincarnation of Mau Mau counter-insurgency during the Shifta war, in which the “Kenyatta regime launched a repressive campaign to quell [the Pan-Somali secessionists through] heavy military assault [and] propaganda that branded those fighting for the union with Somalia as shifta (or bandits)” (Weitzberg 66, original brackets). Nyipir is part of the vicious team of

⁵² Karuti Kanyinga suggests that the “post-2007 election violence has antecedents reaching” in colonial era (326).

man hunting man in comradeship. Predatory subtlety; soft, no-fuss walking. Silent gestures — a look could say everything. He was in a platoon fanning out in the northern terrain, tracking scents. Women, children, and elderly equalled prey, equalled game. Blasting hapless homesteaders, AK-47-ing camel herds to encourage cooperation. [...]. The national economy of secrets. One night, a human screams, “Am I now the enemy, *afande?*” Nyipir remembered that despised things also cried. / But. *Thou shalt not kill?* That was for another season. It was simpler to obey commands for the good of the nation. No questions asked. (Owuor 124, original emphasis)

Like Mau Mau counter-insurgency, the war against the Shiftas targeted not only the militants, but also the civilian communities, their property, and cultural systems. I read the portrayals of Shifta war here conversely to the Kenyatta regime’s Harambee rallying call invoked in *Wimbo Mpya*. The novel suggests the state violently enforced the Harambee call in northern Kenya, thus the portrayals of a predatory Jomo Kenyatta state, which seals its legacy in the blood of victimised communities. The violence against civilians, executed by state security agents, is founded on oaths and utmost loyalty to the commander, who is the president. *Dust* contests the shaky foundations of the Kenyan nation, which is dismissive of the commandment that seeks to preserve and respect the sanctity of human life.

Dust invokes the Jomo Kenyatta 1969 oathings of political supporters in Gatundu, but emplots it in the aftermath of Tom Mboya’s assassination that polarised the country:

[a] hundred, and then a hundred more, herded into holding houses. Picked up — taken from homes, offloaded from saloon cars, hustled from offices, stopped on their way from somewhere else — prosecuted, and judged at night. Guilty, they were loaded onto the backs of lorries. And afterward, lime-sprinkled corpses were heaped in large holes dug into the grounds of appropriated farms. Washed in acid, covered with soil that became even more crimson, upon which new forests were planted. (273)

Here, Owuor archives a schizophrenic Jomo Kenyatta regime’s victimisation of the Luo people following Tom Mboya’s assassination. It reconfigures classified state violence against perceived enemies and shows that this is reminiscent of Mau Mau counter-insurgency, where, in both cases, state security agents summarily executed suspects and secretly buried them in mass graves in forests. These Mau Mau methods that the Kenyatta regime uses to augment its power in the early decades of post-independence Kenya lead to a divided Kenya. After ruining the vision of a united and inclusive nation, Kenyatta’s regime actively participated in

the construction of the Luo as “the ultimate ‘other’” (A. Odhiambo, “Hegemonic Enterprises” 242).

When the Kenyatta regime faced a robust challenge from the Oginga Odinga-led opposition in 1968, a situation that worsened with Tom Mboya’s assassination in 1969, it reverted to Mau Mau tactics. Atieno Odhiambo writes: “truckloads of Agikuyu voluntarily went or were coerced into going to Gatundu, Kenyatta’s country seat, to take oaths to guarantee that the Kenyan flag would never leave the House of Mumbi” (“Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya” 241). Similarly, James Ogude asserts that “Kenyatta was forced to turn to Mau Mau, and duly transformed it into the ultimate bulwark of Kikuyu nationalism, those belonging to the house of Gikuyu and Mumbi, now threatened by other ethnic groups with their eyes on the ultimate seat of authority in the land” (“The Nation and Narration” 277). This kind of categorisation of citizens, whereby state agents use oath-taking for ethnic mobilisation, would lead to seemingly permanent dangerous polarisation of the country, the effects of which exploded during the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence.

Henry Indangasi in his insightful reflections on Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child*, a novel that exposes the crudeness of the Mau Mau counter-insurgency in colonial Kenya, bears witness to the ethnic violence meted against the Luo in Nairobi in the aftermath of Tom Mboya’s assassination⁵³. Indangasi too, like Owuor, links the Kikuyu violence against the Luo in 1969 to Mau Mau, which found its legitimacy in the Kikuyu myth of creation that propagates exceptionalism and entitlement to resources and power to the Kikuyu community as it denounces defilement by outsiders. Ngugi wa Thiong’o draws upon this myth in *Weep not, Child* and *The River Between* as he demonstrates the need for Mau Mau war against colonialism. To Indangasi, the Kikuyu myth of “ethnic exceptionalism [was fabricated] to justify a community’s false sense of superiority [...] to the detriment of their fellow human beings” (Indangasi *Daily Nation* n.p.). Ethnic victimisations founded on the Kikuyu myth of exceptionalism can be gleaned in the assassinations of influential Luo political figures such as Tom Mboya and Argwings Kodhek in 1969, and Jomo Kenyatta’s political marginalisation of Oginga Odinga.

This section has demonstrated the fluidity of memory; its uses and misuses. It shows that novelists tap into memories of violent liberation wars to ascertain the morality of the war, but

⁵³ Indangasi narrates how Kikuyu youth accosted him in Nairobi in 1969 with intention to forcibly circumcise him with crude weapons: “this incident gave me an idea of what was happening to Luo men in that year” (Indangasi *Daily Nation* n.p.).

also to claim entitlement after liberation. However, valorisation of violent memories seems to normalise violence in the society. This situation becomes detrimental to the liberation war's aspiration for and sustainance of nationhood. The reading of these recent narrations of Mau Mau shows the continuous task of the novelist in a society that is ever changing. The militant Mau Mau war has been portrayed as primitive in the settler novels, as heroic in the nationalist novels immediately after independence, but in contemporary Kenya, where the state employs violence against civilians opposed to it, *Dust* calls for a rethinking of the memories as well as rethinking the role of the state. On its part, *Wimbo Mpya* contests for the inclusivity of the liberation struggle memories as it redesigns heroism: it advocates for new heroes who are ready and committed to develop the nation as opposed to demanding help from the state. One linguistic aspect that emanates in the novels' representations of Kenya's histories is that, despite the passage of time, the Kiswahili novel presents the conventional Mau Mau narrative spearheaded by nationalist Mau Mau novels written in English. On the other hand, Yvonne Owuor takes a sceptical stance against the Mau Mau memory project. This reveals differences between women's and men's authorship, but also the role that the author's ethnicity plays in re-remembering the past. The next section reads the actions of the president's henchmen in a dictatorial polity.

Sycophancy in the Moi Regime: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006)

This section focalises how Ngugi wa Thiong'o's satirical novel, *Wizard of the Crow*, explores sycophancy in a tyrannical regime; and how sycophancy gradually degenerates into an avenue for self-preservation struggle and inevitable doom. The novel illuminates sycophants' vulnerabilities before the autocrat, and the precariousness of their very lives under the death machinery of the schizophrenic polity they sustain. It offers satirical portrayals of the unpredictable cannibal state to unmask the flipside of the ruling class who pretentiously exhibit themselves to the citizenry as wielders of real power, yet, in reality they are engaged in a cutthroat war for their own survival. The section also teases out extreme demonstrations of loyalty to the supreme leader, the despot, who is, at heart, deeply insecure. In the many acts of glorification of the absolute leader of the state, ominous histories of fear, repression, and death become part of the public register in the postcolony. My analysis shows that even though sycophancy has been a way of salvaging one's life from economic oblivion and the perilous machinery of the dictatorial states, it inevitably results in absolute loss of dignity. Ngugi's novel suggests that sycophancy is the bedrock of dictatorship. In comparison with

martyrs who choose to die for a noble reformist cause, sycophants accelerate the decomposition of any conceivable gains of democracy and progress.

Achille Mbembe points out that sycophants have made the postcolony “a world of narcissistic self-gratification [in their] quest for profit or favours” (Mbembe 21) and that one of the preoccupations of the postcolony is “the production of lies and double-speak” (17). He also views sycophancy as a kind of “verbal trance” through which harmoniously arranged empty words enhance “a state of ‘possession’ and triggers the mind’s voyaging; the space [that the state] creates through violence [which is] totally colonised by the *commandment*” (16, original emphasis). Furthermore, sycophancy is not only manifest in rhetoric, but also in different performances creatively orchestrated by a state that aggressively seeks to validate its power. For instance, sycophancy in the postcolony is manifest in “the body that [...] is willing to dramatise its subordination [through dances, dresses in party uniform, and assembling in multitudes] to applaud the passing of presidential procession” (Mbembe 25).

Indeed, *Wizard of the Crow* is a voluminous work that engages many issues affecting postcolonies: the indignity of alarming youth unemployment; poverty; Hiv/Aids; reliance on donor funding from World Bank and IMF; dictatorship. But this section explores the figure of sycophancy in *Wizard of the Crow* as an avenue of viewing Kenya’s state histories from a perspective that clinically deflates the confines of state power. Set in the imaginary state of Aburiria, *Wizard of the Crow* is “an important entry to the growing body of dictator novels in Africa” (Colson 134). It embodies the economically and politically stalled dictatorial African polities that depend on funding from former colonial masters; states choking with institutionalised corruption and violence against the citizenry. It foregrounds the absurdities that political elites endure in a dictatorial polity, particularly the “learned sycophants [...], professional sycophants [who hail the ruler as] the master of the world, the alpha and the omega of nation, the master of politics, and of philosophy” (Gikandi, “Postcolonial Wizard” 159). The legacies of assassinations amongst the political elites in the dictatorial state become inevitable due to the contagious paranoia that confounds the highest echelons of power. The novel portrays power in Aburiria as a lethal machine wielded by a predatory ruler; consequently, the political elites must learn to survive like prey in a hostile jungle. At the same time, this novel highlights “global ramifications of African leadership [which] are inextricably tied to world economies, which have effects on ethnic and national levels” (McLaren 158).

In “Ngugi’s Concept of History”, James Ogude, following Carol Sicherman, asserts that “Ngugi’s narrative is steeped in Kenya’s historical landscape and, indeed, at times borders close to direct allusion on actual historical personages and events” (88). But Ngugi does not just retell Kenya’s histories. Rather, for him “narrative is a tool for shaping, ordering, and reinterpreting history” (Ogude, “Concept of History” 88). It is clear in the novel that Ngugi is imagining, dissecting, and challenging the histories of the Kenyan state. As Simon Gikandi points out, “some readers will instantly recognize [Aburiria] as 1980s Kenya, [ruled by] an aging dictator, a former school teacher transformed into a messianic figure and his people’s supreme leader” (“The Postcolonial Wizard” 158). The aging dictator in question is Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, who ruled Kenya for twenty-four years (1978-2002). Gikandi also observes that “[r]eaders familiar with the politics of this period [...] will also be familiar with the main events in Ngugi’s novel” (165). Ngugi himself passionately argues for the writer’s role in revisiting his/ her history: “what has been, [...] especially for the vast majority of submerged, exploited masses in Africa, Asia and Black America, is intimately bound up with what might be: our vision of the future, of diverse possibilities of life and human potential, has roots in our experience of the past” (*Homecoming* 39). It is in this vision of a socially just future that Ngugi satirises the Aburirian state in *Wizard of the Crow*.

The vision articulated in the resolution of the ordinary people to liberate themselves, wraps up the novel when Kamiti, the wizard of the crow and one of the protagonists, joins the armed struggle led by Nyawira:

Our motto, a girl said, is simple: a New Army for a New Aburiria, not with the gun guiding politics but a politics of unity guiding the gun, to protect laws for social justice. These weapons are to protect our right to political struggle and not a substitute for political struggle. (*Wizard* 759)

Ngugi embraces Frantz Fanon’s prophetic idea of the ruling bourgeois in the postcolony depicted in *The Wretched of the Earth* in which he postulates that the “bourgeois dictatorship of underdeveloped countries draws its strength from the existence of a leader [while] in the well-developed countries the bourgeois dictatorship is the result of the economic power of the bourgeoisie” (133). It is in the “shelter [of the leader that] the thin and poverty-stricken bourgeoisie of the young nation decides to get rich” (Fanon 133). Through this novel, Ngugi enables an interrogation of the kind of ‘shelter’/ ‘strength’ a despot provides for the political

elite. It turns out that the political elite's promised shelter in a state pegged on an autocrat is tragic.

Different types of sycophants who have mastered oratory and other hero-worship skills are pillars of a dictatorial polity since they foster a façade of good governance in a space where everything meaningful that drives a society is crumbling. In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi presents a wide array of seasoned sycophants. These figures invoke memories of sycophants who served the Moi regime. One all time sycophant of the era is John Joseph Kamotho, famously known as JJ Kamotho. Kamotho's death on 6th Dec 2014 prompts me to reflect on the absurdities of sycophants' legacies in regard to state histories. From newspaper articles that looked back at his political career, it is apparent that eulogising a sycophant is a tricky task. For instance, Kamotho is eulogised as a man who became "an irritating mouthpiece of what critics regarded [as] an oppressive and corrupt regime" (Ngwala *Daily Nation* n.p.). Another article shows that Kamotho, the songbird of KANU (Kenya African National Union), the party that was in power from 1963 to 2002,

never tired in reminding Kenyans wherever he went that Kanu *ni baba na mama* (is father and mother), and Nyayo *juu juuu zaidi* (high higher highest)! Kamotho would praise Moi and say unrealistic things without blinking an eye to the extent that, some time in 1993, he [ticked] Moi to laughter at a public meeting in Karatina. (Omari *Daily Nation* n.p., brackets added)

But Kamotho is not the only sycophant of the infamous Moi regime. Kariuki wa Chotara, Mulu Mutisya, Shariff Nassir, and Ezekiel Barng'etuny "were President Moi's loud and proud, yet trusted lieutenants and court jesters. They fought his wars viciously as if they were their own. They made their wars the President's and fought them just as ferociously" (Opanga *Daily Nation* n.p.). *Wizard of the Crow* enables a revisiting of these troubling histories to question the legacies of sycophancy.

Wizard of the Crow encodes sycophants' annihilation of their souls, and by extension the soul of the entire nation that they defile in their quest for tokens, for power embodied in the Ruler, then for their endangered survival. Sycophants are tragic villains: as soon as the Ruler notices their sycophantic efforts, they become marked men, marked for death. Ngugi satirically presents sycophants who enlarge parts of their bodies in their quest for power. The sycophants take great risks, some of which are outrageous, for the sake of demonstrating their loyalty to the Ruler. Body parts enlargements are a way of positioning themselves

strategically as tools for their master's use. This is utter subordination of their very humanity, but also a way of magnifying the Ruler's sovereignty. James Ogude, in a critique of Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*, writes,

[t]he grotesque mode, [which] is traditionally considered an especially effective means of assailing middle-class values, is used by Ngugi as a specific typological signifier of a major social type in his narrative. [...]. Ngugi uses the grotesque as an instrument of social satire, specifically in his depiction of 'thieves and robbers' — the comprador bourgeoisie of the postcolonial state. ("Allegory and Grotesque" 79-80)

The grotesque dominates portrayals of sycophancy and enables incisive critiques of the dictatorial state in question. It gives a glimpse into how political portfolios are earned hence explaining the dearth of technocrats in a mismanaged and corrupt regime like Moi's.

The grotesque figures include Markus Machokali, Silver Sikiokuu, and Benjamin Mambo who rise to ministries of foreign affairs, state, and information respectively, after enlarging respective parts of their bodies: Machokali enlarges his eyes, Sikiokuu elongates his ears, Mambo elongates his tongue and lips. The names of these three principal sycophants are allegorical — Machokali for 'sharp-eyed', Sikiokuu for 'great-ear', and Mambo for 'information'. The enlargements/elongations of body parts symbolise the potential excesses and overzealousness in exercising state power in their target ministries. Machokali and Sikiokuu additionally mentor Titus Tajirika and John Kaniuru into sycophancy; while the Ruler coerces formerly hard-line revolutionists Dr. Yunico Immaculate Mgeuzi and Dr. Luminous Karamu-Mbu-ya-Ituika to join the camp of sycophants.

The novel shows that sycophancy entails a tragic end due to factors such as rivalries among political clienteles and the insecurities of the ruler. For instance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Markus Machokali, enlarges his eyes in London "to make them ferociously sharp[...] so that they would be able to spot the enemies of the Ruler no matter how far their hiding places" (*Wizard* 13). Ironically, the system sees him from afar as an enemy within when he is suspected for harbouring ambitions for the presidency, suffused with his dalliance with the West. This leads to his assassination. Like his colleagues in the sycophant team, Machokali loses his dignity when the tyrannical system objectifies him to the point that there seems to be little difference between him and a telescope or CCTV camera, especially when he has to offer his wives and daughters to the Ruler as a way of bribing the latter for political favours. Machokali seems to be a fictionalised nod to the then foreign affairs minister John Robert

Ouko whom the Moi regime assassinated in 1990. Ouko was “[w]idely regarded from the late 1970s through the 1980s as Kenya’s leading international spokesman and one of Africa’s most effective spokespersons” (Cohen & Odhiambo ix). Cohen and Odhiambo show that Ouko had favourable access to his local and national community and “also to President George H. W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker in Washington, D.C.” (ix). According to the two historians, “Ouko was a ‘golden boy’ in George Bush’s and Margaret Thatcher’s circles and was being groomed by his country’s Western allies as the next president of Kenya” (11). This ‘romance’ with the Western powers seem to have made him a risk to Moi’s presidency. Further, Ouko at the time of his assassination was unearthing a major corruption scandal involving powerful people in Moi’s administration (Cohen & Odhiambo 10). His efforts were aimed at reviving the “Kisumu molasses project, the largest capital investment in twentieth-century western Kenya” (10). However, Musila contests sanitised portraits of Ouko: “Ouko has been sanitized and rendered a moral hero and innocent victim of state brutality and the violent paranoias of powerful politicians close to the Moi regime” (*Julie Ward Murder* 58).

Sycophancy depicted in the novel also comments on histories of economic mismanagement during the Moi regime. For instance, Machokali announces the Marching to Heaven grand project as a national birthday gift to the Ruler, and bizarrely claims that Aburiria would “raise a building to the very gates of Heaven so that the Ruler could call on God daily to say good morning or good evening or simply how was your day, God?” (16). The represented excesses of this postcolonial polity resonate with Frantz Fanon’s postulation that dictatorial postcolonies “sink all the more into stagnation [because the ruling bourgeois] is preoccupied with filling its pockets as rapidly as possible but also as prosaically as possible” (133). In order to mask economic disgrace, the rulers “can find nothing better than to erect grandiose buildings in the capital and to lay out money on what are called prestige expenses” (133).

Sycophancy also reveals the Moi regime’s dependency on donor funding, and its ostensible desire for economic advancement. Lack of practical plans and action thwart these aspirations. The Ruler’s humiliation when he travels with his entourage to solicit for funds from World Bank reveals a collapsing state. Absurdly, the proposal for soliciting donor money budgets for wastage of the very funds. Machokali’s speech during the Ruler’s birthday ceremony reveals impractical development plans since every idea is geared towards idolization of the Ruler:

Minister Machokali was waxing ecstatic about how the benefits of the project could trickle down to all citizens. Once the project was completed, no historian would ever again talk about any other wonders in the world, for the fame of this Modern House of Babel would dwarf the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Egyptian pyramids, the Aztecan Tenochtitlan, or the Great Wall of China. And who would ever talk of Taj Mahal? Our project will be the first and only superwonder in the history of the world. In short, Machokali declared, Marching to Heaven was the special birthday cake the citizens had decided to bake for their one and only leader, the eternal Ruler of the Free Republic of Aburiria. (17)

By idolizing the despot and implying that his satisfaction and luxury is all that matters in a country languishing in economic turmoil, Machokali, who ironically has eyes that can see far, embodies destructive myopia of sycophancy. This sycophancy must continuously regenerate itself for survival in changing political times to remain relevant. Factually, the Marching to Heaven project is a critique of the Moi regime's "plans to build a new headquarters in Uhuru Park for the ruling party and the Kenya Times newspaper, co-owned by KANU and Robert Maxwell" (Branch *Hope and Despair* 186). The KANU headquarters, designed to be over sixty-three storeys high, at "a proposed cost of [...] \$200 million, [...] was a flagrant act of profligacy at a time when donors were expected to pick up an ever-larger share of public expenditure" (Branch *Hope and Despair* 186). The 2004 Peace Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai used civil disobedience to stop the building, arguing that the edifice was an affront to the city's ecosystem⁵⁴.

Nyawira, who is the leader of the underground revolution against the dictatorial regime, challenges Kamiti to reflect on the necessity for a revolution: "There are two kinds of saviours: those who want to soothe the souls of the suffering and those who want to heal the sores on the flesh of the suffering. Sometimes I wonder which is right" (94). Here, Nyawira challenges the morality of ideologies that insist on docility and aloofness in a tyrannical state. Indeed, sycophancy fits squarely in such posturing because it seems to soothe the soul of a suffering state, but it does not heal. In the end, the state suppurates and amputations become necessary thus leading to permanent disabilities. For a healing, Nyawira suggests a revolution — a surgical operation that best intervenes in healing the diseased Aburirian state. Like

⁵⁴ In 1986, University of Nairobi "students collaborated with Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement (GBM — a local environmental NGO) and succeeded in protecting Uhuru Park from the KANU political party, which wanted to appropriate part of the park for a sixty-story headquarters" (Amutabi, "Crisis and Student Protest in Universities in Kenya" 174).

Wangari Maathai in Moi's regime, Nyawira does this through civil disobedience whereby members of her movement disrupt the Ruler's public rallies.

The sycophancy trope in *Wizard of the Crow* also enables a critique of the parliament in a dictatorial polity. Permeation of sycophancy in this vital institution mandated with legislation leads to the formulations of bizarre policies and laws. According to Leonard Feinberg, "the basic technique of satire is distortion, usually in the form of exaggeration, understatement, and pretense; and distortion implies disorder" (4). Implicit in its employment is reform. For instance, the kind of parliament portrayed in the *Wizard of the Crow*, is a flat institution manipulated by the executive. The Parliament in Aburiria state degrades itself to the extent of ensuring the Ruler "had the power to declare any month in the year the seventh month, and any day within that seventh month the seventh day and therefore the Ruler's Birthday" (12). In a way that shows the parliament's commitment to gratify a despot's ego in a dictatorial polity, as illustrated by a frenzied debate to set the date of the Ruler's birthday as a national holiday:

Before it was firmly set in the national calendar; the date of his birth and the manner of its celebration had been the subject of a heated debate in Parliament that went on for seven months, seven days, seven hours, and seven minutes, and even then the honourable members could not arrive at a consensus mainly because nobody knew for sure the actual date of the Ruler's birth, and when they failed to break an impasse, the honourable members sent a formal delegation to the very seat of power to seek wise guidance, after which they passed a motion of gratitude to the Ruler for helping the chamber find a solution to a problem that had completely defeated their combined knowledge and experience. (12)

If read as depictions of the Kenyan parliament, the novel is challenging the very coming to existence of the Kenyatta Day (20th Oct) and Moi Day (10th Oct), both annulled by the 2010 Constitution⁵⁵. Despite many challenges, the Kenyan parliament dared both Kenyatta and Moi regimes in a quest for good governance. The detentions of radical members of parliament and assassinations of the most vocal critics are a testament to this. An example is the 1975 detentions of deputy speaker Jean-Marie Seroney and Martin Shikuku when Shikuku made the motion that "KANU was 'dead' as a political party because it had failed to

⁵⁵ Kenyatta Day and Moi Day celebrated national heroism pegged on the presidents. With the promulgation of the 2010 constitution, Moi Day was completely annulled while Kenyatta Day was renamed Hero's Day.

abide by the ideals that brought it to power at independence and had been hijacked by people who did not even fight for independence” (Amutabi, "Interrogating Parliament" 31). During this debate, Seroney stated that “Shikuku’s motion did not need to be seconded as the point was ‘obvious’”(31). There is also the parliament’s robust interrogation and pursuit for justice of JM Kariuki’s assassination in 1975 (30). Moi’s regime faced radical opposition from parliament, especially from the “seven bearded sisters’ [who] rejected politics of patronage which President Moi’s regime perfected” (33)⁵⁶. The novel re-scripts these histories through satire. This reveals to the reader that the grand histories of political figures need interrogation to ascertain why, despite revolutionary debates in parliament, nothing much changed in the political scene.

Sycophancy inherent in the cabinet of dictatorial regimes such as Moi’s contribute to abuse of power. Ideally, cabinet secretaries should endeavour to promote the interests of the republic and the constitution (Constitution 152 (2) a). *Wizard of the Crow* portrays the cabinet as an orchestra of sycophancy hence a progenitor of unprecedented excesses of power. The cabinet is also a space in which rivalry for power invested in the ruler flares up in unprecedented proportions. In one of the incidents in which the narrator shows a duel between Machokali and Sikiokuu, sycophancy is used to validate and entrench the Ruler’s claim to sovereignty. Sikiokuu unknowingly attempts to separate the country from the Ruler, for this ‘crime’ Machokali leads the chant:

His Mighty Ruler is the Mighty Country and the Mighty Country is the Ruler. Led by Big Ben Mambo, the other ministers also stood up and chanted, The Ruler and the Country are one and the same, and soon it became a call-and-response ceremony led by Machokali. (161, original emphasis)

This elevated sycophancy, worship at best, fetishises the Ruler to the point that he becomes a form of religion. In fact, Sikiokuu atones for his ‘crime’ by stating while on his knees:

I am a firm believer that you are the Country and the Country is You, and I propose that this fact be stated in the constitution. I swear before Your Mighty Presence that I shall myself make a motion in Parliament to amend the constitution accordingly. (161)

⁵⁶ The ‘seven bearded sisters’ were James Orenge, Abuya Abuya, Koigi Wamwere, Mwachegu wa Mwachegu, Chibule wa Tsuma, Wasike Ndombi and Lawrence Sifuna. See Kwama (2013).

The suggestions to amend the constitution as a way of showing loyalty to the Ruler show grievous consequences of sycophancy to aspirations for democracy. Sycophancy of this stature gives a ruler *carte blanche* over the destiny of the country, suspending any pretence to accountability. Here, Ngugi appears to be making a commentary on Moi who became a fetish in the Kenyan social imaginaries. Sycophants like JJ Kamotho mentioned above seem to have made Moi believe he was an extra-ordinary being.

Sycophancy also embodies malicious tactics employed by the political class in their rivalry. Sikiokuu, the minister of state in the Ruler's office, uses strange ways to appease the Ruler's ego. For instance, when members of the Movement of the Voice of the People use plastic snakes to disrupt the public during the celebrations of the Ruler's birthday, Sikiokuu degrades himself in attempts to appease the Ruler for his (Sikiokuu's) failure in intelligence gathering. Sikiokuu sends his first, second, then third wives to the Ruler as sexual offers, all of which the Ruler ignores: "[f]inally, he sent his two daughters. It was only then that the Ruler softened and he started seeing Sikiokuu again, but then only to vent his anger on the hapless minister" (23). Ironically, these extreme forms of indignities in which the female body is sacrificed on the altar of sycophancy, where morals and ethics are also torn apart, are geared at the sycophant's quest for obscene powers to crush democratic reform crusaders. Here, the novel examines and submits the hollowness of the moral foundations of this particular postcolony. Having gone through the humiliation process, Sikiokuu

fell to his knees and lowered his head, his ears actually touching the Ruler's shoes. "I beg Your Mighty Excellency please give me more powers to smoke out those who are behind the latest plot to dishonour your person and government." (135)

To this request, the Ruler gives him orders "to use all means, necessary and unnecessary, to bring my enemies dead or alive" (136). With these excessive powers, Sikiokuu sycophantically intones:

"I swear by my two ears and before you, My Lord on Earth and Heaven, that I shall do everything within the powers you have now given me to crush the members of this so-called Movement for the Voice of the People. [...]. O My Lord, their cries for mercy will be heard in all corners of the globe." (136)

In this promise to torture the state's 'enemies', I read Kenyan state histories of violating human rights of the citizenry such as the Nyayo House torture chambers of the mid 1980s

that attracted global outrage (Musila, “Phallogracies and Gynocratic Transgressions” 49). Here, I establish a link between sycophancy and the histories of torture in Kenya.

The novel invokes the Nyayo House torture chambers in the depictions of the Ruler’s sacred chamber in the State House in which the

skulls of his most hated enemies hung on the walls and others from the ceiling, bone sculptures, white memories of victory and defeat. The chamber was a cross between a museum and a temple, and every morning the Ruler, after first bathing in the preserved blood of his enemies, would enter, carrying a staff and a fly whisk, and then walk about quietly, looking at various exhibits one by one... (11)

The flywhisk and staff are possibly nods to Kenyatta’s and Moi’s respective symbols for visible performance of power. These objects are “‘accessories of power’ [because they] are symbols of traditional authority and are the focus of numerous popular legends which impute almost fetish-like power to them. To be hit with any of these objects was to suffer a great curse” (Ogola 151). In the quote from the novel, the Ruler desires to exhibit absolute power over history, but his kind of history should be sanitised. This is seen in his oscillation from the temple to the museum. The novel also shows histories of bloodshed in rumours that the Ruler killed “a wronged he-goat [which] some elders, deeply troubled by the sight of blood flooding the land” (4) were to sacrifice in order to appease state injustices. Here, Ngugi signals Kenyans’ desire for reparation of historical injustices. Since the Ruler kills the he-goat together with the elders and soldiers who knew anything about the matter, Ngugi shows the state’s reluctance to embark on the journey for attainment of Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation. Sycophancy masks such horrendous atrocities by flaunting the greatness and benevolence of the Ruler.

The torturers of dissidents, political prisoners, and other socio-political reform crusaders construe their crimes as patriotic acts. Sikiokuu who is at the centre of these histories of torture in Aburiria draws much pleasure from his duty. He is joyful to be tasked with crushing those deemed enemies of the state: “[t]he state would now strike back, and he, Sikiokuu, was thankful that fate had chosen him to be the instrument of the Ruler’s revenge” (219). Yet, the novel also unmasks the complex nature of sycophancy and how it is connected with settling personal scores with one’s political enemies. Sikiokuu concentrates his newly acquired powers on his rivals — Machokali and his allies. This results in subjecting Vinjina to “the secret grip of the State” (230). Vinjina is Titus Tajirika’s wife, and Tajirika is

Machokali's closest political ally. When the Ruler is out of the country, Sikiokuu also kidnaps Tajirika and tortures him with the intent of forcing him to produce a statement implicating Machokali in unfounded claims of treason. The contrived charges of treason against Machokali are meant to show how loyal Sikiokuu is to the Ruler, and possibly grant him (Sikiokuu) more powers.

This section shows a powerful interlink between sycophancy and assassinations in a dictatorial state. Sycophants sanitise state violence with political propaganda, but they end up as victims of the very system they construct and shield. After Machokali, Sikiokuu, Big Ben Mambo, and Dr. Luminous Karamu-Mbu among others have spent their lives glorifying the Ruler even in the most humiliating of circumstances, they are eventually assassinated. Karamu-Mbu is assassinated for showing evidence, in the biography he writes, of having known too much concerning the Ruler; Mambo for delivering a speech while standing on a military tanker; Sikiokuu for possessing suits similar to the Ruler, an indication that he was entertaining secret ambitions of ascending to the ruler's throne; Machokali for being the West's preferable presidential successor of the Ruler. This analysis establishes that sycophants are key architects of not only a dictator, but also the dictatorial regime. In the next section, I explore the legacies established by individuals who are the antithesis of sycophants, martyrs.

Martyrdom in the Kenyatta and Moi Regimes: Katama Mkangi's *Walenisi* (1995)

This section focuses on the histories of political activists who were assassinated, detained, tortured, or exiled during the Jomo Kenyatta and Moi regimes. Here, I read Katama Mkangi's *Walenisi* as advancing the transformative power engendered in individuals' sacrificial opposition to state injustices. The previous section reviewed state political agents who promote injustice through sycophancy, and gestured at cases of political dissidents who counter those injustices. This section invokes the sacrifices of political martyrs who die fighting for the noble cause of transforming the socio-political and socio-cultural structures of their country. Through magical realism, *Walenisi* imagines a different world where martyrdom subverts state executions. The novel reinterpretes historical events in Kenya during the Kenyatta and Moi regimes, and blends them with the magical to advance its reformist agenda. Wendy Faris writes that "[o]ne of the ways in which magical realism imbricates the extraordinary within the ordinary is the accumulation of realistic details to describe an impossible event" (Faris 90). The impossible event in the novel is the portrayals of the survival of an executed man and the continuity of his life in a utopian country. The

novel presents to the reader a journey from one extreme end of dystopia to the other utopian end.

The title, *Walenisi*, “Those-Are-Us”, seems to be an ambivalent invitation to the society to say those (i.e. perpetrators of violence), are part of us; we produce these wicked people and allow them to stay in power. But also, those utopian figures in the after-world are also us: they represent the best in us, the possibility of a socialist utopia which honours and values humanity. This is a way of conferring power to the populace: they possess the ability to transform their society. Mikhail Gromov lists *Walenisi* among Kiswahili novels that depict “apocalyptic and dystopian pictures of the future — the world before and after the global catastrophe, dominated by dictatorial powers, struck by hunger and drowning in the abyss of ecological and economic hardships” (40). He writes, “these authors also give their own considerations about the possibility of saving the human world” (40).

The novel demonstrates such possibility through the martyrdom of one individual whose actions change the course of history. For instance, as Xavier Garnier asserts, *Walenisi*’s “political act par excellence consists in refusing to measure wealth” (102) in the utopian world. In this case, Katama Mkangi’s commitment to the attainment of social equality is embodied in *Walenisi*’s depictions of “[a] particular feature of wealth [as] a social substance [that] can only flow, to be shared without limits in the social body” (Garnier 102). This reveals Mkangi’s conviction on the bleak situation facing Africa where a few individuals amass wealth while the majority of the population languishes in abject poverty. Mkangi — who passed on in 2004 — is remembered for “his agitation for pluralistic political reforms and advocacy for democratic rights. [H]is creative writings and social [...] analyses came to be infused with political activism, and this was his hallmark until his untimely death from a car accident in 2004” (Ciekawy and Wachira vii).

Writing on the state executions of activists Nigerian Ken Saro-Wiwa and El Salvadorian Archbishop Oscar Romero, Clifford Bob and Sharon Nepstad pose two critical questions: “[u]nder what circumstances does the assassination of a leader weaken or destroy a social movement? Conversely, when do such murders invigorate and embolden a movement — to the shock of its would-be assassins?” (1370). One of the conclusions of their research is that “if a leader upholds an ideology of martyrdom or a movement operates in a society where martyrdom has deep cultural roots, the dead leader will more easily be converted into a martyr with mobilizing potential for the movement” (1390). Here, I read the martyrdom that

Walenisi exhibits as one that revisits histories of political detainees, exiles, and other casualties of the dictatorial Kenyatta and Moi regimes.

Magical realism subverts the established social reality hence creating a world where what seems impossible is possible. Indeed, the magical realist's creation of a utopian world is a powerful statement to forces resistant to transformation. Brenda Cooper writes that utopia "stands for the possibility that such unity might ultimately be achieved in societies where this currently appears only as a slight hope" (36). The period in Kenyan histories that *Walenisi* addresses is particularly repressive. As Musila states, "[t]he post-1982 [Kenya] witness[ed] increased state repression, and deeper entrenchment of a culture of impunity, thanks to a compromised judiciary and state security machinery" (*Julie Ward Murder* 43). In the dedication of the novel, Mkangi's sentiments of disenchantment with the Kenyan state are evident, and the memories of his and other social justice activists' detentions are overwhelming: "Kwa Kaendi Munguti: Kwa wema, mapenzi na ujasiri wa kuwa mke wangu wakati ambao nilikuwa nikiepukwa kama mgonjwa wa ukoma. Na ndugu Willy Mutunga" (i), "To Kaendi Munguti: For your goodness, love and bravery to be my wife at a time when I was avoided like a leper. And to comrade Willy Mutunga". Confounded in an oppressive political milieu, Katama Mkangi appropriates magical realism as an instrument that can give language to his desire for a better Kenya. As Wendy Faris states, "magical realism may resemble Caliban [...] who learns the master's language, then uses it to curse" (Faris 28). In detail, she argues that "magical realism's use of realistic detail to describe an impossible event, which moves us beyond everyday reality, rather than anchoring us in it, was not realism's original program" (28). In effect, magical realism "challenges the assumptions of realistic representation but is enraptured with its practices. Realism, for example, does not believe in miracles, but it has given the magical realist the means to describe them" (Faris 28). The significance of this mode of representation is also emphasised in Cooper's argument:

[m]agical realism strives [...] to capture the paradox of the unity of opposites; it contests polarities such as history versus magic, the pre-colonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death. Capturing such boundaries between spaces is to exist in a third space, in the fertile interstices between these extremes of time or space (1)

It is with this understanding of the significations of the magical realms that I seek to read the trope of martyrdom in Katama Mkangi's *Walenisi*, how it contests Kenya's repressive state histories, but also how it foregrounds and magnifies social justice activists' agencies in their efforts towards an ideal country.

Magical realism in *Walenisi* subverts the sovereignty of death by demonstrating through the protagonist that capital punishment aimed at suppressing dissident voices may lead to a rebirth. Through juxtaposition between the utopian state of Walenisi and the state of 'Jehanamu', "Hell", Mkangi exposes and condemns extreme exploitations, abuses, and violations of citizens' human rights. The novel begins with the protagonist, Dzombo wa BeDzombo, in court, waiting for his predictable death sentence. His sentence is predictable because the courts' major goal in Jehanamu state is to repress, through execution, any form of political dissent. Thus, Dzombo as an activist against state oppression and exploitation of the poor, definitely, has no chance of surviving. The judge who sentences Dzombo "aliingia [kotini] kama malaika wa mauti" (Mkangi 1), "entered the courtroom like an angel of death" and hastily uttered "Kifo!" (1), "Death!", then gathered his robes and disappeared in the court chambers. Dzombo's public execution takes place immediately. This opening formula signals entry into a dictatorial world (Washiali 19). The execution is part of the ruler's recreation since he finds pleasure in eliminating dissidents: the execution ritual was "ushwari wa tafrija ya mtawala" (5), "the excellence of the ruler's recreation". However, Dzombo's execution takes him to a utopian country, Walenisi, where humanity is exalted over everything else, and every citizen's name is preceded by *Mtu-*, Human-. It is in Walenisi that Dzombo becomes Mtu-Dzombo, and human indeed, not just by name. This change of name signifies the restoration of that which has been lost in dictatorial polities: that humanity inseparable from conscience. Walenisi, the utopian country becomes a vantage point from which Mtu-Dzombo is able to grasp the criminal nature of his state and the total moral breakdown of his country of origin.

By unmasking exhibitions of state criminality, which various Kenyan regimes portray as acts of fostering peace, *Walenisi* contests legitimization of human rights abuses. For instance, the state executes Dzombo using very sophisticated means — executioners launch him into space in an advanced rocket. Ironically, the executioner explains to the public that the advanced technology employed in execution of dissidents is an act of state 'mercy'. He proudly declares the 'exceptionalism' of the state in the region: "Tumetoka ushenzini," mnyongaji halali akawa anaendelea, "ndio sababu mtawala hataki kuua watu kikatili kama wafanyavyo

watawala wengine.” (5), “We already moved from savagery,” the legal hangman continued, “that’s why the ruler does not want to kill people with cruelty in the manner other rulers do.” Yet this does not justify the execution of a person who demands accountability of the state to the public. But when executioners shoot Dzombo into space, the rocket transports him to a different planet, a different country — Walenisi. The irony that cuts through the ‘legal hangman’s’ utterances evoke memories of advanced methods of torture replete in the Moi regime.

Walenisi also invokes memories of curtailed freedoms of speech and of assembly. This situation transformed funerals into political platforms where political dissent was articulated⁵⁷. In the novel, a victim of the state’s death apparatuses becomes a springboard for the public to reflect on their need for freedom. Dzombo’s relatives who attend his public execution expose the irony that manifests itself in the situation where the state converts institutions of intellectual and economic investment into apparatuses of death. Here, I read the rocket as symbolic of Kenya’s universities where pro-democracy scholars championed their cause, but which soon became sites of repression. The narrator points out:

“[h]iki chombo hakikupaswa kuwa cha mauti,” jamaa zake walikuwa wakiwaza. Kilikuwa ni chombo cha kupalia angani ili mtu ajisikie yuko huru. Uhuru usiokuwa na kikomo. Si chombo cha kumtokomezea mtu, bali ni chombo cha zao la utafiti — na tokea lini utafiti ukazaa mauti? Sayari [...] iliundwa baada ya utafiti mkali uliokuwa na lengo la kuusukuma ujinga nyuma. (Mkangi 2-3)

“This rocket was never intended to be a vessel of death,” his relatives thought. It is a vessel whose inventors envisioned so swift a soaring to the sky as to make a person feel liberated. Unlimited freedom. It is not a vessel for disposing life, but a product of research. And since when did research endeavour to produce death? The rocket [...] was developed after in-depth research for transforming life.

⁵⁷ There existed “plenty of scope for unrestricted discussions at funerals, which are social occasions that require no licences” (A. Odhiambo, “Ideology of Order” 200).

The quote above reveals citizens' disenchantment with the Moi regime's repression of Kenya's universities, especially the University of Nairobi⁵⁸. Jacqueline Klopp and Janai Orina posit that "the integration of Kenya's university system into the wider system of repressive rule means that the struggle for university autonomy and academic freedom in Kenya, as in many other parts of the continent, is fundamentally linked to wider struggle to democratize the state and economy" (Klopp and Orina 46). The repression of this important organ of knowledge production is a way of killing the country's future. Despite the suppression exercised by the state, the novel shows that martyrs bravely confronted apparatuses of death in their demands for democratic reforms.

Martyrdom in the quest for political and socio-economic reforms can be understood through Mwakenya, "an underground movement opposed to the [Moi] government. [Mwakenya] periodically released anonymous pamphlets detailing alleged [human rights] abuses" (Kiai 4). As a former political prisoner during the 1986-1988 Mwakenya crackdown, Mkangi writes with bitterness as he condemns state's intolerance of dissidence, victimization and imprisonment of pro-democracy scholars⁵⁹. The novel also reveals Mkangi's frustrations with the Kenyan society especially in its tolerance of the political propaganda perpetuated by sycophants such as Moi's henchmen elaborated in the preceding chapter section. Through Mwakenya, Mkangi stood up for social justice despite imprisonment on March 5th 1986 for two years, and remained jobless till the end of Moi's era in 2002 when he got employed at United States International University-Africa in 2003. This was during the Kibaki regime that began with much promise for democracy before it reverted to corruption and repression. This experience resonates with the life story of Goldenberg scandal whistle-blower David Muniyakei, which I highlight in the subsequent chapter section.

58 President Moi appointed Vice-Chancellors to who he "delegated immense and arbitrary power[s] [which] were, in turn, backed up by violence and patronage. [...]. They use[d] these powers to appoint a coterie of higher-level administrators and department heads who work[ed] actively to reproduce this stranglehold on campus" (Klopp and Orina 48). See also Maina Kiai's "Haven of Repression: Report on the University of Nairobi and Academic Freedom" (Kiai). Fred Oluoch writes: "Mwakenya was a Kiswahili acronym for Patriotic Union of Nationalists to Liberate Kenya. Moi saw it as a Marxist movement seeking to topple him, with the support of Communist countries. [He therefore] launched another round of detentions targeting [over sixty elites] mostly university lecturers alleged to be [the movement's] members." (Oluoch, "Mwakenya Crackdown").

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Mkangi's representation of detentions and executions of dissidents transcend the defeatism that the state expected: the tribulations were crucibles for a new Kenya. Dzombo's belief in justice elevates him above the power of the state's death apparatuses. The novel constructs Dzombo as a martyr, thus his death is but a rebirth. When the rocket of death is fired, he breaks from the atmosphere into space "kama vile motto apasuavyo mimba ili naye awe kiumbehurukamili" (9), "like a baby breaking out of the womb so that it may be an independent creature". His resolve at the time of his execution is also a testament to his martyrdom: "'Mungu naja,' alijisemea kwa kauli ya kutovunjika moyo" (9), "'God, here I come,' he said to himself in a resolute voice". At this crucial time, "Dzombo kufa kwake kukawa amekusahau na akawa anatazamia mbele ambako atapata fursa ya kujieleza kwa Mungu Mwenyewe" (11), "Dzombo had forgotten about his impending death, he looked ahead to the chance to present his case to God Himself." This situation of seeking justice only from God speaks to histories of Kenya's compromised judiciary when the "president controlled the judiciary. He appointed judges who then interfered with cases" (Mueller 339). Despite the disillusionment that compounded Moi's regime, the novel envisions an alternative republic that can be realised through the sacrifices of martyrs.

I also flag the dissident tag germane from advocacy for political reforms as a challenge that reformists encountered in the Moi regime. Every time Dzombo questions exploitation, government agents say to him: "Sasa acha maneno yako mengi. Nimeshasikia fununu kuwa, wewe u mtu wa fujo" (21), "Stop your endless bickering. I already have information that you are an agitator". This dissident tag evolves when, at his former employment, he speaks against economic exploitation and oppression of the workers, which lead to termination of his services "kwa kuwachochea wafanyakazi watiifu..." (16), "for inciting obedient workers..." Immediately after Dzombo is executed by the state, citizens who witness the event engage in the following conversation:

"...hii ndiyo dawa ya maneno mengi." / "Kabisa!" Mmoja akaitikia na kuongeza, "sasa mwacheni ajiropokee pekee humo ndani." / "Hata huko," mwengine akajiingiza, "ataona kuwa Shetani pia haruhusu watu kuropokwa ovyoovyo." / "Na itakuwaje ikiwa hatafunga domo lake?" Yule wa pili akauliza kwa kufadhaika. / "Yamkini huenda ikawa Shetani pia ana Sayari yake na asipochunga na kukoma, ataadhibiwa kwa kusafirishwa Jehanamu nyingine kali zaidi," akajibiwa na yule wa kwanza. (6)

“this is the best remedy to those who never stop agitating.”/“Exactly!” the other responded and then added, “now let him agitate alone in that rocket of death.”/ “Even there,” another one joined the conversation, “he will realize that Satan too does not permit agitation.”/ “And what will happen if he won’t shut up in Hell?” the second person asked anxiously. / “You never know, Satan too may be in possession of his special kind of rocket of death; and if he is not careful to shut up, he will be dispersed to a worse Hell,” he answered.

In the conversation, one notes societal familiarisation of dictatorial conditions. For instance, when the anxious and inquisitive citizen asks his colleagues: “Lakini, ni maneno mengi gani aliyoyasema?” (6), “But surely, in what ways was he agitating, by speaking the truth?” To this question, “[j]ibu alilopewa lilikuwa la kutumbuliwa macho tu; naye maneno na maswali yakamwisha,” “for an answer, the people stared at him in shock; his questions and opinions vanished.” This captures the atmosphere of repression during Moi’s regime in which, as Susan Mueller writes, “[n]o one felt safe and no one knew when or if the Special Branch or the police would show up on their doorstep. [...]. Even ordinary people in public places looked over their shoulder to see who might be listening” (339). This repressive atmosphere is disrupted by martyrs envisioned in Wole Soyinka’s words: “The historic man [...] would appear to be a product of a choice between abject submission or bondage, on the one hand, for the sake of self-preservation, and, on the other, a quest for dignity, even if this leads to death” (Soyinka 90).

Histories of the impoverished people who become victims of neo-liberal policies on developing countries like Kenya by the IMF and World Bank are significant in any post-colonial reality. In the novel, Dzombo recalls experiences that triggered him into social activism. As a peasant farmer in his village, Dzombo grows maize to sustain his family, but the ministry of Agriculture mows it down because “Benki ya Dunia yenyewe ndiyo iliyotushauri kuwa sehemu hii inapaswa kupandwa mazao ya kutuletea fedha za kigeni — sasa wewe u nani wa kupinga ushauri huu wa kiutaalamu?” (18), “the World Bank itself advised us that this region should invest in crops that can yield foreign currency — so who are you to oppose professional directives?” Through the agricultural policy to grow “kachatapami, [ambayo kwa urefu ni] Kahawa, chai, katani, pareto, pamba, miwa” (21), “kachatapami, [acronym for] coffee, tea, sisal, pyrethrum, cotton, sugarcane,” the state asserts its autocracy even upon the least of peasants. For his own survival, Dzombo is forced to follow this draconian law, whereby he grows cash crops. But his dependency on government

loaned food impoverishes him more. At the time of payment for his yields, the cashier at the ministry of Agriculture offices tells him: “Bado tunakudai [...]. Kwanza, kwa chakula, mbolea na mbegu. [Pia,] kati ya kuvuna na kabla ya kuyaleta [mazao yako] hapa, bei za ulimwengu ziliteremka kwa ghafla” (19), “You still owe us, [...] First, for the loan food, fertilizer and seeds. [Also,] the period between the harvest and delivering [your produce] here, the world prices drastically fell”. These encounters with the global market through the state curtail Dzombo’s aspirations towards self-reliance.

A martyr had to stand up against the effects of imperial macroeconomics on impoverished farmers. The novel reveals state complicity in cooperating with, and worsening through corruption, draconian IMF-and-World-Bank-controlled world macroeconomic conditions. The state transfers issues like market liberalization and its implications to the peasants. In a critique of World Bank policies on the 1961-1983 agricultural development in Kenya, Paul Mosley writes: “[t]here have certainly been difficulties in the management of agricultural development, [but many of the cases] should be interpreted as problems in the system of overseas aid transfer rather than administrative failures by the recipient” (513). Mosley points out some of the Kenyan state’s managerial inefficiencies that affected agricultural performance in the period mentioned: mainly, long bureaucratic accounting procedures, and Treasury’s underestimation of “recurrent cost implications of a project of which donors have agreed to finance only the capital expenditure component” (Mosley 524). However, major setbacks to agricultural development were directly linked to IMF and World Bank ever-changing macroeconomic policies⁶⁰. In *Walenisi*, Dzombo reveals how changes in market prices directly affected small scale farmers in Kenya. But his contestation is on the state’s uncritical implementation of imperialists’ demands with total disregard of neither the peasants’ consent nor their (peasants) immediate needs. Particularly, the author condemns the forceful implementation of industrial crop husbandry at the expense of food crops⁶¹.

Through a martyr who would not stop at anything to transform the lives of the poor, Mkangi strongly suggests the possibility of transforming Kenya into a state that would genuinely commit itself to the healthcare of its citizens. He connects the commercialisation of healthcare with class and state inefficiencies, a case that resonates with deplorable healthcare

⁶⁰ Implementation of even small urgent financial matter had to be approved through a long and tedious chain of bureaucracy. Further, “many of the ‘management problems’ [...] seen on Kenyan agricultural projects have been caused not by blunderings of individuals but by the need to respond to world economic conditions” (Mosley 525).

⁶¹ Mosley identifies hefty overseas aid for research in industrial crops, and less concern for food crops in 1961-1983 Kenya (Mosley 520).

for the poor in Kenyan government hospitals. These hospitals lack adequate expertise, basic medical equipment, and medicines. On the other hand, the high-cost private hospitals exclusive for the rich are effective and efficient, highly equipped and secured. When in Walenisi, Mtu-Dzombo discovers the ruling elite's paranoia against the poor, and the malicious efforts to control their population. The ruling class "waliogopa kuongezeka kwa waduni 'ambao bila shaka watataka kuishi kama sisi,' haya ndiyo waliyoyasema faraghani" (180), "feared an increase in the population of the miserable 'who would doubtlessly demand to live like us,' this is what they said in secret".

Reflecting on the reign of the Wachuna in Walenisi before the liberation struggle that heralds an ideal society, the narrator indicates that the lives of the poor were "uzima-mauti kwakweli", "life-death indeed" (176)⁶². This is partly because the state had made healthcare "chombo cha biashara", "a commercialised object" (178). The rich have personal physicians and personal obstetricians who attend to them in their homes and in the high-cost hospitals. They also prefer birth through caesarean means rather than natural parturition. The novel juxtaposes this luxurious healthcare with pathetic situations of the poor. In a closer scrutiny of maternal healthcare for the poor, the narrator shows that many poverty-stricken women deliver on queues while waiting for medical cards (179) without which they cannot be attended to in any way. This highlights a torturous state-instituted bureaucracy, similar to the one discussed above on accounting inefficiencies in agriculture. For these 'wretched of the earth', to borrow Frantz Fanon's term, mothers, "aliyezaa alizaa, na aliyeshindwa basi uzazi ulimla — kwisha!", "whoever was fortunate to birth, birthed: but whoever was unfortunate, birthing gobbled her — period!" (179). Further, government obstetricians aggravate the suffering of poor women by torturing them in labour wards: slapping and scolding women in labour; discharging women immediately after childbirth; sterilising women without their knowledge nor consent (179).

Martyrdom is an important platform to mobilize citizens against an oppressive regime since it transforms the oppressed into fearless advocates for justice. The very idea of resorting to martyrdom reveals a state's extreme travesty of social-political justice. Confronting social and political injustices in a state like Moi's Kenya, especially before 1992, was a sacrificial task. Martyrdom is handy in reading such histories since it monumentalises Kenya's second liberation detainees, exiles, and those who were executed in their fight against the repressive

⁶² The Wachuna are portrayed in the novel as oppressors and exploiters, probably colonialists, who were toppled in a revolution that foresaw the establishment a new egalitarian Walenisi.

single-party state, which was eventually toppled in 2002. The novel's focus on the martyrdom of a poor person rather than an influential individual, as it is in many cases, shows the novelist's empathy with the histories of the unacknowledged lowly, the poor who sacrificed their lives in the hope of good governance. Dzombo, the pauper who becomes a martyr as imagined in the novel, defies death and actively speaks to the deplorable political and economic situations of his country — 'Jehanamu'. The next chapter section explores yet another form of activism, which though sacrificial, is not martyrdom.

Whistle Blower: State and Self in Yvonne Owuor's *Dust*

This section offers whistle blowing as another form of challenging state injustices. In martyrdom, the individual invokes an ideology that he/ she is ready to die for a noble cause; his/ her legacy unites the society against injustice. But a whistle blower is "one who speaks out against illegal or unethical practices in the organization where he works" (Alford 223). In a study that discredits whistle blowing, Alford paints a sad end of whistle blowers, and contends that whistle blowers are usually "seized by an overpowering principle, almost as though it were a god [which would] not let go until it has destroyed just about everything else the whistle blower cared about: career, home, family" (228). Yet Peter Baddeley, in defence of one particular whistle blower in medicine, writes that the whistle blower "seems to be an intensely humanitarian and dedicated professional who aspires for the highest standards" (Baddeley 1572). Colin Grant also notes that whistle blowing "is generally evoked by serious concern about what a business is doing, and the harm it may cause or be causing consumers, employees, or the wider community" (393). Grant views whistle blowers very highly, asserting that they "respond to a higher calling" (398). These seemingly ordinary people

stand out from the rest of us by such conspicuous courage and self-sacrifice, even though it is a sacrifice that is often imposed also on their families, serious whistle blowers can only be appreciated in their full significance when they are viewed as saints of secular culture. (Grant 398)

Here, whistle-blowers' mandate is to expose malpractices in their environs in the hope of enabling justice for the wider public despite the risks their actions may pertain to their lives.

The whistle-blower is a more contemporary form of activism employed in disrupting malpractices in Kenya's state organs such as Central Bank of Kenya. Necessitated by the need to counter corruption, this phenomenon strongly emerged in the Moi and Kibaki regimes. Yvonne Owuor's *Dust* provides a platform to reflect on histories of Kenya's whistle

blowers, the men and women who, despite their frailty as human beings, risked their lives by confronting state injustices. Here, I read the figure of whistle-blower in allusion to state corruption scandals such as Goldenberg and Anglo-Leasing mentioned in the introduction. Moreover, I read Owuor herself as a whistle-blower with regard to her perspective on controversial Kenyan histories.

Gloria Mwaniga sees Yvonne Owuor's shunning of humour in *Dust* as a brave way of challenging "a nation that uses humour to avoid engaging heavy, ugly truths" (Mwaniga *Daily Nation* n.p.). Rasnah Warah, hailing Yvonne Owuor's "description of people living on the fringes of society", places Owuor in the uniqueness of female authorship cadre in her argument that "[w]omen [...] tend to be more honest in their writing, not just about themselves but also about the world they live in" (Warah *Daily Nation* n.p.). According to Godwin Siundu, Owuor's novel is among Kenyan literary works that "speaks to the current challenges of resurgent racial or ethnic nationalism" which enables readers "to imagine and narrate a nation that embraces its diverse heritage without imploding under the nationalistic burdens of such differences" ("Celebrating and Reclaiming Kenya's Top Female Author" *Daily Nation* n.p.). Interestingly, *Dust* is replete with 'nationalistic burdens', a point I intimate in the first section of this chapter, especially on how it erases the Kiambaa church massacre of the Kikuyu people as it foregrounds the Luo people's massacres in Naivasha during the 2007/2008 PEV, and also a retelling of Luo nation victimisation by the Kikuyu hegemony.

This section aims at understanding Kenya's state histories through the lens of a special form of dissidence — whistle blowing. The novel exposes individuals' as well as the state's attempts to conceal memories of atrocities. It is precisely because of this that Owuor affirms a moral demand for atonement which is only possible through naming, i.e., speaking the truth. Her memorable injunction is pegged on Tom Mboya's "national dreams" (Owuor 272) of a united Kenya: "[a]fter Mboya, Kenya's official language: English, Kiswahili, and silence. There was also memory" (273). The profundity of this statement lies not in Mboya, who, despite fostering national unity upon independence, largely contributed to the stifling of the opposition and democracy in the Jomo Kenyatta regime, but in the notion of the Kenyan citizenry's silence in the face of state-sanctioned versions of truth⁶³. In this state of affairs, memory emerges as a powerful weapon against the state's treacherous censorship. Memory

⁶³ Tom Mboya became a key propagandist of the Kenyatta regime. See Oginga Odinga's autobiography *Not Yet Uhuru* (295-300).

refigures itself into a language that bears witness to historical atrocities such as those archived in the TJRC Kenya⁶⁴.

In *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot asserts: “the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production” (Trouillot xix). *Dust* exposes the represented Kenyan state as an interested party in the production of the narratives of the pasts of its nation. Through controlling the production of history, the state and its agents ascertain their legitimacy. Yet, in its attempts to silence the past, especially the atrocities meted against communities, memory redeems the very traumatic pasts. Further, Trouillot submits: “[h]uman beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators [because] history means both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts” (Trouillot 2). Through a recounting of Nyipir’s life, *Dust* demonstrates the bloodied actions of the Kenyan military as history despite their refusal to narrate their actions. But the society is blessed with those who are excellent narrators of the state secrets, like the Trader, who compensate for the silence imposed by state oaths of secrecy.

One of the characters who believes in whistle-blowing in the novel is the Trader, Nyipir’s friend and ally, a man whose “genealogy stank” (Owuor 82) because he can only trace his roots to a wandering Punjabi trader, to a ruthless Arab slaver, to a murderous Greek trader, and he was raised by prostitutes in Garissa. This man knows the danger inherent in imposed amnesia, a nation’s silence over atrocities: “[t]he Trader speaks because he must, and because an unshared story can break a heart that carries it alone for too long” (127). The Trader himself seems to be an intra-textual whistle-blower; he is a collector of secrets, some of which he tells. He stands in sharp contrast to Nyipir, who upholds the code of silence over the many atrocities he, as a government agent, has executed or been complicit in; but whose memories we have access to, through his stream of consciousness. Bearing in mind that Nyipir is the flag bearer at the independence ceremony, he is an allegorical symbol of Kenya and its burdens of history and its attempts to hold its family together, without breaking the many silences that are part of the family’s blood-soaked genealogy.

⁶⁴ The atrocities documented in the TJRC Kenya were re-membered through testimonies of the survivors. The extent of the brutalities executed against targeted communities by government security agents immediately disrupted the state’s rhetoric of a peace-loving Kenya. This official version of a great Kenya was channelled for years through government owned media (especially Kenya Broadcasting Corporation) and court musicians’ praises.

Narrated state sanctioned atrocities, some of which I discuss in this section, horrify not only civilians, but also state agents who execute them, like Petrus, a police officer whom Ajany perceives to be heartless. Petrus reflects: “[t]his is a dense land, he thinks, its memories a deluge that crave atonement” (187). This is indicative of Kenya’s state histories of concealment of the violence it has meted against the citizens for many years. And Yvonne Owuor, if understood as a whistle blower, boldly dissects these histories hence suggesting that a dependable, sustainable way of healing the Kenyan nation is possible through facing archives of atrocity and atoning aggrieved individuals and communities.

The whistle-blower figure demonstrates the desire for an alternative republic in a country that tolerates institutionalised corruption, which continuously deprives the poor while enriching the rich. The figure also invokes revolutionary Pan-Africanism while contesting imperialism in African states. Through historical allusions, the novel shows Odidi’s political consciousness in the light of Nigeria’s Fela Kuti, Burkina Faso’s Thomas Sankara and Congo’s Patrice Lumumba⁶⁵. Sankara and Lumumba were assassinated because of their beliefs in social equality of their people and their strong opposition to neo-colonialism. Odidi’s revolutionary ideology is moulded while he studies:

at university, he found Fela Kuti’s songs — their compacted rage: *Aye, aye, aye... I no go agree make my brother hungry, make I no talk...*

He had also appointed himself Thomas Sankara’s heir and wore non-prescription lenses shaped like those Patrice Lumumba had once worn. (Owuor 10)

The novel’s depiction of Odidi as a self-appointed heir of Sankara’s legacy suggests not only a whistleblower’s Pan-African vision for transforming Kenya into a country of people with integrity, but also the aspiration for economic and gender equality. Sankara’s legacy seems holistically transformative: he defined himself as “first and foremost an ardent Nationalist and convinced Panafricanist who has at heart the restoration of the dignity of the African and

⁶⁵ Fela declared his residence in Lagos a republic in an attempt to “demonstrate one thing among others: that individual life did not have to be as constraining as it was in Nigeria, where the tension of acquisitiveness, generated by the capital ideology of development, had almost completely denied the individual a sense of identity and the possibility of self-fulfilment” (Labinjoh 133). Thomas Sankara was assassinated on 5th Oct 1987 in a coup led by Blaise Compaore whom Sankara believed was his closest friend. Indeed, Compaore had led the coup that rescued Sankara from imprisonment on trumped-up charges and then made him President on 5th August 1983 (Wilkins 381). Patrice Lumumba was assassinated in 1961 in an imperialist conspiracy by Belgium, the United States, and United Nations “which feared that Congo might fall under the Communist influence” (Boyce 1249). Furthermore, Belgium oversaw the assassination because it “hoped to retain control over the Congo” (Boyce 1249).

the well-being and progress of the African continent” (Martin 78). This is evident in his change of the country’s name, from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso — “ the ‘land of people with integrity’” (Wilkins 376). As a practical Marxist, Wilkins observes, Sankara challenged exploitation of women by promoting them to high leadership positions; confronting and effecting demotions among the “major ethnic group of Burkina Faso which had maintained a rigid hierarchical structure” (384); readjusting “salaries so that all ministers and public servants earned same [minimal] wage [as himself]” (383); effecting tough measures to “rid the country of sterile bureaucracy and corruption especially amongst government officials” (383). In this case, Sankara is a symbol of the transformation that Odidi, as a social activist, pursues. Yet, like Patrice Lumumba who outrightly condemned the evils of colonialism in the Congo even to his damnation, Odidi speaks out against the evils the Kenyan state metes against the citizens.

The figure of the whistle-blower also foregrounds the political nature of the perennial pastoral conflicts in the Northern Kenya region. *Dust* blows a whistle about the region’s instability by showing that, just like the colonial state, the post-independence Kenyan state uses the region as a banishment zone for erratic or politically unsuitable civil servants and security personnel. *Dust* traces histories of the construction of the region as a banishment zone. The colonial government deployed Hugh Bolton, Nyipir’s benefactor, to the region in its attempts to get him to resign and return to England. Nyipir also finds a hiding place in the region after the state turns against him during what the novel constructs as the Luo persecution after Tom Mboya’s assassination. Because of this victimisation, “Nyipir declared, ‘I owe allegiance to no nation or people’” (84). With his geneology cut off by World War II, as discussed in Chapter One, Nyipir learns to find refuge in the hostile landscape of North Eastern Kenya.

The situation in North Eastern Kenya is well captured through the experiences of Aaron Chache, a police officer posted in the region as a punishment for soliciting bribes in the better regions of Kenya closer to Nairobi. Aaron realises the gravity of his situation when he has “to cling to sanity in an arid land” (206) due to insecurity. He hides in a bunker for days every time “a parade of raiders, rustlers, and other frightening elements strolled through his outpost” (210); and “barely escaped alive” (211) when “a reportedly dead six-foot-seven rustler from Suguta, with a bandolier and a Remington 870 pump-action shotgun, had barged” (210) into his office and violently robbed him of government arms. The depictions of a region controlled by “belligerent nomads” (211) raises questions on the state’s commitment

to the peace of the region. When Owuor traces the vicious rustler's origins to Suguta, she points to another bloodletting encounter in the now infamous Baragoi in Suguta Valley: the Valley of Death. This is an allusion to a tragedy well known to Kenyans. In September 2012, Turkana raiders well acquainted with the hostile terrain of Suguta Valley killed forty-two police officers during a bungled Stock Theft Police pursuit mission⁶⁶. The allusion emphasises government officials' misery and anxiety resultant from their posting in the region. But at the same time, the climate of terror depicted reveal the Kenyan state's helplessness in the face of barons of stock theft who have made Northern Kenya their haven, what the novel refers to as "*The Northern Frontier Stock Exchange*" (209, original emphasis).

Indeed, the police headquarters is privy to the livestock theft and illegal firearm trade networks in the region, cartels that they oversee and benefit from. To highlight state complicity in northern Kenya region's instability, the novel shows that Nyipir, a chief participant in the cattle-raiding culture and illegal firearm trade, is a close associate of the head of police and the police intelligence unit. As mentioned above, Nyipir's grievances against the state drive him to participate actively in plundering northern Kenya. His conviction, which he attempts to force on his children, as he implores Odidi with whips when he (Odidi) renounces his father's ways, is "The only ... war you fight... is for what belongs to you. You can't live in the songs of people who don't know your name" (10). This renunciation of a common citizenship to Kenya is reflective of northern Kenya residents' feeling of marginalisation. Paul Goldsmith, in a study of pastoral conflicts in Eastern Africa, mentions existence of elaborate networks for livestock theft in northern Kenya which

have been drawn into urban culture and participate in trading networks and local and national politics. The end result has been the increase in raids, cattle trade, violent anti-states movements and therefore a general state of turbulence, conflict and insecurity in the region (Goldsmith 11)

The Kenyan state conceals these atrocities from the public and shows no interest in addressing the situation. *Dust* intimates that state agents' involvement in the conflict informs the reluctance to address the matter.

Odidi renounces destructive trades in cattle theft and illegal firearm trade after he has embraced Fela Kuti's idea of alternative republic. The conviction that he should fight against

⁶⁶ See Muchemi Wachira's (2012) "How I Survived Raid that Killed 42 Policemen".

social injustices against his country Kenya is so strong that he sacrifices his relationship with his father. The narrator recounts that Odidi travels home to Wuoth Ogik, and on

their third evening as a family, Odidi Oganda brought in the AK-47 that Nyipir, his father, had given him five years ago. He took it apart, then threw pieces at Nyipir's feet, chanting: *Aye, aye, aye...I no agree make my brother hungry, make I no talk...*" (10)

This is a major step in renouncing violence against one's fellow citizens.

This section establishes that patriotism greatly inspires whistle blowing against various ills in the society. Further, the teamwork and a belief in the cause contribute to the effectiveness of guarding the society against civil malpractices. *Dust* demonstrates this through a sport, Rugby, — a game that requires teamwork, determination, and sacrifice, given the difficult tackles from the opposing team. The winger, a decisive player in the game, embodies the whistle-blower. This means that the whistle-blower is not a loner in the struggles against injustice but the visible actor, such as wingers in rugby, in a mission involving many other significant but back-stage actors. For Odidi, his immense success as a winger in national rugby fosters in him a high sense of patriotism:

[b]efore Jonah Lomu made it right to have large wingers, there was Shifta the Kenyan Winger, who carried the game into the face of the opponents, and scored try after try while crowds chanted *Shifta! Thump, thump! Winger, Thump! Thump!* And later, when he heard the Kenyan national anthem, felt it resound in his spirit, he had wept tears that travelled past his lips and reached the earth. (8, original emphases)

Through allusion to the New Zealand rugby global superstar, Jonah Lomu, the narrator carves an unequalled stature of greatness not only for Odidi, but also for the fans who desire identification with the winning team, Kenya. Writing about European league football fans in Kenya, and their desire to belong to a global world, Godwin Siundu argues: “[s]porting activities like football can [...] be used to help tease out problematic matters such as citizenship, nationalism, ethnic and racial relationships, as well as masculine and feminine transformations in the light of discourses of globalisation and cosmopolitanism (Siundu, "European Football Worlds" 337). Tying these views to the idea of Kenya's whistle-blowers' histories, this section demonstrates that whistle-blowers, special activists of social justice, establish unrivalled legacies in the areas which they choose to transform.

Through the character of Odidi who hails from Northern Kenya, an area that has been pretty much left to its own devices throughout Kenyan history, Owuor suggests a need to confront the region's marginalisation⁶⁷. Owuor achieves this by displacing the Kenyan literary narrative tradition from the typical central province or Nyanza region to Turkana County: a terrain that has never featured much in Kenyan public and literary imaginaries. As depicted above, after the winger has enabled victory in a game where he is a key player, the national anthem plays. By locating the Shifta memory at the centre of a nationalist activity – sport, the novel shows the public's attempt at breaking the silence about the Shifta wars. This is a way of recuperating the war with positive, conciliatory ethos, even if short-lived. Indeed, Shifta, Odidi's nickname, which is sung by his fans, is an encoding of Kenya army's mass killings of Northern Kenya civilians during the Shifta war in a military campaign to clamp down attempts at seceding of the then Northern Frontier District of Kenya. Despite this, the anthem sung at the event unveils the narrator's hope for Kenya's regeneration, by means of love and national unity, from a violent past. By flaunting the nick-name Shifta in a space where Kenya's national anthem is emotionally sung, Owuor exposes the utopian belief in a greater national identity.

Whistle blowing is sometimes the only antidote to grand corruption. As *Dust* reveals, grand corruption is a complex network that is sometimes, weaved by imperialism, secured by the judiciary through oaths of secrecy, executed by powerful civil servants. This powerful corruption network thrives in a complicit environment: the police, the media, and the public have normalised corruption and see it as a way of economic progress. Odidi's struggle with the state when his company is entangled in a corruption scheme demonstrates whistle-blowers' alienating and tragic ends. Tich Lich Engineers, a company founded by Odidi and his colleague, Musali, wins a multi-million contract to repair the nation's dams after catastrophic heavy rains caused by El Nino. But while on duty dredging the dams, a senior magistrate summons and gives them

a paragraph to recite. An oath of secrecy, subject to the Official Secrecy Act. [...]. A week later, Odidi, as chief engineer, received top-secret instructions to silt the dams. Contract to “service the turbines”— in other words, render them incapable of delivering power to the public. At the same time, news of the sudden flooding of the

⁶⁷ Tullow Oil's discovery of oil in North Eastern Kenya has made the Kenyan state to direct its attention to the region. See “Oil Discovery in Turkana County, Kenya” (Johannes *et al*).

lower reaches of Tana River. Travelling to the dam site, they found the dam gates opened. (160)

After the state sanctioned electric power sabotage, the managing director of national power company appears on television and sorrowfully announces

an eminent power-shortage emergency and the enforcement of power-rationing plan. As if by coincidence, obsolete diesel generators from Europe and Asia happened to be aboard cargo ships on their way to Kenya. They would take care of the shortfall in power at 3,000 percent above usual cost. A company to administer the supply of power from these generators had already been registered. (161)

In opposition of this act, Odidi officially complains to the minister of energy and he is instructed to “‘put it in writing.’ So Odidi wrote a letter to the minister headed *Acts of Treason Against the People and Nation of Kenya*, backed with data and figures” (161, original emphases). The minister’s office offers no help; neither does he succeed in an attempt to have his report published in the dailies. His other effort is to persuade his fellow engineers in the company to resign and expose the rot, but this is countered by the members voting him out because he “was being difficult. Wouldn’t listen. We’re talking billions, man” (162). He even records several statements with the police, and unsuccessfully seeks audience with the President on the matter. He moves “from office to office with a petition form for citizens to sign” (161); he unsuccessfully seeks help from NGOs; he is also “spotted speaking on street corners” (163). His friend and colleague, Musali, who purports to understand Kenya, and how to survive in a corrupt system tells Ajany about the scandal, ““This was big. Really big. When you see something like this, man, you say yes or you die, y’know?”” (161). He proudly admits being complicit in the crime: “We silted the dams. No choice. We have our money” (163). To Musali, bowing to corruption of this magnitude is practical because “[t]his thing of mahonourama patriotism” (161) is hollow. And indeed, as Odidi is exploring all avenues of exposing and stopping the scandal, “more diesel generators [are] brought into the country. Tax-free” (161). The final blow to Odidi’s efforts comes when the state invokes its machinery: the bank suddenly recalls his mortgage, throws him out and auctions his house, he is threatened and summoned by police for loitering, “[n]o lawyer would take up the case against the state” (163).

The above detailed analysis of Odidi provides insights in understanding Kenya’s whistle-blowers such as David Munyakei and John Githongo. Billy Kahora traces Munyakei’s life in a

biography *The True Story of David Munyakei*⁶⁸. Yet, upon exposing the Goldenberg scandal, which “cost the Kenyan economy an approximate Ksh 68 billion — slightly more than a billion dollars at today’s exchange” (Kahora 130, original emphases), Munyakei’s socio-economic life worsens. But the legacy that Munyakei left behind is memorable: in one moment, he stood up against state injustice.

This section has explored literary portrayals of a new form of socio-political dissidence where citizens with conscience stand up against state and state agents’ malpractices against the wider public interest. A critical engagement with the whistle blowing figure provides transformative ways of reading our histories. It provokes the need to examine few individuals’ contributions to structural transformation for mobilising the entire society to participate in advocacy for integrity in the state apparatuses.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered insights into the histories of the post-independence Kenyan state. The analysis foregrounds literary reflections on individuals who fashion themselves as martyrs and whistle blowers play in disrupting state oppression. It also points out the novelists’ critiques of Kenyans’ reluctance to confront troubled histories of state atrocities and suggests a rethinking of the situation. Novelists’ approach to Kenya’s histories transcend the defeatism associated with state assassinations, extra-judicial murders, and death sentences of advocates of political and socio-economic reforms by demystifying the powers appropriated by autocrats and their clientele. The novelists portray state clientele in a dictatorial regime, especially sycophants, as caricatures engaged in an existential war against each other. The significance of these portrayals is evident when one scrutinises the transformative powers invested in the champions of political and socio-economic reforms and the masses.

The chapter also shows different strategies employed by novelists writing in Kiswahili and in English. While Ngugi wa Thiong’o in *Wizard of the Crow* resorts to the carnivalesque to

⁶⁸ As a young man striving to build a career, Munyakei aspires for a life of integrity despite living in an environment stifled by dishonesty. When he discovers illegal transactions in Central Bank of Kenya, as a clearing and forwarding junior employee, he rises above the status quo and takes measures to stop it. He speaks to his confidant, Onyango Jamasai, who agrees with him saying “[t]hese transactions are illegal. It’s common sense. Where does gold and diamonds come from in Kenya to warrant these millions?” (Kahora 59). He exposes the scandal to the opposition leaders, after which he is detained for a few months, his mother dies of heart attack on learning of his arrest, he receives threats to his life and escapes to Mombasa where he lives camouflaging as a Muslim. Eventually, he dies in poverty in July 2006 even after winning several awards.

condemn dictatorial governance in a postcolony, Katama Mkangi in *Walenisi* chooses magical realism to imagine a better world. Through the carnivalesque, Ngugi magnifies the rot in African regimes. Through magical realism, Mkangi captures both the dystopic and utopic worlds that are possible in African regimes. A reading of these two different but related patterns that appear to be language-oriented in Kenyan novels enriches the understanding of Kenyan narrated histories.

Chapter Four

Kenya's Social Histories in Romance Novels

Introduction

This chapter explores the manner in which love stories and narratives of courtship/romance reveal certain insights into particular moments in Kenyan history. Here, I focus on romance novels set in Kenya's transitional era of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. This an era marked by radical social changes enabled by Kenya's emergence from colonialism to post-independence, with the elusive prospects to socio-economic well-being. The novels I study here offer platforms to engage with Kenya's various histories; they situate lovers as actors negotiating their existences through regimes of religious, cultural, class, and racial values in Kenya's shifting histories. I read Katama Mkangi's *Ukiwa* (1975), "Desolation," Zainabu Burhani's *Mwisho wa Kosa* (1987), "The End of Wrongs", Mwangi Gicheru's *Across the Bridge* (1979), and Yusuf Dawood's *One Life Too Many* (1991) in the contexts of Christianity and Mijikenda cultural ethos, effects of higher education on Swahili culture, class barriers and the poor's quest for economic inclusivity, and post-independence Kenya's Africanisation policy, respectively. Love narratives provide a meaningful prism through which to read histories of the diverse Kenyan society. Lynn Thomas and Jennifer Cole, in their study of love in Africa, view love as "the sentiments of attachment and affiliation that bind people to one another — in sexual, predominantly heterosexual relationships", and argue that "contemporary discourses, sentiments, and practices of love are the product of complex historical processes and intersections" (2, 4). Tracing literary portrayals of the shifting practices of love offers insightful glimpses of Kenya's social histories.

Different scholars focusing on the romance genre depicting the Kenyan social terrain present worthwhile insights in understanding Kenya's fragmented histories. For instance, Catherine Muhoma in her study of 'failed' and 'admirable' masculinities, in reference to class distinctions in Kenya, demonstrates that even though the romance novel has a very high "capacity to entertain, [it does] explore some of the pertinent issues" (Muhoma 26) affecting society. Romance narratives also examine women's histories in unique ways. For instance, Sophie Macharia in a study of Grace Ogot's *The Strange Bride* (1988) and "The White Veil" in *Land Without Thunder* (1968), argues that the romance narrative gives "women space for expression, visibility and agency" (262). She asserts that Ogot's narratives advance "romance as an agent of restoring human dignity. Even more dramatic is the demonstration of love as a means to restore moral order in society" (S. Macharia 267). For S. Macharia, Ogot "roots

romance within limitless history of [the Luo community]" (265); applies "love and romance as a factor of reconciliation" (269); and "reconstructs romance within the historiography of myth as a mediating instrument through which mankind explains his cosmological existence and cultural order" (277). These reflections underscore the nuanced histories that can be gleaned from romance narratives.

Tom Odhiambo observes that "[p]opular genres such as the thriller or romance indeed have the capacity to combine the elements of excitement and assessment of social life" ("The Romantic Detective" 190). He gives an example that "a romance story that tells of a relationship between a man and a woman can also be read as an allegory of the relationship between citizens and their nations" (190). This view presents the problem of gender relations contested by Florence Stratton in her critique of "Mother Africa Trope"⁶⁹. But in a definition that embraces all the novels I analyse in this thesis, allegory is also a search for the way "the text speaks to its context" (Szeman 808). These insights provide a base on which I anchor my analysis of love and courtship narratives and how they interrogate Kenya's transitional histories, from colonialism to independence.

This chapter is divided into four, and each section engages with specific historical moments in a geographically representative manner. The first section focuses on Katama Mkangi's *Ukiwa* with a particular interest in how it emplots missionary influences on the social histories of the Ribe, a remarkable location at coastal Kenya given its proximity to Rabai Missionary Station, in a love narrative⁷⁰. Ribe is the birthplace of the author but also the name of one of the nine nations of the Mijikenda⁷¹. One of the reasons for the establishment of the mission in Rabai was that the Mijikenda had "remained untouched by Islam" (Harper II 35) which had earlier influences on the Swahili and other communities along the Kenyan coast through the Indian Ocean immigrants from the seventh and eighth centuries as explored in Chapter One. Cynthia Brantley, in a book that explores the histories of the Mijikenda, contests marginalisation of communities other than Swahili in social studies that focus on

⁶⁹ Florence Stratton argues that the 'mother Africa trope' propounded by male writers such as Negritude poets Leopold Sedar Senghor "operates against the interests of women, excluding them, implicitly if not explicitly, from authorship and citizenship" (*Contemporary African Literature* 40).

⁷⁰ Jim Harper II observes that Johann Ludwig Krapf and Johann Rebmann "established in 1847 the first white mission station in East Africa among the Mijikenda (groups) at Rabai village (Freretown), about 25 km North West of Mombasa" (35, original brackets). Marjorie Macgoye has explored these histories in her last novel, *Rebman: a Novel* (2014).

⁷¹ Mijikenda is a term derived from Kiswahili that means nine homesteads. It is now an ethnic group constituting the Ribe, Digo, Duruma, Chonyi, Giriama, Kambe, Kauma, Rabai, and Jibana. They were derogatively referred to as the Nyika (bush) people in most colonial writings, especially in Charles Boxer's histories of the Portuguese on the Swahili coast (Boxer 66).

coastal Kenya. Such studies advance “this dynamic of ‘all things seen through Swahili eyes’ [hence a study of the Mijikenda helps in] removing the silence of hinterland peoples from coastal history” (Brantley xv). *Ukiwa* provides such a rare opportunity to engage with complex social networks and histories of the Mijikenda.

The second section discusses *Mwisho wa Kosa*'s meditation on Kenya's scholarship histories at the dawn of independence, and how overseas educated young people affected societal structures through reformulating their love relationships upon their return. The analysis evokes histories of the African Scholarship Program for American Universities (ASPAU) founded by the American Committee on Africa (ACOA)⁷². In outlining the beneficiaries of scholarships for young Africans at the time, Adelide Cromwell notes that in 1957, “the largest number [of scholarship holders], 242, came from Kenya [...] on a highly publicized and accelerated program by Tom Mboya, a labor leader and politician in Kenya” (95). Mboya himself narrates the efforts he invested in facilitating the ‘air-lifts’ in “preparation for the personnel who [would] be needed at all levels [...] where responsibilities [would] fall on the indigenous people” (Mboya 141) upon independence. Reflecting on the knowledge exchanges between Africa and America, Cromwell states that the exchanges “have enriched the knowledge and comprehension of cultures and societies on both sides and have created and consolidated personal and professional ties across national boundaries” (97). This section examines literary portrayals of how the cultural contacts through higher education reconfigure Kenyan communities through returning students. *Mwisho wa Kosa*, in which several characters are beneficiaries of scholarships such as the ones organized by Tom Mboya's ‘airlifts’, revisits the histories of these scholarly exchanges, particularly the conflicts that arise from returning scholarship beneficiaries who disrupt established societal norms about courtship and romantic love.

In the third section, I read Mwangi Gicheru's *Across the Bridge*, which interrogates histories of social inequalities in the early decades of post-independence Kenya. In a study of *The Girl Was Mine* (1996) by David Karanja, Catherine Muhoma writes that the romance novel attempts to explore “what was once construed to be a great divide in Kenya's social scene — the gap between rich and poor. [...]. Romance therefore becomes a tool for exploring whether this social stratification could be diminished” (29). With this in mind, I explore the intricacies

⁷² ACOA was founded by a small group of individuals in 1953 in America in identification with the black people's struggles against colonialism, and aimed at providing support at many levels (Houser, “American Committee on Africa” 387).

of crossing the class bridge when a male domestic servant falls in love and marries the daughter of a wealthy civil servant. Tracing histories of domestic service from colonial restrictions on Black people's mobility, I identify the continuity of these draconian laws in post-independence Kenya; which intersects with ordinary Kenyans' unmet expectations of independence⁷³. I show that the early years of independence were years of disappointment, but also a period surging with aspirations for self-reliance both for the individual and for the nation.

Finally, the fourth section reflects on tempestuous romance of a British expatriate in Yusuf Dawood's *One Life Too Many*, and argues that the romance is an allegory of Kenya's Africanisation policy. Africanisation policy insisted on giving preference to Black people in the civil service, private sector, business, and farming. Tom Mboya endorsed the Africanisation policy's potential to address "the problems of citizenship and social integration and adjust [...] the artificial imbalance created by deliberate policies of race discrimination during colonial rule" (Mboya 110-111). But as the section shows, Dawood contests the policy as he draws parallels between it and betrayal in a love affair.

Generally, protagonists from all the four novels that I analyse here flout the norms of their society when they fall in love. Their transgressions productively reveal the workings of history in individuals' lives as well as suggest transformations of perceived rigid structures in society. The estrangement of characters in love mostly indicates their commitment to transformation. In their study on love in Africa, Lynn Thomas and Jennifer Cole argue for the

heterogeneous ways that people in Africa have deployed ideologies of love to elaborate generational and cultural distinctions and claim political inclusion; how they have reconfigured affective relations amid the profound political, economic, and social changes of the past century; and how they have engaged ideals of romantic love to reimagine gender relations. (5-6)

This chapter offers similar insights by reading fictional engagements with love, and how the narratives speak to cultural, religious, economic, and political debates in Kenyan history.

⁷³ In a special address to the nation delivered on 20th October 1964, the then Prime Minister of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta acknowledges Kenyans' "high expectations [but reminds them that] it would be impossible to eliminate all past imperfections and injustices, and to meet all modern aspirations and needs, in such a short time" (*Harambee* 3). He also emphasised the need for aspiring "towards the greatest possible degree of self-reliance [and shunning] outside aid" (*Harambee* 5).

Navigating Missionary Influences: Katama Mkangi's *Ukiwa* (1975)

This section explores the way the novel uses a love story set at a particular moment and geo-cultural context in Kenyan history to meditate on the gendered moral economies at that moment, and how people navigated them. It illuminates represented histories of cultural confluence resultant from missionary influences on the Ribe, and how this conflicts with Mijikenda cultural beliefs. In a historical exploration of Kenya's Kiswahili creative works, KyalloWamitila identifies *Ukiwa* as “[o]ne of the commendable works of the 1970s” (117). Similarly, Diane Ciekawy and Kamoji Wachira point out that *Ukiwa*, “a love story that dramatize[s] the gendered life paths of youth in postcolonial independent Kenya, brought [Mkangi] initial public notoriety” (vii). They further observe that *Ukiwa* “portray[s] a social reality of deteriorating economic and political prospects for the poor” (vii). Interestingly, many scholars only mention the popularity of *Ukiwa* as they proceed to offer detailed analyses of Mkangi's *Walenisi* and *Mafuta* (1984), “Oil.” Unlike these novels, *Ukiwa* has received limited scholarly attention.

Ukiwa is a coming of age narrative: schooling and loving, heartbreak and healing, and above all, moral inscription in a hostile world. Emplotted in these coming-of-age encounters are the larger histories of coastal Kenya. This is a compelling narrative of the woes and disappointments of youthful Matano, the I-narrator protagonist, who is pursuing education at secondary school when he falls intensely in love with Tede Lila. Subsequently, the lovers' quest for higher education in distant institutions strains their great relationship to breaking point. The novel seems to endorse the notion that the city morally compromises unmarried young women in more damaging ways than young men. These gendered fears of rural-urban mobility were predominant not only at coastal Kenya, but also in the rest of Kenya. Lynn Thomas, for instance, writes, “the greatest obstacles to recruiting schoolgirls for colonial midwifery work [in Meru] was parents' fear that a training stint in Nairobi would render their daughters 'loose' women” (182). In *Ukiwa*, Matano is portrayed as faithful to Lila while pursuing university education. But when Lila joins a tertiary college in Mombasa, she becomes entangled with the city's sexual liberalism and deceit, breaks up her relationship with Matano and gets involved in sex work. Matano blames Chawa, one of his university colleagues and friend, for maliciously luring Lila to sex work. He narrates with sharp irony: “Chawa, ambayenilikutananye Chuo Kikuu, [...] alijidai kuwa rafiki kumbe alikuwa 'kikulacho' na hasidi mkuu. Alichowahi kunisaidia ni kunisaliti katika mapenzi yangu na Lila — kitendo ambacho kilisaidia kumwondoa Lila duniani akiwa angali bado mgeni kabisa”

(Mkangi 75), “Chawa, whom I met at the university, [...] claimed to be my friend but I later learnt he was traitorous and malicious. The only help he ever offered me was to betray me, causing the collapse of the love between Lila and I — an act that led to her exit from earth while she was but a newly arrived visitor.” In the course of her sex work, Lila ends up committing suicide in unclear circumstances. This tragedy leaves Matano with unimaginable desolation and many unanswered questions. Here, the narrator offers a cautionary narrative on urban young women’s sexualities (Ligaga 249) by affirming the stereotype that the city is more treacherous to young women from ‘moral enclaves’ of rural life than to their counterpart male. Lila lacks agency in the face of the pimp figure, Chawa, whose name (*chawa* is lice in Kiswahili) implies parasitism.

Education offered at the missionary schools seems to lead to cultural alienation of young Mijikenda. The educators denigrate their cultures as a result of teachings that portray indigenous beliefs as ‘despicable’⁷⁴. This can be seen when Matano embraces hierarchical relations between European and African cultures, in many cases displacing African values. At the beginning of their love affair, Matano and Lila meet in secret places, ensuring that Lila’s mother does not get to discover the affair. This conduct is in accordance with Ribe values whereby a young man in love with a girl only expresses it publicly to her parents when both are ready for marriage. But Matano is so drawn to the liberties engendered in European culture, that he transgresses the Mijikenda moral codes. Tired of keeping his love a secret, Matano invokes European values to make their courtship public. Matano seems to underline the novelty of European modes of courtship, especially when he recalls and later emulates his European colleagues at school who ask permission from the girls’ parents to take them (girls) out. But he is conscious that

[h]aya yalikuwa mageni kwangu, hasa kwa kufuatia mazingira yangu na pia desturi zetu za Kiafrika. Lakini kwa kuwa Uzungu ulikuwa umenitapakaa, sikuona kosa kufuata tabia hii ambayo haikuwa ngeni kwangu tu bali hata kwa mila zetu. Nikakata shauri ya kutojificha tena wakati mwingine. (26)

[t]his was foreign to me, especially considering our African cultural context. But at that time, I treasured Whiteness so much that I didn’t see anything wrong in following

⁷⁴ The Rabai Mission insisted on stamping out “‘despicable’ practices such as rites of passage, drumming and dancing, birth and death rituals, pouring of libations and all customs and traditions that the European missionaries deemed pagan” (Harper II 36).

values that were not only foreign to me but also to our culture. I vowed not to keep the love affair a secret any longer.

During Christmas Holiday, Matano invites Lila to his rural home and stays with her for a while. This act is against the moral codes of the Mijikenda, as he acknowledges:

Niling'amu tokea awali kwamba nilikuwa ninakwenda kinyume cha tabaka Fulani za kienyeji na ningefaulu tu kama wazazi wangu niunganika mkono, lakini taabu ilikuwa ni kukosekana kwa maarifa ya kuwaeleza kinaganaga mapinduzi ya mazingira yaliyoletwa na elimu ya kisasa na jinsi Uzungu ulivyongandama na kunitawala. (50)

I knew from the beginning that I was going against certain customs and that I could only succeed if my parents supported me, but the problem was I lacked the audacity and dexterity to openly inform them about the societal revolution brought about by Western education and how Whiteness reigned over my conscience.

In this case, Western education facilitated by the missionaries is a catalyst for transgression of Mijikenda social norms. The situation is more complicated when one considers Matano's awareness of his cultural alienation that makes him "a 'child of two worlds'" (Wanjala, *For Home and Freedom* 33). This is particularly evident in his deliberate confrontation of social norms, and his attempts to rationalise his actions: "[h]aikuwa ni kwa shauri ya ukaidi bali ni kwa sababu ya kumeza ustaarabu wa kigeni nilioupata shule bila kuchagua au kudadisi" (Mkangi 49), "my actions were not motivated by sheer rebellion, it was because I uncritically ingested the foreign civilisation I acquired in school". Here, Matano exposes his desire to synthesise two separate cultural ethos, the European and the Mijikenda. Chris Wanjala shows that such attempts are very alienating especially because they privilege European culture at the expense of the indigenous one: "[c]ultural synthesis in the African context means grafting modern technology and forms of organization from the West on traditional African culture. Emphasis here is on the adjustment of African societies to the new culture" (*For Home and Freedom* 32).

This romantic relationship offers us glimpses into the intersecting moral-cultural economies in the Ribe colonial context and how people made sense of it. Matano does not just graft European cultural ethos on the Mijikenda worldview, but conveniently navigates different moral economies. For instance, when the indigenous logics appear to frown upon premarital dating, he activates 'uzungu' as his moral barometer; but, as I show below, when the religious

version of ‘uzungu’ too disapproves of public premarital socialising, especially at night, he asserts that the love between him and Lila transcends religious boundaries. *Ukiwa* demonstrates this situation when Matano and Lila attend a wedding overnight in Sauni, one of the suburbs of Mombasa, after Lila’s mother permits Matano to take out Lila. But Lila’s godmother, who bumps into them at the ceremony, disapprovingly interrogates her on the relationship. Matano recounts:

Nilihisi kuwa mama wa ubatiso hakufurahi kumwona mwanawe wa kiroho mahali kama pale wakati kama ule kwani hakuficha kutopendezwa kwake. Alimdadisi Lila kwa muda na mwisho akamuuliza kwa sauti ya chini, “Kwani yu dini gani?” (28)

I felt that Lila’s godmother was not happy to see her godchild at such a place at such a time in the company of a young man, for she didn’t even hide her displeasure. She interrogated Lila for a while, and then inquired in low tones, ‘So which denomination does he belong to?’

In this case, the godmother invokes the indigenous and Christian religious logics to challenge the validity of the romantic relationship. But the two lovers counter the indigenous logic by invoking the permission given them by Lila’s birth mother, which overrides any other social censorship.

The existence of a godmother and her attempts to construct social relationships not only in terms of religion, but mostly on denomination is revealing about histories of divisions in Christianity at coastal Kenya. These divisions seem to have been entrenched in the society through spiritual custodians’ patronage of young women. In reply to the question on his denominational affiliation, Matano states: “Mimi ni Mkristo” (28), “I am a Christian.” However, he understands that Lila’s godmother expected him to say that he was a “Mkatoliki au mfuasi wa mojawapo ya madhehebu ya Kiprotestanti” (28), “Catholic or a member of one of the Protestant denominations.” Matano’s contestation is that the godmother need not use religion to create divisions since “dini haikuwa pingamizi kati yetu” (28), “denominational differences would never separate us.” This transgression of a boundary that appears unjust is replicated in other cultural contexts I analyse in this chapter. I locate these transgressions in Lynn Thomas and Jennifer Cole’s observation that “ideologies of affect have been an integral part of the disciplinary regimes through which imperial and liberal governments have sought to regulate their subjects and citizens” (5). In this section, the actors in love disrupt cultural

and religious regimes in their pursuit for happiness, but class and race feature prominently in the subsequent sections.

Denominational boundaries at the Rabai Missionary station are traceable to “the birth of Independent African Churches” (Harper II 38) in 1910. The divisions were heralded by “African ministers [who] aspired to reconstitute the environment that made the superiority and authority of the European missionaries absolute” (Harper II 38). Furthermore, “African missionaries demanded the Africanization of the Church in worship, theology, and understanding” (Harper II 38). Lila’s godmother, who, traditionally has the responsibility of mentoring and nurturing her into an acceptable future wife, integrates this role in Christianity. This suggests she subscribes to one of the break-away churches — the African Independent Churches which integrated some of the African cultural practices into Christianity. Writing about similar African Independent Churches represented in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *The River Between*, Chris Wanjala states that “the break-away churches [...] were involved in a cultural synthesis” (*For Home and Freedom* 35). In *The River Between*, the independent churches emerge in protest against missionaries’ proscription of female circumcision. The case of Independent Churches intimated in *Ukiwa* seems motivated by the Mijikenda’s need to be rooted in their cultural beliefs as they embrace Christianity. When Matano asks Lila what her godmother would have done had they not gotten express permission to attend the wedding from Lila’s mother, Lila says: “Kwa kawaida angetaka ngoma inyamazapo niende ndani nikacheze *chakacha* kama wasichana wengine” (Mkangi 29), “As usual, she would have insisted that as soon as the drumming pauses, I go indoors and dance *chakacha* like other girls”. *Chakacha* is “associated with and performed at weddings [and] was originally part of coastal puberty rites and is generally referred to as ‘dansiyandani’ (innermost dance), an obvious reference to the sexually provocative hip movements by female dancers” (Ogude, “Invention of Traditional Music” 149, brackets with translation added). Like female circumcision in *The River Between*, *Chakacha* initiated girls into the cosmology of the Mijikenda. Partly, this practice both celebrated female purity and inculcated erotic skills. Ironically, Lila loses her virginity to Matano that very night she fails to attend the *chakacha*. This signals Matano and Lila’s convenient navigation of the different moral regimes, and their very estrangement from both sets of moral regimes.

Reflecting on Katama Mkangi’s legacy, Diane Ciekawy and Kamoji Wachira state: “[i]n the classroom, in his sociological writings, and in his political speeches, Mkangi provided information and analyses to help people understand and question the forces that shaped their

lives” (Ciekawy and Wachira ix). Indeed, Mkangi’s characters in *Ukiwa* demonstrate the need to question seemingly rigid regimes that limit productive human experience and interaction. This chapter section demonstrates actors who navigate through different societal norms in their quest for fulfilling lives. The tragic romance suggests reasons for rethinking both Christian and Mijikenda beliefs rather than blindly imprisoning oneself in either of them.

Archiving Kenya’s Scholarship Histories: *Mwisho wa Kosa* (1987)

This section focuses on literary engagements with the social histories of Kenya’s early years of independence with a particular emphasis on the social transformations resultant from the African Scholarship Programme — a brainchild of American Committee on Africa (ACOA). The section examines literary depictions of the shifts in social structures that informed gender relations in the region following the reintegration of students returning from studies overseas. The section also intimates the operationalisation of the Africanisation policy that tremendously affected the early years of independence. The Africanisation policy is a driving factor in the decision by foreign-owned companies to send young Africans for studies abroad. The histories of this particular policy will be focalised in the last section of this chapter. Here, I focus primarily on the histories of Global North educated young women who return to a coastal town in Kenya with hopes of making productive contributions to their society. I use the term Global North rather than America, United Kingdom, Canada, for the purpose of being inclusive of regions that provided scholarships for pioneer higher education elites in Kenya’s transitional period. But I foreground histories of the American scholarships program which was the major contributor to this cause⁷⁵. These histories are emplotted in the love and courtship stories of the young people reflected upon in Zainabu Burhani’s *Mwisho wa Kosa*, “The End of Wrongs”.

Mwisho wa Kosa showcases imagined societal transformations necessitated by acquisition of knowledge through scholarships for African students at the dawn of independence, and how that knowledge disrupts social interactions in a coastal town which seems predominantly Swahili. According to Kai Kresse in his study on Muslim politics in Kenya, “knowledge provides guidance, orientation, and justification for practice, through knowledgeable people who teach others” (79). He further asserts: “[k]nowledge is involved in granting authority and

⁷⁵ Tom Mboya writes, “[f]rom having only about sixty students in the United States in 1956, by January 1963 we had 1,011 and another hundred in Canada” (Mboya 138). Britain’s contribution was to a very minimal scale (Mboya 143).

leadership yet also in challenging or undermining it, by those who know the sources and how to present them. From this perspective, knowledge is a kind of organizing principle” (79). Although Kresse does not write specifically about the Swahili, his views are valuable as they provide an understanding as to why highly educated young women (and men) represented in the novel confront the established social structures in the Swahili town.

In reference to Ali, Bushiri’s son, the novel shows how initiative and determination on his part enable him negotiate through established norms to marry Sara, whom he loves, and to fight for political expression at university. At the end of the novel, Ali and Sara are awaiting their wedding and immediately afterwards their journey to Japan where Ali is going to advance his studies. Finally, there is Asha, the daughter of the wealthy Mariamu. Asha sells her household treasures and even steals in an attempt to satisfy her husband’s gambling passion. She ends up falsely accusing her age-mate, Bi Keti, who used to borrow Mariamu’s gold jewellery, of swapping the gold jewels she had borrowed with silver ones. This leads to a court tribunal in which Bi Keti is ordered to repay the expensive jewels in monthly instalments despite her poverty. But when Mariamu discovers many years later that Bi Keti was innocent, she offers her a bountiful compensation in her will — money and one of her properties in the city. Generally, the novel is about social justice: an appeal to end injustices against defenceless members in the society.

The educated returnees in Burhani’s novel disrupt the belief systems of a well-knit Swahili society that embraces Islam and a communal way of life where most neighbours and relatives ensure the well-being of every member of the society. These educated youths find themselves strangers in their community upon their return. Chris Wanjala, in his reflections on the alienation of pioneer East African writers, writes:

as a useful citizen of his society, [a writer] may have a vision for change in his society that may be at variance with that of the majority of his society. His alienation will be expressed in his withdrawal from the values which the majority of his society stand for in order to levy criticism with a view of creating a better social situation. (*Season of Harvest* 51)

These views can be attributed to pioneer educated youth represented in *MwishowaKosa*. Their worldviews seem completely incongruous to the established social norms. Although the methods of confronting seemingly oppressive societal norms vary, one can read the actors’ visions for a culturally synthesised, inclusive society.

In the represented Swahili civilisation, parents are deeply involved in ensuring that their children are married to partners whose family histories are well known to them. For this reason, most parents in the fictional community betroth their children at a young age to children of their close friends or relatives. As I mentioned in the previous section, this situation suggests that families are regimes of control of intimate relations. Even though, as the narrator shows, the betrothal practice has a provision that allows the betrothed partners to accept or reject the union just before wedding arrangements commence, in accordance with Islamic law on marriage, a violation of such a revered engagement — which is also endorsed by Islamic law on engagement — rarely happens. This is because the parents wield immense influence on their children. Besides, those who opt out this tradition become implicitly marked by the society as unfit for marriage. Even parents who do not betroth their children in childhood take broken betrothals as an affront and an indicator of people's moral fibre. These contradictions expose sexual anxieties in the Swahili people's moral regimes that I explore in this section. Lily Munir's study on Javanese Muslim women postulates important ideas that help unravel what is happening in the Kenyan society I have outlined. Munir observes that patriarchal ideology is sustained "through conditioning [enabled through] institutions such as the family, the school, and religion" (192-3). However, the represented educated young women from this society question and challenge these normalised and institutionalised patriarchal practices, sometimes to their own peril.

Mwisho wa Kosa comments on the histories of courtship and marriage in the Swahili society, especially the practice of betrothing among the Swahili, and attempts to show how love and affection are realised in such unions for the maintenance of communal bonds. Robert Epstein *et al* observe that "[i]n many cultures in the non-Western world [...] love is still not a requirement for marriage. [...] In such marriages, if love emerges, it does so over time" (341). Epstein *et al*'s study grapples with the question: "[i]n love marriages, people are usually strongly in love at the time of their marriage. In arranged marriages, the betrothed are not marrying for love, yet love sometimes emerges in such marriages. How does this occur?" (342). Their study, from which I draw insights for my case, found that commitment to one another, sacrifice, parenting, intimacy, shared values and support from family members, among other factors, enabled the growth of love between spouses in arranged marriages. Histories of arranged marriages among the Swahili were sustained by the concerned partners' knowledge of the promise of marriage right from their formative years. This made them commit their lives to the relationship hence fostering love for their would-be marriage

partner. The case would be different when one is betrothed to another shortly before marriage.

By foregrounding societal disruptions enhanced by imagined lives of young people who have just returned from or are about to leave for their studies in Asia, Europe, and America, Burhani comments on transformations in coastal Kenya's socio-cultural histories. The novel begins with Monika's (daughter of Mhaji and Bi Tatu) return from her studies in Europe. Monika questions the validity of arranged marriages and attempts to make her peers see that such practices are backward. She engages in a relationship with Rashid, a principal secretary at the Ministry of Finance who is betrothed to Salama, her immediate neighbour and childhood friend. This causes tension between her and her parents on the one side, and with Salama and her parents on the other, to the point that Monika walks out of her parents' house to live with Rashid in the city. After a short while, Monika abandons Rashid in pursuit of men with more economic and political powers, ending up with a youthful Minister of Education, Matata.

The novel presents Monika as an embodiment of Euro-American values that diverge with Islamic traditional values of the 20th Century Swahili people of Kenya. Ali Mazrui traces different phases of convergences and divergences between the Euro-American and Islamic world, and notes that "[t]he 'sexual liberation' of the 1960s was largely confined to the Western world [and] while American culture does give greater freedom to women than does Muslim culture, American culture extends less dignity to women than does Muslim culture" ("Islam and United States" 798)⁷⁶. Ali Mazrui further notes that "American women are more active in the economy and in the political process and have made enough progress in the quest for equality" ("Islam and United States" 798). Ali Mazrui's notion of transgressed dignity of women is mainly the issue of objectification of women through "easily available pornographic movies [...], techniques in advertising that promote an idealised version of female beauty [and] high class prostitution" (798). Female body objectification can be read in Monika's experiences with Matata, the Minister of Education, who exploits her sexually

⁷⁶ The aspect of Islam extending more dignity to women is debatable especially when one looks at Muslim women's contestations of the same. Lily Munir highlights "the liberation the Qura'n offers to women" (Munir 199) but points out how Muslim men use "the same Islamic teachings to oppress [women]" (Munir 208). Erin Stiles in her study on divorce in Islamic courts in Zanzibar notes that "Zanzibari men have the right to divorce their wives unilaterally through repudiation without the approval of the wife or the court" (Stiles 582). Nina Hoel and Sa'diyya Shaikh, writing on South African Muslim women "highlight how dominant religious concepts of sexuality intersect with marital dynamics to produce particular forms of female subjectivity" (69).

before abandoning her in a rental house he had not paid rent for months, to marry a virgin teenager in a big wedding. In this case, Matata lives up to his name, *matata*, Kiswahili for trouble. Having survived the betrayal, Monika returns to her parents and yields to their suggestion that she marries Shaaban, a young man who is less exposed and less travelled, in an arranged marriage. Notably, Monika had incited Matata to prevail on the Minister of Finance to fire Rashid in the hope of teaching Rashid a lesson since Rashid disapproved her liaison with Matata and insisted that she should reconcile with her parents. At the end of the novel, Rashid gets a new job with a motor-vehicle company that sponsors him to travel with Salama, his betrothed whom he has just married, to Japan for further studies. Through Salama, one reads the novel's nod to conciliatory femininity engendered in Salama's allegorical name: *salama* is Kiswahili for secure.

The descriptions above demonstrate different forms of patriarchy that pioneer educated young people learn to navigate in their society for their own survival. In the case of Rashid, Matata exercises patriarchy through abuse of economic and political influence in an attempt to destroy Rashid's career. In Monika's case, Matata exercises patriarchy by reducing Monika to a sexual object, some kind of mistress, since he evades any form of meaningful commitment to her. The Islamic form of patriarchy also manifests itself in the form of coercion. Monika realises that she lives in a society where, "[i]f a woman refuses to accept patriarchal ideology, and if she manifests her mistrust by casting off her submissiveness, men will use coercion to accomplish what conditioning has failed to achieve" (Munir 193). Therefore, Monika's resignation to the arranged marriage system which she initially challenges is a way of negotiating existence in a society regimented by different forms of patriarchy. Through these gendered social frictions, the novel unveils the experiences of pioneer educated women in the coastal Kenya society who were actively involved in steering the society to transit culturally in the very way Kenya was transiting politically.

Through Monika, Burhani shows the beginning of the disruptions of the notion of a girl-child as a source of wealth to the parents through dowry. Monika's exposure to education makes her to question her filial responsibilities as defined by her society. Mhaji, Monika's father, confides in his fellow elder, Selele, about his distaste towards Monika's acquired values, stating that she went abroad to study but "amerejea na fikra za ajabu kabisa" (Burhani 139), "she has returned with very strange beliefs". For instance, Monika retorts to her parents: "Mnavyotaka ni kuwa nifanye kazi kwa akili yangu na nguvu zangu nikikulisheni nyinyi na watoto wenu! Nikikuachilieni hata mniendeshee maisha yangu. Hizo ni fikra za kipuuzi na za

kizamani” (58), “So you expect me to work using my skills and efforts to feed you and your children! And that I even surrender my life to your dictates. Those are archaic and stupid cultural expectations.” This level of independence is a point of divergence with the family values in many Kenyan communities. It also reveals histories of the 1950s when educating young people was seen as an investment. Lynn Thomas in her discussion on 1960s school-girl pregnancies in central Kenya observes that “[y]oung women and their parents hoped that schooling would lead to lucrative employment and/ or marriage to a successful man. [Hence, this led to] parents and young people investing considerable resources in school education and expecting high returns” (184). Parents’ expectations that their children would be the source of the entire family’s economic upward mobility seem to have been in double measure on the girls — through a well-paying job and bountiful dowry. Monika’s decision to renounce even the basic filial responsibilities can be understood in this context. Transgression of this established patriarchal norm appears a strange occurrence to a society that demands a lot from women. In Margaret Ogola’s *The River and the Source* which I analysed in Chapter One, upon Akoko’s birth, Chief Odero Gogni of Yimbo remarks that “a home without daughters is like a spring without a source” (Ogola 11). At the time of Akoko’s marriage to OwuorKembo, the suitor’s spokesman says that Owuor’s father had “many daughters who will continue to bring in more wealth” (20). Even though Akoko embodies the source of a genealogy of empowered women in the novel, the Luo society seems to commodify women through dowry, its cultural ethos notwithstanding.

Therefore, higher education seems to empower women to confront these practices in a more audacious way than before. Positioned in the context of political liberation struggles, it would appear women took up the mantle to fight for their liberation from cultural bonds. One can read this in the represented histories of Kenya’s pioneer Global North educated young women who emerged as fierce social critics of well-established patriarchal systems in their communities. The novels I analyze in this chapter show that male scholarship beneficiaries return to the country and exert their influence in the public space while their female counterparts are constrained by challenges in the private space. This is the case even in relation to Yusuf Dawood’s *One Life Too Many* and Gicheru’s *Across the Bridge*, which I critique in the subsequent sections.

A focus on the arranged marriage system and the experiences of the returning pioneer Global North educated young women in it contributes to unique social histories rarely illuminated by male writers. Through the novel, Burhani makes an important commentary on arranged

marriages in an Islamic society. In an article on “love, sex, and Islam”, Jean Dangler examines nonmodern literatures and finds that “the medieval role of marriage [in the Islamicate world was to establish] a foundation of the social order whose aim was to unite families and economic and political power, rather than to accommodate romance and eroticism” (13). Yet, considering minimal or lack of initiative on the persons involved, it appears that some partners in arranged marriages would sacrifice themselves and marry to please their families. This is the angle from which Monika comes in, in her challenge of arranged marriages, with her claim that in the contemporary world one’s interests should come first. She relentlessly persuades Rashid “kuwa madhali uchumba huo ulipangwa na wazee tu — hapakuwa na mapenzi baina yake na Salama — hakuona kuwa Rashid amelazimika kuyakubali hayo au kufungika uchumba asioutafuta” (57), “that as long as that engagement was merely planned by their parents — there wasn’t love between him and Salama — she didn’t see why Rashid should accept or be bound by an betrothal he didn’t choose.” Monika’s inclination to challenge the validity of arranged marriages is not confined to her individual interests. She extends it to her peers as seen when she confronts Muna, who is about to get married to Hasani in an arranged marriage, and reminds her that the world has changed:

“Sielewi vipi unakubali kuolewa na mtu usiyempenda. Mimi nisingekubali! [...]. Hayo mambo ya kizamani. Wazee wetu waliona hivyo ndiyo, lakini sasa dunia imeendelea na watu wanabadilika. Lazima watu wajuane, wapendane kwanza ikiwa wanataka kuishi pamoja.” (55)

“I don’t understand how you can accept to get married to someone whom you do not love. I wouldn’t have accepted! [...]. Those are archaic practices. Our elders indeed believed in those practices, but the world is changing. People must first know each other, love one another if they want to live together.”

At this point in time, romantic love seems to be the cornerstone of engaging in marriage. It is presumed that the element of personal choice of a partner whom one is emotionally attracted/attached to creates meaning for the union.

The veiling of the Swahili Muslim women, a practice which attempts to entrench and convey notions of female purity, is an issue the educated elites confront. Veiling, in which Swahili and Arab Muslim women are “covered in black *buibuis* from head to ankle reinforce the image of inaccessibility” (Kasfir 327) to men who are non-Muslims. Sydney Kasfir makes

this observation in reference to tourists' aesthetics on the Swahili coast. In a study on the sexualizing of Zanzibar Protectorate schoolgirls by colonialists, Corrie Decker deploys veiling "in a broad sense to mean the shielding of women from public view" (45). Decker argues that the "veil is a marker of the gender power dynamics in Muslim communities" (45). In *Mwisho wa Kosa*, veiling is well captured through Sara, Ali's lover. Ali sees her for the first time in a banking hall, then in a movie hall. He then sends his younger brothers to find out her name and where she stays. When he succeeds in this, he makes a point of passing by her parents' house daily on his way from work in the hope of seeing her. The narrator shows that despite his efforts, Ali

[h]akupata kumwona Sara mlangoni wala dirishani akichungulia, ingawa bila yeye kujua, Sara alimwona Ali kila siku alipopita pale, kwani alijificha pembeni pa dirisha na kufungua upenu wa pazia, akichungulia. Kumwona Ali akipita hivyo kila siku kulimfurahisha, kwani alielewa madhumuni yake, lakini hakuthubutu kuvunja amri kali ya baba yake ya kutochungulia madirishani au kusimama mlangoni. (165-166)

[n]ever got to see Sara at the door nor at her chamber window, yet without his knowledge, Sara saw him on daily basis as he passed by her home because she hid at the corner of her chamber and peeped through an opening in the curtains. Seeing Ali passing by her home daily filled her with joy, for she knew his intentions, but she never dared violate her father's strict rule about keeping indoors, never standing at the door nor peeping through open windows.

At the end of the novel, Sara and Ali are planning their wedding. However, this ideal image of female purity among the Swahili perpetuated through veiling is disrupted by Monika after she returns from her studies in Europe.

In contrast with Sara, Monika unsettles tenets of veiling the Swahili Muslim maiden. Due to her exposure through education in the Global North, Monika violates the Islamic law that requires an unmarried woman to live in her father's house: "unmarried Muslim women remain under the shelter of their fathers. When their status changes to wife and mother, this shifts to their husbands" (Hossain 103). After a quarrel, in which her father slaps her, over her bold decision to court Rashid whom her parents know is betrothed to Salama, she moves out in the night and goes to stay with Rashid. Even while staying with Rashid, she exercises her independence by dating different men. Monika demonstrates her attraction to the material conveniences symbolised in expensive cars and wielders of powerful positions. For instance,

when she meets Juma, the driver of Selemani who is the Minister of Agriculture, Monika's attraction to the car is revealed. As Juma drives her to an expensive night club the first night they meet, Monika constantly wonders how an ordinary civil servant "anaweza kumiliki gari kama lile" (77), "can possess such an expensive car." A week into the relationship, Juma had promised to pick her at her place of work "kwa gari na kupitisha siku ile katika sinema na matembezi" (94), "in his car and take her to the cinema and for evening tours of the city". Later, when she sees the same car and dives into it only to find Selemani, an aged man who is the owner of the car, Monika is disappointed to learn that Juma is only a driver (105). While contemplating a relationship with Selemani account of his car, she asks him, "[n]a ile gari? Bila shaka ni yako!" (105), "Could that car be yours?" Her plans for Selemani change when he introduces her to Matata, a liberal youthful Minister of Education who owns a more expensive Benz. The narrator notes that thereafter, Matata regularly picked her in "gari lake kubwa la *Benz* na kwenda huku na huku mahala mote mwa anasa" (143), "his big Benz to take her to all the places of luxury." The narrator also observes that "Monika, kwa kweli, aliona fahari kuonekana na Matata kwa sababu ya cheo chake na hasa akiwa amepanda gari lake lile" (143), "Monika, for sure, was proud to be seen with Matata because of his ministerial position and especially when she was aboard his great car."

Due to exposure to higher education in the Global North, the young women returned with a quest for gender independence predominant in the Euro-American societies. Due to societal vigilance on women's sexuality, which in this case is embodied in notions of veiling, these educated women became more visible and subject to societal ridicule than their male counterparts. The ridicule of Monika even by highly educated male peers reveals the conscripted space these women found themselves in. In a party that Selele organises for Rashid, Monika, and Karim, with the aim of unravelling Rashid and Monika's affair, Monika seizes the opportunity to attempt winning Karim's heart for herself. At this time, she already has Rashid and Matata, but she is strongly attracted to Karim, Selele's close relative who has been living in America for twelve years, and proves to be very intelligent in his conversations. However, Karim already knows Monika's intentions: "alifahamu kuwa msichana huyo amevutiwa naye sana. Aliwaza ikiwa Rashid anafahamu kuwa amekamata kipepeo, mwenye mbawa nyepesi za kuruka kutoka ua hadi mpaka ua" (176), "he understood that that girl was really attracted to him. He wondered if Rashid knew he was grasping at a butterfly with light wings that could fly from flower to flower." Through the examples of

Monika and Sara, Burhani emplots Kenya's 1960s histories of cultural conflict a few years after Tom Mboya's 'airlifts'.

Through the character Muna, Burhani archives the shifting significance of the marriage institution to certain highly educated and widely travelled young women who return to Kenya in the 1960s after studies in Europe. Muna is a college teacher and, like Monika, studied in Europe, but obligatorily enters an arranged marriage with Hasani. Due to her exposure to higher education, marriage does not define her humanity in the way it does with her peers in the Swahili community:

Ukweli ni kwamba Muna hakupata kulifikiria sana suala hilo la ndoa, na kwa hivyo alijiuliza, "kwa nini?" Alipoona wenziwe wameshughulika nalo, alihofia asije kuwa na kasoro Fulani katika akili yake au fikira zake zilizomfanya asijishughuliche na mambo kama hayo kama wenziwe walivyofanya. (62)

The truth is that Muna never bothered about that issue of marriage, and because of this she asked herself, "why?" When she saw her peers deeply dedicated to it, she feared that she might be deficient in her intelligence or worldview, hence her disenchantment with marriage unlike her peers.

In this case, the narrator reveals histories of shifting priorities among educated young women, not as dictated by the community but by one's gifts and ambitions. Saidi, Muna's father, understands that "akili yake [Muna] imeamili sana katika masomo na kiu cha uchunguzi zaidi" (63), "Muna's mind was deeply rooted in learning and research", rather than marriage. It is this commitment to knowledge and research that displaces the significance of marriage, which was initially the highest achievement of a woman in this particular community. Even during the final preparations of her wedding, Muna shows no excitement at all (63).

This inclination captures the cultural transition of educated young women in the 1960s Kenya. Through Muna's lack of enthusiasm for marriage, the novel signals new horizons for women's ambitions, a shift from marriage, which was the ultimate aspirational stage. Muna's ambition is located elsewhere, in pursuit for knowledge. But it is also productive to read Muna's disenchantment with marriage as symbolic of educated women's reluctance to embrace an institution that had carried with it histories of women's subordination and oppression. The symbolism of Muna's hesitation to the arranged marriage clearly comes out when she gets married to Salim. In a conversation with her father, Saidi, several years after

her marriage, Muna contests her society's predominant construction of a woman on the limiting domestic basis of "kukaa nyumbani, kupika, kufua, kuzaa na kulea" (127), "homecare, cooking, laundry, giving birth and nurturing children". Having learnt of Hasani's mistreatment of Muna, Saidi, advises that she should try "kumfahamisha Hasani kuwa wewe si mke tu bali ni binadamu pia" (128), "to make him understand that you are a human being too, not just a wife". Saidi dissects the histories of women subordination in the Swahili society more poignantly:

"Muna, usisahau [...] kuwa tunatoka mbali, na hivi karibuni tu ndiyo mwanamke amepata elimu ya juu, sawasawa na mwanamume. Hiyo ilibidi waipiganie. Pia usisahau hiyo imemfanya mwanamume ahisi kuwa ana mshindani hivi sasa katika ile iliyokuwa ndiyo heshima yake kubwa na cheo: yakuwa yeye ndiye mkuu wa nyumbani, anayelisha na kuvisha, anayejua yale yanayopita katika ulimwengu, na ndiyo mlinzi wa nyumba yake. Hayo yote yanamtoka hivi sasa na yanamtia hofu. Kwa hivyo hatua ya pili pia itabidi waipiganie — ya kujipatia haki ya kuishi kibinafsi, siyo kuwa chini ya vivuli vya waume zao..." (127-128)

"Muna, don't forget that histories of women's liberation struggles are complex; it is just recently that women got equal chances with men for pursuit of higher education. Remember they had to fight for it. And don't forget that that has made man feel he has a competitor since it has threatened man's privileged position: as head of the family, the one who feeds and clothes the family, the only one aware of current affairs, and the protector of the family. Women's higher education is stripping away all these privileges and that makes man to fear. So therefore, women's second liberation shall only be realised in a struggle — they must fight for the right to live independently, not under the shadows of their husbands."

Here, Burhani reveals that women's struggle for liberation is not yet over. Education and exposure to different cultures generatively contribute to the engineering of social transformations in regard to gender.

This section has demonstrated that the novel not only archives pioneer Swahili women's pursuit of higher education abroad, but also envisions transformation of gendered societal structures that hinder women's holistic empowerment. This analysis de-individualizes women's histories by conveying them as the social histories of many educated young women in Kenya who had been exposed to other moral regimes of love and courtship through higher

education in the Global North. Furthermore, this study de-pathologizes represented women who transgress patriarchal norms by underscoring the ethical need for addressing women's structural disadvantage in a Kenya undergoing political transition.

A Quest for Economic Inclusivity: Mwangi Gicheru's *Across the Bridge* (1979)

This section examines class dynamics reflected in romance narratives, as a way of reading individuals' aspirations towards self-reliance in a space dominated by glaring social inequalities. *Across the Bridge* is set in the first two decades of independence — the period of the much anticipated “matunda ya Uhuru”, “the fruits of independence”. It explores class distinctions which have persisted in the Kenyan social terrain which Tom Odhiambo argues extend beyond lack of or ownership of resources to “structural hierarchies that separate them [and] the political authority one group holds over the other and its consequent access to state resources and wealth” (“Melodramas of the Underdogs” 74). This ‘war’ for economic and political inclusivity is mostly envisioned through the familial space, which seems vulnerable unlike the legal, political, or intellectual spheres where the privileged seem well fortified. But as the previous chapter demonstrated, dissidents who model themselves into martyrs and whistle-blowers risk their lives when they confront established structural injustices for the good of the public.

Across the Bridge challenges economic inequalities in Kenya especially during the rise of the emergent middle-class/elite a decade after independence. The author reflects on the amassing of wealth by a few individuals at the expense of the majority. In the novel, the narrator comes to the realisation that the society he lives in is unequally structured and that the underprivileged are likely to remain in their state of lack and exploitation unless they fight for the betterment of their lives. Having overcome the colonial oppressors, the underprivileged Kenyan citizens encounter new oppressors in the postcolony — a discriminatory and corrupt government, and employers who exhibit similar characteristics as the colonial master. In reimagining the histories of social inequalities in this particular era, and pinpointing the consequent dehumanisation on the underprivileged, *Across the Bridge* envisions a radical transformation of society enabled through individuals' initiatives to confront systems responsible for such inequalities.

Across the Bridge presents the rise of Chuma, the protagonist, from abject poverty, working as a houseboy of a wealthy civil servant in Nairobi, to a fortune earned mostly through crime. This journey to wealth is paved with pain and regret for both Chuma and his employer's

family. Chuma gives the reader a glimpse into the excesses of the rich, represented by Kahuthu, his employer. Kahuthu is “a progressive native in the corps of New Africans. A top civil servant [who] lived among the dignified [and] owned a large bungalow, big cars and unaccountable property” (3). Kahuthu who is Caroline’s father considers Chuma as “a part of his discarded property” (3-4); and an unlikely but later undesirable suitor for his daughter. The bond between the daughter of the rich and the underprivileged young man launches Chuma’s quest for inclusion. But Nici Nelson reads *Across the Bridge* as embracing “unusual representation of urban women, that is, woman as redeemer of a man who has lost his way [which is] surely one of the most pernicious myths in the history of gender relations to be promulgated by literature!” (Nelson 151). But this kind of reading appears oblivious of the oppression occasioned on the women who escape pernicious circumstances sheltered under capitalist patriarchy. It is romantic love that stirs Chuma into the reality of his debased existence: people’s humanity gets corroded by poverty, while the affluent monopolise access to a life of dignity. This realisation stirs him to fight for inclusion into the economic access enjoyed by the affluent. The relationship grants Caroline a taste freedom, which reinvigorates her sense of her own humanity.

The novel is anchored in the school-girl pregnancy histories which became “a favorite topic in Kenya’s Swahili papers” (Thomas 193) as it “emerged as an acute dilemma for school-going young women and men” (181) in 1960s and 1970s Kenya. Chuma impregnates Caroline, who is, at the time, in her final year in secondary school. He resigns from his job and escapes to his village in fear of what Kahuthu might do to him, and when Caroline’s school discovers her pregnancy, she joins Chuma in his slum abode. It is at this point that Chuma experiences Kahuthu’s brutality, which can be read as the rich’s capacity to unleash terror against the seemingly defenceless poor. Chuma is charged in court for forceful abduction of Caroline, but acquitted and allowed to live with Caroline. From this moment on, Chuma tries ethical means to sustain the lifestyle of a girl from an affluent background, but in his desperation to provide the needs of his family, he gets into petty crime and he is jailed. This leads to a separation with Caroline whom Kahuthu decides to send to Mombasa. In jail, Kisinga, a former police officer-turned-robber, introduces Chuma to hardcore criminality. Nevertheless, the novel suggests that Chuma’s debased existence before his criminality is indicative of social injustice against the poor and his criminality is some kind of quest for access to the economic resources and political authority of their country.

Through Chuma and Caroline's romance, Gicheru foregrounds socio-economic inequalities resultant from economic marginalisation of the majority of Kenyans in the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, when about to leave jail, Chuma is unenthused about the "free world":

I loved this house called jail. The only place where equality was exercised regardless of social class. But now I was leaving it. Going back to the free world I loved to hate. The world of hate, greed, struggles for power, assassinations and social injustice. But most of all, I hated myself for what I was. (*Across the Bridge*, 1-2)

These statements evoke histories of activism for social justice especially in areas of redistribution of resources that followed independence. One of the remarkable figures of such histories is JM Kariuki who was assassinated by "[h]ighly placed men in the Kenyatta regime" (Nyong'o 162) for campaigning against wealth accumulation by the political elite close to President Jomo Kenyatta, at the expense of the impoverished majority citizens. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, "JM Kariuki, M.P. from Nyandarua, attacked the government for neglecting the needs of the poor, the landless, and the unemployed" (Clough 5). According to P. Anyang' Nyong'o,

[i]n Parliament [JM Kariuki] championed [...] the necessity to put a ceiling on how much land one owned; the need to have a policy of 'one man one job' to create more employment opportunities in both the private and public sectors; the need to democratize the political system and do away with such oppressive measures as detention without trial, and so on. (Nyong'o 162)

This is also a time when the government "wanted a certain history of Mau Mau forgotten, especially the veterans' demand for equity in the distribution of land" (Mwangi 92).

It is ironical that the scramble for wealth accumulation, replete with sycophancy, ethnicity, and nepotism by the political elite occur when poverty assails the majority ordinary citizens. Thus, to the impoverished majority, the promise of economic and political equity engendered in the independence of their country had been betrayed. As Donald Rothchild observes, majority of Kenyans hoped for "a fundamental revision of in the priorities of colonial times" (690) upon independence. Mwangi Gicheru's *Across the Bridge* finds its thrust in the matrix of these troubled histories of Kenya. The novel encodes histories of the Kenyan state's abandonment of the major task of economic transformation for the impoverished majority

citizens. Entrapped in the throes of economic deprivation, the narrator raises fundamental questions:

Did God make man in His own image? Then why were some people more equal than others? If God had not discriminated against me in wealth distribution, I complained, what was happening to me wouldn't have happened.

The meek will inherit the Earth. But when? After they are dead or downtrodden by Kahuthunites! (66)

These sentiments reveal the urgency with which the impoverished required socio-economic inequalities to be addressed.

The novel unmask the complexities of domestic service in class relations at a critical period of Kenya as a nation. This is important in understanding Kenya's social stratification considering that domestic service "is one of the bottom rungs of employment" (Gaitskell *et al* 90) and "was one of the earliest points of entry through which Africans were incorporated, on very unequal terms, into the colonial economy" (Hansen 18). Revealingly, Kenyan novels and memoirs depicting the colonial era and the period after independence are replete with 'houseboys' or 'shamba boys' as opposed to housegirls. Apart from Chuma in *Across the Bridge*, there's also Mutua the cook in Yusuf Dawood's *One Life Too Many* (1991) and Kamande in Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1938). Yet this is not unique to Kenya's histories; Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* (1960) attests to the same histories in Cameroon. The male domestic workers in the novels reflect colonial histories of restricted movements, in which case the women were supposed to remain in the rural areas⁷⁷.

Through Chuma, who seems confounded by low self-esteem and a wounded masculinity, the novel reveals the inequalities embodied in domestic service. On the night that Caroline sneaks to his room, Chuma narrates:

I couldn't figure out who the visitor could be at that time of the night. A night thief? I wondered. [...]. After all, I reasoned, only a stupid thief would come to the servants' quarters while all the precious things were in the main building where the boss and his family slept. (*Across the Bridge* 2)

⁷⁷ This idea will be elaborated further in the next chapter that focuses on the histories of Kenya embedded in the novels set in the urban spaces, especially on the histories of prostitution in Nairobi.

This seemingly impoverished servant quarter is located in the affluent homestead of Kahuthu. The affluence of the entire estate is seen in the narrator's description of the night on which Caroline visits:

Soft and musical, the wind sounded like a night angel singing a lullaby to the sleeping bosses who lived in those exclusive residences. Ambassadors, company executives, top civil servants and other representatives of the cream of creation. This reflection always gave me a feeling of guilt. I felt like a thief, breathing the same air as those men of distinction. (3)

By ensuring that Chuma lives in a structure that reflects his status, Kahuthu reproduces “the existing class relations of domination and subordination” (Cock 65). The servants' quarters serve the purpose of reminding the domestic servants of the need to be subservient to the boss who wields power. This performance of reproducing class relations through servant quarters' structures reflects histories of exclusion of the less fortunate. The images of a thief stealing the breathing air of men of distinction reinforce the perversity of economic inequalities that social justice crusaders such as JM Kariuki observed and condemned in the early decades of post-independence Kenya. It also exposes the excessive ways in which the affluent regimented access to wealth in Kenya.

Gicheru revisits Kenya's histories of land through Chuma's desire, upon his resignation from domestic work, to uplift his economic standing in the society through farming. It should be remembered that domestic work itself “is a microcosm of the inequality which is refracted through the entire social order” (Cock 65). But Chuma's resolve to return to the land is also inserted into the political rhetoric of the 1960s. For instance, Jomo Kenyatta's “Back to the Land” speech broadcast on state television and radio on 11th September 1964 called upon citizens to leave towns and return to the rural areas where they could engage in farming, asserting that “[o]ur greatest asset in Kenya is our land. This is the heritage we received from our forefathers. [The] soil has been there from the beginning of time...Soil is the mother of wealth, development and general prosperity” (*Harambee* 62). This passionate conception of land may explain Kenyatta's convoluted land accumulation of an estimated half a million hectares while using “the former settler land as patronage to solidify his support and build alliances” (Klopp 16). Ordinary citizens who heeded Kenyatta's call to return to the land hardly had any land to return to. In this light, one reads Chuma's resignation and resolution to return to the land as a desperate attempt towards economic freedom. Upon informing

Kahuthu that he was resigning so that he can undertake farming, Kahuthu “gave [Chuma] the usual casual look, half hostile and half godly. [He] was wondering how a cheap creature like [Chuma] could own a farm which produced more than the salary of a house boy” (17). In a sarcastic response to this power gaze, Chuma reflects: “People of my class were not supposed to own farms” (17). This is a provocative thought that speaks volumes to the histories of marginalisation of the underprivileged through the petty bourgeois’ wealth accumulation, especially land, in Kenya the period following independence and departure of white settlers from most settlement schemes.

Gicheru uses a romance narrative to demonstrate how devastating economic marginalisation can be: it denies Chuma his desire to marry the love of his life. As the novel shows, the idea that Chuma and Caroline are socially incongruent haunts him, driving him to use unorthodox means to assert his humanity over time. In a state of despair when he sees the impossibility of marrying Caroline, he narrates: “[i]t hurt me to imagine that she was not made for me” (16). Also, at the onset of their romance, Chuma recalls: “[h]er mother caught us chatting a couple of times, but like her husband, she couldn’t believe that I posed any danger to her daughter. My inferior standing and the social incongruity between her and me eliminated any suspicion” (11). Chuma’s mother also reminds him when he leaves jail the first time: ““If you must have a wife [...], look for a girl of your own kind”” (65). He too admits, after the counsel from his brothers and mother: “Caroline was not of my kind” (65). However, he is overpowered by his love for her because “[i]t isn’t natural for a man to cancel the existence of a woman he loves so much” (65). The social values expressed in the two mothers, both of whom have resigned to class status quo, are compelling — they represent the impossibility of bridging class differences in the 1960s Kenya. This positions Chuma and Caroline’s aspirations to marry each other as an allegory where the poor and the rich who believe in bridging class differences are viewed as transgressors of class norms. At the same time, it shows the novelist’s faith in the younger generation to bring about transformation.

The conflict in the novel reflects Gicheru’s utopian vision for social-economic equality in Kenya. In fact, Chuma’s desperation in his fight for Caroline, and his efforts to earn a genuine living after marrying her, reveal the inhuman nature of economic marginalisation of the underprivileged. The marginalisation can mainly be attributed to the unequal land redistribution and resettlement after Kenya’s independence. As noted in Chapter One, in discussions on the creation and occupation of the ‘White Highlands’, apart from its economic role in the settler economy, land was central in the colonial politics of fostering the other.

Post-independence Kenya would see “the political petty bourgeois [...] integrated to [land] inheritance [while] the interests for the *non-asomi* class for later land acquisition was denied” (Mutiso 86)⁷⁸.

The novel demonstrates the limiting nature of middle-class social engineering based on notions of a particular cadre of respectability and refinement. This unmasks the dehumanising nature of well-fortressed middle-class families that project a façade of enviable existence especially to the underprivileged. Reflecting on Caroline’s chaperoned life and her chance rebellion against it, the narrator foregrounds the detrimental aspects of capitalist patriarchy. The middle-class family attempts to craft their daughter into a person that would not contemplate courting poor houseboys and urban stylistas:

[t]he rich civil servant always had one fear: that Caroline might associate herself with those outrageous teenagers wearing funny bell-bottoms and bring shame to the family. As a measure to save her from the ignorance of youth, he strictly supervised her. [...]. To protect her from hungry teenagers, he made sure that she remained within the home compound whenever out of school and never went out without a chaperon. (4)

This chaperoned life reduces Caroline to a very lonely person, more of a caged bird than a human being. Particularly, it reveals the youth/ elderly struggles over fashion and its linkage to morality. As the dominant fashion of the 1960s and 70s, bell-bottoms engendered the youth’s independence in a society that seemed extra-vigilant to their sexualities⁷⁹. In this case, the novel uses the social atmosphere of the 1960s and 70s to assert Caroline’s sense of deprivation. This is because fashion constitutes person’s identity as it anchors him/her in particular times. Hence, Kahuthu’s chaperoning of Caroline’s life was a way of uprooting her from the development of her individuality.

Imprisonment in Kenya was predominantly political during colonialism and even when the post-independence state targeted dissidents of various regimes. Although reform and justice are the goals of prisons in Kenya, “production of docile bodies” (Woods 135) was the goal during detentions of independence freedom fighters and political dissidents during the Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi regimes. However, imprisonment narratives assert “resistance

⁷⁸ Asomi is a term used here to refer to the educated individuals.

⁷⁹ Noor Ahmed Memon shows that “bell bottoms and hip hugger patterns became popular” in the 60s and 70s. (74). Thomas Burges also reveals bell-bottoms and miniskirts became a point of struggle over revolutionary ideals of 1964 Zanzibar, with the elderly condemning the cloths embraced by the youth (287).

and active bodies, often inserting the activity into the very interstices of the penal system, or [...] the literal walls of the prison itself” (Woods 135). The types of prisoners we have in *Across the Bridge* are neither independence freedom fighters nor political dissidents, but socio-economic freedom fighters — Chuma, Caroline, and Kisinga⁸⁰. Prison here is used as a metaphor that incisively unsettles predominant patriarchy in the represented pioneer post-independnt middle-class families in Kenya. The metaphor condemns women’s suppression, but also transforms into a ground for agitating for the fight against corrupt wealth accumulation that had escalated in the 1970s.

The novel reveals how capitalist patriarchy suppresses wives and daughters of middle-class men as well as male domestic workers and how such women and impoverished men take initiative to counter their entrapment. For instance, when stalking Chuma in the flower garden, Caroline looks at him with desperation. Chuma recounts: “My heart jerked when I saw her standing behind me, staring at me with blank cold eyes. I had seen that look before; the look of a prisoner in search of escape” (7). Further, Caroline constructs her escape from her father’s mansion to live in a shack with Chuma as breaking loose from prison:

‘Chuma, [...] I won’t deceive you by saying that I love this kind of life that much, but it is far better than being enclosed in a palace with no outside contact. I am a human being, not a pet in a cage. [...]. What happened between you and me paved the way out of prison.’ (34)

The peripheral positions that affluent women hold create a fertile environment for some kind of social conspiracy with underprivileged men against the powers wielded by the “men of distinction” (3). This social ‘conspiracy’ enables Caroline to break loose from ‘prison’. However, Caroline’s ‘jail-break’ comes at the expense of imprisonment and disruption of Chuma’s life.

The metaphor of prison as a structuring principle in the novel can also be noted in the way it transforms Chuma’s worldview. It is in prison that Chuma learns unorthodox methods for participating in the struggle for socio-economic inclusivity. He meets Kisinga, a former

⁸⁰ As I have argued elsewhere, “the pathways to [...] imprisonment have gradually changed from largely political — as was the case during colonialism, and the dictatorial regimes of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Moi — to being embedded in economic factors and the gender-specific vulnerabilities of girls/ women” (Yenjela 136).

police officer, who radicalises him (Chuma) with appeals to the exclusion of the underprivileged:

“I was a good citizen until they broke my heart [...]. I was a cop, serving the public. Then that day came when they sacked me because I refused to favour an aggressive rich brute against a helpless native. [Thereafter,] I refused to be tossed about in the name of good citizenship. I refused to be a vulture, scavenging the remains of rich men’s exploits. [...]. I was a policeman. I was transferred to the frontier to face constant dangers. See what I got at last? Dismissal and loss of benefits. Then I was in the country, struggling to make ends meet. So one day I asked myself: if I had risked my life for my own country, why shouldn’t I risk my life for my own self? After all, what comes first, my country’s problems or mine? Why should I fight for somebody else while my house is invaded?” (60, 61)

Here, corruption by Kenya’s middle-class is portrayed as responsible for economic deprivation of the poor and even imprisonment. Ironically, it is in prison that Kisinga unveils to Chuma the invisible workings of middle-class accumulation of wealth. Kisinga believes that criminality is the “only way [he] could get even with the authorities” (60). To recruit Chuma into the world of crime, Kisinga indoctrinates him with ideas of reincarnation. He tells Chuma: “life is like steam. It evaporates upon death and reforms elsewhere [...] in a process called reincarnation” (63). Kisinga reinforces this ideology with memorable anecdotes: “A president who grabs everything he wants becomes a pig in the next life. [...]. A humble beggar might be reborn a king and vice versa” (64). Even without afterlife, Kisinga makes it explicit: “Whether you like it or not, the death day will come. But don’t let that happy day find you where you are. Death by a bullet is far more glorious than death in a gutter” (78).

Indeed, this is a critique of the rampant corruption and impunity not only in the 1970s Kenya, but also in Kenya of 2016. The narrator embraces Marxist thought whereby the oppressed workers take initiative to redeem themselves from capitalist stranglehold as the most effective way of confronting the rise of socio-economic injustices in Kenya. Emplotted in a romance story, we quickly identify with how corruption leads to the degradation of the lives of the poor. Tom Odhiambo posits that “[t]he relationship between the privileged and the underprivileged is not just structured by power differences but can also be likened to war” (“Melodramas of the Underdogs” 74). In the very way that imprisonment emboldened Mau

Mau freedom fighters, prison here becomes a space for mobilising the underprivileged to fight against socio-economic inequalities⁸¹. For instance, Kisinga uses not only the reincarnation ideology mentioned above, but also a collection of militant poetry to assert the need for the poor to confront socio-economic inequalities. One of the poems he uses to teach inmates is: “*It is easier for an elephant/ To enter the hole of a mouse/ Than for a poor coward/ To enter the kingdom of money*” (66, original emphasis). These ideas, of life after death and of a poor coward never accessing money for his/her sustainability, trigger Chuma to renounce compliance to law. He realises that he should not fear jail because he “had just come out of a state jail and was now walking into the world jail” (62). The bosses in the country “smuggle maize and rice to Uganda [and] get away with it because they are men of influence” (83). He also mentions “police discovering a haul of ivory hidden in somebody’s premises [and then the] story disappears from the papers because somebody somewhere has used his influence to stop the investigations” (83). He sums up the conscientisation by reminding Chuma that “big people use their influence to steal. Small people use force” (83).

After Chuma has been radicalised to this extent, he becomes a participant in the fight against class oppression of the underprivileged by the ‘Kahuthunites’. He starts off by violently robbing tourists in Mombasa before eventually robbing a bank. With money in pockets, he pursues Caroline in Mombasa, attempts to convince her to return to him, but when she declines, he lures her into a hotel and rapes her. When arrested and arraigned in court for separate charges of rape and robbery, Chuma’s lawyer argues that the rape victim was still the wife of the accused and therefore the accused was only but claiming his conjugal rights. PumlaGqola in *Rape: a South African Nightmare* argues that rape “is sexualised violence [that] works to keep patriarchy intact. It communicates clearly who matters and who is disposable” (21). In the novel, Caroline is the object of contestation between an older, affluent masculinity and a young, impoverished but violent one. Even though he is jailed for both rape and robbery, Chuma manages to keep the loot, which he left with Zakayo, his trusted village neighbour. Upon his release from prison, Chuma marries Caroline and also benefits from Kahuthu’s financial support for his daughter. This changes his status in society. In essence, the novel aggressively fights against economic inequalities, but incidents such as rape in spheres of asserting masculinity over the female body, as a way of disrupting the policing and prescribing one’s daughter’s social and sexual life, and as an unorthodox

⁸¹ Caroline Elkins observes that “[i]nstead of introducing reform, the detention camps further embittered Mau Mau adherents” (Elkins 212) who educated each other as they sang songs of freedom.

strategy to possess her as a partner, suggests its disturbing normalisation “in areas of conflict” (Gqola 21).

Overall, Gicheru’s novel unmasks the hypocrisy in society’s condemnation and fight against crime while normalising corruption, which exacerbates the gap between the rich and the poor. Through a love story, Gicheru validates poor people’s quest for economic inclusion.

Love, Citizenship, and ‘Africanisation’: Yusuf Dawood’s *One Life Too Many* (1991)

This section suggests that despite the importance of studies on Asians, Europeans, and other minority races in Kenya that advocate for rewriting the minority’s histories in the larger national narrative, the institution of Africanisation policy in the early years of post-independent Kenya was a necessary attempt to redress socio-economic inequalities generated by colonialism. My standpoint is that Africanisation policy, which advocated for a “process of indigenisation of ownership and control of African economies, [gave] an opportunity to many [Black Kenyans] to gain a foothold in economic life” (Muller 293). The policy’s vision was to serve a corrective role in the post-colonial histories of Kenya. Coming immediately after independence, Kenya’s Africanisation would appear a model of what Frantz Fanon writes about when he states, “nationalisation quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period” (Fanon 122). In fact, many scholars have apprehensively approached the histories of Africanisation in Kenya particularly highlighting its negative economic effects on the people of Asian and European origins. For instance, Nayak Pradip is of the opinion that by formulating the policy, the Government of Kenya “had reserved the right to discriminate on racial grounds, theoretically, to correct the ‘historic imbalance’” (925). This suggests Pradip’s sceptical stance on institutional socio-economic injustices meted against Black people in colonial times. He follows this with the following contestation:

It is not disputed that in pre-independence Kenya there was discrimination against the Africans. But this discrimination had affected the Asians as well. [...]. This kind of official discrimination, based only on colour, between citizens was treated with considerable apprehension by many Asian civil servants. It was regarded by others as an example of the type of things to come in the future. (925)

According to Tom Odhiambo, the “‘Africanisation’ (or indigenisation) programme and its variants in the three East African countries — Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda — in the early years after independence was apparently meant to limit the control that Indians had over the

economy” (“Biography of a Trade Unionist” 91, original brackets). Even though the Asians’ control of the economy was adversely affected by the policy, I show below that many Black people found opportunities to better their lives and those of their communities after many years of economic marginalisation and dispossession by the colonial state. Furthermore, the opportunities the policy enhanced for Black people in the Civil Service had long-term effects of restoring the image of Black people who had been dehumanised by racist policies of the colonial regime. This policy should be understood as a productive strategy of contesting a “highly racialized” (Garuba 1645) settler colony that Kenya was emerging from. In this kind of atmosphere,

[a]ffirmative-action-style proposals and policies that focus on getting the racial numbers right, and proposals and policies of a more multiculturalist orientation that focus on recognition and respect, are predominant. The presence of Black bodies in public positions and places matters. (Garuba 1645)

One Life Too Many centres on the love-life of Sydney Walker who is portrayed as a superfluous man, an aspect that manifests in his spiritual isolation and a futile search for happiness. Through his tragic story, Dawood illuminates Kenya’s imagined social histories of a minority race, especially at a time when most white settlers were leaving Kenya en masse, what the novel refers to as “the exodus of colonial staff” (Dawood 24), upon independence. The exodus is motivated by fear of a government led by Black people. These new leaders find themselves compelled to give assurance of protection to undecided white and Asian people: ““The leaders of this country do not propose to form a gangster government”” (Dawood 26). This is Charles Gethi’s response to a seventy-five year old who “is emigrating to South Africa” because she does not ““want to be raped by savages”” (26). As preposterous as her remark is, it reveals the predominant colonial nostalgia at independence; it confirms the confounding sense of loss of white power in the region; it signals to the invention of Black rapist with its concomitant dire consequences for Black bodies (Gqola 4). But at the same time, it exposes the unfair and hostile admission of Black bodies would receive in post-independence Kenya’s civil service, private sector, and business circles.

The novel features professional expatriates who seem a small isolated diasporic community striving to keep together through golf clubs and other social activities, but one whose womenfolk manifest deep desires for home (Europe). Faced with the social challenges of being detached from their ancestral ties in Europe, the expatriates struggle to integrate

amongst themselves in a land that is very distant and different from Europe. Unlike *The Mixers* in Chapter One, where Robinson and his ‘mixers’ family are in daily interaction with indigenes in the White Highlands, there are minimal interactions between the European expatriates and the indigenous people. Actually, there are only two characters from the majority Black race — Charles Gethi, an astute but corrupt director at Kenya Hotels and Lodges, a position granted him by the Africanisation policy; and Mutua, Sydney’s committed but superstitious cook. This reflects the extent of segregation of colonial Nairobi, an aspect that I analyse in the subsequent chapter on urbanisation histories. *One Life Too Many* is a compelling love story that conveys, through the lenses of the colonialist/expatriate, a challenging period of Kenya’s transition from a British colony to an independent republic, the histories of European migrants.

In his obsession with Kenya, Sydney neglects Anna who, in order to remain sane in a foreign land, gets trapped by ““expatriate hang-ups and colonial claustrophobia”” (51). This shows that white women like Anna found the colonies restrictive, a situation that can be read in Ann Stoler’s statement: “[a]s custodians of a distinct cultural and moral community, white women had their honor to protect” (Stoler 34). Conversely, men found these spaces more liberating. Dawood portrays Sydney as the archetype of the colonial imaginaries of Kenya as a land of adultery: “Kenya was home to a distinctive social set known as ‘Happy Valley’, who used the colony as a backdrop to indulge their own highly developed tastes in gin and adultery” (Duder 431). Unlike Anna who is constrained by the baggage of white prestige, Monika in *Mwisho wa Kosa* enjoys her life in similar ways as Sydney.

In a manner suggesting the power of true love, Sydney Walker’s life takes a tragic turn after betraying Anna, his wife. Sydney’s involvement with Patricia King whom he had met on his overseas trips nearly leads to a disaster when Anna attempts suicide through overdose during her pregnancy after discovering the affair. Dr. Hyder, a surgeon at the Kenya United Hospital and close family friend of the Walkers, manages to save Anna’s life, but the long-term effects of the overdose later on cause the death of Tania, the baby girl, within a week after birth. Frightened by Anna’s suicide attempt, Sydney attempts to break loose from Patricia by writing her a letter explaining how complex the situation has become. However, this leads to another problem as Patricia receives the letter when she is celebrating the doctor’s confirmation that she was pregnant with his child. She immediately aborts the child but harbours vengeance against Sydney for the betrayal, and bitterness against Anna for unknowingly causing the abortion by her frightening act. Later on when Patricia and Sydney

reunite and make it clear that they intend to marry, Anna attempts another suicide by cutting her wrists and haemorrhaging in the bathroom. However, Sydney dismisses this act as blackmail and insists on a divorce and Anna's return to England. Anna returns to England, the divorce is finalised, and Sydney and Patricia marry. Just when Sydney thinks he has reached the apex of his achievements, Patricia indulges in adultery with Joe Brindley, a young lawyer newly arrived from England. In the same period, Charles Gethi fires Sydney from his job, citing Sydney and Anna's problems in marriage as scandals that the company cannot tolerate. But the narrator suggests malice in Gethi's action. The discovery of Patricia's adultery and the loss of his job somehow contribute to Sydney's death in a car crash as he drives to Mombasa in a state of disillusionment.

Although set in the transition towards independence, Dawood imagines Kenya in ways similar to the colonial Kenya female settler novelists whose "novels are littered with straying husbands, illicit liaisons and frustrated passions" (Duder 430)⁸². The difference is that he constructs troubled romance as a special kind of ailment that requires surgery. This is evident in the focalisation of a surgeon in the conflict as the counselor, mediator, and voice of reason. The surgeon, Hyder, diagnoses the ailing marriage of Anna and Sydney because of his close relationship with them. For instance, when Anna gets a baby, Tania, who dies a few days later, Hyder seizes Sydney's celebratory mood to counsel him concerning his commitment to the marriage. Sydney notices this and says, "Like a doctor, you like to dissect everything to the bone. [...]. Human hearts don't work by rules" (52). The portrayal of this troubled romance that brings forth a still-born is allegorical to Kenya's promise of independence. Tania's death is traceable to Sydney's adultery as well as Anna's attempted suicide, hence the poisoning of the womb. I read this allegory into the Africanisation policy, noting that Dawood sees this particular policy as poisonous to a multiracial Kenya that he hoped for upon independence.

The story itself is a surgery of a great love gone sour, but one that reveals Dawood's nostalgia for colonialism as he dissects post-independent Kenya's descent into disorder and corruption. This can be ascertained in his recollections of the colonial days in an interview with Godwin Siundu. In the interview, Siundu quotes Dawood as he writes, "[t]here was no corruption' and – in what I saw as a deeply etched belief – Kenya 'had *European efficiency* with African

⁸² Florence Riddell: *Perilous Love* (1932), *Kenya Mist* (1924), *Can Women Forget?* (1929), *Castles in Kenya* (1929), *Out of the Mist* (1925), *The Valley of Suspicion* (1930); Nora K. Strange: *Kenya Dawn* (1929), *Kenya Today* (1934), *Kenya Calling* (1928), *A Wife in Kenya* (1925), *Latticed Windows* (1924); Nora St. John Beale: *Mustard and Cress* (1924), *Flame and wind* (1926) among others.

politeness, friendliness and weather' giving it all the aura of 'a perfect paradise' ("55 Years On" n.p., emphasis added). In the same interview, Dawood expresses a desire for racial equality: "[t]he locals dominate all positions in the government and civil service. This may be a good thing, but it leaves out other Kenyans of European and Asian ancestry. I hope that once the balance is restored, we shall go back to equal representation regardless of skin colour" (Siundu, "55 Years On" n.p.). These convictions clearly come out in *One Life Too Many* which conveys the romance of Sydney and Anna while they were growing up in Maidenhead, England, and how Sydney, upon wandering in several parts of the world before settling in Nairobi, becomes obsessed with Kenya's wildlife and landscapes. He reveals this to Hyder when he says, "'You know this country gets into your hair'" (89).

Dawood presents Kenya as a young republic that, in total disregard of patriots of European and Asian origin, seems committed to the Africanisation policy in both the private and public sectors. The unstable romance of Sydney and Anna appears allegorical to the travails of developing histories of a newly independent Kenya. For instance, the turbulence in the romance, together with its abortion and still-birth, both as a result of adultery, intensifies at a time when the postcolonial government is implementing the aforementioned Africanisation policy in order to mitigate the imbalances engendered in the exiting racist colonial regime. This exposes the traitorous post-independence Kenya, which was courting both the expatriate and the settler. Patricia's abortion signals expatriates' attempts to sabotage the state's Africanisation efforts. Anna's still-birth, divorce and demand for her to return to England can be read in the histories of settlers, who, upon Kenya's independence were the first ones to leave the country. This could be attributed to the bloodshed that occurred in the White Highlands during the liberation struggle. The situation seemed better for expatriates who were urged to stay a bit longer as Black Kenyans were training in various institutions in preparations to take up the positions.

Dawood writes: "[u]huru not only meant the transfer of political power, but also a change of faces in government offices, shops, hotels, schools and private firms" (Dawood 25). The policy was disruptive to the normalised privileges for expatriates of European descent. This can be discerned in the tone of the narrator: "[t]he heat of Africanisation was on and the private sector in its attempt to toe the line scanned through the telephone directory and sat at every junction to find suitable Kenyan Blacks to be invited as directors of private firms" (25). The hyperbole in these sentiments suggests that Kenyan Blacks were undeserving to take up the positions that Africanisation opened for them. Even when Kenyan Blacks were found

from ‘every junction’, they demonstrated varying abilities: some “learnt quickly with responsibilities and power thrust upon them and became assets to their companies [while] others remained passengers and served a cosmetic purpose” (25). Here, the narrator shows that Africanisation policy was implemented in a dictatorial manner. This is particularly reflected in the narrator’s claims that the “private sector [had to] toe the line” (25) and that “responsibilities and power [were] thrust upon [Black Kenyans]” (25). These views display the old racist attitudes that undermined the abilities of Black people.

In these contestations, the narrator reveals the disillusionment that Africanisation policy stirred amongst European and Asian communities in Kenya and how the corrective policy was soon seen as a sign of ingratitude to what they believe/d they had done for Kenya. The narrator also shows that it would have been fair for job opportunities, including top influential positions, to be competed for by all people regardless of race. Yet, the express specifications for Black people’s opportunities in the economic arena were responsive to histories of racially restricted access to quality education, better jobs, and other resources such as cash crop farming⁸³. At the same time, the apprehension accorded the Africanisation policy also shows that there were very few Black Kenyans in the Civil Service and in the private sector. Therefore, the entry of Black Kenyans into the job market, especially with provisions for influential positions was a strange and unwelcome phenomenon to white and Asian races who had been in control of the Kenyan economy for a long time. The prevailing situation was this: the Asian and European civil servants at Kenya’s independence were an unstable group that, in order to achieve certain selfish ends, threatened to desert their duties (Mboya 134).

Dawood critiques the abuse of the Africanisation mission by showing that it was driven by greed and corruption by the beneficiaries. This situation is correct and can also be seen in Kahuthu’s accumulation of wealth in the previous section. But I argue that the policy was not founded in futility. Meanwhile, Dawood’s narrator contends that race alone does not guarantee patriotism. This is because some beneficiaries of the policy use it maliciously. For

⁸³ Volker Vinnai writes, “Africans were recruited for jobs at the bottom, [there existed] differential pay scale according to race, [and] absence of educational facilities for Africans” (176-177). Further, “attempts to promote African growing of coffee in the 1920s and 1930s were opposed by European arguments that the quality of the product would be harmed” (Wasserman 430). By the 1940s, “the availability of a supply of educated Asian candidates relieved the Government of the responsibility to educate and train Africans to fill the subordinate positions in the civil service” (Vinnai 176). Tom Mboya observes that due to the Mau Mau revolution, “racial discrimination in the civil service was ruled out by the Lidbury Report in 1955, wages improved and in many other ways Africans were given fuller recognition” (Mboya 51).

instance, Charles Gethi attempts to get rid of Sydney by claiming that the latter's work permit cannot be renewed because the new head of immigration "is now implementing the policy with vengeance" (87) while the former head "only paid lip service to the policy of Kenyanisation" (87). Kenyanisation is used here to suggest that Europeans and Asians who would acquire citizenship would also benefit from the opportunities that Africanisation offered. But as Sydney's case shows, Kenyan citizenship does not protect his job. Gethi's efforts to fire Sydney are motivated by the former's knowledge of thriving corruption in the company.

Dawood's nostalgia for colonial Kenya's 'European efficiency' can also be seen in his portrayals of the beneficiaries of Africanisation policy as masterminds of colonial scandals. At a time when the tourism "company was expanding fast into projects allied with the hotel industry" (60) of which Sydney and Gethi "had been the architects of most of these plans" (63), Gethi introduces a scheme for looting the company for his and other directors' benefit. Gethi appoints Sydney to be the enforcer of the scheme. On commissioning Sydney to go and enforce the scheme, Gethi explains to him:

"One suggestion is to form a holding company in a neutral territory. This company would collect tariff from all holiday makers, buy cars and aircraft; in fact, everything we as a company import into this continent. The company will charge its own commission in the currency of the country of its base on every transaction. So as not to hurt Kenya, the commission will be deducted from the base price and not added on to it. [...]. This foreign based holding company will be owned by few of us, whose identity must remain anonymous for reasons I am sure you will understand. The profits of this company, and there can only be profits because it will be a commissioning agent, must be regularly transferred into numbered accounts in Switzerland." (64)

Sydney, charged with the responsibility of implementing the scheme, is shocked at such betrayal of one's country. When it dawns to him that Gethi is outlining a looting scheme, "Sydney inadvertently raised his eyebrows and Charles noticed it" (64). Gethi says to Sydney: "In our countries it takes as little time to become penniless as it takes to become rich" (65). Sydney goes ahead to implement the plan but includes his name on the 'numbered accounts', hence suggesting that corruption is not an entirely Black elite problem.

This ingrained culture of corruption among the beneficiaries of Africanisation policy reveals the betrayal of the spirit of Africanisation that envisioned the economic, social, and political uplifting of ordinary Black Kenyans. The devastating effect of such betrayal is evident in the person of Chuma in *Across the Bridge*, in the previous section. Chuma describes Kahuthu as “a progressive native in the corps of New Africans. A top civil servant [who] lives among the dignified [and owns] a large bungalow, big cars and uncountable property” (*Across the Bridge* 3). This is suggestive of impoverished citizens’ disenchantment with individuals who benefit most from independence policies at the expense of the majority.

The flaunting of a culture of corruption in a newly independent country that has embraced Africanisation policy serves as an important critique of the policy’s histories. However, Dawood makes no concession in his narration hence insinuating there were no transformative aspects of the policy. Maria Muller’s 1971 research on the impact of the Africanisation policy on Kitale, a former white settlement scheme, states:

[m]ost studies which have analysed the process of indigenisation of ownership and control of African economies have come to the conclusion that a national elite of politicians, civil servants and wealthy businessmen have benefitted most from the economic transfers, thus enabling them to combine political with economic power. It seems, however, that in small towns, [...] the Africanisation policy has given an opportunity to many small-scale businessmen to gain a foothold in economic life. (293)

This analysis asserts the significance of the Africanisation policy to the ordinary Black people. Even though the opportunities they encountered presented numerous challenges due to lack of necessary skills, experience, and strong networks, the Africanisation policy presented the newly independent Black Kenyans with a chance to redeem their distorted socio-economic situations.

The novel privileges imaginative nationalist discourse of men who failed in their family lives because of their commitment to the nation: its economic and political development. The sacrifice of such imaginary legends is heightened by the knowledge that they chose to leave their own countries and committed their best years to Kenya, their adoptive country. For instance, on hiring Sydney at the Kenya Hotels and Lodges, Charles Gethi mentions that “within a decade tourism will put tea and coffee behind it as our foreign exchange earner” (27-28). Tourism is still one of Kenya’s major economic industries in the present times. The

novel represents Sydney as being at the centre of marketing Kenya's tourism to the rest of the world, a task that "had become wheeling and dealing in what was now a very competitive and cut throat market" (67). This emphasises his importance in the economic development of Kenya and offers an alternative representation of Europeans in Kenyan literature, especially in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's narratives where Europeans are mostly portrayed as plunderers and oppressors⁸⁴.

Dawood archives expatriates' contributions to the newly independent Kenya. He shows that many of them served the country better than those who were privileged by the Africanisation policy. Such a portrayal is meant to debunk the delegitimisation of expatriates at the time of independence as allegorised through Sydney's marriage with Patricia King. This is clear in the depictions of Sydney who exhibits extra-ordinary dedication in building the tourism sector of Kenya in spite of his untamed spirit. His passion for Kenya is evident in his relentless determination to make the Kenya Hotels and Lodges Company, which he works for, a success; his dedication to market the Kenya tourism sector to the rest of the world; his efforts to acquire citizenship and make Kenya his home. To him, Kenya seems the exotic niche he was yearning for in his restless travels across the world. Long before he dies, he expresses the desire that if he dies, the ashes of his cremated body should be scattered in the Indian Ocean in Mombasa. Anna fulfils this will when he dies despite having been divorced. During Sydney's funeral, Charles Gethi, his long-time manager at the Kenya Hotels and Lodges, eulogises him thus: "Here was an expatriate who was bewitched by Kenya. He made it his home and then went on to give it his very best. [...]. He taught us to take pride in our country and serve our motherland" (Dawood 147). Sydney himself, before his death, is conscious of his great contribution to the development of Kenya. On his return from his last international trip, he says to Patricia: "As one who has adopted this country as his own, I have done more for Kenya than many others born here" (112). He is satisfied and proud that he has efficiently advertised Kenya's tourism to the rest of the world:

"I think I have put Kenya on the world tourist circuit, only a fool would bypass it [...]. Kenya has arrived and no tourist programme can ignore it. It has become the Switzerland of Africa and beckons the tourists of the world. They come here just as a moth gets attracted to a flame." (111-112)

⁸⁴ For instance, Mr. Howlands in *Weep not Child*, Rev. Livingstone in *The River Between*, etc.

Despite Sydney's failures in his love life and his complicity in corruption in the tourist company, he leaves a great legacy. Through him, Dawood celebrates the contributions of European expatriates in Kenya, hence addressing a gap in the minorities' histories: "[n]ationalist discourses are generally disinclined to celebrate the achievements of minorities or the contributions of such groups to the nation. Narratives of nationalism tend to suppress 'other' histories and the narratives of the 'few' in the interests of the assumedly larger nation" (T. Odhiambo, "Biography of a Trade Unionist" 87).

However, the imaginary histories of the contributions of one minority race, the white professional expatriates, constructed ideologically in the contested Africanisation histories pose several challenges. First, the histories seem to ratify some racist attitudes. The novel portrays Charles Gethi as Sydney's foil. Gethi displays great understanding of the economics of tourism and expertise in establishing lodges and hotels in the tourist attraction sites. But he is an architect of a corruption scheme that swindles the gains of his company. The narrator describes Gethi, the "son of a rich Kikuyu" (24), in the following terms:

He had his early education at Alliance High School and went to Makerere. From there he moved to London, where he picked up refinements and mannerisms which made him almost more British than the settlers and expatriates put together. He obtained his degree from the London School of Economics and made no secret of the fact that he had learnt more outside the university than inside it. His return to Kenya coincided with *Uhuru* and he immediately made it obvious that the London School had been but a half-way inn to prepare him for greater heights and distant pavilions. He was soon picked out by the civil service, parched dry by the exodus of colonial staff and looking hard both for the right colour and the right calibre to fill the yawning gap. (24)

The imaginary history of Charles Gethi, who represents the first generation of Black Kenyan elites after independence, is at most ridiculous. He is a mimic of English culture thus stripped of any sense of 'Africanness' imagined in the Africanisation policy; he has no experience of fighting for anything worthwhile because everything is provided for him, initially by his rich family, and then by the Africanisation policy.

A look at Sydney's histories reveals a self-made individual, one who confronts and surmounts many obstacles to get to the point where he has in life. For instance, Anna remembers her childhood in Maidenhead with Sydney as the next-door neighbour, and tells

Hyder: “our parents were heartbroken when the war broke out and Sydney who was poised to enter the university was called up” (18). She recounts that “[d]uring the war he was stationed in East Africa and the Middle East [then] in India and discovered the wide world beyond the shores of England as he put it” (20). Sydney himself, while at the Kenya United Hospital awaiting blood transfusion, narrates to Hyder how he ended up in Nairobi:

“For a few years I knocked round India and Malaysia, but somehow the call from Africa was strong. Looking at the map of this dark continent, I somehow fancied it. I conjured up in my mind the image of a sleeping elephant which was soon going to wake up, trumpet and charge. I first went to West Africa but found the humidity, the heat and the squalor a bit trying. I then set my eyes east and finally found my way to Nairobi.” (7)

The evolutions of Sydney and Gethi are very different: Sydney’s is very complex, driven by inspiration, ambition, and determination; Gethi’s is driven by mimicry and privilege. Thus, the novel portrays the Africanisation policy as some kind of privilege that infantilised the beneficiaries.

A glance at the question of Kenyan citizenship at the dawn of independence reveals much concerning the Kenyan state and the people of Asian and European origins. Sydney embodies Europeans who joyfully applied for Kenyan citizenship. His inclination towards Kenya is admirable. In “The Asians of Kenya”, Vincent Cable articulates the uncertainties that surrounded the issue of attaining Kenyan citizenship by the minority races, particularly Europeans and Asians. Black Africans who had previously occupied the base in “the ‘white-brown-black’ racial hierarchy of colonial rule” (Kasfir 322) were now in power. Cable shows that

[t]he provisions for non-Africans to assume Kenyan citizenship were in fact quite liberal. A Kenyan-born non-African with one parent also born in Kenya could qualify automatically for citizenship and for the others there was an opportunity for naturalisation by application within two years of independence, that is before December 1965. [However,] there was a striking lack of interest. Of the 180,000 or so Asians in 1963 only 20,000 applied for citizenship and those only in the last few weeks allowed for this procedure. [...]. The European response to voluntary naturalisation was even smaller — less than 2,000 out of 60,000 applied [...]. This was

widely regarded by Kenyans as ‘fence sitting’, or a lack of confidence in Africans’ ability to run Kenya. (223)

Cable attributes the minority races’ reluctance to apply for Kenyan citizenship to “the policy of favouring ‘black Africans’ in the Civil Service to redress the ‘historical imbalances’” (224); turbulent political climate for minority races, citing cases such as the “Zanzibar massacres of the much more ‘integrated’ Arabs, memories of the Congo troubles, and Kenya’s own recent history” (224) of Mau Mau. These were unrelated factors “but all conspired to create a vague unease in an already insecure minority” (224).

Reflecting on the same issue, Mala Shankardass points out that Indians were reluctant to apply for Kenyan citizenship. This is because, for them, “[i]n the cultural and social sense the Indian settler did not adopt the indigenous African culture and society” (18): “Indian emigrants are perceived in the popular view and foreign observers as taking their India with them, and recreating new Indian colonies in the lands of their adoption” (21). Furthermore, the political climate was rampant with “racial overtones with the surge of Kenyan African nationalism” (Shankardass 17). This shows that there were a range of issues that inflected the acquisition of Kenyan citizenship. Even though the political and social environment seemed hostile to those deemed non-Africans, they too had their own reservations, mostly concerning a country led by Black people. In the novel, Sydney’s successful application for Kenyan citizenship seems a great relief from the throes of abused Africanisation policy. Yet, despite Sydney acquiring Kenyan citizenship and getting his contract renewed, Gethi still hounds him (Sydney) out of the company. This reflects the trials of those viewed as non-Kenyans due to their racial identities despite having acquired Kenyan citizenship: “their future even as Kenya citizens was by no means secure under a government that formally talked about ‘Kenyanisation’ but actually meant ‘blackening’ of various jobs” (Nayak 925). This kind of the Kenya state’s betrayal of expatriates is symbolically encapsulated in Patricia’s betrayal of Sydney, when she commits adultery against someone who had sacrificed everything for her. Notably, the marriage between Patricia and Sydney occurs in a transition phase, immediately after Sydney has divorced Anna. Similarly, post-independence Kenya experiences problems with expatriates after independence when the settler economy has been disrupted. This suggests cohabitation more than a marriage.

One Life Too Many uses a romantic narrative to revisit histories of the early years of Kenya’s independence, and attempts a critique of the contested Africanisation policy. Through the

love story, Dawood invokes a rethinking of patriotism: he puts emphasis on individuals' commitment to the country rather than race. Yet Africanisation was not entirely oppressive to minority races that, historically, were acquainted to privilege, but it was a policy that envisioned corrective justice which could have been operationalised in a better way to for the socio-economic empowerment of the economically marginalised majority.

Conclusion

This chapter teases out Kenya's social histories in a period of transition from colonialism to independence. These histories are read in the tensions and anxieties of imagined heterosexual lovers in selected novels. Since love is mostly the driving force to achieve the lovers' desires to be together, the actors in the love question in many cases transgress inhibiting societal structures. This transgression of moral regimes is what prompted the evaluation of the social histories of the time in an attempt to understand the genesis of such regimes and their implications for the larger nation. This makes romance novels agents of transformative histories in the societies they are produced. This chapter presents situations where people in love confront religious, cultural, class, and other established regimes in the quest to freely commune with each other. In these transformative actions, society eventually remakes itself with the rapidly changing realities of the youth. Endowed with high entertaining capacity, romance novels widely disseminate the novelists' worldviews. This chapter has demonstrated that romance novels discerningly engage with social histories of a nation.

Chapter Five

The City and Kenya's Socio-Political Transformation

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Kenyan novelists' reflections on the socio-political landscapes of Kenya's urban world. Here, I examine how the represented Kenyan socio-political histories where the city features as a template as well as canvas onto which novels reconfigure the nation's histories⁸⁵. Most Kenyan novelists narrate the city as they reflect deeply on various fragments of the nation's histories. Since the founding of Nairobi as an administrative centre for the development of the settler economy, settlers attempted to fortress the city with racist ordinances hence constructing it as a white people's domain⁸⁶. The chapter reads Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*, Charles Mangua's *Son of Woman* and *Son of Woman in Mombasa*, and Yusuf King'ala's *Anasa*, "Indulgence".

This chapter is anchored on the understanding that "[t]here is a long tradition of work on the symbiotic relations between literature and the cities [whereby cities are] a major locus of literary creativity and literature in turn [functions] to make the process of modernity legible" (T. Odhiambo, "City as a Marker of Modernity" 47). Besides, "the city is a spatio-temporal terrain connecting diverse worlds" (Ouma 140). Hence, a reading of the city's socio-political intrigues conveys Kenya's most robust attempts towards a transformed, inclusive, modern society. The transformative power in imagining the city in works of art is best articulated in Chris Dunton's remarks in reference to Lagos, where he notes that novelists portray it "not only as a site of disorder and decay but as an environment in which creative energies are nurtured that are held to constitute corrective and liberatory force" (68). Furthermore, Roger Kurtz in his work on the Kenyan urban novel unveils the important significations, or obsessions, as his book suggests, of the city in Kenyan writing:

Kenyan writers began to draw from the city a whole new set of symbols, as cars and buildings, Western clothing, commercialism and commodification became the new signifiers of the ambivalent glamour of the city. The new Kenyan political and

⁸⁵ Onokome Okome, writing about good-time girls represented in a Nollywood film *Domitilla*, states: Lagos "is the template onto which Domitilla and her friends eloquently write their desires and aspirations. On the canvas the city offers, they all paint their hopes, as painters do on the canvas with which they work" (170).

⁸⁶ See George Kingoriah's "The Causes of Nairobi's City Structure" (253); Tom Odhiambo's "The City as a Marker of Modernity in Postcolonial Kenyan Popular Fiction" (46); Roger Kurtz's *Urban Obsessions Urban Fears*(4).

economic elite, with its power consolidated in the city, provided a whole new set of characters to explore. (75)

These urban novels shelve ‘obsessions’ for lush expanses of agricultural land grabbed by white settlers. Instead, they focus on individuals’ acumen to navigate precarious cityscapes. In novel representations, contradictions inherent in the cityscape emerge: “[p]osh hotels, glamorous as they are, can be cold and artificial. Cheap bars, encompassing and representing all the sins of city life, can also provide a sense of community and belonging in an alien environment” (Kurtz, *Urban obsessions* 75).

I find Nairobi quite vital in an exploration of Kenya’s urbanisation histories through the novel. Commenting on Nairobi’s privileged position in Kenyan literature, Tom Odhiambo notes, “[b]ecause of its advanced levels of industrialization, commercial activities, political signification, social and cultural diversity and perceived sophistication, the image of Nairobi has become a signifier of modernity in works of art and literature” (“City as Marker of Modernity” 47). But an inquiry into the ownership of the industries and the commerce which T. Odhiambo refers to, especially during the first three decades of post-independence Kenya, reveals Kenya’s urban novelists’ dissatisfaction with the economic burden the underclass carried. Colin Leys in *Underdevelopment in Kenya* submits that

[a]s a result of the land-transfer programme foreign ownership in agriculture was greatly reduced. But in commerce and industry, virtually all the expansion which occurred — a 50 per cent increase of output between 1964 and 1970, and 100 percent in the annual level of investment — was foreign owned and controlled. (118)

Hence, Nairobi’s immense industrial and commercial ‘development’ in the 1960s, 70s and 80s did not trickle down to the majority urban populace in meaningful ways. Coincidentally, the first three decades of post-independence Kenya in rural areas, especially Kenya’s coffee growing zones such as Central Kenya and parts of Rift Valley, were experiencing great economic growth because of the 1975-1983 coffee boom. This boom “resulted from a frost in Brazil” (Bevan *et al* “Commodity Boom in a Controlled Economy” 489), a situation that led to a high demand of coffee produced in other parts of the world, of which Kenya was among the largest producers. Hence, coffee farmers reaped huge profits because “export taxes were negligible, and a substantial increase in earnings accrued directly to private agents” (Bevan *et al* “Kenyan Coffee Boom” 359). These development prospects in the rural areas, coupled with the September 11th 1964 presidential rhetoric in which Jomo Kenyatta romanticised land

and rural life as he persuaded urbanites to return to the land, devalued urban settlement especially for the underprivileged city migrants⁸⁷.

Neoliberal capital's stranglehold of Kenya appears to have weakened in the rural areas following the departure of most settlers upon independence. However, this situation concentrated and exerted much pressure on the capital city, Nairobi, more than other urban centres. Collins Leys posits that neo-colonialism is compounded by the "formation of classes, or strata, within a colony, which are closely allied to and dependent on foreign capital, and which form the basis of support for the regime which succeeds the colonial administration" (26). Expounding on Kwame Nkrumah's idea of neo-colonialism, Leys argues that neo-colonialism is "a stage which is inherently likely to give way to other forms of imperialism" (27). He further asserts: "neo-colonialism re-produces and further extends underdevelopment, giving rise to new forms of class struggle which 'an indirect and subtle form of domination' may prove inadequate to contain, giving way to more direct and crude forms" (27). This chapter argues that a reading of imagined urban outcasts such as Nairobi slum dwellers, slum prostitutes, and mostly illicit brew drunkards unmasks the callousness of neoliberal capital, economic marginalisation of the vulnerable, and patriarchy.

Historically, Nairobi has been the locus of struggle for political, social and economic transformation in Kenya. In 1922, urban Kenyans symbolically expressed their nobility in their sacrificial resistance against colonialism during the Harry Thuku strike in Nairobi, which resulted in the massacre of about 150 protesters⁸⁸. In this protest, city dwellers who were united by shared deplorable labour and colonial conditions, demonstrated themselves as a group that had developed a strong national conscience. To the strike leaders, the city became a mobilizing zone for socio-political transformation. The city enabled visibility of Black people's vision for freedom and social justice, but at the same time, it exposed the brutality and illegitimacy of the colonial system.

⁸⁷ Jomo Kenyatta states: "Our greatest asset in Kenya is our land. This is the heritage we received from our forefathers. In land lies our survival and salvation. It is in this knowledge that we fought for the freedom of our country" (*Sufferring Without Bitterness* 232-233).

⁸⁸ Tiyaambe Zeleza offers compelling reflections on Nairobi's contribution to labour reforms through workers' strikes. He views Harry Thuku's "labour protest as a political campaign against colonial rule in Kenya, for its demands included the abolition of kipande and forced labour and the improvement of wages and living conditions, the reduction of taxes, return of African lands, provision of higher education and more social facilities for Africans" (6). The strike also "demanded that Africans should be elected to the Legislative Council and that Kenya should not have colony status" (6). Furthermore, "[t]he strike and consequent massacre of about 150 people by the police was to become a symbol of African resistance and heroism, a source of inspiration for the labour and nationalist militancy of the 1940s and 1950s" (6).

Here, I foreground existential struggles of the urban underclass who are compounded by imperialism. Through reading literary portrayals of urban outcasts' struggles to belong to a city that is indifferent to them, the chapter demonstrates the city's significance in a nation's quest for citizenship as well as democracy. In a book section that explores struggles in the city, Frederick Cooper interrogates:

who shapes the city, in what image, by what means, and against what resistance. [The struggles are] not so much the dramatic confrontations of strikes, riots, and revolt, but the daily struggles over the details of life in the workplace, the marketplace, and the residence [which affect] the transformation of ideology and culture, the forging of vast spatial systems in which people carried out their efforts at survival, advancement and struggle. (10)

These everyday issues are important because they result from certain power structures: neoliberal capital and patriarchy. These power structures intersect in the city to the detriment of the economically vulnerable urbanites.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I critique Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* with a focus on the represented demolitions of informal settlements in Nairobi city. The critique reveals the continuity of exclusionary colonial histories in post-independence Kenya, whereby, in order to maintain a city suitable for the white gentry, the unemployed Black communities were labelled vagrants and faced deportation to 'reserves' when found in Nairobi. Published in 1976, *Going Down River Road* engages with the slum demolitions of the 1970s during Jomo Kenyatta's regime. In demolitions of the informal settlements, the Kenyatta regime was trying to perpetuate a particular "identity and self-esteem of a capital city" (Hake 111) acceptable to the West, but at the expense of the underprivileged urbanites. The analysis delves into the reconfigured lives of slum dwellers in the represented historical period. Above all, the analysis locates the slum dwellers' economic and political struggles in the city as it brings out their vulnerabilities in a capitalist city.

The second section foregrounds histories of prostitution in the city as represented in Yusuf King'ala's *Anasa*, Charles Mangua's *Son of Woman* and *Son of Woman in Mombasa*, and Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*. Building on the work of historian Luise White, I revisit the histories of prostitution in colonial Nairobi and its contemporary configurations as depicted in selected Kenyan novels. In the analysis, I demonstrate that the represented Nairobi slum prostitutes are part of the urban outcasts who experience the brunt of economic

pressures of the city. Through their experiences in the inner city, one deduces the economic turmoil that confronts Kenya's urban poor in the late 20th century.

In the third section, I analyse fictional reflections on slum dwellers' alcohol consumption, and show how it relates to foreign capital investments such as the Kenyan Brewery industry. The section revisits social histories of alcohol consumption in East Africa in general, and Kenya in particular, and submits that the outlawing of informal sector brews such as *busaa*, *chang'aa*, *Karara* was motivated by capital in an effort to increase the market for bottled beer. The represented drinking spaces that slum dwellers patronise reveal deteriorating economic conditions of the lives of urbanite lowly in a time of commercial and industrial expansions in Nairobi.

Vagrants and the City: Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* (1976)

This section revisits the social histories of Nairobi's slums as evoked in Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*. The novel opens a window into the 1960s/ 70s realities of life in the Nairobi slums and how the urban outcasts navigated the hostile terrains of the inner city. By 'inner city' I refer to complex territories of the city which are ridden by poverty and crime; spaces that are densely populated but on the periphery of the economic and political powers of a modern city. This is a concept that I borrow from a study that interrogates the complexities of urbanization in Johannesburg, South Africa, in which AbdouMaliq Simone states: "the inner city has a complex geography that residents must navigate according to a finely tuned series of movements and assumptions. There are places where they know they must not go or be seen — but this knowledge always depends on highly variable notions about which places are safe and which are not" (Simone 421). Simone also shows that "the inner city [is] open to habitation of all kinds" (411): with "seedy prostitution hotels and clubs" (412); a site for "narcotic enterprises that constitute an important component of the inner city economy" (420); a space in dire "need for maintaining hyperawareness of [one's] surroundings" (416) due to unpredictable violent incidents.

Going Down River Road demonstrates worsening poverty in the inner city, a situation which can be linked to the neoliberal stranglehold on Nairobi's commercial and industrial sectors, which resulted into adverse economic marginalisation of slum dwellers. The novel offers a gaze into Nairobi's dark alleys such as River Road and Grogan Road; crowded drinking dens such as Karara Centre and Eden sex jungle; and dilapidated shacks in settlements such as Mathare Valley and Nairobi River, all populated by the most deprived people of a major

urban centre in Africa. As Roger Kurtz writes, *Going Down River Road* is “the Nairobi novel *par excellence*. [It] re-creates Nairobi’s backyard, the peripheral areas [...] that house the disenfranchised and the powerless” (*Urban Obsessions* 125). It focuses on Ben who is Ocholla’s close friend and colleague, both engaged in casual labour on a construction site, Development House, in the city centre. Kurtz points out Development House as an indicator of Nairobi’s class contradictions since it “is located on Haile Selassie Avenue at the edge of the financial and business district and next to the site for a new 800-bed tourist hotel” (127). Here, the urban outcasts participate actively in building a capitalist city, but one that denigrates them. These spaces are accessible to them only during construction. Furthermore, Development House seems a symbol of the Kenyan nation whereby the impoverished populace labour through all odds only to build an economy that benefits a selected few. In this case, the urban outcasts signify the entire nation’s outcasts — those excluded from state resources.

Through the depictions of the lives of Ben and Ocholla, the author offers a glimpse into the social histories of Nairobi’s impoverished and the marginal spaces that define their existences. The precariousness of the city to the underprivileged emerges through the explorations of the dangers and frustrations that Ben, Ocholla, and other characters of their status encounter in the inner city.

The Nairobi City Council’s brutal demolitions of slums reveal histories of Nairobi’s discriminative urban policy traceable to colonial segregation policies⁸⁹. Ben is a former lieutenant in the Sixth Army who was dismissed for gross misconduct: Mbugua, a mastermind of bank robberies in the city approached Ben to help them (the criminals) acquire a

⁸⁹ In a study that outlines the histories of ‘vagrant people’ in Nairobi, Paul Ocobock observes that “the colonial government developed a series of regulations — of which vagrancy was one of the first — to retain and manipulate the movement of Africans” (41). KinuthiaMacharia also states, “the implementation of the Vagrancy Act of 1922 (the first had been enacted in 1902) meant not only that ‘unauthorised’ huts could be demolished, but also that any African found in Nairobi without a job was liable to be identified as a potential criminal, who ought to be repatriated to the so-called ‘native reserves’ (226, original brackets). ‘Authorised’ Africans in Nairobi during colonial times were those issued with ‘pass’ — “employed on the railways, or in the government sector, or in the homes of the colonial masters” (K. Macharia 226). According to Ocobock, “[t]he urban environment appeared, to many colonial officials, to erode the social and political fabric of African society, and this in turn had grave consequences for the maintenance of colonial social order” (45). Furthermore, “[a]s the populations of the city swelled, the maintenance of urban order became of great concern for administrators. Aside from social order, urban order, too, became a concern among municipal authorities” (Ocobock 46). In 1932, over 1000 ‘vagrants’ were arrested, detained, put to forced labour to earn money for their repatriation to rural areas (Ocobock 48). The numbers of people who faced this fate increased with time, reaching the peak during the State of Emergency.

mortar at a time when Ben was “in charge of a mortar platoon” (Mwangi 57). The desire to make “[f]ive thousand pounds [which] was a hell lot of cash in any currency” (57) drove Ben to entangle himself in smuggling the mortar with the help of soldiers under his command. But Mbugua and his gang, on the day of robbery, “loused it up by blowing their arses to hell” (60). This leads to a court martial’s dismissal of Ben and his entire platoon, and now he is hounded by vengeful colleagues who blame him for their fate. Furthermore, vindictive Defence Staff officers hound Ben out of any respectable job he finds in the city. But the novel concentrates more on how the disgraced Ben navigates the squalid and seemingly absurd existence in the inner city.

The novel begins with Ben living with Wini who is a secretary but also a good-time girl. Wini has a boy named Baby whom she locks up in the house most of the time when she is out at work or participating in sex trade. Although she offers Ben great comfort and hope, apart from paying rent and buying food, she later abandons him and Baby and gets married to her boss, “a strange white man” (7). Ocholla, on his part, is confounded by responsibilities of providing for his two wives and several children who live in the rural area but who unexpectedly move to the city and join him in his dilapidated shack. Ben and Wini’s child, Ocholla and his two wives, embody Nairobi’s slum families subject to unpredictable expansion because of rural-urban migration. Through them, the novel reflects on histories of Nairobi’s urban policies and its effects on the people who exist on the city’s socio-economic margins.

The colonial urban policies on vagrancy and public health seem to define the post-independence capital city. These policies emerged from colonial attempts to keep the city a European enclave with a few certified Black labourers. From as early as 1901, many Black people were flocking to Nairobi in search of employment. Mwangi writes the Nairobi slums in a quest to demystify colonial constructs of slums as a danger to the city and therefore deserving demolitions. Instead, he constructs slum dwellers in their usefulness to the city economy, as the hub of informal sector economy and source of casual labourers who build the city. This is clearly reflected in Ben’s gaze at the Mathare Valley while on a bus:

The shuddering monster rattles east along the lip of Mathare Valley. From up here the shanty town appears just as a rubbish heap of paper, scrap iron, dust and smoke. Appearances are deceptive. Down there live enough construction labourers, unlicensed fruit peddlers and illicit liquor brewers to cause concern to the whole city

police. It can be nightmarish hunting for vagrants down there. Almost everyone is a vagrant, that is including women and children. And they drink *Changaa* and smoke bhang, two things that cannot stand the sight of a policeman. A few coppers have got themselves knocked cold by unknown assailants down there. Coppers find it easier to follow behind the City Council constabulary who have the right to raze the place down any day in the interest of public health. In the resulting smoke and chaos the policemen descend into the forbidden valley, make a few desperate arrests, then scramble out before the place regenerates into solid, obstinate, granite resistance to law and order. (160-161)

Here, the novel satirises the city council's creation of 'vagrants' through city by-laws that require the licensing of small scale traders⁹⁰. The narrator also reveals the city authority's paranoia against the impoverished slum dwellers. But through a tiny view of it by one well acquainted with it, the slum emerges as a well-structured economic zone of the city.

Meja Mwangi engages with demolition of slums in Nairobi in a way that reveals the persistence of the 1939 colonial Public Health Act. This can be seen in the narrator's observation that the "City Council constabulary [...] have the right to raze [down slums] any day in the interest of public health" (161). Demolitions of slums became a common phenomenon in the Kenyatta regime as a way of setting and maintaining the control of a capitalist city. Kinuthia Macharia observes that "Kenyan leaders [...] were trying hard to prove that they could maintain 'law and order', especially in the overcrowded capital [hence] the old colonial policy of slum demolition was reinstated with much vigour and wrath, yet still officially justified by the [1930] Public Health Act" (K. Macharia 228). In its quest to attain economic relevance in the global space, the postcolonial city prioritises the demands of foreign investors at the peril of its urban outcasts. The investors' preferences include a 'safe' city populated with a consumer class with disposable income. After the City Council razes down Ochola's shanty, he tells Ben: "[f]our years I have said things to those monkeys Ben, [...]. Called them brothers, citizens, everything! And every time they went and razed down the hut, anyway" (Mwangi 203). Here, the novel reflects on the histories of Nairobi's slums

⁹⁰ The 1972 International Labour Organisation Mission to Kenya "developed and popularised the notion of the 'informal sector' in explaining how cities grow and function [and emphasised the fact that] the informal sector is not a parasite on [developing] economies [...], but an integral part of them" (Winpenny 119). It also proposed elimination of "official licensing of trade and commercial activity [...] except where they were strictly required for health and amenity" (120).

demolitions with emphasis on the question of citizenship: were the slum dwellers treated as legitimate citizens?

In her study of the demolition of Muoroto slum in Nairobi, Jacqueline Klopp draws a relationship between the urban outcasts' struggles for democratic space and the consequent slum demolitions: "in the early 1990s when the fight for multi-party elections started to intensify, slum demolitions were unusual in their scope and brutality" (295). Klopp elucidates that the Moi regime that was fighting against a wave for re-introduction of multiparty politics weighed in on the Muoroto slum dwellers that were pro-multiparty and burnt them out of the city. Here, "slum clearance was a way to punish insubordination by withdrawing access to land and, conversely, a way to reward loyalty by re-allocating vacated land to political supporters" (295). To the regime of the time, slum dwellers' active participation in opposition politics was insubordination to the government that had the powers to withdraw their belonging to the city. Hence, Ocholla's invocation of the idea of the citizenship of a slum dweller is a pertinent one to an emerging nation: it advances the need for governments to observe human rights at all times when dealing with citizens.

The setting of Ben and Ocholla's shanty in Nairobi River Valley is significant to slum demolition histories of 1970s Nairobi. In the novel, the "health enforcement gang" (201) descends on the informal settlement at dawn and razes it down. By referring to the city council's officers as a gang, the narrator reveals the illegality of the council's actions against slum dwellers. To a slum dweller, as Ben discovers when he is rendered homeless, "a shanty hut [is] the absolute possession, the retreat of the vanquished heart" (186). This portrays the city as a frontline where slum dwellers suffer insurmountable economic losses. The shanty hut is where these urban outcasts nurse their wounds. Hence, by pursuing slum dwellers in their last fort, the city authority seems determined to exterminate them. Ironically, the force intent on exterminating these people purports to be on a mission to enforce public health.

Despite callous demolitions, the shanties still emerge by evening: "[t]here is something malignant about shanty huts. They go up in the smoke at dawn, spring to life again by twilight" (204). The author's use of the term 'malignancy' demonstrates the city authority's attitude to the slum problem: it seems to them a chronic disease resistant to the antidote injected by the health gang. On the other hand, the term reveals the slum dwellers' unbreakable resilience despite being treated like vermin. James Winpenny observes that in the early 1970s, "[s]quatter settlements were under constant threat of demolition [and in the]

extreme case [of] the settlement in the Nairobi River Valley... squatters had to dismantle their shacks every morning and reassemble them every night in order to evade destruction and loss” (119-120). The conflict over slums’ presence in Nairobi demonstrates the city’s reluctance to invest in accommodation for the impoverished, just as colonial Nairobi was reluctant to tolerate more than ‘needed’ Black people’s presence in the city. Additionally, in the period the novel reflects on, many foreign-owned commercial and industrial investors needed space to build their empires.

I also examine histories of micro-enterprise traders who were contributing to the development of the city in creative ways in the 1970s, but whose legality was denied through presidential rhetoric. The novel depicts the city council’s eviction of the urban outcasts’ food vendors in a way that shows the city’s haste to make room for multinational capital through constructions of tourist hotels and other commercial centres while destroying the informal sector economy. In the novel, workers on the construction site for Development House have specific food kiosks where they buy their lunch: Hilotoni, Tree Bottoms and Sukuma Wiki. These food kiosks operate within the logics of city’s low-income workers such as selling low-cost meals mostly on credit, and are part of what Ato Quayson, in the context of Accra’s food vendors, terms “improvisation [that] engenders a particular experience of street life” (76). The names of the food kiosks carry meanings that relate to the low-income workers’s simultaneous aspiration to and parody of, the affluent establishments they are excluded from: Hilotoni references Nairobi’s Hilton Hotel; Tree Bottoms, an inversion of Nyeri’s Tree Tops tourist hotel, built in 1932, that overlooking Mt Kenya. Sukuma Wiki (literally ‘push the week) refers to kales, the most affordable vegetables common with Nairobi’s impoverished, but also codifying the urban outcasts’ struggles to survive on limited finances from week to week, thanks to affordable kiosk meals.

The aspirational allusions to the affluent centres is a characteristic of the city’s low-income zones where “commerce is dressed in the garments of faith [where] the laborer’s appetite works for him and hunger drives him firmly into the bosom of the capitalist circuit” (Quayson 94). But “the City Council’s good-health brigade” (Mwangi 165) thwarts the economic aspirations of the Nairobi roadside food vendors depicted in the novel by destroying “all the roadside kiosks and other insanitary eating places” (165) in response to a cholera outbreak. The narrator notes: “[t]here are rumours rife that the Council will build organized sanitary Food Kiosks but no mention was made of when. Or what the food prices will be like. Neither did they say precisely who will own the new sanitary eating places nor

what they will do with the old man Hilotoni and his one-eyed wife and semi-illiterate son” (165). Here, the narrator expresses his disenchantment with the city control measures that destroy the economies of the urban outcasts without offering any alternatives to their existence. On the question of ownership of the proposed new food kiosks, the narrator alludes to the possibility of the city authority instituting a middle-class investor in a confirmed food market. This underscores the penetration of parasitic capitalism in the spaces of low-income urbanites since slumlords who understand the logics of food trade for the urban outcasts will be out to exploit at all costs. The socially fortress city expressly denies an experienced urban outcast a chance to earn a decent living.

Meja Mwangi highlights the plight of Nairobi’s impoverished urbanites in a context where the political climate was against them. This is noticeable in Jomo Kenyatta’s (the President at the time) reference

to the lowest income groups as ‘*ragai*’, loosely translated to mean ‘lazy’ or ‘useless’, thereby showing a lack of understanding about the significance of the growing number of Africans who were making a valuable contribution to the economy by their innovative micro-enterprises. (K. Macharia 229)

Contrary to the presidential rhetoric, the novel depicts most slum dwellers as innovative and hardworking people, but constrained by structural barriers to achieve economic success. The novel further questions taxation of low-income workers living in squalid conditions. The contradiction in the taxation lies in the fact that the same city revenue authority inadvertently outlaws the existence of low-income people in the city because with such an earning they cannot afford better housing elsewhere. This is evident in Ocholla’s dislike of taxation when he is paid at the construction site: “The Indian has just sliced off a fat chunk of my money and called it tax. [...]. Before you know it we may be working one lousy month to earn a small slip labelled TAX” (189). Here, we encounter a citizen who contributes to the development of the country through paying tax, hence disrupting Kenyatta’s indignation of the low-income groups. But the novel advances a humanitarian cause for the low-income workers who find it difficult “balancing something that has no centre like a labourer’s budget” (189). Implicit here is the income tax exception for low-income slum dwellers.

This section focused on the socio-economic struggles of slum dwellers and informal sector economy players who creatively and resiliently navigate the rough terrains of their environs. It shows that the city’s oppressive laws are a perpetuation of colonial racist laws, which

sought to foster a city for the white gentry. But in the context of the first three decades of post-independent Kenya, slum demolitions and an affront on the informal sector economy is influenced by capitalist control on the city. But the slum demolitions experienced during the fight for multi-party in 1990 demonstrate the dictatorial state's efforts to constrict democratic space. The novel foregrounds the humanity of slum-dwellers; their crucial contribution to the growth of the city; the need for economic rehabilitation of slum environments; need for the recognition of slum-dwellers' citizenship — their rightful belonging. In essence, implementation and enforcement of reformed, humane laws that would improve livelihoods in the slums would be transformative to the city, and by extension, to the Kenyan society. Reflections on such impoverished masses suggest the novelist's desire to see the city authorities embrace slum dwellers as human resource and not as a liability to the city economy.

Prostitutes and the City: *Anasa* (1996), *Son of Woman* (1971), *Son of Woman in Mombasa* (1986) and *Going Down River Road*

Yusuf King'ala's *Anasa*, 'Overindulgence', Charles Mangua's *Son of Woman* and *Son of Woman in Mombasa* and Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* offer productive ways of reading Kenya's urbanisation histories through fictional depictions of prostitution. In examining King'ala, Mwangi and Mangua's narrations of prostitution in this section, I provide reflections on the social histories of prostitution and its link to Kenyan urban centres, particularly Nairobi and Mombasa. The section demonstrates manifestations of patriarchy in both the rural and the city spaces: in rural areas, cultural constrictions on a young woman's sexuality confound her existence; in the city, commodification and commercialisation of her sexuality threaten to erase her humanity.

Timothy Gilfoyle, in a study of metaphors of prostitution across varied spatial and temporal spaces, underscores the difficulties that historians of prostitution encounter: "most sources are so embedded in discourses of pleasure, reform, and regulation that any effort to reconstruct the lived experiences of these women is nearly impossible" (138-139). He reckons that "the prostitute remains an elusive historical character [and that] one searches in vain for an exemplifying individual or narrative that personifies the complexity of the prostitute's world" (138). Indeed, prostitution is a complex social phenomenon that is as difficult to define as understand. Gilfoyle contests that although the term "'sex worker' [...] is less stigmatizing than 'prostitute', [...] sex work practices include more than just prostitution: erotic dancing, nude modelling, filmmaking, erotic massage, escort service work, and sexual surrogacy"

(119-120). Ian Shaw and Ian Butler define it as involving “the exchange of sexual services, sometimes but by no means exclusively, sexual intercourse, for some kind of reward; money, drink, drugs, a meal or a bed for the night” (181). Similarly, Shu-Ling Hwang and Olwen Bedford define prostitution as the

exchange of personal interaction of a sexual nature for payment [which ranges] from flirting, dancing, and drinking to sexual intercourse. The exchange may be voluntary or forced, and the individuals engaging in the behaviour are not necessarily the ones making or receiving payment. (202)

The definitions by Shaw *et al* and Hwang *et al* do not differentiate sex work and prostitution in the way Gilfoyle does. In the Kenyan context, prostitution historically refers to the actual transaction of sexual intercourse as well as sex work which necessarily supplement/ed it. But more uniquely, as Luise White’s work shows, prostitution in colonial Nairobi was highly motivated by male housing crises⁹¹. Hence, homeless men’s search for overnight accommodation and intimacy from prostitutes who owned houses normalised prostitution in the rapidly developing urban centre.

In a highly polemical speech at a “Prostitution: From Academia to Activism” symposium, Andrea Dworkin, a former prostitute, submits:

[w]hen men use women in prostitution, they are expressing a pure hatred for the female body. [...]. It is a contempt so deep, so deep, that a whole human life is reduced to a few sexual orifices. [...]. Prostitution per se, without violence, without extra violence, [is] in and of itself [...] an abuse of a woman’s body. [...]. In prostitution, no woman stays whole. It is impossible to use a human body in the way women’s bodies are used in prostitution and to have a whole human being in the end [because] too much is taken away when the invasion is inside you, when the brutality is inside your skin. [...]. The only analogy I can think of concerning prostitution is that it is more like gang rape than it is like anything else. [...]. The gang rape is punctuated by a money exchange. [...]. With money [a man] can buy a human life and erase its importance from every aspect of civil and social consciousness and conscience and society, from the protections of law, from any right of citizenship, from any concept of human dignity and human sovereignty (1)

⁹¹ Luise White observes that “Nairobi prostitution was as much a function of the housing shortage as it was of the ratio between the sexes” (“Prostitution in Nairobi during World War II” 256).

Melisa Farley also asserts that “prostitution amounts to men paying a woman for the right to rape her” (14). These views exclude male sex workers, who, in Kenya, are most prevalent at tourists’ hotspots such as Mombasa and Kilifi⁹². A study on such figures, which is outside the ambit of my study, could provide interesting grounds for comparison with female prostitution.

Valerie Jenness offers a glimpse into the complexities of prostitution by highlighting two organisations formed in relation to prostitution: “COYOTE (an acronym for “Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics)” (403, original brackets) and “WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt)” (412, original brackets)⁹³. COYOTE’s mandate is to sever “prostitution from its historical association with sin, criminality and illicit sex [and place it] in the rhetoric of work and civil rights” (417). It also insists that “not all prostitution is forced prostitution; in fact, often prostitution is voluntarily chosen” (416). On the other hand, WHISPER “argues that prostitution must be understood as an institution created by patriarchy to control and abuse women. [It also] claims that no woman *chooses* prostitution and that all prostitutes are victims” (412-413, original emphasis).

But Ronald Weitzer suggests three paradigms that can enable a broader understanding of prostitution: the oppression paradigm, empowerment paradigm, and polymorphous paradigm (214). The oppression paradigm holds that “sex work is a quintessential expression of patriarchal gender relations [and claims] that exploitation, subjugation, and violence against women are intrinsic to and ineradicable from sex work” (Weitzer 214). On the other hand, the empowerment paradigm “holds that there is nothing inherent in sex work that would prevent it from being organized in terms of mutual gains to both parties — just as in other economic transactions” (215). Weitzer advocates for the polymorphous paradigm as “alternative perspective [which] holds that there is a constellation of occupational arrangements, power relations, and worker experiences” (215). Indeed, prostitution is equally compounded with hazards as with gains depending on various factors — legal, cultural, social, health, personal.

One very useful question that Gilfoyle asks is: “But are prostitutes metaphors of modernity?” (136), to which he responds that “pre-modern prostitution was a regulated, institutionalized,

⁹² Scott Geibel *et al* in a “capture-recapture enumeration estimated that 739 male sex workers who sell sex to men were active in Mombasa” in 2005 (746).

⁹³ COYOTE was “[f]ounded in San Francisco by ex-prostitute Margo St. James...” (Jenness, 403) while WHISPER “emerged in the early 1980s [...] in New York City [and it’s] made up of volunteers, feminist scholars, and clergy who are concerned with saving prostitutes from the life of prostitution” (Jenness, 412).

and integrated feature within dominant culture [in] sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spanish [and] other European cities” (136). This means prostitution is not entirely a modern phenomenon. Its conspicuous visibility in the cityscapes, which is characterised by pervasive commodification and commercialisation of sex, situates it in the rhythm of the city. For instance, Janet Bujra refers to early Nairobi prostitutes as entrepreneurs and argues that these particular women

were able to take advantage of a certain demographic and socioeconomic situation to achieve high incomes and thereby acquire property. Through prostitution and beer brewing they accumulated savings which they invested in building or buying houses, and occasionally in petty trade. Their ability to accumulate savings in this way equalled or surpassed that of men in the earliest phase of Nairobi’s history, and until today women own almost half the houses in Nairobi’s oldest existing “African location,” Pumwani. (213)

Here, Bujra constructs the urban space as uniquely inclined towards opening up greater opportunities for prostitution, which in effect yields economic advantages for the participating women.

Writing some years after Bujra, Luise White, in a study of the histories of prostitution in colonial Nairobi, also constructs prostitution as an urban phenomenon that emerged from the founding of Nairobi, and the colonialists’ settlement control policies and other unique urbanisation factors. She observes that “colonial African cities were designed (sometimes years after their foundation) to contain and maintain pools of competitively cheap male labourers, who in theory would return to their rural families as soon as their contracts ended” (*Comforts of Home* 45, original brackets). African men’s migration to the city was mostly due to the hostile atmosphere generated by white settlers’ demand for cheap labour which the colonial government facilitated through introduction of taxation: “Hut Tax [which was] introduced in 1902, [and] amounted to a tax on household heads, generally married men [while] “Poll Tax [which was introduced in 1910, targeted] all males over sixteen” (*Comforts of Home* 35; 36).

The enforcement of taxation necessitated wage labour on settler farms to people who were used to other economic activities such as subsistence farming, livestock keeping, and fishing. This economic factor contributed to migration of young men to Nairobi and other urban centres. In fact, the “violence of 1920s labor recruitment made the option of employment in

Nairobi attractive to many African men; wage labor in Nairobi seems to have been free of many of the disciplinary abuses that had so often characterized agricultural labor” (*Comforts of Home* 52). Furthermore, the influx of World War soldiers added to the immense male population of the city⁹⁴. The housing crisis for Africans in the city resulted from urban planning since “the British colonialists sought to make the capital a city of male migrants” (*Comforts of Home* 1). Excluded from formal employment, women resorted to prostitution “as a reliable means of capital accumulation, not a despicable fate or temporary strategy” (*Comforts of Home* 1-2).

This section reads prostitution in the urbanisation histories of Kenya by showing how the city became a refuge for girls who became prostitutes, and by examining the imagined lives of prostitutes and their families. Despite Luise White’s contestation that colonial Nairobi prostitution was a conscious and respectable choice, the post-independence novels I read here demonstrate shifts in the city landscapes and their implications for prostitutes. Even for Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Wanja, in the 1972 novel, *Petals of Blood*, “a female figure rife with agency and power” as evident in “her ability to forge her own destiny”, a turn to prostitution is “certainly a tragic and cynical decision on her part [though] a reasoned and logical solution to the problem she faces” (Roos 154). To some extent, the standpoints of the novelists I focus on here reveal their nostalgia for the continuation of a traditional heterosexual family.

The novelists foreground the hazards of the trade and the long-term effects on the holistic well-being of the prostitutes. Unlike the colonial Nairobi prostitutes who faced treatable sexually transmitted diseases, Karen Hampanda’s study on prostitution in Mombasa notes more risky consequences for the 21st Century prostitutes: “[w]omen engaging in commercial sex in sub-Saharan Africa are considered one of the highest risk populations for HIV acquisition” (141). Hampanda’s study details prostitutes’ lack of agency in the trade and economic desperation due to competition for male clients. The work rhetoric notwithstanding, the novelists’ I study here show disenchantment with the commodification of a woman’s body, as is the case in the cheap sex dens of the inner city. Using prostitutes as

⁹⁴ Luise White notes as follows:

There was also a large military presence in Kenya during the war: three Royal Air Force bases (one in Eastleigh); Royal Engineers at Thika, Eldoret and Nairobi; twenty thousand Italian [Prisoners of War]; four camps in and around Nairobi housing King’s African Rifles (East and Central African soldiers) in training programs and in transit to and from combat in South east Asia; and a total of nine thousand troops of the Gold Coast Regiment (GCR) of the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) involved in the defense of East Africa from June 1940 to October 1941. [...]. By the end of December 1940 there were seventy thousand African and European troops in British East Africa, the plurality of which were in Kenya. (*Comforts of Home* 148).

metaphors of the morally degraded masses in the impoverished zones of the city, the novelists demonstrate their dismay at the morally uncontained cityscapes hence painting the city as a site of moral and cultural subversion. By so doing, the novels chastise patriarchal bonds predominant in the rural areas, which consequently lead to the escape and pursuit of liberty engendered in the anonymity that the city provides.

However, Florence Stratton contests African male writers' appropriation of female archetypes such as mother, virgin, and prostitute in imagining the nation. Among the works she reads is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* in which Wanja, a prostitute, embodies post-independent Kenya's degeneration. Wanja is a victim of schoolgirl pregnancy, a motif replicated by most writers I study in this section. Unlike the girls I study here, Wanja disposes her baby "in a latrine. This act marks the end of a period of national optimism, the abandonment of a hope that the new nation would be founded on socialist principles of distributive justice" ("Periodic Embodiments" 119). Stratton contests the trope of the woman's body in writing the nation since, for her, it "excludes women from the creative production of the national polity, of identity, and of literary texts" ("Periodic Embodiments" 122). She further posits that in such depictions, "woman herself is produced or constructed by the male writer as an embodiment of his literary/political vision" (122). Although all the novels I read here are by male writers, my interpretation leans towards reading depictions of the inner city prostitute as one of the urban outcasts exploited by the urban capitalist patriarchy.

I begin my analysis of the novels with a focus on Yusuf King'ala's *Anasa*, and thereafter Charles Mangua's sequel. *Anasa* contributes to the reading of societal shaming of schoolgirl pregnancy as a pathway to prostitution. In the previous chapter, I discussed schoolgirl pregnancy as a dilemma that forces Caroline to marry Chuma despite glaring class differences. Here, school pregnancy features not so much as a precursor of class struggle it is in Caroline's situation, but mainly as a gender conflict issue that leads to prostitution. *Anasa* is set in the 1980s when schoolgirl pregnancy was a crisis, which actually began in the 1950s as revealed in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*. For Lynn Thomas, "schoolgirl pregnancies [in Kenya] emerged as an acute dilemma for school-going young women and men in mid-twentieth-century [because] their parents often viewed them as foiling plans to build better and more prosperous lives" (181). Schoolgirl pregnancies not only meant that the affected girl would be expelled from school, but also stigmatised by the society from which she comes from. AG Ferguson in "Schoolgirl Pregnancy in Kenya: the Continuing Saga"

observes that “between 1985-87 10,000 girls dropped out of school because of pregnancy” (35). Further, Barbara Mensch *et al*, writing about premarital sex and school pregnancies in rural Kenya in the 1990s, show cases of surveys that under-report schoolgirl pregnancies due to the unseen cases of “miscarriages and abortions — that is, to pregnancies that may not have come to public attention” (Mensch *et al*. 295). *Anasa* is a literary engagement with these concerns in Kenya’s social histories, which are presented as one of the triggers that push young women into prostitution.

The novel revolves around Hawa’s ‘descent’ into prostitution after Mzee Tamaa impregnates her. Hawa is born in a relatively wealthy family even though she and her only brother, Said, grow up as orphans due to their father’s demise. They are raised by Habiba, their mother, who is beautiful and hardly in her middle-life. Teenage Hawa’s great love for Daudi who is slightly older than her crumbles when her mother lures the penniless young man to be her (Habiba’s) secret lover. This incident permanently affects Hawa’s life; she chooses never to enter into a relationship with young men. The narrator portrays Hawa’s attempt to escape from love relationships with her male counter-parts based on mutual emotional and physical attraction and acceptance, as a shortcoming that endangers her conformity to societal expectations of fostering and sustaining a heterosexual family. The broken love and the absence of a father-figure in her life heighten her vulnerability. It is in this context that a rich elderly neighbour, Mzee Tamaa — whose name connotes greedy desire — seduces the schoolgirl by initially showing her fatherly love and attention before luring her into secret escapades of alcohol consumption in a neighbouring Thika town. Eventually, he laces her drinks with drugs before raping her, after which she becomes his mistress until she becomes pregnant.

Schoolgirl pregnancy is portrayed as a precursor to prostitution, mainly because of burdensome societal expectations for women in the rural areas which demarcate “a constricted space” (Young, 10) for women to the point that escaping to the city engenders liberation. The novel shows pregnant Hawa’s despair when she resolves to flee her village. Her situation of abandonment deeply lowers her self-worth to beneath the ants she sees at the bus stage. The ants at the bus stage “walikuwa na utulivu na uhakika wa maisha yao kutokana na ulinzi waliokuwa wakipewa lakini yeye alikuwa kama mtoto mdogo aliyeachwa jangwani bila ulinzi” (62), “enjoyed the calmness and assurance of their lives from the security given them by soldier ants, but she was like a baby abandoned in the wilderness without protection.” When she gets pregnant, Hawa “[a]litarajia kumtumia Mzee Tamaa kama nguzo

wakati wa dhiki kama huu lakini alitemwa kama masuo” (58), “hoped that Mzee Tamaa would be her pillar during these times of anguish but he spat her as if she were dregs.”

Hawa’s miserable state is heightened by the idea that she is carrying “mwana wa haramu tumboni” (60), “an illegitimate child in her womb”. Her pregnancy, which occurs outside sanctioned social codes, invites ostracisation for Hawa and her child. Both Hawa and Mzee Tamaa dread societal condemnation for the pregnancy. Hawa feels condemned for dishonouring her body, contrary to what society expects of her and what she aspired when she first fell in love with Daudi. Mzee Tamaa intends to preserve his status in society as “mtu mzima, mzazi na aliyekuwa kioo cha mwelekezo kwa makinda yaliyokuwa yakikulia katika eneo aliloishi” (42-43), “an elder, a parent who was a role model and a mentor to fledglings in his locality.” Mzee Tamaa succeeds in maintaining a facade, but Hawa’s pregnancy carries long-term consequences that would stretch to the future, including how she should nurture the ‘illegitimate’ child. These cultural issues that construct Hawa as an ultimate failure immensely contribute to her decision to flee to Nairobi.

Hawa’s pregnancy is the turning point that launches her into prostitution and the consequent “sexploitation” (“Periodic Embodiments” 122). The novel delves into the circumstances that foster her choices, a way of uncovering the pasts of a prostitute, but also show the peculiar circumstances that determine her choices. The elderly people prey on youth sexuality due to the latter’s economic vulnerability. For instance, *Anasa* presents relationships between Mzee Tamaa and Hawa, and Daudi and Habiba, in metaphors of predation. Daudi’s and Habiba’s betrayals cause Hawa to lose trust in people leading to her miserable loneliness, especially because these two were people she treasured. It is in this state of suppressed desperation that Mzee Tamaa’s attentions to Hawa become very meaningful to her. Mzee Tamaa uses his economic muscle and experience to ensnare unsuspecting Hawa. In this relationship in which he appears to fill the gap of a father-figure, Hawa was “kama kipaa kinachonyemelewa na chui nacho kinaendelea kunywa maji bila habari yoyote” (42), “like a young antelope drinking water at a river without knowing that a ruthless lurking leopard was closing in.” The predator/prey metaphors used here depict Hawa’s innocence and vulnerability as she unknowingly indulges in the luxuries that Mzee Tamaa makes available. In his exploration of the link between schoolgirl pregnancy and prostitution, King’ala shows that school-girls’ carousing with sugar-daddies, which sometimes lead to rape, contribute to young girls’ entry into prostitution. This situates prostitution in the realms of capital patriarchy.

Predation metaphors also manifest in male sex work, an intricate case where Habiba takes charge as an economically empowered woman to solicit sex from Daudi. The metaphors reveal societal anxieties about sexuality. Unlike in the city, sex trade in the rural areas is constrained by cultural norms. On the nights that Daudi secretly spends with Habiba, he is depicted as walking back to his parents' home at dawn while “akipiga mluzi kama mvuvi aliyenasa mtungo wa samaki” (4), “whistling like a fisherman who had caught a basketful of fish”. At the same time, Daudi is described as a hyena: “[a]likuwa ni kama shundwa aliyeonjeshwa asali kwani wakati wa magharibi miguu ilimwelekeza katika kiambo cha Habiba” (3), “he was like a hyena who had tasted honey, for every evening his legs led him to Habiba’s trap.” Here, the novel presents prostitution as a snare to young people. On the night that Hawa discovers the secret sexual relationship between her mother and Daudi, she sees Daudi in a different light: “[a]likuwa kama mbweha ambaye huparamia zizi la ng’ombe akiwa na nia ya kumla ndama lakini nia hii hugeuka kuwa ya kunyonya mara amwonapo mamake” (8), “he was like a fox who invades a cattle-shed to devour a calf but when the cow finds it out, it cunningly begins to suckle the cow.” In these cases, Daudi emerges as both a predator and a prey. As a fisherman, a hyena, and a fox, he reaps both financial and sexual benefits from Habiba. Compared to Hawa’s case, Daudi’s endangerment is minimal since the trap that Habiba has set for him also benefits him satisfactorily.

Betrayal in intimate relationships also emerges in *Anasa* as a precursor to prostitution. Unlike the transgressions of the lovers I discussed in the previous chapter, Hawa’s case is peculiar because she is a custodian of culture whilst her mother navigates the moral barriers of her community by soliciting sexual satisfaction from her (Habiba) daughter’s lover. This situation is problematic for Hawa because, in her deep love for Daudi, she describes his sexual advances to her as intentions to dishonour her (21). This is at a time when her understanding of honour, in accordance with her society’s prescription of female sexual purity, is chastity. The narrator conveys the social destabilisation that Hawa suffers from Habiba’s betrayal in the following metaphors: “Trela lilikuwa limegongana na gari dogo mgongano ambao uliliondoa gari hilo dogo barabarani na kuliacha trela likiendelea imara daima” (30), “A heavy-duty truck had collided with a small car in a collision that threw that car off the road as the truck powerfully surged forward.” The small car rendered inconsequential after the tragic accident succinctly conveys Hawa’s helplessness and moral destruction after her heartbreak.

Anasa portrays prostitution as a calamitous occupation. At a time when Nairobi is expanding rapidly, the slum prostitutes are seen degenerating socially. In fact, the novel suggests that Hawa's carousals with Mzee Tamaa is not prostitution *per se*, but a phase that initiates schoolgirls to the sex trade. The kind of prostitution she participates in is visibly commercial unlike in the village where it is masked in discreetness. The commercialising culture of the city trickles into the prostitutes' lives, making them overwork their bodies in a quest to earn meaningfully from the trade. This is because their clients are underpaid urban workers, which directly affects the prostitutes' 'fortunes.' To show how dehumanising prostitution is, the novel uses metaphors of exploitation to portray Hawa's pathetic situation as prostitute in Mahere slums: "[a]nasa za mjini zilikuwa zimemnasa Hawa kama nzi anavyonaswa na utando wa buibui" (121), "the city indulgences had trapped Hawa and she was like a fly caught in a spider web." Besides, "[w]atu walimzingira kama nzi wazingiravyo kidonda. Alikuwa ameanza kutoa miadi kama daktari kwa kutokuwa na wakati wa kutosha. Nyumba yake ilikuwa kama kichinjio mwisho wa mwezi" (121), "men haunted her like flies on a wound. Because of her busy schedule, she began to give appointments like a medical doctor to patients. At end-month, her house was like a slaughterhouse."

In the first instance, Hawa is like a fly in a spider web: predated upon, so helplessly trapped that her life is sucked out in the very way a spider consumes its prey. The metaphor of flies on a wound further registers prostitution as an injury under constant torment. Ironically, this particular injury offers perverse healing to the lonely urban poor as signalled by the medical metaphor. Yet the portrayal of Hawa's brothel as a slaughterhouse — a place where animals are butchered for the benefit/survival of human beings — reconfigures the earlier predator/prey metaphor of the antelope, to reference the scale of urban commercialisation of sex. This metaphor resonates with Andrea Dworkin's afore-cited observations which emphasise the predatory violence of prostitution (1).

Allegorically, Hawa as a prostitute is a symbol of the urbanite lowly predated upon by capitalist patriarchy driving Nairobi. In such an interpretation, the narrator contests the situation of underpaid disposable workers who offer economic satisfaction and life to the commercial and industrial holdings of the city. Imagining a prostitute as a physician treating sick men in the city foregrounds deplorable extents capitalism can reach. Unlike Wanja who embodies capitalism in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, Hawa embodies the proletariats in Nairobi of the 1980s.

Turning to Charles Mangua's *Son of Woman*, I read prostitution through imagined precarious childhoods of prostitutes' children exposed to their mothers' trade. In *Son of Woman*, the protagonist-narrator Dodge Kiunyu recalls his childhood in Eastleigh slums in the early decades of post-independent Kenya. Miriam, a prostitute and neighbour of Dodge's mother, adopts Dodge after the tragic death of his mother in a road accident. He grows up with Miriam's daughter, Tonia, in the sexualised environment among other prostitutes' children until Miriam evicts him for sexually experimenting with Tonia. In the rural home where he is taken, Dodge discovers that his grandmother had died and therefore he had no one to take care of him. Subsequently, Kamau abandons him at a Catholic Mission, which adopts and educates him up to university. *Son of Woman in Mombasa* is a sequel of *Son of Woman*. In this new setting, Dodge and Tonia are in a 'trial' marriage after Tonia has quit prostitution and bought a house at the beach. The novel depicts the represented histories of 1980s Mombasa, which is teeming with corruption in different government sectors, illegal money exchange trade, and sex tourism. In this milieu, Dodge actively participates in the illegal foreign money exchange, but most of the time gets into trouble with a corrupt extortionist police service. Dodge's narrative of relocating from Nairobi to Mombasa is a quest for the promises and changing fortunes of the city.

Roger Kurtz sees *Son of Woman* as Kenya's "second landmark" (91) urban novel, after Leonard Kibera's *Voices in the Dark*. He argues that the novel uniquely portrays Nairobi as "a city of light adventure, and life. [It] describes the actual poverty, grime, and degradation that constitute life in Nairobi's slums [in] an attitude of cynical humor and fatalistic opportunism" (91). *Son of Woman* sequel enables various interpretations of the complexities of the city represented in popular fiction. For instance, Tom Odhiambo states that Dodge "is a city 'dodger' ("City as Marker of Modernity" 55) which means he (Dodge) is an expert in navigating the complex challenges of the cityscape, especially the inner city. T. Odhiambo sees Dodge as a character who "creates and recreates at will his own urban legends of modern Nairobi in which men and women like him are constantly in search of self-fulfilment in a highly competitive environment" (54). Kurtz describes Dodge as a "happy-go-lucky protagonist; [an] individualist who flouts the law for purely selfish reasons" (91-92); one who expresses his dissatisfaction with "injustice and inequality [by making] sure he gets the biggest possible piece of an unjustly divided pie, by whatever means necessary" (92).

As indicated earlier in this chapter, Kenya's 1960s and 70s transition years brought forth urbanites without social roots in the rural areas, where indigenes belonged according to the

colonial creation of ‘reserves.’ The precariousness of represented prostitution in the inner city brought forth a crop of individuals with rootless paternal genealogies, most of whom could not trace their fathers. This presented a social dilemma to such individuals in a predominantly patriarchal society. Kathleen Greenfield sees Dodge Kiunyu as “a man alone [...]: his self-proclaimed identity as ‘son of woman’ is intended to indicate his lack of any inherited social identity” (686). This social alienation is germane to the cityscape, but it is also directly linked to urban prostitution. Dodge narrates:

My whoring ma could never figure out who my pop was. [...]. It was one of the scores of men who took her for a bed-ride but she wasn’t bothered to remember who among them I resembled. That’s my mother. Nothing bothered her. All she did was collect a quid from the punks who came for a tumble. That’s me. I was conceived on a quid and mother drank it. (*Son of Woman* 1)

Even though Dodge claims not to care about his situation, his desire to know his father is evident in his cynicism. Mangua’s commentary on urban prostitution zooms in on the fate of the children conceived in the trade. This is notable in Dodge’s claim that all it cost for his conception was a quid, which, ironically, was not invested in business or real estate as in the case of the colonial Nairobi prostitute women that Luise White studies. Dodge’s mother’s inability to remember the man who impregnated her also shows the shift in what Luise White refers to as *malaya* prostitution of which she claims clients and prostitutes developed strong bonds⁹⁵. Here, concerned partners transact sex like any other consumable commodity and forget about it. Later in the novel, Dodge discovers that his mother got disoriented about life when, while pregnant, her fiancé was jailed for life.

The novel uses a brazen narrative voice to depict the harsh realities of prostitution in the slums. According to Tom Odhiambo, *Son of Woman* “introduced a different grammar in the representation of [Nairobi] life. [Mangua’s] settings, characters, language and style [...] graphically celebrated the urban, in some cases depicted the rural as backward [...], or irreverently adopted a macho and hedonistic approach to life” (“City as a Marker of Modernity” 49). This ‘macho and hedonist’ style emerged in the 1960s and 1970s literary writings in Kenya, in a way that captured the rise in armed robbery crimes and prostitution in the midst of post-independence disillusionment. This is especially true in David Mailu’s *My*

⁹⁵ Luise White notes that “[m]alaya prostitution mimicked marriage” (*The Comforts of Home* 59). This form of prostitution emerged in the 1920s Nairobi where women had rooms to offer accommodation and sex for a night (58).

Dear Bottle (1973), *Unfit for Human Consumption* (1973); Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*; Mwangi Gicheru's *Across the Bridge*, among others.

In *Son of Woman*, Mangua shows that in the city, both the public and private spaces are precarious. Prostitution disrupts children's nurture and puts demands on them to learn to navigate the sexualised environment at a tender age. But the racy, gritty, and harsh narrative voice also reveals the rough kind of life in the slums, where prostitution is rampant. Dodge's narration shows that he not only survived a problematic childhood, but also bore witness to the harrowing intrigues of prostitution in Eastleigh slums. For instance, Dodge and Tonia grow up in Eastleigh, which, Dodge claims, is the "[m]ost famous place in Nairobi for advanced prostitution. Ninety percent of the kids are fatherless. They are bastards" (*Son of Woman* 26). Dodge's teacher, Jack, denigrates Eastleigh prostitutes' children: "Jack calls us poor little bastards and the damn fool is right" (26). Miriam sends Tonia and Dodge out whenever "some fellow paid her a visit for an hour or two during which the door would be locked and the curtains drawn and then the fellow would walk out looking somewhat weaker and ashamed" (20). Tonia and Dodge also wait outside for an hour when they return from school and find the door locked from inside. Dodge recounts cases when Miriam forced him and Tonia out of the house into the rain when a client called in the evening. When a man emerges from the house, "he looks round like a thief and starts to walk away" (26). Furthermore, when Miriam discovers Tonia and Dodge's sexual experimentation and decides to send Dodge to his grandmother in the rural area, she pays her client with sex: Miriam and Kamau "withdraw to her bedroom for some thirty minutes and we simply sit there, Tonia and I. We pretend to be deaf to the creaking of the bed and the grunting noises that drift to our ears. [...]. Their pig noises don't help either" (34).

These depictions of the shame that assails prostitution in the Nairobi slums disrupt the myth that the city provides anonymity to urbanites who engage in prostitution. Unlike the rural areas where cultural controls on sexuality are stronger, prostitutes move to the city to participate in the trade with some kind of freedom absent in the villages. But the promise of freedom is illusory. Writing about Lagos city and the good-time woman, Onookome Okome states that the city "offers a blinding sense of freedom but one that is likened to malarial state of consciousness" (170). This situation resonates with depictions of prostitution in 1970s Nairobi in Charles Mangua and Meja Mwangi's novels. In Yusuf King'ala's *Anasa* analysed above, Hawa flees from her village to a fictional Mahere slum in Nairobi, in a quest for such elusive freedom. In *Son of Woman*, a child's perspective reveals strong disapproval of

prostitution. Ben, in *Going Down River Road* analysed above, also reveals the stigma attached to prostitution when he walks out of Wini's house on his first visit:

[t]here is something creepy about walking out of a harlot's room into the morning. The skin tremors, crawling with millions of little consciences that were not there last night. Every face that sees accuses silently, every passing word is like a condemning statement. (Mwangi 85)

The irony of these moral logics emerges when Ben realises that Wini's neighbours are prostitutes, retired prostitutes, or men who patronise prostitutes⁹⁶. Hence, this city of contradictions enables an understanding of the moral dilemma of the children of prostitutes in slums. In contemporary Kenya, Dina Ligaga writes, focus is on the "university woman whose sexual exploits are a source of [...] great moral anxiety because of her apparent freedom, living as she does away from the normalizing structures of family, church, and school" (252). This is a phenomenon I evaluated in detail in relation to Monika in Zainabu Burhani's *Mwisho wa Kosa* in the previous chapter. The fact that prostitutes who are mothers overlook the stereotypes in their trade reveals difficult economic times among the urbanite lowly.

A study of prostitution in Kenya also reveals capitalist patriarchy in more dehumanising ways. Charles Mangua, in *Son of Woman in Mombasa* presents a case which positions prostitution in the midst of racism and misogyny. In Sunshine Club in Mombasa, Dodge bears witness to the racism that prostitutes undergo in their search for clients. This illuminates the indignities that prostitutes encounter in their trade — contempt for their female body, contempt for their Black race. Yanis, a Greek captain of *Athens* ship seeking Dodge's services in exchanging foreign currency, rebukes young prostitutes who come to him:

"Skip off, will you. And don't you dare put your greasy black hands on me again." He says it in a manner that gets her recoiling so she just stands there somewhat dumbfounded. [...]. He looks at her with such contempt that I feel embarrassed myself. After all, prostitutes are prostitutes and all they want is a sucker with dough to spare. Why get nasty? [...]. "Just get your silly stinking black cunt out of here, will you? Jesus! I can't have a quiet little drink without having some black bitch shoving

⁹⁶ Onokome Okome in "Nollywood, Lagos, and the Good-Time Woman" writes that the represented prostitutes come to a realisation that "they carry the stigma of prostitution which is publicly frowned upon even by those who patronise them" (171).

her sweating syphilitic cunt into my face. All they wanna do is fuck, fuck, and fuck, they'll fuck a dog for half a fish. What a world! Grrrrr. Better explain to your sister, my dear Dodge, that we are not in a black cunting mood". (*Son of Woman in Mombasa* 52)

Here, Yanis views this particular prostitute in terms of a part of female genitals, and reduces her further, to venereal disease. These statements full of hatred triggers Dodge's reflections on prostitutes' experiences — "I look at them and get this strange feeling that they are my sisters. [...]. Any white man would treat her the same way. Would he treat a Greek prostitute the same way?" (*Son of Woman in Mombasa* 53). In an unorthodox way of fighting racism against prostitutes, Dodge decides to punish the Greek sailor: "[t]he whole idea of robbing him wouldn't have occurred to me if he had not been so downright insulting to that black prostitute, and in a way to me and all my black brothers" (*Son of Woman in Mombasa* 57-58). This case reveals the risks the urbanite underprivileged dare for the purposes of making a living.

This section gives a view of the city through the lives of represented prostitutes in Nairobi of the 1960's, 70s, and 80s. Exploitation of the prostitutes' bodies by male clients who can hardly support themselves suggests difficult economic times in the Nairobi cityscape. The analysis reveals the intersection of capital and patriarchy in the city in an attempt to understand why the urbanite lowly faced the economic brunt as investors' fortunes expanded. The next section examines the city through the lives of mostly slum drunkards who are the prostitutes' male regular clients.

Alcohol and Urban Leisure: *Going Down River Road, Son of Woman, Son of Woman in Mombasa, Anasa*

In "Kula Raha: Gendered Discourses and the Contours of Leisure in Nairobi, 1946-63" Atieno Odhiambo unveils a history of leisure consumption by a developing proletariat in colonial Nairobi. Through an exploration of popular songs that are definitive of the times, ie., 1950s, 60s, and 70s, songs known in Kenyan lingua as "Zilizopendwa", "treasured songs of the yesteryears", A. Odhiambo presents "ways in which urban Africans created, contested and occupied African towns, seeking to exercise choice and control over their urban existence and identity" ("Contours of Leisure in Nairobi" 254). A. Odhiambo's work catalogues the emergence of urban guitarists such as John Nzenze, Elija Taliano, John Otieno Oteng'o, David Amunga, John Mwale, among others, and shows how they defined the city in ways

that revealed the musicians' anxieties about the urban woman who could drink freely in pubs, have several sexual partners, and be bothered less with getting married. Bearing in mind that these early bands played mostly in alcohol drinking halls in the city, A. Odhiambo's work is a pertinent entry point into reflecting on how the low-income urbanites in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s engaged in alcohol consumption during their leisure times.

This section examines represented slum dwellers' consumption of alcohol, especially the 'informal-sector beverages' (Willis "New Generation Drinking" 245) in the case of *Going Down River Road*, and the urban class imaginaries that emerge from the indulgences. In this case, alcohol consumption challenges the notion of bottled beer as a mark of 'respectability' or 'good citizenship'. In the novels of Charles Mangua and Yusuf King'ala, alcohol consumption presents opportunities for performance of power relations. This analysis links demolitions of the city slums and prostitution histories discussed above, with mostly illicit alcohol consumers in an attempt to offer a comprehensive view of Kenya's cityscape from below.

Justin Willis's work offers a fascinating gaze into the histories of alcohol consumption in East Africa. In *Potent Brews: a Social History of Alcohol in East Africa 1850-1999*, Willis unveils shifting significances of alcohol among different communities. For instance, he pinpoints the centrality of alcohol in different rituals and ceremonies. Willis writes:

If ritual is that which evokes the transcendent, then it might be argued that drinking is always in some sense a ritual; and of course, drinking has very often been drawn into the practice of circumcisions, funerals and offerings precisely because it *does* evoke the transcendent, and confers a particular social status on a social moment. (*Potent Brews* 14, original emphasis)

This is particularly true among the Babukusu of Western Kenya among whom the presence of local brew 'validates' ceremonies such as circumcision and funerals⁹⁷. This means that alcohol facilitates individuals' connections with revered spirits invoked during such rituals. However, most people who drink, especially in the urban spaces, have been, with time, cut off from the significations of alcohol in particular rituals. Such individuals converge to drink in a manner that establishes a bond among them, some kind of communion.

⁹⁷ In an anthropological study of Babukusu circumcision, Mellitus Wanyama and Omar Egesah identify busaa brew as an important ingredient in the ritual (11).

However, brewery companies and various regimes' onslaughts on Kenyan local brews have consistently disrupted dominant beliefs about drinking. In "New Generation Drinking", Justin Willis identifies the driving forces behind construction of bottled beer as the ideal. He notes, Kenya Breweries Limited (KBL) "played heavily on the association between bottled beer and good citizenship: 'After work, nation builders relax with Tusker', ran their advertisements of the 1970s'" ("New Generation Drinking" 243). The local brews soon became identity markers for low class and crime, especially in the city. As Willis states, the informal-sector beverages "were illegal drinks, and their consumption was an affront to the ideas of respectability, modernity and orderly development which bottled beer represented" (245).

Alcohol consumption in the informal-sector economy serves as a survival strategy. In the midst of myriads of economic challenges that the slum dwellers face, cheap alcohol becomes a source of comfort and leisure as they navigate the cityscape. *Going Down River Road*, which engages with the 1970s Nairobi, foregrounds histories of urban drinking in a way that seems different from the rural alcohol consumption that Justin Willis evinces in the *Potent Brews* cited in the introduction. One of the findings that Willis notes about alcohol consumption in predominantly rural East Africa is that it is a source of pleasure. He writes: "[t]hat alcohol makes people more adventurous — socially, and sexually — is widely accepted. It is also generally believed that alcohol can make people happy" (6). This function of alcohol proves vital in the 1970s Nairobi, where underpaid construction workers whose shanties have been demolished seek solace in the crowded cheap local brew bars in the dark alleys of the inner city. Actually, Ocholla finds a home for the night in the drinking den because "vultures from the City Council [...] burned down [his] shack [in the] morning" (Mwangi 74). Besides, when overwhelmed by the financial demands of his wives and children in the rural area, he seeks escape in alcohol. He tells Ben: "'Guys like you and me, Ben [...], we have got to drink, Ben. Drink and drink. That is the only way to stay sober in this bloody hell. [...]. We have got to forget things, Ben, [...], problems we must forget'" (68-69). As multimillion companies like Kenya Breweries Limited concerned themselves with 'respectability' and 'good citizenship' in their advertisements of bottled beer, Nairobi slum dwellers were seeking affordable intoxicants that could make them forget their economic miseries if only for a while.

Similarly, Dodge Kiunyu in *Son of Woman* drinks to escape the harsh realities of the city and a corrupt system. Before he becomes a "wily and street-hardened maverick" (Kurtz, *Urban Legends* 92), Dodge loses his fiancée to a butcher and misses a job promotion he thinks he

deserves to an underperforming colleague who could bribe the boss. When the person he loves and a system he is willing to commit his skills to for life betray him, Dodge encounters loneliness and depression, which only dissipate after he indulges in alcohol consumption. Unlike Ocholla and Ben in *Going Down River Road* who are languishing in economic deprivation, Dodge depletes his savings in alcohol and on attendant good-time girls in a quest to recover from his personal injuries. In both cases, Charles Mangua and Meja Mwangi register the 1970s Nairobians' disenchantment with the Kenyan state agents' corruption, inefficiency, and lack of vision for the greater public.

Through examining alcohol consumption histories encoded in the novels I focus on here, this section reveals Kenya's gendered cityscape. Even though personal and structural injustices cause both men and women to indulge in alcoholism, women tend to suffer more because of consequent sexual exploitation. This can be read in Theresa Ngendo's (Dodge's mother) and Hawa's alcoholism in *Son of Woman* and Yusuf King'ala's *Anasa*, respectively. Both Hawa and Theresa discover the soothing power of alcohol after heartbreaks. As discussed above, Daudi betrays Hawa when he yields to Habiba's (Hawa's mother) sexual demands. This double betrayal cause immense loneliness to Hawa, making her vulnerable to Mzee Tamaa's schemes. Mzee Tamaa uses alcohol to ensnare Hawa. Although Hawa does not become an alcoholic, she ends up as a barmaid and a prostitute in Nairobi. Theresa's life "becomes an amorphous nebulous mass in which she floats" (*Son of Woman* 138) when, while pregnant, the man she is to marry is jailed for life for manslaughter. Dodge imagines her heartache: "[t]he pain of her first love nags and nags and her heart is worn out. [...]. She surrenders to fate. Life has no meaning any more but she has to live. How she lives is immaterial because life is meaningless" (*Son of Woman* 138).

The kind of mother Dodge briefly encounters is a reckless drunkard, one who is constantly arrested for irresponsible drinking in the city. In a manner that reflects the challenging economic times in the 1970s Nairobi slums, Theresa's clients solicit sex on credit but still dodge paying when they earn their wages. Her death is a result of both prostitution and alcoholism: "[s]he was run over by a car when she jumped off a moving bus to confront a fellow who owed her some dough. She was dead drunk again" (*Son of Woman* 8). The colonial Nairobi prostitutes in Luise White's seminal work experienced tremendous

economic prosperity due to high demand of their services⁹⁸. However, the 1970s that Mangua writes about reveal economic challenges whereby the available male clients can hardly support themselves. Hence, drinking is an alternative for the prostitutes to survive the unbearable gendered inner city.

Power relations that define alcohol consumption spaces play out in the novels. In a study of the shifting power and authority embodied in beer drinking among the Nyakyusa of Tanzania, Justin Willis observes that beer was a “symbolic resource of male power” (“Beer Used to Belong to Older Men” 383) up to the 1950s. He writes that “the superior status of old men was marked by their exclusive access to millet beer, the lubricant of their social engagements with one another” (374-375). Willis notes that young men’s access to paid migrant labour disrupted this power structure perpetuated in alcohol consumption and elderly men’s possession of cattle, especially because young men could now afford to pay bridewealth (375). In the 1970s Nairobi, power relations in the drinking spaces play out not only in the alcohol consumers’ economic muscles, but also in gendered ways.

In the represented 1970s Nairobi, men use their access to wages to perform gendered power relations in the drinking clubs. For instance, heartbroken Dodge squanders his savings in bars: “I was dishing out money and drinks right and left and naturally running down my savings. [...]. It pleased me to see women pleased when I bought them drinks — and I bought plenty” (*Son of Woman* 11). With lots of stolen cash on him in Nakuru where he works as a settlement officer, he buys drinks for good-time girls and enjoys the feeling of them thinking that he is a millionaire. He hopes “that in the end they are going to fight over [him]” (*Son of Woman* 106). These cases show women’s economic dependency on men in the drinking spaces, but also reflect societal patriarchal structure. Men admit women in the public space of the bar on their (men’s) terms. For instance, when Margaret Kungu, a woman scorned by her husband, ‘invades’ the space and drinks alone, paying her bills, Dodge is shocked. He remarks: “When a woman sits by herself in a bar and simply gets drunk you can bet your life there is something wrong. [...]. This woman wears a wedding ring and I suppose she should be warming her husband’s bed” (*Son of Woman* 90). Here, Margaret Kungu’s transgression of the norms of drinking spaces in the urban-scape, though propped on her bitterness, speaks to women’s attempts at gender equality. Besides, the drinking spaces reveal continuation of

⁹⁸ During World War I, soldiers from British East Africa and West Africa camped in Nairobi. This “enabled many [Nairobi prostitutes to profit] from wartime prostitution [which they turned] into real estate” (*The Comforts of Home* 48).

Nairobi's gendered histories, founded as a Whites city and slowly admitted Black male migrant workers⁹⁹. Unlike Ben and Ocholla who find casual jobs with construction companies developing the city, and Dodge who finds several government jobs (in the Ministry of Labour and Social Services, and Ministry of Agriculture), Theresa and Hawa engage in prostitution for survival. This trade, which, in the inner city, is located in or near drinking dens, is depended on male clients.

To avoid engaging in criminal activities, the afflicted slum dwellers resorted to alcohol consumption. When Ocholla in *Going Down River Road* explains to Ben that drinking helps them remain sober in a confounded cityscape, Ben is quick to add that it also helps them keep out of trouble with the authority (Mwangi 69). Andrew Hake in *African Metropolis: Nairobi's Self-Help City* examines Nairobi's development in the first two decades of post-independent Kenya. He captures the slum-dwellers' desire to belong to the city, and their commitment to lead lawful lives. Hake writes: "most of the dwellers in the self-help city are trying to earn a reasonable living, have made a rational choice in turning their backs on an overcrowded rural slum, and want to belong to the city and contribute to its development" (Hake 111). Social workers in the city in the 1970s also reminded the Public Health Inspector of the Nairobi City Council that "hostility of the population to the authorities is the factor which shelters the real criminals" (111). This particular situation, in which slum dwellers were an unwanted element in the city, explains the significance of affordable alcohol to the majority. Alcohol provided refuge, however momentary, which helped prevent them from venting their anger against the city authority in retaliation to slum demolitions, arrests on claims of being vagrants or unlicensed informal-sector traders.

The informal-sector alcohol dens provided shelter to many people rendered homeless by slum demolitions. *Going Down River Road* foregrounds several overcrowded clubs in the inner city. There is Karara Centre, Capricorn, Small World, Eden Garden, all of them unique in what they offer to patrons. Small World is renowned for good-time schoolgirls in the sex trade; Karara Centre is crowded and operates for entire day and night; Capricorn is famous for more potent informal-sector brews; Eden Garden for affordable prostitutes. Karara Centre is located on River Road, which is "crowded with its usual mass of haunted, hungry faces,

⁹⁹ Nairobi began developing into an important centre as stop centre for slave and ivory caravans to and from Uganda, connecting to Mombasa in the 1800s. By 1902, colonialists began regulating the number of African migrants on claims of protecting the city from crime and diseases (Hake 19,46). Louise White states that "colonial African cities were designed [...] to contain and maintain pools of competitively cheap male labourers, who in theory would return to their rural families as soon as their contracts ended" (*The Comforts of Home* 45).

poverty-hypnotised faces, hateful faces, and the fragrant stink of unwashed bodies and burst sewers” (64). This paints a picture of Nairobi’s 1970s economic disintegration mostly experienced by the city’s low-income population in their marginal spaces. It is in the same period that coffee farmers in the former White Highlands were reaping great benefits from the coffee boom discussed in the first section of this chapter.

Karara Centre, whose “doors are wide open” (64) to the River Road crowds provides a home to drunkards under the socio-economic siege of the city. The novel draws attention to the complex demographic architecture of Nairobi’s inner city, which, in essence, undercuts the official narrative of post-independent Kenya’s rapid development¹⁰⁰. The narrator notes: “[t]hough most shops are closed down, the ghostly wanderers are still here. This is one place where there will still be people left after doomsday. They have survived repeated police cleanups. They can take anything” (64). The numbers increase in the drinking den: “[a]s usual there are a lot more people in Karara Centre than there will ever be anywhere. A crowd of ragged, emaciated low-income drinkers, pathetic and not giving a shit about it. They are nice people, the patrons” (65). By depicting Ocholla as roaming from one club to another till morning, when the City Council demolishes his shack, the narrator shows that drinking dens served as temporary ‘safe houses’ for slum evictees. In fact, Karara Centre could never dare close at the lawfully stipulated time because “[t]he patrons would murder [the barman], wreck the joint and set it on fire” (22). Andrew Hake identifies a case, in 1971, when Nairobi’s social workers invited the City Council’s Public Health Inspector and showed him “areas where hundreds of people had been living in the open air in the city for some five months since their homes had been torn down and burnt by the City Council” (111). Given this level of desperation, drinking dens such as the ones portrayed in *Going Down River Road* were crucial to the survival of afflicted low-income Nairobians.

The costs of beers that the represented low-income people drink show histories of Kenya’s breweries companies as well as the resilience of ‘outlawed’ but affordable drinks. The narrator in *Going Down River Road* mentions “whisky and brandy bottles” which are on the shelves in Karara Centre, and claims they “can never have been emptied here” (64). The Karara Centre ‘Beer Menu’ shows the price of *Karara*, “a home-made brew that looks like muddy water, tastes like sisal juice and is as powerful as gasoline” (66) as the most

¹⁰⁰ See *Underdevelopment in Kenya* (Leys xi).

affordable. It costs “one third of the price of Pilsner and a quarter the price of any of the best Scotch whiskys” (66).

Conclusion

The city is a microcosm of a nation such as Kenya, and any socio-political transformations that occur in it, with time, cascade to the ordinary people in the entire country. This chapter focused on the represented lives of urbanite lowly which I categorise as ‘vagrants’, prostitutes, and drunkards. Depictions of the marginal informal spaces revealed the workings of capitalist patriarchy in the city, with the urbanite lowly bearing the brunt. The chapter showed the resilience of the urbanites that exist in economic marginalisation but find ways of surviving difficult terrains of the city.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

In *Swahili Beyond the Boundaries*, Alamin Mazrui reckons that “[s]ometimes a command of the best literature of another society may be a better guide to that society than many history books about it” (10). This is because fiction searches through the soul of a nation as it reminds people of events that shaped their identities. This thesis explored some of the most provocative novels that reflect on Kenya’s pasts, presents, and futures. Homi Bhabha argues: “it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea” (1). The novels I read in this thesis affirm novelists’ commitment to fostering a better nation. However, Ernest Renan writes, “historical inquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial” (11). In such cases, Renana argues, “[f]orgetting [...] is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation” (11).

But this thesis demonstrated that novelists unearth and interrogate details of communities’ and individuals’ traumatic pasts. They expose injustices from events that occurred, as a way of mourning, of disrupting a false sense of national tranquillity, a way of charting the route to closure. Indeed, Kenyan novels both in English and in Kiswahili offer in-depth reflections on the histories of the nation. The analyses offer glimpses into Kenyan socio-cultural, socio-economic and political landscapes. Since Kenya is a diverse society, there exists a multifaceted nature of individuals’ encounters with histories. Even colonialism, which occurred at a specific time-span despite its continuities, was experienced differently according to one’s geographical location, racial, ethnic, or gender categories.

Writing on Kenya’s adoption of Kiswahili as a national language, Lyndon Harries interrogates Jomo Kenyatta’s decree in September 1974, made in a speech that claimed Kiswahili will enable the achievement of a national culture. Sceptical at Kenyatta’s move, Harries argues:

[t]he intention would appear to be that Swahili should become both the instrument for achieving, and the medium for expressing a developing national consciousness. The reality is that Kenya’s national culture is made up of about sixty different ethnic communities and as many different languages. (155)

Four decades later, after Kenyatta’s decree and Harries’ views, Kiswahili has established itself at the heart of Kenya’s nationhood. This thesis explored how richly the Kiswahili novel

has engaged with Kenya's existence as a nation. By reading selected Kenyan novels written in both Kiswahili and English alongside each other, this thesis established that patterns of representation of Kenya's histories vary stylistically and thematically due to different literary traditions. Hence, a combination of these variances enabled a broader understanding of Kenya's pasts.

This study has attempted to reflect on a larger canvas of portrayals of Kenyan histories, ranging from the marginalised volatile North Eastern region that borders Somalia, to the Lake Victoria Basin region where there abound memories of the imperial wars that extensively ravaged communities. The thesis charted histories of the coastal region where maritime encounters with the Indian Ocean World are traceable to the age of Biblical Solomon and even beyond. In central Kenya and Rift Valley, the thesis interrogated novel depictions of disruptions that resulted from colonial and settler economies.

Conflicts arise from a struggle for and to control resources. Besides, there are many cases where conflict is precipitated by ideologies of dominance. In this case, race, ethnic, and gender identities become targeted platforms for contestation. Religion featured in represented social histories where individuals invented ways of navigating its inhibiting logics. For instance, some of the novels emphasise the ways in which both Christianity and Islam put strenuous demands on female sexuality but the analyses foregrounded individuals who conveniently transgressed the limiting religious logics yet appropriated those that guaranteed them more social freedom. But as a category of fostering difference, compared to race, ethnicity, and gender, the selected novels seem to suggest that religion plays a limited role, especially in post-independent Kenya. During colonialism, Christianity was used to justify occupation as well as entrench master servant relationships amongst races. For instance, the colonialist and settler's invented Black people as a people without religion, hence making Black bodies available for their exploitation and oppression. These damaging potentials of religion resurfaced when in October 2011, the Kenyan military invaded Somalia on a mission to fight the Al Shabaab terror group whose activities were undermining Kenya's internal security. Because of this, religion re-established itself as a major category in Kenya's social fabric. This is yet to be explored in novels, but has been narrated in several documentaries¹⁰¹.

¹⁰¹ Wahome Mutahi's *DoomsDay* (1999) explores the 8th August 1998 bomb blast that occurred at the American Embassy in Nairobi's CBD, resulting in 213 deaths while over 4000 suffered injuries of varied scale. Mutahi shows the attack as a consequence of corruption in the state security agents and immigration offices.

The study opened with reflections on Indian Ocean World histories as re-presented in Rocha Chimera's trilogy *Siri Sirini*, "Secret in a Secret." The critique underscored indigenous coastal people's active participation in the histories from which they have been marginalised. Historical interpretation seems one of the major secrets referred to in the title of the trilogy. The section demonstrated that when indigene writers revisithistories from the perspective of the people they identify with, they generate worldviews that might have been ignored or taken for granted by priorhistorians. The analysis speaks to unabashed claims such as Edward Rodwell's in a foreword to his *Gedi: The Lost City*, that the rise of "national consciousness on the part of the Chinese, Persians, Indians and Arabs may bring, in our time, numbers of eager students from these countries to see what they can learn of their pioneering forefathers in Africa" (7). The text attributes Gedi's prosperity to Chinese, Persians, Indians, or Arabs. This constitutes epistemic violence that novelists contest through re-membering the pasts of Kenya.

In the same chapter, I explored literary commentaries on colonial annexation of land in colonial Kenya. The critique showed how race played a major role not only in displacing indigenous people from their lands, but also in maintaining and sustaining the injustice. In engaging with the land question, which has its continuities in post-independent Kenya, I highlighted colonial laws that were drafted with shifting circumstances on the occupied lands. A critique of the world wars on the Lake Victoria Basin concentrated on women novelists who explore the corrosive impact of the imperial wars ontheir society. These represented encounters of Kenya with foreign cultures from, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Arabic world, Portugal, Asia, and Britain over many years of contact precipitated varied experiences. Most of the encounters were initially peaceful and harmonious, but turned violent with time due to factors such as contest for maritime domination by groups that established themselves as hegemonic.

In a quest to understand troubled relationships between the state and its citizens, the thesis employed various figures: martyrdom, sycophancy, whistle-blower. Fictional reconstructions of Kenyan post-independent state celebrate robust citizens' opposition to state misrule. The analysis explored represented state injustices against civilians, established its links with the violent colonial rule, the state agents who are complicit with the injustices, but emphasised the transformative power engendered in few individuals who confront the system, albeit at a great cost. These individuals are portrayed as heroic for exposing mega corruption scandals that senior-most state officers oversee; speakingagainst injustices in a highly repressive climate; disruptingand exposing the hollowness of state performances of grandiosity in a

poverty-stricken society. The portrayals where individuals have the power to confront oppressive and exploitative structures show novelists' optimism in humanity when faced with history: the individual can alter the course of history.

The study also made a case for Kenyan romance novels' engagements with race, gender, and class relations, which form the core of social histories in this thesis. The study showed that love emboldened concerned individuals to rethink power structures that undermined the success of their relationships. In the first instance, lovers are depicted as engaging in a struggle to overcome the barrier of economic inequality, which is exacerbated by patriarchy. The struggle for economic equality is also seen in the same light as the struggle for independence from colonialism. In this, the narrator grapples with history through formal argument, by foregrounding the injustice involved in a few elites amassing wealth through corrupt deals while the majority of the people exist in poverty. Gender also featured as a category that limited women's freedoms in the selected novels. This was evident in an analysis of represented pioneer Global North educated youth whose return to their homes generates controversies. The novels demonstrated how Islamic religious ideals are used by custodians of patriarchy to condition women's bodies, and how educated women who attempt to traverse the norms are whipped by the system to the point that they surrender, for their own survival. Through the romance narratives, I also contested uncritical portrayals of the Africanisation policy. I showed that the policy, despite having been abused by selfish individuals, was formulated with a vision to correct racial imbalances precipitated by colonialism. The chapter demonstrated that romance novels are rich with ideas that concern nation formation.

Finally, the thesis explored the socio-economic plight of represented Nairobi's low-income residents. The novels analysed in this final chapter revisited histories of Nairobi's segregation laws and the demolition of slums; it highlights how survival through indulgence in prostitution and alcohol consumption defined the urban outcasts at key historical moments in Kenya. These novelists seemed to gesture at connections between this sense of disillusionment that prominently affects low-income urbanites to neo-liberal capital and patriarchy. The study's analysis disrupted Nairobi's rhetoric of socio-economic prosperity through unveiling the workings of capital.

Narrated histories of Kenya in the first fifty years of flag independence reveal possibilities of Kenya's exponential socio-economic and political growth. This hope is engendered in

represented individuals who confront oppressive, exploitative, corrupt, and patriarchal systems.

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